**In Her Words: Exploring the Landscape of Women's Intimate Partner Violence**

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# ABSTRACT

There are ongoing debates about whether intimate partner violence (IPV) is primarily an asymmetrical problem of men's violence against women and whether women's violence is less significant in terms of frequency, severity, and consequences. Such literature highlights the need for more qualitative studies of women's roles as the perpetrator and is why I chose to use a qualitative approach to this research. The purpose of this exploratory study was to answer the following question: What are the lived experiences of women who have used IPV against their male intimate partner? This study incorporated a qualitative methodological framework using a descriptive phenomenological approach to data analysis. Considering the importance of the women's lived experience I incorporated the theoretical principles of feminist standpoint theory. The findings emphasize the importance of learning from women's voices and contribute to a contextual understanding of the complex dynamics of IPV. Textural themes include destructive emotions, bottling negative sentiments/feelings, wanting control, and the complexities of substance use. Structural themes include retaliation, justification, the impact of unhealthy familial and intimate history, and reflective insights. The women's experiences demonstrate the importance of contextualizing their violence. From this, the findings may also provide experiential insights toward informing professionals working in the area of IPV, specifically where women are perpetrators, as well as strategies and policies to increase effectiveness in intervention and prevention.

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# Chapter One – Introduction

## 1.1 Introduction

This research emerged from a question I asked myself many years ago: Why do women use intimate partner violence (IPV)? It is a question that has been asked by many researchers and practitioners in the field of partner violence, including myself during a time in my career when I had a significant role in setting up and monitoring the Domestic Violence Court in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan. My involvement included reviewing the literature on the implementation and effectiveness of a specialized domestic violence court, defining the terms of reference and development of policy to govern the operations of the court, and having a direct role in the court as a specialized domestic violence probation officer. It was at this time that I, and the team working within this specialized court, started noting (although anecdotally) that an increased number of women were coming through the court as perpetrators. I can recall thinking that I would endeavor to learn more about women's experiences using violence against their intimate partner.

At that time, I was working within the system of justice and corrections primarily with men who had perpetrated against their partner. I had also been part of a research project in Saskatchewan entitled *In Each Other's Hands: Community Allies Preventing Intimate Partner Violence* (Farden, Martin, Broda, Thomas-Prokop, Kewistep, & Hodson, 2009). This project examined men's narratives as perpetrators of IPV and women's as victims, and raised similar questions regarding women's roles as victim and perpetrator, an area with limited exposure. It was not until many years later that I was prompted by one of my academic colleagues to return for a doctoral degree with the idea that I might explore this issue further. This dissertation is about answering the above general question, using a systematic and objective methodology. I did

not expect that this dissertation would fully answer the question that I had pondered years earlier, as the issue of IPV is complex. However, I knew that this work would contribute in a meaningful way to the discourse about IPV by women. I also aimed to fill a vital gap in the literature regarding the lived experience of women and allow for their voices to be illuminated in a manner that respects their experiences. The women's stories call attention to the underlying issues contributing to their violence and provide a forum for their lived experiences, captured in a way that will assist in our overall understanding of IPV. There is more to the story of IPV and the devastating impact it has on the perpetrator, the victim, their children, the families, and the communities that are affected. It is my hope that this work conveys participant stories in a respectful and sensitive manner, contributes to informing the qualitative literature, increases the presence of women's voices in the literature, and provides insights for the professionals working in this area.

## 1.2 Importance of the research

The importance of research in the area of IPV cannot be overstated. The literature by researchers and practitioners in Canada and internationally highlights the damaging effects of IPV on individuals, families, and communities, and it is well documented that IPV compromises the health and safety of millions of Canadian families each year (Farrell, 1996; World Health Organization et al., 2002, 2010, 2013; Arias, 2004; Pottie, Bunge & Locke, 2000; Sutherland, Bybee, &Sullivan, 2002; Nelson, Nygren, McInerney, & Klein, 2004; Sinha, 2013; Statistics Canada, 2015). Women, men, children, families, and communities experience long-term effects that impact the mental health, physical well-being, and mortality of individuals involved (Kilpatrick, Acierno, Resnick, Saunders & Best, 1997; Statistics Canada, 2015). Children who

witness IPV or who experience violence as a result of parental IPV are deeply affected and suffer long-term consequences (Campbell & Soeken, 1999).

More specifically, violence leads to substantial and life-lasting emotional trauma and post-traumatic stress disorder, resulting in high rates of medical complaints including depression, low self-esteem, and other psychological problems (Campbell & Soeken, 1999; Burczycka, 2016); Statistics Canada, 2015). It is also a major contributor to both women and men encountering the justice system at all levels (Statistics Canada, 2015). As there is a quantifiable effect on the legal, social, health, and economic well-being of those who experience or perpetrate IPV, there is an equal need to understand the context of this phenomenon in order to engage in appropriate intervention and prevention responses (Spatz-Widom et al., 2008; Zhang et al., 2012; Spatz-Widom, 2014).

The literature reveals that incidents of male-perpetrated violence against female partners are prevalent year over year. Police reported data represented in the Family Violence in Canada report also reflect this longstanding trend (Koonin, Cabarcas & Geffner, 2002; Mills, 2003; Statistics Canada, 2015). While this may be the reported past and current trend, it is well documented that women also perpetrate IPV. However, according to Gabora et al. (2007) there has been formidable resistance to examining or theorizing the issue of women perpetrating abuse or violence and a legitimate concern that focusing attention on women as perpetrators will take away from the serious issues of male to female violence. The issue to date, however, is that little attention has been paid to understanding women's IPV compared to men. Despite the lack of a direct focus, Gabora et al. (2007) indicate an "emerging body of research suggests that several contextual factors and motives may distinguish female and male perpetrators of domestic violence, and that the consequence of this violence may differ between the genders" (p. 1).

As the understanding of the magnitude of the impact of IPV continues to grow, the scope and depth of both national and international programs designed to address the roots of this problem and provide strategies to remedy its effects also continue to grow (Statistics Canada, 2016). Importantly, continuing the work in this area will produce a deeper level of understanding that will creatively and effectively inform responses to the issue. The definition of intimate partner violence varies within the literature; however, the World Health Organization (2012) defines IPV as "any behaviour that causes physical, psychological or sexual harm to those in the relationship" (p. 1). While the present research did not attempt to define IPV, this general definition informed the criteria for participation in the research.

**1.2.1 Summary context of women's violence against an intimate partner**

The quantitative literature, primarily self-reported surveys, on women's IPV indicates rates of IPV experienced by men and by women do not significantly differ (Straus, 1997; Archer, 2000, 2002; General Social Survey, 2014). In my review of the literature, several studies on female victims of IPV and male perpetrators have been conducted, but women's use of violence and men's experience as victims have received substantially less attention. Further, there is a historical exclusion and scarcity in the literature regarding women and men's perspectives on IPV related to gender roles and determinants of health that has contributed to the delayed development of holistic women's and men's programs, services, and policies (Janzen, 1998; Farden et al., 2009). This is contrary to theoretical frameworks that argue the importance of including experiential voices in research and, subsequently, the literature (Smith, 1999; Moosa-Mitha, 2005; Sinclair & Albert, 2009). Last, the lack of qualitative studies on women's violence against intimate partners represents a  noteworthy research gap, especially with respect to both understanding the depth and variation of women's IPV compared to that of men's, and

understanding the impact on men's health and well-being (Archer, 2000, 2002; Allen-Collinson, 2009). Of particular note is the exclusion of women's voices on their use of IPV. A broader discussion of the historical and current debates within the literature on women's IPV is presented in the next chapter.

## 1.3 Description of the larger research project and research questions that inform this dissertation

The objective of this dissertation is to describe and document women's lived experiences of their perpetration of IPV and to contribute to the dialogue within the literature. I specifically aim to answer the following two research questions: What are the lived experiences of women who have used IPV against their male intimate partner? and How do women contextualize and understand their use of violence against their intimate partner? As my analysis is a systematic description of their experiences using violence, with analytical underpinnings rooted in Husserl's (1970) descriptive phenomenology, I do not attempt to presuppose the women's experiences nor do I interpret. My aim is to describe their experiences, remain accurate to their words, and to render thematic findings that shed light on the context in which their violence occurred. To do this, I also adhere to principles of critical feminist theory, particularly standpoint feminism, to ensure that women's experiences are reflected from their social locations and to have their voices heard in their contextualization of their violence.

The data for this dissertation were obtained from a larger study entitled *Understanding Women's Use of Violence in Intimate Partner Relationships,* funded by the Saskatchewan Health Research Foundation (SHRF) and described in more detail in the methodology chapter. Informal project conceptualization and partnership building related to the overall SHRF project commenced with the completed *In Each Other's Hands: Community Allies Preventing Intimate Partner Violence* project (Farden et al., 2009), which examined men's violence against their

female intimate partner. Also, the completed project *Understanding Women's Use of Violence in Intimate Partner Relationships*, undertaken with community stakeholders about women's IPV, also informed this research (Brooks & Martin, 2010). The latter project aimed to gain understanding about women's IPV from the stakeholders working in the field.

My research employs a qualitative approach (interviewing) to data gathering and a descriptive phenomenological approach to data analysis. I used in-depth personal interviews with women who have used violence against a male intimate partner to whom they were married, common-law, divorced, separated, or dating. Qualitative techniques are most suitable for exploratory research, generating personal and collective experience on a topic with limited published information (Cook, 1997; Migliaccio, 2002; Allen-Collinson, 2009). Further, a qualitative research approach is considered culturally appropriate and crucial when doing research with Indigenous people and assists in understanding the holistic and broader contexts of wellness (MacCaulay & Paradis et al., 1997; Smith, 1999). It creates opportunities for women and men to reflect on their experiences and the experiences of their communities and allow their narrative to emerge in a holistic manner; this is in contrast to quantitative data gathering, such as surveys, in which the personal context is lacking.

As little research about women's use of violence has been conducted from a qualitative point of reference, the literature review below will serve to uncover the current context and debates within the discourse, given this identified gap in the literature on women who use IPV. This dissertation is in response to a question about women as perpetrators of IPV. The intention to incorporate women's voice into the paucity of the literature on this topic area and illuminate their contextual experiences contributes to the foundation for further research. Together, these domains will address the urgent need for research on the perspectives of women who use IPV.

The next section provides an overview of what can be expected in the coming chapters of this work.

## 1.4 Overview

My stated intent above is to provide a phenomenological description of the lived experiences of women who reside in Saskatchewan and have used violence against their male intimate partner at some point in their lifetime. The women who shared their stories come from diverse backgrounds and have a range of experiences that have rendered a thematic understanding of the contextual nature of their IPV. This dissertation is meant to highlight their experiences and the thematic totality of the context in which their IPV occurred. To this end, this dissertation is segmented into the following chapters.

This first chapter provides an introduction to the topic of study and a brief overview of the research, and introduces how women's use of intimate partner violence is situated within the broader discipline. It also describes the purpose and objectives of the research, including the importance of describing the women's lived experience, and outlines the research questions, analytical approach, and overall thesis of this dissertation.

The second chapter outlines the current state and the insufficiency of knowledge with respect to women's use of violence against an intimate partner. I also present the gender debate regarding women's and men's IPV. Further, I highlight the gap in the knowledge of women's use of violence that has led to this debate and to the need for this research as it particularly relates to women's lived experiences.

Chapter three includes a presentation of my theoretical framework, incorporating a general overview of critical feminist theory and a specific focus on feminist standpoint theory, which underpins my research. I also present the historical debates regarding the efficacy and

objectivity of feminist standpoint theory, followed by the important contributions of the theory to research. I conclude this chapter with a discussion of obtaining knowledge through standpoints in situating and understanding women's IPV with a focus on the importance of using standpoint in the research on women's IPV.

In chapter four, I provide an in-depth discussion on the methodology of this dissertation that includes a rigorous discussion of data collection and use of a qualitative interviewing approach and related principles. Following that is a discussion on the phenomenological approach to the analysis and the methodological steps used, highlighting the methodological underpinnings of each component of the approach used to analyze the data obtained from the women's lived experiences of using IPV. Finally, I discuss the sampling method, recruitment and selection, interview questions, ethical considerations, and challenges/limitations.

Chapter five includes a presentation of the data, specifically the women's individual descriptions of their experiences of their use of violence against their male intimate partners. The narratives of the women's lived experiences provide depth to their experiences and include both textural (what happened) and structural descriptions (how it happened) and the essence (meaning) or summary of these experiences that generated the initial emerging cluster of themes.

Chapter six lays out the thematic findings rendered from the women's textural and structural descriptions presented in chapter five. Here, I introduce the composite *textural* themes (destructive emotions, bottling negative sentiments/feelings, wanting control, and the complexities of substance use) and composite *structural* themes (retaliation, justification, the impact of unhealthy familial and intimate relationship history, and reflective insights) that emerged from the women's description of what happened when they used violence and how they contextualized and understood it. An integration of the totality of the descriptions of the

women's experiences into a universal description of the experiences representing the group as a whole is presented.

Chapter seven discusses the thematic findings against a backdrop of the broader literature in the area of women's IPV that attempts to explain women's violence in a narrowly defined manner and focuses on motives and the suggestion that women's IPV is mainly a response to victimization. A discussion of both the women's composite textural descriptions of what encompassed their violence and composite structural description of how they contextualized their use of IPV is also included, followed by an overall summary of the discussion.

Finally, chapter eight provides a conclusion to the dissertation, describing the insights and knowledge gained from the women in this study who shared their lived experiences for the purpose of helping other women or men who have similar experiences. This chapter also highlights implications and recommendations for further research in the area of intimate violence. It illustrates the importance of employing qualitative approaches and capturing the lived experiences of participants to fully understand the impact on an individual's sense of self/identity, their partners, their children, their families, and their communities.

## Chapter Two – Review of the literature: understanding women's use of violence

## 2.1 Setting the stage: current trends in research on IPV

There is no doubt that, when it comes to violence, the human cost is substantial. IPV is viewed as a serious threat to the safety, health, and well-being of women, men, children, and families in our society (Farrell, 1996; Pottie, Bunge & Locke, 2000; Sutherland, Bybee, and Sullivan, 2002; World Health Organization, 2002; Arias, 2004; Nelson et al., 2004). Trends vary year over year and understanding the context of both police reported and self-reported trends is important to consider when examining this phenomenon. In the 2014 Family Violence in Canada report, Ibrahim highlights "that victims of intimate partner violence accounted for more than one-quarter (27%) or 88,600 of all victims of violent crime reported to police" (p. 23). Although police-reported rates of IPV have been decreasing nationally, from 102,500 in 2012 to 90,300 in 2013 to the current rate of 88,600 in 2014, Saskatchewan continues to have the highest rates of IPV among its provincial counterparts (Statistics Canada, 2015, 2016). Further, IPV among Indigenous people has been cited year over year to be three times more prevalent than IPV among non-Indigenous people (Statistics Canada, 2006, 2016), thus highlighting the significance of the issue for this group.

The experience of IPV and the context in which it occurs is of particular concern for all communities and systems, particularly health and justice, as many of those in the field tout IPV as being a population health issue (World Health Organization, 2002, 2013). Therefore, addressing it requires the critical coordination of response between health, justice, social services, and education systems, independent of jurisdiction. The complexities of this pervasive social issue have maintained the attention of professionals in the field in Canada's western provinces, particularly Saskatchewan (Farden et al., 2009).

One important measure of IPV trends can be found in the General Social Survey, which is a sociological survey that represents data that are self-reported in a variety of areas, inclusive of family violence, and are gathered every five years in Canada (Statistics Canada, 2016). The GSS was reported this year within the Family Violence Canada report, and while reflecting similar trends to police-reported IPV it also revealed variance in reported male and female perpetuated IPV as well as in male and female victimization (Statistics Canada, 2016).

Overall, the GSS (2014) data on self-reported victimization indicate that four percent of Canadians have reported physical or sexual victimization by their spouse in the previous five years. While this represents a drop from a decade earlier, at which time the rate was seven percent, the issue remains of concern with respect to the physical and emotional harm that IPV represents for all involved (Burczycka, 2016). Further, and important to the context of understanding women's IPV and the notion of reciprocal or couple violence, the GSS (2014) reports fairly equivalent proportions of men and women being victims of IPV violence in the past five years, with 382,000 women and 418,000 men reporting spousal victimization (Burczycka, 2016). What this conveys is that traditional notions of violence have been understood in the context of women as victims, but several quantitative studies in recent decades indicate that intimate partner victimization is experienced equally by women and men (Straus, 1997; Archer, 2000).

The type of violence experienced is also important to frame the scope of the IPV problem as there are notable differences between men and women. The story of intimate violence can be told by looking at its representation laid out in the General Social Survey. It comes as no surprise that there are differences in how women and men use force in the context of their violence. Further the GSS (2014) states that,

*[…] the most commonly-reported type of spousal violence experienced was being pushed, grabbed, shoved, or slapped (35%). A quarter of victims (25%) reported having been sexually assaulted, beaten, choked, or threatened with a gun or a knife. A similar proportion (24%) reported having been kicked, bit, hit, or hit with something. As in previous years, women reported the most severe types of spousal violence more often than men. Among victims of spousal sexual assault, over half (59%) reported non-consensual sexual activity that came as a result of being manipulated, drugged, or otherwise coerced, sometimes in combination with sexual assault through physical force. Just under one-third (31%) of spousal violence victims in the provinces reported sustaining physical injuries as a result of as a result of the violence. Women were proportionally more likely than men to have reported physical injuries, with 4 out of 10 (40%) female victims reporting injuries compared to just under a quarter (24%) of male victims (Burczycka, 2016; p.3).*

Equally important is gaining a deeper understanding of the rates of violence amongst Canada's Indigenous population. Violence in Indigenous communities has been cited as a direct result of the impact of colonization, residential schools, and the 'sixties scoop', which led to serious and lasting inter-generational trauma amongst the Indigenous population (Truth and Reconciliation Canada, 2015). Burczycka (2016) highlights the GSS (2014) findings that

*…individuals self-identifying as Aboriginal were more than twice as likely as non-Aboriginal people to report experiencing spousal violence in the previous five years (9%$^E$ versus 4%, respectively). In particular, Aboriginal females were more likely to be victimized by current or former partners, as compared to non-Aboriginal women* (p. 4).

This represents increased rates of violence for Indigenous women who are already facing multiple challenges as a vulnerable group due to their historical and colonized past.

Another important concern is related to reporting victimization to the police. Ibrahim (2016) highlights the findings from the GSS (2014) which found that men were less likely to report their victimization to the police compared to women (76 vs. 64%, respectively) and that 70% of men did not report to the police.

These trends tell a story about a significant amount of violence being inflicted by both men and women that cannot be ignored. While the data within the GSS (2014) are self-reported, as opposed to police-reported statistics, we cannot dismiss the efficacy of the GSS as a reporting

tool. It stands to reason that both men and women would not feel compelled to mislead a self-reported survey as there is no gain in doing so.

The current 'symmetry' debate, as it is frequently referred to in the literature, suggests that women and men perpetrate IPV equally, and the lack of qualitative research in the area of women's IPV supports the objectives of this research to fill the gaps in the current literature. The following section will discuss the impact of IPV generally on women, men, children, and families to illuminate the importance of research in this area.

### 2.1.1. Impact of IPV on women, men, and families

My aim to understand women's IPV is to contextualize it against the backdrop of men's violence and the impact IPV has on families and children. While women and men can be viewed as vulnerable in these circumstances, children who are exposed to their parents' IPV are the most affected. These effects have been clearly established (Fantuzzo et al., 1991; Rossman & Rosenberg, 1997; World Health Organization, 2013). The violence that occurs between intimate partners, results in grave, and sometimes lethal consequences for the victim, children, and the family, and these effects continue to make it a major public health issue (World Health Organization, 2013; Statistic Canada, 2015). IPV is complicated by the fact that emotional attachment of those involved increases its complexities and the risk for recurring violence (Cui et al., 2013). Much of the literature demonstrates the impact of IPV on women and children with respect to health and quality of life; based on historical trends, IPV has been established as a primary determinant of women's overall health status (World Health Organization, 2013). Compared to women who are not victimized, survivors of abuse and violence have an increased risk of multiple physical health symptoms, chronic health problems, depression and mental illness, suicidal ideation, alcoholism and substance abuse, as well as difficulties developing

healthy relationships and trusting others (Gondolf, 1998; Wiehe, 1998; Cocker et al., 2002; Sutherland et al., 2002; Laffay, Kennedy & Stein, 2003; Fanslow & Robinson, 2004; Nixon, Resick, & Nishith, 2004).

The impact of IPV on men as victims is less prominent in the literature, and effects are often reported in the context of the family, not necessarily from the men's perspective or in the context of health (Cook, 1997). Regardless, the overall effect of IPV on mental health, physical injury, and mortality are pervasive (Kilpatrick et al., 1997). Therefore, rather than examining violence from a male-dominated context, violence can be best understood as a human problem, where gender dynamics are much more complicated than historically thought or commonly known. Violence leads to significant emotional trauma, resulting in high rates of medical complaints including depression, low self-esteem, and other psychological problems (Campbell & Soeken, 1999). For example, suicide rates in abused women are five times higher than in women who are not abused (Stark, 1984, cited in Buzawa & Buzawa, 2003). Importantly, research highlights that IPV  impacts mental health and can have lasting effects on those affected long after the violence ends, resulting in stress that accumulates over time (DeKeseredy & MacLeod, 1997; Golding, 1999; Barnett, 2000; Anderson & Saunders, 2003). The impact of unhealthy abusive and violent intimate relationships on children is also a serious cause for concern and requires attention. The next section will delve into the impact of IPV on children and the importance of an informed response to address the consequences for all affected.

### 2.1.2. Impact of IPV on children

While the impact of IPV on children is not the main thrust for my work, there is no doubt that children are exposed to, witness, or, worse, get caught in the crossfire of their parents' violence, which is most disturbing. Children's exposure to IPV has gained increased attention in

recent years (Saunders, 2003). In Canada, it was estimated in 1999 that 800,000 children are

exposed to intimate partner violence every year (Jaffe & Poisson, 1999). As the rates of IPV and

family violence have remained relatively stable over the past five years, we could expect the

rates of exposure would likely remain the same. Understanding the impact of exposure and child

maltreatment as a result of IPV keeps the issue at the forefront when developing strategies and

policies of intervention and preventions. The issue of child exposure highlights how adverse and

traumatic childhood experiences can lead to serious consequences that compromise children's

emotional and relationship lives and the potential for further cyclical violence.

A report by the Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics (Statistics Canada) authored by

Hotton (2001) reports "62% of cases in which children witnessed their mother being assaulted,

and in 16% of cases of children witnessing an assault against their fathers" (p. 4).

Further, in a 2008 Canadian Incidence Study of Reported Child Abuse and Neglect Trocmé et

al., (2008) reports that "[t]hirty-four percent of all substantiated investigations identified

exposure to intimate partner violence as the primary category of maltreatment (an estimated

29,259 cases)" (p. 3). Moreover, this is suggested to be an underestimate of the actual prevalence

(Public Health Agency of Canada, 2010). According to the Family Violence in Canada Report

(Statistics Canada, 2015), approximately

> *…16,700 children and youth, or 243.5 for every 100,000 Canadians under the age of 18, were the victims of family-related violence. This represents over one-quarter (29%) of all children and youth who were the victims of a violent crime. Parents (60%) were the family members most often accused of violence against children and youth, especially in incidents involving children under the age of four"* (p. 4).

What this establishes is that considerable numbers of children either witness or experience

violence at the hands of their parents, marking an urgency in appropriate responses. Hamby et al.

(2011) suggest data such as these reveal a dangerous and longstanding trend, i.e., that children

are exposed to violence at much higher rates, resulting in grave consequences to their physical and emotional development.

The effects due to exposure to IPV are devastating to children and are associated with a multitude of mental health issues both in childhood and later in adulthood (Hamby et al., 2011; Wathen, 2013). Further, Holden (2003) argues that understanding children's experiences of IPV as 'exposure' versus 'witnessing' allows for more inclusivity and diversity of experiences. With this in mind, Holden (2003) suggests that methods of exposure that impact the child can include witnessing and overhearing violent acts, observing injuries, and hearing about the violence from someone important in their lives.  Directly seeing the violence implies the child's presence and is more clear-cut when examining adverse effects; however, listening to parental violence also means a child is present and hence subject to adverse effects. Compelling evidence has been gathered regarding the negative effects of witnessing IPV on the physical and emotional health and well-being of children (Kitzmann et al., 2003; Wolfe et al., 2003; Lang & Stover, 2008), and the effects of exposure to parental intimate violence may lead to many associated problems that range in severity (Fantuzzo et al., 1991). The impact and resulting harm that children experience from exposure to intimate violence depend on several factors, including the amount of violence in the family, the frequency of exposure, the child's capacity to cope, and protective influences in their environment (Holden, 2003).

What becomes clear is that exposure to IPV leads to child victimization, even if the child is not physically abused directly in the course of their parent's violence. Amongst the literature is a growing recognition that children suffer severely in the context of IPV (Marra, 2005; Gilbert et al., 2009). Children can be affected by violence on many levels: physically, emotionally, socially, cognitively, and behaviourally. Children who witness or experience violent episodes

between their parents will often exhibit more aggressive and anti-social behaviours. Other effects are related to sensitivity and anxiety, poor concentration, frequent illness, depression, stress-related disorders, worry, low self-esteem, suicidal behaviour, disrespect for others, and lack of empathy, to name a few (Kerig, 1998; O'Brien et al., 1997; Rogers & Holmbeack, 1997; Health Canada, 1999; Bedi & Goddard, 2007). These children will also typically have increased aggressiveness, have difficulty with peer relationships, engage in high conflict situations with peers and others, experience general conduct problems, and experience isolation (Wolfe, et al., 1985; Jouriles, Murphy, & O'Leary, 1989; Graham-Bermann & Levendosky, 1998; Becker & McCloskey, 2002; Kernic et al., 2003; Wathen, 2013).

Ultimately, children who witness family violence over the long term will often use violence to resolve marital conflicts in adulthood (Rodgers, 1994; Wathen, 2013). For instance, Murrell (2005, as cited in Hamby, 2011) found that children who witnessed a parent use a weapon during a violent episode against their partner had an increased likelihood of using a weapon as part of their intimate violence (Murrell, 2005 as cited in Hamby et al, 2011). Research also points to differences in gender vis-a-vis the impact. For instance, in her work on child maltreatment and neglect, Reyome (2010) found that boys who experienced abuse and neglect had an increased likelihood of experiencing difficulty in their social and intimate relationships with respect to being non-engaged and non-assertive compared to their female counterparts; for girls, experiences of emotional abuse triggered distance and overbearing actions in their relationships.

Family violence researchers and practitioners in the area of health recognize IPV as an issue of ongoing significance, and one that recently gained recognition at the national and international level as a major public health concern (World Health Organization, 2013). Making

it a priority amongst researchers, clinicians, and policymakers in the area of health is of utmost importance for IPV to be effectively addressed (Saltzman, Reshman, Mahendra, Ikeda, & Ingram, 2005). The examination of women's IPV is critical to understanding the overall landscape of IPV as it addresses questions of women as aggressors and men as victims, which are different understandings. Ultimately, trying to resolve some of the unanswered questions will inform how to address the issue of IPV in a more holistic manner, resulting in positive effects for both partners and their children. This distinctly illustrates that children who witness or are exposed in some manner to IPV can experience detrimental effects on their physical and emotional well-being that can, and often do, transcend into their adult lives. The next section will discuss the nature of the literature with specific reference to women's IPV, including the general landscape of women's IPV, the lack of qualitative literature, the gender symmetry debate, women's motives for IPV, women's victimization and aggressor roles, historical and socio-cultural factors of women's IPV, and Indigenous women and IPV.

## 2.2 The empirical literature on women's use of IPV

Allen-Collinson (2009) suggests that the discourse of women's intimate violence consistently reveals that "intimate partner abuse and violence are shifting, complex, situational and multifaceted" (p. 1). This suggests that ongoing work, both academic and practical, is required to effectively and holistically address it. Historically, IPV has been studied from the perspective of male-perpetrated intimate violence against their female partners, with a particular focus on the social, political, and gendered nature of male perpetrators (Koonin et al., 2002; Swan & Snow, 2003). Studying men's violence in this way is understandable against the backdrop of the historical and current police-reported trends that reflect high rates of victimization of women (Statistics Canada, 2016). Gabora et al. (2007) suggest that, until recent years, any discussion of women's use of IPV was limited, owing to the "strong political and

social bias" (p. 1) against the idea that females could exert abuse and violence against their partners. There has also been concern that any study of women as aggressors would sidetrack or avert attention away from women's victimization (Mills, 2003; Gabora et al., 2007). However, quantitative research in the past few decades has triggered the debate about whether women's violence is equal to men's in type and frequency (Straus, 1997; Archer, 2000, 2002).

The issue of women's IPV continues to be misunderstood due to the notion that women's violence often occurs within the context of their victimization (Saunders, 1986; Gabora, 2007). Thus, there is a general understanding that this connection between women's violence as a response to their victimization is the current norm and perpetuates an understanding that women are engaging in self-defence, which may not accurately contextualize their violence. Not all studies support the sole motive of self-defence, suggesting multiple and concurrent motives are present (Morse, 1994; Straus, 1997). Other research suggests that motives that lead to women's IPV extend beyond self-defence to also include power and control or issues of abandonment. A meta-analysis by Archer (2000) also discovered gender differences in the level of seriousness of violence, suggesting that research needs to consider that the examination of acts of violence and consequences of violence can render different results. Further, Archer (2000) found that women have a higher probability of reporting the use of physical violence toward their partners, but men are more likely to inflict serious injury.

Examining women's IPV in a manner that only considers the frequency of perpetration and the context of her victimization limits the ability to gain knowledge from the women's experiences and negates her agency in this dynamic. Further, it unintentionally devalues the complexity of the issue by disregarding the structural, socio-cultural, and macro-level contributions that lead to a depth of understanding. Attempts to address this gap and the

associated complexities are illustrated in a critical review conducted by Williams, Ghandour & Kub (2008) that examined 62 studies (in the United States) on women's IPV with the objective of seeking developmental patterns of women's IPV in adolescence, college, and adult women's experiences. Their findings point to greater perpetration by adult women with variance in moderate to severe violence, and high rates of physical aggression by adult women compared to college or adolescent women (Williams et al., 2008). According to their research, IPV is a frequent occurrence amongst adolescents, college students, and adult women, with the greatest prevalence amongst the latter. This review revealed that emotional violence is the most prevalent, followed by physical and then sexual violence. In spite of a wide range of prevalence rates within each study population, the intent of the study to map the developmental trajectory of female-perpetrated IPV could not be accomplished. This reinforces the assertion that IPV is a complex, multifaceted issue. There are many incongruities in the research, whereby one camp argues that women and men are equally violent and the other argues that male violence is more problematic than female violence. Therefore, it is important to examine this issue in greater depth, as we do not have a good understanding of the relationship between the two types of violence. Qualitative research is required to assist in our understanding of the context in which male and female perpetration of IPV occurs.

Research on Indigenous women's IPV is also lacking, with research undertaken to date only examining the general violence of Indigenous women (Murdock, 2001). While colonization and the impact of residential schools has had devastating inter-generational effects on Indigenous people, some distinctions related to mutual violence without the inter-generational trauma experiences are cited in cases of severe violence (Truth and Reconciliation Canada, 2015). One study on federally sentenced women reports that 45% of Indigenous women did not cite

residential schools as a factor (Gabora et al., 2007). This suggests the importance of gaining some further insights as to the scope of the problem within Indigenous communities.

Gaps in the research regarding the gender symmetry debate, women's motives for their IPV, women as aggressors, women's response to their victimization, and the historical and socio-cultural factors that contribute to women's IPV mean that intervening professionals may not be appropriately equipped to address the holistic nature of IPV. The following sections will address the existing literature in the area and illuminate the gaps requiring attention.

**2.2.1. The gender symmetry debate**

There is a passionate debate in the literature regarding the plethora of studies that argue women's IPV is equal in frequency to that of their male counterparts. Emerging from this is what is referred to as the 'gender symmetry' debate. This dispute is well cited in the literature and features self-reported survey data that support the assertion of an equal frequency of perpetration by women and men (Straus & Gelles, 1984; Archer, 2000, 2002; Whitaker et al., 2007; Straus, 2009b; Dragiewicz & Dekeseredy, 2012; Howard-Bostic, 2014). Some scholars such as Johnson & Ferraro (2000) suggest the notion of symmetry is misunderstood and that there are better and more concise ways to categorize mutual violence between partners. For instance, these scholars argue that the notion of symmetry limits the understanding of the reality of mutual violence. Further, they caution that the use of surveys limits contextual understanding and recognition of variations in frequency, severity, and rationale for IPV (Johnson & Ferraro, 2000). Other literature supports the notion that differences between women's and men's IPV suggest that IPV is gendered and fraught with complexities with respect to the differing patterns and roles of men and women (Langhinrichsen-Rohling et al., 1995; Barnett, Lee, & Thelen, 1997; Miller, 2001; Kimmel, 2002; Melton & Belknap, 2003; Dasgupta, 2002). Dasgupta (2002) frames it well by

suggesting that "[t]he major problem plaguing the popular understanding of women's violence is the tendency to remove such behavior from its complete context. Even when the surrounding contexts are somewhat recognized, the dynamic underpinnings of the interactions are often overlooked" (p. 1377). Unpacking this conundrum underscores the need to understand the personal and historical contextual factors that may underlie women's IPV.

While the symmetry debate suggests IPV occurs equally between men and women, it maintains that 'asymmetry' is found in type and context (Kimmel, 2002) and dismisses women's socio-cultural context and a complete understanding of the severity of injuries that occur (Howard-Bostic, 2014). For example, some studies suggest that women's motivations for IPV are commonly understood as masculinity issues related to relationship conflict patterns and control (Howard-Bostic, 2014). Other studies recognize that women's motives for IPV also exist independently from men and that a gender-biased understanding ignores the complexity of the motives that influence women to use IPV and that historical trajectories often must be considered (Caldwell et al., 2009; Williams et al., 2008). Nazroo (1995) and others suggest that quantitative studies and methodologies in the area of IPV have been limited in capacity and criticized for their inability to seek a broad, socio-cultural understanding. Howard-Bostic (2014) also suggests that IPV research is constantly challenged by inconsistent outcomes with respect to correlations between men's and women's motivations in their use of IPV.

Schwartz & Dekeseredy (1993) state that "there is an important battle being waged over the nature of women's behavior and its role in woman abuse" (p. 249), which continues to raise questions related to the context in which women's perpetration of violence occurs. As illustrated above, this debate is highlighted in the Family Violence in Canada Report (2014), with the GSS (2014) reporting equal frequencies of IPV against a backdrop of police-reported data that suggest

the prevalence of women's IPV is much lower (Burczycka, 2016; Ibrahim, 2016). Under-reporting to police of male victimization suggests that gender constructions related to roles of women and men are the reason for the discrepancy (Whitaker et al., 2007; Allen-Collinson, 2009).

Considering the complexity of the issue, it is important to consider the larger context of gender inequalities and recognize differences in how men and women experience IPV (Allen-Collinson, 2009; Cook, 1997). There are persisting debates within the literature about whether IPV is predominantly an 'asymmetrical' issue with respect to men's use of IPV, and to what extent women's violence against men is less significant with respect to severity, frequency, consequences, and safety (Nazroo, 1995; Archer, 2000; Dobash and Dobash, 2004). Some research findings indicate women who are non-reciprocal perpetrators of IPV are viewed as challenges to historical notions and explanations of women's roles in IPV (McHugh and Hanson Frieze, 2006; Whitaker et al., 2007). Such studies highlight the need for more in-depth qualitative studies of women's roles as perpetrator and men's roles as victim, as well as the implications for men's and women's health, social relationships, and legal issues as a result of their use of IPV.

**2.2.2 Understanding reciprocal intimate violence**

The gender symmetry debate sparked an increased focus on women's IPV that led to research in what scholars refer to as mutual combat (Archer, 2000), common/situational couple violence (Johnson, 2000, 2006), or reciprocal violence (Whitaker et al., 2007). Some scholars in the field of women's IPV identify distinctions within these categorizations, whereby women's IPV may be situated in a way that also falls out of the category of classic self-defence, which simply means women defending against an attack from their partner (Flemke, 2003). For

instance, Johnson et al. (2000) suggest that couples experiencing intimate violence, or what they refer to as "common couple violence" (p. 3), do not project the same levels of patterned control exhibited in typical IPV situations. Shedding light on the complexity of the issue, Whitaker et al. (2007) examined data on young adults collected from the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health that contained information on IPV and found that nearly "24% of all relationships had some violence and that half (49.7%) of those were reciprocally violent" (p. 941), with men more likely to inflict injury than women. Further, Whitaker (2007) found that women were the perpetrators in 70% of cases of non-reciprocal relationships.

In cases where common couple violence is evident, common frustration or anger on behalf of both partners, whereby one or both use physical violence to achieve control and power, is part of this context (Johnson & Ferraro, 2000). While infrequent to start, this violence intensifies over time (Johnson & Ferraro, 2000). In an analysis of 20 women's experiences of using IPV, Lloyd & Emmery (2000) found that 50% used physical violence to fight back against violence against them. All but one woman indicated violence was first initiated by their partner. The authors also found that the violence looked different with respect to motive, in that the woman wanted to gain some level of control and used violence out of frustration and anger (Lloyd & Emmery, 2000). Further, Swan (2006) suggests women's IPV is reactionary and often minor compared to that of their male counterparts. Others such as Gilbert (2002) and Ferraro (2003) suggest that a woman who fights back goes against our gendered understandings of acceptable feminine behaviour and therefore shares the blame in her victimization. Renzetti (1999) argues for the importance of gaining the perspective of women who use violence to understand its context, as women's motives will be different than men's, and thus the conceptual notions of women fighting back or engaging in common couple violence can be more accurate.

However, scholars who follow this continue to maintain their position that women participate in violence that is outside of the gendered argument (Johnson, 2000, 2006; Kimmel, 2002; Whitaker et al., 2007).

The various terms used to describe women's IPV that falls outside of the standard definition of self-defence remain unclear in the literature. Thus, the importance of qualitatively examining women's IPV becomes more critical.

### 2.2.3. Women's IPV from a motives framework

When studied from a qualitative (and, less so, quantitative) approach, much of women's IPV has been understood from a motives framework (Flinck et al., 2010; Caldwell et al., 2009; Bair-Merritt, 2010, Howard-Bostic, 2014). In contrast, the quantitative literature has traditionally focused on the frequency of IPV perpetration. Thus, much of this research does not identify why women use IPV, which must be known to develop effective responses and interventions (Caldwell, et al., 2009; Bair-Merritt et al., 2010). Further, numerous theories attempt to explain women's IPV, such as feminist theory, family conflict theory, and power control theories (Buttell & Carney, 2005). Johnson (2006) suggests that women's motives for IPV will differ depending on the context in which the IPV occurs, such as situations in which there is reciprocal violence, retaliation to being a victim, or sole aggressor. Bair-Merritt (2010) states that many of the theories suggest women's motivations toward IPV are singular and distinct. Further, scholars in the area (Dasgupta, 2002; Buttell & Carney, 2005; Swan & Gambone et al., 2008) have only produced a summative analysis of women's motivations toward IPV rather than a systematic review of the literature to gain a depth of understanding.

Much of the earlier research on women's IPV suggests that motives are centered on patterns of control and domination, as understood against the backdrop of men's motives for IPV

(Johnson, 2006). However, recent research indicates that women in contrast to their male counterparts often have multiple and concurrent motivations, and that developmental and historical trajectories are part of their narrative (Howard-Bostic, 2014). Caldwell et al. (2009) suggest that the complexity of women's motives for IPV is not well understood. The motives can be viewed within a defensive/reactive framework, which Caldwell (2009) refers to as "self-protective violence" (p. 673), or an active motive framework, which references violence that falls outside of merely defending the self. Thus, women's violence is viewed as being tied to anger, control, and retaliation toward their partner (Swan & Snow, 2006; Caldwell et al., 2009). More current research on women's motives demonstrates the multiple and concurrent patterns tied to the active motive typology and notes that, while self-defense patterns cannot be ignored, understanding that women aggressors have multiple motives is critical (Bair-Merritt et al., 2010; Fiske, 2004).

The results of research about women's motives in using IPV are consistent. Motives such as anger (Hettrich & O'Leary, 2007), rage (Flemke & Allen, 2008), control (Fiebert & Gonzalez, 1997; Swan & Snow, 2003; Stuart et al, 2006), jealousy (Follingstad et al., 1991; Caldwell et al., 2009; Bair-Merritt et al., 2010), negative emotional expression (Kimmel, 2002; Fiske, 2004; Caldwell et al., 2009), self-defense (Swan & Snow, 2003; Stuart et al., 2006), and retaliation (Gabora et al., 2007; Swan et al., 2008; Flinck et al., 2010) are well cited. In their quantitative study examining 412 women in the southern United States who used IPV against male partners, Caldwell et al. (2009) use exploratory factor analysis to identify relationships between women's use of violence and hypothesized motives of self-defense, expression of negative emotions, jealousy, control, and tough guise (a front that women put up to represent their toughness). All five factors occurred at a higher frequency for women perpetrating IPV, thereby reinforcing

existing literature on motives. Another contributing factor underlying women's IPV is substance use, which is a consistent foundational theme in both women's and men's IPV (Caetano et al., 2001).

To better intervene when it comes to women's IPV, Bair-Merritt et al. (2010) suggest that it is important to increase understanding with respect to the complexity of women's motives. In their systematic review of 23 studies in the academic literature that directly studied women's motivations toward IPV, they consistently found multiple and concurrent motives both prior to and during women's use of IPV. The primary motives cited, similar to other research, were anger, rage, control, jealousy, retaliation, and self-defense (Caldwell et al., 2009; Bair-Merritt et al., 2010; Howard-Bostic, 2014).

Bair-Merritt et al.'s (2010) review of the literature on women's motive for IPV found that anger was consistently present as a primary motivation in 16 of the studies examined (Barnett, Lee, & Thelen, 1997; Cascardi & Vivian, 1995; Downs, Rindels, & Atkinson, 2007; Flemke & Allen, 2008; Hamberger,1997; Hamberger & Guse, 2005; Hamberger, Lohr, & Bonge, 1994; Henning, Jones, & Holdford, 2005; Kernsmith, 2005; Miller & Meloy, 2006; Olson & Lloyd, 2005; Rosen, Stith, Few et al., 2005; Seamans, Rubin, & Stabb, 2007; Stuart, Moore, Hellmuth et al.2006; Swan & Snow, 2003; Ward & Muldoon, 2007 as cited in Bair-Merritt et al., 2010). Some studies cited anger as primary, while other suggested it was correlated with other motivations linked to jealousy and betrayal or emotional release (Bair-Merritt et al., 2010).

Bair-Merritt et al. (2010) found that coercive control as a common theme in 14 of the studies reviewed, but was not a primary motivation (Barnett, Lee, & Thelen, 1997; Carrado, George, Loxam et al., 1996; Cascardi & Vivian, 1995; Hamberger, 1997; Hamberger & Guse, 2005; Hamberger, Lohr, & Bonge, 1994; Kernsmith, 2005; Olson & Lloyd, 2005; Rosen, Stith,

Few et al., 2005; Seamans, Rubin, & Stabb, 2007; Stuart, Moore, Hellmuth et al., 2006; Swan & Snow, 2003; Ward & Muldoon, 2007; Weston, Marshall, & Coker, 2007 as cited in Bair-Merritt et al., 2010). However, two studies found that issues of control are often misinterpreted when coding qualitative data, as the context in which women report using control could be linked to their own safety (Bair-Merritt et al., 2010). As part of the control thematic, desiring attention was a theme common to 10 of the studies, and typically related to women feeling ignored by their partner or trying to 'get through' to their partner (Bair-Merritt et al., 2010)

The motive of self-defense was identified in all but three of the included studies. Of the 14 studies that examined frequency and endorsement of this motive, four referred to self-defense as a primary motivation (Hamberger, Lohr, & Bonge, 1994; Barnett, Lee, & Thelen, 1997; Hamberger, 1997; Olson & Lloyd, 2005; Rosen et al., 2005; O'Leary & Slep, 2006; Seamans, Rubin, & Stabb, 2007; Stuart, Moore, Hellmuth et al., 2006; Weston, Marshall, & Coker, 2007, as cited in Bair-Merritt et al., 2010). Studies on the motive of self-defense, or in cases of self-defense to protect children, are less clear due to the complexity of the issue and the intertwining of other motives such as anger, control, and jealousy with self-defense. Thus, Bair-Merritt et al. (2010) suggest using caution when examining and explaining women's IPV from a motives framework, as more research is needed to unpack the intertwining factors. Motives of self-defense are clearer when the woman experiences severe victimization or is defending the victimization of children (Caldwell et al., 2009).

Finally, retaliation was a common theme amongst 15 of the studies examined, with only one study citing it as a foremost motivation (Carrado et al., 1996; Dobash & Dobash, 2004; Flemke & Allen, 2008; Hamberger, 1997; Hamberger & Guse, 2005; Hamberger et al., 1994; Kernsmith, 2005; Miller & Meloy, 2006; O'Leary & Slep, 2006; Rosen et al., 2005; Seamans et

al., 2007; Stuart et al., 2006; Swan & Snow, 2003; Ward & Muldoon, 2007; Weston et al., 2007 as cited in Bair-Merritt et al., 2010). In each of these studies, women described using IPV because of the emotional and physical abuse exerted toward them; however, the use of retaliation as a motive was less clear in other studies (Bair-Merritt et al., 2010).

### 2.2.3.1 *Victimized women and women as aggressors*

While women's victimization is cited in the literature as a motive in their use of IPV, my aim to discuss this separately is to make a clear distinction between women as victims and women as aggressors. These two are commonly intertwined, but also distinctly different. Until recent years, the common understanding amongst those who work in the practical and academic field of IPV was that women who use violence do so to combat violence from their male intimate partner. This assertion has been demonstrated to be the primary factor in their perpetration of lethal and non-lethal violence (Comack & Brickey, 2007). Further, Comack & Brickey (2007) suggest the creation of the 'victimized woman' as a result of the patriarchal ideal and constructed gender roles historically drew attention to IPV as a significant social issue. Thus, research highlights women being constructed as passive and weak, often remaining as victims in relationships where violence is prevalent against them, and the notion that women are incapable of being aggressors that results in devaluing their agency to be perpetrators (Africa, 2010).

The notion of women as primary aggressors is now more established in the literature. For instance, in their quantitative review of women's motives for IPV, Caldwell et al. (2009) found that when victimized or when self-defence was identified as a motive, women would often respond with equal or greater severity of violence. However, if self-defence was not evident, women were identified as the primary aggressors and exhibited a higher level of aggression and low levels of victimization. Gabora et al. (2007) found that 59% of 135 federally incarcerated

women reported to have engaged in mutual combat, where normative responses to conflict resulted in mutual violence; just over 23% reportedly engaged in primary perpetration and revenge/retaliatory violence. This is contrary to other research that suggests that women arrested for IPV used violence in response to the violence exerted against them (Hamberger & Polente, 1994).

Women's victimization cannot be ignored for obvious reasons. Africa (2010) suggests there is much more to the narrative of women's victimization and their use of IPV that must be understood. Women acting in self-defence as a response to violence exerted against them is well established in the literature. Similar research suggests that women who were victimized in previous relationships, but not in current ones, will use aggression and the threat of violence toward their partner to caution their partners of their ability to harm them (Thomas, 2005; Hettrich & O'Leary, 2007). Some studies also show that women will consistently use threats of violence and intimidation to make their partner feel scared or afraid (Makepeace, 1986; Stuart et al., 2006). In spite of the literature illuminating women as perpetrators and the motives that influence their use of violence independent of their victimization, the image of the woman as victimized continues to infiltrate our understanding of women's perpetration of IPV (Comack & Brickey, 2007; Africa, 2010). This pervasive assertion that IPV by women exists solely against the backdrop of responding to their victimization or for the protection of children is argued to be a prevalent stereotype (Africa, 2010) that ignores the importance of women's agency and ability to be the aggressor. For instance, Swan & Snow (2003) use the term "abused aggressor" (p. 104), which conveys the notion that women's violence is rooted in violence exerted against them and thereby perpetuates the dichotomy of the victim-aggressor typology and limits the breadth and scope of understanding.

The construction of the label of victim-perpetrator that is placed on women has been a contentious issue for critical feminist theorists because it affects the confines of understanding and the denial of agency; indeed, suggestions that violent acts are beyond a woman's control have been subject to critique (Campbell, 1993; Africa, 2010). My aim to incorporate critical feminist theory is vital in this research as it provides a grounded framework to deconstruct current stereotypes regarding women's IPV by engaging women's voices in research. Further, the underpinnings of feminist theory will bring marginalized voices and described narratives to the fore in both research and practice, where women's experiences have been historically excluded. Critical feminist theory and scholarship provide a foundation on which women's socio-cultural history and the context of the multiple intersecting social factors that impact women's agency are rendered visible; historically and currently, to some degree, such issues have been silenced (Moosa-Mitha, 2005). Critical feminist theory, particularly standpoint feminist theory, will be discussed later in this dissertation.

## 2.2.4. Historical, personal, and socio-cultural factors pertaining to women's IPV

Women's IPV cannot be explored without examining the context behind it in a holistic manner that includes their histories and the socio-cultural factors that play a role. There has been a disservice to women in this regard and the result has been a lack of, or inadequate response to, addressing their IPV in a meaningful way. Further, focusing on men's violence, which has been the historical norm, does not give women a voice with respect to the solutions or responses required for them to address it. While there have been decades of literature on men's IPV, there is comparatively little on women's IPV. In their work examining incarcerated women's IPV, Gabora et al. (2007) highlight that there is a plethora of research in the context of men's IPV that pertains to developmental trajectories, psychological characteristics, interpersonal relationships,

and life histories. In contrast, scholars agree that research on the historical and socio-cultural factors that underlie women's IPV has only emerged within the last decade (Linder & Collins, 2005; Gabora et al., 2007 Williams et al., 2008; Swan et al., 2008; Capaldi et al., 2012). Conradi & Geffner (2009) argue that quantitatively defining any criminal act, including women's IPV, minimizes its context and misses important variables of consideration, specifically those that might highlight differences between women and men's IPV. This lends further support to my aim of using a qualitative approach to gain insight into women's IPV and that my framework for doing so allows for the examination of the personal, historical, and socio-cultural factors that may be present, which is critical to this work.

As the aim of this literature review is to determine the landscape of what has been examined in terms of how and why women use IPV, it is important to flesh out what historical and personal factors are cited as contributing to this phenomenon. Historical child abuse is a known influencing factor toward women's use of violence (Straus, 1990; Siegel, 2000 as cited in Swan et al., 2008; Sullivan et al, 2005; Roberts et al., 2010). For instance, a study conducted by Henning et al. (2003) on the impact of childhood family experiences as they pertain to both female and male IPV found that, for women IPV offenders, "1 out of every 4 witnessed inter-parental violence, a third were physically abused by a caregiver, and most of the women (81.5%) reported that their parents used corporal punishment" (p. 850). In their study examining 135 incarcerated women offenders of IPV, Gabora et al. (2007) found high rates of past victimization from familial or historical relationships were underlying factors in women's use of IPV. Three-quarters of women in their sample had experienced long-term or severe violence as a child that occurred at the hands of their parents, step-fathers, or other family members. Further, Gabora et al. (2007) report that women's history of victimization in their previous adult coupled

relationships was also pervasive, as "60% had experienced abuse in some of their intimate relationships […]. For 63% of the women, the violence was reported to be long-term or severe abuse" (p. 13). Gabora et al.'s (2007) findings validate research that illuminates the unhealthy historical multi-abuse experiences of women who use IPV.

Further, several studies show that domestic violence, historical child abuse, and trauma are major contributing risk factors in women who use IPV (Hamberger & Polente, 1994; Dowd, Leisring & Rosenbaum, 2005; Swan et al., 2005; Kernsmith, 2006). For instance, a study conducted by Swan et al. (2005) on women's IPV found that "sixty percent of the women experienced emotional neglect and abuse, 58% were sexually abused, 52% were physically abused, and 41% were had their physical needs neglected" (p. 16). Further, a longitudinal study of 136 women revealed prevalent impacts of childhood sexual abuse on the women's subsequent adult relationships; specifically, childhood sexual abuse predicted women's IPV and violence used against them (Siegel, 2000 as cited in Swan et al., 2008). These studies illustrate that women who use IPV have experienced severe rates of violence and abuse at the hands of their parents, other family members, or past partners. This reinforces the importance of further examining the context that contributes to a deeper understanding of their IPV and determining through this exploration if any new understandings emerge in this regard.

It would be no surprise that women who experienced, or were exposed to, childhood violence or abuse also experience considerable trauma. Traumatic experiences contribute to the developmental trajectories of individuals throughout their lives (Williams et al., 2008). Swan et al. (2005) suggest that depression, anxiety, substance use, and post-traumatic stress disorder are all factors that emerge for women as a result of traumatic childhood experiences, citing that "69% were struggling with depression. Almost one in three met the criteria on the PTSD screen"

(p. 18). The authors further note that "Almost one in five were suffering from alcohol or drug problems" (p. 18). A study by Dowd et al. (2005) on 107 (56 court ordered and 51 voluntary) women IPV offenders' participation in an anger management program reports similar results. Their findings indicate that "[…] 67% abused one or more substances in the past" (p. 225). In addition, the authors also found "[…] high rates of depression (67%), bipolar disorder (17.9%), and anxiety disorders (38.7%)" (p. 226). Other important factors were related to attempted suicide and prevalent psychiatric issues. Henning et al. (2003) found women perpetrators of IPV were more likely to attempt suicide than their male counterparts; however, women had fewer substance problems than men.

The development of a comprehensive theory or model to increase understanding of women's IPV is required considering the gravity of the issue. Dasgupta (2002) and others (Gilbert 2002; Swan & Snow, 2006) argue that a thorough framework would include not only women's physical violence, but also their victimization, relationship history, past child victimization, motives, and the outcomes of their abuse for all involved. Importantly, the larger cultural context of gender, race and ethnicity, and social class should also be considered. Williams et al. (2008) indicate that the literature lacks a complete personal, historical, structural, and socio-cultural level framework for understanding women's IPV and engaged in a systematic review of the literature regarding the developmental patterns of women's IPV. Their attempt to understand the complexities of IPV suggest that prevalence rates could be clearly identified, but the developmental trajectory of female-perpetrated violence could not be determined, indicating more needs to be done.

The literature on women's personal and historical factors as these pertain to their use of IPV demonstrates the need to increase research efforts as there is much more that can be learned

about what informs a women's choice to use IPV. When looking at the larger context of men's and women's IPV, there is comparatively very little research on women's IPV and thus more needs to be done to reveal new insights into this phenomenon.

**2.2.5. Indigenous women and IPV**

In general, IPV among Indigenous people is three times more prevalent than among non-Indigenous people (Statistics Canada, 2006, 2014; Scrim, 2016). To date, the research on IPV within First Nations communities has been incomplete, and what is available does not outline the full scope of the issue (Aboriginal Women and Family Violence Report, 2008; Burnett, 2015). Further, according to the Aboriginal Women and Family Violence Report (2008), there is limited documentation on "the attitudes and perceptions of Indigenous victims, their abusers, and the community at large" (p. 1) regarding IPV within Indigenous communities. Scrim (2016) suggests that examining Indigenous violence is critical due to Indigenous people being "disproportionately represented as victims of crime in Canada" (p. 1). The specific historical circumstances and inter-generational effects of colonization, oppression, and trauma that resulted from the inception of the Indian Act, residential schools, and the 'sixties scoop' experiences that Indigenous people have faced are integral to their over-representation as victims (Truth and Reconciliation Canada, 2015).

Although Indigenous IPV is understudied, some studies provide some insights. For instance, Murdock (2001) in her study of Indigenous women and IPV reflects on the dearth in the literature exploring Indigenous women's violence outside of the perspective of 'victim', especially when violent women are seeking assistance in coping. Not only does Murdock (2001) seek to understand Indigenous women's IPV, she argues for the need to set aside the debate about whether women are more or less violent than their male counterparts and focus instead on

understanding the complexities of their violence. She further argues that including women's

voice on their violence in research, particularly the voices of Indigenous women who have been

historically excluded and marginalized, is critical to addressing their needs (Murdock, 2001).

In Gabora et al.'s (2007) study, 40% of the 135 women sampled in federal institutions

who had committed IPV were Indigenous. Considering that Indigenous people encompass less

than four percent of the Canadian population and, at that time, comprised 22% of the federal

female inmate population, IPV is clearly a serious issue amongst this population (Gabora et al.,

2007). The absence of literature on Indigenous women's IPV is not astonishing, considering the

much higher rates of victimization amongst Indigenous women (Statistics Canada, 2015).

Studies of Indigenous communities illustrate the correlation between violence and the long

history of oppression experienced by Indigenous people, particularly with respect to the impact

of residential schools and the resulting inter-generational trauma and prevalent social ills, such as

addictions and violence (Murdock, 2001; Gabora et al., 2007). The established connection

between substance use and IPV in both women and men is a central contributing factor (Caetano

et al., 2001; Kruttschnitt et al., 2002). However, some distinctions related to mutual violence

without the inter-generational trauma are also cited in severe cases of violence (Gabora et al.,

2007). Thus, it is imperative to frame the high rates of IPV in Indigenous communities within a

socio-political context; to focus solely on the cultural dimensions of violence within Indigenous

communities might result in a failure to recognize the underlying structural and systemic features

that further perpetuate violence within the family regardless of culture (Michalski, 2004).

Violence has not traditionally been a prominent aspect of Indigenous culture and is not

inherent in Indigenous people, but rather a tragic consequence of residential schools and the

experiences endured by Indigenous people (Truth and Reconciliation Canada, 2015). However,

incidence and prevalence rates of IPV in Indigenous communities suggest that violence is not decreasing (Murdock, 2001; Bopp, Bopp, & Lane 2003; Statistics Canada, 2013); in fact, it has remained stable in some jurisdictions, which suggests entrenched normalization. Solutions to the violence that exists in Indigenous communities must acknowledge the long history of dispossession and the traumatic impact of this history. Interventions must include a design and delivery that are community-based and reflect the different needs of each community (National Clearinghouse on Family Violence, 1996; Proulx & Perrault, 2000). Levels of response to IPV range from the implementation of violence education services within the community to an overall silencing at the community level, a strategy that can potentially lead to increased perpetuation of the violence (Indigenous Justice Implementation Commission, 2001; Bopp, Bopp & Lane, 2003;). Many responses to violence in Indigenous communities do not effectively deal with intervention and prevention but rather react to major incidents such as murder (Indigenous Justice Implementation Commission, 2001).

In 1991, the Canadian government sponsored the Royal Commission on Indigenous Peoples (RCAP), a comprehensive research study that employed First Nations people across Canada to utilize their cultural ethics to collect data on a national scale on a number of topics, including violence. In 1996, Indigenous people indicated the need for community-relevant and responsive intervention strategies (Royal Commission on Indigenous Peoples, 1996). A ten-year follow-up report indicated the recommendations from 1996 were not realized, and many of these social issues still exist (Assembly of First Nations, 2006). The recent Truth and Reconciliation report, Honouring the Truth, Reconciling the Future (2015), highlights historical oppression and inter-generational trauma through personal experiential accounts of the survivors of residential schools and the resulting impact of this historical travesty. This report embodies several calls to

action that pertain to healing of the "physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual harms caused by residential schools" (p. 163) that are rooted in the need to address the past abuse and violence experienced by Indigenous people. It also calls on the Federal Government to engage in developing a national plan to research and publish data on family violence in Indigenous communities (Truth and Reconciliation Canada, 2015). Thus, learning from Indigenous women participants will provide insights and increased understanding based on their described lived experiences in their use of IPV and how they contextualize it, without presupposing their needs. The *United Nations Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* (2007), article 22, specifically outlines that "particular attention shall be paid to rights and special needs of Indigenous elders and women [….]" (p. 9), suggesting the importance of their unique experiences. This specific right can be applied not only in the context of their victimization, but also to their role in IPV. This illustrates the importance that research reflects specific experiences as perpetrators as well. Hearing Indigenous women's voices may also reveal the needs of Indigenous women, and in this sense, contribute to informing culturally responsive measures that reflect their unique circumstances. The data collection for my research was done using a culturally sensitive and informed approach, and the use of a descriptive phenomenological approach to data analysis will allow the research to stay true to the voice of Indigenous women who participated in the study.

**2.2.6 Summary**

In spite of recent literature regarding the personal, historical, and socio-cultural factors related to women's use of IPV, more needs to be done to determine how these factors play out in the adult lives of women who use IPV. My assertion is that both the perpetration of violence by men and women as well as their victimization must be addressed and can be done so sensitively

and safely if the examination of the context in which their violence occurs is considered. Examining women's IPV does not take away from their victimization, rather it simply acknowledges their location within the context of IPV and increased knowledge of these impacts can assist in better policies and interventions for women, men, and families. Further, much of women's IPV is understood against the backdrop of men's partner violence and, as a result, the issues are decontextualized and women's violence is constructed to be similar to men's violence. Critical feminist theory and scholarship also bears weight in understanding women's position and voices, recognizing their lived experiences are varied, multilayered, and not monolithic. The need to focus efforts toward recognizing individual experiences while drawing from collective standpoints is critical (Stanley & Wise, 1990 as cited in Comack, 1999). Using the foundational underpinnings of critical feminist theory, specifically feminist standpoint theory, and a descriptive phenomenological analysis, a deeper understanding of the reality and intricacy of women's IPV can be reached. Their diverse and multi-layered experiences collectively render a standpoint for the women, while staying true to their individual experiences. This will also help in better understanding Indigenous women's IPV as there is a lack of depth in understanding IPV from the voices of Indigenous women perpetrators. The literature is just starting to explore these women's life trajectories, which are markedly different from those of their male counterparts. Overall, the literature points to the importance of learning experiential perspectives related to women's violence and how they understand the context in which this occurs. The themes generated from the women's experiences may contribute to more informed strategies for addressing IPV for this population as well as more generally.

## Chapter Three - Theoretical Framework for Understanding Women's IPV: Feminist Standpoint Theory

## 3.1 Introduction

Feminist theory underpins my work due to its focus on the changing assumptions about the study of social phenomena pertaining to women that have been historically studied from a point of view that lay in traditional sociological inquiry. I assert that feminist knowledge better informs the context of women's experiences and has historically set out a path toward research practices that has guided and altered the construction of traditional modes of inquiry, which historically have been androcentric. Recognizing and understanding that women's position of 'knowing' differs from that of men is critical in the study of IPV. Women's lived experiences, their multiple realities, their marginalized and oppressed positions, and their way of contextualizing these experiences is at the heart of feminist scholarship. When it comes to IPV, women's knowledge is different than men's. Therefore, it is critical that IPV be studied from the perspective of women in this way. Also essential, is gaining knowledge from Indigenous women who have historically come from an oppressed and marginalized position. Accordingly, no one woman's story is deemed to be representative of the whole; rather, it is many individual voices that speak together (Baber & Allen, 1992).

When it comes to women's violence in general, historical understanding has been against the backdrop of their male counterparts. Further, women's violence has been understood in the context of women's victimization and argued to be devoid of women's voices or any discussion of women's agency (Africa, 2010). Comack &Brickey (2007) further this notion, suggesting that women's violence, and their IPV in particular, has been understood in the context of three competing notions: victimized woman, bad woman, and mad woman. Africa (2010) contends that the resulting effect is the ongoing perpetuation of the construction of their violence rather

than efforts to seek to understand directly from the women themselves. Kelly (1996) broadens the discussion, suggesting that gender is constructed in a manner that has not included women's experiences, which should be at the fore of understanding the research and discourse of IPV. Research in the field has portrayed gender variations in quantitative ways (e.g., frequency, injury severity, and risk of serious harm) and qualitative ways, concerning relational dynamics and motives (Hamberger & Potente, 1994; Johnson et al., 2000). In this vein, women's use of violence should not be constructed through the lens of women behaving like men, as this assumes that men's violence is the norm with women's violence being compared against this backdrop (Flemke, 2003). Comack & Brickey (2007) also contend that women's IPV should be studied with their social context in mind.

While gendered violence is cited in the literature as a key understanding of women's violence and specifically their use of IPV, I contend it is only one part of the story in the research and practice toward understanding it. Where women find themselves at a particular point in time, in terms of their social location, or how their violence emerges that may result from their histories or their socio-cultural backgrounds is also part of this discourse. Kokushin (2014) argues that understanding social issues, particularly issues related to race, class, and gender, has been at the exclusion of women's voices in feminist scholarship (Kokushin, 2014). Further, Kokushin argues that not only have women of all races been excluded from mainstream theory and scholarship but there has been historical tension amongst feminist theorists regarding women's position as it pertains to issues of privilege between race and class groups. Hill-Collins (1990 as cited in Kokushin) illustrates this in her work, *Black Feminist Thought,* where she argues that while feminist movements have sought to include women's voice, theory, and research into the mainstream, the perspectives and voices of women of color have been

systematically excluded from this movement (Kokushin, 2014). This becomes an important

consideration when examining women's IPV as the act of IPV crosses racial and socio-economic

lines.

Thus, although gender as an explanatory model is understood as important, the notion of

intersectionality also offers a theoretical explanation for women's victimization or vulnerabilities

that would co-occur alongside their use of violence and abuse. Thus, whether victim or

perpetrator of violence, the lived experiences of women in this regard cannot be read through the

lens of gender alone; rather, a consideration of the intersecting factors that fundamentally shaped

their lived experiences must be considered (Lipsitz-Bern, 1993).

### 3.1.1 The History of Feminist Contributions and its Use in Understanding Women's Violence

Feminist contributions are found with the first and second wave of feminism when

feminist scholars were challenging the traditional theoretical and methodological approaches

toward research, particularly research concerning women's issues and suffrages as a result of

their oppression and marginalization (Harding, 2004; Moosa-Mitha, 2005; Comack, 2006;

Kokushin, 2014). For instance, Comack (2006) argues that "feminists needed to transgress the

traditional boundaries of criminology, to start from outside the confines of criminological

discourse" (p. 33). The second wave of feminism included women and advocacy groups actively

addressing women's inequality, social injustices that impacted women, and activism to create

changes in law and policy that historically oppressed women (Kokushin, 2014). Kokushin (2014)

argues that mainstream research and scholarship has touted traditional theories mainly within the

sociological discipline as dominant, and that inclusion of feminist theories is required and

necessary. One can be critical of research traditions as being unilateral and not all-encompassing

in hearing the voices of those who are researched. The concerns lie in the theorization of data, analysis, representation, and purposes of social research. Critical and feminist scholars alike challenge the traditional methods of research as being exclusionary of the participant; this can be seen in the existing debate in the literature with respect to the context of women's IPV (Moosa-Mitha, 2005; Comack et al, 2006). My work aims to bring women's perspective and their voices about their violence, particularly their IPV, to the literature in a way that traditional theories, methods, and practices have ignored. By inviting women to speak about their use of IPV is to negate old ways of doing research on social phenomena pertaining to women, and to adopt and adhere to feminist principles and contributions to illuminate their voices. Explanations related to women who use IPV are varied due to the diverse reasons for their violence. I argue that the use of traditional theories and methods to understand why women use violence and how they contextualize their violence is not satisfactory. While some research has moved beyond simply studying women's violence from a quantitative and male centered position, more needs to be done.

Thus, when it comes to women's violence and crime generally, critical feminist theory and scholarship are preferred over traditional criminological or causation-type theories in understanding, explaining, and positioning women at the fore of this work (Cain, 1990; Harding, 2004). As Comack et al. (2006) succinctly point out, the criminalization of women has become an increasing and widespread trend; women have historically been the fastest-growing segment of the prison population, particularly in industrialized countries such as Canada, United States, Great Britain, and Australia (Comack et al., 2006). This is true of women's participation in the justice system generally; it relates to specific crimes such as theft, fraud, and prostitution, which are considered women's crimes and for which women are distinctly represented. It also includes

the slow, but rising, trends of women's violence (Comack, 1996; Comack, et al., 2006; Statistics Canada, 2015).

Women's criminality is rooted in similar, yet different, etiologies than men's and traditional criminology has failed to address these differences in meaningful and concrete ways. The consequence is that women will be positioned on the victimization-criminalization continuum in far greater numbers than men (Comack, 1996). While violence, racism, poverty, and inequality impact both men and women who find themselves in the justice system, distinct events and circumstances reveal the systemic nature of violence, racism, and poverty and extreme victimization in criminalized women's lives (Comack, 1996; Comack & Balfour, 2006). The traditional invisibility of women in the history of the research on criminality and theorizing within criminology is evident. Sociological theorists such as Merton, Sutherland, Hirschi, and Becker have studied women's criminality primarily from an androcentric position, focusing on male juvenile offenders and negating girls'/women's role in criminality (Chesney-Lind & Sheldon, 1992; Belknap, 2001; Comack & Balfour, 2006). Girls' and women's crime emerged in the research in the late 1970s and, even then, was only included in a marginalized way. For example, Shaw and McKay's work, Juvenile Delinquency and Urban Areas, included only a few pages on girls and suggested it was mostly related to sexual delinquency (Belknap, 2001). Before this, theorists such as Cesare Lombroso, Otto Pollack, and W.I. Thomas explained women's criminality as linked to biology, with little emphasis on the socio-cultural factors and consequences of women's criminality (Chesney-Lind & Sheldon, 1992; Belknap, 2001; Comack & Balfour, 2006). These theorists suggest that women's criminality and devious nature is rooted in their physiology and thus, women have been categorized as misfits with a predisposition to

criminality based on physical typologies and biological indicators (Belknap, 2001; Comack & Balfour, 2006).

Alternatively, yet within the same vein, Banwell (2010) argues that women's IPV has historically taken a reductionist view, in that women are either "blameless victims or culpable agents" (p. 116), and this dual approach limits the move toward a contextual understanding. Considering that the intention of my research is to explore women's use of IPV, it is important that the theoretical approach supports and explains the significance of having their voices heard, and to make visible the collective standpoints of women who use IPV while recognizing their individual experiences. It is also vital that the research process empowers women to share their experiences in their words. Finally, it is important to identify and locate women's experiences and their agency within its existing framework, acknowledging their realities in the process (Kelly, 1996; Bowell, 2011).

The above context is provided to illustrate the complexities of the issue and the importance of understanding IPV from women's perspective in order to better respond. The focus of feminist scholarship, and critical feminist theory then, is to correct the misconceptions in the analysis of gender, and, particularly, the women about whom men have historically written. Further, feminist scholarship aims to understand women's experiences and to make women visible in the research. Therefore, these were valuable contributions to feminist research and, in effect, to the social sciences disciplines, particularly sociology; it offered a lens to engage in research that theorized critically about the importance of women's experiences (Comack, 1996; Comack & Balfour, 2006; Banwell, 2010). With this in mind, this chapter focuses on defining standpoint feminist theory as a product of tradition feminist inquiry. It also examines and highlights challenges in the critical debate about recognizing standpoint theory as a scientific

theory and method. Finally, I lay out the contributions of the theory, identify knowledge acquisition via standpoints of women who use IPV, and discuss the importance of the theory to my research.

## 3.2 Feminist standpoint theory

This dissertation is about women who are violent towards their intimate partners. My rationale for using feminist standpoint theory is to support my position that women's voices and knowledge obtained from their experiences should be at the fore of the study of women's IPV. With this in mind, I align with Sandra Harding's (2004) assertion that standpoint theory, as a method of inquiry for studying scientific phenomena, is best suited for centering women's experiences due to their multiple realities, and in its influencing of women's knowledge from a collective standpoint. This premise also corresponds with my use of qualitative interviews and descriptive phenomenology in the analysis of my data. My aim is to ground women's individual experiences from whatever locations these occur and to thematically render their collective standpoints. Using a descriptive phenomenology approach to data analysis will allow this to occur systematically and serves to increase explanatory power to understand women's IPV, placing their voices at the center of understanding. I believe that while women come from diverse and multiple lived realities, collective points of experience are commonly shared. The historical de-centering of their experiences is not inclusive. Recognizing difference is critical in understanding women's positions and collective points of reality can be shared regardless of a woman's race, ethnic culture, socio-economic status, or whether she is privileged or oppressed. I chose a feminist method to open the door to the exploration of women's differences and commonalities. Phenomenology allows me to explore these locations and allows for the possibility of uncovering their similarities.

I assert then that engaging in research that is difference centred is crucial to valuing and respecting knowledge that emerges from women's experience in their use of IPV. Putting their voice and experience at the fore allows women to be the authors of their own knowledge, individually and collectively, and this undeniably acknowledges their social position and challenges the historical structures that have marginalized their voices.

Feminist standpoint theory emerged from traditional feminist inquiry as a response to early feminist contributions that were critiqued as narrowly focused on issues of women who were white, privileged, and universal (Hill-Collins (2000). These critiques of early feminist scholarship (particularly second-wave feminist thinking) were related to, as Harding (2004) suggests, the "production of knowledge and practices of power" (p. 1). Essentially, it is a critique of the universalistic approach to understanding women's position in society and the suggestion that women will experience a social phenomenon, such as IPV, the same way, essentially negating the intersection of their experiences, particularly through the lens of race, class, and gender (Harding, 2004). Thus, third-wave feminist scholarship has challenged the evaluation of gender in what Hill-Collins (2000) references as a universal notion. Comack (1999) and others argue that, under the paradigm of standpoint theory, there is no one truth; rather, there are multiple truths that are social, culturally, and politically constructed by the social structures within which we live (Wonders, 1999; Harding, 2004).

Standpoint theory emerged out of Marxist traditions as a theoretical method for feminist scholars to understand and explain the social and natural world from the view of women's lived experiences. It was proposed not only as a model to explain but also an objective and prescriptive methodology to guide feminist research, because the historical study of women was done from androcentric positions (Harding, 2004; Bowell, 2011). Its advocates argue the theory

has two main propositions: it critiques the dominant conventional methods for obtaining knowledge in the natural and social sciences, and it defends the consistency and congruity of feminist knowledge (Hekman, 1997). According to Comack (1999), "standpoint feminism marks an attempt to give voice to the knowledge arising from the lives of women in patriarchal capitalistic societies" (p. 292). It is both the method and science bringing women's knowledge and reality to the fore (Harding, 1993; Clough, 1994). As Hekman (1997) suggests, the power of the theory is that it allows researchers to connect everyday life with the social structures that shape social life. Its objective to position women's experiences in the center signals a resistance to what has been considered the predominant influence in traditional fields of knowledge, such as the social and natural sciences (Harding, 2004). Kokushin (2014) argues that a further strength of the theory lends it to being shaped in a "debate opening way" (p. 9), which in turn leaves open a window of introduction to feminist analysis to scholars who do not necessarily characterize themselves as feminists (Kokushin, 2014). Either way, the literature clearly demonstrates that women who use IPV do so for a variety of reasons that may or may not intersect, depending on the women's social location. I argue that the tenets of standpoint theory recognize and value the varied social points from which women are situated and acknowledge that women who come from different points or location can have similar experiences.

Furthering the notion that women's experiences embed multiple truths, Harding (2004) argues that fundamental to the feminist standpoint inquiry is that knowledge is socially situated. For Harding (2004), this means that the knowledge of the oppressed will be different than the knowledge of the dominant group, and thus the dominant situation allows for the production of distinguishing kinds of knowledge. Harding (2004) also submits that groups who experience marginalization are socially situated in a manner that makes visible their surroundings, making it

possible for them to be conscious to what happens in these surroundings. Finally, Harding (2004) argues that traditional research has focused on social/power relations, leaving out marginalized voices. Thus, Harding (2004) argues that understanding sites of power requires inclusive knowledge that begins with understanding the realities of the marginalized. Brooks (2007) highlights that its premise is to allow for an understanding to emerge from the voices of oppressed women and to apply the knowledge gained from their voices to create change. Further, standpoint theory advocate Donna Haraway (1988) also argues that standpoint is the notion of 'situated knowledge'. There is an assumption that women's lived experiences are the site for critiquing and assessing dominant knowledge claims made about them. Harding (2004) lays it out clearly, indicating that knowledge is rooted in human experience; because women are represented in race and class, the diversity of these must stem from all women's lived experiences. Thus, the origins of standpoint theory are rooted in the empowerment of oppressed groups, women being one of them, and valuing their experiences, and, as Hill-Collins (1989) frames it, a way to cultivate a resistance to constructed notions about their realities.

Proponents of standpoint feminist agree that engaging in standpoint theory to further the scholarship around phenomena related to women is not simply due to the mark of being a woman (Kokushin, 2014). Rather, a standpoint evolves through the experiences of a collective struggle whereby women's position is the starting place of inquiry (Hartsock, 1983). Bowell (2011) suggests that, while privileged and marginalized women are equal in locating standpoint, those marginalized are more apt to successfully achieve standpoint as a result of their marginalized position. However, this does not negate that in certain circumstances or contexts, such as women's intimate violence, privileged and marginalized women alike can share critical insights as to the effects of power, and structures of power, on the production of knowledge (Bowell,

2011). It is particularly relevant considering that the act of intimate violence does not discriminate across socio-economic strata and that women who use violence come from different lives, activities, and social locations, thus rendering many different consciousnesses and standpoints (Comack & Balfour, 2006).

My claim as to the importance of using standpoint theory to underpin my work is supported by feminist scholarship in that it strives to recognize the complexities of women's use of IPV, which are also illustrated in the literature. Feminist scholars have called for a multi-layered discourse that provides the forum/ framework/ platform for women to share their stories in a way that illuminates these complexities and realities of their use of intimate violence in their lives (Hill-Collins, 1990; Gilbert, 2002). With this in mind, understanding women's use of IPV is critical to challenging the conventional thinking that suggests women are passive victims without voice or agency (Murdock, 2001; Africa, 2010). Better understanding women's roles in their IPV can assist in the development of appropriate responses that are informed by women's collective knowledge.

### 3.2.1. The critical debates on standpoint feminist theory

While it is important to lay the foundation for my aim to engage with feminist standpoint theory in my work, it is equally important to highlight the debates and criticism in the use of the theory in this regard. Many critiques have been put forth by numerous scholars on the use of feminist standpoint theory in research that have both informed and advanced the theory. As Wylie (as cited in Harding, 2004) suggests, "[i]ts advocates, as much as its critics, disagree vehemently about its parentage, its status as a theory, and crucially, its relevance to current thinking about knowledge" (p. 340). Hekman (1997) also argues that the late 80s and early 90s were fraught with criticisms of the tenets of feminist standpoint theory, leading to it holding a less pronounced position than it had previously. The critique stems from more contemporary

notions regarding the feminist study that emerge from accusations of relativism and essentialist universalism, post-modernist assumptions, and 'difference'-centred feminist thought (Hekman, 1997; Bowell, 2011). I agree with the above contentions and with the importance of stimulating discussion as this contributes to the discourse on various levels that advances the theory and strengthens its position. The following discussion highlights a few of the key debates on the use of feminist standpoint in research and scholarship.

### 3.2.1.1 *Privileging advantage and negating difference*

Since the inception of standpoint as a theory and method, there has been a critical focus on the notion of 'difference' within the framework of the theory (Bowell, 2011). Women's lives, particularly the location of their realities, lies in many facets of the social structures and the marginalization and oppressive intersections that women face within them (Bowell, 2011). In spite of attempts to reconcile the streams of thought related to putting difference at the fore, there remains a dilemma: the attempts to be inclusive of the varied experiences continue against the view that standpoint is monolithic (a postmodern contention). Moreover, due to concerns about the lack of, and appropriate account of, differences such as race, class, gender, and so on, the role of power relations within the experiences are not accounted for in a meaningful way (Bowell, 2011). The response to these concerns has been to argue for multiple standpoints and to vary the theory to take into consideration the ways in which women experience their realities, as well as the intersections of the structures that marginalize and oppress to produce different standpoints (hooks, 1984; Hill-Collins, 1990). hooks (1984), in her work *From Margin to Center*, illustrates how bringing marginalized women of color to the center recognizes difference and social locations by which difference emerges. Bowell (2011) also points to the argument put forth by Mies & Shiva (also as cited in Harding, 2004) who contend that many examples of women's

activism exist, including their advocacy work pursuing environmental causes, making evident the reality of women engaging in solidarity and overcoming differences to gain a depth of understanding of their lives as well as how their marginalized or non-marginalized experiences are intertwined. Hekman (1997) argues that the debate about standpoint related to 'difference' has redefined standpoint; this has been a crucial contribution to the discourse, as it has kept the notion of situated knowledge at the fore of the discussion. Hekman (1997) further states that

> [o]riginally, feminist standpoint theorists claimed that the standpoint of women offers a privileged vantage point for knowledge. But if the differences among women are taken seriously and we accept the conclusion that women occupy many different standpoints and thus inhabit many realities, this thesis must be re-examined. (p. 349)

Thus, when it comes to women's IPV, the idea that standpoint theory in its contemporary form provides only a privileged voice is not accurate. The reason this is important is that much of the literature on women's IPV illustrates that women who use violence are found in varied social locations. I contend that the use of standpoint allows for a method to illuminate their collective voices in this regard and this strengthens my assertion that standpoint theory best corresponds with my aim to explore their use of IPV.

### 3.2.1.2 Postmodern critique of feminist standpoint theory

Critical post-modern feminists contend there is no actual 'women's experience' from which to build knowledge and that 'reality' is too complex to be understood universally (Moosa-Mitha, 2005). As stated by Moosa-Mitha, "[…] to the question of what constitutes social reality and the social relations that characterize it, postmodern theorists would respond by saying that one cannot answer this question in generalities or universal terms" (p. 57). Proponents of the postmodern approach suggest women's lived experiences are so distinct it is difficult, if not impossible, to produce themes that generalize their experiences (Comack et al., 2006; Brooks, 2007).

Postmodern feminism focuses on the deconstruction of ideas and social construction of meanings (Moosa-Mitha, 2005) that place women in vulnerable positions such as criminality (Wonders, 1999). It further suggests you cannot 'know' anything completely, and truth then is challenged and ever changing; when examining issues of women's violence and justice-related issues, there is a 'story' or discourse that has been traditionally ignored (Wonders, 1999). Thus, the limitations of standpoint theory may be that a universal understanding cannot be rendered. Scholars such as Smart (as cited in Cain, 1990) suggest that a central component of postmodern, feminist ideology is the denial of the notion that there is a single reality (Smart, as cited in Cain, 1990). The theory contends there are many diverse experiences and multiplicities that should be recognized as subjugated knowledge (Moosa-Mitha, 2005).

However, Cain (1990) had already posited her position that current feminist inquiry, specifically standpoint feminism, is a "relational concept" (p. 133) that emerges from our everyday interactions and relationships rather than ascending from the diverse experiences of women. Standpoint feminists have recently argued that women can be oppressed in some situations while at the same time privileged in others. Postmodern feminists argue that standpoint may stifle the subjugated knowledge that emerges from these women's experiences if collected in a way that represents one standpoint or one collective experience. However, as Cain (1990) points out, the "occupancy of standpoint does not foreclose debate" (134), and thus standpoints do not cause knowledge but restructure the possibilities for knowledge. Women have varied and diverse experiences that afford contributions to knowledge that are based on relationships, and a socio-cultural history from which collective understanding emerges (Cain, 1990). Hartsock (1987) had already been long advocating this point in her work, *Rethinking Modernism*, where she argues that the position and experiences of women are critical at both a theoretical and

practical level, thus rejecting the postmodern position that standpoint as a theory and method cannot derive systematic knowledge that will create social change.

Further, Zinn et al. (1996) in their work on multi-racial feminism, which is described as an area of theory and practice underpinned by academic traditions, suggest that situating women (and men for that matter) within various systems of control allows people to address inequality and challenge the power structures in order to create change. Zinn et al. (1996) suggest that that social location informs our reality, stating that

> *...people experience race, class, gender, and sexuality differently depending upon their social location in the structures of race, class, gender, and sexuality. For example, people of the same race will experience race differently depending upon their location in the class structure as working class, professional managerial class, or unemployed; in the gender structure as female or male; and in structures of sexuality as heterosexual, homosexual, or bisexual.* (p. 326)

This suggests the importance of recognizing difference, and thus acknowledging the multiple realities to women's lives.

### 3.2.1.3 *The critique of relativism*

Also underneath this umbrella of the criticism of standpoint theory is that feminist standpoint is situated on politically unstable ground; this is owing to the commitment of epistemic relativism and the position that all knowledge is socially situated and relative, for instance, to time, place, and culture (Harding, 2004; Bowell, 2011). Harding (2004) argues that opponents fault the theory for accepting a harmful "epistemological relativism" (10) as a result of standpoint theorists' claim that knowledge is socially situated. In this vein, Harding (2004) argues that, generally, research areas are informed by the interests and values of the researcher. The researcher's interests clearly inform the direction, framework, methods, and content of the research, and this does not impact the empirical rigor or theoretical quality of the work. She further argues that knowledge claims are relative to cultural context or practices by which social

groups create meaning (Harding, 2004). What this means is feminist epistemology is knowledge produced by the particular perspectives of the subject, and social values, culture, and one's social position heighten the process of analysis and the attainment of that knowledge (Harding, 2004). Harding (2004) asserts that it is critical that knowledge be both socially constructed and empirically accurate, a notion that validates and justifies socially situated knowledge claims.

### 3.2.2. Contributions of feminist standpoint theory to research

While important debates and criticisms have been levied against standpoint theory, Kokushin (2014) suggests that many scholars point to a fourth wave of feminism in recent years that marks reconvening of the critical debates from the previous waves in a manner that reflects the importance of the contributions of standpoint theory to research. I argue that the contributions of standpoint feminism far outweigh its criticisms and Harding's (2004) notion of standpoint as a site of political, philosophical, and objective and scientific method and theory is solidly grounded. With this in mind, the tenet of feminist standpoint theory's 'situated knowledge' has been argued to be its most significant contribution to the knowledge debates within the social and natural sciences (Harding, 2004). However, scholars such as Longino (1993) and Hekman (1997) suggest that knowledge is socially situated and that marginalized standpoints offer a knowledge advantage that is in conflict (Hekman, 1997; Bowell, 2011). The conflict that arises relates to the advantage of one standpoint over another within a marginalized and non-marginalized position. From Longino's standpoint (1993), if a resolution to this dichotomy cannot be resolved then the result is varied, multiple, and irreconcilable knowledge positions (Longino, 1993).

In spite of the controversial debate regarding feminist standpoint theory as an objective and scientific theory and method, the approach offers critical insights to the feminist discourse

and is a theory that can be used within both feminist and non-feminist scholarship (Kokushin, 2014). As discussed, a prominent feature, contrary to some of the criticisms, is the recognition that knowledge is situated in a social way. For instance, marginalized women are positioned in ways that illuminate their awareness of their marginalized position more acutely, and women's voices must be included when focusing on issues where power relations are at the fore (Bowell, 2011). As a result of the theoretical and methodological debates in the social, political, natural, and philosophical disciplines, standpoint feminism has held a prominent position in second-wave feminist scholarship (Bowell, 2011). According to Harding (2004), standpoint theories move past analysis and description of women's situated location in structuring and molding knowledge to chart out how political and social disadvantage can be shifted into valid scientific knowledge (Harding 2004; Bowell, 2011). This is accomplished by incorporating women's voice and experiences into the forum of research in an objective and systematic manner to acknowledge and learn from their positions of disadvantage. Women's collective, marginalized voices are the catalyst to resist and produce knowledge toward change.

These contributions are the visible rendering of the facets of social relations and the natural, lived world that is unavailable from dominant discourse. As a result, the theory allows for the production of questions leading to a more comprehensive and truer account of those social relations (Harding, 2004; Bowell, 2011). It also includes a focus on correcting misconceptions in the analysis of gender and, particularly, for women about whom men have historically written. Further, the focus aimed at understanding women's lived experiences and making women visible in the research is key. These were essential contributions to feminist research and, in effect, to the social science disciplines, particularly sociology as it offered a critical lens to engage in research design (Bowell, 2011). Moreover, feminist theory and

methodologies included a vision of social justice that opposed patriarchy and gendered social relations considered unjust (Moosa-Mitha, 2005; Comack, 2006; Kokushin, 2014).

With the intent to impact systemic change within the broader institutions, the thrust of standpoint feminism led to a strong entry point into the social and political discourses (Bowell, 2011). The result was a shift in cultural attitudes and values related to intimate violence, which was no longer considered acceptable or a normal part of marriage and family (Bowell, 2011). Further, Bowell (2011) asserts that the broadening of the social and political discourse has, at a minimum, increased the responses that have led to attitude and policy changes disavowing violence against women that have produced legal protections to women who experience it. According to Bowell (2011), the challenging action by women and the men who support them in fighting intimate and family violence have driven research to critically analyze the etiology and conditions driving it. These include the socio-cultural and historical factors (poverty, addictions, inter-generational abuse) affecting both men and women who use it. Thus, the contribution of feminist standpoint theory has been a broadening and deepening of understanding of intimate and family violence to also include violence against men, children, and elders (Bowell, 2011).

### 3.2.3 Importance of using foundational principles of standpoint in the research of women's IPV

Within any approach that engages feminist scholarship, it is important to employ a theory and method such as feminist standpoint theory whereby the research endeavors can include both the researcher and the women researched (Murdock, 2001). Viewed as a joint initiative, the objective is to maximize the opportunity to reflect on women's experiences (Murdock, 2001). I agree with this assertion and that, because this process is reflexive and recognizes that the researcher and those being researched have different experiences, opinions, and views about the world in which they live, the knowledge gained can be rich (Cain, 1990). Further, Cain (1990)

also illustrates the importance of relationships and references these as a core part of our identity and reflexivity, with the "web or configuration of relationships" (p. 129) being distinctive and interrelated. She further suggests that women speak from a unique site and that several points of knowledge arise. Thus, there is a recognition that various opinions and experiences emerge from a specific location in society, or from a specific standpoint, and these can, and do, differ over time (Cain, 1990). Cain (1990) further argues that our identities are shaped as the conditions and social points of the world change. As a result, the knowledge produced from a particular standpoint, at a particular point in time, is a critical aspect of working from the standpoint (Cain, 1990). When it comes to women's IPV, I argue that the reflexive process is critical in gaining a deeper understanding of the reasons why women use violence against their partners. Using a feminist method such as standpoint can render women's collective experiences without marginalizing their realities, while the reflexive process recognizes the importance of the individual experiences. The intersection of relationships that are class-, race-, and gender-based are the sites by which we produce knowledge and, in effect, constitute a standpoint (Cain, 1990). Thus, understanding that knowledge is produced from a social location or, as Harding (2004) suggests, is socially situated affords a better understanding of how to engage in research from women's positions. Feminist standpoint theory, therefore, is a method that allows data to be gathered in a snapshot in time, making women's lived experiences as it relates to their use of IPV a point of reference. It acknowledges that research is never complete. As Bhattachary (2009) suggests, researchers "do not have complete access to the participants' lives, making this research only a frozen frame of collective moments" (p. 109).

As Murdock (2001) suggests in her work examining murderous women, one must shift into a site that is connected to women engaging in IPV to know about women who use intimate

violence; only at that time will it be possible to produce knowledge that can adequately speak about women's IPV. Cain (1990) conveys this idea adequately by suggesting the process of engagement is much more than connecting with individuals who hold the same experiences or share a particular site; rather, it involves theoretical reflexivity and referencing historical, environmental, and cultural connections. Again, in the process, the researcher must recognize their position and the historical and socio-cultural factors of their own site to be able to be reflective of the experiential knowledge produced by those who share it and to make knowledgeable claims about women's experiences (Cain, 1990).

Further, using an interviewing approach to data collection allows for a forum in which women can convey their experiences. Comack (1996) suggests standpoint begins with the 'experiential subject' and a process inclusive of listening to, and documenting, the experiences of their day-to-day lives, histories, and culture. By engaging in a process that includes the experiential account of women's IPV, it becomes more possible to situate women's violence within their social realities and locations in relation to race, class, and gender (Comack, 1996). Comack (1996) also suggests some of the issues and conflicts women experience and which contribute to women's violence may also emerge. Therefore, proponents of standpoint theory ultimately argue the truth is situated in the multiplicity of truths that emerge from the standpoint of women's experiences (Comack, 1996; Brooks, 2007). Comack (1996) suggests women's varied experiences cannot allow one truth to be told or to situate knowledge in a universal, monolithic way because women's social location as it pertains to class, race, and culture challenges this notion. This is consistent with Harding's (2004) argument that knowledge is socially situated. Their collective standpoint is a representation of the reality of the social context of their lives and how women contextualize this reality (Comack, 1996; Brooks, 2007).

An example of the use of standpoint feminism can be seen through Comack's (1996) work, Women in Trouble. Comack interviewed 24 women in prison and used the standpoint feminist approach to gain knowledge about their concrete experiences and stories. She found these women comprised an extremely marginalized group, as many were unemployed and uneducated, had been victimized physically and sexually, and were in the lower-class segment of society. Comack also highlighted questions of race and how this figures into the larger picture when locating women in structural terms. She notes a disproportionate number of incarcerated women are Indigenous, and in addition to the significance of class and race, she argues social relations are gendered. Essentially, women have roles men do not by virtue of being women, such as being the mother and, often, the primary caregiver of children. These complex social relations and gendered roles complicate the picture even further and only become visible after a woman has become involved in the system (Comack, 1996). She further indicates that standpoint feminism informed her work with the women in prison, highlighting the importance of taking women's lives as the starting point from which to gain knowledge or develop ways of knowing and to situate their lives within the context of race, class, and gender. While Comack (1996) examined this in the context of extremely marginalized women who demonstrate multiple marginalized realities and diverse backgrounds, it does not diminish the theory's strength of application to all women, whether privileged or oppressed. In fact, it clearly supports the need for a foundational theory and theory and method such as standpoint to appropriately and systematically guide and obtain collective standpoints from women in this way. As eluded to earlier, IPV exists across race, culture, and socio-economic status, and thus standpoint theory can be applied whether or not a woman is privileged or marginalized.

I assert that traditional theories have been limited in their capacity to understand and explain women's IPV and thus have historically resulted in impeding the ability to formulate an appropriate response, both in policy and practice, to address the issue. While many theories have been foundational to understanding women's use of violence generally, no one traditional theory can accurately reflect or fully explain the complexity of the act of violence toward a partner. This is no different when attempting to understand women's IPV (Barnett et al., 2005; Baird et al., 2014). According to Barnett et al. (2005), the inability to achieve empirical verification means theoretical support remains abstract and hypothetical. Women's motives regarding their IPV are well established as multiple, complex, and co-occurring. Thus, more research is needed emerging from their experiences so that scholars and practitioners in the field refrain from interpreting women's experiences for them as a universal phenomenon. Thus, it becomes increasingly clear against this backdrop that using standpoint theory as a method for both exploring and explaining women's IPV will address this gap. The focus, then, should be toward understanding the historical gender constructions of women's roles, perceptions of women's status, and the multifaceted historical and socio-cultural factors within the reality of their lives that contribute to their violence all while maintaining a recognition of their agency (Holloway & Wheeler, 2010). In this vein, Baird's et al. (2014) work examining pregnant victims of domestic violence suggests that, when studying women's issues, the concept of intersectionality as it pertains to understanding women's experiences of vulnerabilities is important as these co-occur and affect the understanding of violence and abuse (Baird, et al., 2014). The factors that shape women's realities are also important to consider as they relate to how they obtain intervention.

So, who better to ask about their use of violence against their male partner than women? It is incongruent to study women's victimization or criminalization without asking them about

their lived experiences and having them identify what they need to address their violence in a meaningful way. The issues of women's IPV can be addressed through questions about the social and institutional oppression potentially experienced by both privileged and oppressed women.

Therefore, a feminist standpoint approach will acknowledge these women's experiences in a unique and important way, with a recognition of their experiences as it relates to their use of violence. Their voices will be heard and understood through this framework, which is particularly important for Indigenous participants who may have a history of oppression and whose voices have traditionally been silenced. It will recognize and value the women's experiences as these relate to their underlying motivations or belief systems that supported their violence; it will also recognize their resistance to circumstances, structural or otherwise, that may have contributed to their decision to use violence whether as resistance or to empower. Renzetti (1999) supports the above assertion by suggesting that a critical feminist theoretical approach is required because women's motives for their IPV are gendered and varied from that of men's as they pertain to the context in which the IPV occurs. With this, there is a need to include an approach that organizes women's positions in the use of their IPV as central in research aimed at studying them. The framework I am using for this research provides an understanding that recognizes the personal, historical, socio-political realities, and oppressions embedded within race, class, and gender that women and, particularly women of culture, may have experienced. Feminist theoretical approaches allow for the subject or research participant to be an active agent in the research process; this is particularly important for Indigenous women who have experienced the social injustices of colonization from both a societal and research standpoint (Smith, 1999; Moosa-Mitha, 2005). Standpoint will meet the objectives of both theoretically

supporting the intent of this research and underpinning my analytical framework in the exploration of women's IPV.

## 3.3 Summary

Standpoint theory may well be one of the most controversial and debated theories proposed in the realm of feminist theory and literature on the issue of knowledge and science, relations, and power (Hekman, 1997; Harding, 2004; Bowell, 2011). Critics and advocates disagree impetuously about its origins, its status as a theory, and, more crucially, its relevance to current thinking about knowledge and its role in scientific research (Harding, 2004). In spite of this, the central tenets of the theory—to pursue and provide a voice to oppressed groups, particularly women, and to unearth the veiled knowledge women have nurtured from their marginalization and oppression—remain strong (Harding, 2004; Brooks, 2007).

While the theory has become more refined in recent times, with a focus on turning knowledge gained from women's experiences and their collective standpoints into practice, social change regarding the oppressed and marginalized position of women and other marginalized individuals is inevitable (Brooks, 2007). Brooks (2007) further suggests standpoint is multi-dimensional and evolutionary and has shifted to recognize that women do not come from one universal oppressed group but rather from varied backgrounds of culture and class, they occupy varied realities, and they thus endure marginalized positions in different ways. From this point of view, the need to use the principal tenets of standpoint to underpin research on women's IPV becomes even clearer considering the complexity of the issue and the lack of women's voice on this matter. Brooks (2007) summarizes it well:

> *Finally, while feminist standpoint scholars understand and recognize differences between and among women—different experiences of oppression and different standpoints, or perspectives, based on those experiences—they also continue to emphasize the importance of dialogue between and among women, the need for empathetic*

*understanding, and the potential for achieving alliances. After all, alliances between and among women are possible—without risking the repression of difference—and necessary, if we hope to fight for more just societies and to improve women's condition within them."* (78)

In the study of IPV, Renzetti (1997) further comments that, within all of the debate and, at times, rhetoric on women's IPV and the best theories to understand it, we must not lose sight of the individual people we are trying to understand. Successfully meeting the challenge to unravel the complex relationships between society and the individual and to recognize our role as theorists and researchers in this regard will require openness to variations of what came before (Renzetti, 1997). This strikes me as fitting when it comes to the purpose of standpoint theory and rendering women's lived experiences visible, both individually and collectively. Renzetti (1997) further suggests effectively addressing women's IPV and all other forms of violence involves moving beyond what she refers to as 'winning a point' in the game of science (Renzetti, 1997). Dekeseredy et al. (1997) argue that research must keep at the fore the notion that, regardless of how IPV is studied, the perspectives researchers offer are inconsequential to those who live it and who instead should be considered the experts (Dekeseredy & MacLeod, 1997). Harding's (2004) version of the theory has been cited as the canon on standpoint and, while not all theorists agree, the discourse has benefitted from the critical debates. With this in mind, Harding's (2004) assertion that women's knowledge is central in science remains undebatable in this regard.

# Chapter Four – Methodology: Research Design, Qualitative Inquiry, and Methods

## 4.1 Introduction

This chapter includes a discussion of the background of the broader scope of the original study funded by the Saskatchewan Health Research Foundation (SHRF) that led to this dissertation and the data used for the purpose of understanding women's use of violence, the foundational principles informing the research design, the methodology employed, and the approach to data analysis. I will briefly discuss the intent and scope of the original research study, entitled *In our Own Words: Understanding Women's Use of Violence in Intimate Partner Relationships*, the objectives of the research as these pertain to social and health implications, and how these may inform intervention and prevention in these forums. I will also discuss how data gathered from the larger study, specifically those obtained from the women who used IPV against their male partners, are the focus of this dissertation. Next, I discuss the importance of qualitative inquiry as a methodological foundation for the study of IPV. I further discuss the principles of descriptive phenomenology and feminist inquiry as well as the rationale for the incorporation of these principles as part of the research design and data analysis, with specific focus on lived experience. I then outline the research design and methods used for participant recruitment and selection, process with participants, data collection, and data analysis, including the steps that led to the thematic findings. Finally, I summarize the ethical considerations required for research with human participants.

## 4.2 Purpose of this dissertation

The overall goals of the original study funded by SHRF, from which the data for this dissertation were obtained, were to understand social, health, and wellness implications of IPV by women in reciprocal and non-reciprocal relationships and how this was situated within the

nature of IPV more generally within rural, urban, and First Nations communities in Saskatchewan. The SHRF study also sought to understand men's experience as victims of IPV by a female partner. The specific objectives of the SHRF study were to:

- identify and describe existing health-related programs and supports for women who have used violence and male victims via an environmental scan (e.g., literature, programs);

- **document the experiences of IPV with women who have used violence** and men who have been victims of violence, with specific attention to the psychological, social, cultural, and environmental factors that influence health and well-being, via a qualitative framework involving in-depth personal interviews;

- identify health needs, barriers, and pathways through formal services as well as informal family and community supports, with a particular emphasis on health services for both women and men who experience women's IPV; and

- share the knowledge gained via dissemination to participants and community.

The outcomes of the SHRF study will contribute to further research that will have the potential to provide support for culturally-responsive psycho-social health interventions and preventive measures. By identifying the social and health needs and experiential accounts of women who have used IPV, and of men who are victims, the outcomes of the original research have potential implications for health systems and policy, including mental health and addictions, primary health care, innovative models of service delivery, and health services in rural and remote regions. In addition, the emphasis on learning from Indigenous voices provides an increased understanding of the lived experiences and needs of Indigenous peoples. By engaging in a qualitative study and looking past statistics when understanding and explaining IPV, it is hoped this dissertation will provide critical understandings to assist in developing

community programming for IPV that will produce effective outcomes for those affected and, at a minimum, make important contributions to the existing literature. The data gathered to understand women's IPV is the focus of this dissertation. I had extensive involvement as a researcher in gathering the data and worked closely with the principal investigator.

The SHRF study employed an interdisciplinary approach with team members with expertise in IPV and who were well-positioned to complete the work. Dr. Carolyn Brooks is an Associate Professor of Sociology with extensive experience conducting research with Indigenous women in the areas of IPV and health. Dr. Stephanie Martin is a Registered Doctoral Psychologist and Associate Professor in the Department of Educational Psychology. Her research has focused on primary trauma and healing from trauma, particularly in the area of IPV. Martin was the primary investigator of *In Each Other's Hands: Community Allies Preventing Intimate Partner Violence* (Martin et al., funded by the National Crime Prevention Center, 2008), a community-oriented, action research project on IPV by men in Saskatchewan. Brooks and Martin were both team members and researchers for a longitudinal study on IPV, entitled *The Healing Journey: A Longitudinal Study of Women who have been Abused by Intimate Partners* (2009). Dr. Jennifer Poudrier is a Métis scholar with a strong background in Indigenous health and community-based research with First Nations communities.

The completed project *In Each Other's Hands* and an IPV stakeholders' review entitled *Understanding Women's Use of Violence in Intimate Partner Relationships* (Brooks & Martin, funded by President's SSHRC, 2010) informed this work. Stakeholders from the Domestic Violence Court, Saskatoon Mental Health and Addiction Services, Domestic Violence Victim Services from both Justice and Family Services, and a First Nations Counsellor from Yellowquill First Nation supported the research goals and objectives. I was one of the primary researchers

and co-managed the *In Each Other's Hands* project, and was also a primary researcher and manager for the *Understanding Women's Use of Violence in Intimate Partner Relationships* project. I bring specific expertise in IPV through education, professional training, and experience working with men and women as offenders and victims as well as facilitation of domestic violence programs with men and women who have used violence against an intimate partner.

### 4.2.1 Women's experiences using IPV against their male intimate partner

The data collected from the women's experiences in the SHRF study described above were used to answer the following: What are the lived experiences of women who have used IPV against their male intimate partner? How do women contextualize and understand their use of violence against their intimate partner? This research will both make visible their voices through documentation of their experience and identify thematic findings that contextualize these experiences.

Because of my keen interest in documenting women's experiences of their use of violence and also gaining a deeper understanding of the context in which this violence occurs, the descriptive phenomenological analysis suited my goal. My experience in the field of IPV, in addition to a direct role in the development and implementation of the Domestic Violence Court in Saskatoon, led me to be concerned about the number of women entering the justice system who had committed offences of violence against their intimate partners. What was not clear to me was the contextual experience in which these women were using violence and the meaning behind it. I wanted to know more about this phenomenon and, thus, it became clear that a qualitative inquiry would be particularly important for understanding women's life experiences and social processes (Mason, 2002) as they pertain to their use of IPV, especially due to the understudied status of women's IPV in the literature. As I had already gathered the data using a

qualitative interviewing approach and intended to focus on women's use of IPV, I decided to engage in a descriptive phenomenological approach to data analysis to support my inquiry. The principal underpinnings of a qualitative interviewing approach used in data collection are closely aligned with the principles of descriptive phenomenology generally: not only are the participants part of the research process, the women's voices are also at the fore of the analysis. This will be discussed later in this chapter.

## 4.3 Using a qualitative research approach: incorporating methodological principles of descriptive phenomenology and feminist inquiry

This research employs a qualitative methodological framework, specifically a descriptive phenomenological approach to data analysis, consistent with the disciplinary traditions of Edward Husserl (Husserl, 1970). Further, considering the importance of women's lived experience and the telling of that experience from their point of view/perspective, I sought to incorporate feminist inquiry to support the importance of the above assertion. Finally, qualitative interviewing was used for data gathering, with an embedded cultural approach aimed at incorporating culture practice within the interview process if desired by the participant. The following sections address each of these approaches and their importance to the research analysis framework.

### 4.3.1. Foundational principles of qualitative research inquiry

The importance of qualitative inquiry as a means to explore and understand social phenomena experienced by individuals or groups cannot be overstated. The qualitative method is a means for understanding the connotation ascribed to a social or human problem and allows for a type of inquiry that is inductive and affords inclusivity to the participant (Patton, 1990; Creswell, 2009). This approach involves the collection of data in the participant's setting and

inductive data analysis, from the particulars to the thematic outcomes, with the goal of describing and understanding the meaning of the data (Creswell, 2009). Further, this type of inquiry honours the experiences and voices of the individual or group, allowing the complexity of the issue to emerge in a responsive, yet systematic, way (Creswell, 2009). I chose a qualitative research design and a phenomenological analytical strategy for this research due to the sensitivity of the area; it also provides a rich, detailed understanding of IPV that comes from the women's words.

### 4.3.1.1 *Qualitative Research on IPV*

Much of the literature has employed a quantitative methodological approach to explain and understand women's violence towards a male partner (Archer, 2000, 2002). According to Allen-Collinson (2009) and others, an array of research and meta-analysis of empirical research dating back as early as the 1970s suggests IPV is perpetrated by women and girls nearly as often as by men and boys (Cook, 1997; Fiebert, 1997; Straus, 1997, 2006; Archer 2000, 2002; Whitaker et al., 2007). The quantitative literature is restricted with respect to explaining IPV and requires a broader scope (Nazroo, 1995). Recognizing the differences in how men and women experience IPV and the larger context in which it occurs is required (Cook, 1997; Allen-Collinson, 2009).

Qualitative research on physical abuse by women towards intimate partners is lacking (Migliaccio, 2002; Allen-Collinson, 2009) and is an extraordinary research gap given violence is suggested to be unilaterally generated by men (Allen-Collinson, 2009). Because of the cyclical nature of IPV (Whitaker et al., 2007), reciprocal and non-reciprocal understanding of women's violence (in addition to men's violence) are becoming more critical (Whitaker et al., 2007; Allen-Collinson, 2009). My research may inform the development of health-related intervention

and prevention strategies to improve the physical and mental health of individuals and families impacted by IPV.

Creswell (1998) notes that our world views and what others might call paradigms, epistemologies, and ontologies have driven particular research questions and methodological approaches (Crotty, 1998; Lincoln & Guba, 2005), and this has certainly driven my desire to qualitatively examine this social phenomenon. It has also furthered my aim to be inclusive of women's voices as well as to understand and advocate for appropriate interventions to address the phenomenon.

One important consideration for this research was design flexibility. As Patton (1990) and others suggest, qualitative inquiry designs cannot be completely specified in advance of entering the field. While the initial focus, plans for interviews, aims, and primary questions of this research project were specified in advance, the naturalistic and inductive nature of the inquiry rendered it impossible, and inappropriate, to specify variables or sampling schemes as these need to unfold during the fieldwork (Patton, 1990). This was especially important during the interviews with the women as their experiences were varied; many needed the flexibility of the open-ended interview format to feel empowered to tell their stories.

As qualitative methods are explicitly directed towards exploration, discovery, and inductive logic, it made sense to settle on an analytical strategy that underpinned this aim. The process of exploration can occur systematically, often without any pre-suppositions of what outcomes may be rendered (Patton, 1990; Creswell, 2009). Further, an inductive approach begins with the individual experience and from this seeks to identify the unique characteristics that make each experience stand alone as well as common thematic patterns (Patton, 1990). Morse (1991) suggests qualitative inquiry is critical in areas where the topic studied has not been

researched with a particular sample or group or if prevailing theories are not applicable to the individuals or group being studied. Considering the relative dearth of literature related to women's IPV, and a lack of theoretical application to women's intimate violence, a qualitative approach is considered suitable for this research.

## 4.3.2 Using a Phenomenological approach in qualitative inquiry: descriptive phenomenology

Using descriptive phenomenology to describe and understand women's experiences of their use of violence against their partner is appropriate considering the exploratory and understudied nature of this phenomena. Of importance is the inclusivity of the voice of the women studied, considering much of the research focuses on statistical trends versus the lived experience. Thus, the distinguishing features of a phenomenological approach is its usefulness for topics delicate in nature. Further, it has a literary focus as one describes participant experience, and it represents the phenomenological account that can assist in understanding the meaning of the experience (Patton, 1990; Creswell, 2009).

The phenomenological research approach has its roots in German philosophy, and its strategic intention is to identify and describe the essence of lived human experience (Patton, 1990; Van Manen, 1990; Holstein & Gubrium, 1994; Moustakas, 1994; Creswell, 1998 & 2009; Rossman & Rallis, 1998). The traditional roots of phenomenology are found in the work of Edward Husserl and his followers, who developed and refined the concepts and rigorous methods of modern social science that provide more concrete methodological foundations to better understanding human experiences (Wertz, 2005). The works of Whitehead (1958), Merleau-Ponty (1962), Giorgi (1971), and Moustakas (1988) have also been influential in firmly establishing phenomenology as a major social science perspective (as cited in Patton, 1990). Further, contemporary users of the phenomenological approach, such as Giorgi (1985) and

others, identify phenomenology as a descriptive process that examines an individual experience with their unique situation, the relationship that exists between the individual and their situation, and the meaning of the experience relative to the situation (Patton, 1990; Moustakas, 1994; Creswell, 2009; Giorgi, 2009). This method is meant to be a strictly descriptive process rather than an interpretive one, and values the possibilities and horizons of meaning and what Husserl refers to as 'imaginative variation' (Creswell, 2009; Giorgi, 2009). The phenomenological approach is oriented by Husserl as a descriptive science based upon intuitions of concrete givens; however, it cannot be advanced in the same manner as a formal, exact, eidetic science due to the process of intuiting or being present for the phenomenon being studied (Giorgi, 2009).

Embedded within the approach is the notion of intentionality, which Husserl refers to as the fundamental property of consciousness, one of the principal components of phenomenology. Intentionality is something that is familiar, a characteristic of our mental state of consciousness or awareness (Van Manen, 1990; Moustakas, 1994; Schwandt, 2000). Caring about the 'essence' of the lived experience and understanding in what ways the ordinary, inter-subjective world is created through the perspectives of the participant are part of the intention (Van Manen, 1990; Moustakas, 1994; Schwandt, 2000). For Husserl, the essence is not interpreted from the experiential phenomena, as this would represent interpretation versus precise description. Giorgi (2009) indicates discoveries about the phenomena are determined by unfolding and describing meaningful implications in an open and indeterminant system, allowing the described experience to emerge freely (Giorgi, 2009). According to Creswell (1998), interpretation would run counter to holding a descriptive phenomenological attitude:

> *Researchers search for essentials, invariant structure (or essence) or the central underlying meaning of the experience and emphasize the intentionality of consciousness where experiences contain both the outward appearance and inward consciousness based in memory, image and meaning.* (p. 52)

Husserl (as cited in Moustakas, 1994) suggests phenomenological research requires an attitude of wonder in exploration. Husserl referred to the freedom of suppositions as an 'epoch' which means to abstain or avoid any prejudgements, bias, or preconceptions of the phenomena being studied to extract new knowledge (Moustakas, 1994).

Following the tradition of Husserl and furthering this understanding, Giorgi (1997), Moustakas (1994), and others elucidate the importance of 'bracketing' or dropping all presuppositions related to the phenomena being analyzed. This process of 'phenomenological reduction' is critical for ensuring the analysis of social phenomena is being viewed with a new lens: one that is not informed of the issues being analyzed and one that can describe the experiences precisely as they are lived. The approach highlights the specific experiences of the participant and identifies the meaning of the phenomena as opposed to simply a discourse, without presuppositions (Husserl, 1970; Moustakas, 1994; Schwandt, 2000). The researcher not only captures the lived experience of the participant but can also reflect on various characteristics of the lived experience, such as bodily, emotional, imaginative, social, linguistic, and behavioural aspects, which can provide increased insight into the participant's experience (Giorgi, 1997). Bracketing aims to ensure past knowledge does not influence the research; this can be difficult at times but not impossible (Finlay, 2009). Merleau-Ponty (1962 as cited in Moustakas, 1994) suggests the practice of reduction, and lessons learned from this practice, demonstrate the impossibility of complete reduction. However, contemporary scholars suggest that, when executing bracketing, a certain heightening of the present is being sought without ignoring the past (Giorgi, 2009). Giorgi (2009) argues our past experiences as researchers may expand our understanding of the meaning of the phenomenon we are describing.

Descriptive phenomenological research, when pure, will seek to describe rather than explain and, from the design inception, will be free from researcher perspective, preconceptions, and hypothesis (Husserl, 1970). Its goal is to explicate statements of experience that are inclusive of a group of meaning units that lead to the growth of an essence description (Moustakas, 1994). Husserl (1970) suggests there are no absolute facts and one can only establish what he refers to as 'knowledge of essences' which identifies the underlying meaning of lived experiences. While some researchers in this area debate the ability of the researcher to 'bracket' their preconceptions and separate themselves from the analysis, they also emphasize the importance of ensuring the researcher is visible in the construction of the research as a subjective actor instead of a separate and unbiased observer (Stanley & Wise, 1993). This is a noted challenge in qualitative inquiry (Patton, 1990; LaVasseur, 2003; Finlay, 2009) and will be discussed later in this chapter. Others suggest it is better to think in terms of being curious, exploratory, and open to new information during analysis while ensuring the researcher is constantly aware of their experiences when interviewing and analyzing the data (Husserl, 1970; Van Manen, 1990; LaVassuer, 2003).

Collecting descriptions from individuals is an effort to uncover the scientific meaning of the participant's experience (Englander, 2012). What is particularly relevant with respect to the phenomenological approach is that it allows for individual perspectives to be described through analysis, which may result in an outcome that can effectively challenge structural assumptions about the phenomena being studied in the global literature. With this is an element whereby the outcomes can be used to inform further and bring concrete links to refute or support policy and practical action. Analysis using a phenomenological approach requires the researcher to stay with the subjects' descriptions of their lived experiences and quietly contemplate (Parse, Coyne,

& Smith, 1985). Parse et al. (1985) indicate the themes and meaning both emerge in the interviews and that analysis can occur simultaneously. Given the complexity of this sort of analysis, Mariano (1990) suggests this approach to analysis can be difficult to understand with a limited background in philosophy. However, this methodological approach, while challenging and exhaustive, has been established as rigorous, critical, and systematic (Struebert & Carpenter, 2007; Donalek, 2004; Creswell, 2009).

Interviewing is the primary method of data collection to obtain lived perspectives (Giorgi, 1985; Patton, 1990). The importance of using semi-structured interviewing for data collection, in addition to a phenomenological inductive approach to analysis, is to extend theoretical orientations to support the illumination of the participant's experience. In this vein, a phenomenological approach suggests the researcher is a co-participant; however, the original data collection for this project did not include this as an aim of the research. Rather, qualitative interviewing was used to gather the data, and a phenomenological approach was used to analyze the data. This approach varies to some degree in orientation with respect to the steps of analysis, and this will be discussed later in this chapter. As indicated earlier, this research aims to describe women's lived experience, and the purpose of a qualitative analytical approach such as this is to elucidate the essential meanings of the experience and thematic linkages that may generate new knowledge (Sandelowski & Barroso, 2003, 2007).

### 4.3.3 Role of feminist perspectives in understanding and explaining women's lived experiences in their use of IPV

My decision to utilize feminist standpoint theory as a framework for exploring women's IPV allows for women's lived experiences as perpetrators of IPV to be voiced in a way that promotes their inclusion in the research. This inclusionary approach validates the importance of their lived experience, renders visible the socio-cultural factors that are part of their realities of

their use of violence, and reveals how they see their violence in this regard. Further, it seeks to treat all women's experiences as valid and equal. It also provides a forum for understanding these experiences and the potential interplay of race, class, and gender in both a broad and specific way within the themes that emerge from the data. Most importantly, the women's experiential accounts emerge from the development of their standpoint.

The aim is to move away from the traditional explanations of IPV, which have focused on theories of causation, psychological understandings, alcohol and drug explanations, social learning, and family systems theory related to men's use of IPV. Moving toward a broader discourse of the issue and provision of a forum for the contextualization of women's reciprocal and non-reciprocal violence addresses the minimization or silencing of the issues. This emergence of knowledge is critical to our understanding and contributions to the literature, to the potential identification of intervention and prevention needs/ strategies identified by the women related to justice and health, and to address the unique needs of Indigenous women. Both feminism and phenomenology can be unified to strengthen the overall framework of the research to gain a deeper insight of women's lived experience of using intimate violence (Fisher, 2000).

## 4.4 Research design and methods

Qualitative research methods are specifically suited to planning and conducting the research process with individuals whose lived experiences are under study and thus involve participants from the community, whether recruiting to interview as part of the research inquiry or as collaborative co-researchers (Bergold & Thomas, 2012). This section includes a discussion of the sampling method and inclusion criterion, recruitment of the participants, the method used for data gathering, ethical and other methodological considerations, and the steps used in the analysis of the data. Following this is a discussion of challenges related to recruitment and the

interview process, as well as challenges and limitations related to the use of a descriptive phenomenological method of analysis. Formal ethical approval for this research was sought and granted by the University of Saskatchewan before the commencement of the project (Appendix D).

**4.4.1 Recruitment and participant selection**

Participants were recruited using a purposive sampling approach via posters and information sheets and also through community stakeholder contacts. Purposive sampling is an appropriate and useful sampling technique in qualitative research as the researcher can select individuals and sites that can purposefully inform the research problem and central focus of study (Creswell, 2009). My involvement in two previous studies—*In Each Other's Hands: Community Allies Preventing Intimate Partner Violence*, funded by the National Crime Prevention Center (Farden et al., 2009), and *Understanding Women's Violence in Intimate Partner Relationships* (President's SSHRC, Brooks PI, 2010)—positioned me to re-engage with numerous stakeholders for the purpose of advancing the research. Community stakeholders such as Band and Tribal Councils, Friendship Centres, Mental Health Services, Public Health Services, Family Violence Programs, and Victim/Justice services who work in the area of IPV were invited to distribute information sheets and recruitment posters to appropriate agencies who work with women who have used IPV or men who have been victims of IPV. These agencies were under no obligation to distribute the invitation and thus there was no potential for coercion. An Indigenous cultural advisor was recommended by the current community stakeholder contacts and stakeholder participants to assist when required for Indigenous participants. When the stakeholder contacts were not willing to distribute the information due to potential for conflict, we posted the

recruitment posters and letters of information at a number of related agencies and First Nations agencies in Saskatoon.

To safeguard the integrity of the research process, participation was voluntary with no potential for coercion. Participants self-selected and were individuals who were willing to discuss their experience of being violent to an intimate partner. Considering the tenets of a qualitative framework, I ensured there was no risk of a perceived position of power relative to the participants, and took steps to ensure if an unanticipated power relationship was identified then the interview would be scheduled with another researcher.

#### 4.4.1.1 *Participants and sample size*

The participants included women who perpetrated IPV toward their male partners and were recruited from northern, central, southern, and First Nations communities (urban and rural) in Saskatchewan. Posters were distributed in urban and rural treatment programs in the province of Saskatchewan, such as the Women's Anger Management and Self-Esteem program or addictions programs, at relevant community-based agencies as listed above, and using local media. Indigenous participants were recruited through the above means as well as through local First Nation Health Centres, stakeholders, support groups, and newspaper articles. As indicated, this research had already established collaborative working relationships with a number of First Nations communities, and this was found to be beneficial with respect to recruiting Indigenous women participants. Key stakeholders in urban, rural, and First Nations communities were asked to distribute information about the study but were not asked to recruit participants. Interested individuals were asked to contact the research team via a phone number and voicemail designated for this project.

This research had six inclusion criteria: (1) 18 years of age or older and able to provide informed consent; (2) no known cognitive impairments; (3) last violent incident at least 6 months prior; (4) willingness to participate in audio-recorded interview; (5) not in crisis; and (6) resident of Saskatchewan. These inclusion criteria were established based on ethical considerations and deliberately targeted women who were not active in their violence. We also wanted to ensure that the data collected were strictly based in Saskatchewan.

At the time of contact, participants were advised of the inclusion criteria and asked regarding their willingness to participate in audio-recorded interviews. Participants were also provided an information sheet, asked to sign consent forms (see Appendices A and B) prior to the interview, and advised of their rights to decline answering any question and to terminate the interview/ withdraw at any time.

The objective of the overall research was to recruit and conduct individual interviews with 20 women to document their experiences and understand their perspectives on their use of violence against a male intimate partner. The sample size was selected in accordance with standards cited in literature, which state a range of 2-25 as the norm for qualitative research (Polkinghorne, 1989; Patton, 1990; Creswell, 2009; Giorgi, 2009). Sample size recommendations for phenomenological studies range from six to 10 interviews (Morse, 1994; Creswell, 1998, 2006, 2007). I recruited 14 women for the overall study and analyzed all interviews. While only eight women's experiences are described, the themes rendered are reflective of all 14 women's experiences and am therefore speaking from the entire data set. The quotations pulled are the most telling and the purpose for this is to reflect the integrity of the analysis. While understood as a potential limitation, all of the women's data is captured. Mason (2010) suggests more data do not always mean more information; however, it is important to

examine as many as required to reach as close to saturation as possible to obtain strong descriptions of the phenomenon (Struebert & Carpenter, 2007).

The participants varied in age and cultural background, were from urban, rural, and northern communities, and had varied social, educational, and socio-economic backgrounds. Of the 14 women recruited, eight were First Nations, two were Métis of mixed descent, and four were Caucasian with mixed backgrounds. The women ranged in age from 21 to 55 years of age. Eight of the 14 women had greater than grade 12 education, while four had between grade eight to 12 education. At the time of data collection, 10 of the 14 women were students with some working and others were on social assistance. Overall, the sample met the goal of accessing variance in experiences and data saturation. I had hoped to recruit 20 women participants, but this did not occur. One explanation is the topic area as well as the sensitivity to the idea of women's violence being different than men and therefore not being recognized by women in the same way as men's violence. In this study, many women indicated they did not recognize the significance of their abuse and violence until they seriously injured their partner or, in one case, killed him.

**4.4.1.2 *Process with participants***

As noted above, potential participants were asked to contact the researcher if interested in participating. I reviewed the parameters of the research, the inclusion criteria, and the consent information to ensure full disclosure prior to scheduling an interview. Once at the interview, I reviewed the consent form, read aloud the contents to ensure full disclosure, and invited participants to ask questions and raise concerns before signing the consent form (Appendix B). I also advised them that their identity would be protected and, in addition to a pseudonym being assigned, any identifying information would be omitted or altered to safeguard their identity.

Participants were also reminded they would receive an honorarium of $50 for their participation and this was provided at the conclusion of the interview.

Participants were informed at the beginning and end of each interview that they may withdraw from the study at any time. Participants were reminded of this right at various scheduling points of contact as well (i.e., when interviews were scheduled by the research assistant).

### 4.4.2 Data collection

The method used to elicit each woman's experience using violence against their male partner was a semi-structured in-depth interview. I used open-ended questions to guide the interview process, which allowed for the experiences to emerge freely. For instance, I would ask the women to broadly describe their use of violence against their partners in as much detail as possible and later would ask them to expand on ideas or statements requiring more probing. The probing questions aimed to elicit more detail on something relevant that the participant highlighted. The intent in probing is not to lead the participant, but rather to re-open the door for the participant to fully and freely describe the experience. Individual in-depth interviews are a preferred data-gathering method for yielding data with depth and richness and are particularly useful in innovative areas of research (Kvale, 1996).

Indeed, the task at hand for the researcher during qualitative inquiry is to provide a framework within which the participant can respond in a way that accurately represents their experience about the world (Patton, 1990; Creswell, 2009). Thus, the interview process provided a forum in which the women could describe their experience using violence against their intimate partner. The use of individual interviews is especially important for these participants as women who are perpetrators are also often victims or present with other risk factors that are part of their narrative and, therefore, may be reluctant to discuss their victimization in a group setting (Allen-

Collinson, 2009; Cook, 1997). My approach, and that of the other Research Assistants, when meeting and interviewing participants was critical to ensuring each participant felt comfortable, reassured, and valued during data collection. Patton (1990) suggests the importance of the research venue being comfortable and from the outset, with engagement of the participant at the fore. I wanted to ensure each participant felt they were part of the process and that their values, beliefs, and perspectives, as part of their lived experience, were obtained respectfully and with care and sensitivity in the process of sharing and beyond.

A series of semi-structured questions guided the interview processes and all interviews were audio-recorded (see Appendix C). The interview questions were the starting point for the interviews but were not viewed as exhaustive of all questions that would be asked of participants. The interviews were conducted either at the University of Saskatchewan in the Qualitative Research Unit interview room, which is set up to provide a comfortable secure environment for participants, or off-site depending on what was convenient for the women. Understanding the historical and cultural context for Indigenous participants and ensuring a culturally appropriate approach to interviewing was paramount for creating opportunities for Indigenous women to reflect on their own experience and the experiences of their communities. Indigenous women participants were offered cultural support and practice, such as prayer or smudging, as part of the process if they desired. While none of the participants expressed a desire to engage in cultural practice prior to the interview, it was an important consideration within the research to ensure cultural sensitivity. Given the sensitivity of the topic area, qualitative approaches are considered culturally appropriate for engaging in research whereby participants are deemed a vulnerable population (Crisp, Swerissen, & Duckett, 2000). Considering the fact that Indigenous women participants would likely be included in the sample, the approach assisted in understanding the

holistic and broader contexts of wellness and afforded the researcher the ability to engage in dialogue with the participant (Macaulay, Paradis, Potvin, et al., 1997). A qualitative research approach also respects, honors, and promotes voice regarding the historical and current cultural context of the participant (Smith, 1999).

Interviews are a method by which the researcher can explore individual experiences of social phenomena, in this case women's violence against their male intimate partner. Kvale (1996) suggests the interview is an effective means to share knowledge and allows the participants to be co-researchers in the process; this corresponds well with phenomenological principles. It is also a way to inform and provide insight to the researcher through their lived experience (Patton, 1990). Thus, the existing research that has used the interview as a means of gathering data provides evidence as to the usefulness of this approach when researching topics that are complex, where data are scarce, and if little is known about the phenomenon.

### 4.4.3 Data analysis steps and process

Descriptive phenomenology as a qualitative analytical approach corresponded best to the overall goal of my research analysis and is useful when little is known about a particular phenomenon (Donalek, 2004). Creswell (2009) and others convey that the use of the phenomenological approach allows the researcher to obtain a richer understanding of the meaning of a lived experience of an individual that cannot be obtained through statistical means (Patton, 1990; Van Manen, 1990).

This approach to the analysis included a series of steps that has its foundational philosophical roots in Husserlian phenomenology and is a commonly used qualitative method of analysis in psychology, sociology, and nursing (Creswell, 2009). In this same vein, the descriptive phenomenological analysis is meant to be viewed as neutral and without bias,

meaning that data are perceived with a fresh lens, as if for the first time (Moustakas, 1994;

Creswell, 2009). Analysis of phenomenological data requires the researcher to approach the data

with an open awareness to allow the meaning and structures to emerge freely (Kvale, 1996).

Kvale (1996) characterizes this as 'deliberate naïveté'. The overarching principle of data analysis

is to ensure focus on the development of thematic outcomes or what is referred to as experiential

structures that make up the experience (Rossman & Rallis, 1998). Creswell (2009) indicates that,

"whereas a narrative study reports that life of a single individual, a phenomenological study

describes the meaning for several individuals of their lived experiences of a concept or a

phenomenon" (p. 57). Thus, the descriptive phenomenological approach seeks to distinguish the

shared experience of individuals and to find the essence of the experiences, which includes *what*

was experienced and *how* it was experienced through the eyes of the participant (Moustakas,

1994; Creswell, 2009; Christenson, Johnson & Turner, 2010).

Patton (1990) further suggests this process requires methodological and systematic rigor

to thoroughly capture and describe how individuals perceive, describe, feel, judge, remember,

make sense, and talk about their experiences. Creswell (2009) stresses the importance of

phenomenological research in serving to advance a deeper understanding of the phenomenon

studied, in addition to providing knowledge that has the potential to inform policy or practice in

the field. Thus, a descriptive focus does not go beyond what is given, and no interpretation is

sought.

Therefore, I did not put forth a hypothesis nor seek evidence to support or refute one;

rather, my aim was to describe the thematic essence of the lived experience of women's use of

their violence so its meaning can be understood in a deeper, holistic, and comprehensive manner

and in a way in which quantitative methods cannot. Phenomenology does not begin with a

theory, but rather with an examination of the phenomenon under consideration (Simon & Goes, 2011).

#### 4.4.3.1 *Steps to analysis*

After reviewing the works of several different established and published authors in the field who use the descriptive phenomenological method for data analysis, I settled on using the principles and steps outlined in Creswell (2009). Creswell's approach is based on a simplified form of the Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen approach as outlined by Moustakas (1994) and best corresponded with my aim for analysis. The steps within this approach serve to illuminate the textual and structural description of the women's experiences that would result in common themes of these experiences. Data analysis steps are fairly similar across phenomenologists' experiences (Polkinghorne, 1989; Moustakas, 1994; Van Manen, 1990; Creswell, 2009; Giorgi, 2009); however, the steps outlined in Creswell (2009) promote systematic rigor in explicating the data and correspond well with my intent to ensure objectivity in data analysis.

My analysis started shortly after the interviews were transcribed and involved the first step of separating my own knowledge and experience related to women's violence. This meant adopting the phenomenological attitude, which means to 'bracket' any presuppositions, notions, or ideas about the topic area (Husserl, 1970; Moustakas, 1994, Creswell, 2009; Giorgi, 2009; Broom, 2011). Within this, I needed to ensure any ideas, whether they be cultural, theoretical, or experiential, were put aside when listening to the audio and reading the transcripts for the sense of the whole (Giorgi, 2009). For each interview, I first listened to each audio recording and made some notes on their description of their experience. From there, I read through each transcript systematically, moving back and forth throughout the read to absorb the 'whole' of each participant's described lived experience – to immerse completely into the written description and

the contexts of the participants. I also cross-referenced this with my notes from the interview and my notes made when listening to the audio recording.

The process of bracketing is crucial to the analysis. To address and mitigate the potential for bias, I worked to maintain a bracketing position to increase neutrality and avoid judgment on the content based on my own experiences. This meant reviewing and analyzing the data without judging the validity and seeing it without disbelief or doubt (Creswell, 2009; Broom, 2011). As part of bracketing, I made notes as I worked through each transcript, as a means to reflect on the data and maintain a fresh lens on the transcript. Also important at the initial stage of the analysis was to set aside my personal experiences and maintain an open mind to new information rather than information filtered by my experiences working the field, which, as described by Creswell (2009), is difficult but possible.

It must be noted that in qualitative research there are situations or circumstances that must be contemplated so as to avoid influencing the outcomes of the analysis. As part of addressing my role as researcher, , I needed to acknowledged my position as the researcher as being shaped by having worked in the field. According to Borg, Karlsson, Kim & McCormack (2012) qualitative research must consider the reflexive process and how researcher subjectivity may affect the reliability of the analysis. Borg et al., (2012) notes,

> *"Reflexivity requires the researcher to be aware of themselves as the instrument of research. This is a particularly important issue for action researchers who are intimately involved with the subject of the research, the context in which it takes place, and others who may be stakeholders in that context." [52]*

Locating myself as a researcher that has knowledge and experience related to the phenomena allowed me to be honest in this role, and to remain aware of this unique position while analyzing the data. For instance, I have extensive experience working with offenders and

victims of IPV and have worked on various initiatives, strategies, and policies related to IPV. I have also had significant involvement with Indigenous communities and governments including being part of the Truth and Reconciliation process which has also shaped my knowledge location. While there was no reason to believe that I would not be systematic in the analysis, I did need to recognize the potential for my knowledge and experience to influence the data. Doing so, assisted in maintaining an open mind in data gathering and also during analysis. The technique of bracketing helped in minimizing bias that could have potentially impacted data credibility and/or the study outcomes.

The second step involved the identification and creation of a list of the significant statements from the interviews with respect to how the participants described their experiences. This includes the demarcation of the meaning units to see these statements evolve, ensuring each statement was treated as equal (Creswell, 2009). From there, I developed a non-repetitive and non-overlapping list of statements (horizontalization of the data). It is also here whereby the meaning statements are grouped into larger meaning units or themes.

The third step involved documenting 'what' the participants experienced in their use of violence. This is referred to as the textural description of what happened and includes examples verbatim from the participants (Creswell, 2009). In addition, a narrative summary of the description in the language of the first person for each participant that temporarily reflects the original experience is also included.

Once the textural descriptions were complete, I then engaged in what is called the structural description of the participant's experience. This fourth step included documenting *how* the women's IPV occurred. It is here where the researcher reflects on the context and location in

which the violence occurred and continues the engagement with imaginative variation (Creswell, 2009).

Finally, from the structural and textural descriptions, I then developed a composite textural-structural description to present what represents the essence of the phenomenon. Out of this emerges the identification of common themes experienced by the women that will contribute to a deeper understanding (Creswell, 2009). It involves an integration of all of the descriptions of the women's experiences into a collective depiction of the experiences representing the group in totality (Creswell, 2009).

**4.4.3.2** *Strengths and challenges of the phenomenological method for data analysis*

Using a phenomenological approach to analysis has both strengths and challenges. A strength of this approach, whether part of the full research design or used for research analysis only, is that it provides a deep level of understanding of a phenomenon for multiple individuals. Acquiring the knowledge of common experience is cited as a strength of the method, especially for researchers in the field who seek greater insight to inform intervention and prevention initiatives (Creswell, 2009). In this same vein, phenomenology also requires some level of understanding on the part of the researcher who engages in the topic area. This happened to be a strength of this research resulting from my experience in this area. However, for a researcher who not very familiar with the topic areas that are personal or emotionally risky, such as intimate partner violence, this may be a deficit.

A challenge of using this approach is the issue of bracketing personal experiences and any presuppositions related to the topic area to maintain researcher neutrality while engaging with the text (Finlay, 2009). Van Manen (1990) suggests this is an impossibility; however, Giorgi (2009) and others suggest this can be achieved with discipline and rigorous adherence to the steps of analysis (Creswell, 2009; Moustakas, 1994). Some suggest the researcher should

purposefully engage in and be aware of the 'researcher' and 'researched' relationship, ensuring all presuppositions are dropped and suspending their understandings as part of a reflective move toward cultivating a curiosity, rather than removing oneself completely from the text (LeVasseur, 2003; Finlay, 2009). In the end, the lived experience of the participants of the phenomenon should be the sole focus of the research, providing for inclusivity and empowerment of the participant during the research process.

## 4.5 Ethical considerations

### 4.5.1 Storage of the data

The data for this project are maintained at the University of Saskatchewan by the team members (Brooks, Martin, and Poudrier), including the Research Assistants. Data files are stored in a locked filing cabinet, and computers used for data analysis are password protected. Consent forms are stored separately from interview transcripts. Data is stored in a locked filing cabinet in the principal investigator (PI)'s university office. In accordance with university and ethics policies, the data will be destroyed ten years after completion of the study.

### 4.5.2 Dissemination of the research

An important outcome of the overall research will be the dissemination of the findings to the communities and stakeholders involved, and this same premise holds for this dissertation. It is my intent to ensure community stakeholders are provided an opportunity to offer guidance and feedback towards dissemination and the development of knowledge translation. At the conclusion of the project and this dissertation, I will make efforts to share the research outcomes with the participants, community, and stakeholders, to seek feedback on process and results and for the purpose of knowledge translation. Dissemination and knowledge translation are also critical in the process of honouring participant voice toward the improvement of social

conditions (Minkler & Wallerstein, 2003). However, I will need to ensure that any dissemination or discussion of the results ensures that the women cannot be identified either by name or by information to uphold ethical guidelines in this regard.

### 4.5.3 Issues of risk, benefit, and deception

No deception was used, and the women participants did not benefit from this research. Potential risks to participants were mitigated through appropriate planning with each participant (described below) if sharing their story triggered any emotional reaction, thus increasing their vulnerability. There were no identified institutional relationships between researchers and women participants.

A qualitative inquiry such as this may be experienced as empowering, as participants have some input as to the outcomes of the research process; many expressed a desire to be helpful and described feeling empowered as a result. As one participant stated:

> *I think it's effective for me, by just even for myself, coming here and talking about it. It's helping me, and that's where it's got to begin.*

When asked how their story might be helpful to women or men, another woman responded with male victims in mind:

> *Well, other men would maybe feel like they have a voice which is so funny because in our society men seem to have a voice but they don't with this issue at all. Maybe they would go oh, the court would actually believe me. I think maybe that's the thing is maybe they think nobody will believe them, that it's happening or they are less of a man because they can't take care of themselves [...]*

Another participant stated that talking to somebody she did not know helped her feel better about her experience and allowed a feeling of release. This was in contrast to talking to someone who knew the stories that were going on for her personally:

*I feel like a little bit of a release off of me, even though I don't really know you. It makes me feel like that, like I'm actually able to share it with somebody that I really don't know, and be comfortable about it.*

As it was potentially possible to associate information with participants, they were given the opportunity to withdraw their responses after their interview and prior to the publication of the findings. Appendix B includes a copy of the transcript review and consent forms.

As discussed above, qualitative research may be experienced as therapeutic as it provides participants with an opportunity to discuss matters and issues they deem important; however, it may also evoke traumatic or negative emotions. Thus, the researchers took steps to ensure the participants had support in place before the interview. Further, the research interviewers have experience in the area of IPV as psychologists and practitioners and thus could recognize signs of distress during interviews and take appropriate steps to make a referral to a professional if required to deal with any emerging issues. As noted above, we also ensured Indigenous women had access to a cultural advisor, prayer, and smudging if requested. This was done with the support of the community stakeholders.

### 4.5.4 Confidentiality

In addition to the measures already described, I maintained confidentiality in the following ways. First, the Research Assistants and transcriptionist were asked to sign statements agreeing to keep all information confidential. Second, all participants were assigned pseudonyms. Third, any identifying information in the interviews was deleted or altered. Last, consent forms were stored separately from the transcripts.

### 4.5.5 Data release

At the beginning of the interview, the participants were asked if they wished to review their transcript; a corresponding consent form was signed if they declined (see Appendix B). If

the participant desired to review their transcript, they were asked to sign the transcript release form at the time of the interview and would then receive a copy of the interview once it was transcribed.

**4.5.6 Summary**

This chapter outlined the importance of the use of a qualitative approach to the study of women's violence against an intimate partner. Within this, I outlined the principles of qualitative and phenomenological research to clearly establish how these corresponded to my overall research aim of this dissertation. Further, I discussed the importance of incorporating the principles of standpoint feminism to support the premise that women's voices about their violence are valued and inclusive.

I also outlined the methodological steps used for data collection, inclusive of recruiting and sampling, process, and other considerations. In addition, I discussed the steps for data analysis that included the importance of interviews as a method to collect the data and a phenomenological method for analysis. The aim of this dissertation is to specifically examine women's lived experiences, so the phenomenological approach to data analysis was appropriate.

Finally, I discussed the ethical considerations and the challenges and limitations of using a phenomenological approach to analysis to be transparent and accountable to the approach. The subsequent chapters will include the presentation of the data, a discussion of the findings, and conclusions regarding the overall thematic outcomes.

# Chapter Five - Participant's Lived Experiences of their use of Intimate Partner Violence

## 5.1 Introduction

The participants of this study took the time to tell the story of their use of violence in a way that would serve to provide insights into female perpetrated violence against an intimate partner. The insights gained from the women's voices is central to this research and critical to the discourse and for understanding women's violence. In this chapter, and cons87istent with the phenomenological approach to analysis, the individual descriptions and themes identified from systematic analysis using the steps of Creswell (2009) are presented. Each woman's lived experience is described with a depth of detail that remains accurate to their descriptions.

Each of the women's narratives is described to provide the meaning and context for understanding their experiences. Some of the women, such as Pamela, described their violence as confined to one particular relationship, while others, like Anne, told a lengthier story as her violence involved multiple partners over an extended period. In keeping with the phenomenological analysis, the textural description outlines what the women experienced in their use of the violence, in the moments preceding and during the violent event, focusing on statements and meanings which includes quotes from their interviews. The structural description includes how the women experienced the phenomenon and reflected the setting in which their violence took place or the structural factors that impacted on her violence and also include quotes. An amalgamation or synthesis of the women's experience is provided to illustrate the 'essence' of their experience.

## 5.2 Individual Experiences

### 5.2.1 Dana

*Textural description of Dana's experience.* Dana describes her use of violence occurring over a period that included reciprocal violence with her partner. It led to a single event that ended in her killing him. Dana described being in a long term relationship with this man whom she states had an addiction issue. She explained the violence she used in this relationship emerged both reciprocally and from a need to defend herself. She also described her violence as a result of arguing about issues related to the children, or sometimes to protect the children:

> We were always arguing, we were fighting and he was always threatening me. Everything just seemed like it got worse and worse. I didn't know how to go about getting help or asking for help, I didn't want other people getting involved with our relationship, because it was only between him and I.

Dana stated that typically the moments preceding her use of violence included arguing with her partner over being unfaithful, his addictions, the neglect and adverse treatment of the children, and his lack of commitment to the family. Dana indicated both of them had been using drugs and drinking and the dysfunctional situation escalated over time. On the day she killed her partner, she stated they argued all night: *we were arguing throughout that whole night and whatever. Everything was getting thrown onto my pile, more and more and more.*

Dana indicated their argument lasted all night until they both started to throw things at each other:

> He was throwing everything at me that he possibly can. And then, just like that pop bottle, I told him 'I'm done with you.' [...] I kept on yelling in his face, telling him how much I hated him, how much I wanted him dead, how much I just wanted to kill him. That he was useless, that he wasn't worth being a dad. Some other guy would be way better [...] at treating our kids [better] than he ever did. We were just throwing all this shit at each other and whatnot, saying the most hurtful, meanest things to each other. And then he came up to me 'Oh, I just want to fucking hit you', he raised his hand and whatever.

At this point, Dana mentioned several times she repeatedly stated to her partner she could kill him and was telling him to leave:

*You think I'm scared to kill you? I'm not scared to kill you. I can kill you right now.' I told him that repeatedly, he kept on raising his hand at me. We just kept on taunting each other that night, that morning. Pushing each other, I hit him.*

During this time, Dana described seeing the knife on the counter, all the while her partner was taunting her to stab him, calling her names and pushing her with his chest. Dana stated she stabbed him in the ribcage and when she saw the look on his face, she was immediately scared and was immediately sorry:

*I'm really, really sorry. I'm sorry, I'm sorry.' He's like 'ditch the knife'. I was walking towards him, and he's like 'I love you'. I went to go ditch the knife. I didn't ditch it, I just put it by the kitty litter, and then I phoned 911. I was trying to keep him awake. I called 911, and I told them what happened or whatever. And he died at the scene [...].*

Dana was charged and convicted of manslaughter, and spent and lengthy time in jail for her violence.

***Structural Description of Dana's experience***. Dana described living with her partner since the age of 18 and of having serious internalized and persistent anger with him due to drinking and substance use. She describes in the early days both would frequently argue, however, when this occurred one of them would leave the situation:

*At first, how everything was with [my partner] and I, we'd argue, that's all we'd do, just argue. One of us would storm out of the house. That's how everything was for a while.*

Dana also explained having her first child lessened the tension between her and her partner, however, his extended family contributed a different kind of strain to their relationship as well. She described the chaos of the home as part of her environment, and the mounting pressure, combined with both of their addictions, his neglect, and anger with the children, arguments, and cheating over the course of the relationship was evident:

*But he'd take his anger out on the kids. If he didn't want to hit me, he'd take his anger out on the kids. I was basically the protector for my kids, always telling them 'stay away from your dad, don't go near your dad when he's in that kind of mood.' It just seemed like he was rarely ever happy. The only time he was happy was when he was gone from the house or if he was high or if he had money.*

Dana further indicated the violence between them started just before their first child was born and escalated after and with subsequent children. However, Dana stated the violence toward her did not occur when he was sober, only when drunk or high. She attributed his anger toward children to perhaps being jealous of the children:

*Once the baby was born [...] he was proud to be a dad, but it just seemed like he was jealous of the baby. My attention wasn't focused on him anymore; it was more on the baby.*

When asked how she understands her use of violence, Dana described she would bottle her emotions when her partner would not treat her or the children properly, but also stated she recognized being furious all of the time with him. At the time of her violence, Dana had also been drinking and doing drugs that day and felt pressure to use substances by her brother as everyone at his home was using. She described worrying about the children in spite of choosing to use drugs and these emotions led to arguing with her partner:

*I'm sick and tired of not doing anything about it, and that's where everything was [...] you know when you shake a pop bottle and when you open it, it starts fizzing and what not. Well, when he got back, and we started arguing, that's how it was.*

Dana also describes a fragmented history with her family, whereby violence and addictions were prevalent, and she ended up in several foster homes and being ripped apart from her baby sister, and eventually joined a gang. She has battled addiction issues that contributed to her violence toward her partner, and the outcome of her killing him. She stated she was very upset and was in disbelief after it happened:

*I'm really upset with myself that I actually did it. I always thought it only happened in movies or on TV. When it actually happened to me, reality totally kicked me in the ass.*

The culmination all of these factors led to a tragic outcome that left her children without their father and ultimately their mother when she served a period of incarceration for her violence.

***The essence of Dana's experience.*** Dana found herself in a mutually abusive relationship that ended when she killed her partner at her brother's home. Dana conveyed that she longed for a stable, and loving family felt so much pressure, anger, and hurt by her partner, yet rather than seek help, she presented as tough. While theirs was a tumultuous relationship fueled by alcohol and drugs, abuse and violence, Dana said she loved her partner and wanted a better life. She described a neglectful and abusive history, needing a mother present to teach her how to love and be loved and her family history did not provide for this nurturing. Dana describes her understanding of her violence is connected to her family history, gang involvement at a young age, bottling things up, and retaliating for the hurt she experienced. She also stated for her, and for other women, feeling hurt and betrayed, and showing men that women can hurt them too, is part of the issue:

> *With girls, it's like 'I'm going to show you how it feels when you hurt me.' Some women are fairly open, they're open books, most women are open books. When they're being treated like shit throughout their life and whatnot, and they don't want no more of that garbage in their life anymore, they get to a point where they're done being treated like that. They have to prove to the man or society that we're not just feminine, fragile objects; we're able to hurt people.*

### 5.2.2 Pamela

***Textural description of Pamela's experience.*** Pamela describes her violence toward her partner of four years as a reaction to her partner's substance use, his attitude toward it, suspected cheating, and the resulting effect on their relationship and their financial security. She stated it was the only time she used violence, and it started off with damaging his stuff by throwing things or using objects:

*[…] at that point, there was not violence towards him, but I threw a hammer at his truck, stuff like that. It was that kind of, that physical […]. One time, I caught him at another crack house and I took the bat and smashed his mirror and put dents in the truck, stuff like that.*

Pamela describes being angry with him for his behavior as a result of his substance misuse and hanging around with other women who would drug with him, never knowing where he was or what he was doing. She reported she was the sole aggressor, and although her partner was never violent toward her, he could be emotionally abusive at times, and this added to her anger toward him. Pamela stated her use of violence on her partner occurred all in one cluster, but the tension leading up to it was palpable. She describes being alone on Christmas day with her young daughter opening presents and waiting for her partner to come home. When he didn't, Pamela states she felt anger and hatred:

*So I'm opening these presents, she's all happy, she asking where her daddy is. So he comes home Boxing Day, and I said 'I can't do this, I can't.' So I said 'I'm going to go to [away] for a couple of days, visit my girlfriend, taking [our daughter]. I've got to get away because I have a lot of hatred, a lot of anger, and all I want to do is kill you. So I've got to go.*

When Pamela and her daughter returned home, she noted the new truck was missing, and she had been locked out of the home. She described feeling outraged and broke into her home, saw her partner had another woman there, then beat her partner with a pair of garden shears, and a bat while her daughter was in the truck:

*I took those shears, and I started hitting him with those. He's pushing me away and trying to push her out, and I'm just hitting, swinging this thing every which way. I cut him; I cut me on my leg, and she gets out of the house […] So, I come back in the house, there is crack cans on the table and ashes, and he doesn't smoke, and there is cigarette butts everywhere, and beer. So then somehow I drop these shears, and I pick up the bat, I've got a wooden bat. So then I started hitting him with this bat. And screaming at him, and I'm just releasing all this […].*

Pamela recalled feeling accumulated anger toward her partner for his years of using drugs and being with women who would use substances with him. She stated at the time she felt hatred toward him for making her feel the way that she did over time and in the moment:

> So somehow I chased him outside, and he fell in the snow, and he was on his hands and knees and his head, and I remember thinking 'I could hit him in the temple right now, right in the temple would solve all these problems.'

Pamela describes how this bubbled over time and she had never used violence in the past with other partners: *he was the first one where it was actual violence like that. It bubbled, bubbled, bubbled, and usually, I could stuff it back in, right.* At the point her partner is on the ground, Pamela stated she weighed the moment of what she could do to end the extreme tension, anger, and hatred toward her partner:

> But when he was down like that, his temple is like a big bull's eye. And instead, I hit him in the shoulder. I knew that much. I knew, and I just pulled back. And then, I'm screaming at him to get up [...]

Pamela describes chasing him back into their home with the bat and screeching at the top of her lungs for him to come out of the bathroom where at some point the police showed up to the home to intervene:

> I turn around with the bat, and I got sprayed with mace, pepper spray, right. And so then I'm thinking because I can't see it's a cop, he doesn't say he's a cop, all I see is this huge guy in dark clothes. I'm thinking 'now I'm getting beat by the dealer, right?' So I'm fighting him, I get sprayed again. Now I've got swirling thoughts, 'what the hell? I'm going to get robbed. He's taking everything.' Who knows what he's going to do to me. So I'm fighting this guy, fighting as much as I can. My whole face is burning, I can't breathe. I had my glasses on, it was hell. And then I hear this woman tell me '[Pamela], you've got to calm down.' And that's all it took. It was a woman cop. She didn't say she was a cop, either. It was so calm; her voice was so calm.

The incident ends with Pamela getting arrested and her daughter remaining with her partner. Pamela explained she waited in jail for two days before being able to see her daughter and felt the situation was unjust and was worried about her daughter. Pamela was convicted and ordered to take programming for women's violence.

***Structural description of Pamela's experience.*** While Pamela described addictions within her family history, she conveys she was raised well and did not experience neglect or abuse. Pamela described her desire to experience a good life with someone. She also expressed how the added stressor of being in a business relationship with her partner that was financially compromised by his addictions. Pamela stated in spite of their problems when she got pregnant, they decided to try to make things work:

> *But he's a hard worker. [...] we decided to open, run our own business. We did everything, and for three years [...] well, for two years of the business it was great.*

Pamela stated the business was good at first but described her partner's substance use was prevalent and despite being a hard worker this posed stress and tension on both their personal and business relationship and felt she had limited coping in this regard:

> *But then [he] gets into smoking crack, and he gets a big pay cheque and whatever else he takes off and he's gone, whatever. A lot of the stuff I'm finding out now, that I did a lot of stuff wrong that I thought I was doing right, like trying to control who he saw, and who he associated with, and controlling his time and phoning him all the time and keeping him on schedule and controlling his money. Not controlling it but [...] you know, I'd give him a pay cheque every week rather than two big pay cheques, stuff like that. Trying to help him budget.*

Pamela also expressed feeling the pressure and tension from her partner for her to use drugs with him as she stated he did not like to use alone. Pamela conveyed his pressure and the constant cyclical tension in their relationship, coupled with his cheating, resulted in a need to want to control everything, and she indicated that this bubbled internally within her. She described her anger at their home being a place where his substance use, and sometimes hers, would take place. It was not until she was charged with assault with a weapon that she first received some professional intervention. However, it was not immediate, and Pamela describes going back to court two more times due to breaching a 'no contact order' and begging for help for herself and her relationship. Pamela described feeling hatred, frustration, loss of control and

desperate. In spite of these feelings, she stated she felt disappointed in herself and believed she knew better: *number one, most important, I am disappointed in myself. Because I am better than that, and with anybody else. And I know better.*

For Pamela, her understanding of her violence was firmly rooted in her desire to fix her partner and recognized her abuse toward him in her efforts to control the situation, negatively affected her children and herself:

> *There are so many women out there, same situation. Either their alcoholic or their drug addict old man...and they stay in that relationship because they think that they can fix it, or they can help, or they can do [...]*

> *I would never put myself in that position again. I didn't know [...] ignorance is not an excuse, but I really did not know how an addict functioned. I didn't know how an addict's wife functioned. I didn't know that a lot of the things that I did, that I thought, I was doing good, were actually harmful.*

Pamela recognizes what she did was wrong, but still has feelings of justification because of how she had been treated, stating: *I feel like, for all of the shit I put up with, he got away light.*

***Essence of Pamela's experience.*** Pamela described she was not able to experience the normal family environment she wanted. She tried to maintain her relationship with her partner by meeting his unhealthy needs and not seeking help for her negative coping. However, the relationship and the violence she exerted on her partner moved her farther away from her goal to have a healthy and respectful personal and business relationship. It exacerbated her need to control the situation and fuelled her anger and hatred toward her partner for his behaviours which became cyclical for both. Her partner's ongoing addiction issues also provided her justification for her violence and kept her from seeking help until police intervened, however, she maintained her belief he made her feel this way. She understood her violence toward him as being in response to his infractions and behaviours toward her and explained trying to "fix him" unsuccessfully.

### 5.2.3 Katrina

***Textural description of Katrina's experience.*** Katrina described what she referenced as "freaking" out on her partner the day she used her violence against him. She reported there was constant "nitpicking" and had enough:

> *Yeah, I don't know, it was just like constant nit picking all night and finally when we got home I just had enough, and we were still in the truck, and I freaked out. I absolutely lost it, and I was just, in my mind I thought I was grabbing him and shaking him really hard but I was actually hitting him, and I just kept telling him shut the fuck up, and that was basically it.*

Katrina stated she recalls feeling like it happened fast and she had been drinking when the situation escalated. During the incident, she realized her lip was bleeding but did not attribute it to her partner hitting her, rather, him trying to stop her from hitting him. At some point during the incident, he had left to call the police at which point she had calmed down. By that time her partner was irate at the situation. In the end, both she and her partner were charged with assault. At this time, Katrina also describes recalling: *a fear of being left or a feeling of a loss of control.*

In another incident, in a prior long term married relationship, Katrina identified engaging in violence with that partner which resulted in her partner holding her down:

> *[…] there was a few incidents of violence, but I don't remember it ever being that bad, more just me freaking out and I don't know, maybe throw a pillow at him or break things. I only remember one time, him grabbing my wrist because I had a watch on. He grabbed it really, really hard. I don't know if he pushed me down on the couch or what it was, but the watch broke, and I remember that, but I'm not saying he was, he would never have touched me if I wasn't losing my mind.*

She recalled a couple of more instances where she was restrained by her partner for freaking out, and this behavior on her part would result in moving from one relationship to another. At the time of this incident, Katrina again mentioned what she referenced: *that crazy fear of being alone.*

***Structural description of Katrina's experience.*** Katrina identified she had a pattern of

seeking attention in situations where she feels insecure, jealous or not in control. She also

reported when in situations where her partner would do something she interpreted as wrong,

perceived or real, he would feel the need to retaliate:

> *I am a control freak, and I understand that. I can be hard to deal with, but I don't know. First physical thing that ever happened to me or in a relationship was just getting simple pushed out of the way, and I remember something like snapping, in my head, being like fuck you, because if you're going to fucking do that to me, like I will get you back. I don't know; I just noticed it start escalating from there. If I wasn't being heard, you can only yell so loud and then your point is still not getting across.*

Katrina described coming from a large, religious, traditional family. She attributes her

family background as a catalyst for her abuse and violence, and the need to be in control. She

expressed this as stemming from her anger about with her parents, never teaching her what a

good relationship is, and not being representative of being good role models:

> *I remember telling myself when I was young, and I said this to my mom, when I was young I never wanted to be like you, and that hurt her feelings really bad. It's not like I don't want to be like her, I do, she's a really good woman, I just, she's just too passive you know. My dad called all the shots, and I hated it, it irritated me that she didn't have any control. I told myself, I will never be that, I will never just be at home, having kids, I will never just do it. My dad […] would make huge decisions without her […] even consulting her […]. To me it just didn't seem like a fair or equal relationship.*

***Essence of Katrina's experience.*** Katrina recognized her abuse and violence was

primarily instigated by her as an aggressor and was a result of the need to get her way, for

control, to retaliate, and also to mitigate her fear of being left. She dates this back to her teen

years and does not correlate it to being victimized. While Katrina wanted and valued a healthy

relationship, she also would move from one relationship to another to avoid being left or if she

wanted something particular that she was not getting from it. She understood the need for control

as connected to the traditional roles of her parents and the inequality she attributed to these roles.

Katrina viewed the traditional relationship of her parents as being a product of the time versus

being abusive and states her part of her behavior is combatting this traditional value system of which she grew up. Katrina stated she continues to work on this.

**5.2.4 Brooke**

*Textural description of Brooke's experience.* Brooke's use of violence was rooted in her desire to gain control of the dysfunction between her and her partner, and her environment around her. The day she used violence against him, she described them to be on a break, and when she went to his place with a friend, he had his arm around another girl:

> *I walk into the camper, and there's this guy that I'm on a break with […] he has his arm around one of my really good friends. So I just lost it. I lunged at, I think both of them, I don't even know who I started punching first, I don't even know, I just started punching him, her.*

Brooke indicated she felt jealous and furious at both of them, and despite attempts to calm her, Brooke continued her violence. She described following her partner and the girl outside and continued to punch and hit them both, eventually using a full beer can as a weapon to punch her partner in the face:

> *The can was like closed, I punched him and the can cracked open in my hand, I punched him so hard, his eye like instantly turned pink and started gushing. So I was like satisfied at this point, and then he starts walking […]*

The violence carried on out into the street where Brook continued to punch her partner at one point describing it to be funny when his head bounced off a stop sign. When she fell, he kicked her twice at which time police arrived to deal with the situation. Because Brooke admitted to starting the physical fight, no charges were laid.

*Structural description of Brooke's experience.* Brooke indicated she normalized a dysfunctional situation that included several years of her patterned violence, substance use (both her and her partner), and infidelity by her partner. Brooke described this cycle of issues continued for the duration of her relationship. It wasn't until she left the relationship she realized

the chaos of it. Brooke stated when she used violence she did not feel bad and justified it,

indicating it was part of this normalization:

> *I'd be all 'I hit him first', I didn't see anything wrong with the unhealthy relationship we were having. I didn't, I didn't try to stop myself at all, I just, I'd lose it, and I'd black out, I don't even know what was going through my head at that time. I'd always justify it that he wasn't listening, you know what I mean […]*
>
> *[…] I didn't think of it as a problem. I just kind of thought, it was normal, that's how we were. Because even when I got to the courses, I was still in denial that I had done anything wrong. I don't know what.*

Brooke also understood her use of violence as resulting from her need to control, and this

coupled with substance and alcohol use increased the intensity of her feelings:

> *I think it's just trying to get control. You can't mentally control them, so you try to physically control them. I think it was just that he hurt me and I wanted to hurt him, too, and that was just one way of hurting him. He hurt me; I want to hurt you back.*

She further stated that the need to control her partner and the situation of trying to hold

on to something too long was part of her narrative. She conveyed most of her violence was from

fear of him leaving or not listening to her, which made her feel justified:

> *I tried way too hard to hold onto something that wasn't there. I don't even know, I just had these really deep feelings for this guy and just wanted him to have them back for, I don't know. I definitely chased him for a long time; it took a lot for me to be able to let go and step out of the situation. I don't even know what was going on all those years.*

***Essence of Brooke's experience.*** Brooke found herself in a serious relationship at a very

young age with a young man who was several years older than her. She described a very volatile

relationship accompanied by dysfunctional environmental factors, such as substance use,

drinking, and little support from family. Brooke did not realize the effect of her behavior, and to

a degree, her partner's, in the context of their relationship and normalized and justified it. She

would often refer to herself as the instigator, resulting from being so angry she would "black

out". Brooke knew she wanted the relationship, but did not know how to get out of the negative cycle, recognized after it ended it was not healthy and, in fact, toxic.

**5.2.5 Susan**

*Textural description of Susan's experience.* Susan described the violence she used as a response to her partner's continued drinking during a time when they were trying to make a new life together. Susan indicated in her other relationships there was reciprocal violence. However, this was not an issue in her current relationship. In this particular incident, she had come home from work and her partner was drunk, so she started hitting him. On that day, she stated she had enough of his behavior:

> *I was working, we were just trying to make a new start and everything, but he continued to drink, and I would just become violent towards him […] So whenever an argument would arise, I would react first because I was scared that I would be the one to be hit, and I had sworn that I'd never let that happen to me again. He never ever once, over the seven years that we were together, he never was once violent towards me.*

Susan also admitted part of her narrative was that she was going to pre-empt the violence she experienced in this situation, as her partner had never been violent to her previously. While Susan did not get charged for her violence, she maintained her abuse and violence toward him over the seven years of their relationship until he finally left.

*Structural description of Susan's experience*. Susan experienced severe and long term violence toward her that started at a young age within her family, and from a past partner who had been violent to her. She expressed her desire to pre-empt any potential violence as a result of both. Susan attributes her violence toward this partner as not knowing how to deal with being treated well by a partner and her desire to be in control of the situation she found herself in with her partner who drank and before anything violent could happen to her:

> *[…] my dad showing me violence when I was growing up. Growing up, I got into relationships that were always violent, it seemed like I attracted men that were violent so*

*then when I got into...with my oldest son's dad, when I got into a relationship with him, I didn't know how, when somebody was treating me good, I didn't know how to deal with that.*

*To have control, to think they have control in their lives, or to have control over somebody. I guess I'm trying to think for me, what it was. It was, I think a lot of control. I had that power to do that, even when it wasn't necessary. I didn't have to do that. I wasn't being abused myself, like how I was in other relationships. I could just do this to this person and there's nothing that he's going do about it.*

Susan also contextualizes her use of violence as connected to her experience of being a young Indigenous girl who struggled in a "white society". She states this resulted in some identity issues that were contributory toward her self-preservation which included using violence to protect herself or to pre-empt violence or abuse toward her:

*And also, being Métis, I also found myself stuck with my identity. Not knowing where I fit in with the white society or with the native society, and then, as being Métis, then native people look at you 'you're a half breed so you don't belong' and then the white people say 'you don't belong with us because you have Indian in you.' I started being violent very young because it was a thing of self-defence, especially at school and stuff. Kids used to wait for me around the corner and stuff like that; I had to learn how to fight to protect myself. Then I'd go home, and the violence was happening with my dad.*

Susan understood this in the broader context related to the impact of the residential schools on Indigenous people leading to intergenerational violence that persists today.

***Essence of Susan's experience.*** Susan's described her historical experience as being connected to her ability to understand the difference between a healthy and unhealthy relationship. While she experienced violence in her relationships before this current one, she cited her resentment toward her partner's drinking and her desire to control the situation as reasons for her behaviour. As a result, she engaged in a pre-emptive stance in part, to avoid being hurt and due to her resentment toward her partner's drinking for which she retaliated against him. Susan understood her use of violence as connected to her history of abuse from her father, and also her struggle with finding her identity as young Indigenous girl who did not feel she belonged anywhere. She also broadly understood her violence stemming from the impact of

residential schools. It was not until she was incarcerated for her violence that she realized she

needed help.

**5.2.6 Rita**

*Textural description of Rita's experience.* Rita described her use of violence as being

more of a regular occurrence with multiple partners rather than one particular incident with one

partner. She stated in once incident, she pushed and hit her partner for pressuring her to be sexual

with him:

> *I started getting angry and instead of getting, talking about it like a normal person,*
> *because I was angry, I would just do things to make him angry.*
> *I never used to be violent in my relationships; I found it more like, they were violent*
> *towards me in the beginning. And now the guy I'm with, I guess I started to really push*
> *that threshold after we got together. I started, I'd find myself pushing him around*
> *sometimes, kind of maybe putting my hands on him.*

In another relationship, Rita stated she would become angry and "pissed off" with her

partner over various issues, particularly his drinking:

> *[…] I find I get pissed off; it's just like 'well, you pissed me off'. I know that's not right,*
> *so I think I've changed a lot in that way. I have a shorter fuse, I guess, I used to be able*
> *to think things through, and now I don't really. I kind of just use my violence.*

In one particular incident with this partner, Rita indicated she became enraged and threw

him down to the ground: *I got really mad one time, he's a big guy, he can handle himself, I threw*

*him around, I was so mad I wouldn't stop. He's like, 'oh my God'; you're gonna kill somebody.*

In another instance with this same partner, Rita conveyed she pushed him hard, and he hit

his head on the bed. She recalled being angry, grabbing his face with her hands:

> *I've gotten pretty mad, and we've gotten into a fight, and that's the same night I pushed*
> *him. I got really mad, and I put my hands across his face, and I was pushing him around*
> *and yelling. I tried to push him onto the bed, but he went flying the other way. I don't*
> *know, he hit his head, and he got this great big bump on his head, I felt pretty bad.*
> .
> Rita also described that she would often verbally threaten this same partner and would

also do so in front of people, however, in such a way that would suggest it was a joke:

*Yeah, I tell him, if he's a dick to me, 'you'd better watch how you treat me, I'll slap you around.' I'd say it in front of people, so they think I'm totally joking, which most of the time I am, right? But then I found myself really smacking him around sometimes so I guess it's not really a joke. I guess I find myself saying stuff like that.*

At these times, Rita stated she felt scared of her capability to damage her partner, or even kill him.

**Structural description of Rita's experience.** Rita understands her use of violence as emerging from her history of being sexually abused in her younger years and physically abused when she was older. The abuse she experienced convoluted her ability to understand a healthy relationship:

*I[t] started at a really young age, I can't even remember. When it stopped, I must have been maybe 10, 10 or 11. That's when she started getting me into drinking, drugs, smoking. Started smoking at like age 10, started drinking and getting high. I think that's one of the reasons why I'm also so violent. I started drinking and smoking at such a young age, that I don't think I fully developed myself. And then I was really dependent on my alcohol for a really long time. There were times where I would drink 5-7 times a week. It got really bad in high school. Once that stopped, I guess I kind of stopped hanging out with my sister. That's when the problems really hit.*

She also identifies her use of drugs and her partner's drinking as being directly related to her use of violence:

*Probably my use of drugs. Drugs don't help anything, especially when you run out of your drugs, you're a lot more agitated, you're violent. If you're an alcoholic, you need that drink […] I mean there was times when he wanted to drink when I didn't want to drink. He would come home and be drinking or want to drink, and I started getting violent then.*

Rita links her historical context to her lack of self-esteem and feeling of jealousy, anger, inability to trust her partner and her need for control that allowed her to use violence against him, even if he wasn't doing anything to upset her:

*I also started getting mad because I was a little bit jealous, maybe. I'm at home, you know where I am, you can call me anytime you want, and sometimes I call you and it's like 'where's your phone' […] Not feeling good about yourself so you think he's gonna go and fool around with someone, the first chance he gets. That's not always the case, obviously.*

She felt her violence as a response to pre-empting any violence that would potentially befall her and attributes this to her history as a victim. She further contextualizes the normalization of her violence to the historical context of being an Indigenous woman and colonization and the impact of this on Indigenous people's traditional way of life:

> *Well, in our tradition, people weren't the way they are now. In our tradition, we took care of our own, even if they weren't our own. We took people in, we cared for them, we nurtured them [and] we always had lots of aunties and uncles even if they weren't aunties and uncles. We respected our elders; we sat down with our elders; they passed on their traditions, their stories.*

Rita understood her violence against the backdrop of this historical and painful history that resulted in lost generation of family that deeply eroded the culture:

> *Our culture is really important; our spirituality is really important. If we could get into those traditions again, I think there would be a lot less hurt and a lot less pain, because you have that structure of help.*

***Essence of Rita's experience.*** Rita described having difficulty experiencing a healthy relationship with her partner resulting from her historical context of being sexually abused when she was younger and physically abused at times when she was older. Rita recognized growing up in an environment where addictions were prevalent was also a barrier. She also attributed this to the historical context of residential schools and the impact on Indigenous people and the normalization of violence that resulted. Rita regularly used violence in her relationship in response to her anger, frustration, and stress related to her partner's drinking, in addition to the pre-empting violence she felt may befall her, even though he had not used violence against her. Feeling 'bad' and 'guilty' were also part of Rita's narrative, and she has been working on her self-esteem and self-worth to address these issues.

**5.2.7 Tara**

*Textural description of Tara's experience.* Tara cited her use of violence against her partner was patterned and mostly reciprocal, however, started with her initiation of violence toward him. She stated the first time she was violent, they were arguing, and she slapped him:

> *We were arguing that night. I don't know. I slapped him. That was the first thing. I'm pretty sure that was just the first time, it was just slapping.*

Tara stated her worst violence was when she stabbed her partner in the arm where she inflicted a wound which she describes as being about 4-6 inches deep and an inch wide. She described both of them had been drinking:

> *When we were drinking, I'd think really crazy things. One time I did actually stab him in the arm. That's when I realized I had to snap out of it and quit drinking […] yeah he was scared that I was trying to intentionally kill him too […]*

After she had stabbed him, he was scared because he did not want to charge her. Tara stated she scared the hell out of herself and she did not realize what she did until she did it and saw the floor covered with blood. While Tara was not charged for this, she states it was at this point she knew she needed to stop drinking and get some help.

*Structural description of Tara's experience.* Tara felt her frustration with her partner's drinking, cheating, and leaving for days at a time contributed to her use of violence against him. Tara described she tried to talk to her partner; however he would not listen, and this impacted her: *I used to tell him how I felt, and then I noticed he wasn't listening to me, so it got bottled up inside. Then, when I would drink, it would come out on him.*

Tara also understood the context of her violence as a response to her partner leaving her and wanting to force him to stay and cites jealousy and anger as being part of this context:

> *I don't know because he'd always leave and I didn't want him to. I was trying to force him to stay there and everything. He'd leave, I wouldn't see him for like a week at a time or something, and I'd want him to stay there. I thought I'd be able to force him.*

*Jealousy, I know that was a factor. Wanting him to stay there, that was a factor. Trying to force him to do something he didn't want to do by hitting him. Anger that just got built up inside.*

Tara conveys being the primary instigator in using violence against her partner; citing this led to reciprocal violence. When her partner would abuse her, she states she would try to hold back:

*I tried to hold myself back after he started abusing me back, too. I'd try to hold myself back but then I'd get so mad that I would just end up start hitting him or something, and then it would be both of us hitting each other.*

She stopped her violence as an attempt to end the cycle; however, her partner continued his violence against her: *yeah, because I figured, maybe if I stopped, he wouldn't no more, he wouldn't try an abuse me no more or anything like that, but it actually got a little bit worse on me.*

Tara further understood her violence in the context of her familial history of growing up in a home where there were violence and alcohol stating she and her sisters had threatened their father to stop his violence against their mother:

*I remember, me and my sister, we threatened my dad, we threatened my dad real bad, we scared him. Ever since then, we never seen bruises on my mom, she was always happy. She got to go do what she wanted after that; he wouldn't say anything.*

Tara described being scared when her parents would drink and her father would use violence and did not want this for her children. This realization moved her toward stopping her violence and getting help.

***Essence of Tara's experience.*** Tara's experience being violent and also experiencing violence from her partner culminated from her historical context, her and her partner's drinking, and her frustration, anger and jealously toward him. Tara felt a strong urge to try to control her partner and used violence to do so which often included preventing him from leaving, leading to

reciprocal violence between them. When Tara stabbed her partner, the seriousness of her behavior and the escalation of her violence became evident. The awakening of the impact of the reciprocal violence between her and her partner and her violent behavior was having on her children, led to her removing herself from the relationship and seeking help.

### 5.2.8 Anne

*Textural description of Anne's experience.* Similar to Rita's experience, Anne stated her perpetuation of violence did not pertain to one partner, rather to multiple partners; that was often in response to violence directed at her. Anne indicated in one situation her partner had hit her and blackened her eye. In this incident she retaliated by kicking and hitting him:

> *Yeah, I just kicked him and punched him as best I could eh, and then he left […].*

In another instance with this same partner, Anne described her partner coming home drunk and raising his fists. She stated she grabbed a paring knife and stabbed him in the shoulder:

> *He was out drinking, and he came home and he was getting mad at me, I got mad at him for first, because I said well how come you come here drunk […] then he put his fists, I was doing the dishes, I remember this, and he was going to punch, and I had one of those little pear knives and he turned around […]*

In this incident, Anne recalled stabbing him in the shoulder and described being angry at the time. She stated it was just a little poke that bled, however in this situation her partner called the police and she was charged with assault with a weapon. In another incident, Anne described how she kicked and beat her partner to the point of unconsciousness after he pushed her. She conveyed being furious in the moment:

> *I was kicking him in the head, he on a door like this and I had him on the ground, and I had big boots on, and I kept kicking, and kicking, and my foster brother grabbed me off him. I rolled him out the door, and I thought, yeah I was scared then because I don't know he's just all bloody and I didn't care I just threw him out and closed the door. The*

*next morning he still there and I thought oh my god I hope I didn't... I checked him, I moved him, then he finally came around, and I thought, oh I hope I didn't, you know.*

Anne noted many other instances where she would also instigate the violence where she would often slap, kick, hit or use weapons against her partner. During these times, she disclosed that her violence was either in response to violence used against her or with her being the instigator.

**Structural description of Anne's experience.** Anne contextualized her violence as resulting from becoming angry over time. Her anger, coupled with her and her partner's drinking and chaotic environment in which their drinking occurred, only exacerbated the situation. Eventually, this led to Anne's patterned violence toward her partners that was both in response to her victimization or her as an instigator. Anne felt she could gain power and control when she used violence:

*I don't know I guess at that time I felt good because I took him over. I finally put him down for so many years. Finally, I stood up to him. In that way I did. I felt bad afterward I did it. You know, but it's still, you know the honeymoon, it's the same scenario again. The next time that's when I stabbed him.*

In a similar situation as above, Anne noted her tendency to retaliate rather than leave. In this instance, Anne had been violent to her partner to the point of worrying if she killed him but indicated she had had enough:

*No, he was more, yeah he did to me. Finally, I just had enough. He was drunk, so I knew I could put him down [...] There was blood, he made me bleed anyways, and that when I pushed him and I started kicking him and I just rolled him out the door.*

This cycle of violence between Anne and her partners continued for much of Anne's life. She attributes her understanding of this to embedded anger she states has been bottled up inside her to the point of not caring and ultimately exploding:

*I think him, and I were both. I think I was more, I guess hateful towards that because I just didn't, I had so much built up and I just didn't give a shit. You know, just kept yelling*

*at him. Hey, how do you like that, how does it feel and all that. That way I had no remorse for that, at that point, I had nothing, ah he deserved it and then the next day I felt kind of bad about it because he was all beat.*

*[…] is kind of scary because you don't know how to say it and if you say it the wrong way it can start a fight, so I just whatever, throw it on the back burner. It festers and festers and finally I just blow up.*

Anne understood this as being unable to communicate properly with her partners. She stated she never learned how to talk with a partner, and if she were hurt she could not express it, rather would act out in anger. Anne recognized this as the catalyst for her violence and she could severely harm her partner as a result:

*It scares me because I get to the point where I get so mad I just see red, I just, I react before I think […] But I know I get a lot of anger and when, I get pissed off more, easier I mean, when I am drinking. When I'm sober, it's not too bad, but then it builds up. And then when I do drink, if that person's there I'm like you know.*

*Yeah, and I have to. It kind of scares me though because sometimes I push them, and they bang their head and their bleeding, and I'm like oh, I hope I didn't, because sometimes I get like really violent. It scares me.*

Anne's violence is situated against the backdrop of her history of familial addictions and abuse. Anne believes this to have impacted her at a very young age, resulting in her ending up in the child welfare system in foster homes, and eventually adopted out where she experienced further abuse:

*[…] both my parents are alcoholics and my [mom]used to tell me that my dad used to go for days, and my dad would say that she was the violent one, which I can see that because I've drank with her one night and she beat me up so I can see that violence. I think that's where I get it from. That was only when I was like two.*

*Not really. My adopted dad was, he's hit on my foster brother and he'd like hit the horses and stuff like that, so he didn't know what they wanted, he'd hit them eh. And then there was sexual abuse there too in there […]*

Anne also indicated her father attended residential school, and this affected his ability to parent which in turn impacted Anne's ability to find and maintain healthy relationships of her own:

*Yeah, especially with the residential, I think that has a lot to do with the native people, like their anger and I mean my dad went there, residential, and he was angry too. He drank but he never, he got into a fight too and all that and he said it was because of the, he'd have so much anger with that.*

She further stated it is because of the negative impact of the residential schools on her family, the anger her father experienced as result of being abused, and in turn the impact on her at a very young age:

*I wouldn't be sitting here talking about this, like my anger, because I think if I would have lived in a home like a normal home I think I would have been alright […]*

Anne recalled never thinking it was her fault, but admits instigating violence too, recognizing it did not help. She described feeling bad afterward and some level of guilt as well.

***Essence of Anne's experience.*** Anne's trajectory of her use of violence is multifaceted and resulted in a cyclical pattern. While Anne has also been a victim of violence that had been reciprocal, she also reports being the instigator as well. For Anne, her anger, desire to control and retaliation toward her past and current partners has been a part of her experience. Anne had been exposed to a history of familial addictions and violence that led her to move around in the foster care system starting at a very young age. Eventually, when she was adopted, Anne described being abused by her adopted father, exacerbating her underlying hurt and anger. Further, the impact of her father attending residential schools is convey by Anne as a factor contributing to her inability to engage in a healthy relationship. While Anne expresses remorse and guilt, she also justified her violence to some degree.

## 5.3 Summary

The women's experiences articulate the multiple perspectives from which their lived experiences of IPV emerge. The women provided valuable perspectives into how they situated their experiences, and into the complexity and reality of their lives regarding their violence. All women interviewed were extremely open with the historical accounts of their lives for the purpose of this research and offered a window into their existence that was both raw and reflective. While their experiences varied, the emerging themes such as the overwhelming stress of familial and parenting responsibilities, wanting control, the impact of their partner's substance abuse and the unhealthy familial and intimate relationship history illustrate the complexities of their individual and multiple realities, while at the same time demonstrating the essence of their collective experiences.

Descriptive phenomenology was used to present the women's experiences as accurately as possible, and the principles that underpin feminist standpoint provided a point of departure for analysis and understanding of women's use of violence. It is through this approach that informed insights are made visible to counter misinformation regarding women's IPV and generate new understandings rendered by the women. Further, their experiences foreshadow the intersections between the class and cultural lines that can inform appropriate culturally responsive measures to address their IPV. The presentation of the data gives voice to the women's experiences and illuminates their critical insights from their lived experiences that lead to the themes presented in the next chapter. In chapter six, I present several themes rendered from the women's descriptions and situate these in the broader literature.

# Chapter Six - Making Sense of Women's IPV: Thematic Findings

## 6.1 Introduction

The narratives described in the previous chapter provide powerful contributions to the existing research in the area of IPV and the findings outlined below have potential implications for intervention strategies by those who work in the work in the field of IPV. The findings tell the story of the complexity of IPV by women and must be understood against the backdrop of the existing literature. This chapter will outline the composite textural descriptions as well as the composite structural descriptions, and the themes that resulted, which serve to illuminate the totality of the women's experiences. I will conclude with a synthesis of both the textural and structural descriptions and group essence or commonalities of the women's experiences. While there are challenges and limitations to qualitative research such as this, the findings provide critical insights to the field and point to the need for further research, which I will speak to in the conclusion chapter.

## 6.2 Composite textural descriptions

The primary aim of this research and consistent with my research questions was to explore and illuminate women's experiences using IPV. I asked the question: What are the lived experiences of women who have used IPV against their male intimate partner? The composite textural descriptions provide the framework for gaining a totality of understanding all of the women's experiences. The women's stories provided some important insights into how they came to use their violence, leading to findings that deepened the understanding and meaning of the motives underlying their violence, and illustrating some of the struggles these women have faced leading up to it. The findings from this analysis resulted in four composite textural themes that emerged from the women's descriptions of their lived experience using violence. These are

illustrated in Table 6.1: Textural Themes and Meaning Units and include destructive emotions, bottling (internalizing emotions) negative sentiments and emotions, wanting control, and complexities of substance use. The theme regarding destructive emotions resulted in five sub-themes: partner use of substances, infidelity and betrayal, overwhelming stress with parental and family responsibilities, and fear of being left or being alone. These themes will be laid out here and discussed in the following chapter.

**Table 6.1:** Textural Themes and Meaning Units

| Theme | Meaning Units | Sample Quotes |
|---|---|---|
| **Destructive emotions** | Anger/rage at partner's substance misuse (alcohol/ drugs) | I just kept yelling in his face telling him how much I hated him and wanted to kill him. |
| | | I was seeing red. |
| | | […] I felt so enraged that I'm sitting there opening presents with my two year old […] and he is with a crack whore […] |
| | | So, he's gone on another fucking episode and then he comes back and I blew up again. |
| | Jealousy/anger at partner's cheating and betrayal | I think, I hate this man for making me feel this way. |
| | | Jealousy was a factor […] wanting him to stay there. |
| | Frustration/anger at partner's irresponsibility with family duties | I've got to get away, because all I have is frustration and anger and all I want to do is kill him. |
| | | Women are the one's who have to keep it together, the house running, the kids […] all this shit. There's only so much a person can take, right? |
| | | So he was gone again on another fucking episode. So then he comes back and I blew up again. |
| | Stress of being overwhelmed | […] here would be times I would get so stressed and frustrated, I would go out and get drunk. I would hit him. |
| | | I honestly think its frustration from what women put up with so much for so long, and they have no release. |
| | Feeling a loss of control | […] 140 down the freeway. My car is just shaking…. I'm surprised I did not kill anybody […] just wanted to bash into his truck. |
| | | When it comes to [partner] I have very little self-control, to the point of almost no control. |
| | | I'd lose it, I'd black out. |
| | Fear of being left or alone | […] I had a fear of being left or a fear of losing control |
| | | […] he would always leave, and I didn't want him to. |
| | Scared he would not come home | I was a little bit jealous […] I'm home not feeling good […] think he's going to fool around with someone. |
| **Bottling negative** | | And then, just like the pop bottle, I told him, 'I'm done with you'. |

| sentiments /emotions | Not putting up with partner's behaviours | It festers and festers and finally I just blow up. |
|---|---|---|
| | Cumulative negative treatment from partner | The way he treated me […] I kept bottling it in. |
| | Partner would not listen | You know, when you shake a pop bottle and you open it and it starts fizzing and whatnot. |
| | | I would always justify it that he would never listen. |
| | Releasing tension | So, then I start hitting him with this bat, I'm screaming at him, just releasing all this. |
| | | So I kept it all in. Then I had enough and blew up. |
| | | I had so much built up and I just didn't give a shit. |
| | | It bubbled, bubbled, bubbled, and usually I could stuff it back in right. |
| | | […] constant nitpicking and when we got home, I had just had enough. |
| Wanting control | Wanting/forcing him to stay | I had that power [to be in control] even when it wasn't necessary. |
| | | I am a control freak […] I want control. |
| | | […] he would leave for a week at a time and I thought I could force him to stay. |
| | | Trying to force him to do what he did not want to do by hitting him. |
| | Stop partner from using alcohol or drugs | […] I did a lot of stuff wrong, that I thought I was doing right. Like trying to control who he saw controlling his time […] his money. |
| | Having power over partner | […] just trying to get control. You can't mentally control them, so you physically control them. |
| | Wanting to make partner talk | […] I'd try to make him understand, but he couldn't, he wouldn't listen |
| Complexities of substance use | Both partners drinking or drugging preceding or during violence | I'll tell you I smoked crack too. It was not my thing, it wasn't. I do like weed though […] |
| | | It's mainly the only time I would fight, when I was under the influence. I'm an alcoholic […] trying to stay clean. |
| | | One time I actually stabbed him in the arm. That's when I realized I needed to snap out of it and quit drinking. |
| | | […] my use of drugs. Drugs don't help anything, especially when you run out, you're a lot more agitated, you're violent. |
| | Feeling pressure to use drugs | […] women put up with a lot of shit, and alcohol will also be a factor. Yeah, I was breastfeeding, and I'm yeah, 'no I'm not' using […] |
| | | […] he could never use alone. |
| | | […] he would get mad at me because |
| | | I wouldn't smoke crack with him. |
| | Reacting to partner's drinking or substance use | One time I caught him at another crack house, and I took a bat and smashed his mirror. |
| | | […] he continued to drink and I would just become violent toward him. |

**6.2.1 Destructive emotions**

Collectively, all the women identified destructive emotions, with anger and rage being the primary emotions leading to a loss of control and ultimately their use of violence against their partner. It is not surprising that anger and rage would be connected as a motive to women's IPV. Further, the contextual factors that can be understood as pre-cursers to their feelings of anger are of equal importance. While all of the women in this study experienced anger and some women rage, the manner in which they experienced it did not occur the same way. Underlying emotions, such as frustration, jealousy, fear, and stress were feelings the women experienced that led to the intensity of their anger. While self-defence was only described by one woman, this was in tandem with her description of anger and rage toward her partner's cheating, lack of involvement with the children and substance use. The contextual factors leading to anger were similar in nature, generating four sub-themes: partner use of substances, infidelity, and betrayal, overwhelming stress with parental and family responsibilities, and fear of being left or being alone. Many women identified experiencing emotional pre-cursers such as extreme frustration and stress related to partner's substance use. For others, feelings of jealousy related to infidelity and betrayal and overwhelming stress and parental responsibility were also contributing factors.

**6.2.1.1 *Partner's use of substances***

Almost all of the women described feeling anger toward their partner's substance use, and while the complexities of using substances is a theme of its own, the women also described it as an underlying factor to their deep feelings of anger and resentment related to their partner's lack of familial and parenting responsibilities.

Pamela conveyed a culmination of anger toward her partner for his ongoing drugging and irresponsibility toward his family and business obligations and stated:

*I hated this truck because it's the physical embodiment of just what I went through. Every time I see it […] how many thousands of dollars partying with him […]. That's what I thought every time I see this truck that's parked in front of our house.*

Like Pamela, Dana also experienced a culmination of anger toward her partner for constantly wanting to get high or drink, often pressuring her to engage in using with him. She indicated that early in their relationship, she would use crack with him too, however, when she became pregnant her focus changed. According to Dana, her partner's continued drinking and using drugs stating, *that the only time he was happy was when he was gone from the house or if he was high.* Dana also felt her partner's substance use was interfering with his ability to be an active father to their children:

*I kept on yelling in his face, telling him how much I hated him, how much I wanted him dead, how much I just wanted to kill him. That he was useless, that he wasn't worth being a dad. Some other guy would be way better […] at treating our kids than he ever did.*

The accumulation of the intense feelings of frustration and anger led to Dana becoming so enraged in an argument with her partner, she ended his life.

Anne reported she and her partner were trying to start a new life together. However, her partner continued to drink, and as a result, she became increasingly angry at this stating, *he continued to drink, and I would just become violent to him.* Anne describes becoming so outraged with her partner stating, *I get so mad I just see red, I just, I react before I think.* Anne described hitting and kicking her partner and leaving him outside the door on the ground. Her partner survived, however, when Anne checked on him the next morning she feared she had killed him. Susan described similar circumstances, in which she would become angry with her partner's drinking and use violence to get back at him.

Rita described her mounting anger regarding her partner's drinking led to her violence toward him where she stated she started, *to really push that threshold after we got together.* She described how she would push him around, put her hands on him, but not full out violence.

However, for Rita, the violence escalated in its intensity stating, *because honestly...I could be really abusive. I get really angry sometimes; I could do a lot of harm to somebody.*

For Katrina, her partner's drinking often resulted in him emotionally abusing her, and described that his constant 'nitpicking' led to her anger:

> *[…] if I'm going to be entirely honest in this, he's very, very emotionally or mentally or whatever abusive without even knowing it and really bad when he drinks […] Yeah, I don't know, it was just like constant nit picking all night and finally when we got home I just had enough, and we were still in the truck, and I freaked out. I absolutely lost it, and I was just, in my mind I thought I was grabbing him and shaking him really hard, but I was actually hitting him […]*

Likewise, Brooke described her partner's use of substances as a factor leading to her anger and she would act out in a violent manner, breaking and destroying objects that represented his drug use:

> *[…] just kind of like threw the drugs around […] The amount of mirrors that I smashed in that house […] they do it on mirrors, and I'd literally just grab the mirror and throw it, and this was ongoing for a while. So we had our little fights […] I was still trying to control him […]*

Similarly, Tara states her partner had serious addictions and was also abusive to her, however, she felt she would initiate more because she was angry about his substance use:

> *I tried to hold myself back after he started abusing me back, too. I'd try to hold myself back but then I'd get so mad that I would just end up start hitting him or something, and then it would be both of us hitting each other.*

Tara reported continuing in her abuse and violence due to her anger toward her partner continuing his substance use after she worked toward stopping hers.

The use of substances posed major problems for almost all of the women participants. While this will be discussed as its theme later in this chapter, it was clearly identified as a theme as part of the women's lived realities and as a pervasive factor that impacted their intimate and familial situations.

### 6.2.1.2 *Partner's infidelity and betrayal*

Some of the women described the feelings of jealousy and frustration resulting from their partner's infidelity and betrayal as leading to intense anger. While jealousy is cited to be a shared motive amongst women using IPV, the women in this study identified it as a precursor to their anger leading to their violence.

For Dana, the added circumstances of her partner cheating on her exacerbated her feelings of frustration and resentment, and she later recognized how the impact of these behaviours led to profound, negative sentiments she was thinking and feeling that preceded her violence:

> *Why did you even fuckin' go do that? I've been nothing but loyal and honest to you throughout our fuckin' whole relationship. I didn't cheat on you, I didn't want to be with anybody else but you. Now that I get pregnant, you frickin' go out of your way and go fuck somebody else? I'm done with you, I don't need this'.*

Dana later described the incident that led to her partner's death where both were arguing vehemently, and she recalls the knife just sitting there and her grabbing it, and in her rage, stabbing her partner, killing him at the scene.

Tara stated her partner's substance abuse led to his cheating stating, *he started drinking more. He was cheating on me, too, after I had my daughter.*

Brooke described anger towards her partner's infidelity during a time she understood them to be 'taking a break.' She described immediately reacting violently when seeing her partner with her friend:

> *Oh yeah, I was mad, I was really mad. So the table came off, and then as soon as I lost grip I turned on him, I punched him, he let go of me, she had run up to the front of the camper. I think at this point I kind of was like.... My friend's house who it was just kind of calmed me down, I don't know how I got calmed down, and I just kind of blacked right out.*

Infidelity was a key sub-theme, determined to be a catalyst for emotions like jealousy as a secondary or underlying emotion to anger. While each woman described varying degrees of anger, such as Brooke, who described being mad as compared to Dana who was enraged, the factor of betrayal was clearly described as a common theme.

### 6.2.1.3 *Overwhelming parental and family responsibilities*

Many of the women described the overwhelming burden of caring for children and family. Anger, frustration, and jealous feelings regarding their partner's whereabouts, or when their partner would leave and not return home, exacerbated their anger and increased their motive for violence. A few women indicated their partner would sometimes leave for days, leaving them to care for the children or manage household issues. For these women, the devastating effect of these emotions led to feelings of rage toward their partner who left them with the responsibilities of managing the household and children.

The overwhelming burden of caring for children and family was described by many of the women. Tara described how her partner would leave for periods of time stating, *I wouldn't see him for like a week at a time. And when I heard people who did see him, he was out drinking with some other people.*

Pamela also stated her partner would often leave for days at a time where he would use substances and would come home high:

> *And he goes through with that whole thing, and then there's another fight afterwards and then he'd take off again. And so that huge fight, and the he comes back and sleeps for two days. Time after time, it just keeps building.*

She also indicated she would often manage their business, the household, and the children and justified her anger toward him:

> *[…] lack of communication, somebody's an asshole, drinking or drugs are involved, kids are involved. Money's involved, right? Women are the ones that have to keep it together,*

*keep the house running, keep the kids going, try and get all this shit, and there's only so much a person can take, right?*

Likewise, Dana described how her partner was often in and out of the relationship and the household whereby he contributed minimally to supporting her which in turn contributed to her anger towards him:

*He was always gone, long periods of the night, he'd leave in the middle of the night, whatever. I was getting tired of it, and of course I'm going to have a clue to where you went and whatnot. I just told him 'grab your shit and get out, get out of my house.'*

This quote relates to her frustration with him leaving frequently while Dana had to manage the parental responsibilities alone. Similar to Pamela, Dana also described extreme anger over her partner shirking his family responsibilities:

*His old ways came back again. I was like 'you know what, go back'. At that time, he was seeing somebody, she didn't live too far away from where I lived. He was always gone, long periods of the night, he'd leave in the middle of the night, whatever. I was getting tired of it, and of course I'm going to have a clue to where you went and whatnot. I just told him 'grab your shit and get out, get out of my house.' He was like 'this ain't your house.' I was like 'yes it is. The bills are under by fucking name, I paid for everything in this house. Nothing has your name on anything. Nothing has your name on it. Get the fuck out, with your clothes. Get the fuck out. I don't need you.*

Rita described how her anger and frustration regarding her partner leaving the household responsibilities to her and his perception that he took care of her:

*[...] sometimes you grow up with nothing and just want something, someone who's willing to provide for you, you're willing to follow their rules, or, you know, do what they say because they're the money maker, as long as you have your needs and you're taken care of, then [...] I've seen that a lot. Those are my big issues, you know. He would kind of rub it in my face, 'I take care of you', and it's like 'really?' I think that had something to do with my violence because I would get really mad that he would even say stuff like that.*

For Rita, she expressed feelings of jealousy thinking about where her partner went while out, or what he was doing and with whom. She described not feeling good about herself while she stayed at home, and this would contribute to her feelings of anger and resulting violence toward him:

*I also kind of started getting mad because I was a little bit jealous, maybe. I'm at home, you know where I am, you can call me anytime you want, and sometimes I call you and it's like 'where's your phone'. Sometimes you're going out and you're drinking with your buddies and you're supposed to be working. Why can't I go out with my friends and do that, you know? So there's a little bit of that jealousy issue, maybe a little bit of that self-esteem issue. Not feeling good about yourself so you think he's [going to] go and fool around with someone, the first chance he gets. That's not always the case, obviously.*

This particular experience was recurring throughout the analysis. All of the women cited the feelings of being overwhelmed, yet the circumstances varied for each woman. For instance, a few of the women with children described feeling overwhelmed as a result of household, parental and familial responsibilities, while some of the other women were overwhelmed and jealous due to their partner's freedom.

**6.2.1.4 *Fear of being abandoned or alone***

For a few women, the fear of being abandoned or of being alone was also an underlying factor leading to feelings of anger in the moment and over time. Katrina stated her biggest fear was her partner would leave her and her irrational thoughts regarding her perceived reasons for him leaving would lead to insecurities stating, *I have this crazy fear of being alone.* Katrina reported she would feel very jealous, leading to anger toward her partner:

*I don't really remember exactly what the content of the arguments were but I can pretty much assume it would have had something to do with me being jealous of something, overly controlling [...] fear of being left [...] that's my biggest fear, is just being disposed of.*

Brooke also expressed feelings of fear of being left alone stating, *and he didn't care and I think most of our violence was when he was trying to leave me.* Like Brooke, Tara also described feeling angry when her partner would try to leave stating:

*[...] he'd always leave and I didn't want him to. I was trying to force him to stay there and everything. Jealousy, I know that was a factor. Wanting him to stay there, that was a factor. Trying to force him to do something he didn't want to do by hitting him. Anger that just got built up inside.*

For a few of the women, the theme of the fear of being left or when their partner would leave during an argument was prevalent. The underlying emotions fuelled their fears were jealousy and insecurity below the surface of anger. These women described their desperation and anger led to attempts to control their partner when he would try to leave during an argument of if he would leave for days at a time.

### 6.2.2 Bottling negative sentiments and emotions

For nearly all of the women, the "bottling" or internalizing of their thoughts and feelings and the described feeling of 'exploding' at the time of their violence was found. The accumulation of negative thoughts and emotions experienced by almost all of the women led to the theme of bottling negative sentiments and feelings until it became unbearable. Many of the women talked about how the totality of these emotions led to 'exploding' and situated these feelings against the backdrop of their partner's wrongdoing toward them. Some women related bottling to their partner not listening to them.

For instance, Anne expressed she would become angrier when her partner would not listen to her, and while at times, she described being able to identify the need to walk away when feeling angry, she states it would eventually come out:

> *[…] used to tell him how I felt and then I noticed he wasn't listening to me, so it got bottled up inside. Then, when I would drink, it would come out on him […].*

For Anne, her violence was over the course of a few relationships, and while most of her partners were not violent to her, she described how her anger had "built up" to the point of not caring. While she knew herself well enough to walk away because she would hurt him, she believed keeping her feelings bottled up for too long resulted in a negative outcome of stabbing her partner on two occasions:

*I think I was more [violent], I guess hateful towards that because I just didn't, I had so much built up and I just didn't give a shit. You know, just kept yelling at him. Hey, how do you like that, how does it feel and all that [...]?*

*I think, I think women keep it in too long and then they burst. I mean, that's for me, that's how I am [...] I think it's just build up and just let it burst out when it comes and not thinking before reacting, like I don't think I just react.*

Anne described how not talking led to deep unresolved feelings and the lack of communication between them resulting in the internalizing of negative sentiments and emotions and likened the bottling of emotions to throwing issues on the back burner where it festers to the point where she had enough and finally blew up:

*I think it was just [that] him and I never communicated nothing that was it. We never talked it was always like now we're talking and all of a sudden we didn't know how to learn to talk to each other and we got angry.*

Brooke described a similar experience stating by not being able to talk about her problems was one issue, but when she did try to talk, her partner would not listen to her:

*Me not being able to talk about my problems, I think was the main thing. I couldn't talk about it and he just wasn't listening...Actually, I think I did do a lot of talking to him, it's just that he didn't listen [...].*

During Brooke' episode of using violence, she recalled, *I'd lose it, I'd black out* to the point of continuing her aggression toward her partner onto the street where at this point he was also hitting her as well.

Like Brooke, Tara found she would become angrier when her partner would not listen to her stating, *I tried [to talk], and he wouldn't listen. So that's how it got bottled up inside.* Tara stated the 'bottling' of emotions eventually releases in a negative manner. Pamela described how women feel shame to the point of not being able to control their feelings:

*The woman feels the shame, like you can't control your temper. You dealt with it for this many years and now you're blowing up? If you were going to blow up, why didn't you do it six years ago? Why didn't you do it six months ago?*

Pamela also reflected on how women generally keep things bottled and have no way to release their frustrations:

> *[…] I honestly think it's frustration that women put up with so much for so long and they have no release, no support that finally you can't take it anymore. What are you going to do, leave? Where are you going to live?*

Similarly, Dana indicated that she would just try to ignore her partner if he said anything about her or treated the children badly:

> *[…] I used to just shake everything off and act like as if he didn't say anything. The way he treated me, and my two youngest, I just kept on bottling everything in, kept on bottling it in until it got to a point […] I'm sick and tired of not doing anything about it and that's where everything was […] you know when you shake a pop bottle and when you open it, it starts fizzing and what not […] and then, just like that pop bottle, I told him 'I'm done with you'.*

Katrina described her anger as resulting from her partner's constant nitpicking on her and feeling a need to be in control when she wanted something:

> *I remember something like snapping, in my head, being like fuck you, because if you're going to fucking do that to me, like I will get you back. I don't know, I just noticed it start escalating from there. If I wasn't being heard, you can only yell so loud and then your point is still not getting across.*

> Rita explained having pent up anger toward her partner when he would pressure her for

sex, and because she had a history of sexual abuse, this infuriated her. Even though he had not been violent toward her, her anger with him on this issue propelled Rita toward her violence. She states instead of talking she kept it in:

> *[…] and he got pretty pushy with it and I found myself doing it when I didn't want to do it. Just little things started happening where I guess you would just call it being pushed over the edge or not being comfortable with it. I started getting angry and instead of getting, talking about it like a normal person, because I was angry, I would just do things to make him angry.*

The accumulation in the form of bottling emotions was prevalent for all of the women in this study. Many of the women even used the word 'bottling' their thoughts and feelings as part of their attempts to cope with the overwhelming stress or to control their existence.

### 6.2.3. Wanting control

Nearly all of the women described how gaining control was pervasive in both leading up to their use of violence and during their acts of violence against their partner. Brooke recalled feeling the need to control her partner's substance use and to keep him from leaving her were key factors in her use of violence and many times she described using her violence to stop the situation of him using and also selling:

> *I just kind of like threw the drugs around […] The amount of mirrors that I smashed […] they do it on mirrors […] I wasn't really too happy about this, I was still trying to control him, still trying to be with him, and when we went on our break […]*

> *Take his drugs away, control his friends being there, trying to be like, 'get out of the house, this is my house, you can go to your dad's house' and trying to take ownership of our relationship and make a stand.*

For Brooke, having control also meant hurting him to get what she wanted, whether it was to get him to stop his using or to keep him with her and she described it as trying to take ownership of the relationship which was key for her to feel in control:

> *[…] I think it's just trying to get control. You can't mentally control them so you try to physically control them. I think it was just that he hurt me and I wanted to hurt him, too, and that was just one way of hurting him. He hurt me, I want to hurt you back.*

Susan described how she used violence to exert control over her partner and recognized having the power to do so:

> *To have control […] or to have control over somebody. I guess I'm trying to think for me, what it was. It was, I think a lot of control. I had that power to do that, even when it wasn't necessary. I didn't have to do that. I wasn't being abused myself, like how I was in other relationships. I could just do this to this person and there's nothing that he's [going to] do about it.*

Similarly, Pamela described how she also attempted to control her partner's substance use, with whom he spent time, his whereabouts and also the money:

> *[…] like trying to control who he saw, and who he associated with, and controlling his time and phoning him all the time and keeping him on schedule and controlling his money.*

Anne described control as 'taking him over' and this included serious violence where she stabbed her partner. And while Anne does not recall all of the reasons why she felt this way in the moment, she does elude to finally putting him down for so many years:

> *I don't know I guess at that time I felt good because I took him over. I finally put him down for so many years, finally I stood up to him. In that way I did. I felt bad afterwards I did it. You know, but it's still, you know the honeymoon, it's the same scenario again. The next time that's when I stabbed him.*

Katrina revealed that her need for control was a result of feeling jealous and insecure:

> *I'm not saying that I was ever in a position where I should of had any control over anyone, but I did feel a need to control the people I was with probably because of jealousy, being super insecure because that's, I'm a very insecure person, I'm getting better for sure.*

Katrina also recalled lying to maintain control and keep her partner from leaving:

> *[…] but when he's trying to leave, I lie to him and I say I've documented what he did to me and that if he leaves I'm going to charge him. I didn't document him, I don't have one picture, I didn't write anything down, but he thinks that and that it will stop him from leaving, what the hell. Control.*

Equally for Tara, she recalled trying to maintain control over her partner leaving as he would leave for long periods of time stating, *I was trying to force him to stay there and everything [...] to force him to do something he didn't want to do by hitting him.*

### 6.2.4. Complexities of both partners using substances

The complexities of substance use was another prevalent theme that emerged from the women's textural experiences. All of the women described having used either drugs or alcohol in isolation and with their partners over the course of their relationship. Within this, they understood that substances was an associated factor in the serious violence they perpetuated. Some women also used drugs or were drinking before their incident of violence. For others, using substances was a part of their narrative before starting a relationship with the partner with

whom they exerted their violence. Dana indicated she struggled with addictions since she was

younger:

> I'd been having a struggle with drinking and doing cocaine and I'd fall of the wagon, and then get back on. And then wait for another couple of weeks and then I'd fall right back off again and go for a little binge and get back on. Now, I just want to stay on. I'm done with fooling around with my life.

Tara explained when both she and her partner would use substances she would be the one who

would initiate the violence:

> I don't know, he was just...it was our drinking, I know that. The first two years that we were together we were drinking lots, and then I think it was me who started abusing first […] We were arguing that night. I don't know. I slapped him. That was the first thing. I'm pretty sure that was just the first time, it was just slapping […]

Tara described an escalation in her violence that included stabbing her partner. She stated it was

at this point she believed she should stop drinking as her partner was also afraid she was

intentionally trying to kill him:

> When we were drinking, I'd think really crazy things. One time I did actually stab him in the arm. That's when I realized I had to snap out of it and quit drinking […] yeah, he was scared that I was trying to intentionally kill him, too.

Katrina stated she had used various substances while involved with her partner:

> I've gone back to smoking during the day and it being totally useless. I don't know. I feel like my days of having it always there are getting close to being over but I still, I don't know, I've talked about it so many times seeing an addictions counsellor.

Brooke stated her use of drugs was in response to his but she could take it or leave it. She

explained once she quit using she noticed his use continued and she found she wanted some

control over him in this regard. She stated:

> When he started doing it, it kind of started bothering me, it really did start bothering me and he didn't really care about me, it was all about his friends […] and all about partying […]. So I'd get mad […] I was trying to control him and at one point it got really bad […] I don't even know, it was all crazy […] crazy, crazy times, I just don't know.

Brooke attributed some of the issues that contributed to her use of violence to getting caught up

in an unhealthy relationship to her partner's use of substances, stating it played a predominant

role, and, *that was basically his whole lifestyle.* .

Anne indicated in one instance where this particular partner was abusive and at times

violent when drinking, she stabbed him in response to his attempt to engage in a fight with her:

> *He was out drinking and he came home and he was getting mad at me, I got mad at him for first, because I said well how come you come here drunk and blah, blah, blah and then he put his fists […] and he was going to punch and I had one of those little pear knives and he turned around and I poked him in the shoulder.*

> *But I know I get a lot of anger and when, I get pissed off more, easier I mean, when I am drinking. When I'm sober it's not too bad, but then it builds up. And then when I do drink, if that person's there I'm like you know.*

Anne also described how her use of substances increased the risk of her use of violence and

described using substances at a very early age stating, *it was the alcohol for one thing that was*

*the main thing for growing up.* Like Anne, Rita reported she was violent towards her partner

when he was using or at times when both of them were drinking. She states her drinking could

also contribute to her increased anger and ultimately violence against him:

> *Because honestly I could be really abusive. I get really angry sometimes, I could do a lot of harm to somebody. He used to ask me to hit him, to see if I would hit him, and I was like 'no', but now […] We got into a fight one night, we were drinking, and I actually put my hands on him, and I threw him across the room, I got so mad. I don't want to be doing stuff like that.*

Rita also clearly described her tendency to use violence was fuelled by her use of drugs

and alcohol and likely increased the risk, however also reported she would be violent when not

under the influence:

> *Probably my use of drugs. Drugs don't help anything, especially when you run out of your drugs, you're a lot more agitated, you're violent. If you're an alcoholic, you need that drink […] but I mean there was times when he wanted to drink when I didn't want to drink. He would come home and be drinking or want to drink and I started getting violent then.*

Pamela reflects on how women, including herself stay in relationships where they think they can do something to fix their partner's addictions:

> *There's so many women out there, same situation. Either their alcoholic or their drug addict old man...and they stay in that relationship because the think that they can fix it or they can help or they can do [...]*

> *You're trapped, you can't get out of it. You know, women put up with a lot of shit and usually, you know, alcohol will be a factor, and whatever else [...]*

Clearly, the identification of the use of substances by both partners during the time of the women's use of their violence, or just preceding her violence, is problematic. The complexity of substance use by the women's partners was prevalent in many of their stories, in addition to it also being an issue for some of the women, and was part of their narrative during their use of violence.

### 6.2.5 Summary

The composite-textural themes presented above illustrate what the women experienced during and preceding their violence against their partner, and accordingly have answered the above posed question laid out in the introduction: What are the lived experiences of women who have used IPV against their male intimate partner? The results also present a picture that women's experiences are multifaceted, demonstrating the various struggles women face that contributed to their violence. It is clear while the women all shared their unique stories, their experiences rendered visible their collective standpoints or position while honoring their individual narratives which will be further discussed in the next chapter. In spite of this, more work is required to gain further insights into this complex phenomenon to address it in a meaningful manner. The next section will outline the composite structural themes that emerge from the women's contextualization of their violence and how it came to be in their lives.

## 6.3 Composite Structural Descriptions

This section describes the composite structural themes generated from the questions asking the women *how* they contextualize and understand their violence. Here I asked the question: how do women contextualize and understand their use of intimate violence. The purpose here is to understand the setting and context in which their violence took place, inclusive of the contributing factors that led the women toward their violence. These may also be historically or socio-culturally driven and while some overlap may be present, the composite structural descriptions are about understanding the meaning of the phenomenon in the larger context in which it occurs (Creswell, 2009). The data analysis generated four main composite structural themes that emerged from the women's descriptions and supporting quotes that are illustrated in Table 6.2: Structural Themes and Meaning Units below. These include retaliation, justification, the impact of unhealthy familial and intimate relationship history, and reflective insights. The latter theme references the women's realization of the impact of their violence on their partner. While the theme itself is not contextualized as a factor leading to their violence, the women recognized, through their reflections, as being conscious of their feelings toward the impact of their violence. This theme also elucidated four subthemes that emerged from the women's structural descriptions: being the sole aggressor, feelings of guilt, implications of violence, and trying to fix or hold onto the relationship and will be discussed later in this chapter.

**Table 6.2:** Structural Themes and Meaning Units

| Theme | Meaning Units | Sample Quotes |
|---|---|---|
| **Retaliation** | Tired of being a victim or pre-empting being victim | I'm going to show you how it feels when you hurt me. |
| | | I didn't want to be abused anymore, so I thought it would be easier to be abuser. |
| | Taking opportunities to fight back | […] I had enough. He was drunk and I knew I could put him down. |
| | | […] it felt good, cause I finally took him over. |
| | | […] being like fuck you, because if you're going to fucking do this to me, like I will get you back. |
| | Wanting to be respected | You hurt me, I hurt you. |
| | Had enough of partner's lack of responsibility | I'm fucking done, I'm sick of being the victim. |
| | | As soon as I get around him […] I want to beat him […] for the hurt he's done to me. |
| | | That's one of my biggest regrets, I had my one chance [to kill him], and did not take the opportunity to the fullest extent. |
| | Instigating violence | If I wasn't being heard. |
| | | Well you pissed me off, I'm just pissed off. |
| **Justification** | Partner got off light | I feel like with all of the shit I put up with he got away light. |
| | Felt satisfied afterwards | He should not have hurt me. |
| | Injustice or equal justice | He deserved it. |
| | He should have stayed home | Look how much shit I had to deal with already. That's the thought in my head. |
| | Partner should not have been drinking | […] he continued his drinking and I became violent. |
| | Partner hurts her, she hurts him | […] you hurt me, I hurt you back. |
| | Partner not listening | I justified it that he wasn't listening […] |
| | Making light of the violence used | […] it was just a little poke. |
| **Impact of unhealthy familial and intimate relationship history** | Not understanding healthy behaviours | I didn't know what was going on all those years. |
| | Prior abuse experienced | […] my parents are both alcoholics […] I learned from them […] my mom beat me. |
| | | […] also been in our culture, through the residential school system. |
| | | […] I was broken, I was brought up in foster homes. |
| | Normalizing violence | I didn't see anything wrong with the unhealthy relationship we were in. |

| | Traditional values | that they never showed me what normal relationship was and I was just spewing anger on anyone. |
| | | […] my dad called the shots. |
| **Reflective insights** | Inability to fix partner | [women]….think that they fix or they can help, or they can do […] |
| | Desire to live a positive lifestyle | […] wanted a better life. |
| | Not wanting to be like parents | […] I never want to be like [them]. |
| | Not wanting to be abused | I didn't want to be abused anymore, so thought easier to be the abuser. |
| | Scared of capability to seriously harm/ kill partner. | I scared the hell out of myself. |
| | | […] I'm scared of the things I'm capable of […] that I'll be more rageful. |
| | | Sometimes I get really violent and it scares me. |
| | Feeling bad/ guilt disappointment and remorse for their behaviour | I'm really upset with myself that I actually did it. |
| | | Number one, most important, I'm disappointed in myself. |

### 6.3.1 Retaliation

Many of the women reported much of their violence was in retaliation against their partner's substance use, betrayal by partner's cheating, their partner's lack of responsibility for family and children, and some levels of physical and emotional abuse toward them. Pamela reported having deep feelings of rage when around her partner that evoked negative sentiments and feelings for her:

*As soon as I get around him, I have so much rage that I can't […] the only thought in my head is […] beat him. Hurt him, as much and as hard as you can, because of all the hurt that he's done to me and to my family.*

Pamela described how the intensity of her feelings led to her making dangerous decisions that put herself and others at risk, just so she could get back at her partner:

*He's out of there, and I chased him […] 140 down the freeway, I have a little [car]. My car is just shaking […] I'm surprised I didn't kill anybody, kill myself, another innocent person. All I wanted to do was just bash into his [vehicle].*

Katrina reported if she felt her partner slighted her in any manner that seemed wrong to her, such as him not listening to what she was saying, she would snap and get her partner back: *I*

*remember something like snapping, in my head, being like fuck you, because if you're going to*

*fucking do that to me, like I will get you back. I don't know, I just noticed it start escalating from*

*there […] if I wasn't being heard.* Katrina attributes her insecurities and feeling hurt as part of

the retaliation she used against her partner. She describes this as part of feeling hurt by her

partner, and also when her partner would not talk with her or listen to her:

> *I get a sense that a lot of them, the physical violence perpetrated by women is*
> *because I think in a lot of cases these women are maybe like myself, insecure, or*
> *in a violent relationship, not a physically violent but or sorry an abusive*
> *relationship and they are trying to get back at them.*

Brooke explained in her incident of violence toward her partner that she felt satisfied with

getting back at him and while he was violent to her in response she continued to feel satisfied in

the moment and in fact found one point of it humorous:

> *I was satisfied at this point. They started walking away and then he said something and*
> *then I chased after him, we were on the corner or whatever, and I started punching him*
> *again and then he punched me back, and I fell to the ground, and just kind of turtled, and*
> *he kicked me a couple of times, and then he went to walk away and I got up again, and I*
> *like punched him. He was right beside the stop sign and I punched him and his head hit*
> *the stop sign […] I don't even want to say, but it was kind of funny.*

Rita indicated she would often remind her partner to treat her properly and would

threaten retaliation under the guise of humour stating:

> *Yeah, I tell him, if he's a dick to me, 'you'd better watch how you treat me, I'll slap you*
> *around'. I'd say it in front of people so they think I'm totally joking, which most of the*
> *time I am, right? But then I found myself really smacking him around sometimes so I*
> *guess it's not really a joke. I guess I find myself saying stuff like that.*

Anne stated she felt in the moment using violence against her partner that he deserved it

which allowed her to continue on with the intensity of her violence:

> *I don't know I guess at that time I felt good because I took him over. I finally put him*
> *down for so many years, finally I stood up to him. In that way I did. I felt bad afterwards*
> *I did it. You know, but it's still, you know the honeymoon, it's the same scenario again.*
> *The next time that's when I stabbed him.*

Anne's past victimization was part of this narrative and she stated that standing up to him or pre-empting the violence as well was part of the contextual understanding. Further, in Anne's situation she states that 'taking him over' felt 'good' at the time, while feeling bad for using violence against him.

Dana explained that women, including herself, take on a retaliation approach as part of their defense and when men hurt women in any way:

> *With girls it's like 'I'm gonna show you how it feels when you hurt me.' Some women are fairly open, they're open books, most women are open books. When they're being treated like shit throughout their life and whatnot and they don't want no more of that garbage in their life anymore, they get to a point where they're done being treated like that. They have to prove to the man or to society that we're not just feminine, fragile objects, we're able to hurt people, too.*

While Dana describes how many times her violence was more like self-defence to protect the children or herself, she also describes the incident where she took her partner's life was also driven by her bottled anger and rage whereby she took control by stabbing and killing him.

### 6.3.2. Justification

Tied closely to the theme of retaliation is the notion of justification. Many women who retaliated using violence also believed it to be justified due to their partner's substance use, betrayal, some levels of emotional and physical abuse, and feeling burdened by family responsibilities, which justified their violence for longer periods. Brooke stated she would justify her abuse and violence to her partner not listening to her:

> *I didn't, I didn't try to stop myself at all, I just, I'd lose it and I'd black out, I don't even know what was going through my head at that time. I'd always justify it that he wasn't listening, you know what I mean [...]*

Brooke also stated that for her and many women, violence is much more justified and she took a position that anything that went wrong or she did not like was his fault, which entrenched her justification:

*I think it's more justified, definitely. Not like it shouldn't be justified, but it is [...]*

*Yeah, definitely. I justified mine, is what I did. I justified what I did with 'he did this', and kind of justified what I did with what he did, and never really thought what I was doing was wrong [...]*

Anne described minimizing her violence toward her partner, justifying her actions through her built up feelings of hate and rage, and feeling no remorse in the moment of her violence toward him, stating when she stabbed him, it was 'just a little poke' and he deserved it:

> *[...] I guess hateful towards that because I just didn't, I had so much built up and I just didn't give a shit. You know, just kept yelling at him. Hey, how do you like that, how does it feel and all that. That way I had no remorse for that, at that point, I had nothing, ah he deserved it and then the next day I felt kind of bad about it because he was all beat up.*
>
> *It wasn't bleeding like, it was just a little poke. And he phoned the police and I was going to leave and I thought ah, what's the point of leaving it's going to catch up to me anyways so I sat there waiting for the police and that's when they took me in….never thought it was my fault [...].*

Pamela describes feeling justified in her use of abuse and violence stating, *I feel like, for all the shit that I put up with, he got away light [...] That's one of my biggest regrets, I had my one chance and I didn't take that opportunity to the fullest extent that I could have*. This statement is referencing the context of when she had the opportunity to end her partner's life, and while choosing not to do so, she remained rooted in her justification that he 'got away light'.

### 6.3.3 Impact of unhealthy familial and intimate relationship history

All of the women understood and contextualized their violence as emerging from their historical backgrounds related to unhealthy familial and intimate relationships whereby they experienced or witnessed unhealthy relationship patterns from their parents. For distinction and clarity, I separated the theme into unhealthy familial and intimate relationship history.

#### 6.3.3.1 *Unhealthy familial relationship history*

Anne understood her violence as emerging from the historical abuse she experienced in her family recalling witnessing and experiencing addictions, abuse, and anger between her

parents, attributing her violence to what she lived when she was young and in part resulting from

her father's experience in residential school:

> *[…] I know both my parents are alcoholics […] my mom told me my dad used to go for days and my dad would say that she was the violent one, which I can see that because I've drank with her one night and she beat me up so I can see that violence. I think that's where I get it from. That was only when I was like two.*
>
> *Yeah, especially with the residential, I think that has a lot to do with the native people, like their anger and I mean my dad went there, residential and he was angry too. He drank but he never, he got into fight too and all that and he said it was because of the, he'd have so much anger with that […]my mom, I don't know if she went to residential, but she was mean […] she beat me up.*

Anne recounts being placed in foster care and moved around to various homes while in care,

when she was adopted at the age of six, where she reports continued experiences of sexual abuse

when she was young and not feeling loved:

> *I think so too, because I know foster homes I felt out of place, like that has been always, kind of shoved away from the people. I think they were just there for the money, like when you foster you get money right so I think that was a big part of it, because I never felt like anything. No love, no nothing most of my life so I was mean.*

Anne describes the trajectory of her anger and resulting violence from what she witnessed when

she was younger and summarizes if she had grown up in a 'normal' home, she would not be

sitting with me to contribute to this research.

Susan also attributes her and other Indigenous women's violence to the impact of the

residential school system, stating violence is prevalent in the Indigenous community:

> *[…] it's also been in our culture, through the residential school system […] you don't talk, you don't say nothing, you know. Even coming from the mentality of the streets […] you don't talk […] your grandmothers and grandfathers, you don't reveal your dirty laundry, you don't talk about that stuff. I know so many people that have incestual abuse, my family has been part of it. Even to this day, you don't talk about it. It's just something that's not talked about.*

For Susan, the violence she experienced from her father, and then her uncle who adopted her

when she was five, was a contributing factor to her violence, and this led to her engaging in

relationships where she was not only a perpetrator but also a victim or partner violence. Susan

indicated that her ability identify a healthy non-violent relationship had been compromised.

When she was with a partner who treated her well, she describes not knowing how to deal with

it:

> *I think for me it began with my dad showing me violence when I was growing up. Growing up, I got into relationships that were always violent, it seemed like I attracted men that were violent so then when I got into...with my oldest son's dad, when I got into a relationship with him, I didn't know how, when somebody was treating me good, I didn't know how to deal with that. When an argument would start, right away I would react to it by being violent towards him […] it would always be in a violent sense. At first it would just start with grabbing his clothes, cutting up his clothes and stuff, and if I didn't get a reaction out of him, then I'd throw things at him or go and hit him and stuff like that […] it just escalated and escalated and escalated and finally he just left.*

Like Anne and Susan, Rita describes how the history of colonization for her people

severely impacted their ability to engage in positive relationships and the way of life previously

known to Indigenous people has been lost but if those traditions could be revived, there would be

a lot less pain:

> *Well, in our tradition, people weren't the way they are now. In our tradition, we took care of our own, even if they weren't our own. We took people in, we cared for them, we nurtured them, we always had lots of aunties and uncles even if they weren't aunties and uncles. We respected our elders, we sat down with our elders, they passed on their traditions, their stories […] to really have that bond. And now I just don't see that at all.*

> *[…] think maybe that's part of the colonization, people putting you down so often […] make fun of Indians, whatever. I think that's just another step into the whole colonization factor and the whole self-esteem factor, you know. All of a sudden you don't feel worthy. I've got these kids running around saying 'I don't want to be Native, I don't want to be an Indigenous', and it's like, we used to be so proud of that, you know what I mean? Our culture is really important, our spirituality is really important. If we could get into those traditions again, I think there would be a lot less hurt and a lot less pain.*

Related to this, Rita understood her violence as coming out of the historical physical and

sexual abuse against her when she was much younger stating, *I was sexually abused and it had a*

*lot to do with it because he was trying to get sexual with me all the time and I found myself not*

*wanting to.* Rita stated while her partner did pressure her about sex and this led to her anger

toward him, he was not violent toward her. She identified sexual abuse as contributing to her violence against him nonetheless. Rita stated in other relationships she was a victim as well as the perpetrator, and in this particular relationship, she found herself the perpetrator and contextualizes this to her history, stating, *I just all this really pent up anger [...].*

Rita identifies this as being tied to her abuse and violence to feeling mistreated by family:

> *I was always mistreated [...] I never wanted anybody to grow up and feel that pain that I felt because I still have depression because of it. Even just thinking about it and talking about it sometimes, it gets me really emotional. It's just not something that I would want anybody to go through. It's just not good, it doesn't do anything for your mental health. And if you're already in a fragile state, it just takes you to a whole different level. It's just not healthy. I used to be able to do the whole thought process, 'this is wrong, would you want someone to do this to you, why are you even doing this, why are you so mad, is it something you can get over, is it because you're out of this' you know what I mean? But now I'm just like, 'snap, snap'.*

Dana contextualizes her use of violence as emerging living in a familial environment that included addictions, abuse, and violence. She states her mother drank all of the time and Dana would frequently run away and was considered uncontrollable. Dana states she felt a tremendous amount of resentment toward her mother as she was not there to protect her, guide her, or teach her:

> *[...] I was broken. I was brought up in foster homes, I lived away from my family. My baby sister, the only thing that I had in my life at that time was my baby sister.*

Dana states she joined a gang when she was young and found the protection she needed there. However, this led to an entrenchment of violence that was carried out in her intimate relationships as well, not knowing a healthy relationship or expressions of love:

> *I thought that was love. Getting a lickin' from my boyfriend and my girlfriend, I thought that was love. I had no other way of knowing what love was. Growing up around my [family] getting hit and then all of a sudden, they're saying 'I love you, I'm sorry' and all this stuff[...]it's like 'I don't know the true meaning of love'. So with [my partner] and with my prior relationships to that, I thought being cheated on and put aside, getting ditched for chilling with other friends, and getting drunk, and whatever, I thought that was love, because they're always going to come back. And chasing after them, I thought that was a way of showing them 'I care about you, I love you'. It was all stupid.*

Katrina understood her abuse and violence as emerging from growing up in a traditional family system and not having good role models to demonstrate what she now thinks would be a healthy relationship and states she is mad at her parents for not teaching her what constituted a healthy relationship. She states her father typically made all of the decisions, and her mother had little input or control:

> *[…] they never showed me what a normal relationship was and I was so mad, just spewing anger on anyone and I know […]. My dad called all the shots and I hated it, it irritated me that she didn't have any control. I told myself, I will never be that […]*

Katrina felt her mother was subservient and viewed her need for control as a result of seeing her mother have no control and no equality in her relationship.

### 6.3.3.2 *Unhealthy intimate relationship history*

A few of the women discussed not recognizing their past relationships and the current partners were unhealthy. For some women, their past victimization led to their violence in current relationship, not seeing how unhealthy it was for them. Pamela described trying to fix her partner and the unhealthy relationship she was in was a catalyst for her violence stating, *I dropped my kids in order to fix this guy and he just kept on shitting on everything that I did.*

Brooke reported not seeing anything wrong with the dysfunction she was in and thought it was a normal relationship, not recognizing the chaos of it:

> *No, and like even, if he hit me back, I'd be all 'I hit him first', I didn't see anything wrong with the unhealthy relationship we were having […] I think I knew, I don't know, I was kind of living in my own little fantasy world, just pretending that everything was okay[…]*

> *I don't really know, because I didn't think of it as a problem. I just kind of thought, it was normal, that's how we were […] I was still in denial that I had done anything wrong. I think it definitely would have had to have been someone telling me […]*

Rita also described past abuse in her intimate relationship history and understood her role of being an abuser, as a way to avoid being abused. She described the impact of past experiences in other intimate relationships where emotion control was a factor and viewed this as a

contributing factor to her abuse and violence. She describes below an example of an early

relationship:

> *He was kind of one of the first boyfriends that I've ever really lived with, with my parents, that is. He had moved in with me and my parents and he was just really controlling. I couldn't go out with my friends, I couldn't talk on the phone, there were lots of things, lots of fights. Just kind of a really controlled environment. He would get really mean with me sometimes. I stayed with him for a really long time.*

Anne also reported that in another intimate relationship, being a past victim of violence

would also use her violence to avoid being abused:

> *One night he was at his buddy's place and he was drinking and he asked me to take the keys from him so he wouldn't drive. So I went to his neighbours and took the keys and came back and he was pushing me around, he gave me black eyes, so then I started on him I got up and started beating on him […]*

Anne conveyed she learned to pre-empt the violence in her current relationships to avoid being

the victim. Similar to Anne, Susan also described how abuse and violence from a past

relationship impacted her current relationships leading to violence:

> *[…] whenever an argument would arise, I would react first because I was scared that I would be the one to be hit, and I had sworn that I'll never let that happen to me again. He never ever once, over the 7 years that we were together, he never was once violent towards me.*

### 6.3.4 Development of reflective insights

This theme and related sub-themes occurred in tandem with the women contextualizing

how they understood their use of violence toward their partners. As the women recounted their

experiences leading to their use of violence, they would also describe moments of self-reflection

whereby they realized something important about their understanding that generated some level

of personal responsibility. The women also described a recognition of having relationship issues

and wanting to do something about it. This theme led to the sub-themes below. Engaging in

reflective insights meant the women were contemplating how to change for themselves and on a

broader social level. Some even discussed what would help them cope, albeit not in a deep manner. Yet the insights that emerged are important indicators toward the potential for change.

### 6.3.4.1 *Being the sole aggressor*

On reflection, some of the women understood themselves to be the sole aggressor in their relationships. Looking back, Katrina reported she felt her role was to be the aggressive one in all of her relationships and would, in fact, instigate the violence she used:

> *I tried to think about this and it has been happening for a really long time and for probably since I was 17, 18 maybe. One of the first serious relationships I was in, I didn't, I was trying really hard to think back how this, how did I get here, you know? I don't know, I was young and I'm trying to remember exactly, it didn't start off with me being hit hard or anything like that but it was just gradual decline starting with more [...] I am a control freak [...]*

Rita also contextualized her violence as pre-empting any abuse that may come to her by taking on the abuser role. She stated because of her history of being abused as a child and with the violence exerted against her in past intimate relationships, she became the abuser stating*, I didn't want to be abused anymore, I thought it would be easier if I was the abuser. But I know that's not right, either.* Like Rita, Susan also describes being the sole aggressor in her relationship reacting from her victimization from her father and also from other relationships wherein she would be the one to react first in the interaction:

> *I was working, we were just trying to make a new start and everything, but he continued to drink and I would just become violent towards him. I think it was because of being in these abusive...first with my father, and then with this man. So whenever an argument would arise, I would react first because I was scared that I would be the one to be hit, and I had sworn that I'll never let that happen to me again. He never ever once, over the 7 years that we were together, he never was once violent towards me.*

### 6.3.4.2 *Feelings of guilt*

Almost all of the women described feeling bad or some form of guilt for their use violence against their partner. This realization did not come until much later and even though a couple of the women felt solidly justified in their violence, these women also described feeling

some level of remorse for their behaviour. Anne conveyed that in spite of feeling justified in using her violence most times, she would feel bad about it stating, s*ometimes yeah, and then I felt bad afterwards when I did that. It was like, oh I shouldn't have hit that hard. Or stabbed him like that.* Anne further stated women do have feelings and just because women are violent doesn't mean there is no guilt afterward.

For Rita, she described feeling guilty about her violence stating, *I feel pretty guilty sometimes, I guess. I just try not to be, I guess.* Rita further stated she believes the guilt she feels is different from than men who are violent to their partners:

> *Lots of men that I know who've abused their women, they don't have that same remorse. It's kind of like 'well you brought it on yourself'. There's more anger, there's more, I don't know what you would call it […]*

An observation made by Katrina was her recognition that she was the 'typical abuser', by making immediate apologies afterwards and her desire to tell him she was sorry was overwhelming, even though she would do it again:

> *And cause I said, at the time, because I honestly did not know how my, why my lip was bleeding. I said I don't know. I was like, you figure it out, you're the cops. And, yeah so basically we were just, another car came for me and they took me downtown and they took him downtown and I didn't see him until the next morning, which was awful. That was the worst feeling ever because I was the typical abuser, you want to, oh I'm sorry, I'm sorry right away.*

### 6.3.4.3 *Implications of violence*

Many of the women described the feeling shocked, scared or fearful of their potential for causing serious harm against their partners and noted this during their descriptions of their understanding of their violence. Anne stated she realized later when she feels that she does not *give a shit* she could seriously harm her partner and this scared her:

> *Yeah, and I have to. It kind of scares me though because sometimes I push them and they bang their head and their bleeding and I'm like oh, I hope I didn't, because sometimes I get like really violent. It scares me.*

Tara reported her fear of what could have been a tragic outcome after she stabbed her partner stating, *He was scared, he didn't want to charge me, he said. And I was scared, too, after that, I didn't realize what I did until I did it [...] my floor covered in blood.* Tara stated it was at this time she realized the implications of her violence and her having the potential to seriously or kill her partner.

Dana stated she felt upset with herself that she killed her partner and compared it to something one would see on TV:

> *Yeah, I'm really upset with myself that I actually did it. I always thought it only happened in movies or on TV. When it actually happened to me, reality totally kicked me in the ass.*

Her experience led her to come to the realization, *the woman can do as much harm as the man can do.*

While Pamela described feeling extremely justified in her abuse and violence toward her partner and situates this against the backdrop of his wrongdoing toward her, she describes the realization of how grave the outcome could have been for him not wanting to *make light of it*:

> *I'm not making light of it. I know how serious the situation was. I thank whatever it was that stopped me, because at that moment, one more little thing and I probably could have killed him, killed him.*

Similarly to the other women, Rita describes that guilt comes with her role as the abuser but recognizes if she does not feel guilty and does not tell anyone, her capability for violence may increase if she does not talk with somebody:

> *But, kind of being the abuser, I guess, guilt is a barrier. I mean, I feel pretty guilty, you know, but like I said, I would rather tell somebody about it so that if I ever got out of line...because, you know, I'm pretty scared of the things that I am capable of. I feel like if I hide it, I'll just get more rageful.*

As Susan describes below, many women do not recognize that their acts of violence are no better than when they are victimized making it more difficult to see how entrenched their violence had become:

*[…] not knowing that using violence against somebody is no better by having it done against you. Like not knowing […] like now I know where my stuff comes from, at that time I never knew that I carried all this demons and stuff and now I'm trying to work through that stuff.*

#### 6.3.4.4 *Trying to fix or hold onto the relationship*

Some women came to some realizations of how they were either trying to fix their partner or trying to hold onto a relationship that was toxic. Pamela described how she thought she could fix her partner and when he did not do what she wanted him to do to achieve this, her violence escalated. For Pamela this was tied to trying to get him to stop his substance use and to take responsibility for the family:

> *And that's what I did. I dropped my kids in order to fix this guy and he just kept on shitting on everything that I did. And instead of cutting my losses, I kept sinking time and money and effort into him, thinking that I could fix him.*

For Brooke, holding onto the relationship too long was a realization for her in understanding her violence. She also attributed this to fear alone or that someone else would not want to be with her:

> *I find it was really, really toxic […] I tried way too hard to hold onto something that wasn't there. I don't even know, I just had these really deep feelings for this guy and just wanted him to have them back for, I don't know. I definitely chased him for a long time, it took a lot for me to be able to let go and step out of the situation. I don't even know what was going on all those years.*

During the course of the analysis, it became clear the women had developed some critical insights during their reflection of the experiences that generated the overarching theme of 'reflective insights'. While collectively, their described insights were clear, the variations in context that rendered the four sub-themes reflects the multiple realities these women experienced.

### 6.3.5 Summary

These composite structural findings illustrate that beyond the typical motive framework through which women's IPV is primarily understood, a more profound level of understanding is

illustrated. Through their voices the women were also able to access their critical reflections in a manner that provides deeper insights into how they understood their violence and answers the second research question I posed at the onset: How do women contextualize and understand their use of violence against their intimate partner? Hearing their voices in this regard was integral in retrieving the key meanings and the structure of these meanings.

The next section will bring together the integration of the essence of the women's composite textural-structural and the purpose of this is to identify the common themes or universal description of the experience to gain deeper meaning and better understanding.

## 6.4 Synthesis of the textural-structural description and group essence

All of the women talked about feelings of anger as part of their textural experience of using violence against their partner. Underlying feelings such as jealousy, betrayal, frustration, and hurt were also part of their narrative. For nearly all of the women, the "bottling" of these emotions led to their IPV. Many women also experienced feeling abandoned, overwhelmed and frustrated by their partner's use of substances which they described as leading to their anger and ultimately their violence. The women also described a pull toward wanting and maintaining control of their partner that was not only manifested during their described incident of violence but also over the course of their relationship. Finally, the women also described the complexities of the substance use for themselves and of their partner. Many women used substances leading up to their use of violence or had been using at the time of their violence and while this was identified as part of their narrative as it pertained to their feelings of anger toward their partner's use, it was also a theme related to both partners use.

As part of the analysis in obtaining the women's structural descriptions, many of the women described the context of their violence against the backdrop of the wrongdoing against

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them by their partner. Many women described retaliating against their partners and within this, the women identified feelings of justification with many suggesting their partner either got off light or deserved it. While in the moment of their violence, women described feeling justified, many women described later feeling badly or guilty about the violence inflicted on their partner. The women also described their unhealthy familial and intimate relationship history as a backdrop for contextualizing their violence. For some of the women, having been exposed to familial violence and abuse was part of their narrative and for some it was witnessing unhealthy relationship patterns between their parents. A few women also viewed the historical familial violence they experienced as tied to the negative consequences of residential schools. Many of the women also described having had past relationships with intimate partners that were dysfunctional, abusive or violent toward them, and the essence of their experiences help to explain and contextualize how they understood their perpetration of violence.

Finally, in the context of understanding how they came to their violence, almost all of the women had some realizations regarding it. A few of the women expressed understanding themselves as the sole aggressor in the relationship whereby they would initiate the abuse or violence as a means of trying to control their partner. Some women described feeling shocked and scared about their ability to seriously harm their partner or kill him. Others described the implications of using violence to hold onto their partner or to try to fix him not recognizing the toxic pattern and unhealthy status of their relationship. All of the women discussed aspects of wanting a healthy loving relationship and family, and could articulate their violence as the means of trying to achieve it.

In summary, the group essence reflects a synthesis of the meaning that emerged from both the composite textural and structural descriptions which yield rich results of what happened

in the moments the women used their violence and how the women contextualized their violence and understood their contributing factors leading to it. The next chapter will discuss the importance of these findings and the connection to the broader literature, provide further support to the literature and ground my results in this regard.

# Chapter Seven – Discussion of the Findings

## 7.1 Introduction

This chapter includes a discussion of the above findings on women's IPV. At the onset of this research, I asked two questions: What are the lived experiences of women who have used IPV against their male intimate partner? How do women contextualize and understand their use of violence against their intimate partner? Through the women's lived experiences I aimed to increase my understanding of women's use of IPV and also contribute to the literature in this regard. Indeed, the findings address my research questions, lead to a richer understanding of what and how women experience their use of IPV, and support the existing research in this area. Much of the literature examines women's IPV from a motives framework using mainly a quantitative lens versus a qualitative lens that includes women's perspectives on their use of IPV. My research findings also add value to the existing literature, specifically due to the focus on the women's lived experience and the deficiency of literature in the area. The findings from the analysis support existing literature regarding women's motives for their violence and, in fact, move beyond a surface level of understanding. A unique finding, not well developed in the literature, is women's reflections on their use of violence. As the women described their experiences regarding how they understood and contextualized their violence, they were reflective and enlightened by the consequences of their violence, which led to the theme of 'reflective insights'. Another finding that requires further research is the impact of women's unhealthy familial and intimate relationship history. Much of the literature suggests the historical and socio-cultural factors contributing to women's IPV must be understood more clearly. These themes will be discussed later in the chapter. The importance of these findings underscores the

complexity of the issue, thus requiring more research to gain a consistency of understanding to better inform intervention and prevention practice.

## 7.2 Discussion of thematic findings of the women's composite-textural descriptions

The analysis of the women's textural descriptions yielded some rich and insightful context related to the emotions underlying their anger and rage, which led me to entitle the overarching theme *destructive emotions*. The literature is very clear on anger as a key motive for women's intimate violence, and this finding validates the existing research (Kimmel, 2002; Babcock, et al., 2003; Fiske, 2004; Hettrick & O'Leary, 2007; Caldwell et al., 2009). Many studies focus on anger and rage from an emotive/motive framework for women's IPV (Williams, et al, 2008; Caldwell et al., 2009; Flinck et al., 2010; Bair-Merritt et al., 2010). The context underlying what leads to the women's anger is less clear, thus making my research valuable to informing the literature. For those studies that do examine the contextual factors in some depth, my research validates these works. The underlying emotions, such as frustration, jealousy, or stress, leading to anger and, thus, to women's IPV, were clear. For some of the women, their partner's ongoing substance use led to varying degrees of anger, in turn leading to violence that was mild and purposeful, or more intense and impulsive, including the feeling of a loss of control. For others, it was the combination of the situational factors that impacted them negatively over time, leading to precursor emotions such as frustration, hurt, or being overwhelmed, contributing to deeper levels of anger or even feelings of rage that resulted in tragic consequences for some women. For instance, Dana described how the impact of her partner's use of substances, his betrayal, and her feelings of being overwhelmed led to her anger and rage and eventually to where she killed her partner during a heated argument. Pamela described her experiences of anger and resulting violence toward her partner, to the point where

she stopped herself from killing him. She also described feelings of resentment and anger as a result of her partner's ongoing substance abuse, and of being overwhelmed with family and business responsibilities. Rita and Anne described similar experiences of feeling overwhelmed by familial responsibilities and also feeling frustration and anger resulting from their respective partner's substance use. The use of substances has been cited as both foundational to women's IPV and also as a theme of its own. The current literature and my work here support other research citing partner substance abuse as a factor in women's IPV, in addition to playing a role in reducing inhibitions toward using aggressive behaviour (Caldwell, et al. 2009).

For a few women, betrayal by their partner was a catalyst for their frustration, jealousy, and anger. Some studies of college women's IPV found jealousy to be a predictive influence of anger and resulting violence (Bookwala et al., 1992). Other studies report a clear correlation between infidelity, jealousy, and IPV (Stuart et al., 2006). Some women identified fear of being left alone, or loneliness, and jealousy as a combination of destructive feelings leading to bouts of anger when trying to keep their partner from leaving; for others, betrayal was an aggravating factor.

These findings are consistent with the literature with respect to understanding women's IPV from an emotive framework, specifically when referencing anger and rage. Hettrich & O'Leary (2007) in their study of women's violence in dating relationships found motives of anger toward intimate partners to be a major contributing factor. Further studies on college women using IPV also cite anger as the primary motive driving their violence (Fiebert & Gonzalez, 1997; Harned, 2001), as do other studies related to women's arrest for IPV (Babcock et al., 2003; Stuart et al., 2006; Howard-Bostic, 2014).

Flemke & Allen (2008) conducted a deeper analysis by examining anger in the context of rage. In their study of 37 women's described lived experiences of using IPV, these authors conclude that rage is a distinct experience, with nearly all women describing a clear demarcation between the feelings of anger and rage (Flemke & Allen, 2008). Further, anger was described as a controllable emotion that the women could easily manage, as compared to rage where feelings of loss of control were prevalent and the use of reason and logic ineffective. The collective experiences of the participants suggest rage is not a single event; rather it has other emotional precursors that include feelings of fear, being overwhelmed, and loss of control.

Flemke & Allen (2008) also found the recurring theme of being overwhelmed was correlated to feelings of helplessness, linking it to a sense of survival, and leading to anger and rage; this is also cited in other studies (i.e., Swan & Snow, 2003; Sullivan et al., 2005). Many of the women cited infidelity and betrayal as other factors that led to jealousy and frustration, which culminated in anger and sometimes rage. This sub-theme is validated by Stuart et al. (2006), who studied women arrested for IPV and found that 25% used violence against their partner because they felt betrayed by their partner's cheating.

While not all women identified rage as part of their narrative, Flemke & Allen's (2008) findings are consistent with the findings of my work. Dana and Pamela clearly described feelings of rage when they used violence towards their partner, while other women described varying degrees of anger with underlying emotional triggers. Rather than imposing a universal emotion on the description of the women's experiences of violence, the theme title 'destructive emotions' was chosen in keeping with the women's descriptions of feeling a multitude of emotions.

The literature provides some good insights into anger as a motive, and my research provides more depth to further this understanding; this is due to the women's detailed accounts

of what happened when they used violence and the emotions and issues in the moments before and during their use of violence. The complexity of these women's experiences is evident and more research that comes from the women's lived experiences regarding the emotional motivators toward their IPV is needed.

The theme of *bottling negative sentiments and emotions* reflects the fact that nearly all of the women attributed their violence to the accumulation of negative emotions and a loss of control of their emotions and themselves. Blaming their partner for wrongdoing, as well as not listening to them, were also described and connected to the theme of destructive emotions, specifically anger. The amassing of negative sentiment and emotions and the expression of emotion noted here is a predominant theme in women's motives toward IPV and is consistent with other works (Hamberger, Lohr & Bonge, 1994; Babcock et al., 2003; Thomas, 2005; Stuart et al., 2006; Bair-Merritt et al., 2010). Research by Mäenpää-Reenkola (1997 as cited in Flinck et al, 2010) found it is not typical of women to vent anger through open action or words, as many women in their study reported not talking to their partners when angry or, when they tried, their partners did not listen.

The underlying factors related to 'bottling' emotions described by the women participants of this study are complex and related to a variety of reasons for using IPV, such as not feeling listened to/feeling ignored on important issues, feeling criticized, or feeling pressure in a variety of ways. For instance, Rita described feeling pressure from her partner to have sex, and the internal accumulation of her resentment led to her acting violently to her partner. My findings here support the literature in this regard. In their analytical review of 23 studies on women's motivations with respect to their use of IPV, Bair-Merritt et al. (2010) found women experienced feelings of anger when their partners ignored them. A review paper by Thomas (2005) also found

that women whose partners ignored them felt a sense of powerlessness, resulting in anger. Consistent with other findings related to the 'bottling' of anger, Thomas (2005) and Flemke & Allen (2008) found that when women stifled and suppressed their anger, overt aggression was evident.

The theme of *bottling negative sentiments and emotions* also supports existing literature on women's aggression as well as the motive of anger and attitudes of justification, which will be discussed later. Stuart et al. (2006) found that 39% of women cited reasons for their violence related to loss of control, such as they "didn't know what to do with [their] feelings" (p. 615) and blaming their partner for it; this is similar to the women's descriptions in the present study of an accumulation of emotions leading to their use of IPV. Further, a study conducted by Caldwell et al. (2009) reported that women who scored high on voicing harmful emotions engaged in more frequent psychological and physical aggression; this is in spite of controlling for victimization and social appeal. Flemke's et al. (2008) study on women's rage describes an emotional process women experience preceding their rage, and references 'emotional accumulation' as part of this process. Thus, the bottling and emergence of negative emotions are important predictors/precursors to women's IPV and any intervention undertaken should understand the complexity of this factor.

For all of the women in this research, *wanting control* over their partner, or their wish to take back control, was part of their narrative of violence. This theme is consistent with the literature regarding women's motive of control, whereby women are cited to threaten the use of violence to gain compliance from their partner (Swan & Snow, 2003). Other studies found women used control to feel more powerful. For instance, in their study on women arrested for IPV, Stuart et al. (2006) found that, 26% of the time, women indicated that a motive for their

IPV was "to feel more powerful" (p. 614). These authors also cited other motivating factors related to control, such as the women's desire to get compliance or to get their partners to agree with them. Indeed, this was certainly represented in the women's descriptions of their violence and supports the above assertions.

Research related to the motives framework suggests women's desire to control or engage in coercive control is often used to get something from their partner. Research by Follingstad et al. (1991) on college women using IPV reported their use of violence to get their partner to comply (22%), with some feeling empowered when violent against their partners (Fiebert & Gonzalez, 1997). In a systematic review of 23 studies related to women's motivations for IPV, Bair-Merritt et al. (2010) cite control as a key motivation in women's use of IPV. However, the authors illustrate the distinction between the need for control by women compared to men. Bair-Merritt (2010) note that women will typically use control to gain autonomy in their relationship while men will use it to demonstrate authority. Caldwell et al. (2009) found that, at times, women would use control in a calculated manner to get their partners to do what they wanted, or to comply; however, they acknowledged some women would also use aggression in response to being victimized by their partner. This was certainly the case for Susan and Brooke, who described how having power over their partners was because 'they could', and for Katrina, who described her motive for control as rooted in past familial experience of living in a traditional home with less autonomy. For Brooke, and also to some degree Katrina, the precursor factor in their need for control was related to jealousy and insecurity. These findings support research by Caldwell et al. (2009) that notes positive correlations between jealousy and coercive control and then resulting aggression. As the reasons why women use control remain only vaguely defined, caution should be used in drawing sweeping conclusions regarding the rationale for women's

and men's control in their use of IPV due to the complexity of the circumstances in which control is exerted.

Although the *complexities of substance use* is identified as a theme, it is also cited in the literature as a foundational component to IPV for both men and women due to its correlation to violence (Caetano et al., 2001). While many of the women identified substance use by their partner as a precursor to their violence, they also admitted their use of substances was problematic and, at times, served as an aggravating factor.

The composite textural themes illustrate that women's IPV cannot be neatly understood as simply emerging from anger or rage. Certainly, these emotions are a common precursor to the violence they exert; however, unpacking the underlying issues and a depth of understanding is required if intervention is to be successful. The women's lived experiences are not monolithic and cannot be assessed as such. More research will be required to ensure a holistic understanding of the complexity of the issues. In the next section, the discussion of the composite structural themes that emerged from the women's descriptions will provide a contextual framework for deepening the understanding of what led to their violence.

## 7.3 Discussion of Thematic Findings of the Women's Composite-Structural Descriptions

In addition to the women's textural descriptions of their use of IPV regarding *what* happened, several structural descriptions were revealed as to *how* the women contextualized their violence. This also includes the variables underlying or contributing to the women's IPV that were structural or historical.

Almost all of the women identified *retaliation* as part of their situated context although, again, the reasons for retaliating against their partner were varied; this finding thus supports existing research in this regard. Some women described engaging in a violent episode against

their partner to pre-empt abuse that may potentially befall them, while others cited fighting back or having had enough of their partner's irresponsibility related to substance use or parenting. According to Bair-Merritt et al. (2010) in their review of women's motives for IPV, retaliation for these reasons is common. Further, Bair-Merritt et al. (2010) cited women who also described engaging in a pre-emptive strike if they felt they might be subject to abuse or violence, which some scholars consider self-defence.

Although retaliation is a clear theme in the literature, the findings and discussion of retaliation are done so against the backdrop of self-defence (Saunders, 2003; Banwell, 2010). For instance, Dana was the only woman who described self-defence as a rationale for her violence. However, her described experience did not seemingly fit the literature definition. Much of the literature is not clear on what constitutes self-defence outside of the cases of 'battered woman' (Saunders 2003; Bair-Merritt, 2010). Rather, the literature reflects an understanding of how women can use effective agency to decide and plan how and when to protect their children and themselves from harm. This suggests women are both agents of violence and also victims, which can co-occur with other factors at play (McHugh et al., 2005; Dunn & Powell-Williams, 2007). With this in mind, Banwell (2010) suggests the complexity of women's IPV must be considered with the notion that women's IPV should not be understood as a direct cause (women's victimization) and effect (their violence) dynamic that occurs. This was certainly the case for Dana when she used the word self-defence to describe her violence; yet, she also described other factors that were part of her experience, which suggests hers was not a clear case of self-defence.

Bair-Merritt et al. (2010) also suggest using caution when drawing conclusions regarding self-defence, as retaliation and self-defence are both frequent motivations described by women who use IPV. They also cite difficulty in defining and measuring self-defence. On the other

hand, they and others (Swan & Snow, 2006; Flemke et al., 2008; Caldwell et al., 2009) highlight that several women report engaging in physical violence following their partner's use of violence toward them. While there is agreement that this context would constitute self-defence, the issue is deemed complicated. For instance, Bair-Merritt et al. (2010) highlight the fact that some women did not want to be viewed as a victim and would engage in acts of violence to mitigate this image of themselves. Again, this illustrates the complications and confusion in understanding retaliation and self-defence. The clear-cut cases of women who use violence as self-defence are often cases where severe harm is inflicted or a weapon used (Banwell, 2010; Bair-Merritt et al., 2010). However, it is suggested that caution be exercised in cases where circumstances are less clear as the precipitating factors may not be evident or point to self-defence (Kimmel, 2002).

The cases in which women cite pre-emptive violence or fighting back as retaliation appear to fit more under the context of reciprocal violence. This motive relates to arguments that include mutual violence, accumulated emotional release, and fighting back against their partner's abuse, which are consistent with the existing literature (Johnson, 2000). Anne described taking opportunities to fight back when her partner was drunk. At these times, Anne would take advantage of the situation to get back at him for the abuse he exerted. Other women retaliated through intimidating messaging. Rita described joking about slapping her partner around when they were in social situations to remind him she will retaliate if he does not do what she wants. Some literature suggests women may use covert messages to signal to their partner they are not to be 'messed with' or consequences will abound (Thomas, 2005). Other literature illustrates women consider slapping their partners as less serious or harmless, thus minimizing their violence (Fiebert & Gonzalez, 1997; George, 1999; Thomas, 2005); this is also consistent with

my findings. The message to the man is that he ought to take his partner seriously, or there could be violent consequences toward him (Thomas, 2005). Research by Caldwell et al. (2009) is consistent with Thomas (2005) in suggesting that some women take on a "tough guise" (p. 692) in order to appear tough and/or intimidating. The woman is willing to harm her partner if he does not take her threats seriously. Caldwell et al. (2009) attribute this in part to a response to high levels of victimization. This was evident from Rita's experience, as she described how she would send her partner a warning message rooted in control to ensure he did what she wanted. Dana also described taking on a tough guise in response to victimization in past relationships, at one point joining a gang to reinforce her ability to retaliate.

The complexities of understanding the theme of retaliation and self-defence become even more evident when looking at connections to the theme of *justification.* For instance, Brook retaliated against her partner for his infidelity and betrayal of her trust, but also justified it by stating she was satisfied with the amount of violence she inflicted. This is consistent with Sarantakos' (2004) study on wife to husband aggression, which found that women fail to identify their violence as problematic, minimize the seriousness their violence, or are in general denial of their violence. Further, a study of 24 women's experiences using IPV conducted by Flinck et al. (2010) cites the theme of justification, which was linked to sub-themes of "defending one-self", "panicking while overburdened", "venting repressed feelings", and "seeking the right to exist" (p. 312). My research validates these findings to a degree, as almost all of the women described similar reasons for their justification, including feelings of being overwhelmed and frustrated with how their partner was treating them or related to their partner's substance use. Similar to Flinck's et al. (2010) study, these women justified their actions by stating their partners deserved it. For example, Pamela stated, *he got off light. For what he put me through.* This is also

consistent with work by Mihalic & Elliot (1997), who found in their study of marital violence that women typically place greater blame on their partners, justifying their violence as a result of their partner's wrongdoing against them (i.e., using substances, leaving for days at a time, shirking parental role/responsibilities, and even their victimization).

Further, according to Flinck et al. (2010), some women viewed denial and justification of violence as connected to them having moral superiority, which served to keep the women rooted in their IPV. For instance, Pamela consistently described how her partner would hang out with 'crack whores', whom she described as the lowest class of people. Within this, Pamela implied a level of superiority for herself that supported her position. Blaming is a tool used to make demands and exercise power and control within the social environment. With this consideration, Flinck et al. (2010) suggest that women justifying their violence and conceptually putting themselves on a higher plane allows them to maintain their denial of it.

While the theme justification was prevalent in this study, it sits against the backdrop of the women's reflections on their violence and feeling bad or guilty; this appears to parallel their feelings of justification, suggesting that the women feel justified and guilty at the same time. Justification, as a stand-alone theme, is not well cited in the literature, likely due to the complexity and the intertwining of the issue as it relates to retaliation and self-defense. In spite of this, understanding justification as a theme is critical to assist women in shifting their thinking. More research is required to continue to inform work toward appropriate interventions in this regard.

The theme of *unhealthy familial relationship history* emerged from many of the women's experiences as a contextual factor linked to their IPV. The connection between witnessing or experiencing violence and subsequent IPV is evident in the literature on men's IPV; however,

the impact is not as clear for women (Caldwell et al., 2009; Swan & Snow, 2006). Some studies document the correlation between women's intimate violence and their past experiences of child abuse and maltreatment, witnessing of familial violence, and use of substances (Caldwell et al., 2009; Gabora et al., 2007; Field & Cataeno, 2005; Swan & Snow, 2005, 2006). The experience of abuse, violence, and neglect as a child is illustrated in some studies on the understanding of women's IPV. However, the complexity of the influence of these experiences is not well known (Babcock et al., 2003; Swan & Snow, 2006).

For instance, Dana, Rita, Susan, and Anne all described having witnessed or experienced violence, abuse, and neglect from a parent or family member. Dana described being beaten by her mother at two years of age, then being placed in the children welfare system and repeatedly moved between foster homes where she was further abused. She eventually joined a gang at the age of 13 and was both a perpetrator and victim of violence. Both Anne and Susan traced their violence back to their parent's experiences of abuse in residential school, citing the deep levels of abuse their parents experienced as indirectly contributing to their IPV. For these women, their parents' experiences of colonization and residential schools led to cyclical violence and abuse, resulting in an inter-generational effect that carried into the women's lives. Although these experiences were not primary motivations, the multiple realities of these women's histories were indeed part of their understanding of their use of IPV. My findings support much of the research on risk factors for IPV, particularly the transmission of inter-generational trauma. Witnessing IPV between parents or exposure to IPV in the family of origin is highly correlated with increased levels of women's IPV in adult relationships (Linder & Collins, 2005; Roberts et al., 2010).

Important knowledge can be gained from these women's personal, historical trajectories, which are different than their non-Indigenous counterparts and require acknowledgment. The impact of systemic racism and oppression in the form of residential schools brings to the fore the intersections between the historical cultural oppression and the current realities of these women's lives, rendering visible their differences while at the same time acknowledging similarities. The multiple variations of their experiences reinforce the importance of positioning women as central in research. When it comes to understanding Indigenous women's IPV, more work needs to be done. While there is widespread literature citing high rates of Indigenous women's victimization, there is almost none on their use of IPV. Considering that the profound levels of trauma and inter-generational effects resulting from residential schools are well documented, it is important that Indigenous women who use IPV can access culturally appropriate programs to address their IPV (Murdock, 2001). Interventions must consider the contextual and structural factors that precipitate women's IPV, whether or not the woman is the sole perpetrator or both victim and perpetrator, and, if the woman is Indigenous, the intervention should be culturally relevant and appropriate (Murdock, 2001; Gabora et al., 2007).

The women also identified an *unhealthy intimate relationship history* as a catalyst for their IPV. For almost all of the women, previous abuse was described as an issue at various times in their lives. For some women, they were the sole aggressors in their current relationships; however, were acting violently as a pre-emptive tactic in their current relationship due to victimization in a previous relationship. Many of the women reported a pattern of engaging in unhealthy relationships since their childhood. Certainly, Dana describes relationships that started early and were not healthy. This supports the literature in this regard. Marshall & Rose (1987)

found past relationship abuse is a predictor that women will find themselves in similar relationships in the future.

All of the women contextualized their IPV as normalized and associated it with their past experiences of violence in their childhood and into their young adulthood, which is consistent with the literature (Field & Caetano, 2005; Swan & Snow, 2006). Related to this, many women described how they normalized their violence as part of their historical victimization from other partners. Not knowing how to relate to a partner that did not victimize them resulted in feelings worthlessness and low self-esteem in these women, who would then seek to obtain control in an unhealthy way (Ojuri, 2004 as cited in Flinck et al. 2010).

The theme *reflective insights* emerged from the women's post-violence reflections or realizations of how they situated themselves in their use of violence, the impact of their violence on their partners or those around them, or implications of their violence. For instance, Katrina described herself as the sole aggressor in her current and past relationships even at times when her partner was emotionally abusive. A few women, such as Anne, described upon reflection feeling scared at what they were capable of or at the severity of violence they could inflict on their partners. Almost all of the women described feeling some level of guilt or "feeling bad" for their behaviour. My findings are congruent with the work of Flinck et al. (2010). The women in their study recognized their desire to cause pain, threaten their partner, or destroy the man physically; however, it was through their 'awakening' that brought them to recognize the reality of the impact of their violence. Further, Miller & Meloy (2006) found women in treatment groups were readily taking responsibility for their IPV as compared to their male counterparts, who typically minimize and deny their violence (Dobash et al., 1998). This may indicate women's ability to be reflective once some time has passed since their use of violence.

Apart from Flinck's et al.'s (2010) study, there is almost no research to specifically address women's reflections on their use of violence, and thus more work is required to contextualize this theme. The feelings of sadness, guilt, or upset are a part of the practice of becoming aware of unhealthy relationships, personal accountability, and the need for support (Flinck et al., 2010). Understanding women's IPV from their reflective position is critical to developing appropriate interventions to combat their deflection and justification (Dowd et al., 2003).

The above discussion highlights the key findings of composite structural descriptions of the women's use of IPV and its connections and contributions to the existing literature. Using a methodology and theoretical framework provided a forum to illuminate women's voices and to bring to the fore the multiple realities women face that led them to conflict with their intimate partners. Understanding the women's personal and historical complexities that contributed to their experiences, and the development of reflective insights as they told their IPV stories, is of extreme value with respect to interventions.

## 7.4 Summary

IPV is clearly a multidimensional social phenomenon influenced by the immediate and larger context of social relations (Howard-Bostic, 2014). This research provides insight into the context of what the women experienced or, as Howard-Bostic (2014) puts it, the images, words, people, and ideas that arose the moment of, or leading to, the violence. Thus, this research encompasses what the women experienced in the immediate moments they used their IPV as well as the underlying contextual factors of how they experienced it. My findings take into consideration the larger context of how the women experienced and understood their violence. The women's culture, history, and trajectory of aggression illustrate the diverse realities of each

woman's life. Studies on the personal and socio-cultural factors of women's IPV are minimal because of the difficulty in gaining knowledge in how the contextual factors contribute to women's IPV (Caldwell et al., 2009; Capaldi et al., 2012) and, indeed, this research illustrates the intricacies of the issue. Although the literature in this area is scant, my findings are consistent with those of some other researchers (Dutton, 2007, Williams et al., 2008; Conradi & Geffner, 2009; Capaldi et al., 2012; Howard-Bostic, 2014).

Bair-Merritt et al. (2010) suggest that research must move beyond putting a number to women's intimate violence to address controversies in the study of women's IPV. Instead, research should move toward understanding the larger context of why women engage in aggression against their partners to better inform practice in the field (Lindhorst & Tajima, 2008; Bair-Merritt et al., 2010). The importance of evaluating the broader personal and socio-cultural context helps to provide deeper insight on women's vulnerability to abuse, use of aggression, and feelings about getting help (Lindhorst & Tajima, 2008). The last chapter of this thesis consists of some concluding remarks that highlight the insights and limitations of the present study, provide recommendations for future research, and foreshadow potential implications for intervention/ practice.

## Chapter Eight – Reflections and Insights, Methodological Challenges, and Implications for Future Research

## 8.1 Introduction

This research emerged from a question I asked myself several years ago regarding why women use IPV that eventually became the foundation for exploring women's use of IPV from their perspectives. It aimed to describe their lived experiences and gain an understanding of how the women contextualized their experience of using IPV by locating the knowledge from their individual and collective standpoints and positioning their voices in the literature. This research study specifically asked the following two questions:

1. What are the lived experiences of women who have used IPV against their male intimate partner?

2. How do women contextualize and understand their use of violence against their intimate partner?

My work has fulfilled its intended purpose to the extent it could. However, I have learned that the exploration of women's IPV is anything but straightforward. Women's experiences of IPV share many similarities as highlighted in the discussion of the findings. Their historical trajectories contribute to their lived realities and are as diverse as they are alike. However, in spite of the differences and/or similarities, what is clear is that women are the experts of their own experiences. As such, their narratives render visible their collective similarities while at the same time respecting their individual differences. What follows is a summary of the insights gained from the lived experiences of the women and thematic results, the methodological challenges of my work, and implications and recommendations for future research.

## 8.2 Reflections and insights from findings and theoretical contributions

Because women's IPV is complex, the importance of this research to further contribute to the paucity of the literature was critical. This research aimed to explore and give voice to women's lived experiences and to address a gap in the extant literature. The research questions regarding how women described their lived experiences using IPV and how they contextualized these experiences provided key insights that positioned women's knowledge in a meaningful manner. The women were raw and vulnerable while sharing their experiences, yet at the same time demonstrated strength, resilience, and agency whether they were on the victim-offender continuum or were the sole aggressors.

### 8.2.1 Insights on findings

This research validates the current literature to date on women's motives; however, the complex and intertwining factors related to the women's personal, historical, and socio-cultural variables still require clarification. If we continue to evaluate women's experience of using IPV against that of men, then we lose sight of the importance of women's agency and, in effect, continue to perpetuate constructions of their experience that negate their ability to act independently of men. My findings suggest more research is required to position women's voices in the literature and to gain more accurate knowledge. For instance, Katrina's described experiences of being the sole aggressor could potentially be missed if not adhering to the tenets of feminist theory that position women's voices at the centre. Further, through their *reflective insights* the women recognized their ability to hurt men in multiple and complex ways; this also stresses the importance of locating women's experiences from their standpoint. The *reflective insights* finding illustrates and acknowledges the importance of a theoretical orientation that recognizes the differences between men and women, that women are not always victims, and that

women are different from each other as a result of the multiplicity and complexities of their realities. As McHugh (2005) suggests, "[b]oth men and women are inconsistent, and complex, and can change" (p. 722).

This research also supports some of the literature on women's motives for their use of IPV, particularly the motive of anger/rage and of wanting control. However, while much is known about risk factors or motives for IPV, less is known about how these factors intersect and culminate toward a violent episode (Williams et al., 2008; Capaldi et al., 2012). Risk factors such as the stress of being overwhelmed by parental, familial, and other responsibilities was a prevalent theme described by the women. However, there is very little research regarding the association of stress and reactivity and women's IPV or the motive for needing to gain control when feeling disempowered.

These findings also shed more light on some other areas that either remain unclear or are too complex to allow conclusions to be drawn, such as the dynamics of reciprocal violence and the multifaceted aspects of personal and historical factors that contribute to women's use of violence. For instance, an unhealthy familial and intimate relationship history was a prevalent theme, particularly for Indigenous women, where their historical trajectories included socio-cultural and political acts of oppression resulting in inter-generational trauma that continues to play a prevalent role as an underlying factor in their use of violence. For the Indigenous women, their use of IPV can also be understood from their individual standpoints; this highlights the intersecting identities of being a woman and being Indigenous with respect to the context in which they understand their IPV. Their descriptions of the historical systemic oppression of the residential school experience that impacted their familial relationships, which were marked by cyclical physical and sexual abuse from their parents, illuminate this reality. I suggest more

research could be done specifically on Indigenous women's IPV to substantiate or refute the generalized understanding or to develop a better understanding of the intersection of the factors that contribute to their violence.

Women's voices on their use of IPV are underrepresented in the literature, with only a few studies that illuminate women's experiences in this regard (Flemke et al., 2008; Flinck et al., 2010; Banwell, 2010). To get at the core of the issue of IPV, more work needs to discover women's experiences and, ultimately, for their voice to be the focus. The women in this study described their lived experiences of using IPV in a manner that was humbling, reflective, insightful, and with intent to help others. Each woman's strength and resiliency were evident in spite of their histories and the current realities many described experiencing. As a researcher in this process, I could not help but also be humbled by their accounts which, at times, led to extremely tragic outcomes.

It became clear during the interviews and analysis that, due to my humanity, my role in the process was not invisible, and in fact, I had to continually remain aware of my role and the knowledge and experience that I held regarding IPV. This was both a strength and a challenge of the study. Using an approach consistent with feminist and phenomenological methodologies allowed me to recognize how the fault lines between the research and those researched can be penetrated, thus making the methodological framework even more critical to mitigate bias (Stanley & Wise, 1993; Flemke et al., 2008).

Finally, many of the women described being empowered by the research and conveyed gratitude for the experience, describing it as cathartic to their healing and supporting their desire to change their lives in many respects. If this is all my research accomplished, then I am satisfied because this small feat has larger implications for these women whose marginalization and

whose situated knowledge varies on the continuum. One such implication is that their voices are now present in the literature, and that the knowledge comes from their experiences rather than from a traditionally dominant position.

## 8.2.2 Gaining knowledge of women's IPV using a phenomenological approach and critical feminist theory

To correct the absence of understanding regarding women's IPV, research must be conducted with the objective of seeking both what was experienced and how the women experienced it. Thus, the importance of using a phenomenological approach with the underpinnings of standpoint feminism for this type of research cannot be understated. My work is consistent with the principles of phenomenology (Moustakas, 1994; Creswell, 2009) and standpoint feminism (Harding, 2004), and the methodology employed an inclusive approach that illuminated women's experience of using IPV.

The use of a descriptive phenomenological approach for analysis provided a unique framework to understand the women's lived experiences and their contextual understandings of these experiences that cannot be achieved using quantitative measures. Further, the results flow from the analysis of the data rather than being imposed, as would be the case for a statistical analysis. The principles and structure of the phenomenological analysis provided a rigorous stepwise method for uncovering the meaning of the women's experiences that deepened my understanding of the phenomenon of IPV. The aim of obtaining the lived experience and adhering to a descriptive approach mitigated interpretation and honoured the women's experiences as their stories unfolded. More research using qualitative approaches, such as a phenomenological approach, to gain a deeper understanding of women's IPV is required, leading

to a better understanding of their abusive behaviour that can inform interventions and those practicing in the field who work with both women and men.

Using critical feminist theory to underpin my work and a phenomenological approach for analysis provided solid ground for seeking answers to the research questions. Critical feminist theory, and specifically the principles of feminist standpoint theory, supported my assertion that women's IPV is complex and that their realities are multifaceted and diverse. This framework helped these results to be understood, adding further support with respect to the importance of women's experiences being the point of departure in understanding their IPV. Thus, rather than examining women's IPV from the confines of a quantitative statistical framework, or from an approach that may be considered male defined, my research put women at the centre. My work aimed and achieved telling the story of women's IPV from the women's perspectives and was accurate to those experiences, or as least as close to their truth as possible. Using critical feminist theory, specifically standpoint feminism, my research aimed to locate women's situated knowledge, their agency, and also their resistance to notions that their violence is similar to men. Attempts to understand women's marginalization support the use of this theory (Comack, 1999). Further, my aim to recognize women's individual experiences, while at the same time acknowledge the multiple realities and complexity of their lives, is illustrated in my findings and renders their collective experiences visible. My work is consistent with much of the research that argues for the importance of studying issues about women from a feminist approach, with women at the centre (Harding, 2004). Renzetti (1999) suggests that the most glaring factor in the controversy of women's IPV is gender, because most women's IPV has been historically studied against the backdrop of men's violence. Much more should be done to support research that has had women at the fore.

## 8.3 Methodological challenges

There are many strengths to this research. Notably, the use of a phenomenological and feminist methodology allowed the women to share and reflect on their experiences and uncover their understanding of their use of IPV. To this end, the authenticity of the research added value and support to the existing literature. In this regard, my work is critical as transferability of the results to the broader phenomena is evident. In spite of its strengths, however, this study is not without limitations. Using a qualitative methodological approach allowed for a rich thematic understanding of how women experienced IPV and thus makes a solid contribution to the literature in this regard. Future research will be critical in order to continue making strides in support of policies for intervention and prevention.

First, recruitment was challenge. The aim of the project was to interview 20 women who have used violence against a male intimate partner; however, this was not achieved despite aggressive recruitment. This could be due to a lack of societal understanding and support for the notion that women can be as violent as their male counterparts. It could also be the result of women not recognizing their own violence and abuse as significant. Nonetheless, 14 participants were sufficient for a qualitative study such as this and provided representation from a cross-section of cultural and socio-economic groups. The results produced important thematic findings that contribute to the existing literature in the area.

Second, the strength of the methodological analysis laid the foundation for a rich description of the women's life world. This allowed me to adopt the phenomenological attitude, which assisted me in refraining from introducing peripheral frameworks related to my position in the field and to set aside any judgments or pre-existing knowledge I may hold. However, the process of bracketing during analysis was a noted challenge, which required regular discipline to

separate myself from the knowledge position I hold as a result of having worked and researched in the field. I also found it difficult at times to remain in the researcher position, and not drift into the interventionist position when they were upset or had an epiphany moment in their recollection of their experiences. Although challenging during both data gathering and analysis, I diligently remained in the role of researcher, endeavored to stay reflective, and recalibrating myself to the purpose of the research and my neutrality in this process. I was able to remain appropriately present with the women's described experiences, allowing meaning to emerge freely to form the thematic results. As a result, I have an increased my understanding of the reflective process. Further research will require strict adherence to remaining neutral and free of knowledge of the topic area to ensure bias-free results.

Finally, avoidance of interpretation is paramount within a descriptive phenomenological analysis. As illustrated in my work, I laid out the women's lived experiences and used reflective analysis to identify the thematic findings derived from the essences of the phenomenon. Remaining faithful to the accounts provided by the women to generate meanings from these and formulate themes was indeed challenging. I aimed to describe the women's experiences and not interpret what was laid out before me or presuppose or interpret what I thought the women meant. However, as Finlay (2009) suggests, "to what extent does this involve going beyond what a person said and enter the realm of interpretation?" (p. 10). Indeed, this is a worthy point. Taking on the epoche/bracketing position and staying close to the women's narratives assisted in minimizing research subjectivity and interpretation in this regard, but the process was challenging. To deal with this, Finlay (2009) suggests scholars prefer to view the analytical process of description and interpretation "as a continuum" where explicit work may be "more or less interpretive" (p. 11),

thus avoiding rigid boundaries. This is something to bear in mind when engaging in future research.

## 8.4 Implications and recommendations for future research

Several implications for future research emerged during this project. First, the social context of women's IPV must be considered in subsequent research. This will provide a whole picture of the underlying contributing factors that lead a woman to IPV. This includes examining the social, historical, and cultural variables that may be intersecting factors of her reality. Continuing to examine women's IPV in a narrowly defined way will not address their vulnerabilities, and consequently will ignore the factors and context that led to their use of IPV. Further, not focusing on women's IPV will ignore their male victims and work is required here to understand their victimization. Not engaging in comprehensive research in the area of IPV, inclusive of women's IPV, will ultimately perpetuate the ongoing exclusion women have faced in the study of their violence and ignore the specific and required intervention and prevention programs that can address women's IPV and men's victimization.

Second, another area that has been largely ignored, and requires further research, is women's IPV and impact on children. While the women in my study described being concerned about their children, this research did not address this. The impact of IPV on children is studied under the paradigm of men as perpetrators, but understanding in the area of women's IPV is lacking. The impact of women's perpetration as a critical aspect of the familial context should be a focused area of study going forward.

Third, the literature in this area lacks a solid theoretical foundation as part of the research design. Because much of the literature focuses on women's IPV from a motives framework, it lacks a theoretical foundation. Some studies suggest future research should include theoretical

frameworks, such as the nested ecological model or feminist theory, to increase understanding of women's IPV (Dasgupta, 2002; Bair-Merritt et al., 2010; Capaldi et al, 2012). I agree with this position, as the complexity of this issue cannot be understated. Seeking better and deeper understanding against the backdrop of a sound theoretical framework will avoid inappropriate assumptions or constructions of gender, women's agency (further victimizing women), consequences for women's lives, or the creation of useless policy that does not produce meaningful solutions. In this same vein, more studies need to examine women's IPV using critical feminist theory as a foundation for understanding women's agency, situated knowledge of their experiences, and how factors that contribute to their IPV intersect. Further, articulating women's voices from their standpoint allows for an inclusive position of women's voices in the literature.

Fourth, further research must encompass an exploration of the role and impact of substance use in women's IPV. Many women described their partner's substance use as ranging from problematic to creating serious issues in the relationship. Some of the women also described their substance use as problematic, and the way in which this impacts the relationship or how it exists between couples is not as prevalent in the literature on women's IPV.

Last, further studies are also required to explore and address the unique circumstances of Indigenous women's IPV as this is an area of limited research. While there is a plethora of literature on Indigenous women's violence generally, this is not the case with respect to issues of IPV. All of the Indigenous women cited reciprocal violence in their relationships and also admitted to being instigators at times. What is unique, and not surprising, however, is that almost all of the Indigenous women cited historical oppression and the devastating impacts of colonization and residential schools as part of their familial, historical context and viewed this as

contributing to their IPV. The impact of this structural factor on their use of IPV remains unclear, and therefore further research must be conducted to gain an increased understanding of the implications of this structural factor as well as understand how women cope with their experience of IPV, whether perpetrator, victim, or both (Burnett, 2015). Understanding the reciprocal violence Indigenous women experience and their role in perpetrating IPV against the backdrop of the historical context of oppression would provide a deeper level of understanding that can inform culturally appropriate policies. My work points to the importance of using an Indigenous feminist or post-colonial theory that can ground how race/ethnicity, class and gender intersect and at which point on the axis this occurs. The reason there is a requirement for this type of focus is that Indigenous women's violence and related feminist issues remains unexamined. When it comes to Indigenous women, their experience are situated against the backdrop of their oppression and loss of cultural identity. Understanding this in from an Indigenous or post-colonial lens can lead to a focus on the implementation of holistic intervention and prevention within health, justice, and education sectors. My findings provide some initial insights into Indigenous women's IPV and, as Burnett (2015) suggests, this can move professionals to be 'reflexive' in services for Indigenous people and to identify sites of oppression within these interventions, working toward addressing these to provide a holistic program. Thus, further research is recommended to not only address the phenomenon of IPV but also to address the structural determinants that continue to perpetuate these issues.

## 8.5 Summary comments

My work contributes to the wider body of literature on women's IPV and provided a forum for women to tell their stories about their use of violence. All of the women wanted to share their experiences to shed light on their violence and to help other women and men get help.

The use of critical feminist theory provided a framework in which women's experiences are understood through their lived realities and the lens of the race, class, and gender. The women in this study were able to contextualize the structural factors that contributed to their violence in a way that helped increase understanding of the historical and socio-cultural factors that contributed to their IPV. Further research on understanding the historical context of IPV and how this links to the contemporary context of women's IPV will be critical.

I have learned, in a systematic manner, that the issue of women's IPV is quite layered. What stood out to me amongst the many insights here is that trying to gain knowledge about understanding women's IPV underscores the importance of doing it as part of a broader framework of knowledge in understanding and responding to IPV. As Kimmel (2002) states, "compassion for victims of violence is not a zero-sum game" (p. 1334). Kimmel thus suggests we need to move away from debating the gender symmetry issue and look at the larger scale impact, regardless of who is the victim, and afford compassion to all victims of IPV and provide effective interventions to perpetrators, whether women or men. Remaining rooted in the debate of gender symmetry simply continues to ignore important issues such as the effect of violence on children and families. While this research did not seek to discover what constitutes effective intervention, it is certainly logical to conclude that interventions such as counseling or appropriate programming to address women's IPV would benefit all of those involved. Understanding and responding to IPV in a comprehensive manner requires an explanation that can address the personal, cultural, historical, and socio-cultural factors that lead to IPV, whether committed by women or men. Acknowledging that women can also be violent has social, legal, and political implications and, regardless of context, will lead to better outcomes for both women, men, children, and families when it is researched and addressed in its totality.

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Appendix A


Recruitment Materials

Information for Research Participants

Poster for distribution

# INFORMATION SHEET FOR RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

(To be distributed to potential participants)

## Understanding Women's Use of Violence in Intimate Partner Relationships

### Thank you for your interest in this study.

**Purpose:**

This is a study to understand women's use of violence within intimate partner relationships from the perspectives of women who have used violence against their male intimate partner and from men who have been victims of violence by their female intimate partner. We are inviting participants to share their experiences and to provide opinions about this very important topic.

**If you decide to participate in this study, you will be asked to:**

1) Participate in an interview to discuss your experience related to women's use of violence against a male intimate partner. The purpose is to gain experiential accounts from women who have used intimate partner violence (IPV) and the perspectives of male victims of IPV.

2) You will also be invited to participate in a second one-on-one interview to review the transcript of the first interview, if you choose. This is an opportunity to add to any of the information discussed at the first interview.

   You will receive a $50.00 honorarium for taking the time to participate in this study.

**Time:**

You will be asked to spend approximately two hours in the interview.

You may leave the study at any time if you change your mind about participating. If you decide to leave the study, we will not use any information that you have shared with us,

**Dissemination and Confidentiality:**

The interview tapes and transcripts will be used by the researchers to understand women's use of violence in an intimate partner relationship. The research data and recordings will be kept for ten years in a secure location at the University of Saskatchewan. After ten years, all of the data that will be destroyed. We intend to publish information from the study in books and journals, as well as share parts of the findings at presentations and conferences. Your participation in the study will remain anonymous. Where requested, we will send participants a copy of our final report when the study is complete.

For concerns about how this study is being conducted, you may also contact the University's Office of Human Research Ethics Administration, at (306-966-2975) or the ethics.office@usask.ca

# WOMEN
## We are interested in hearing from you!!!

We invite you to participate in a research project called:

### Understanding Women's Use of Violence in Intimate Partner Relationships

**WHO?**

We are seeking women in Saskatchewan who have used violence against a male intimate partner within an intimate partner relationship. We would like your perspective on intimate violence. We are conducting research on what you think would help our homes be happier, safer places to be? If you have ever used violence in your intimate relationship we want to hear from you!

**WHY?**

To learn about women's perspectives of their use of violence in their intimate partner relationships to research solutions to this violence.

**WHAT?**

Participants will be asked to participate in an interview to discuss their use of violence in an intimate relationship.

**HOW?**

If you wish to participate or you have questions about what we are doing, please call:

University of Saskatchewan, Department of Sociology
Carolyn Brooks, PhD          966-5814

Email: carolyn.brooks@usask.ca

*A $50.00 honorarium will be paid to each woman who participates in an individual interview. You can expect to spend about 2 hours with us and will be paid at the conclusion of the interview. Our only expectation is that you will give us your point of view and you cannot have used violence in the past 6 months.*

# Men

## WE WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU!

We invite you to participate in a research project called:
*Understanding Women's Use of Violence in Intimate Partner Relationships*

**WHO?**
We are seeking men in Saskatchewan who have been victims of violence from their female partners within an intimate partner relationship. We would like your perspective on intimate violence. We are conducting research on what you think would help our homes be happier, safer places to be? If you have ever been a victim of violence in your intimate relationship we want to hear from you!

**WHY?**
To learn about women's violence in their intimate partner relationships to research solutions to this violence.

**WHAT?**
Participants will be asked to participate in an interview to discuss your experiences as relates to violence in an intimate relationship.

**HOW?**
If you wish to participate or you have questions about what we are doing, please call:

University of Saskatchewan, Department of Sociology
Carolyn Brooks, PhD     966-5814
Email: carolyn.brooks@usask.ca

A $50.00 honorarium will be paid to each man who participates in an individual interview. You can expect to spend about 2 hours with us and will be paid at the conclusion of the interview. Our only expectation is that you will give us your point of view and that you have not used violence in the past 6 months.

Appendix B

Confidentiality Form

Consent Forms: Interviews

Transcript and Release Forms

**University of Saskatchewan**



**Dr. Carolyn Brooks**

**Department of Sociology**

University of Saskatchewan

1019, 9 Campus Drive

Saskatoon, Saskatchewan

Tel:  (306) 966-6935/Fax:  (306) 966-5814

E-mail:  carolyn.brooks@usask.ca

**In Our Own Words: Understanding Women's Violence**

**In Intimate Partner Relationships**

## INFORMED CONSENT FORM FOR MALE PARTICIPANTS

You have indicated to us that you would like to participate in a study on intimate partner violence by women. Please read this form and the Information Letter carefully and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to take part in the study. This Consent Form and the Information Letter tells you what you will be asked to do as a participant in the study, any possible risks and benefits to taking part, and who to contact if you have any questions or concerns.

**Purpose and Procedure:**  The purpose of the study is to learn from the experiences of men who have experienced intimate partner violence by women, and women who have used violence against intimate partners. We want to ask you about your experiences, your perspectives and ideas for intervention and prevention. You will be asked to participate in an interview that will be taped and transcribed.

Our research questions are:

(1) What are the meanings and experiences of intimate partner violence by women, for men and women?

(2) What barriers and opportunities related to intimate partner violence did you face in your communities (related to culture; history; environment; health systems; community programs)

(3) How might learning from the meanings and experiences of people who have experienced intimate partner violence by women, help communities understand these experiences and provide information essential to health systems, policy and implementation?

Your involvement in this study involves a one-on-one interview.  The interview will help us to learn more about your experiences.  The interview will last about two hours.  You will be asked if you would like to review your transcript after the interview. You will inform your interviewer of the best way to have contact with you. At this time, if you have chosen to review your transcript, the research assistant will also provide you with your transcript and the opportunity to make any changes.  Although this study will last two years, your time commitment is complete after the interview.

**Potential Risks & Benefits:**

Potential Risks:  The greatest risk associated with this study is in the recall and discussion of traumatic or uncomfortable personal experiences.  Researchers will work with the community stakeholders to refer anyone needing individual counseling as a result of their participation in this study.

Benefits to the participant will involve a $50.00 honorarium as payment for participation.  In addition, by participating in the research interview, you are assisting in developing insight into experiences of intimate partner violence, which may lead to improved interventions and prevention strategies.

The results of this study will be shared with community stakeholders who work in the area of health and intimate partner violence with the hopes that the information shared will benefit other men and women.  The hope is that community members (you) may record and reflect upon community strengths and concerns and provide information essential to policy makers to transform existing practices, programs and policies related to health and intimate partner violence.

We will also *publish in relevant academic journals* (e.g., International Journal of Men's Health; Journal of Public Health; and Journal of Indigenous Health).

**Confidentiality:** Carolyn Brooks, co-Investigators and research assistants will keep confidential all information arising in discussion with you.

Audiotapes and transcripts will be stored in a locked filing cabinet in the researchers' offices. Transcribed data will be destroyed ten years after study completion. Audio takes will be destroyed immediately after they have been transcribed.

Your name will not appear in any report, conference presentation or publication about this study. Direct quotations from the interview may be used in publications, but transcripts and quotations will not include the participant's name. Any material used in publications will have any identifying information altered or deleted (e.g., names of relatives, names of health care professionals) prior to publication. Although the data from this study will be published and presented at conferences, you will be assigned a pseudonym. The consent forms will be stored separately from the transcripts so that it will not be possible to associate a name with any given set of responses.

We will also be asking you for the best method and procedure for contacting you (for transcript review or review of the findings). This contact information will be store in a locked computer file which only myself, the principal investigator, will have access to.

*Please note that we are required by law to report any past or current child abuse that has been unreported. We are also required to report situations, which are dangerous to children to the legal authorities. In addition, if it is revealed to the interviewer that you are planning to harm yourself or someone else, we are obligated to report this to the authorities.*

**Right to Withdraw:** *You may withdraw from the study for any reason, at any time, without penalty of any sort and without loss of the honorarium. If you withdraw from the study at any time, any data that you have contributed will be destroyed. Your right to withdraw from the study will apply until April 1st, 2011 when results will begin to be disseminated, and data has been pooled and analyzed. After this it is possible that some form of research dissemination will have already occurred and it may not be possible to withdraw your data.*

You do not have to answer any questions you do not wish to answer.

**Questions:** If you have any questions concerning the study, please feel free to ask at any point; you are also free to contact the researchers at the numbers provided above if you have questions at a later time.  This study has been approved on ethical grounds by the University of Saskatchewan Behavioural Sciences Research Ethics Board on __.  Any questions regarding your rights as a participant may be addressed to that committee through the Ethics Office (966-2084).  Out of town participants may call collect. .   You will be asked if you would like to receive a report of the results of the study.  This will be given to you upon your request.

**Consent to Participate:**  I have read and understood the description provided above; I have been provided with an opportunity to ask questions and my questions have been answered satisfactorily.  I consent to participate in the study described above, understanding that I may withdraw this consent at any time.  A copy of this consent form has been offered to me for my records.  I do not have to take a copy of this consent form.


_____          _____

(Signature of Participant)                                              (Date)



_____

(Signature of Researcher)

**University of Saskatchewan**

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**In Our Own Words: Understanding Women's Violence**

**In Intimate Partner Relationships**

## INFORMED CONSENT FORM FOR FEMALE PARTICIPANTS

You have indicated to us that you would like to participate in a study on intimate partner violence by women. Please read this form and the Information Letter carefully and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to take part in the study. This Consent Form and the Information Letter tells you what you will be asked to do as a participant in the study, any possible risks and benefits to taking part, and who to contact if you have any questions or concerns.

**Purpose and Procedure:**  The purpose of the study is to learn from the experiences of women who have used violence against a male intimate partner and from men who have experienced intimate partner violence by women.  We want to ask you about your experiences, about what could have stopped the violence before it started, and about what was needed once the violence had started in order to stop it. You will be asked to participate in an interview that will be taped and transcribed.

Our research questions are:

(1) What are the meanings and experiences of intimate partner violence by women, for men and women?

(2) What barriers and opportunities related to intimate partner violence did you face in your communities (related to culture; history; environment; health systems; community programs)

(3) How might learning from the meanings and experiences of people who have experienced intimate partner violence by women, help communities understand these experiences and provide information essential to health systems, policy and implementation?

Your involvement in this study involves a one-on-one interview. The interview will help us to learn more about your experiences. The interview will last about two hours. You will be asked if you would like to review your transcript after the interview. You will inform your interviewer of the best way to have contact with you. At this time, if you have chosen to review your transcript, the research assistant will also provide you with your transcript and the opportunity to make any changes. Although this study will last two years, your time commitment is complete after the interview.

**Potential Risks & Benefits:**

Potential Risks: The greatest risk associated with this study is in the recall and discussion of traumatic or uncomfortable personal experiences. Researchers will work with the communities to refer anyone needing individual counseling as a result of their participation in this study.

Benefits to the participant will involve a $50.00 honorarium as payment for participation. In addition, by participating in the research interview, you are assisting in developing insight into experiences of intimate partner violence, which may lead to improved interventions and prevention strategies.

The results of this study will be shared with community stakeholders who work in the area of health and intimate partner violence with the hopes that the information shared will benefit other men and women. The hope is that community members (you) may record and reflect upon community strengths and concerns and provide information essential to policy makers to transform existing practices, programs and policies related to health and intimate partner violence.

We will also *publish in relevant academic journals* (e.g., International Journal of Men's Health; Journal of Public Health; and Journal of Indigenous Health).

**Confidentiality:** Carolyn Brooks, co-Investigators and research assistants will keep confidential all information arising in discussion with you.

The interviews and group discussions will be audiotaped with the permission of the participants. The tapes will be transcribed. Only the research team members will listen to the tapes and read the transcripts. You may ask to have the recorder turned off at any point.

Audiotapes and transcripts will be stored in a locked filing cabinet in the researchers' offices. Transcribed data will be destroyed ten years after study completion. Audio takes will be destroyed immediately after they have been transcribed.

Your name will not appear in any report, conference presentation or publication about this study. Direct quotations from the interview may be used in publications, but transcripts and quotations will not include the participant's name. Any material used in publications will have any identifying information altered or deleted (e.g., names of relatives, names of health care professionals) prior to publication. Although the data from this study will be published and presented at conferences, you will be assigned a pseudonym. The consent forms will be stored separately from the transcripts so that it will not be possible to associate a name with any given set of responses.

We will also be asking you for the best method and procedure for contacting you (for transcript review or review of the findings). This contact information will be store in a locked computer file which only the principal investigator and myself, will have access to.

*Please note that we are required by law to report any past or current child abuse that has been unreported. We are also required to report situations, which are dangerous to children to the legal authorities. In addition, if it is revealed to the interviewer that you are planning to harm yourself or someone else, we are obligated to report this to the authorities.*

**Right to Withdraw:** *You may withdraw from the study for any reason, at any time, without penalty of any sort and without loss of the honorarium. If you withdraw from the study at any time, any data that you have contributed will be destroyed. Your right to withdraw from the study will apply until April 1st, 2011 when results will begin to be disseminated, and data has been pooled and analyzed. After this it is possible that some form of research dissemination will have already occurred and it may not be possible to withdraw your data.*

You do not have to answer any questions you do not wish to answer.

**Questions:** If you have any questions concerning the study, please feel free to ask at any point; you are also free to contact the researchers at the numbers provided above if you have questions at a later time. This study has been approved on ethical grounds by the University of Saskatchewan Behavioural Sciences Research Ethics Board on __. Any questions regarding your rights as a participant may be addressed to that committee through the Ethics Office (966-2084). Out of town participants may call collect. You will be asked if you would like to receive a report of the results of the study. This will be given to you upon your request.

**Consent to Participate:** I have read and understood the description provided above; I have been provided with an opportunity to ask questions and my questions have been answered satisfactorily. I consent to participate in the study described above, understanding that I may withdraw this consent at any time. A copy of this consent form has been offered to me for my records. I do not have to take a copy of this consent form.


_____          _____

(Signature of Participant)                                (Date)


_____

(Signature of Researcher)

# TRANSCRIPT RELEASE – INTERVIEW

*To be distributed and signed prior to the interview.*

I, _____, have been offered the opportunity to review the complete transcript of my interview in the study ***Understanding Women's Use of Violence in Intimate Partner Relationships.***

_____I would like to review the transcript.  If I choose to review the transcript, I will have the opportunity to add, alter, and delete information from the transcript as appropriate.  I am aware that I will be asked to sign a transcript release if I choose to review the transcript.

_____I do not wish to review the transcript.

I have received a copy of this form for my own records.

_____          _____
Participant                                              Date

_____          _____
Researcher                                              Date

**TRANSCRIPT RELEASE – INTERVIEW**


*The research assistant will ask participants to sign this form if they indicate they would like to review the transcript.  The RA will arrange for direct delivery of the transcript and participants will be asked to sign this form when the RA picks up the transcript after it is read.*



I, _____, have been offered the opportunity to review the complete transcript of my interview for  the study: ***Understanding Women's Use of Violence in Intimate Partner Relationships.***



I acknowledge that the transcript accurately reflects what I said in the interview with [research assistant]. I hereby authorize the release of this transcript to Lisa Broda and Carolyn Brooks to be used in the manner described in the consent form. I have received a copy of this Data/Transcript Release Form for my own records.



_____          _____
Participant                                            Date


_____          _____
Researcher                                            Date

**Confidentiality Agreement**


I, _____ have been hired by Carolyn Brooks to work on the study: Understanding Women's Use of Violence in Intimate Partner Relationships.  I acknowledge that I have reviewed and am familiar with the Ethics Submission for this research, and that any information I encounter will be treated confidentially.  I agree that I will not repeat, discuss or disclose this information to anyone.  I have received a copy of this agreement for my own records.




Research Assistant_____                    Date_____



Researchers_____                    Date_____



        _____                    Date_____

Appendix C

Interview Guidelines

Introduce the study including the purpose: to explore their perceptions on women's use of IPV in intimate partner relationships.

Explain that the purpose for tape recording is to make sure that we are as accurate as we can be. Stress how important their words are. Discuss the consent forms in detail.

If they are reluctant to tape, let them know that we could start taping and if it really bothers them, then we can stop.

Preamble: I understand that you agreed to come here today to talk about a difficult event in your life; that you are here today to participate in research on women's use of violence in an intimate relationship and in this process talk about your own story. Is this your understanding as well?

We will be asking a series of questions that will form the basis of the interview, however, are not exhaustive. Questions may be added or deleted to further illuminate the issues in question related to the research topic.

There are 10 main questions. If needed, the interviewer can use the additional probing questions.

_____

Have the participants introduce themselves.

Ask basic demographic questions.

Your story:

1. Could you begin by telling me about your own story of abuse and violence.

     Where does your story begin?

     How did you meet your partner and when did the abuse begin?

     How have you changed from the violence?

     How has your partner changed through the violence?/your children or family?

How did you perceive/see/understand your relationship with your partner?

Coping:

Could you tell me about how you coped with the abuse?

What did they do or say that was helpful to you in stopping your violence?

Was there anything else they could have done to help you stop your violence?

How do you view/understand/see your use of violence?

What steps did you take to deal with your own violence?

How did you try and stop your own violence?

Do you believe any person or institution could have helped you stop your violence sooner? How?

Did you receive formal support from programs? If so, was this helpful? Why or why not?

Did you have contact with the justice system? If so, was this helpful? Why or why not?

Did you receive informal support from friends and/or any other people? Who were they and how did they support you?

Who was important within your journey of abuse? Why?

Was spirituality and/or religion important in your journey?

How has this experience affected your life in the years following the violence?

What do you feel should be implemented to help individuals cope with IPV violence by women?

Safety:

3. How did you cope with issues of safety?

What steps did you take to deal with safety concerns?

What steps did you take for your safety? And/or others safety?

Reflections on intervention/prevention: Education, Community, Justice, and Health

4. Do you believe more can be done to reduce/stop intimate partner violence?

If yes, what do you believe could be done?

Who knows about the violence in your community?

How do feel that people acquire their knowledge about IPV?

What is your perspective on the development of programs which work with women and men as intimate partners together?

What is the importance of acute and/or long-term intervention?

What are the barriers to services?

What are the strengths?

What role do systemic factors play, such as socio-economics; culture; race; history?

Nature of IPV by women:

5. What, in your experience is the nature of intimate partner violence by women?

What is the impact on women?/men?/children?/communities?

What are the dynamics (ask if they understand this, explain what it means) between men and women in IPV relationships?

What is the impact of age?

What is the impact of culture?

Does violence against men look differently than violence by men against women?

Impact of IPV by women on others:

6. What is the impact of the violence on others in your family, community or life?

Could you tell me about the experience for your children?

Could you tell me about the experience for your family?/community?/others?

How did others cope with the violence?

Who knew about the violence?

How did they know about it?

How did they respond/react?

Homicide:

Could you tell me if there was a time when you thought your partner/ex-partner was at risk of being seriously harmed or killed?

What happened?

How did you view any threats of violence that you experienced?

Precipitating (factors leading up to violence) factors:

8. What are some of the precipitating/contributing factors that lead to violence by women within intimate partner relationships?

What role to systemic (explain what this means) factors, such as culture; family; socio-economics (poverty) play?

What role to inter-generational factors play?

What role does age play? (i.e.: adolescents; elderly)

What role does race (and racism) play?

What role do relational factors play?

Helping others:

9. How might your story help other men or women in your situation? Women who use violence?

What would you like to say to other men?

What would you like to say to other women?

About the study:

10. Reflection on the study and interview process.

Are there other questions or ideas that you think are important?

What are your thoughts about the effectiveness of a project like this?

How would you like to see the information shared?

Closing, including a discussion about services and support available.

## *<u>Follow-up Interview Questions – Men/Women</u>*

Follow Up Interview Questions

If the participant chooses to participate in a second interview to review the transcript, he/she will be given access to the transcript of their interview and given an opportunity to read it prior to the 2nd interview.  The following questions will guide the second interview:

1. Is there anything in the interview transcript that you would like to add, change, or clarify?

2. Is there anything else that is important for the researcher to know?

3. What, for you, was the most important thing you talked about in our first meeting?  Why was that important?

4. These are the themes the researchers saw emerging from our interview (then list).  Do these themes reflect what you see as important?  Why or Why not?