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The everyday world as violent: A feminist exploration of the social constructions of violent female offenders.

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THE EVERYDAY WORLD AS VIOLENT:
A FEMINIST EXPLORATION
OF THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIONS OF VIOLENT FEMALE
OFFENDERS.

by
Julie Catherine Hunt

A Thesis
Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research
through the Department of Sociology and Anthropology in
Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the
Degree of Master of Arts at the
University of Windsor

Windsor, Ontario, Canada

1990



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ABSTRACT

This research explores violent crimes by women utilizing an interactionist and feminist framework. Detailed interviews were conducted with women serving time for offenses of violence at Huron Valley Women's Facility; a maximum security penitentiary located in Ypsilanti, Michigan. In accordance with other interactionist research on violence, emphasis is on situational definitions and the impact of self concept on the development of violent interactions. This thesis attempts to move beyond the predominant theoretical models developed in this area by researchers such as Athens (1977;1980), Dietz (1983), Felson (1978), Felson and Steadman (1983), and Luckenbill (1977) by stressing that the concept of power, both in a global and individual sense, is paramount to understanding violence by women. Existing research on female criminality is critically discussed with reference to the sexist etiological views perpetuated in a male dominated society. The conclusion is made that interpersonal violence, specifically violence by women, cannot be understood except with reference to a sociology which is fully cognizant of the pivotal position of gender in society.

This thesis is dedicated to my parents,
Fran and Wayne Hunt, who have taught me
the value of education.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

We live today in turbulent times. The economic, political, and social landscapes are constantly shifting. For many change often inspires fear as has been well documented across history: fear of a changing economy resulting in Black Tuesday and the Great Depression; fear generated by a changing political environment as evidenced by the paranoia of the McCarthy era 'pink lists'. Beyond this, fear of changing social arrangements as reflected by the resurgence of the Parti-Quebecois, the assassination of world leaders, in addition to the race riots of the 1960s in response to the civil rights movement, and of course, fear of the changing role of women in society. From the advent of the birth control pill and the resultant 'sexual revolution' of the late 1960s the challenge by women to a largely patriarchal social order has engendered fear and negative response by the 'first' sex. Today, women's changing roles in society are accompanied by fear of increased property crime and violence by women. The media has, since Simon's (1975) and Adler's (1975) contention that women's liberation and increased crime rates were not only correlative but also causative, created a panic, or at least insightful interest, about increasing rates of crime by women, especially violent crime. Our society arguably

suffers more from this perceived fear of female crime than it does from the actual incidence of female offending. Despite the proliferation of sensationalist television, movie portrayals, and print media using catch phrases such as "black widows" and "the deadlier species" to describe female offending, the relative incidence of violent crime by women has remained consistently lower than that of males.

At every age, in every class, in every country during every historical period, women have committed fewer violent offenses than men (Jones, 1980). Presently violent crime by women accounts for at most approximately ten percent of all criminal violence in North America (Smith, 1988). The pertinent sociological question that arises is why do these differences exist, how can they be adequately explained, and what insight can we gain into the position of women in the social world by examining their violent acts?

Criminological theory and research has focused almost exclusively on male criminality. Historically both popular, sensationalist and academic treatises on violence by women have reflected the biased view that women are motivated by different forces than men. Whereas male criminality has been examined as resulting from socio-economic circumstances, poor socialization and interpersonal character contests, women's motivation has largely been attributed to physiological and psychological factors particular to their sex or their perceived subordinate role

in male/female relationships. From early criminologists Lombrosso and Ferrero (1895) to Pollak (1950) to Cowie, Cowie and Slater (1967) to the more recent work of Dalton (1978) criminologists have perpetuated the inferior status of women¹.

It is only within the last two decades that feminist criminology has developed (cf. Abbott and Wallace, 1990; Currie, 1986; Jones, 1980; Smart, 1976) and "feminist" criminologists have begun to call attention to the male hegemonic domination of the discipline of criminology. The subject of women's criminality has not been a primary focus of inquiry and has remained largely unwritten. Traditionally this has been justified by reference to the relatively low frequency of crimes by women (cf. Heidensohn, 1968; Radzinowicz, 1937; Smith, 1974). For instance, the rate for males of 'crimes against persons' exceeds the rate for females in Canada and the United States by more than eight to one [8:1], whereas the rate for males of 'crimes against property' exceeds the rate for females by approximately four to one [4:1] (Nettler, 1984:106). Thus it is factually correct that women are indeed under-represented in criminal statistics, especially serious

¹ The dominant male ideology has excluded women from the political, economic and cultural realm of life since the beginning of recorded history. For greater than two thousand years women have acted, and been acted upon, under the umbrella of patriarchy best described as paternalistic dominance (Lerner, 1986).

personal crimes. However, statistics alone do not provide an adequate explanation for this lack of interest in, or subsumption of, female criminality. Intimations that women are by 'nature' less criminal (cf. Lombroso and Fererro, 1895; Pollak, 1950; Cowie, et al, 1967) imply the innate moral superiority of women, whereas arguments grounded in socialization theory (cf. Henry and Short, 1967) imply that perhaps society should have males socialized more like females in order to curb criminal activity. Neither of these explanations have been accepted by male dominated criminology, although criminologists in general would agree that gender is the single most important characteristic differentiating criminals from non-criminals. However, obvious biological differences between the sexes do not adequately explain male and female crime in society. Rather, culturally specific behaviour and attitudinal differences must be examined with reference to criminality.

Historically, gender differences have been perpetuated in male dominated academic circles, which until the late 1960s were themselves dominated by functionalist and correctionalist orientations, and reflect a paternalistic society. A necessary prerequisite for an accurate discussion of social reality is the ability to reliably record it. Separate studies of women and crime are therefore a necessary corrective to the imbalance created by male oriented research and theory in criminology and may be a

necessary prerequisite for fully understanding human behaviour, both male and female (Currie, 1986; Jones, 1980; Smart, 1976). The ultimate goal of more research on female offenders should be unitary theories and methods which do not discriminate against either sex while at the same time recognizing the lived experiences of men and women as gendered.

This research examines violent crimes of women as lived experiences from the perspective of feminist theory and methods. This data will allow a comparison to existing theories of violent crime (male violence) in order to address the question of whether or not there are common explanations or whether male and female violence must each be explained from gendered theoretical approaches. Chapter II explores the rationale for a feminist approach to violent crime and examines several general explanations of violent crime. Chapter III critically examines past and present literature on female crime, especially violent crime. Chapter IV discusses methodology used in this research. Chapter V introduces the women of this study and provides detailed life histories and case reconstructions. Chapter VI applies a symbolic interactionist framework to the study of violence by women. Chapter VII discusses the inability of traditional interactionist research on violence to fully explain violent encounters by women and discusses the importance of power, both societal and individual, in

shaping violent acts. Chapter VIII presents a summary of the main findings of this research. It also considers the applicability and generalizability of this research to existing knowledge of crime by women, specifically violent crime, as well as to criminological theory.

CHAPTER II

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical premise of this research is comprised of two levels of analysis. First, a general theoretical foundation is developed. Secondly, theoretical concerns of a specifically criminological nature which centre upon the subject of violence are presented.

The theoretical perspectives which inform this present study represent an attempt to build integrated theory drawn from two sources; feminist theory and symbolic interactionism. The work builds upon that developed by Smith (1987) in The Everyday World as Problematic: A Feminist Sociology, Denzin (1989) in Interpretive Interactionism, and from that proposed by Kirby and McKenna (1989) in Methods From the Margins.

Historically, it has been men who have done the reporting and recording of social reality. Women have existed as marginal persons in an intellectual, political, and cultural world in which they have not been a part of the power and decision making processes. Women's exclusion from a social reality defined by males has its roots in language and the symbols used to construct reality. Language is the most important sign system of human society (Berger and Luckmann, 1967). The naming of objects may, on the surface, appear to be a neutral process; objects exist and need symbols to denote them. However, words and symbols embody a

complicated understanding of values, traditions, and general assumptions about appropriate behaviour. The domination of men over women is a pattern that is entrenched in our language system. Since men were largely responsible for our language and history, they have affected not only our factual knowledge, but also our sense of what is 'natural'. Existing historical accounts inform us that not only were women not political thinkers or contributors to culture, but also that this is a natural phenomenon. The acceptance of the masculine pronoun 'he' in addition to the nominative 'man' as universal of both male and female illustrates the standpoint of women as outside the framed organization of social consciousness (Smith, 1987). Women have thus become objectified--the objects of inquiry of a masculinely defined social discourse. For instance, "it never quite makes sense to do a sociology of men, nor is it clear how it would differ from the sociology we do" (Smith, 1987:74). For this reason, any application of theory is limited unless a history of patriarchal relations, and the maintenance of a bifurcated consciousness, informs the analysis.

Reality, the social world, is not a sui generis objective phenomenon, but rather it is an existential product of human activity which is produced inter-subjectively and then externalised as a reified entity (Berger and Luckmann, 1967). Since women's thought has been imprisoned in a confusing and erroneous patriarchal

framework, the transforming of female consciousness is a precondition for change. The growth of this 'bifurcated consciousness' (Smith, 1987) requires 'Kuhnian' non-rational conversion to a new paradigm². A feminist world view will enable men and women to free themselves from both the concrete and abstract realms of patriarchy so that they can construct a fully human social reality free of hierarchy and oppression. That is not to say that one form of oppression, patriarchy, should be replaced by another, matriarchy, but rather, that an inclusion of women as actual subjects and active constructors, as opposed to objects, within the sociological discourse will result in a more equal world view.³

In order to construct a sociology for and inclusive of women the social structure must be de-reified and the everyday world of experience must be taken as the null point.

The work of the sociologist is to develop a sociology capable of explicating for members of society the social organization of their [male/female] world, including in that experience the ways in which it passes beyond what is immediately and directly known, including also,...., the structure of a bifurcated

² It is Kuhn's (1977) proposition that science, inclusive of Sociology, does not produce privileged knowledge, but merely reflects collective opinion. Thus knowledge is both self-authorized and self-reflexive and subject to change.

³ The relationship between gender oppression and other oppression has been well documented (cf. Davis, 1981; Dill, 1983). Thus an obliteration of one form of oppression may result in an improvement in other societal structures.

consciousness (Smith, 1987:89).

The everyday world is not an abstract, rather it is an actual material setting. Conceptualizing the everyday world as problematic allows us to relocate the sociological subject as an individual located in a real social context. This problematic begins in the actual daily social relations between individuals. It explicates an actual socially organized relation between the everyday world of experience, and social relations in an economically based social order, thereby intertwining the micro-sociological level and the macro-sociological level into a contextual relation.

This is not an ideological explanation that represents women's oppression as having a determinant character nor does it universalize particular experiences of women. Rather, in contrast to existing descriptive methodologies which construct third versions out of contending versions thereby constituting the objectivity of the world as a product of inquiry, this perspective proposes to explicate the same world as that of people's actions and experiences (Smith, 1987). It should also be clarified that this is not a perspective to be used solely by women in understanding women. Rather, it applies to any group that has been traditionally oppressed by the existing power relations and ignored by the universal white male voice of authority, such as ethnic minorities, homosexuals, and members of the lower classes.

If the every day world provides the starting point for inquiry, it is thus the perceptions and experiences of the individual actor which are important to understand in order to reliably record how social reality is constructed and how these individual actions and experiences are integrated into the larger social order. Symbolic interactionism provides a framework for discussing these perceptions and experiences.

In conjunction with the theoretical biases of this researcher and their application to the research at hand, it should be noted that the term symbolic interactionism will be used herein as it applies to the tradition of the Meadian Chicago school. Social reality is the result of ongoing negotiations between mutually involved sets of actors (Cosser, 1977). Thus, it is only by taking the role of the other and empathetically placing oneself into the flux of the social exchanges that the sociological researcher is able to make sense out of society and human interaction (Cosser, 1977; Rock, 1979; Ericson, 1975). Symbolic interactionists place emphasis on how the process of interaction mediates between the attributes of the individual and society (Turner, Beegley, and Powers, 1989:476). According to Blumer (1969:2), the basic tenets of symbolic interactionism are:

- 1> human beings act towards things on the basis of meanings
- 2> meanings are derived through social interaction
- 3> meanings are handled and modified through an

interpretive process.

Thus human interaction always takes place in a situation that confronts an actor and the actor subsequently acts on the basis of the definition of the situation that confronts him/her.

There are two kinds of situations that confront an actor: the objective situation and the subjective situation⁴ (Stebbins, 1975). The objective situation is comprised of, "(T)he immediate social and physical surroundings and the current physiological and psychological state of the actor" (Stebbins, 1975:6). Whereas, the subjective situation is comprised of, "...those elements of the objective situation seen by the actor to affect any of his[her] action orientations and must, therefore, be given meaning before he[she] can act" (Stebbins, 1975:7). Multiple actors can experience the same objective situation, but each will define a unique situation dependent on their cultural predispositions. However, this uniqueness of situations does not preclude generalizability:

(U)niqueness does not imply that nothing is shared with other individuals, only that not everything is common to them (Kaplan, 1964:117 as cited in Stebbins, 1975:11).

⁴ It should be noted that Stebbins' use of the term "objective situation" does not pose an epistemological question. Rather, the term is used to simply connote the total collection of situational elements and their interrelationship from which the actor constructs his/her subjective situation.

Thus it is the goal of situational research, such as the present study, to produce general statements about "classes of definitions" used by identifiable groups in particular but recurrent situations (Stebbins, 1975:11).

Individuals are active constructors of their daily experiences who interpret, evaluate, and define their own action, as opposed to passive beings who are acted upon (Homans, 1950). Conduct does not occur in a vacuum; people act in relation to their definition of the situation. Thus symbolic interactionism will prove useful in conceptualizing female inmates' interpretations of their particular situation, particularly the sequence of actions leading to their incarceration.

Conventional theoretical approaches to the study of violent crime have generally followed two paths: (1) they have sought the causes or correlates of violent crime by pursuing aggregate studies and/or (2) they have sought such causes in the personal make-up of the individual offender (Blumer, 1980). Both of these approaches, the external pattern approach and the personality approach, concentrate on causative factors as opposed to examining the violent act itself or the experience of the violent actor with regard to the formation and execution of his/her act:

...this is the reason why both of the conventional approaches fail in so many ways to explain criminal behaviour, such as their inability to answer the following questions: (a) why do so many individuals not engage in violent behaviour even though they have all of the characteristics of the

aggregate population that is declared to have high causative or correlative relation with violent behaviour; and (b) why does an offender with a constant personality make-up vary so pronouncedly in whether or not he [she] engages in violent behaviour even though his [her] situations are objectively alike (Athens, 1980:xi).

Thus the study of actual violent behaviour, in contrast to a study of causative factors of violence, must examine how the individual actor defines the situation in which he/she is placed and subsequently why he/she chooses to pursue a violent solution to the situation. Since violence, like all behaviour, is constructed within a situation by its participants the major substantive approach guiding research on the processual dynamics of violence is based in Symbolic Interactionism. The interactionist approach applied to violence stresses the role of situational identities, or self images, in interaction (cf. Athens, 1980;1977; Felson, 1978; Felson and Steadman, 1983; Luckenbill, 1977). For example, Luckenbill (1977), borrowing the dramaturgical metaphors of Goffman (1969;1967;1963), examines "character contests" or "face games" resulting in homicidal interactions in "situated transactions". Similarly, Felson (1978) discusses the importance of retaliation for maintaining a favourable situational identity, and cites evidence suggesting that retaliation reflects face-saving concerns. Athens (1980;1977) relies on Blumer's (1969) differentiation between the self as object and the self as

process in order to emphasize the relatedness of symbolic interactionism to the study of violence. The self as object refers to one's self-image: "an actor develops a self image by looking at him[her]self and then judging what he[she] sees" (Athens,1980:16;1977:57). This is accomplished by taking the role of the other. The second aspect of self, the self as process, refers to the fact that humans interact with themselves. This self-indication involves imaginatively placing oneself in the role of the other. It is the generalized other that provides the link between self as object and self as process. Through interaction with both self and others the actor is able to both define and then judge the situations which confront him or her (Athens, 1980;1977).

This 'interactional' approach to the study of violence provides a favourable alternative to longitudinal analysis of individual histories or statistical analysis of ascribed characteristics because, "violence is, in part, situationally determined-the result of events and circumstances that cause a conflict to escalate" (Felson and Steadman, 1983:61). Unfortunately, none of the existing interactional approaches towards understanding violence are centred in understanding violence by women.

The experiences of women, violent and non-violent, have been ignored and/or subsumed by a masculinely defined social discourse. The universal linguistic convention of the

nominative 'man' or the pronoun 'he' is more than simply convention. Theories have been developed by men based on research of men. Thus while research on violent crime among males can provide some possible directions for research on violent female criminals, there is little research that is useful in understanding violent criminal acts within a gendered historical and interpretive context. In order to redress the imbalance created by male oriented research and theory there is a need to study the individual experiences of women:

We need to reclaim, name and re-name our experience and thus our knowledge of this social world we live in and daily help to construct, because only by doing so will it become truly ours, ours to use and do with as we will (Stanley and Wise, 1983:205 as cited in Kirby and McKenna, 1989:17).

Knowledge is power and therefore research is in itself a tool of domination (Kirby and McKenna, 1989). The institutionalization of the research process within a predominantly white, middle and upper class male domain has left women as well as critical scholars in a weak position to contribute to knowledge production and in terms of shaping public policy. Shifting the power dynamics of gender requires integrating research and action--praxis. C. Wright Mills (1959) has argued that the theoretical purpose of sociology should be the transformation of private troubles into public issues. Those in positions of power would argue that our North American society has accomplished

this by establishing various ministries and departments concerned with specific areas such as housing, public health, women's issues, corrections, etc. However, detaching these concerns from their subjects; bureaucratizing private troubles with the public domain merely ensures that,

...personal troubles become no more than public issues framed and contained within the public media, and that they do not become the basis of political organization uncontrolled by the institutional structures of state and relations of ruling (Smith, 1987:217).

The public issue of crime can only be understood in the antecedents of its personal troubles. Violence by women is very much a public issue; one that has recently been at the forefront of the media. Understanding the interpersonal dynamics that culminate in violence within the context of larger structural factors is the first step to understanding violence by women, and indeed, violence in general.

CHAPTER III

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Traditional criminology has maintained a predominantly male focus. Literature on female criminality is limited in comparison. The pioneer work on female criminality is that of Lombrosso and Fererro (1895). Based upon the now discredited concepts of atavism and social Darwinism, and following Lombrosso's earlier work on male criminals, Lombrosso and Fererro studied the biological attributes of female offenders. They studied photographs, measured skulls, counted freckles and noted other physical characteristics in order to formulate an index of female criminality based upon de-evolution or atavism. They found fewer physical consistencies among female criminals and therefore concluded that women are not as far along the evolutionary scale. Thus, because the female was seen as naturally more primitive than the male her prospects for degeneration were also fewer. However, the female in her "degenerative stage" made up for her rarity with extreme cruelty and violence. Lombrosso's and Fererro's thesis is completely ahistorical. It neglects important social factors such as the socio-economic status of women, the legal system and other systems of social control, in addition to the structural composition of society in the western world, namely capitalism. Despite its theoretical and empirical bankruptcy, the work of Lombrosso and Fererro

(1895) is widely cited as the ideological framework for other biologically determinist approaches to the study of female crime.

Pollak (1950) resurrected this biological-positivist approach, but integrated it with social-psychological factors in his attempt to unmask the full extent of female criminality. He suggested that women have the potential to equal men in their rates of crime. However, due to their inherent powers of deceit and manipulation women appear to be less criminal than their male counterparts. He postulated that woman's natural ability to manipulate and deceive is due to her lack of a penis:

Man must achieve an erection in order to perform the sex act and will not be able to hide his failure ...Woman's body, however, permits such pretence to a certain degree and lack of orgasm does not prevent her ability to participate in the sex act. It cannot be denied that this basic physiological difference may well have a great influence on the degree of confidence which the two sexes have in the possible success of concealment and thus on their character pattern in this respect (Pollak, 1950:10).

Women, according to Pollak, are under-represented in criminal statistics because they are the instigators rather than the perpetrators of crime. He contends that women manipulate men into performing their crimes for them. This 'femme fatale' view of women did not originate with Pollak, but rather has its origins in the Old and New Testaments. One need look no further than the Bible to see the

operationalization of the duality of woman as the polarization of both good and evil; Madonna and Whore. Pollak (1950), building on Freud's work, also draws connections between menstruation, pregnancy, menopause and crime. For instance, Pollak accounts for crime during menstruation as an act of vengeance by women for the conformation of their inferior status, whereas menopause is associated with depression and irritability and consequently crime. Pollak's work is based on the flawed assumption that all women desire to be men. He has followed a folkloric notion of male superiority and attempted to imbed this assumption in theory which is deterministic and unscientific. He failed to take into consideration the differential power structure existing between men and women, as well as the differences in cultural expectations within the sexual realm. Pollak's work is not, however, entirely without merit, for he does point out the unreliability of official statistics.

Other researchers have attempted to control for the various criticisms levelled at Pollak while still maintaining the validity of biologically determined causes of female crime. Dalton (1978) also studied the relationship between the menstrual cycle and crime. Her study revealed that fifty-seven percent of her sample had committed their offenses during either the twelve pre or post menstrual days or during the cycle itself. Campbell

(1981) points out the unintended humour in Dalton's thesis; that if we accept the validity of these results then the entire risk time of any given woman would approximate seventy-five percent of her life. Despite empirical medical evidence, researchers have not abandoned attempts to connect the relationship between women and crime to the inherent biological or psychological nature of women.

Other researchers have attempted to link female criminality to chromosomal abnormalities as well as to chemical and hormonal imbalances. Cowie, Cowie and Slater (1968) maintain that the ascribed differences between the sexes are fundamental in explaining crime. They suggest that females have lower rates of crime due to their chromosomal and hormonal structure. Cowie et al., (1968:171) associate deviance with the presence of the Y chromosome and the "masculine pattern of psychosomatic constitution". These researchers have confused biologically determined sex with socially defined gender. Cowie et al., (1968), in addition to Lombroso and Fererro (1895) and Pollak (1950), are unable to conceive of the female population outside the traditional, male defined, stereotypical roles. All of these researchers attempt to explain female criminality in isolation from structural, historical and cultural factors and are thus left with no alternative than to cite biological and psychological factors at the expense of proper theory.

This search for a simple causal factor in female crime ... is indicative of a certain attitude towards women which infers that simple, biologically-based, causal factors can explain the motivation and reasoning of complex, culturally located and socially meaningful acts (Smart, 1976:52).

The explanation of female criminality in terms of the social differentiation of gender roles represents one of the first attempts to analyze female criminality in other than biological or psychological terms. The 'role convergence hypothesis' is one such explanation. This hypothesis asserts that, "as the social roles of the sexes are equalized, the difference between the sexes in terms of crime rates is diminished" (Nettler, 1978:24). For the purpose of discussion this role convergence hypothesis may be broken down so as to offer explanations relating to (1) role convergence and socialization, and (2) role convergence and opportunity (Weisheit, 1984).

With regard to role convergence and socialization, it is hypothesized that the female crime rate varies inversely with the rate involvement of females in the familial role and directly with the rate of female participation in the extrafamilial [more male oriented] roles (Fox and Hartnagel, 1979:98).

A similar relationship is postulated between role convergence and opportunity; as economic opportunities expand female crime rates, especially in the area of property crime, will increase (Simon, 1975; Fox and Hartnagel, 1979; Giordano, Kerbal, and Dudley, 1981).

The role convergence hypothesis, disregarding the

distinction between role convergence and socialization or role convergence and opportunity, has been closely linked with the North American women's liberation movement. Role theorists such as Simon (1975) and Adler (1975) were not, however, the first to attempt to link female crime rates with the liberation of women. Cecil Bishop (1931) premised a similar hypothesis. The major difference between Bishop and more recent role theorists is that Bishop associated the emancipation of women from traditional roles with the negative consequence of greater criminality, whereas Adler and Simon view emancipation in a more favourable light with the end result being the same. This raises an important question not addressed by role theorists: does liberation have to mean crime and violence, which implies liberation of the female gender role in favour of the masculine gender role, but not liberation in a larger sense? Further criticisms of role theory include Smart's (1976) twofold contention that role theorists fail to situate the discussion of sex roles within a structural explanation of the social origins of these roles, and in addition, that role theorists fail to discuss motivation and intention as an integral part of female criminality. Similarly, Currie (1986) does not deny the importance of the women's movement, however, she argues that role theory is ahistorical and consequently reductionist for it fails to consider economic and political changes in relationship to the historical

emergence of the women's movement. Moreover, the present researcher firmly denies the causal relationship suggested by role theorists and maintains that the recent gains of women as measured through status, income, education, and social expectations are not as great as the role theorists would have us believe.

Since small groups, or subcultures, reflect the social structure of society, researchers have also attempted to gain insight into female criminality by examining it from this group level of analysis. Most of the research surrounding group level analysis of crime centres around the topic of gangs, and is usually more concerned with delinquency than with adult crime. There is little evidence of gang behaviour among females and hence little evidence that female gang behaviour is approximating that of male gangs. There is, however, some supporting evidence that females are most likely to commit illegal acts in the presence of, or under pressure from, mixed gangs (Giordano, 1978; Giordano and Cernkovich, 1979). These studies conclude that males serve as 'educators' for the females within mixed sex gangs. Other studies, such as the one conducted by Bowker, Gross, and Klein (1980), suggest that there is a discrimination factor at work within the subculture of gangs. Steffensmeier (1980;1983) and Steffensmeier and Terry (1986) also cite the absence of viable criminal subcultures and the existence of

'institutionalized sexism' within the underworld. Thus, gangs do not provide a counter-culture, but rather a microcosm of American society (Campbell, 1984).

There exists little agreement as to the extent of female crime⁵ and subsequent interpretations. Researchers have attempted to account for the frequency of female crime from many levels of analysis. It is, however, difficult to theorize about the nature of female crime when there is not yet agreement about the frequency, or changes in frequency, of female crime.

The majority of American researchers utilize the Uniform Crime Rate [UCR] statistics published annually by the Federal Bureau of Investigation. These UCR statistics are the only continuous nationwide data available which provide the number of arrests in a given year broken down by such variables as age and sex. The validity of these statistics has repeatedly been called into question by a number of researchers (cf. Giordano, Kerbal, and Dudley, 1981; Steffensmeier, 1978; 1980; Hindelang, 1979). It has been asserted that the use of UCR arrest data without the use of secondary sources has led to many methodological and conceptual shortcomings. Giordano, et al (1981) cite three serious limitations of employing UCR statistics without the supplementary sources. First, most analyses of crime rates

⁵ For a detailed discussion on the limitations of official statistics see Won Lee (1983).

only examine short periods of time (cf. Steffensmeier, 1978; Simon, 1975). Moreover, these statistics were not created until the 1930s and observation in a longer historical context is necessary if we are ever to determine the full extent and ramifications of female crime. Second, the use of UCR statistics alone limits analyses to only a few broad offence categories. For instance, the broad category of fraud can include passing cheques of little value to stock fraud of thousands of dollars. Third, the use of Uniform Crime Rate statistics does not allow the researcher to ascertain anything about the individual characteristics of the women who comprise these statistics such as social class, race or education. In addition, Steffensmeier (1980) adds to this list of limitations: UCR statistics do not take into account population changes in both size and composition, nor do they control for differences in the initial base levels of arrest thereby often artificially inflating female gains.

Violent behaviour, especially that which results in death, is the most statistically reliable form of criminal behaviour to study as the presence of a body implies the occurrence of a crime. Research on specifically violent criminal behaviour has yielded a diversification of data and a multiplicity of theoretical schemes to account for this behaviour. Literature in this area can be broadly categorized as (1) an analysis of statistical data and other

evidence attempting to illustrate trends and patterns (cf. Pittman and Handy, 1964; Hepburn and Voss, 1970; Wolfgang, 1958); (2) an analysis of the pathology of the individual offender (cf. Carrol and Fuller, 1971; Fisher, 1970; Megargee, 1966; 1973); or (3) an analysis of social psychological factors as manifested in a 'subcultural normative system' (cf. Ball-Rokeach, 1973; Ferracuti and Wolfgang, 1973; Wolfgang and Ferracuti, 1967a; 1967b). These aforementioned categories for the study of violence are premised on the notion of positivism and thus have two basic shortcomings. First, they ignore the fact that human conduct is situated in interaction, and, second, they imply passivity, as opposed to conscious action, on the part of the individual (Athens, 1980).

The 'interactional' approach to the study of violence provides a favourable alternative to longitudinal analysis of individual histories or the statistical analysis of ascribed characteristics. Athens (1977; 1980), Block (1977), Dietz (1983), Luckenbill (1977) and Felson and Steadman (1983) are among researchers who recognize the importance of dynamic interaction in a homicide situation. These theorists hold that the outcome of an aggressive interaction is not predetermined by the characteristics or initial goals of the participants; "violence is, in part, situationally determined - the result of events and circumstances that cause a conflict to escalate" (Felson and

Steadman, 1983:61).

Some interactionists have attempted to delineate patterns or stages of violent interaction. Luckenbill (1977) examines the organization and development of seventy transactions in which murder was the result of an interchange between an offender and victim. He breaks down the various dynamics of the "situated performance" into six processual categories. First, the violent encounter is initiated by an event performed by the victim and subsequently defined by the offender as an "offense to face"; that is a verbal or physical action interpreted as negatively affecting one's image of self. Second, the pivotal event is interpreted by the offender as personally offensive. Third, the offender then retaliates with a "facesaving" verbal or physical challenge. Fourth, the victim then accepts or declines the challenge. Fifth, the commitment to battle is ensured either verbally or through the acquisition of props or weapons. Finally, the victim's demise marks the end of the violent transaction and the offender must choose to either flee the scene, or voluntarily remain at the scene, unless of course he\she is involuntarily detained by an audience. On the basis of the recurring nature of these processual categories Luckenbill (1977:186) concludes that murder is the outcome of a dynamic interchange between participants, at least one of whom agrees that violence is, "a useful tool for resolving

questions of face and character". Felson and Steadman (1983) are among other researchers who concur with Luckenbill's (1977) argument that violence is the result of the processual development of a dynamic interchange. Similar to Felson (1978), Felson and Steadman (1983) examine the role of retaliation for maintaining a "favourable situational identity" in interaction leading to violence. Reconstruction of one hundred and fifty-nine cases leads Felson and Steadman (1983:72) to conclude that,

...each participant's actions were a function of the other person's behaviour and the implication of that behaviour for defending one's well being as well as one's honour.

Similar to Luckenbill (1977), Felson and Steadman (1983) postulate three stages in the processual development of homicides and assaults. The first stage involves verbal conflict in which identities are attacked. The second stage involves threatening behaviour or evasive acts; it is at this stage that mediation, if it is to occur, will happen. The third and final stage postulated by Felson and Steadman (1983) is that of physical aggression culminating in violence.

Hepburn (1973) is yet another interactionist who attempts to delineate the processual development of violence. Hepburn diverges from the previously mentioned interactionist theorists in that he stresses the holistic integration of structural factors and processual

developments and concludes that:

(T)he factors which facilitate a violent response are: a pervasive norm of violence referred to as the subculture of violence; the actor's prior experience with violence in similar situations; the presence of intoxicants; the overt and/or covert support of the audience to the interaction; and, the perceived cost of failure (Hepburn, 1973:427).

Athens (1977;1980) is similar to Hepburn in that he too advocates the examination of more than categories of processual development alone. Rather, Athens presents an empirically based analysis of violent crime suggesting that actors commit violent acts on the basis of their definition of the situation. Thus, it is categories of definitions that interests Athens as opposed to categories of processual development. Athens develops a typology of situational definitions that may be employed by the actor in his or her decision to act violently. In addition, Athens (1977; 1980) also links the offenders' self images to their interpretations of situations. In examining the relationship between self image and definition of the situation, Athens (1977; 1980) found that actors with non-violent self concepts committed their crimes in situations where they had formed physically defensive interpretations. On the other hand, those actors with incipient violent self images committed their crimes in situations they interpreted as either physically defensive or frustrative-malefic. In addition, those actors with violent self concepts tended to

commit violent acts in situations interpreted as malefic, frustrative, frustrative malefic and physically defensive.

The conclusion drawn by Athens (1977;1980) is that these various typologies of interpretations of situations and self images exist due to a difference in the "generalized others" possessed by the actor thereby giving credence to the argument put forth by Hepburn (1973) that suggests that processual development of violent situations should be examined in conjunction with other factors such as the existence of a subculture of violence.

None of the aforementioned interactionist approaches towards understanding violence are centred in understanding violence by women. Although their presence may be implied [as is evident in Athens (1980) and Dietz (1983) who do at least include a few women among their samples], we do not as yet possess the basic components and resources of adequate documentation for a wide range, uni-gender analysis of female deviance.

Specific literature on the relationship of women and violence is sparse and can be broadly categorized into one of three main venues. First, much of what exists is sensationalist historical accounts of individual cases lacking in academic, criminological merit (cf. Hugget and Berry, 1956; Kuncl and Einstein, 1985; Sparrow, 1970; Wilson, 1971). A second broad category of literature on violence by women involves a concentration on relationship

specific homicides and/or assaults (cf. Barnard et al., 1982; Browne, 1986;1987; Fiora-Gormally, 1978; Goetting, 1988). Although often insightful, this research is too relationship specific or situationally specific to give insight into the plethora of factors culminating in violent acts by women. The third category of literature is that which examines violent encounters by women from a quantitative statistical approach. Such research offers statistical profiles based on aggregate data such as the involvement of weapons, time of offense, the involvement of intoxicants, the ascribed and achieved characteristics of the offender and victim, as well as the relationship between offender and victim (cf. Block, 1985; Browne and Flewelling, 1986; Goetting, 1987; 1988; Palmer and Humphrey, 1982; Rasko; 1981; Silverman and Kennedy, 1987; Totman, 1978; Weisheit, 1986; Wilbanks, 1982; Wolfgang, 1958).

The most complete work to date is Jones' (1980) Women Who Kill. This social history of female murderers in the United States discusses homicidal patterns linked to multiple factors such as race, class, sexual bigotry, criminal law, feminism; all of which may reflect 'cultural deformities' entrenched in a sexual division of labour. However, while Jones (1980) provides a strong critique of sexist etiological views set forth by many other authors, she fails theoretically to provide systematic analysis of why women kill. Rather she concentrates on male reaction to

violence by women within a paternalistic society. This is in itself an important factor to recognize, yet it still falls short of providing a theoretical framework for the analysis of violence by women.

Like all crime, violent crime by women is not a monolithic, easily explainable act. Similarly, those individuals who commit violent crimes cannot be treated as a homogenous group. Violence is undeniably situational and more research is therefore needed on the unique processual developments of violent encounters than is currently available. While research on violent crime among males can provide some possible directions for research on violent female criminals, there is little research that is useful in understanding violent criminal acts by women within a gendered historical and interpretive context. The definitive criminology which includes women as anything other than a sub-species or afterthought remains to be written. The research study which follows provides a preliminary step towards addressing the issue of women and violence.

CHAPTER IV

METHODOLOGY

Methodology, theory, and ideology are all inextricably intertwined. The use of qualitative methods is the primary method of analysis specific to the theoretical perspective of symbolic interactionism. Thus the research methods espoused herein build on the notion that social interactions form the basis of social knowledge; that knowledge is socially constructed, subject to change, and has been utilized as a tool of domination since power differences have resulted in a commodification of knowledge. It is the goal of this research to aid in moving one step closer to a new paradigm of knowledge; specifically to move towards a greater understanding of women and violence. This research did not set out to test any predetermined hypothesis. Rather, in keeping with a symbolic interactionist and grounded theory approach, "...understanding or explanations are induced from data with which the investigator has become thoroughly familiar" (Wallace and Wolf, 1985:236).

A major problem with much of the research done to date involves the omission of women as subjects of inquiry. Researchers often assume similar experience on the part of males and females with regard to issues such as involvement with certain aspects of the criminal justice system. However, if the experience of women is not part of the research sample and the results are generalized to both

males and females then the result is that women are both misrepresented and marginalized (Kirby and McKenna, 1989). Alternatively, women are simply ignored. Thus in order to de-marginalize women within the realm of criminology, qualitative methods, specifically intensive nonstandardized interviews, were employed in an attempt to capture the experiences of women.

Before addressing the methods in detail it is first necessary to describe the research site; inclusive of both problems of gaining access and ethical considerations, as research is undoubtedly affected by the circumstances in which it is situated.

The Research Setting; Ethical and Access Considerations

Gaining access is an integral part of the research process. As Lofland and Lofland indicate, "it is one thing to decide for yourself about interest, appropriateness, accessibility and ethics; it is quite another to get all interested parties to go along with your plan" (1984:20). This statement proved to be all too painfully true. It was the original intent of this researcher to complete this study in a Canadian prison; specifically the Prison for Women in Kingston, Ontario. This was chosen as the ideal site as it is Canada's only federal penitentiary for women. Moreover, the number of Canadian women serving time for violent criminal acts is small enough to feasibly interview

all of them.

A letter was written to both the warden of this institution and the Director General of Research Canada requesting permission to interview willing participants. The warden replied that she had no say in the matter and would go along with what ever the "ministry" said. The government response, after a great many telephone calls at the researcher's expense, was that these women are "over studied" and perhaps the researcher would consider a re-evaluation of her proposed thesis. Further inquiry asking that this 'supposed plethora' of research on federally incarcerated women be made available to the researcher [as her extensive literature review had not unearthed it] resulted in a barrage of other excuses for non-access such as:

- there is already one graduate student working here;
- your presence within the institution might be disruptive and peacekeeping is essential;
- the Elizabeth Frye Society is currently undertaking an enormous study and further research is not necessary at this point,
- you'll have to wait until the Moore Inquiry [investigating the alleged suicide of an inmate] is over.

This last excuse sparked a glimmer of hope for the researcher and she sat patiently (?) awaiting the end of the inquest. The machinations of bureaucracy grind excruciatingly slowly, and so after a period of a few months

it became blatantly obvious that alternative plans would have to be made if the project was going to ever get off the ground.

Alternatively, arrangements were then made with Huron Valley Women's Facility in Ypsilanti, Michigan through contacts provided by Dr. M. L. Dietz. Copies of the academic proposal were sent to the necessary parties, an appointment was made with the Deputy Warden of the prison, and access was gained.

Huron Valley Women's Facility is a maximum security penitentiary located in Ypsilanti, Michigan. Built in 1976 with a capacity of 250 residents it now houses close to 600. Aesthetically, Huron Valley has a pleasing appearance both inside and out. The grounds are well groomed. There are no guard towers surrounding the property, although inconspicuous corner towers surround the men's super maximum facility next door. Rather, the women's facility is fenced and topped with coils of barbed wire or razor ribbon. There are nine separate housing units on the grounds which are categorized according to the security classification of the inmate. There are no bars visible within the institution and originally all inmates had their own rooms. Because of the current problem of overcrowding in the Michigan prison system, many women are now forced to live in dormitory style arrangements. For instance, the gymnasium has been filled with rows of bunk beds and many of the lounges/studies

currently house upwards of six women each. The women are housed according to their security level with those with the highest security risk having individual rooms. Although Huron Valley Women's Facility is classified as a maximum security institution; levels 4 and 5, women of lower security classifications such as 2 and 3 are housed here as well. In addition, special handling units such as 'Protective Environment' and 'Segregation' exist.

Huron Valley also has an Activities Building incorporating classrooms for high school, college, and technical studies. In addition, separate buildings provide other programs and/or services, i.e., chapel, graphic arts building which prints the prison newspaper for both the men's and women's facility, the Michigan State Industries factory which produces chair cushions and license tags, and a newly built kennel for a yet to be instituted program training seeing eye dogs.

Interviews with the residents of Huron Valley were conducted, for the most part, in the Visitor's Room. This is a large room furnished with clusters of chairs and coffee tables. There is a large toy box and crib filled with a variety of toys and stuffed animals. All regular prison visits take place in this room or, weather permitting, in the courtyard directly outside. Although the majority of interviews were conducted in this room between the hours of 9:00 am and 3:00 pm, the researcher was not considered a

visitor. This was important as the number of visits allotted each inmate per month is closely regulated. This researcher felt that she would be 'punishing' the residents; cutting in on their time with family and friends, if she was classified as a visitor. Thus, it was arranged that she be given a 'special visitor' pass similar to those given to lawyers and counsellors. In fact, those interviews that did not occur in the Visitor's Room, due to scheduling or cleaning conflicts, were conducted in the Attorney's Room; a small enclave off the main Visitor's Room.

Research with human subjects undoubtedly requires ethical considerations. The women involved in this study were fully briefed about the nature of the research. A cover letter was circulated describing the purpose of the research, the mode of research, guaranteeing anonymity and confidentiality, and requesting voluntary participation [see Appendix A]. As a further precaution both the researcher and the participants signed a consent form in triplicate; one copy for the subject, one copy for the researcher, and one copy for the prison administration [see Appendix B].

A Question of Respondent Reliability

A recurring criticism of qualitative methodology, more specifically nonstandardized interviews, is what reassurance does the researcher have that the informant is telling the truth? In other words how reliable is the data?

First of all the reader must be aware that in any verbal dialogue there is both objective, factual information [i.e., "I picked up the gun, walked across the room and shot him"] and subjective, attitudinal information [i.e., "I'm feeling very depressed"]. While in evaluating respondents' statements the researcher does indeed try to distinguish between subjective and objective components, objective truth is not the ultimate goal of the interviewer. In fact, since reality is socially constructed, "truth" becomes a matter of majority consensus. Therefore, a respondent's sentiments may change depending upon the social situation, inclusive of the interview situation, in which she finds herself. Thus, it is the goal of the interviewer to understand the social construction of reality as manifested through the statements of the respondent. As Dean and Foote Whyte (1969:105) state,

(T)he informant's statement represents merely the perception of the informant, filtered and modified by his [her] cognitive and emotional reactions and reported through his [her] personal verbal usages.

It is the way in which an individual interprets a given situation and its subsequent meaning for him/her that is important to understand when undertaking qualitative interviewing. That is not to say that the researcher accepts the respondents' accounts at face value. As Dietz (1983) points out there is a tendency for those imprisoned to present their accounts in a self-serving manner. That is, they tend to describe their own involvement in the

criminal act in the best possible light.

This self-serving type of distortion may not be only in regard to the homicide [or other crime], but also to conceal any other illegal activity that may be found out (Dietz, 1983:40).

However, self-serving behaviour is not exclusive to the inmate population. Most persons, incarcerated or living in the free world, desire to present themselves in the best possible manner. The distortion of events may be controlled for in a variety of ways (Dean and Foote Whyte, 1969). First, by comparing subjects' accounts with those given by other sources; in this case those accounts recorded in the newspapers and/or those accounts given by other inmates. Secondly, detecting distortion can also be accomplished by screening for implausibility; does the respondents' story make sense, is it contradictory? Thirdly, by stressing to the respondent that the researcher is in no way able to influence, positively or negatively, the respondents' current situation any ulterior motives on the part of the respondent should be quelled. Finally, the researcher should in no way impart her biases and/or values on the situation so as to influence the interview situation (Dean and Foote Whyte, 1969).

It is this researcher's firm belief that her rapport with her subjects was such that any and all information gathered from the subjects is indeed indicative of their point of view in defining the situation which resulted in

their incarceration.

Data Collection and Analysis

Interactive, or nonstandardized (Denzin, 1989b:104-106), interviews were employed in order to gain insight into the background, attitudes, perceptions, and emotions of the incarcerated women. The goal of qualitative interviewing is to construct records of action in progress from a variety of people who have likely performed these actions (Lofland, 1976). Participant observation, although equally effective in gaining insight into the actions and feelings of the subjects, is not possible with violent offenders unless the researcher is incarcerated with them or has knowledge of a pending offence. Furthermore, it has been suggested that the bulk of participant observation is probably gathered through informal interviews and supplemented by observation (Lofland and Lofland, 1984).

The nonstandardized interview schedule as an instrument of data collection indicates an awareness that individuals have unique ways of defining their world. This particular interview strategy also assumes that no fixed sequence of questions is appropriate to all respondents. Moreover, the nonstandardized interview enables the researcher to develop greater rapport with subjects thereby removing some of the Interviewer-Interviewee hierarchy of inequality.

The nondirective interviewer's function is primarily to serve as a catalyst to a

comprehensive expression of the subject's feelings and beliefs and of the frame of reference within which his [her] feelings and beliefs take on personal significance. To achieve this result, the interviewer must create a completely permissive atmosphere, in which the subject is free to express him[her]self without fear of disapproval, admonition or dispute and without advice from the interviewer (Selltiz et al., 1965:268).

This research strategy allows the observer to learn how to define situations from the perspective of those being studied.

Fieldnotes were also collected for the duration of the prison visits. As is customary in deviance research (cf. Dietz, 1968; Prus and Irini, 1980; Callaghan, 1985) records were kept by jotting down notes after each encounter and writing them out formally once at home.

Lofland and Lofland (1984) describe the analysis of qualitative data as dual-phaseal. First, the data must be filed and coded, and second, the data must be organized into the written report.

For the purpose of filing and coding, the tape recorded interviews and fieldnotes were transcribed using an IBM Wordperfect computer program. It was the original intent of the researcher to use a computer software package specifically designed to code and file qualitative data, such as GATOR or ASKSAM. However, previous personal experience coupled with the experience of others (cf. Matheson, 1989) indicated that this methodology would not

contribute to the analysis.

The biographical information, with stress on "epiphanies" (Denzin, 1989a:129); those existentially problematic moments, or 'turning-point' interactional episodes, in the lives of individuals, collected from the subjects were transcribed in order to provide "thick description" (Denzin, 1989a; Ryle, 1968; Geertz, 1973) for the purpose of interpretation.

A 'thick description' has the following features: (1) it gives the context of an act; (2) it states the intentions and meanings that organize the action; (3) it traces the evolution and development of the act; (4) it presents the action as a text that can then be interpreted. A 'thin description' simply reports facts, independent of intentions or the circumstances that surround an action (Denzin, 1989a:33).

Once transcriptions were complete, the researcher attempted to 'make sense' of the data through the use of "thinking units" (Lofland and Lofland, 1984:73). These various lists of topical categories were then colour-coded and 'cut and pasted' into categorical files which reflected both interviewee identification; number and date, and recurring concepts.

From here 'interpretive interactionism' took place (Denzin, 1989). Similar to that provided by Lofland and Lofland (1984), but more in depth, this is a methodological framework for the purpose of data analysis.

Interpretive interactionism⁶ involves six steps. First, the research question is framed. In this instance a more grounded, inductive approach was used and no specific questions were framed. Rather, the category for research was broadly framed as that involving women and violence. Second, existing literature is reviewed, deconstructed, exposing any existing biases and inadequacies [refer to Literature Review]. Third, the researcher locates multiple instances of the phenomenon being questioned in the natural world. In this case Huron Valley Women's Facility provided multiple instances of women who had engaged in violent criminal behaviour. Fourth, the phenomenon must be 'bracketed'. The term bracketing is borrowed from the work of Husserl (1913[1962:86]) and means that the subject matter is confronted and extracted from the natural world so that its essential features may be examined. In the present study this was accomplished through intensive interviewing and the coding system espoused by Lofland and Lofland (1984). Fifth, the subject matter is 'constructed'; ordered, classified and reassembled -- "the goal of construction is to re-create lived experiences in terms of its constituent, analytic elements (Denzin, 1989a:59).

⁶ Interpretive interactionism is Denzin's (1989a;1989b) attempt to connect symbolic interactionism with the phenomenological works of Heidegger and the tradition of hermeneutics, while also incorporating work in feminist school theory (cf. Smith, 1987) and the critical-biographical method formulated by Mills, Sartre, and Merleau-Ponty (Denzin, 1989a).

Again, similar to Lofland and Lofland's (1984) idea of "thinking units" where data is extracted, classified and reassembled through the cutting and pasting and filing of topical categories. The final step is 'contextualization'; relocating the phenomenon in the social world and illustrating how lived experiences alter and shape the phenomenon being studied (Denzin, 1989a:48-60). It is this final step of contextualization which provides the body of the following analytical chapters.

CHAPTER V

CASE RECONSTRUCTIONS

To assist the reader in understanding the experiences of violent women background summaries are provided on the research sample. The summaries are based on the interview data, personal field notes, information provided by other inmates and prison staff, as well as the local newspaper. In order to protect the privacy of the women involved they are referred to only by a numeric designation. In addition, the names of those significant others involved in the cases have been omitted.

Subject #1

Subject #1 is an attractive black woman and mother of three who looks much younger than her thirty years. Very personable and willing to talk she describes herself as a "Hustler". She has previously been incarcerated for,

...grand theft, forgery...oh, I had eight cases, but it was like one big one-- they just put them all together and only once was I tried. I was locked up for 14 months--make that 15 months.

She has no juvenile record although she admits to a history of violence:

...in school oh ya I used to fig!! all the time...and then when I got in sixth grade I fought so much in fourth, fifth and sixth and then I didn't fight girls, I always fought boys. So they sent me to a psychiatrist in school....Then when I got to Junior High School I fought so they kicked me out of my two Junior High Schools...one time I broke the teacher's nose....

Presently Subject #1 is serving a six to twenty year

sentence for armed robbery. While "out cold on cocaine" she and a girl friend entered the home of one of her relatives on the premise that she came to get a phone number. Once inside she assaulted the elderly woman--

...then after I hit her it was like what am I doing--like I ain't no bad person. When I say that I mean I would give anybody anything--I was feeding kids that I know their mamma ain't feeding--I have a good heart...

(M)y intentions were to rob her but after I beat her up I felt bad...I got her up, I helped her up, I cleaned her up. I just felt like a real bad person to do something like that and ah, we all had a talk--me, her and my friend and I told her because I'm a dope fiend, I don't know I just wanted to get high. So she said well--she went and got her purse and she said "well here's thirty dollars; is this enough?" I said "even if it ain't I don't want it if you don't got it to spare" and she gave me the money. By then I thought it was over...and even if she wanted to prosecute me, which is what she did, she shouldn't have charged me with armed robbery cause I didn't take the thirty dollars--she gave me the thirty dollars!! I assaulted her, she should have charged me with assault.

Subject #1 maintained that her drug problem was unknown to her family. She held down a steady job and felt she was a good mother to her children. Even her "man" did not know she was dependent on drugs:

(H)e didn't know that see I had been getting high a year--he didn't know. When he'd pull out in his car at 2:30 to be at work at 3 I'd pull out right behind him. I know he'd be home at 11 or 12 so I'd be home before 11 and this went on for a long time.

Now that she is incarcerated Subject #1 has kicked her drug habit. Her biggest concern is her children and their welfare. She hopes to make parole on her first parole eligibility date, but her history of violence within the institution will probably impede her progress.

Subject #2

Subject #2 is a rugged looking twenty-four-year-old

white woman. She has a low voice, tattooed arms and a very tough demeanour. She grew up in the deep south the youngest of ten children and was molested by three male members of her family--"I always associated love with getting hurt". An elementary school drop-out, Subject #2 started "getting high" at age ten; left home at age thirteen, had a child at age fourteen and "caught her first case at nineteen".

She is presently serving a twenty-five to fifty year sentence for "Gross Sexual Misconduct--First Degree" in addition to "Assault with Intent to Commit Bodily Harm less than Murder".

How it came about, ok--at that time I was dealing drugs and this person and me--I had my stuff out on the table--and this person and me we were the only two people in this house and when I came out it [drugs] was gone--so where'd it go?...(S)o she came back to my house later and I said like "where's my shit?" And she's like "I haven't got it", and I said "you do have it--you've got my shit, you know, I'm going to beat the hell out you"...I beat the hell out her-- bad, but I left the poor thing...I went into the bedroom and commenced getting high--actually I continued to get high--put on the headphones, turned the stereo up high. I couldn't hear...she was in the room with the other two people. When I come out I didn't know she got raped. I didn't know--there was blood everywhere--I'm like what the fuck happened...

<R: Was there a weapon used?>

Knives, baseball bats, you name it, it was used. I'm not going to lie to you, it was gross...then what happened was I figured we had to get this girl cleaned up, stop her from bleeding before she dies. So I got her up and I put her in the bathtub and I helped clean her up...she was conscious but they done fucked up her clothes so she had nothing to put on but a pair of jeans and the girl's like huge...so the girl that was living with me, she gone grabbed a sheet and put it around her...it was fucked up...They say she walked out, I don't know. If she was beaten as severely as they said she was and from the pictures I don't know how she could have walked out...

<R: Did this girl testify?>

She said I helped, she said I helped rape her...by the way I understand it she's got me placed behind her with the baseball bat in my hands, but see I don't remember it at all, I do not remember...

<R: And everybody got the same sentence?>

No, the male--the female got 25 to 50. I got 25 to 50, and the male got natural life.

Since she has been incarcerated, over five years ago, Subject #2 has completed her high school equivalency and has enrolled in vocational programs. She is, however, still considered a management problem by prison administration:

...but see I've learned to control my temper a lot--when I first came in here I was in Max.

<R: Where are you now? Are you in closed custody?>

Yup, but I'm in general population...I don't get write ups any more. I had forty major write-ups the first year I was here. My file is this thick [uses thumb and finger to illustrate three inches or so], and I've only been in here five years--that's usually a file that's been here twenty-five.

By Subject #2's own admission she has had a detailed history of violence both within and outside of the penitentiary. Although she was unwilling to go into detail about her immediate case and maintains her lack of involvement, she did, however, talk in length about her life experiences both violent and non-violent.

Subject #3

Subject #3 is a large [approximately 5'11/ 200lbs] light-skinned black woman in her late thirties. She is a very likeable woman whose deep voice and large size are initially intimidating. The youngest child and only girl in a family of twenty-one children, she grew up in the city. She has never used drugs and drinks only occasionally. Presently she is serving three and a half to ten years for

assault with intent to commit bodily harm less than murder. This is her only conviction and, according to her, the only time she has ever been in trouble with the law.

In the early morning hours she attended a local club with some of her co-workers as part of a friend's birthday celebration. Present at the club was her partner of ten years.

(H)e was at the club and I was on the phone because I was at work and I told him the group of us coming from work was going to stop by the club because one of my co-workers it was their birthday and we was going to celebrate, and he [partner] didn't want me to come. I said "why not, you know?" He wouldn't tell. I said, "I do not care if you have fifty bitches down there. I'm coming because this is the only place open at six o'clock in the morning" Ha, ha...So we went there. It was nice until I got up to go tell him I'm going home, because this was just the way our relationship was. So the next thing I know I hear somebody say "oh bitch" and the next thing I know I'm on the floor. I didn't even know I was bleeding.

Subject #3 was jumped from behind by a woman who wanted her "man".

She could have him, but she didn't have to fuck up my suit--you see he had bought it for me. And we were going to a wedding; we were going somewhere and I didn't have time to make me nothing. So he told me to go buy something, and I had seen the suit and wanted it. I put it on layaway I think I owed about a hundred or a hundred and twenty on it, and he went and paid the rest of it. It was a two hundred dollar suit. Oh, it was gorgeous, you know, and I don't wear pants. I am going to wear more pants here now than I have in my entire thirty some odd years.

This "pale lemon yellow silk pant suit" was Subject #3's prize possession. She describes her rage upon realizing that her suit was damaged:

...the only thing I remember after I got off the floor was my damn suit is ruined. That's it. I don't--I wasn't thinking.

<R: So did you clock her?>

Clock ain't the word for it. They said I took her and spun her around like you do a spinning top. They didn't even know I had cut her. They said after I did this, I bought everybody something to drink, I played four games of pool and they said all I kept saying was, "my motherfucking suit is

ruined"...And that ain't even the best part. I'm coming to the best part. After that I remember my co-worker. He told me "come on I'll take you home". I said "no, I'd rather walk". I was mad. I didn't realize that I'd clocked out. He said that he put me in the car. I left my car down there, my purse, everything. They took me home. I live approximately ten blocks from the club. They said that they could not understand how I did it to this day, but I beat them back to the club...All I remember is my suit's fucked up. I mean, oh, that was my pride and joy...They said I walked up to one of the club members and asked him to give me my shit--in other words my purse, my keys...and about that time [partner] came in the club. I started saying something. They said I ripped on her head with my fists. I don't remember this. I don't even remember cutting the woman.

Subject #3's inability to recall the details of the assault is not indicative of her feigning innocence:

(T)he judge asked me the same thing. I told him, I said, "I'm going to tell you what God knows and that's the truth. I don't remember doing any of this, but if all these people --fifty people ain't going to sit up and tell the same damn lie, so evidently I did it. No I do not regret doing it. I'm sorry I don't remember doing it, but if you and anybody else hurt my person, I will hurt you" and that I meant.

Presently Subject #3 is working as a teachers' aide in one of the vocational programs and working towards her associates degree in the paralegal program. A very religious person, once released she would like to return to the penitentiary as a religious counsellor:

I can help people. I know I can. The main thing is that these folks once they get here, stop being mad at the world and take a good look at themselves...so you get a couple of bad breaks. What the hell! The Lord didn't promise you it was going to be all sunshine and rain. You got to have some pain with the good...being in this damn penitentiary is a pain.

Subject #3 was a good informant. She was friendly and willing to talk openly about her life experiences, inclusive of those which led to her incarceration.

Subject #4

Subject #4 is an pleasant twenty-one-year-old white

woman from rural Michigan. She was born with a learning disability in addition to a drastic over-bite which resulted in a speech impediment. Subject #4 was sexually molested by her father, her uncle and one of her brothers by the time she was six years old. Labelled by her family as "*hard to handle*" and "*always in trouble*" she was sent away to training school at the age of seven. From there she spent her formative years in a number of different foster homes, juvenile homes, and reformatory schools. She "*caught her first adult case*" at age seventeen and was sentenced to one to two years for assault and battery having "*busted the nose of an officer*" in her juvenile home. She cites family problems as her motivation:

(S)he reminded me to much of my daddy. I could see my daddy in her.

Released from prison before her twentieth birthday, having no job or education, she returned to her parents' home. Her visit was short lived. After overdosing on cocaine and being hospitalized she stole the neighbor's car and "*totalled*" it. She received one year in the county jail for Unlawful Driving of An Automobile. Currently she is serving fourteen to twenty-four months for attempted felonious assault. Immediately after talking to her father on the phone, in a fit of rage and brandishing a eight and a half inch knife she cut the screens and destroyed property of her foster/juvenile home. She believes that she should have

been charged, convicted and sentenced for "*possession of a dangerous weapon*" or "*malicious destruction of private property*", as she does not believe that she would have hurt anyone. Her prior arrest record, however, suggests that she could and has. Moreover, given her history of alcohol and drug abuse and her previous suicide attempts Subject #4 is also a threat to herself.

This interview lasted only forty minutes as Subject #4 was more interested in talking about me and had little insight into her own situation. Very much a victim of circumstance traumatised by her family experiences she would have benefitted more from special education than from incarceration. A very likeable woman she is described by prison staff as "*a little girl trapped in a woman's body*".

Subject #5

Subject #5 is a thirty-year-old, short, athletically-built black woman with no prior arrest record. Originally charged under open murder and then first degree murder, she is presently serving seven to fifteen years for Manslaughter for unintentional death of a child. She describes the time of the incident as a low point in her life:

(B)ut, a lot of things wasn't going right for me. And, I had lost my Aunt, me and my step father couldn't get along. And then I was out on the streets and the booze and the liquor and the crack was on my back more so than I wanted my life.

A confirmed homosexual, her relationship was falling apart and her lover wanted no part of her lifestyle.

...You see, what it was she didn't want me to be involved in that crack cocaine and she was leaving me. And I didn't want her to leave me. And I lied to her and told her that I was at home the night before. She came over at my mother's house for three or four hours. I never showed up. I never came home at all. And she told my mother to tell me that it's goodbye and that it's the end. I wasn't going for no goodbye.

Subject #5 entered the house of her girlfriend to confront her the following day:

...and me and her had gotten into it because I had been drinking. And I hadn't been home all day long and all night and she knew I was smoking the crack...Me and her was arguing and I told her, "bitch I will kill you". And she said, "I'm going into the kitchen"...And I said, "fuck this bitch" and I got in the car, I pulled off there. And I got to the corner, and I said, "fuck this! I'm going to go back there and beat this bitch down!" I went flying around the corner, hit the curb and ended up on the porch...I didn't hear no one holler. I didn't hear no one chasing me and my windows were down. I didn't hear nobody scream. I didn't hear nothing--that's just how fucked up I was.

S#5 was completely unaware that she had done any damage other than to the car.

...I drove up on the curb. I saw myself on the sidewalk and I just kept cutting the corner till I got back on the street. And I ran into the bushes...once I hit the bushes I heard the tire go flat and I just drove the car home. The police followed me all the way from the street to where I was going.

It was only once the police and witnesses reconstructed the scene that Subject #5 was fully aware of what had transpired:

...and the car came so fast that it nicked the eleven year old on her right leg and it just drug the eight year old off the porch.

Then what happened was, was they told me I had drug the little girl into the bushes. See I had problems once I hit the bushes, but I thought it was because of the bushes, cause it was so bushy...And they said I took her all the way up--this was fucked up boy.

Originally Subject #5 was charged under open murder and then first degree murder both of which imply intent and not accidental death. The prosecution felt intent was present

as she was overheard saying, and by her own admission had said, to her lover "bitch I will kill you".

Yea. I was trying to get to that bitch. I was going to beat her ass. I wasn't going to kill her. But that's what made the papers write it the way they did because they put down that two lesbians were having a lover's fight and the lover claims that she was going to kill somebody that day. The lover came out to talk to her. She did and she said that she was going to do it, you know. That's why the prosecuting attorney was trying to get a bigger trial.

The newspaper didn't even talk to me--they thought I was a boy; they thought I was a faggot...They [police] was looking for a guy; a short male driving a Oldsmobile. They wasn't looking for a female cause as far as the eye witnesses were concerned I was a guy.

Subject #5's physical demeanour is in fact masculine; she looks like an adolescent male. This physical presentation of self is deliberate as it reinforces her role as a "boy" within the prison.

Subject #5's self image and general outlook on life have improved drastically since she has been in prison. She has kicked her drug habit; she is one of the "star" players on the multiple prison sports teams; she is involved in prison vocational programs, and she is respected as one of the head "boys".

Subject #5 seemed to take great pride in being chosen to speak to me. She spoke willingly and at great length about all aspects of her prison and street life and even provided me with dates to check in the paper to reaffirm her story.

subject #6

Subject #6 is a forty-five-year-old light-skinned black

woman and divorced mother of three. She is tiny in stature; almost frail. Her frailty is increased by her physical disability. She broke her knee in an accident and does not as yet have full use of her leg. A well educated woman, she has completed her Associates degree, her Paralegal certification and is currently working towards her Bachelors degree. Prior to her incarceration she held down a full time job and lived in a predominantly white middle-class suburb of Detroit. Currently she has served over fifteen years of a "long independent sentence" with a thirty year "tail" having been convicted of "well, murder--2nd degree and kidnapping, well, aiding and abetting".

...I feel fortunate that they do distinguish aiding and abetting because I didn't commit the crime. I was more like a victim of the crazed mentality of other people and it's a very complicated case in respect to what really happened.

This case has many racial overtones and nobody was ever charged with or convicted of ever having committed the actual murder.

Ok um, its a very long story. To begin with where the crime happened was where I was living because I lived in an all white neighbourhood and 'round that time--I had been there for quite some time--and something happened where people poured paint on my car, cut the tires up--it was a brand new car and ah, I had gone through the papers to find a dog--let me tell you what happened, I had called some people from the newspaper --different people were saying call the newspaper--this is after what happened to my car--I called, some man came out and took pictures of the car--he was some kind of reporter I couldn't remember, but a man was there to take picture of the car and stuff. This was important at the trial because the prosecuting attorney was saying there was no proof that anybody had poured anything on my car or cut the tires, but there was certainly proof becausebecause _____ Ford came back removed the paint, put new tires on and all that stuff....

(H)ere's what happened--I had gone through the paper to get a dog which was some idea that was given to me and thought if you have a dog that

barks then you will know when people are messing around your house...I'll never know why I chose to call for this particular dog breeder. Two of the people who turned out to be, you know, the ones who committed the crimes-- he and his family were selling dogs and they were just dogs I guess that they found, you know, some kind of scam..... They brought a dog, they brought a german shepherd out and I bought the dog you know this was some kind of scam they had going--I bought the dog I just wanted something that would bark, but the boy's mother says well my son and-- he has a lot of friends-- I wouldn't mind letting him come around and stay around here and at night and watch out--I was really kind of scared after that, you know, somebody would do that to your car, that sends out a pretty strong message to me...but during this time too, I was under psychiatric care due to different things that had happened and ah, I was on medication that caused you know, your thinking isn't really clear and ah, she had offered for these different people to watch my house at night which----at this stage in my life I would never go for anything like that but I did--I was alone with my children....and different guys, they would come back and forth and back and forth--this was their scheme and they got in, they got in, stealing things out of my house--furniture you know, everything...

<R: ...who was kidnapped?>

Ok, ah, some young white man--here's what happened--the men, those two guys who were watching my house, said there goes the guy--you know different things were happening, and they said there goes that guy who came up in the drive way last night and I don't know cause I wasn't watching and different things were happening and I don't know so now we get in my car and I was driving my car--they were in my car so that's how I'm involved and they say just go up and catch him so we can see if this is the one so I get up near the car and they say that's him so pull over in front I'm just doing everything they're saying, I'm not even thinking so and I did that and ah, they get out and I look and they are bringing him back and putting him in my car...I feel bad about the whole thing but I was not in control of my mind...it was terrible thing--they directed me-- one guy got into his car and drove around the front of me and said follow me, I'm thinking all the time we're going to take him to the police so he is going to say that this is the one who maybe poured the paint on my car cause I had called the police over and over when different things were going on with the neighbours and they told me that these people--these people across the street said somebody had threw a bomb over here and I was getting frantic and what ever, I feel it was part of their plot to clean me out and just do a total job on me.... [We] followed him to another part of Detroit and ah, the two of them got out and went into the house and that's when the crime happened and when they came out--they got into my car and the one told me that the other one had shot him....

The young man who actually committed the murder was granted immunity for testifying against both Subject #6 and the other man involved:

...and there was no one ever convicted of actually doing the murder, I was convicted of second degree murder, aiding and abetting, but nobody's ever been convicted of doing the murder cause they granted the murderer

immunity--they didn't know that till afterwards...

Although it was never questioned that Subject #6 was only a bystander she feels that she was victimized; first by her neighbour's racial slurs and actions, and second by the men who brought the dog and agreed to watch her house.

I was on psychotropic medication and just totally submissive to everything that was going on.

Subject #6's mental state had no bearing on her trial or sentence.

No, it didn't have no bearing on it. Nobody really--like I said you how the prosecutor will argue and frame their case--it was based on the premise that I wanted revenge for the paint job...what was done to my car and that I had hired these people to do this--you know all they want is a conviction.

Subject #6's psychological imbalance has continued while in prison. Still under psychiatric supervision she had been diagnosed "chronic hypertensive" and currently resides in the P.E. [protective environment] Unit of the penitentiary. Many of her teeth and much of her hair fell out in conjunction with the trauma of being incarcerated.

She is currently centre eligible and looking forward to the day she joins the Community Residence Program. She hopes to make a living as a paralegal:

...after this leg injury though its going to cause me a little trouble, but this [paralegal work] is where my heart is and combined with all my other skills I already had; excellent typist, short hand and all that, I have no doubt that I'll have a job opportunity.

Subject #6 will soon return to the community. I do not think that anyone would perceive her to be a risk to her community. She may, however, be a risk to herself given her

history of mental instability and her constant feelings of suspicion and victimization which seem to have permeated every facet of her life.

Subject #7

Subject #7 is a heavy-set white woman in her early thirties. The mother of two, and one of two children, she was raised in rural Michigan by her father and step-mother. She was sexually molested by her step-grandfather at the age of twelve up until the time she left home. She married a domineering man sixteen years her senior who introduced her to the "swinging scene".

...and those [swingers magazines] were his bible. I mean they really were. we had tons of them, um, but to me he made it that this was really special to him and I was special to him; that special person he wanted to share this with, um, and since I had already had sex since I had been raped--I didn't turn against men like most women do; it was like I needed them. I needed to be loved...and sex was love.

Over time her husband's preoccupation with sex grew,

...it was like he was never satisfied with any of it and that's why it just kept going. I mean he was even starting to get into animals; there were dogs and --I mean we have pictures of me holding a dog with his penis out...

From adult men and women to animals, her husband's preoccupation turned eventually to children. Subject #7 and her husband were charged with "five first degree criminal sexual conducts and one second degree" for the sexual molestation of a ten year old girl.

She was a neighbour girl...there was never any force. She liked him [husband]; she needed somebody to love her. Her parents were not together. She was the oldest of three children and her mom didn't give a darn about anything and so he gave her that affection.

He had been leading up to it, you know, touching her in certain ways or, you know, being really special to her and stuff and then he just started moving-- "would you do something for me?" And it was like she told him you can do anything you want to me.

Subject #7 and her spouse were caught not because the child complained but because sexually explicit pictures of the girl were found by a member of Subject #7's family and turned into the police. The couple was implicated on the same charges and both took a plea bargain, although Subject #7 was offered the chance to turn state's evidence against her husband:

(I) If I had testified against my husband I would not have been sent here.

She names devotion towards her husband and ignorance of the justice system as leading to her incarceration:

They had charged us with five first degree criminal sexual conducts and one second degree and they dropped three of the first degrees with no indication of what type of sentence or--my attorney advised me to do that--I was railroaded the whole way, I know that now. I knew nothing about the legal system than. At the time I got my attorney there were two first degree criminal sexual conducts on the warrant July __, 19__. I was in the hospital having a baby on that day and the man didn't even say how can you have this warrant....

Subject #7 and her husband were convicted and sentenced to fifteen to thirty years and thirty to fifty years respectively. He served only a couple years of his sentence before dying of cancer. Prior to his death, however, Subject #7 came to realize her submissiveness and lack of control over her own life:

At that time I thought that my whole purpose was that he loved me and I was supposed to do everything that, you know, he wanted me to do.

Subject #7 also came to terms with the amorality of the acts

she had participated in, and took action in order to alleviate some of her guilt.

For the first two years that I was here it was like he still had me totally in his grips. I mean we wrote back and forth and um..... And, um, husbands and wives can have one visit per year, at their expense. The first year I went to Jackson to see him. The second year he came here--he sat right over there [points] by the windows, and back then prisoners could walk all over the place and um, he kept looking out the window and saying "ooh, look at that one, look at that one" and it was like --I had been here long enough by myself--I had already started questioning some of the things he said in his letters, like he was subscribing to swingers magazines and he was going to write to some people so that when we got home-- and it was like wait a minute--I didn't really accept that I was here for that amount of time then but when he sat here and it was like the women outside of that window was more important to him than I was. I went back to my room and cried for days and then it was like I don't need this, its not --and I knew that I could do it by myself--I was so afraid that I could not--that I was worthless, that I could not do anything in my life by myself, you know, and I can.

Subject #7 divorced her husband one year prior to his death:

...and that was the real turning point...and I don't even know if I needed to have the paper, I mean ...I made that choice, that was my choice, that was my choice a year before the man died I said that's it you're out of my life....

She has also tried to communicate with the little girl they were convicted of sexually assaulting:

I wrote a letter while I was in jail to her mother that I wanted her to read to her and tell her that I was really sorry and to tell her that I hoped that any help that she needed that she would get.

Since her imprisonment over eight years ago, Subject #7 has completed her Associates degree and is presently taking courses at the college level. She has also been in counselling to help her become more assertive. This assertiveness training has not made her a violent person. In fact she questioned why a study on violence would include her in its sample:

...well when _____ asked me if I would come and talk to you and I read the paper [letter explaining who I was and what I was doing] and I said "well I'm not a violent person, why do you want me to talk to this lady?"

and he said "well. I want to give her a variety of people."

<R: Well because your formal charge implies that you are a violent person or that you engaged in a violent act. But you would never categorize yourself as a violent person?>

NO. I don't think anybody here would...

Subject #7 is a sex offender. Sex offenses are by definition under the criminal code assaultive in nature. Having been in group therapy with other female sex offenders, Subject #7 feels that majority of female sex offenders have similar motivation:

In fact they [sex offender's cases] were quite similar really; a man--it was kinda you were the wife or the girlfriend and this man did this and you loved him and you did it. That's a lot of what it was.

Subject #7 was willing to talk frankly about the sexual lifestyle that led eventually to her imprisonment. Although she did symbolically separate herself from her husband through divorce, she does not seem to realize the extent of her accountability in these events. A pleasant woman, Subject #7 is very easily dominated. In fact, the more subdued my intonation and mannerisms became the more willing she was to talk with me.

subject #8

Subject #8 is a well-spoken, short [5'1/118 lbs], white woman in her early thirties from a middle-class suburban family. She was raised by her aunt and uncle until she ran away from home at age fifteen and ended up in a juvenile home. She returned to her family at age sixteen for a short

stint before running away again; this time spending a little over a year in a training school.

...they wanted me to stay there for two and a half years and I couldn't handle it so I had stayed there about a year and had called up my aunt and uncle and I said "could you please allow me the opportunity to come back home if you are not willing to change then I am willing to make that change". So I was released after a year and was almost seventeen and then after I turned seventeen I went to my aunt and uncle and I had a job at that time and I sold acid so I collected money cause I wanted to move way from home...I planned to get my own apartment.

Subject #8 dropped out of her senior year of high school and moved to another city where she got a job and ran drugs to support herself:

...so I would take the drug to them, they in turn would pay me in cash and pay me in weed, cause at that time I was just smoking weed, so I was making these runs about every two or three weeks....

Eventually curiosity got the better of her and she sampled the drug she was running:

...I mean I knew it wasn't weed, but they told me it was "boy" and "girl" and I didn't know what that was, but I knew it was a drug...so there came a time when curiosity crept into me--I was on the highway driving and had pulled over and I opened up the bag and I opened up one of the containers and I tried some...one was a white powder and the other one was like a beige powder so I tried a little bit of both and I had snorted it and I threw up all the way back....

Seeing this as a profitable way of making money Subject #8 decided to sell the stuff with the help of a man,

...and then I let him use my apartment and ah, we were having sex and you know everything was really nice and, you know, I was pinching here and I was pinching there and before I had realized it I had become hooked and he had caught a case for selling it....prior to him coming out of the penitentiary I had let go because I had found someone else that I felt like I could have a real meaningful relationship with, I didn't know that prior to him and I getting involved that he used to use drugs so I went from tooting heroine to shooting heroine.....

(S)o I had quit [in the months previous] and had gone on methadone and I had caught a higher habit cause in order to quite the heroine you have to take something that's stronger so I ended up catching a higher habit. I had stopped shooting up heroine, but I was hooked on this methadone and then I was taking valium along with it....

So I had got involved with this man, and we were together for a long time...This is the same man that I caught this case with so given the process of being with him I increased getting high and I started shooting up dope and it was included with heroine and it was included with valium and it was like my whole world was fucked up and I didn't know how to escape.

In order to support their increasing drug habits, Subject #8 prostituted herself while at the same time attending school and working while her partner was doing B&E's.

One night after they had been "partying hard" her partner suggested they make "stop" on the way home:

...he had indicated earlier that he had scouted this place and the people would not be home so I felt sort of comfortable being with him, you know, I felt like its just an empty house, so you know, we went through the house and took jewellery and some other stuff, we took cheques and we took money and it was a really good sting...and then we went upstairs and opened that door and saw that guy sleeping.

...and it was kinda shocking--we were so surprised and he had like turned like he was in the process of turning over in his bed and he handed me the gun and said "shoot him" and I received the gun and I shot him and I ah, killed him.

Having shot and killed the sleeping man, Subject #8's first response was to flee the scene, but she was stopped by her boyfriend,

...he said "we got to get rid of the body". I said "what do you mean? I'm scared." We took the body out ...it was maybe 2:30, 3:00 in the morning and it was a really nice area so the average person was sleeping. And we took it down --we took it to another city and...And he set it on fire, he set the man's body on fire...and ah, I watched his body coil...

Subject #8 and her accomplice were not caught until a month and a half after the crime. Her boyfriend was picked up first because he signed his own name on cheques belonging to the dead man. A few days later Subject #8 was arrested under open murder--"that means where the conviction could go from either manslaughter to

first degree murder". The charge then went to first degree murder, her accomplice turned state's evidence, and knowing that she would be found guilty, Subject #8 took a plea to Second degree murder and received an original sentence of sixty to ninety years. Her accomplice on the other hand,

(N)o, he was not granted immunity. He ah, there was some cheques that were involved and he received a cheque case and he got nine to fourteen years on that and he was convicted of involuntary manslaughter because he told them--he indicated he was making a sandwich downstairs while I was up there committing this horrible act so ah, he got ten to fifteen on that and nine to fourteen and then right after that ran crying so he got four and a half years.

Subject #8's original sentence of sixty to ninety has been knocked down and she was eligible for parole after ten years. Subject #8 has currently served twelve years. She was ineligible for parole at her first out date because of her history of violence within the institution:

(T)hey put me in the hole--I was in the hole for three and a half years--I know that since I've been here I have done a total of three and a half years in solitary confinement...

Since she has been incarcerated she has made a conscious effort to change:

I was disgusted with myself and I wanted to change so after I had made that change--and it took about four or five years cause I was acting like an asshole when I first got out here...

To date she has completed her high school education. She has completed her Associates degree. She has completed the two year paralegal course and currently she is working towards her Bachelors degree. Given her past conduct within the institution, Subject #8 feels she will have to serve a minimum of fifteen years before she is considered for

parole.

This interview was one of the best in terms of the quantity and quality of information provided. We talked at length about her life experiences. She also provided me with dates, locations and newspapers to corroborate her accounts in addition to provided me with greater insight into the women's prison system in general.

Subject #9

Subject #9 is a small, forty-year-old white woman who looks to be in her early to mid-thirties. She has only been at Huron Valley for fifteen months and is serving parolable life plus forty to sixty for conspiracy to commit murder; the murder of her father.

The only daughter of an eccentric multi-millionaire, she attended Catholic girls schools and is an accomplished horse woman. She married at age twenty-five to a man with a similar interest in horses. She describes her childhood as secluded and her only friends as animals:

...I only had one girlfriend, never went to proms, I never rode the school bus--my mother always picked me up at school, never went to any parties, it was just horses and dogs.

Her case she describes as,

...I've been told that I have the story of the century, that its going to go way beyond the Patty Hurst story.

A very complicated case, the origins of the circumstances of this case go back many years:

...about five years after my marriage my dad started to get real mean to my

mother; now I don't know if it related to age...but it was a personality change...

...and she would show me like bruise marks and finger print marks where he tried to choke her...and I kept saying "Mom you've got to get out of there, come and live with us".

Subject #9's elderly mother was unable to leave and her father forbid mother and daughter to communicate. After talking with a lawyer, Subject #9 and her husband made plans to remove her mother from her abusive situation.

And so when she got to my house she said, "oh, I'm so glad to leave". We probably cried for a half hour.

Subject #9's attorney advised her that the only way to keep her father away from her mother was to file for divorce. When the divorce papers were filed her father counter sued with a kidnapping charge:

...it was dismissed. Then that didn't work so then he accused my husband and I--I was served papers for stealing his million dollars worth of silver collection the day I went to get my mother...well that was dismissed...First there was no record that he ever had it, second where's the insurance on it and how could I manage to take a million dollars worth of silver home?

(N)ow all through these trials he kept saying he was going to see us in prison, or dead, one of the two--dead to my husband, but me he was going to punish...

The story is further complicated by the elderly mother's mental state:

(S)he got to court on her divorce, it was months later and um, she said "I'm not married, I don't know who that man is", and the judge said "how can you get divorced if you don't even know you're married". So they had to drop the divorce and immediately my lawyer took it to probate court and put me down as temporary guardian.

After a highly publicized, two week custody battle Subject #9 was awarded permanent legal custody of her elderly mother. Due to the rapidly failing health of her mother,

Subject #9 moved her mother to a private rest home and soon afterwards her father was granted visiting privileges. Approximately six months later Subject #9 received word that someone has broken into her father's home and assaulted him. Worried about his well being she called her father,

...and he says "oh you stupid S.O.B., you know what happened to me, you sent these people up to kill me, you and your stupid husband"--but he didn't say stupid he said you know the language these girls in here use--and he said, "don't play stupid with me" and I said, "geez, Dad, I just tried to see how you are" and he says, "you never were concerned about me before" and I said "well, you're still my father" and he says, "I don't consider you my daughter after what you've done to my money and my property"--he never mentioned my mother, and he says "don't bother calling me, you'll see me in court" and he slammed down the phone and I never thought anything more of it because we had a court date the next day and he said I'll see you in court--probate again, and I thought well God if he can yell that bad he can't be hurt that bad, right?

(H)e never did tell me what happened and we see him in court the next day and he's telling the judge how he got beat up and we sent the people to kill him and the judge wasn't paying any attention to him; and he didn't look that bad hurt, he had like a little band-aid that you'd put over a cut right back here [points] and I thought gee, he's ok and I thought he made it up ok, so he supposedly--they never came to question me, the case was closed even though he said he gave them two numbers of a licence plate and he could describe the people that came in but he said he let them in the house to buy a peacock--he raises peacocks.

...and um, he never lets strangers in his house. The state police even testified that they'd had ten-twelve calls from my dad about trespassers to come and get them so it was very unusual that he would let this big, big man; six foot six, and this woman in his home and into his house. Well he told them that we--me and my husband sent these two people to kill him. So the case was dropped. The case was dropped in October; he was hurt in April..... so October the case is dropped....

Subsequent to the case being dropped the father called a meeting with his daughter and warned her to divorce her husband because he will soon be going to prison:

(H)e says, "I want you to divorce your husband, your husband's going to prison for the attempted murder of me", and I says---I got really upset--I says "you've got to be kidding; you call me here saying you want to make up and now you're back to saying we tried to kill you again", and he says "ya". He says "if you don't leave him then you're going down too". Well I just--that was it; I thought my dad's hopeless; I felt insulted, I says you know, "how can you sit there and tell me this" and I left. And I was crying and

hysterical...

...four months later the police came to my house and I got arrested for the attempted murder of my father.

Subject #9 and her husband were arrested and held on the credence of testimony provided by a woman Subject #9 had never met. A woman who testified that she and her brother were the ones who had assaulted Subject #9's father almost a year prior and had done so in contractual agreement with Subject #9 and her husband. Also implicated was this woman's own husband who was alleged to have organized the contract.

She got rid of her brother, her husband, my husband and me. They gave her complete immunity.

The trial itself was laughable and witnesses constantly contradicted one another:

...laughable--the state police were falling off their chairs-- _____ [woman] testified that the only reason she drove her brother up to do it was he didn't have a driver's licence. And my attorney said, "now wait a minute--you're going up drive up to murder somebody and you're worried about a traffic violation". Then she said my husband gave her all the wrong directions...she said when they finally found the place, after he gave them all the wrong directions, when they finally found it by accident, when they found my dad's house, it was all the wrong description--now this is my husband supposedly telling them how to get to my dad and kill him?!

Describing her father's testimony she says,

...there was blood all over the place, blood all down the stairs and not one -- I mean twenty steps down to concrete, he said they beat him up then pushed him down the steps to die, ok, there's blood all over--but he said he went running up the stairs when he heard them leave to look out the window to look 150 feet away to get their licence plate, ok, ...

Police said "no, he never gave it to them". He testified that he did, and a description of the people in the truck. The police testified they never got anything like that. Ok, he runs up the stairs, there's not a foot print in any of the blood and they want to know how he got up the steps that fast--without a footprint. And he told them that St. Christopher told him to play dead and that he would help him up the steps--he like flew up the steps in other words--there wasn't a footprint on them....

Expert witnesses brought in to testify in Subject #9's defense believed the crime scene of a year prior, whose charges had already been dismissed in previous court proceedings, to have been fabricated. The amount of blood present at the scene, as evidenced by photographs taken by police, did not concur with the size of the wound.

He had a one inch cut that required four O-type stitches..

In addition, it was questioned whether or not it was even human blood, and the investigation by the police department involved was so haphazard that much of the evidence was either lost or never collected:

I have--that thing right there [points to huge file folder containing the testimony of a renowned forensic specialist] which I'm going to have copies made of saying that the scene was one hundred percent fabricated. it wasn't even human blood. The police didn't even bother taking blood samples....they [police] said the finger prints were lost. the blood samples were never taken and only six pictures developed out of two roles of state police cameras. Six pictures. Apparently the rest of them did not develop. Finger prints were lost and no blood samples were ever taken.

Despite all this, Subject #9 and her husband were both found guilty and sentenced to life plus forty to sixty years. The husband of the woman granted immunity was found not guilty--according to hospital records he was undergoing heart surgery at the time in question. The brother received eight to twenty for assault and he is now, like Subject #9 and her husband, under going appeal procedures.

Subject #9 maintains that her father, by his own confession, arranged and paid for the trial in order to teach his daughter a lesson; a lesson which cost him,

...four years and four million dollars.

Having visited his daughter in prison, her father is now funding her appeal and wants her released to his custody. As convoluted as this case is, it is interesting to note that since the trial,

...the chief detective who wasn't even near retirement retired shortly after my case; the judge has now resigned....

Subject #9 is busily working with her appeal lawyer who has indicated to her that he should be able to get her "if not a reversal at least a new trial." Until that time she resides in the Protective Environment Unit of the Prison. She is not well liked by the other inmates and is considered a "snitch". She is very depressed and confided in me that she considered our conversations to be therapeutic. We talked for greater than three hours during which time Subject #9 broke down in tears on multiple occasions. She also admitted to having contemplated suicide,

...I mean I pray every night that I die rather than stay here because I know that at least I'm going to heaven.

She is hoping her appeal will go through but has been warned that these process could be dragged out indefinitely.

Subject #10

Subject #10 is a fifty-year-old black woman serving mandatory life for drug possession; specifically eleven million dollars worth of cocaine. She maintains that she was simply an innocent bystander who happened to be in the

wrong place at the wrong time and that in addition, she has been incarcerated for life to cover up an embarrassing error on the part of the Federal Bureau of Investigation.

A working-class married woman who has been employed in the automotive industry for close to twenty years, Subject #10 says her crime was "picking up a man at the airport".

Well, he was kind of a friend of my brother's. I had only known him six or seven months. He was going with my ex-sister in law. He was, kind of, her boyfriend.

Now, what is his precise reason for calling me, I don't know. I didn't ask...But, he called me and asked me to pick him up from the airport. I said, okay. I was an hour and a half late getting to the airport cause I had worked the night before. I dozed back off to sleep after I talked to him and when I did wake up, "damn I was supposed to be at the airport!" I jumped up. I woke my grandson up. He was sleeping ...I said, I'm late. Get on up. You gonna ride with me. I took him with me, pulled up at the airport, the man got in the car. He said, "hello, how you doing". I said, "how are you". And, he said, "stop this motherfucker". And I was looking like what's wrong with you and all? And, by the time I put my foot on the brakes, cause he had his eyes bugged, and he hollered, the police was opening the car door, dragging us out the car, and hollering, "where's the ammunition?"

So, I had no time to say nothing to the man but "hi". And they were watching when I picked him up. He put his suitcase in the trunk, and we pulled out, and they stopped us. And that's all I know.

Subject #10, her teenage grandson and the man she picked up were all arrested, charged and tried on drug charges. All three were tried separately. The grandson was found innocent and the two others received mandatory life, no parole.

Prior to the trial Subject #10 was publicly linked with "a dope king-pin" in another state.

And, they come up with--when they first put us in jail, I don't even know if it was the same night or the night after...But, we went to the courtroom that night ... and when they got through deciding they gonna give me a five hundred thousand doilar bond, me and my grandson. So, ... the prosecutor got up and said that my whole family was dope dealers and stuff. So, when we started out the courtroom, the T.V. people asked me what did I think about it. I said, "I don't know understand what's going on cause I don't

understand how in the hell my whole family got in this cause my family weren't into no dope". And, ... that night, back in the jail, they didn't turn the T.V. off till 11:00. And, they asked the officer to leave it on cause they wanted to see the news, the girls did. But, they called me out the cell to see it. And they're looking at the news, and they're talking about this big king-pin of dope and the sister runner. I mean, it hadn't dawned on me that they were talking about me and some man named _____ and his sister running his dope business while he doing time. And, they flashed the man's picture across the screen. He's in a federal penitentiary in _____ somewhere. His sister running the dope business. Who in the hell is _____? I ain't never heard of him... The next morning I got up and called my Mamma. I said, "did you all see that news last night?" She said, "yea, your daddy and your brother are down at the jail now trying to find out what in the world going on"... for two or three days that's all you could see on the news, "King-pin's sister." I couldn't believe it.

I was the sister of this guy that I'd never heard -- I don't know the man, not even--don't know him! Never seen him in my life.

They never asked me, my mother...when they were putting my grandson in the police car, they asked him, was _____ his uncle. He didn't know what the hell was going on. Nobody had asked nobody in my family, nothing. My brother went down there and asked them why was they putting this shit on the news? And, they asked my brother, who is forty-five, "how do you know that _____ is not her brother?" My brother, you know, didn't talk very nice--"if I've been her brother for forty-five years, do you think I would know whether _____ was her brother or not?!"

Although the newspapers and the police dropped this line of investigation, a formal retraction was never made:

...they found out that I was absolutely no kin to this man, let alone his sister. They dropped all them damn lies. They never retracted them and they gave me Mandatory Life on their mistake.

Subject #10 has been in prison for two years. She is currently working on an appeal and both she and the man she picked up at the airport have been in the papers recently:

(H)e [reporter] wrote a nice article in the paper. He did. In the Detroit Free Press...that's the first time since I've been in jail, in the two years, that they've ever printed that I was not a King-pin of dope.

Subject #10 is a bitter woman and this bitterness has manifested in her behaviour within the institution. She has had a number of write-ups for insolence:

...these guards, once you a prisoner, you have a lot of them that's on an ego trip, and it makes them feel great because they have this job and like, you

are a prisoner and they can be degrade to you. But, see, I've worked all my life...and I've dealt with people. And these people that's on these ego trips-- See, I'm not a junkie, a dope addict, I'm not a bull-dyke, I don't participate in none of this bullshit. I came off of a job like them, and you can't talk to me like that, you know.

Subject #10 has also refused to go to school or work while in prison. For this reason she is classified "unemployable" and must remain locked in her room while other women attend their school or work postings. Subject #10 does not feel that these misconducts will impede her progress in winning her appeal.

*That's for people who are going back for to get paroled and all that stuff.
I'm going back for NOT GUILTY.*

Subject #10's hostility was very apparent throughout our interview. On multiple occasions she responded to my questions defensively and indicated that my white middle-class background made it impossible for me to understand how she had been treated by "white society". Despite this hostility we were able to continue our conversations; I simply countered her hostility by asking her to help make it clear to me what had happened and why.

Summary

The women sampled came from a wide variety of backgrounds. They varied in age from twenty-one to forty-eight; in educational attainment from college graduates to elementary school drop-outs. The interviews ranged in duration from forty minutes to three and a half hours. The

amount of time spent with each woman was a reflection of (A) their willingness to talk and (B) the depth and degree of information they were willing to offer.

The overall profile that emerged from the data concurs with those put forth by other researchers (cf. Goetting, 1988; 1987). The portrayal is that of a woman disadvantaged along multiple dimensions and in many ways isolated from main stream culture. Some were bitter, mean, and explosive, but most were not. For the most part, these are ordinary women whose life experiences have placed them in a disadvantaged position where violence is either an acceptable means of negotiation or a necessary alternative for survival.

Now that the reader has had the opportunity to 'meet' the women of this study, the following analytic chapters will explore the violent acts of these women first as situated interactions from the perspective of Symbolic Interactionism. Second, these violent acts will be examined from a feminist perspective as relating to power dynamics both within a patriarchal society and between individuals.

CHAPTER VI

ANALYSIS

Introduction

In keeping with the goals of interactionist research, the data were analyzed and categorized in order to produce general statements about 'classes of definitions' used by identifiable groups; in this case women incarcerated for violent crimes, in particular but recurrent situations (Stebbins, 1975:11). Similar to the findings of other interactionist approaches applied to violent transactions (cf. Luckenbill, 1977; Felson, 1978; Felson and Steadman, 1983; Athens, 1977;1980) it was found that "self concept" was a recurring emergent theme in the data. In addition, it was found that self concept was both influenced by and had an influence on the subject's definitions of violent situations. The role of the generalized other also emerged as an important indicator of self and situational definitions. Furthermore, it was found that almost all of the women interviewed had undergone, or were under-going, a process of transformation in the ways they defined both self and situations as a result of their prison experience. It is these themes which will be explored both individually and as intertwined entities in the following analytic sections.

Definitions of Situations

Human interaction always takes place in the course of a situation which confronts an actor. It is the way in which an individual defines and subsequently acts upon a specific situation which determines further reaction or redefinition by actor or other. Because the subjects of this study have been incarcerated for their violent actions, defining and categorizing their various definitions of situations was done retrospectively. This was done by having subjects recount in detail the events, inclusive of their emotions and perceptions of own and other's actions, resulting in their incarceration. Thus, I was not so much interested in the "objective situation" as earlier defined by Stebbins (1975:6) as the collection of situational elements and their interrelationship from which the actor constructs his/her subjective definition of the situation. Rather, I concentrated on understanding those subjective elements, such as self concept and interpretation of the actions of others, which resulted in a violent line of action.

Thus, in keeping with the goals of situational research, different classes of definitions used by identifiable groups; incarcerated women, in particular but recurrent situations; those culminating in an act of violence, emerged from the data. Similar to the categories of interpretations found by Athens (1977;1980), it was found that violent female offenders' definitions of situations

fell into three general areas. For the purposes of theoretical consistency those categories used by Athens (1977;1980) and pertinent here shall remain the same.

It was found that the subjects of this study reported committing violent acts when they formed A) **Physically Defensive** (B) **Frustrative** and (C) **Malefic** definitions of situations.

Physically defensive interpretations of situations are formed when the actor fears physical attack to self, intimate, or possession. Often victim precipitated, physically defensive definitions of situations occur when the offender indicates to herself, by taking the role of the other, that it is the intent of the victim to harm the physical or psychological being of the offender, and that the course of action best suited to the situation is one of violence; specifically defensive violence--hurt or be hurt. This type of interpretation is best illustrated by the circumstances surrounding Subject #3's case:

(S)o the next thing I know, I heard somebody say, "Oh bitch", and the next thing I know, I'm on the floor. I didn't even know I was bleeding...my back was to her...and I was trying to get up. What really pissed me off about the whole ordeal, I had on a pale lemon yellow silk pant suit. I had just bought the damn thing that Monday. I paid over two hundred dollars for that suit, and she fucked it up. So that was all on my mind when I got up.

In this case the subject became violent only after a physical attack. Anger and violence was not only to protect her person, but also to defend her prize possession [or a reprisal for damage to prize possession].

They said I took her and spun her around like a spinning top. They didn't

know I had cut her. They said after I did this I bought everybody something to drink, I played four games of pool, and they said all I kept saying was, "my motherfucking suit is ruined".

Frustrative definitions of a situation are those formed when an offender is 1> trying to block the intended actions of the other or 2> attempting to force her will upon a resisting other. For instance, Subject #8 formed a Frustrative definition of the situation when in the course of a robbery she shot and killed a person:

(W)hat had happened was we were in the process of doing a B&E and we weren't aware that somebody was in the house at the time. We had searched through the first floor and went upstairs, into the bedroom and there was a man and ah....it was kinda shocking--we were so surprised and he had like turned over like he was in the process of turning over in his bed and he handed me the gun and said "shoot him" and I received the gun and I shot him and I ah, killed him.

Having interpreted the victim's presence, or perhaps motion, of indicative of his possible foiling of the offender's plan of action the offender(s) decided that a violent line of action was the appropriate response in order to carry out her intended course of action--robbery.

Malefic definitions of situations are often those that involve "face saving" (cf. Felson, 1978; Luckenbill, 1977) concerns such that the offender interprets the victim's actions or words as personally belittling or damaging. Then, by taking the role of the other, the actor indicates (explicitly or implicitly) to self that the victim is an evil or malicious person who would be best handled through a violent plan of action. Subject #5 illustrates the nature of malefic interpretations of a situation:

...me and her had gotten into it because I had been drinking, and I hadn't been home all day long and all night, and she knew I was smoking the crack... Me and her was arguing and she said, "I'm going into the kitchen". And I said, "Fuck this bitch", and I got in the car and I pulled off there. And I got to the corner, and I said, "Fuck this, I'm going back there to beat this bitch down".

Often this type of interpretation whereby the actor decides that there is something about the victim that is deserving of violence, incorporates the previously mentioned types of interpretations such that it may be a Malefic-Defensive or Malefic-Frustrative definition of the situation. In a Malefic-Defensive definition of the situation the offender believes that she personally is under physical or psychological attack and that the person attempting the attack is a bad person best dealt with in a violent fashion. Similarly, in a Malefic-Frustrative situation the offender internalizes the idea that violence is the best type of response 1> to block the intended actions of an evil or malicious person or 2> to deal with the attempted blockage by an evil person of the line of action intended by the offender. Reference to the case of Subject #2 exemplifies a situation culminating in violence which was interpreted by the offender in a malefic-frustrative manner. In reference to her missing drug "stash" Subject #2 says:

(H)ow it came about,ok--at the time I was dealing drugs and this person and me--I had my stuff out on the table--and this person and me were the only two people in the house and when I came out it was gone--so where'd it go?...I ain't got my stuff and I ain't got no dog to eat my stuff and I ain't got no cat to eat my stuff, so where's my stuff? You know I got my shit all over the table, I come out of the bathroom and its gone and so is she...this is maybe a week later when she come back...and I said "you have it--you've got my shit, you know, I'm going to beat the hell out of you"... I beat the hell out of her--bad.

In this case it was the intended line of action of the offender to get either an admittance of theft on the part of the victim or a repossession of her missing "stuff". The victim's refusal to concur with the intended line of action of the offender not only angered the offender but started her thinking about the 'type' of person who would take another person's stuff and not admit it.

The reader should be aware that these are only general categories and are neither mutually exclusive nor exhaustive. Moreover, it is not to say that any time an individual forms a Physically Defensive, Frustrative or Malefic definition of a situation that violence will be the unavoidable end result. Human action can be both the cause and effect of subsequent action. An individual may redefine a situation at any time. As suggested by Athens (1980:31), "restraining judgement" may be employed by the actor for a variety of reasons: such as fear of legal action [ie. arrest, imprisonment], fear of unsuccessfully carrying out intended line of action inclusive of victim retaliation, or because the actor suddenly changes her mind about the intended meaning of the potential victim's actions or words.⁷

Furthermore, an individual may also change her mind after

⁷ These factors will be discussed in greater detail, as relating to gender differences and differences in the perception of power, in Chapter VII.

the course of action has been completed, albeit too late for those incarcerated. The following passage illustrates the re-interpretation of a situation after the fact:

I, ah, assaulted her...I ah, a friend of mine and myself, and we jumped on this lady cause--when I was out cold on cocaine...I was doing a little bit of everything except heroine and stuff like that...but when I first thought about doing the crime I just thought about it and thought about it and it fucks you up--you really think about something long enough you will do it. My intentions were to rob her but after I beat her up I felt bad and I was like damn...I got her up, I helped her up, I cleaned her up, I just felt like a real bad person to do something like that (Subject #1).

Further insight into this case reveals that a frustrative-malefic interpretation of the situation was formed. The victim was someone known to and disliked by the offender and the assault occurred in the course of the robbery. As is evident from the above passage, immediately after the violent act the offender changed her mind about her course of action and tried to "take back" the act by helping the victim up and cleaning her up.

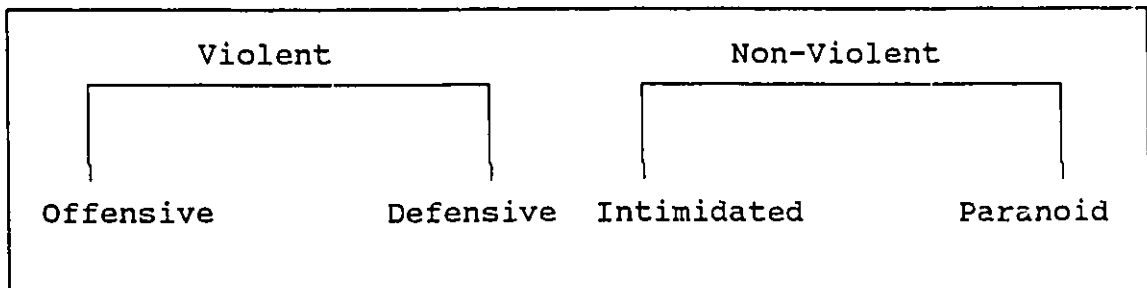
Self Concept

An individual's self concept is both influenced by and has an effect on society. The way in which these women view themselves and are viewed by others is a reflection not only of the environment in which they grew up but also of the significant and generalized others in their lives. Moreover, the effect of these various self concepts on society can be seen as a manifestation of the acts committed by these women.

Self concept is a multi-faceted concept which may be understood as either a global concept--that is, the attitudes towards self that remain reactively constant throughout the life span, or it may be conceptualized with reference to its' specific components, such as self-esteem, which are subject to change over time. One must keep in mind that there are both external, situational forces as well as internal, dispositional forces that affect an individual's self concept.

All of the women interviewed at Huron Valley Women's Facility are serving time for "assaultive" crimes; crimes which by definition imply violence. However, not all of the subjects were violent offenders. In fact, despite their charge, approximately half of the women interviewed were defined by self and others as non-violent individuals.

Data were gathered on the self-images the women held both currently and at the time of their offense. It was found that self concepts could be categorized into one of four categories:



Violent self-images are those in which the actor is seen by both self and other as having a violent disposition--usually

exemplified by references to definitions of situations resulting in recurring patterns of violence. The salient characteristics of those described by self and others as violent emerged through the data via key words such as "bad tempered, tough, unpredictable" etc. Take for instance the following self description:

(L)ike I said, fucking with me is like fucking with a stick of dynamite, you don't know when I'm going to blow (Subject #2).

The category of violent self concept can be further broken down as the data suggest that there are those who are "offensively violent" and those who are "defensively violent". For instance, Subject #3 describes herself and feels that others see her as a defensively violent person. That is, someone who only uses violence when she feels her physical or psychological being is under attack:

(L)ike I let them [other inmates] know, I am not a pushover. If you don't fuck with me, then I won't fuck with you. But if you fuck with me, then I'm going to hurt you.

This same woman admits her distaste for violence:

(Y)ou see, I've always hated fighting, I hate violence, but once I'm provoked Tyson ain't got nothing on me.

Subject #8 is also indicative of someone who has a defensively violent self-image. When asked how she is perceived by other inmates she responded:

I was tired of being humiliated and I have learned, you know, to dislike what was being placed upon me and after I got the drugs out of my system and you know, I felt like I could be worth something, someone, then I had to deal with the bullshit in the penitentiary and I just got to the point where I just wasn't going to be humiliated in my life any more and I just fought back and I would just kick ass and I would just get them up off me and I think it was probably more out of fear than actually wanting to be in that situation, you know, I felt like I had to defend my physical being and that's

what I did.

On the other hand, those women with offensively violent self-images were those who initiated and encouraged confrontations. The following is indicative of someone who possesses an offensively violent self concept:

(S)ee I'm not one to talk, see I don't talk, I don't argue, you know, if we going to argue we can fight--fuck ya, I'm not going to stand there and make myself look like an asshole arguing with you, I'm going to beat your ass for satisfaction (Subject #2).

In describing herself and her childhood Subject #2 maintains this self concept when she says:

*(T)here's an old song that says, "I'm the only hell my Mamma ever raised"-
-and in my case that's true.*

In contrast to violent self concepts, and despite their charge of violence, many of the women possessed non-violent self-images; those in which the actor is seen by self and others as not possessing a violent disposition. That is even in instances involving physical or verbal attack the subject did not see violence as a viable alternative. Take for instance the following response of Subject #7 when asked about her initial reaction to prison:

I was very scared and I did not hide it. A lot of the women knew I was really scared and they would say, you know, "come on!"; I mean, "come on, I'll fight you"--I never fought a day in my life--I never hit anybody. I used to fight with my brother when we were kids, but that was it.

This same woman further exemplifies her non-violent self-image when asked about violent confrontations within the institution:

(N)o, no, physically I'm not fighting; mentally I'm fighting, but I'd never-- I could probably beat up a lot of people, I mean I have muscles you know, and I mean--but its just not me, it never was me.

Those women who were described by self and others as being non-violent generally fell into two categories: those who were non-violent and intimidated and those who were non-violent to the extent of paranoia.

Those women who were non-violent and intimidated were those women who, in contrast to those who were defensively violent, would avoid violence at all costs and thus were often intimidated by other more aggressive individuals. Subject #9 is illustrative of someone possessing a non-violent intimidated self concept:

...I've been hit in the head here by girls, been assaulted, they went to Max. I had three knots on my head for no reason...they [other inmates] don't like me. When I see them do something wrong I run and tell the officers. I am considered a snitch.

Rather than confront a potential violent encounter she says,

...I cry. I'm not a fighter, I've never even swore at these girls. I cry. Not a day has gone by out here that I didn't cry. I cry at night, I cry in the morning...I break out in hives.

The difference between the non-violent intimidated individual and the non-violent paranoid individual is a matter of degree. Those who are intimidated are still very much realistic about their fears. They know that a direct confrontation with another individual may culminate in violence. The paranoid non-violent person, on the other hand, is unrealistic about her fears; more than simply intimidated by those more aggressive individuals, she is psychologically destroyed by her fear of confrontation.

Subject #6 provides an example of an individual seen by her self and others as non-violent to the extent of paranoia. When asked how she coped in the institution, she responded:

I guess not very good because I'm hypertensive.

This same subject's adjustment has not been good in the outside world either as evidenced by her own admission. In talking about the circumstances resulting in her incarceration she says,

I feel fortunate that they do distinguish aiding and abetting because I didn't commit the crime. I was more like a victim of the crazed mentality of other people.

She later explains this lack of control:

I was on psychotropic medication and just totally submissive to everything that was going on....

Making the Connection between Self Concept and Definition of Situations

In keeping with Symbolic Interactionism, and as one might well expect, there does indeed exist a relationship between self concept and definition of the situation.

Those individuals with non-violent self-images were more likely to commit the crime for which they were incarcerated in a situation which they interpreted as physically defensive or, as previously mentioned, committed an offense deemed assaultive in the eyes of the law yet in actuality void of any physical violence.

Those subjects who held defensively violent self-images were more likely to commit their crime in the course of

situation they interpreted as either physically defensive or malefic-defensive. Whereas, those possessing an offensively violent self concept committed their violent act under all situational interpretations with greater concentration on Malefic and Frustrative interpretations of situations. Thus it would seem that those individuals with offensively violent self-images interpret a wider range of situations as calling for a violent line of action.

The Role of the Generalized Other

In keeping with the interconnectedness and reciprocal relationship between the definition of self and situations it was found that the way in which the subjects defined those generalized others in their lives also contributed to their self concept and actions. The role of the generalized other is the perspective of an abstract which the individual forms over time from his/her interactions with other people.⁸ It is by taking the role of the generalized other that the individual actor indicates, consciously or unconsciously, to her self which course of action is required and appropriate in a given situation. Previous research by Athens (1980;1977) suggests that violent generalized others play an important role in the formation and execution of violent criminal acts. The connection

⁸ See Blumer (1969) for a detailed discussion on the generalized other.

between self concept and definition of the situation implies (1) that those women with offensively violent self concepts maintain an **"unmitigated violent generalized other"**; one which provides them with overall categorical support for violence; (2) that those women who are defined by self and others as defensively violent have a **"mitigated violent generalized other"** whereby they are provided with only limited support for violence, and (3) that those who hold non-violent self-images, both intimidated and/or paranoid, have a similar non-violent generalized other which does not provide them with any support for violence excepting in extreme situations, usually those defined as physically defensive.

Transition of Self

It was interesting to note that life in an institutional environment seemed to alter the self concepts of the majority of subjects. This would suggest a transformation of the generalized other possessed by the individual subjects such that they were defining situations differently than had previously occurred. In fact, the majority of women who presently or in the past had violent self-images all stressed that they were trying, or had already succeeded, in becoming less violent--as measured by both their actions [i.e. number of write-ups] and their self perceptions. The most common response to explain this

change reflected a desire to "go home" and a realization that this would only be accomplished if their actions and attitudes indicated a move away from violence. For instance, when asked if she had learned to control her violent outbursts Subject #2, an offensively violent individual, responded:

I'm trying, I'm trying--I'm tired of fighting, but at times I can't bite my tongue, but at one time I was fighting just cause I didn't like the way you looked. I'm getting away from that, if I don't like the way you look I stay away 25 feet, but if you persist--if you persist then I'm going for it--come on! I give them a chance now, at one time I didn't.

This same subject named self-reflection as her reason for change:

I look back and see what I was when I come through here and I know when I walk out of here I don't want to be the same.

Similarly, Subject #1, also a self-proclaimed offensively violent individual, indicates a desire to get home and a transition of self concept:

I have a bad temper but,--ok. I'm going to give you an example, when I was in _____ [another institution] I had a bad temper. I've always been the kind of person never to argue--I just hit you; to argue would just get me more upset, you know, so at _____ [another institution] I had write-ups and write-ups and write-ups--this institution thinks I'm a management problem. Back then they would have said "she's crazy!" I have calmed down you know, even from when I first came here.

In a similar fashion those on the opposite end of the continuum; those possessing non-violent, intimidated or paranoid self-images, indicated that they were becoming, intentionally or unintentionally, more aggressive in both attitude and action. For example, when asked about her history of violence and her temper, Subject #7, a self-

proclaimed intimidated non-violent individual responded:

A violent temper. I cry! I run to my room like "oooo" and I cry! I cry violently--ha,ha....I think I've become more violent in here sometimes than I ever was in the real world. This place makes you--it just gets harder.

The transition of self concept upon incarceration reflects a difference not only in the way in which the women viewed themselves, but also in the way in which they were viewed by others. This suggests that the generalized other also underwent transformation in conjunction with the subject's incarceration. That is, the epiphanal event of incarceration surrounds the woman with different specific others and thus a different generalized abstract in which to view self.

Those who have been successful with violence in the past are likely to consider it a viable behavioural alternative in the present. However, more than simply success with violence, it is success with violence in similar situations with similar others that is likely to proliferate violence. If indeed there does exist a sub-culture of violence, where violence is a legitimized norm, it is within the maximum security prison. Therefore it is not surprising that those non-violent individuals came to define selves as more violent than prior to their incarceration. On the other hand, the overt use of violence as a means of negotiating within a penitentiary is guaranteed to result in sanctions (i.e. longer sentence, write-ups, suspension of privileges, etc.,). Thus those

women who previously defined themselves as offensively violent came to view violence from a different perspective than before.

The Role of Specific Others in Prison

The transition of self and the constructing of a new generalized other once imprisoned may be reflective of the specific others the women are surrounded by once incarcerated. In fact, the data suggests the existence of an "US" and "THEM" duality. That is, subjects either sympathized and identified with the general prison population thereby constituting an "US", or subject did not associate and identify with the other inmates thereby constituting the "THEM" category.

Those subjects who fell into the "US" category described a camaraderie between inmates; felt that they were liked, or often more importantly, respected, by others, and generally felt more comfortable in their surroundings. For example, when asked if she lived on the defensive or felt that she continually had to prove something to other inmates, Subject #1 replied:

(N)o, they don't care, they don't care--if you live in an emotional unit, a closed custody unit like I live in they don't worry about nothing like that. Everybody just like me, you know, they look after their own.

It is interesting to note that even among those who felt they were part of the prison culture and identified

themselves with other inmates, this identification was not with all others; only a select few of privileged or superior others. This hierarchical division within the group of inmates constituting the "US" category is made more evident by the following dialogue between Researcher (R) and Subject (S):

R: Obviously you had made friends with these others.

S: Oh ya. very good...

R: ...now are they all doing long time like you or are some of them going to leave...

S: ...some of them going to leave. Like I said I've only got about five friends. Two of them be going home this year, one of them is already out...

R: ...I hear that a lot-- a couple good friends...

S: ...very few good ones out here, very few--if you find two you doing damn good. I found maybe four, maybe five, and actually not even four because two of them I like but I don't trust--they're too much like me...

R: ...what? You don't trust yourself?

S: Oh, I trust me, I just don't trust no one like me. You know...ha,ha,...like I said I know my capabilities! (Subject #2).

Thus although the subject identifies with those around her and is quick to say she has friends and is part of the "US" congregate, she also qualifies her answer by saying that friendship and belongingness within this prison subculture in no way imply trust.

The distinction between "US" and "THEM" with regards to definition of others was made in a variety of ways such as by colour -- black versus white; by sentence -- long-timers versus short-timers; by sexual preference -- homosexual versus heterosexual, and by self concept -- most commonly

violent versus non-violent. Moreover, these distinctions were often made on more than one continuum. For instance, Subject #5 initially differentiated between "US" and "THEM" on the basis of violence when asked about staff-inmate relations she replied;

(T)he management problems are either in Max or Segregation. So the rest of us shouldn't have to suffer.

In addition, Subject #5 also differentiated between "US" and "THEM" on the basis of sexual preference. Within the homosexual subculture of the prison a great deal of status is derived from one's dominant role as a "boy" and from one's previous homosexual experience:

(A)nd when I came out here, they thought I was just another little girl coming in and decided I'm going to be a stud and try to do this life. But see I had fourteen years experience when I walked through this door. See, and once they sat and talked to me they seen they couldn't run this bullshittin' game out here on me!

Subject #5's previous homosexual experience not only gave her status and the respect of others within that particular subculture, but also gave her a group with which to identify. Hence, in this case "US" became the "boys". Moreover, "US" in this particular case was further defined as the "boys" not in Max or segregation whose roles as management problems Subject #5 perceived to negatively affect the rest of the population.

Those women who did not identify with any faction of the prison population were very outspoken in establishing themselves as not one of "THEM". Some of these women simply

kept to themselves and did not overtly make known their distaste and discomfort of those around them. For instance, when Subject #6 was asked if she had any friends in prison she paused in thought and replied:

(A)h...no. I don't really trust these people. Every once and a while I enjoy the company of someone trying to trust them, but I'm watching and usually they turn out to be a dud, something really bad. I'm usually cautious, you know, cautious, and a couple of times I really did think this person, that person was a friend and they turn out to be you know....

On the other hand, some of the subjects, such as Subject #9, were much more outspoken in denouncing any ties or identification with the inmate population:

...everyday in here feels like twenty years at least. This is horrible. I can't look out at the express way; I can't go out in the yard because I don't like the things I see. I don't like the drugs being passed, I don't like--where they get them is beyond me--I don't like all the relations I see--the kissing--its disgusting to me. It goes against me and if I had to live here forever--which I'd never make it; I'd die of a stroke or heart attack, I know I would. Um, I could never be like that--it just goes against all my beliefs and I am not going to turn like that, and I don't consider myself a criminal--I'm not going to go down to their level--not that I'm better than them, but I don't think like them. I don't want to act like them.

In terms of relating Subjects' self concept to their perceptions of their specific others within the institution, all of the women with offensively violent self concepts felt an association with one or more of the prison factions. Those women with defensively violent self-images were split in terms of the "US" versus "THEM" phenomenon; some felt a sense of belongingness whereas others maintained no identification whatsoever. In addition, all of the women who defined themselves and felt that others defined them as non-violent expressed absolutely no identification

whatsoever with the other inmates. In fact, they did not even feel that they could identify with other self-other defined non-violent individuals. It would seem that the stigma of incarceration for an assaultive crime overrode all else including a searching out and identification with other non-violent inmates.

Summary

It would appear that, indeed, symbolic interactionism as applied to violent situations is a theoretical application that works equally well when applied to violence by women as it had previously with violence by men (cf. Athens, 1977;1980; Felson, 1978; Felson and Steadman, 1983; Luckenbill, 1977). This would suggest that a distinct feminist criminology is not a necessary prerequisite to a holistic approach to the study of violence in general. However, certain factors have emerged from the data that would seem to be specific to violence by women. While the theoretical, situational categories postulated by Athens (1977;1980), or for that matter Dietz (1983), may be applied to violence by women, there are certain mitigating factors influencing these situational definitions that are gender specific. For instance, when women engaged in violent acts in which a male fell victim the subjective situational definition made by the actor reflected the objective situation surrounding the event. The women were more likely

to re-define or hesitate in their intended line of action when the victim was a male. Moreover, males were only the victims of female violence when the objective situation was not one that suggested fear of retaliation such as when the woman possessed a gun or when the male victim was in a compromising position like sleeping or under the influence of drugs and/or alcohol. Hence it would seem that the concepts of power and empowerment, both physical and psychological, are key in understanding differences between male and female violence.

Employing a feminist framework this concept of power, and more specifically individual empowerment, shall be examined in the following analytic chapter.

CHAPTER VII

POWER AND EMPOWERMENT

Introduction:

Analyses of power; who possess it, who does not, and where it originates, have historically been at the forefront of sociological inquiry and theory. How power has been conceptualized by sociological theorists is very much a reflection of the theoretical orientation of the individuals who study it. The three major factions of sociological theory; conflict theory, functional theory and micro-level exchange theory, all approach the study of power relations from a different world view and therefore, not surprisingly, all conceptualize power in different ways. For instance, Marx and his followers have conceptualized power as resulting from the class divisions of capitalism. Weber and his supporters, such as Dahrendorf (1959), on the other hand, have argued that Marxian analyses of power and its' association with property and class are too simplistic since society is stratified along plural dimensions. Functionalist theorists, such as Parsons (1951), have conceptualized power as resulting not from the conflict in society but rather as a natural function of society. Moreover, social exchange theorists, such as Homans (1974) and Blau (1964) have defined power quite differently than the traditional conflict view of power which focuses on the ability to coerce on the basis of one's command of resources

or the functionalist view of power as the means by which society organizes and implements decisions. Homans, Blau and other social exchange theorists contend that power originates from the unequal exchange of unilaterally provided valued societal services (Wallace and Wolf, 1985). It is obvious that one's definition of power reflects one's world view; that is, whether or not society is viewed as an arena of conflict, an interdependent, functioning organism or as constructed through individual social exchanges.

Criminological theorists too have long disagreed over the role and constituency of power in society and its resulting effect on deviant behaviour. For instance, Pfuhl (1986) argues that behaviour that is labelled criminal, or "banned behaviour", reflects the moral biases of those in political positions of power. The values and interests of the dominant groups in society are transformed into rules and those rules are enforced through threat and fear of sanction. Pfuhl's (1986) conceptualization of the function of power as it pertains to legislation of legal and illegal behaviour is similar to that of other criminologists such as Piven (1981) and Quinney (1969):

...not all segments of society are equally well situated or equipped to command--to have their interests incorporated into public policy. They do not all have equal amounts of or access to power. Since interest groups have differing amounts of power and conflict with one another, power and conflict become critical factors in the politics of deviance (Pfuhl, 1988:84).

The concept of a "ruling class" and the unilateral division of power between those who control the means of production and those who do not does not appear in any of the major non-Marxist conflict criminologists writings. Rather, as Turk (1969) maintains,

(T)here are those in a society who constitute the dominant, decision-making category--the authorities--and those who make up the subordinate category--the subjects. That is not to say that any specific population can be readily dichotomized into a ruling elite and a powerless mass. Power is rarely, if ever, so neatly distributed... (Turk, 1969:33 as quoted in Vold, 1979:316).

Feminist criminological theorists would be quick to agree with Turk (1969), Pfuhl (1986), Quinney (1969) and others that indeed power relations are not neatly organized into class relations between those who control the means of production and those who do not. However, feminist theorists point out that regardless of how we choose to conceptualize the social world and the resultant power struggles, there can be no denying that women in all segments of society are oppressed by their relative position of powerlessness in a patriarchal society.

Within feminist theory, as within most theoretical orientations, there exist different and competing factions. All feminists are not in agreement in their world views. For instance, Marxist feminists argue that women's oppression is the result of a capitalist mode of production. Radical feminists, in contrast, cite the maintenance of a

patriarchal social structure as the impetus of women's oppression. Socialist feminists, on the other hand, argue that the dual systems of patriarchy and capitalism provide the source of women's oppression. Despite their particular world views and the competing ideologies surrounding the source of women's oppression, all feminists agree on the primacy of women's oppression. Patriarchal structures are fundamental to our form of social organization and therefore it follows that the main axis of differentiation in our society must be gender (Abbott and Wallace, 1990).

Interpersonal violence, specifically violence by women, cannot be understood in isolation from the engendered power differentials that permeate society. On the societal level power is exercised by the reified social structures of a patriarchal society. On an individual level power is most often in the hands of men. The overriding fear of male physical violence, be it proactive or reactive, coupled with the passivity dictated by a masculist society commonly places women in a position of powerlessness. This powerlessness has been internalized as a natural state of being and thus, whether or not women are consciously or unconsciously aware of their position in society, their actions, violent and non-violent, are reflective of this differential.

Given the neglect of explanations of power in the analyses of violence by women it is necessary to first

present this concept in a broader scope as it exists both within and outside of the prison before examining power as it affects interpersonal violence by women.

Power and Empowerment in and outside of the Prison

Society is stratified in multiple ways; by race, by gender, and most obviously by economic differences. Each of these stratification systems allocates varying degrees of power and prestige within society. For instance, when we speak of economic stratification we speak of the power and prestige associated with different occupations and their respective financial rewards (cf. Clement, 1988; Wright et al., 1982). Prison society mirrors greater society in that it too is stratified along multiple dimensions. In contrast to the outside world, economic stratification undergoes a radical transformation which renders it of secondary importance within the institution walls. Inmates at Huron Valley Women's Facility are required to either work or attend school, and jobs within the institution are very much stratified according to their prestige and financial benefit⁹. As Subject #8 explains,

⁹ Inmates who refuse to work or attend courses while imprisoned are classified as 'unemployable' and must remain in their rooms while others attend their respective stations. This reflects the prisons origins in capitalist society as has been demonstrated by Foucault (1977) and Melossi and Pavarini (1981) to be the central pivot in society's attempts to punish, and control, to make over the malfessant, and 'straighten out' the bent.

(T)hey are regulated depending on what type of classification you have. If you're under twenty-one then its mandatory you attend school to obtain a GED. ok, so you might clear twelve dollars a month. They have kitchen jobs out here. They clear about anywhere from eighty bucks a month to about a hundred and twenty, ok, they're entitled to these like bonuses that come like every quarterly of the year. You've got people that work on ground maintenance and people that work in the housing unit keeping it up--they make an average of maybe twenty to twenty-five per month. Um, the women on the cushion side of the factory will clear anywhere from a hundred and eighty to two hundred and twenty per month plus they're entitled to quarterly bonuses. The women on the tab side--because they make tabs and that tends to filter through the Feds--they clear anywhere from two hundred to three hundred a month, so that's like the primo.

The income the women receive from their work in various positions is not disposable income. Rather, the women incur quite a few expenses while incarcerated. Subject #8 comments:

(W)hat are you expenses in here?! Christ, everything! If you're conscious of your body then you're going to want to take vitamins--you have to take some sort of supplement here because they tend to feed you a lot of bread, a lot of potatoes, a lot of starchy foods, a lot of carbohydrates, a lot of cheeses, a lot of eggs, a lot of bullshit, ok, and if you don't have access to the commissary to where you can go out and purchase some kind of food you're going to blow up...I buy vitamin supplements. The institution will not provide any type of personals--you have to buy your own soap, your toothbrushes, toothpaste, shampoo, deodorant, powder, douches, everything.

Because of the personal expenses incurred by inmates and the limited income they generate, economic stratification within the institution is minimal. Family socio-economic background does, however, influence one's hierarchical position within the institution. Family support is very important. Certainly a woman with familial financial backing is able to separate herself from the others via a display of material wealth. But this is not easily accomplished and moreover, often not desirable. As Subject #9 describes, having more immediate material wealth than

your peers within the institution can be detrimental:

(N)ow they're accusing me of running a store. They say I have all this stuff and I won't share it with them. So I had a duffle bag check done and what they can't fit in they confiscated in see through bags and they make you send it home. Well I got five day top-lock on a first ticket--a girl got caught next to me on a major ticket and got a two or three day top-lock.

<R: And you got this because you had too much stuff in your room?>

Aha, ya, of my own...I broke the rules by having too much stuff in my room, but I was trying to protect myself...I figured I'd buy a whole bunch of stuff [at prison store] then I'd only have to go out there once a month. And if I don't go then they'll think that I don't have anything...but see it backfired. And it was working fine until I found out that this officer that took it went and told everybody what I had in my room.

Thus it is obvious that immediate material wealth targets you for rip-offs, abuse, and ostracism within the institution, unless, of course, you are willing and capable of successfully defending your property as was Subject #1:

...but now I stopped loaning money. I don't have no money first of all and what I have I do need. If I do you a favour--and I'm doing this girl a favour--she's got a store--she's taking my two dollars to give to some one else two for one, you know, and I just want to get my two dollars back...but I just beat her in the face. The more I hurt her, I thought I'd end up killing her.

The small amount of income generated by inmates, coupled with living expenses, and the stigma of having more material wealth than one's peers results in the secondary importance of wealth as a means of determining status in prison.

Race

Race is also a factor that has vast impact on an individual's power in society. Typically, in North American society greater power is accorded to white people than is to black people. Because of their history as slaves in the

United States, blacks are currently over-represented in the lower socio-economic brackets and, some would argue, as a consequence of discrimination and poverty are also over-represented in the prison population. Within Huron Valley Women's Facility the ratio of black to white inmates is approximately sixty-five to thirty-five [65:35]. Although none of the women interviewed would argue that racial tension was non-existent, many felt that less prejudice was exercised among inmates than was the norm in society:

(N)o. I think it's more racial, like, with the officers and the prisoners than it is with the prisoners and prisoners because most prisoners, black and white, are having their love affairs together. So whether they're racial or not you can't tell because--a lot of the times you do see a white girl with a white girl, but most of the white girls have black women--however you say it--you don't see a lot of racism, unless of course they get mad at each other...otherwise I would say it's more prejudice comes down from the officers, because there's not too many white girls once they get to this penitentiary--I don't care how prejudice they are in the world,--they get to be alright with most of the black ladies.

According to the prison administration, racial tension among inmates tends to flare up bi-annually; once in February, which is black history month, and during the summer season when tempers reflect the hot season. Thus, race is also not a major determinant of status and power within the institution.

Individual Empowerment Through Sex Roles

Within the prison power and prestige are predominantly determined not by socio-economic or racial means, but by role differentiation mirroring gender differences in greater

society. The differentiation between appropriate roles for males and females is nowhere more brazenly drawn than in the area of sexuality-- a term describing the complexity of relations between the sexes; the roles played by each gender, and the various functions, purposes, capacities, and behaviours of men and women. This reliance on role differentiation as the principle means of determining status and power within the single-sex environment of the prison can be explained by the historical linkage of power in society to the separation of men from the household and the rise of industry and capitalism. In conjunction with the Industrial Revolution, power in the more global context moved from informal control within the private, familial sphere to formal control within the public sphere. During the mid 1800's, with the rise of the Industrial Revolution, large rural, agrarian populations began a massive demographic shift into the new urban interstices. In the new blurred normative order of the city control was recast as a function of state governments as feudal power arrangements based upon "companionage" faded. The rise of the modern police force, and the concomitant investment in the prison and lunatic asylum as control mechanisms have predominated to contemporary times (cf. Scull, 1979; 1981). This division of labour between the sexes along familial and extra-familial lines has resulted in women more than men being both the instruments and objects of informal social

control, and men, more than women, being the instruments and objects of formal social control (Hagan, 1990; Hagan et al., 1990). This instrument-object cycle is perpetuated by the socialization of females into familial roles and the socialization of men into extra-familial roles. Indeed, even those women who attempt to infiltrate male occupations do so largely in addition to their familial roles and thus do not fully participate in 'male' society. Moreover, it is estimated that women's earnings as a percentage of men's are only fifty-nine percent (Lipman-Blumen, 1984; Mackie, 1988). Hence, while the outside world is socially organized around the work world, the rewards from which women are predominantly excluded, the inner world of the women's prison reflects power differences based upon women's position within the familial, and marginalized, instrument-object cycle perpetuated by gender socialization. Accordingly, when women in a single-sex environment, such as those sampled, attempt to achieve power and personal empowerment they do so by mirroring the behaviour of those most powerful individuals within their direct frame of reference; namely men. To be a man in society is to be masculine and society's construction of masculinity is, first and foremost, a construction of power. Boys are typically taught that to be masculine is to be aggressive, assertive and independent. Girls, on the other hand, are frequently socialized that to be feminine is to be passive,

compliant and dependent. These characteristics are obviously indicative of degrees of power and control. Those who are passive and dependent are those individuals with lesser power and those over whom greater control is exercised.

Given the gendered exclusion of women from the means of economic and knowledge production, it is not surprising that upon entering a single-sex environment that women would attempt to define their role in this sub-cultural hierarchy by modelling those traits associated with power and empowerment in greater society; namely those traits most commonly associated with males. Nowhere is this more evident than within the homosexual subculture of the prison.¹⁰

Some women withdraw from the sexual culture of the prison and maintain celibacy for the duration of their incarceration. These, however, are the exceptions to the rule for the majority of the prison population engages in situational homosexuality. Those who partake in same sex relations in the prison do so for a variety of reasons; some seek comfort and companionship, others for sexual release, others were confirmed homosexuals prior to incarceration, and still others conform to peer pressure. Indeed, for

¹⁰ For a detailed discussion of homosexuality and the assumption of imitative gender roles within women's prisons see Ward and Kassebaum (1967).

whatever reasons, same sex relations are the accepted and widely practised norm within the prison just as they have been proven to be in other single-sex environments.¹¹

Within these various relationships are deeply embedded power relations. Those inmates who fulfil a traditional masculine role and act as a dominant partner refer to themselves and are referred to by others as "boys". Whereas those who present themselves in a more feminine manner are referred to by self and others as "girls".

Subject #5 in explaining the colloquialism 'punk' further explains this differentiation between "boys" and "girls":

(W)ell it depends on what side of the field you're on. If you are on the sex show and you are supposed to be dominant which is a boy, if you are a punk, that means that you don't socialize with the IN crowd, ok. If you are not a punk, you socialize with the IN crowd, but you carry your own weight, you know. And you know just like the fresh womens that comes through the doors, a lot of these women, and I speak honestly, a lot of these womens come through the door they never have messed around with womens before. And they comes through the door and one day they put on a hat and some gyrt shoes and they pimping, you understand. And they go out and they get more dates than every other female...and that's what we call a punk, you know. There's a lot of them come out here and other womens you know from the world who--the bitch is wearing a dress out there and I sit out here laughing. That's a punk. Then a lot of females, feminine females, come out here and pick one of the boys. Those that don't get turned on, they are lost. They don't know where to go.

It is obvious that there are deeply rooted power and status relationships embedded within this sub-culture where greater

¹¹ The use of the term "same sex relations" is deliberate for many of these individuals would not agree with the label of lesbian as many see their actions as temporary and out of necessity. They contend that it was not, nor will it be, their world outside the prison much as young male street prostitutes view their behaviour as non-homosexual and required for minimal survival (cf. Visano, 1987).

power and status is accorded to the "boys"; moreover it is accorded to those "boys" who have remained true to their free world identity and have not situationally assumed this dominant homosexual role.

In addition, since greater society is very much divided on gendered lines, sexual activity, both in and outside of the penitentiary, becomes a bargaining tool:

...a lot of the little boys out here go for the girls with the money. You could be the ugliest motherfucker with the finest bitch on count. But see, if one of you all got some money, that's the way the game is played (Subject #5).

In addition to being a commodity, human sexuality is also a status making device. Associating yourself with a more respected, higher status individual helps to increase your own status. Similarly, associating yourself with an attractive "girl" or "boy" is also seen as an extension of your identity as evidenced by the following dialogue:

<R: Do they respect you out here?>

Oh ya, especially now that I'm walking with _____ on my arm and she's so gorgeous. She's--my life is beautiful because she has these green coloured eyes and this tan from the sun and she's got that kind of hair like--she's gorgeous to be a white girl, but, _____ is also considered very gorgeous to be in the black race you know. And--it's a trip, you know, because the minute I turn my back here's a little boy sending her a kite or here's a little girl telling her I ain't right for her...(Subject #5).

This behaviour mirrors the heterosexual outside world where sex is a commodity for which men are willing to pay and a woman's physical appearance is a contributing factor to her value in society.

Power relations can take many forms. In a larger social context we can see via societal structures such as

the division of labour and politics that men are more highly valued and given greater power in society. Power implies control and control may be conscious or unconscious, physical or psychological. Abuse is one example of a micro level power differential; one which victimizes females at the hands of males far more frequently than it does other males (cf. Drakich and Guberman, 1987; Guberman and Wolfe, 1985). Interestingly enough, while it is estimated that one-fifth to one-third of all women are sexually abused in childhood (Drakich and Guberman, 1987), it is further estimated that approximately nine out of ten female inmates were sexually or physically abused as children (Adelberg, 1987). Abuse, whether it is physical, sexual, or psychological in nature, is indicative of a power differential between a dominant and a subordinate. Abuse is a terrorist tactic used to keep the subordinate under control.

The prison subculture with its high number of previously abused women provides multiple examples of how women may choose to deal with this power differential. Some may be consciously unaware, or desensitized, and seemingly unaffected by it. Others may choose to quietly accept it, and still others may take extreme measures to redress the imbalance.

Subject #9 is indicative of someone unaware of power differentials in society. Although she was never physically

abused, it is quite apparent that she was mentally abused and she is consciously aware of this:

...my dad was, um, not real kind and loving, you know, he was good..... and he gave us material things, but not love.

On the surface Subject #9 would appear to be a feminist based on such remarks as,

(H)e was always verbally abusive, but he was never physically--see, I can't stand that at all; my blood pressure goes high--I don't know what--I am totally against a man beating up on a woman....

However, throughout the course of our conversations all references to women other than herself were on the basis of who their husband was and what he did for a living. For example,

(T)hank God _____ was there, her husband's a neurologist at _____ Hospital....

or,

...and he says "well, what's wrong?" And they said "nothing, just go over to _____'s house"--she lives about three miles down the road--her husband is a mortgage attorney.

Thus, this subject although she may be consciously unaware of any discrepancy, clearly voices her unconscious acceptance of a masculist society where women's identity is defined in relation to their spouse's occupational status.

Those women who were consciously aware of their status and the related consequences were often those women who had a history of physical and sexual abuse. A variety of coping strategies were used by these subjects in dealing with this reality. Some rejected men and became avowed homosexuals. Others took it one step further and had a history of

violence against men.

Subject #2 presents us with a woman very much aware of how an engendered power differential has affected her life:

I had my daughter when I was fourteen...I'd been molested by my father from the time I was six years old up to the time I was twelve--I don't remember before that--I got two brothers who molested me--I always associated love with getting hurt.

Realization of her dissatisfaction with her position prompted her to leave home at a young age. Returning only once she was confident with her own empowerment:

I stabbed my brother through the arm with a pitch fork and pinned him to a barn wall. I shot my other brother--I came home when I was sixteen and told my dad if he ever laid a hand on me or my baby I'm going to kill you.

Prison has paradoxically been a positive experience for many of these women. Perhaps being removed from male society and surrounded by women with similar life experiences was necessary before they were able to question their own situation. Take for instance, the experience of Subject #7 whose husband was also incarcerated:

I had been here long enough by myself--I had already started questioning some of the things he said in his letters. and it was like wait a minute...and then it was like I don't need this, its not -- and I knew that I could do it by myself--I was so afraid that I could not--that I was worthless; that I could not do anything in my life by myself, you know, and I can!

This woman's realization came about only after she had been physically separated from her husband. Her subsequent divorce symbolized her breaking away from her own powerlessness.

Ya, and that was the real turning point. I think I could say to you at one point "nope I wouldn't do it [crime] again" and really mean it--I mean you would think I really meant it, but in my heart I still knew that he had a hold on me I could not get out of.

<R: And divorcing him was getting out of that hold?>

Ya, and I don't even know if I needed to have the paper.

Thus, ironically, it was only while in prison in a single-sex environment that this woman had her first sense of empowerment. Power can be exercised both physically and socially. Because the majority of inmates sampled were previously abused and serving time for violent crimes, the form of power they are most familiar with is that of physical power.

Physical Power

Those women who possess violent self-images are those who have internalized and had prior success with violence as a form of self-empowerment. These same women are those who through threat of physical harm are able to maintain their position of status within the institution.

Character contests, confrontations with the potential for violence, can be dealt with in one of three ways (Hepburn, 1973). The individual may choose to (1) physically withdraw from the location or socially withdraw from the encounter; (2) the individual may choose to accept the new situational identity as legitimate, or illegitimate but not worth the effort or potential cost of negotiation, or (3) the individual may retaliate in either a verbal or physical manner. Character contests within the penitentiary, and indeed in outside society, are in fact

status contests between actors vying for power.

Case #2 illustrates the outcome of a confrontation in which the actor 'saved face' and established her situational identity as one of powerful. In response to the 'snitch jacket' placed upon her by another inmate, thereby threatening her identity, Subject #2 made a physical retaliatory effort to save face:

...you know you can only try to flush someone's head down the toilet so many times before you realize it don't fit.

<R: Or you drown.>

...I tried, but it didn't work. They only put this much water in our toilets [uses thumb and finger to demonstrate one to two inches].

Rather than accept her potential identity as 'snitch' Subject #2 retaliated with violence. Her success with a violent line of action reinstated/reinforced her status as a tough person not to be reckoned with lightly. In justifying violence as an acceptable means of negotiating confrontations she says,

...I've got enough time to cover my ass--I can go to Max twelve more times and still get out. So it don't matter to me--I got twelve years to fuck up if I want to and four to clean it up cause as long as I got two years clean conduct they going to let me go.

In this instance the subject views violence as a legitimate means of preserving both physical and psychological self.

In contrast to the retaliatory face saving measures illustrated by the previous example, Subject #5 is indicative of someone who has accepted the new situational identity placed upon her by another inmate. She describes

how she avoids confrontation:

(W)e played _____ the last two years together for the prison. And I think because we both love the game we kind of got that settled...she has mellowed out a lot. I think she's tired and ready to go home now. She has no--but, I--I give her twelve inches at all times, you know, unless we all together. She might say, "hey _____, you want to play some ball?" Or, if I am already playing and she comes along and plays and we all play together. But when she's in a bad mood and I see that she's in a bad mood, she may not speak to me, you know. If she's in a good mood she'll speak to me first. Usually if I see her I give her respect. I say "what's up _____?" And if she speaks back I know she's straight today. If she don't, I'm gone.

It is obvious that this individual has internalized her position as less powerful and secondary in status to that of her adversary.

Given the importance of violence as a legitimized means for maintaining a favourable situational identity within the institution, one cannot help but foresee problems of adjustment and status inconsistency upon the women's return to a sexually integrated society. The ghettoization of these women while in prison increases their individual empowerment by separating them from male society and may also breed understanding of the imbalance of power in society. However, while other unequal groups in society are often able to live separately from one another, most men and women are not. Segregation is not, for the most part, even a choice as it is for some political, racial or other social groups, and thus these women upon their return to society must (re)learn to deal with society's engendered power differentials.

Social Power and the Maintenance of Empowerment

Physical power is more easily attained and maintained than is social power. However, no one would know better than these women that the exercise of physical power; violence, can result in punishment; incarceration, by those reified entities possessing social power. In contrast, those who exert social power over others do not fear similar sanctions. Social power is the abstract power governing society. Abuses in social power go largely unpunished as individuals have internalized social power structures as absolutes. When, and in some cases if, these women return to society they will (re)discover that they are largely devoid of social power. The physical power that they may have internalized as status power while in the institution can, upon return to society, only be exerted over similar others. However, success in assaulting another female; same sex character contests, will have diminished impact in defining similar situations and legitimizing violence as an accepted means of negotiation when the intended victim is a man or someone with a gun.

Power as Affecting Interpersonal Violence by Women

Violence by women, in contrast to violence by men, is very much framed by the objective situation in which it occurs. This objective situation is inclusive of such mitigating factors as the availability of props such as

weapons, the locality of the interactional exchange inclusive of any and all audience support, the present physiological state of the intended victim, and the previously defined relationship between those involved in the encounter. All of these factors incorporate a conscious or unconscious analysis of power differentials on the part of the female offender. It is only once this more objective situation is internalized and evaluated, and power differentials are weighed, that the subjective situation is defined and the line of action carried out.

Thus it is not surprising that there exists vast differences between the processual dynamics of violent interchanges where the victim was a male and those where the victim was a female. In those instances where the victim was another female [case #1,2,3,5,7] the interactional exchange occurred between equally empowered actors and followed a processual development similar to that documented by traditional interactionist research on male violence (cf. Dietz, 1983; Luckenbill, 1977). However, in those instances when a male was victimized [case #6,8,9] the women relied more heavily upon the objective situation and either (A) invoked the participation of another male in committing their alleged violent act with or for them; (B) relied on the use of props such as a gun so as to avoid physical contact and lessen the threat of retaliation, or (C) committed their alleged crime while the victim was in a

lessened state of power such as asleep or intoxicated. These factors give credence to the relationship specific research done on women and violence. However, as has been previously mentioned, most of this research concentrates only on retaliatory violence by women (cf. Browne, 1987), and therefore only concentrates on micro-level power differentials between a dominant and a subordinate. But what of more macro-level power differentials entrenched in a patriarchal society? Surely these affect both reactive and proactive violence by women. Proactive violence by women, or that which is initiated when other than physically defensive definitions of situations occur, is also reflective of engendered power differentials. Whether or not women are consciously or unconsciously aware of these differentials their violent acts do indeed reflect the larger social structure.

For instance, Subject #3 in the course of committing a B&E with her male accomplice, upon discovering the home owner asleep in the bedroom initially interpreted the situation as one not calling for violence but rather one that called for immediate withdrawal from the situation:

(W)hen I had went upstairs and opened up the door I was very surprised that there was anyone in the house you know, and when I had turned--he [accomplice] was right by my side--when I had turned it was for the purpose to remove myself from that area cause I had seen a human being....

This initial definition of the situation was re-defined by her accomplice:

He had had the gun, and he put it in my hands and said "shoot him" and I

shot him.

After following the orders dictated by her accomplice Subject #8 again re-defined the situation as calling for retreat. Again the her situational interpretation was re-defined for her:

...the impact when I had like shot it [sawed-off shotgun], it had like popped me in the chest and then my ears went bad and I turned to run out of the room and he had grabbed me by my arm and said "wait", and I was like "Aggggh"; I was hysterical...he said "we got to get rid of the body". I said "what do you mean, I'm scared"...We took the body out...to another city...and he set it on fire....

Thus, for reasons that suggest an unquestioned acceptance of an engendered power differential, the subject acted not on her own definitions of the situation, but rather on the orders of another.

Similar to Subject #8, Subject #7, a convicted sex offender, also made no attempt to question the situational definition provided to her by her male accomplice.

Justifying her submissiveness she says,

...I thought my whole purpose was that he loved me and I was supposed to do everything..... that he wanted me to do.

It was only once her husband's perversion turned towards his own children that Subject #7 voiced any objection. This objection to her husband's definition of the situation, however, occurred only after the act had been completed:

...I mean we had a son and a daughter and...when our son was three there were three pictures of myself and our son on the bed naked...I mean he had his hand on my breast and I had my hand on his penis...I got off the bed that day and I said to him [husband]--I mean it was the first time I ever really stood up and said "this is one thing that I will not ever do again and I will not ever go any further with this". So this was like the first time I said no. "No, I'm not doing this; you've already got me somehow to do all the rest of the stuff but no I'm not doing this".

Subject #7 reacted to and re-defined the situation only after the intended line of action had been carried out. Her statement "*you've already got me somehow to do all the rest of the stuff*" is indicative of her unquestioned acceptance of her position as less powerful and less knowledgeable than her male counterpart. It is doubtful that Subject #7 would have engaged in sexual acts with animals and children of her own accord as by her own admission she did not even enjoy sex.

The unquestioned acceptance of a proactive violent definition of the situation provided to the subjects by their male accomplices not only gives credence to the argument that engendered power differentials cannot be ignored when examining the behaviour of women, but also suggests that the generalized other possessed by the subject is one that is mitigated by her life experiences within a patriarchal society. Whether or not the subject's generalized other provided support or rejection of violence as a means of negotiating situational outcomes had little effect on the line of action followed by the subject. For instance, neither Subject #8 nor Subject #7 were defined by self or others as offensively violent, or proactively violent individuals, yet both of these women renounced their own initial situational definition, and the supporting view of their generalized other, and unquestioningly accepted a situational definition they did not condone.

As was discussed in Chapter VI, the generalized other possessed by the majority of subjects seemed to undergo a transformation within the prison environment. Those women who previously defined situations from the standpoint of an "unmitigated violent generalized other" became less violent, whereas those women who previously defined situations from the standpoint of a "non-violent generalized other" came to adapt the abstracted societal view provided to them by a "mitigated violent generalized other". This suggests that those self-defined non-violent women came to accept violence as a legitimate means of negotiation in certain "mitigated" circumstances. Similarly, those offensively violent women whose generalized other had previously provided them with unqualified support for violence also reformulated their generalized others such that they were provided with only limited support for violence. The extent to which an individual is comfortable and confident with the use of violence is indicative of her degree of self-assurance and self-empowerment. While it may be obvious that those self-defined non-violent women who came to internalize violence as legitimate in certain circumstances were those same women who had increased their confidence and assurance of self-empowerment. Less obvious is that those women who became less violent due to a transition in self concept and generalized other also may have become more secure in their degree of empowerment. The transition to less violent does

not necessitate an acceptance of self as less powerful. On the contrary, accepting the use of violence as conditionally legitimate, or necessary, as opposed to unconditionally legitimate, is reflective of one's degree of self-assurance and empowerment in dealing with situations in other than violent means.

The incarceration of the actor with similar others, and the subsequent transformation of the generalized other, may also affect retrospective definitions of self and situations. That is, those women whose original situational definitions were re-defined for them by an accomplice, thereby suggesting an acceptance of self as powerless, are now able to see that their participation in the violent encounter was indicative of power and empowerment. For example, Subject #8 presented herself as a powerless individual when she dismissed her own definition of the situation and shot, killed, and disposed of the body of her victim on the directives of her accomplice. However, the actual event of killing another person was in itself an exercise of power and self-empowerment. Similarly, Subject #7 initially considered herself powerless in a sexual situation she did not condone. However, retrospective definition of the situation, coupled with the transformation of self during incarceration, allowed Subject #7 to see that her mere presence during the assaultive act of sexual child abuse and pornography was indicative of her position of

power. Thus, the reformulation of the self and the generalized other once imprisoned may reflect more than the internalization of the prison environment. Indeed, it may reflect a retrospective definition of the situation and an acknowledgement of a position of power in a situation originally defined as powerless. Moreover, this retrospective acknowledgement of power and self-empowerment may be reflected in the subsequent violent, and non-violent, acts of the women once incarcerated. For example, those women who possessed defensively-violent, or non-violent, self-images retrospectively realized their degree of power and empowerment, evidenced by their violent offense, and by doing so gained confidence in their success with a violent line of action as a means of negotiating character contests within the institution. The impact of 'doing violence'; being a violent person and therefore an empowered person, has been integrated into the subjects' self concepts as well as their abstracted generalized others.

Summary

Women's position on the fringe of society and overall exclusion from the means of economic and knowledge production places women in a relative position of powerlessness. This powerlessness cannot help but invade all aspects of women's daily lives, and moreover, cannot help but, consciously or unconsciously, affect their social

interactions just as men's relative position of authority; possessing power, affects every aspect of their daily lives. Women's self concepts and the societal frame of reference provided to them by their abstracted generalized others are affected by this discrepancy in power as are the ways in which they define and re-define situations and carry out intended lines of action. When a male directs violent action towards a female he is more assured of carrying out his intended line of action than when he directs his actions towards another male. This is not only because of the usual power differences in strength between the sexes but also because of the internalized social power differences. Similarly, when a woman interprets an encounter with another woman as calling for violence she too is acting within a more equal setting and thus relying more upon the subjective situation and the immediate threat to her identity than she is to the objective situation. In contrast, female violence directed towards males, given the internalization of the social construction of masculinity and femininity, provides a situation where greater risk is taken by the female offender and thus greater weight is given to the inter-relationship of those elements comprising the objective situation.

In addition, when women act violently, or non-violently, in the company of a male it is often his definition of the situation, his generalized other and his

intended line of action which frames the situation. Women's overall acceptance of her subordinate position in society often results in her sense of powerlessness in a situation she may in fact have complete control over. It may not be until she is removed from integrated society and surrounded by similar others that she is able to retrospectively define the violent situation as one in which she exerted power over another individual. This realization of empowerment while incarcerated, coupled with the internalization of the prison environment, may be responsible for the transition in self-image once incarcerated. Furthermore, problems of readjustment upon release into greater society are foreseen given the subjects realization of self-empowerment and the use of violence as a legitimate means of negotiation in prison.

The vast impact of engendered power differentials on assaultive crime by women suggests that when examining mixed-sex violent interactions researchers must look not only at the processual dynamics of the violent interchange (cf. Dietz, 1983; Felson, 1978; Luckenbill, 1977) but also they must concern themselves with the structural factors embedded in power relations between the sexes which are manifested in these violent episodes.

CHAPTER VIII

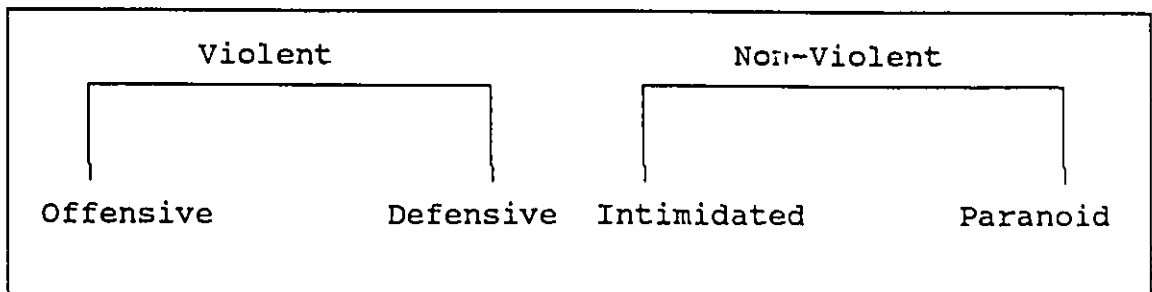
CONCLUSIONS

Summary of Research

Conventional approaches to the study of violent crime; those which concentrate on aggregate data and/or those which follow a personal pathology model, have concentrated largely on causative factors in explaining violence. However, violence, like all behaviour, is constructed within a situation by its participants and thus the study of actual violent behaviour, in contrast to a study of the causative factors of violence, must examine how the individual actor defines the situation in which she/he is placed and subsequently why she/he chooses to pursue a violent solution to the situation. There are two kinds of situations that confront an actor: the objective situation and the subjective situation (Stebbins, 1975). Rather than posing an epistemological dilemma the objective situation refers to, "(T)he immediate social and physical surroundings and the current physiological and psychological state of the actor", whereas, the subjective situation is comprised of, "...those elements of the objective situation seen by the actor to affect any of his[her] action orientations and must, therefore, be given meaning before he[she] can act" (Stebbins, 1975:6-7). Multiple actors can experience the same objective situation, but the subjective situation formed by each will be unique and dependent upon their

cultural predispositions and personal life experiences.

This research has explored violent crimes by women from a symbolic interactionist perspective. Data provided by indepth non-standardized interviews were analyzed and general statements about classes of situational definitions made by women during violent interpersonal exchanges were developed. In support of Athens (1980;1977), it was found that the situational definitions formed by these women could be categorised into one of three main categories. That is, women engaged in violence when they formed either **physically defensive, frustrative, or malefic** definitions of their immediate situation. Furthermore, it was found that the definitions of situations made by these women reflected their individual self concepts. The self concepts held by the women sampled were categorized as either violent or non-violent:



In addition, the role of the generalized other, that abstracted frame of reference used to evaluate one's behaviour before acting, also emerged as an important indicator of self and situational definitions. It was suggested that the apparent connection between self concept

and definition of the situation implies (1) that those women with offensively violent self concepts maintain an "unmitigated violent generalized other"; one which provides them with overall categorical support for violence; (2) that those women who are defined by self and others as defensively violent have a "mitigated violent generalized other" whereby they are provided with only limited support for violence, and (3) that those who hold non-violent self-images, both intimidated and/or paranoid, have a similar "non-violent generalized other" which does not provide them with any support for violence excepting in extreme situations, usually those defined as physically defensive. Furthermore, it was postulated that during the course of incarceration, the generalized other, in addition to the self concept possessed by each of these women, underwent a transformation which reflected both the specific others with which they were surrounded and the environment in which these women were placed.

The findings drawn from this research support other interactional research on violence. Indeed, Athens (1977;1980), Dietz (1983), Felson (1978), Felson and Steadman (1983), and Luckenbill (1977) would all agree that understanding self-image, situational definitions, and the roles of generalized and specific others are paramount to understanding interpersonal violence. However, this research deviated from other interactionist research by

stressing that a micro-level analysis of violence as constructed by its participants ignores important structural factors; specifically the societal structure of power.

Women's position on the fringe of society and overall exclusion from the means of economic and knowledge production commonly places women in a relative position of powerlessness. Consequently, women's self concepts and the societal frame of reference provided to them by their abstracted generalized others reflect this discrepancy in power, as does the way in which they define and re-define situations and carry out intended lines of action. This research suggests that the impact of an engendered power differential affects not only how violent female offenders define situations, but also how they define self in relation to the violent event. When a woman directed violence towards another woman the relationship between the two actors was virtually equal. That is not to say that a small woman without a weapon is any match for a larger woman with a weapon. Rather, the equality that exists between the two actors is an abstract, yet internalized, equality of status. In contrast, female violence directed towards males, given the internalization of the social construction of masculinity and femininity, provides a situation where greater risk is taken by the female offender and thus greater weight is given to the inter-relationship of those elements comprising the objective situation. Thus, in

those instances when a male was victimized the woman either (A) invoked the participation of another male in committing the violent act, (B) relied on the use of props such as a gun to lessen the threat of retaliation and to avoid physical contact, or (C) committed the offense while the male victim was in a lessened physiological state of power such as when he was asleep or under the influence of drugs and/or alcohol.

In addition, this research further suggests that when women act, violently or non-violently, in the company of a male it is often his definition of the situation, his generalized other, and his intended line of action which frames the situation. Thus, woman's overall acceptance of her subordinate position in society often results in her sense of powerlessness in a situation she may in fact have complete control over. Given the retrospective acknowledgement of power in a situation originally defined as powerless, coupled with the accepted use of violence as a means of negotiating character contests within the penitentiary, problems of readjustment upon release into sexually integrated, male dominated society, were also predicted. It was concluded that understanding women's societal position of power(lessness) and the control of women is paramount to understanding women's behaviour; specifically why and when they engage in violent acts and why and when they do not.

Future Research Considerations

This thesis provides a preliminary step towards understanding violence by women. Because of the pioneering and exploratory nature of this research, this research does not presume to provide a theoretical alternative to existing criminology. However, it is hoped that this research has opened the door to further research in this area.

Interactionist studies of violence by women and men need to bridge the gap between micro and macro-levels of analyses. Understanding the processual dynamics of interpersonal violence must encompass an understanding of the structural factors influencing the violent encounter. Thus, when mixed-sex violence occurs, whether females and males act in unison or in opposition, analyses, or at least an awareness, of engendered power differentials must be considered. Moreover, there is a need for more research on the complex relationship between violence and power. This suggests a need for more relationship-specific studies of violence. Presently relationship-specific literature on violence concentrates largely on family violence (cf. Browne, 1986;1987; Drakich and Guberman, 1987; Fiora-Gormally, 1978). However, the power differentials between men and women permeate all facets of society and therefore all inter-gender violence reflects the social organization of society. Also, if we do accept that domination and suppression result in greater violence within the lower

classes; those largely devoid of social power, then we must consider why it is that women within these lower classes do not act violently.

In addition, because so relatively few women commit violent crimes there is a need to examine the effect of the use of violence on these women. If, as was suggested by this thesis, the effect of 'doing violence' coupled with the effect of being incarcerated with similar others results in a retrospective realization of self-empowerment, then post-release studies on violent female offenders examining the ways in which they (re)adapt to integrated society would also prove useful.

Furthermore, more indepth qualitative research examining larger samples of violent women in addition to exploring their 'violent careers' would be useful in determining how these women came to internalize violence as both a successful and legitimate means of negotiating conflict. In addition, a discussion of violence and the perceptions of violence as heard from the voices of women may lead to an understanding of how men can learn to select non-violent alternatives.

All of these future research considerations necessitate an inclusion of the life experiences of women within the sociological and criminological discourses.

Towards a Criminological Discourse Inclusive of Women

Understanding behaviour by women, violent and non-violent, must start in understanding the experiences of women. However, the life experiences of women are undeniably mediated by gender and class relationships, inclusive of patriarchal relationships, the ideologies of femininity, and women's assigned roles within the home (Abbott and Wallace, 1990). Thus, in order to construct a sociological, or criminological, discourse for and inclusive of women the social structure must be de-reified and the everyday world of experience must become the starting point of inquiry (Smith, 1987). While individuals are active participants and supposed constructors of their daily lives, women's exclusion from the economic, ideological and political arenas of society necessitates that we do not examine their roles as participants and constructors in isolation from those social factors from which they are marginalized.

Criminological theory, and sociology in general, have failed to recognize gender as an important explanatory variable and have assumed that research and theory based upon male samples and a male world view can be generalized to women. The experiences of women, violent and non-violent, have been ignored and/or subsumed by a masculinely defined social discourse. Even the major critics of traditional criminology have failed to address the issue of

women and crime (cf. Fleming, 1985; Taylor, Walton and Young, 1973). The experiences of males cannot be generalized to females for they encompass a world of experience from which women are largely excluded, marginalized and powerless.

While research on violent crime among males can provide some possible directions for research on violent female criminals, there is currently little research that is useful in understanding violent criminal acts within a gendered, historical, and interpretive context. Knowledge is power and therefore research is in itself a tool of exploitation and domination (Kirby and McKenna, 1989). The institutionalization of the research process within a predominantly white, middle and upper-class male domain has left women as well as critical scholars in a weak position to contribute to knowledge production.

Violence has become part of our cultural lifestyle; a lifestyle that affects all of us yet in practise is largely indigenous to men alone. The socialization of males into the masculine gender type legitimizes and perpetuates the use of violence. Males are taught to be masculine is to aggressive, assertive and independent. Rambo, Conan the Barbarian and G.I. Joe provide us with the ultimate cultural stereotype of masculinity; the true man is one who is powerful and strong and uses his power and strength to control others. But where is G.I. Jill? She is home in her

societally designated place looking after children or working in an occupation that on average pays only fifty-nine percent of what her husband is making (Mackie, 1988). When and if she models the masculine behaviour put forth by her male counterpart she is said to have failed in her femininity. For a woman who is aggressive or violent is a woman who is characterized in society as unfeminine. Thus understandably, given the social construction of gender, violent crimes by women make up only ten percent of all violent criminal behaviour in North America (Smith, 1988). Given the instrument-object cycle which socializes males into the dominant roles in society and women into the more passive ones, the question sociologists and criminologists should be asking is not why do women commit violent crimes, but rather, why do so few women commit violent crimes.

The public issue of crime can only be understood in the antecedents of its personal troubles. Understanding the interpersonal dynamics that culminate in violence within the context of larger structural factors is the first step to understanding violence by women, and indeed, violence in general.

GLOSSARY

Blues: Refers to blue uniform worn by all prisoners not in Segregation.

Boy: The dominant more "masculine" partner in a homosexual relationship. Also slang term for heroin.

Clocked out: To lose control of one's temper.

Count: Five times daily inmates are locked in their rooms and counted to check for and deter escapes.

Crack: A form of cocaine.

D.D.O.: Disobeying a Direct Order; a major misconduct within the prison.

First Parole Date: Michigan Law allows for indeterminate sentencing which results in two dates from which parole can be calculated. Therefore, the inmate receives four possible parole dates: early and late parole on the first date and early and late parole on the second date.

Girl: The effeminate member of a homosexual couple in prison or one who is not a boy. Also a slang term for cocaine.

G.E.D.: General Educational Development; a high school equivalency diploma.

Head Games: Manipulation through use of deceit or lies.

Hole: Term used to describe solitary confinement or Segregation.

Kite: A message sent by one inmate to another.

Seg: Segregation unit of the prison where inmates are shackled, removed of privileges and identified by their brown as opposed to blue uniforms.

Shit/Stuff: Words used interchangeably to connote personal property. Also slang for drugs.

Snitch: Label given to individual who allegedly reports other inmates to the officers or administration.

Store: Economic arrangement where one or more inmates benefit by loaning money or tokens at one hundred percent interest.

Tail: The maximum sentence; for example, in a sentence of twenty-five to fifty years the tail is fifty.

Tickets: Written reprimands for improper or illegal activity which may result in sanctions.

Tokens: Objects used in place of legal tender.

Top Lock: Punishment for a minor or major misconduct whereby the inmate is removed of all privileges and only allowed out of her room five minutes per hour and for a daily ten minute shower. Maximum top lock sentence is five days.

Weed: Marijuana. Most often smoked in the form of a cigarette called a joint.

Write-up: Written notification of rule infraction. Categorized according to Major, Minor, or Summary Misconduct.

World: Society outside of the prison walls.

APPENDIX A

Attention Residents of Huron Valley Women's Facility:

You are being asked to participate in a study about women and violent crime. To complete this research I need to speak to women serving time for violent acts who are willing to speak honestly about themselves and their experiences. This interview should not take more than two hours of your time. Anything you tell me will be kept in the strictest of confidence and you may end the interview at any point if you do not feel comfortable.

I do not work for the Dept. of Corrections, the State, the Police, etc. I am a graduate student at a Canadian University and completing this study is part of the requirements for my degree. Your name will not be used in this study, nor will any information be provided to correctional staff, other inmates or anyone else. Thus, this study will not affect your future in the institution in one way or the other.

I cannot stress enough the importance of this research for women and the value of your participation. Research to date has focused almost exclusively on violence by males. This has been justified by the relatively low number of violent crimes by women. The effects of this are vast: we have only a partial understanding of human behaviour; correctional policy and programming has been implemented by men for men.

Since there is presently little research concerning violence by women, this study will aid in removing unjustified stereotypes about women who commit violent crimes. Also, the way government policy and laws develop, the way programmes are carried out and priorities are set is usually based on research. By exposing the bias of the justice system and voicing the concerns of women and their experiences within the justice system, we may become one step closer to erasing sexism from the legal system.

I hope you will agree to talk with me and I look forward to seeing you soon.

Sincerely,

Julie Hunt.

INSTRUCTIONS FOR STAFF:

Release must be signed and witnessed prior to any interviews that are to be published or broadcast in part or in whole and prior to production of still and/or motion pictures and/or voice recordings and/or videotape. Separate occasions require separate release forms.

DESCRIPTION OF ACTIVITY:

I give my permission to:
(Initial all that apply)

- Be interviewed
- Be photographed with still equipment
- Be filmed with motion picture or video taping equipment
- Have my voice recorded.

I understand that the resulting product can be copyrighted or sold. I waive the right to inspect and/or approve the finished product.

I agree to the following uses of the product:
(Initial those that apply)

- Any legal use
- Only for use by the Department of Corrections as it sees fit (example: Reports, brochures, films, slides, etc.)
- Only for: (Please specify) _____

I understand that if I give my permission for the photographs, filming, videotaping, interviewing or voice recordings that I have given up any right to privacy and the use of the product may identify me to the general public as a client of the Department of Corrections.

I have voluntarily signed this release. I have been told that I do not have to grant permission, and that I will not be subjected to unfavorable treatment if I refuse permission.

CLIENT SIGNATURE	NUMBER	DATE
WITNESS SIGNATURE	WITNESS SIGNATURE	

DESCRIPTION OF ACTIVITY:

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Julie Catherine Hunt was born May 22, 1966 in Ottawa, Ontario. She attended Simsbury High School in Simsbury, Connecticut before graduating as an Ontario Scholar from Thomas A. Blakelock High School in Oakville, Ontario in 1984. She then enrolled at the University of Western Ontario. She served one term as the president of the U.W.O. Sociology Club before graduating with an honours B.A. in Sociology in 1988. She then entered the Masters program at the University of Windsor. While completing her thesis she worked concurrently as the Executive Assistant to the Federal LifeLine Project in conjunction with St. Leonard's House of Windsor. She completed her M.A. thesis in August of 1990 after being awarded the University of Windsor Summer Research Scholarship. Currently she has accepted admission to the Bachelor of Education program at the University of Toronto as well as the Sociology Ph.D. program at York University. In addition she has also been awarded an Ontario Graduate Scholarship. After a brief hiatus she will pursue one, or both, of her options.