Antecedents of Violent Behavior:

Early Childhood Trauma in the Lives of Adolescent Female Offenders

by

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Abstract

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Advisor: Professor Mary Gibson

This qualitative study uses grounded theory to analyze interviews with 24 adolescent female offenders who were adjudicated and remanded to custody in New York State for assault or robbery. The secondary analysis is based on data from a National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA) funded study that assessed the links between drug involvement and youth violence through semi-structured interviews. Detailed findings from the lives of a subset of the 51 young women who participated in the original NIDA study are used to construct a model for understanding violence among this particular group of adolescent females. The trauma associated with disrupted parental attachment and an accumulation of early childhood loss and victimization, combined with minimal parental support and supervision, contributed to the use of maladaptive coping strategies and shifted the pathways of these young women into violent delinquency.

Acknowledgments

> If you hear a voice within you that says 'you cannot paint,' then by all means paint and that voice will be silenced.
>
> Vincent van Gogh

Many people helped me in ways both big and small to bring forth this portrait of young women's lives. During the proposal stage Debbie Baskin-Sommers urged me, literally, to draw a picture and her advice has served me well. The blemishes and shortcomings are my own, of course, but without the financial, physical and emotional support of mentors and colleagues, family and friends, the following document would be a mere sketch. I thank Susan Crimmins for the use of the data and for encouraging me to write what I was passionate about; her vision and scholarship have greatly influenced my own research.

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This work is dedicated to the young women who offered their stories, both those that are depicted here, and those that were lost.

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INTRODUCTION

In February 2002, as I was writing this dissertation, eight teen-age girls allegedly beat and burned a 32-year-old female counselor at a residential treatment center north of New York City. This case of severe juvenile violence not only sparked several investigations into residential treatment centers in New York State, but because the alleged assailants are young women, generated much media attention and discussion. The police chief claimed he was "shocked by the viciousness" of the attack, and stated that "it's hard to believe that we're dealing with children here" (Liebson, Cohen, & Garin, 2002). Indeed, because of the severity of the assault, the young women, 14, 15, and 16 years of age, were arraigned on several felony charges and could spend 10 to 25 years in prison. The recuperating counselor, in a press interview six weeks after the attack, suggested that the girls may have been reacting to her disciplinary methods: "If I catch them doing something I just report it. I don't cover up. They would keep saying I was too strict. I was just doing my job. That's what I told them" (Cohen, 2002).

The case raised numerous questions as I considered it in the context of the current study, which is based on interviews with adolescent females adjudicated for robbery or assault. The violence of the young women in this study was often similar to that described in the news account. Clearly children, including girls, can be very vicious. But I wanted to know more about the young women's lives prior to living in the treatment center. Specifically, what traumas had they experienced early in life that may have contributed to their behaviors? Had they themselves been victims of violence? What role did gender play in those prior experiences and in the current event? What was their relationship with their parents and other adult caregivers? I was also curious about their

relationship and history with the counselor, who two of the same young women had attacked six months earlier.

A subsequent newspaper article, depicting the life of one of the alleged assailants, suggested some answers (Rae & Cohen, 2002). Unlike the more typical, sensationalized stories of female violence, this account drew from several years of court and social services documents, family interviews, and the 16-year-old's own statements from the county jail to document a history of foster care placements, beginning at birth; family physical abuse and sibling incest; and parental alcohol and drug abuse, neglect, and abandonment. Eventually, because of her own substance use, truancy, and running away, the girl was placed at the residential treatment center, where she was treated for depression and alcohol abuse. Given this background, perhaps her participation in the attack is less incomprehensible.

The news article outlined what the present study empirically demonstrates: violence often stems from a culmination of childhood traumatic experiences that were ignored or inadequately addressed by primary caregivers. The lack of parental attachment and social supports contributes to maladaptive coping strategies, including violence. Thus, violent offenders are often victims of violence first. Without condoning their behaviors, we must acknowledge that children's "senseless" and "random" acts of violence often are the result of years of abuse and dominance by others, during which the need for attachment to others has been ruptured. Although gender may not be sufficient to explain such violence, it is an important attribute that shapes children's experiences and choices.

The interviews with the young women in this study took place in 1996, during a decade (1987-1997) in which the juvenile arrest rate for violent crime by females

increased by 85% (Snyder & Sickmund, 1999). Furthermore, between 1985 and 1994, female juvenile arrest rates for robbery and aggravated assault increased 110% and 134%, respectively (Snyder, Sickmund, & Poe-Yamagata 1996, p. 10-11). What is even more significant, perhaps, is the fact that while both male and female Violent Crime Index arrests rates rose and then fell between 1980 and 1999, the female rate rose proportionately more, but then fell proportionately less than the male rate, suggesting the influence of gender-specific factors (Snyder, 2001, p. 11).[1] Although the number of female adolescents involved in violent offenses may be small, these changes reflect a large percentage increase.

In addition to official record data, evidence from self report studies suggests that female adolescents continue to engage in a considerable amount of violent behavior (Sommers & Baskin, 1993, 1994; Artz, 1998). Self report data from the National Youth Survey reveals that at the peak ages of offending (15-16 for females) nearly 20% of black females and 10% of white females reported involvement in serious violent offending (Elliott, 1994, p. 5), while the Denver Youth Survey indicates that "the prevalence of serious violence among females ages 13 to 15 was more than half that of males the same age" (Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention [OJJDP], 1999, p. 5).

These statistics first came to my attention when I was Senior Project Director of a study assessing the role and impact of drug use and trafficking on youth violence. The sample consisted of 363 male and 51 female adolescents adjudicated and remanded to a New York State Office of Children and Family Services facility for a violent offense. Remarkable not only for their smaller numbers in a juvenile justice system dominated by

[1] In addition, between 1980 and 1984, "the male rate increased 50%, while the female rate increased 117%. By 1999, the male rate had dropped to 7% below its 1980 level, while the female violent crime arrest rate was still 74% above its 1980 level." Snyder, 2001, p. 13.

boys, the girls all volunteered to participate in the original research study and once involved were eager to talk, oftentimes well beyond the standardized questionnaire. They spoke about their drug trafficking experiences, as that was one of the original study's foci, but I was struck by the amount and pervasiveness of extreme trauma in their early lives. Thus, for the current study, I began to look for clues about adolescent female violence in these early life experiences.

In particular, I was interested in learning more about the experiences that predated the violent acts for which they were remanded to custody. I was curious about who these teen-age girls were who broke the stereotype of the female offender as a petty thief or a prostitute. These young women had inflicted physical harm upon other people. Could they be neatly classified as either vicious and unremorseful gangbangers, or helpless victims of a racist and patriarchal society—the two most common categories portrayed in television and the print media? Were they suppressing "intrinsic feminine traits in favor of more typically masculine forms of aggression" (Seaman, 1996) or "practicing a particularized race and class femininity" (Messerschmidt, 1997, p. 74)? What were their early social experiences and how might those have affected interpersonal relationships and subsequent actions in adolescence?

The data consist of semi-structured interviews with 24 young women (median age 15 years) for assault or robbery. The young women spoke at length about chaotic family lives that included rotating parental figures and homes, witnessing and experiencing violence by loved ones, death and illness. They expressed remorse and vindictiveness, anger, shame, longing, and frustration, as well hopes for the future and recommendations for reducing future violence. They talked about assuming adult responsibilities for

siblings as well as parents, and described acting on their own as if adults were almost incidental to their lives. At the same time, they portrayed themselves as quite powerless against adults (including those representing government agencies) who neglected, directed, and sometimes violated them. Clearly, none of the young women were solely victims or offenders, but rather, conducted their complex lives as best they could in an environment that was often hostile to and interfered with the young women's healthy physical, social and psychological development.

Despite increases in violent crime by female juveniles, recently accompanied by advancements in scholarly research, still very little is known about such offenders, beyond basic demographic information (i.e., age, race, offense labels, arrest rates, caseloads and custody status). Such analyses are important because they specify differences among young women, shedding light on "which females commit which crimes and in which social situations" (Messerschmidt, 1995, p. 185). The answers to how or why young women come to be involved in violence, however, are still very much in a formative stage. An extensive literature on the detrimental and frequently long lasting effects of childhood trauma exists, but most analyses of juvenile violence do not include victimization and loss variables. These factors are likely to contribute significantly to the development of anti-social and maladaptive behaviors, particularly among girls (Browne & Finkelhor, 1986; Dembo, Williams, Lavoie, & Berry, 1989; Smith & Thornberry, 1995). Furthermore, until very recently, criminological studies have generally focused on the adolescent years, overlooking the effects of much earlier experiences on the process of engaging in deviant and delinquent activity (Benda & Corwyn, 2002).

This study seeks to fill some of the gaps in the literature by exploring the relationship between adolescent female offenders' early traumatic experiences and subsequent coping strategies and violent behaviors. Using a grounded theory approach, the study employs a developmental framework with attention to attachment theory. I analyzed the interview data of 24 young women to investigate the social contexts and processes through which these young women came to be involved in violent behavior, examining connections between earlier life experiences and their own use of violence. In addition to variables traditionally analyzed in studies of juvenile male delinquents, such as family functioning, peers, and community environment, I examined traumatic events, including losses and victimizations. In addition, I included in my analyses variables found to correlate with female delinquency such as running away from home (Whitbeck & Simons, 1993; Kaufman & Widom, 1999) and attempts at physical self harm (Ross, McKay, Palmer & Kenny, 1978; Acoca & Dedel, 1998). The young women's ways of managing or coping with distress in their lives were examined, as were their motivations, rationales, and justifications for violent behaviors.

Unlike many studies of female juvenile delinquency, (Acoca & Dedel, 1998; Robinson, 1991; Artz, 1998; Burman, Batchelor, & Brown, 2001) the majority of girls in the current study were, at the time of the interview, at the "deep end" of the juvenile justice system. There were variations among the 24 young women in this study, of course, but 14-year-old Elena (a pseudonym), in describing the robbery for which she was adjudicated, presents what is in many ways a typical violent event:

> It was two of my cousins, my cousin's friend, and me. We was in the train station and I told this lady she looked nice and she was like fronting. She was like y'all Black Bs. I was like what? I was already high but I didn't even pay her no mind. My cousin was like you heard what she said?... My cousin was like, she pulled the

> gun out. She was like which one of you all wanna die tonight?... The lady was like, y'all kids. Y'all need to be home in your bed. I was like s'cuse me? She was like, you heard what I said. I said what?" and I just punched her. Then I slapped her when we got on the train. Then she was trying to get something outta her pocketbook. She pulled out a knife. And I was like, oh, say what? And I just smacked her with my gun and just started beating her up. Beating her head over this thing in the train station in the train. And after that—my cousin grabbed her purse. We just got off the train and started running.

Acting in concert with other females her age, Elena attacked a woman in her mid-thirties over insulting and disrespectful comments pertaining to age, race and gender. A minor exchange rapidly became a brutal beating, wherein the robbery seems almost an afterthought. To begin to understand the context and dynamics of the violence portrayed in this particular scenario, as well as those described by the other 23 respondents, I examined early social experiences, particularly with parents and other primary caregivers. Specifically, I considered how disrupted attachments with primary caregivers interfered with the ability to form healthy relationships and to develop "more mature forms of emotional expression and control" (Greenberg, DeKlyen, Speltz, & Endriga, 1997, p. 200). Throughout the study I quote Elena extensively, as well as the other young women as their words exemplify specific analytic concepts.

This study of violence among adolescent females contributes to the recent and growing research that focuses on women and crime, and more specifically, girls and violent crime. It is interdisciplinary, and draws particularly from the criminology, developmental psychology, traumatic studies, and feminist literatures, and provides the opportunity to "listen" to and learn from the young women themselves. This research helps to build a solid research-based foundation that profiles characteristics and life circumstances of girls involved in the juvenile justice system (Acoca, 1999), and will

contribute to the development of a theoretically-informed interpretation of the processes underlying the initiation of violent behaviors.

To accommodate the research questions, this dissertation is divided into nine chapters. In Chapter Two I briefly review the vast bodies of literature most pertinent to adolescent female violent offending. This includes research on juvenile delinquency, which is primarily based on the lives and actions of boys; studies of female offenders and offending, both adults and juveniles; developmental psychology and attachment theory; and trauma literature relevant to childhood victimization and loss. In Chapter Three I describe the original data set, the research design, and the method used in this study. In Chapter Four I begin the analysis and discussion of the childhood traumatic events and experiences of the young women, focusing on their narratives of loss, including the death of a loved one, physical absence, psychological unavailability, and loss of home; Chapter Five continues with a focus on victimizations, both those directly experienced and those witnessed, within the family and in the larger community setting. Chapter Six discusses parental attachment, supports and supervision, and the lack of other adult supports. Chapter Seven examines the young women's ways of coping with, or defending against, excessive life stresses by running away from home, deliberate self harm, and substance use. In Chapter Eight I analyze the instant offenses for which the young women were adjudicated, against a background of their involvement in other illegal activities. In Chapter Nine I present a theoretical framework to suggest how these particular young women came to be involved in violent behavior, and discuss theoretical, methodological and programmatic/policy implications in conjunction with suggested research directions.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

Increases in juvenile arrest rates for violent crimes have generated much public debate and political and scholarly attention in recent years. Particularly disturbing for many has been an increase of violent offending among young females. Unfortunately, as Kruttschnitt (1993, p. 255) has noted, little empirical research exists that identifies "characteristics or situations that increase women's risks for violent offending;" research on adolescent girls' violent offending is even more limited. Indeed, prior to the 1970s, female offenders were seldom at the center of the crime and delinquency literature (Simpson, 1989) and today, analyses specific to female participation in violence continue to be rare (Giordano, Millhollin, Cernkovich, Pugh & Rudolph, 1999). Some researchers have justified excluding the relatively small number of female offenders from studies for statistical reasons (Ewing, 1990, p. 101), while others have dismissed females as "criminologically much less interesting" [than young males] (Cowie, Cowie & Slater, 1968, p. 1). As a result, explanations for the phenomenon of violent adolescent females are too often left to media stereotypes (see Evans, 1999).

Traditional criminological studies provide some direction, as does emerging feminist research that contextualizes the lives of women and girls, and suggests the importance of early childhood victimization. Attachment theory, as understood from the perspective of developmental psychology, augments these other two bodies of literature. Specifically, while it is consistent with empirical findings that crime and delinquency are associated with a lack of attachment, attachment as used in the psychological literature is a different concept from that articulated by criminological control theories. Focusing on

developmental needs in infancy and early childhood, attachment theory offers a lens through which to examine young women's early childhood traumas that may help to illuminate our understanding of young women's violence.

Over the last two decades the female percentage of juvenile arrests increased in most offense categories, generating much public, government and academic concern and speculation, as to the reasons as well as the "solutions." Of particular interest is that between 1980 and 1984, the Violent Crime Index arrest rates for males increased 50%, while the female rate increased 117%. By 1999, however, the male rate had dropped to 7% below its 1980 level, while the female violent crime arrest rate was still 74% above its 1980 level (Snyder, 2001, p. 13). Some scholars contend that the increase in number of girls' arrests for violent crimes is evidence of a "masculization" of female behavior (Taylor, 1993), while others submit that the increase is less indicative of a change in female behavior than of an increase in youth violence overall and girls' lower base rate of arrests since the 1970s (Chesney-Lind, 1997; Chesney-Lind & Sheldon, 1992). Changes in official reporting and enforcement practices may also effect characteristics of female delinquency (Steffensmeier & Steffensmeier, 1980; Acoca & Dedel, 1998). For example, while the female proportion of robbery arrests increased only marginally, the female proportion of aggravated assault arrests grew substantially (from 15% in 1980 to 22% in 1999) as did the female proportion of simple assault arrests (from 21% in 1980 to 30% in 1999) (Snyder, 2001, p. 11). Possible explanations for this phenomenon may be that behaviors that may have once been labeled "incorrigible" and considered status offenses, such as minor assaults, have been redefined as criminal acts (Mayer, 1994), and law enforcement has changed its response to domestic violence, especially mandatory arrest

laws. Although researchers debate the exact numbers as well as the meaning of the statistics (Acoca, 1999), any increase in the proportion and seriousness of female adolescent offending is noteworthy. Both empirical research and theoretical study are needed to investigate the early lives of these young offenders. To provide a context for the present study, this chapter will briefly examine literature relevant to the study of female adolescents' violent offending. The pertinent research broadly falls into the following four categories: general juvenile delinquency; feminist analyses of female offenders and offending; developmental psychology and attachment theory; and trauma studies. Specific aspects of these large bodies of literature also will be discussed in subsequent chapters when appropriate.

Juvenile Delinquency Studies

Historically, juvenile delinquency literature has been based primarily on arrest rates and life histories of males, particularly working or lower class males involved in street crime (c.f. Shaw & McKay, 1942; Cohen, 1955; Hirschi, 1969). Thrasher's (1927) classic definition of juvenile gangs is derived from fieldwork with over 1,000 youth gangs, the vast majority of which are male. Nearly thirty years later, Cohen's (1955) study of juvenile gang culture defines "gang delinquency" as exclusively male, and when Miller (1958) considers the conflict in values of middle- and lower-class adolescents, he addresses forces that influence boys' involvement in gangs and delinquency. Likewise, Shaw and McKay's (1942) analyses of official arrest records of young males are referred to as "delinquency rates," though few records of females are included. And while Shaw's biographical case studies (1966, 1936) are instrumental in establishing the life history as

a viable research tool, they tell solely of male experiences with the justice system (Riessman, 1993).

More recent research testing juvenile delinquency theories (Wolfgang, Figlio & Sellin, 1972; Hamparian, Schuster, Dinitz, & Conrad, 1978; Farrington, 1995; Bartusch, Lynam, Moffitt & Silva, 1997) continues to rely primarily on methods verified with male subjects and hypotheses tested with male samples (Daly & Chesney-Lind, 1988), and ignores the implications of gender (Leonard, 1982; Messerschmidt, 1997). In addition, many emphasize the adolescent years, generally neglecting the early experiences of children relative to engaging in deviant and delinquent activity. For example, routine activity theory provides empirical support for the association between delinquent activities in adolescence and increased risk of victimization—that is, adolescents at greatest risk of being victimized are those who are themselves involved in routine delinquency (Jensen & Brownfield, 1986; Lauritsen, Sampson & Laub, 1991; Esbensen & Huizinga, 1991). Thus, victims and offenders are not neatly categorized as one or the other, but are frequently the same people (Singer, 1981). An implicit assumption of routine activities and lifestyles theories is that the public (i.e., streets, parks, schools) environment has more "motivated" offenders and fewer guardians than the private (i.e., home) environment (Cohen & Felson, 1979). The literature disregards emerging evidence that much of the victimization that adolescents may have ever experienced is likely to have occurred much earlier in childhood. Particularly with girls, victimizations are likely to have taken place within the home and offenders may be parents or other trusted adults (Strauss, Gelles, & Steinmetz, 1988). Routine activities theories assume

adolescents are being victimized in the context of their delinquent activities on the street, but do not contemplate the role of earlier victimizations in the home.

Social control theories address childhood, but only in terms of the family's role in socializing, or bringing under control, the natural tendencies toward delinquency (Hirschi, 1969). In this paradigm, the absence of attachment to others is the natural state and without social control our human instincts would run rampant. Therefore, children must be taught (socialization) to restrain natural impulses. Attachment in this context is recognized but only as a later outcome; if socialization is effective, a bond will develop and conformist behavior will result. Similarly, in Gotfredson and Hirschi's (1990) general theory of crime, the lack of attachment to others is considered the natural human state and an indicator of low self control, which is causally associated with the propensity to commit crime.

Female delinquency studies.

The few early studies of females and crime emphasize an inherent female "nature" and its biological, physiological and psychological factors. For decades, two images of this female "nature" dominated the criminological commentary. One portrayed the "good" woman led astray by her own base instincts (or by a male consort), who sometimes went "mad." The alternate image depicted the "bad" woman as dark, hairy, and aggressive (i.e., masculine), a social threat who was beyond rehabilitation (Rafter, 1982; Backhouse, 1991). Sexually defined in both images, the female offender was deemed morally deficient and deceitful (Thomas, 1923; Pollak, 1950) and her offenses trivialized and conceptualized as interpersonal and sexual (Glueck & Glueck, 1934; Konopka, 1966; Vedder & Somerville, 1970). Although vigorously critiqued by

feminists beginning in the 1970s (Klein, 1973; Smart, 1976), the dichotomization of female offenders as either sexually maladjusted or promiscuous, or "masculine" if she is violent (Klein, 1973), continues to be offered as an explanation for criminal activity (Skrapec, 1993). This assumes that using violence is inherently masculine. Yet, as Messerschmidt (1995, p. 179), notes, female violence may be infrequent and unusual in some arenas but it is hardly an anomaly for a great many "lower-class racial minority girls" for whom violence is often normalized within the context of specific situations.

The image of the "masculine" female was popularized in the 1970s when social and cultural factors, particularly changing sex roles, were presented as explanations for a purported increase in the amount and seriousness of female crime (Adler, 1975; Simon, 1975). Although Adler did not attribute anticipated changes specifically to the women's liberation movement, she predicted that female and male delinquency rates would converge, just as girls' opportunities, circumstances and sex roles were set on a path to converge with those of boys. From this "liberation" perspective (as described by the media), Adler appeared to suggest that young women had an "equal opportunity" to gain power and independence through increased participation in profitable and violent crime—behaviors traditionally considered "male" (Gennaro, 1982; Daly & Chesney-Lind, 1988).

Adler did hypothesize that deteriorating economic conditions, family breakdown and social disorganization would influence young women to run away from home and "the safety of traditional female roles" (Adler, 1975, p. 95) to engage in prostitution and "male" crime (Faith, 1993). What she did not address, however, was the danger to females in the home, particularly in terms of physical and sexual abuse. Thus, although

Adler's work is important as one of the first studies on females and crime authored by a woman, it lacks an understanding of the context of many young women's daily lives and, as was the traditional proclivity, it overlooked female victimization and its relation to crime and violence (Chesney-Lind, 1989; Debold, Wilson, & Malave, 1993).

Although young men and women inhabit a gendered world, they do share many individual and family characteristics, peers and school factors, neighborhood environments and daily activities (OJJDP, 1999; Baskin & Sommers, 1998). Thus, male delinquency research does provide valuable data for beginning to understand violent female delinquency. For example, findings on the relationships between violence, drugs and alcohol, and the effects of exposure to violence pertain to both males and females, though perhaps in different ways. There is much evidence to suggest that regular use of drugs and alcohol may be related to violence among youth (Cirillo, Pruitt, Colwell, Kingery, Hurley, & Ballard, 1998; Dembo et al., 1987, 1990; Kingery, Pruitt, & Hurley, 1992; Powell, 1997). Furthermore, studies have documented how drug selling provides a context that facilitates violence (Fagan & Chin, 1990; Altschuler & Brounstein, 1991), and that association with drug-using, criminally-active peers is a strong predictor of adolescent drug use and crime (Watts & Wright, 1990; Inciardi, Horowitz, & Pottieger, 1993). Likewise, many studies indicate that urban youths' witnessing of violence in the home (see e.g. Briere, 1992; Fantuzzo, DePaola, Lambert, Martino, Anderson & Sutton, 1991), and in the community (Osofsky, 1995; Marans & Cohen, 1993) may result in behavioral problems (Langhinrichsen-Rohling & Neidig 1995). Most of these studies, however, have not included females, nor have they considered early childhood experiences.

Developmental Criminology

Developmental criminology research seeks to bring "the formative period of childhood back into the picture," (Sampson & Laub, 1993, p. 24) and advances in this realm are promising for both female and male delinquency studies. Drawing from the psychological literature, this developmental model theorizes that offending behavior is related to developmental and age-related stages, with adolescence a particularly acute period of risk for offending (Sampson & Laub, 1990). The model explores multiple risk factors and developmental pathways likely to lead to delinquency and violent behaviors, as well as to desistance, over the life course (e.g. Catalano & Hawkins, 1996; Sampson & Laub, 1993). Longitudinal research from the Pittsburgh Youth Study (Kelly, Loeber, Keenan & DeLamatre, 1997) indicates that the development of disruptive and delinquent behavior among (male) youth generally takes place in an orderly, progressive fashion over time, with less serious problem behaviors preceding more serious problem ones. Remarkably, and a finding with theoretical and programmatic implications, the onset of serious and violent offending (among boys) often occurs before age 10 (Loeber & Farrington, 1998).

Sampson and Laub (1993) refer to a "life-course perspective" that analyzes trajectories—long-term patterns of behavior marked by a sequence of "transitions" and "turning points," including, for example, employment, involvement in criminal behavior, marriage, and parenthood. They hypothesize that problems in adult development are the result of childhood antisocial behaviors and, that transitions in offending behaviors over the life span can be explained by social bonds to work and family in adulthood. While Sampson and Laub's (1993) proposed age-graded theory of informal social control is a

major attempt at integrating stability and change over the life course, it also assumes that children must be disciplined and monitored in order to internalize social norms, with little attention to the child's need for support and loving attachment. Again, attachment is considered an acquired state that comes about only as the result of child rearing that emphasizes monitoring and sanctioning of children's behaviors (Wright and Cullen, 2001).

Such sophisticated research is promising, as it has begun to identify causal factors that precede and effect the course of behavioral development, and to document pathways capable of indicating the extent to which individuals progress over time from one behavior to another (Loeber & Le Blanc, 1990; Sampson & Laub, 1993; Loeber & Stouthamer-Loeber, 1996; Kelly et al., 1997). It is an important recognition of the critical role of age, and significant life experiences. Studies applying this social developmental perspective, however, do not adequately address the contribution of childhood trauma and victimization in disrupting and otherwise shaping early social bonds. Furthermore, most have used only male samples (Moffitt, 1990, 1993; Nagin, Farrington & Moffitt, 1995; Laub & Sampson, 1993), thereby missing behaviors and experiences that may be gendered, particularly early childhood victimizations. Before we can begin to identify developmental pathways for females, the preliminary work of learning more about the context of girls' lives must be conducted.

Female Offenders and the Context of Offending

Over the past 25 years, women have become more central to the study of crime and generally are assumed to be acting with agency within a specific historical and situational context (c.f. Steffensmeier & Allen, 1991; Culliver, 1993; Rafter & Heidensohn, 1995). For example, by looking closely at the characteristics and circumstances of women involved in white collar crime, Daly (1989) found that offenders were not among the rising number of bank managers, but were in low-level clerical positions. The women were convicted of credit and postal fraud and making false statements—offenses typically related to welfare and unemployment claims. It is not surprising that a close examination of these data revealed women who were disproportionately young, non-white, and had dependent children. Although the women may have been acting with agency, they were also both economically and socially restricted, offending more out of need and "in resistance against the destitution level of welfare allotments" (Faith, 1993, p. 65). Similarly, Maher (1995) notes that many women choose (for a variety of complex reasons) to initiate drug use and to continue in the drug life, but their choices "are sorely in need of contextualization" because, as is the case in the licit market, gender severally limits women's options once they are immersed within the illegal (drug) economy.

The importance of the context of offending may be especially important when violence is studied. Research on violent female offending, however, has focused primarily on adult women involved in lethal violence and much of this has included. statistical accounts and demographic information (Silverman & Kennedy, 1993; Langley, 2002; Goetting, 1988). Such research includes studies of women who have engaged in child sexual abuse (Russell & Finkelhor, 1984) or robberies and assaults (Sommers &

Baskin, 1993; Campbell, Muncer, & Bibel, 1998; Miller, 1998). Others, however, have examined the context of the drug-relatedness of homicides by women (Spunt, Brownstein, Crimmins, & Langley, 1996); as well as female-perpetrated homicides of children (Wilczynski, 1997; Crimmins, Langley, Brownstein & Spunt, 1997).

Maher (1997) describes how women involved in a neighborhood drug market often assume a violent street persona as part of a "necessary survival strategy" in response to immediate threats or harm against them. Miller (1998), on the other hand, portrays violence as part of a gendered economic strategy: female robbers use stereotypical perceptions of women to their advantage, e.g., appearing sexually available to men before robbing them, and participating with men in robberies of other men. It may be, as Faith has suggested, that such offenders act as they do "not because they have gained independence but because they have not" (1993, p. 65). Crimmin's qualitative analysis found that among women who had killed, "periodic expressions of rage became assertions of vitality in an attempt to keep the self alive" (1995, p. 98), but unlike the theory of an "over controlled personality" that suddenly erupts into lethal violence (Ogle, Maier-Katkin & Bernard, 1995), these women barely controlled their aggression throughout childhood.

Clearly the links between girls' problems and women's crimes are important and not necessarily discrete (Chesney-Lind, 1997, p. 4). Several studies have attempted to understand adult female offending by investigating subjects' childhood and adolescence. For example, Baskin and Sommers (1998), in interviews with adult women, include a variety of background variables in their analyses. They ask subjects about specific events and situations in their youth in order to identify factors influencing adolescent initiation

into violent street crime. Similarly, Gilfus (1992) uses in-depth life history interviews with incarcerated adult women to construct a framework for understanding women's progression from "victims to survivors to offenders."

Although retrospective studies have been criticized because of the likelihood of subjects to describe the past within the context of their present life situation (Widom, 1989b), such studies of adult women can be helpful in identifying variables pertinent to adolescence. With the advantage of hindsight, adult subjects are often able to critique and evaluate their behavior patterns and life situations more clearly than would those currently experiencing adolescence (Kaplan, 1997), frequently linking childhood and adolescent experiences with adult offending (Gilfus, 1992). Thus, variables cited by women as playing a role in adult violent offending may be particularly important to our understanding of violent behaviors by adolescent females.

Adolescent female violent offending.

Currently, much of the research specific to violent female adolescents is limited to demographic statistical analyses. For example, Ageton (1983) used National Youth Survey data from 1976 to 1980 to examine changes in the distribution, incidence and prevalence of female delinquency, categorizing by race, social class and place of residence. Among other findings, she determined that the incidence and prevalence of violent behaviors declined as females aged through adolescence, and that significantly higher proportions of black and lower-class females were involved in assaultive behaviors. Laub and McDermott (1985) use National Crime Survey victimization data from 1973 to 1981 to analyze the offending rates and trends of black female delinquency. For assaultive crime only (not theft crime), they report that black adolescent females are

more similar to their male counterparts than white adolescent females are to white males, and that there is a greater difference in rates of offending between black and white females than there is between black and white males. These findings emphasize the importance of crime-specific analysis when examining rates of offending. Similarly, Loper and Cornell's (1996) analysis of 1984 and 1993 FBI Supplemental Homicide Reports found the pattern of homicide committed by female juveniles to be "essentially distinct" from those of male juveniles and female adults: homicides by girls were more likely to involve a knife, to involve interpersonal, interfamilial conflict, and young victims. From this, and other evidence, it is clear that all violent female offending is not the same, nor does it always conform to male patterns (Messerschmidt, 1986; White & Kowalski, 1992; Miller, 1998; Heimer & De Coster, 1999).

In their survey of the 162 young women convicted of felonies (including robbery, assault, and homicide) and incarcerated in the California Youth Authority, Owen and Bloom (1997) determined that overall, about 85% of the sample indicated some type of physical, emotional, or sexual abuse or sexual attack at some time in their life. Other studies that have attempted to look more closely at the life circumstances of young women also have noted the role of childhood victimization, especially physical and sexual abuse, in creating a pathway into violence. Artz's qualitative study (1998) similarly found that among her sample of Canadian adolescent girls, those who were violent (but not involved in the justice system or in gangs) reported significantly greater rates of sexual and physical victimization than their non-violent female counterparts. Similarly, Gaarder & Belknap (2002, p. 509) report persistent themes of "sexual and

physical abuse, neglect and disorder in the family" among juvenile girls bound over and sentenced to an adult prison.

Feminist research, recognizing that female offenders report a disproportionate risk for incest and other child abuse, as well as acquaintance and stranger rapes as adolescents, has borrowed from the social developmental perspective to bring victimization to the forefront of criminological research (Chesney-Lind, 1989; Belknap & Holsinger, 1998). This research has begun to investigate gendered pathways to crime, particularly examining childhood experiences that may place youth at risk of delinquency, including violent offending (Chesney-Lind & Shelden, 1998; Daly, 1992, Silbert & Pines, 1981; Rivera & Widom, 1990). Thus, while the pattern of "victims to survivors to offenders" (Gilfus, 1992) does not fit all females (and does fit some males), because victimization figures prominently in the lives of many girls and women (Dembo, Williams, & Schmeidler, 1993), it may contribute to "blurred" boundaries between victimization and offending (Gilfus, 1992; Gaarder & Belknap, 2002). This research, however, does not explain how the effects of early childhood experiences, including loss and victimization, may influence a young woman to adopt violent behaviors herself.

There is evidence, however, indicating that children are at higher risk for victimization than adults (Hashima & Finkelhor, 1999) that childhood victimization may be a prime cause of delinquency (Maxfield & Widom, 2001), and that the effects of childhood maltreatment are "varied and lasting," often continuing into adolescence and adulthood (Finkelhor, 1995, p. 183; National Institute of Justice 1995). This strongly suggests the need to examine the developmental psychology literature to better understand these connections.

Developmental Psychology and Attachment Theory

Developmental psychology has long asserted the primacy of early childhood in understanding the emergence and development of maladaptive behaviors over the life course. Attachment, as used in this literature, is very different from its use in criminology, especially in social control theories. In developmental psychology attachment to others is conceptualized as a natural inborn need, necessary for normal development to occur and to be sustained (Bowlby, 1969). Relationships replace instincts, and human beings are social animals who are naturally seeking attachment and social cooperation (De Zulueta, 1994; Bowlby, 1988). As with control theories, attachment theory considers the early bond between parents and child as crucial in determining the course of human development. The emphasis, however, is on nurturing and supporting an innate need as opposed to controlling destructive impulses (Sroufe and Fleeson, 1986; Coble, Gantt, and Mallinckrodt, 1996). Furthermore, while control theories postulate that the construct of low self control remains fairly stable over a lifetime, attachment theory maintains that under certain circumstances and given the appropriate opportunity, "reattachment" is always possible, as individuals generally tend to move toward the natural state of satisfying attachment relationships.

The early bond of love between caregiver and child is pivotal in determining the course of development throughout childhood and beyond. A secure attachment in early childhood fosters long-term positive outcomes, whereas disruption of early attachment bonds (through, for example, neglect, abandonment, or abuse) inhibits healthy attachments and culminates in an acquired state of social "detachment" (Bowlby, 1973; Ainsworth. 1972, 1979). The detachment is the result of "a traumatic failure of the

environment (i.e., the primary caretaker) to meet the child's attachment needs" (Hayslett-McCall and Bernard, 2002, p.12).

Infants, according to Bowlby (1988, p. 9) are essentially "preprogrammed to develop in a socially cooperative way; whether they do so or not turns in high degree on how they are treated." The newborn child has a physiological predisposition to be close with her caregivers (parents), which continues throughout early development. Newborns use signaling behaviors such as babbling, crying, and the "social smile" to gain adult attention, and adults will work hard to elicit such a smile. Delighting the baby is rewarding to the adult and thus, serves to ensure that an attachment will be formed (Wenar, 1994, p. 35). An infant directs a repertoire of behaviors (crying, clinging, signaling) toward the caregiver under conditions of stress, threat, fatigue, or illness, which are designed to gain the caregiver's attention, care and proximity, and to relieve the infant's distress (Connor, 2002). Eventually, the repeated interactions between infant and caregiver form a reciprocal and organized strategy that serves to regulate the infant's emotions and behaviors.

Thus, children internalize their experiences with caregivers as internal psychological representations, or working models: mental representations of the self in relation to others. Early experiences with the caretaker (attachment figure) lead a child to develop expectations about her and others' roles in relationships (Shapiro & Levendorsky, 1999). The working model is the basis for interpreting later experiences and for predicting experiences in other relationships. An infant's successful, "secure" working model of attachment relationships with caregivers results in healthy and successful social behaviors in adulthood.

On the other hand, insecure attachment styles in infancy, especially when combined with other risk factors (Rosenstein & Horowitz, 1996), can cause one to be more vulnerable to disorder and may result in poor adult functioning. The child reacts defensively by psychically walling off those needs, and the early disruption of attachment may become manifest in adolescence in a variety of externalizing problem behaviors, including violence (Erikson, Sroufe, & Egeland, 1985; Egeland, Kalkoska, Gottesman, & Erikson, 1990; Sroufe, Carlson, Levy, & Egeland, 1999). Especially among girls, distress may be expressed internally, as well as externally. Aggression toward others and aggression directed toward the self, however, may not be opposite forms of aggressive expression, but may reflect difficulties in impulse control that are manifested as maladaptive expressions of anger and aggression (Cairns, 1986; Cairns & Cairns, 1984).

Trauma Studies

Prior research identifies several variables that may be significant to the study of violent behavior among young women. Included are the broad categories of loss, victimization, and exposure to violence—potentially traumatic events. Certainly many events in life are upsetting, but several factors other than the actual experience itself influence the extent to which one perceives and whether one processes an event as traumatic (Crimmins, 1995; Luthar & Zigler, 1991; McLeod & Kessler, 1990; Finkelstein, 1988; Cohen & Wills, 1985; Berman, et al., 1994).

While anxiety and mourning are part of normative development, when the separations are lengthy and result in deprivation of essential needs, a foundation for long-term ill effects is laid (De Zulueta, 1994). Thus, death or a prolonged separation from the

mother or mothering figure, without the benefit of substitute loving caretakers, are significant losses that may inhibit healthy attachments, cause a child to exhibit both depression and aggression (Ainsworth 1979; Hughes 1988; Mangold & Koski, 1990) and, later in life, to exhibit externalizing problem behaviors (Erikson, et al., 1985; Egeland et al., 1990) such as delinquency, aggression and violence toward others (Elliott 1994; Fantuzzo, & Lindquist, 1989; Rouse, 1991; Thornberry, 1994).

Child victimization, particularly that perpetrated by a child's caregiver, is a gross disruption of attachment—a failure to meet the child's natural needs. Determining the extent of abuse against children is difficult, however, because most cases are not reported when they happen or may not be disclosed at all, and thus are not included in officially counted cases (Myers, 1994). This is complicated further by the context in which abuse, particularly sexual abuse, generally occurs. The closer the relationship between abuser and abused, the more likely the abuser will seek to ensure secrecy—by whatever steps necessary, including verbal and physical threats against the child and those whom she loves.

This has profound effects for girls, as they are especially vulnerable to sexual abuse (Bureau of Justice Statistics 1994; Finkelhor 1995; Weisz, 1995; Harris, Blum, & Resnick 1991). For example, estimated prevalence rates of childhood sexual abuse—defined as an unwelcome sexual experience perpetrated by an adult to a child or minor—are approximately 27% for females and 16% for males in the United States (Finkelhor, Hotaling, Lewis & Smith, 1990). Further, about one in six women in North America has experienced sexual abuse (Gorey & Leslie, 1997). Girls also tend to suffer abuse beginning at an early age and extending over a long period of time (Browne & Finklehor

1986) — perhaps because their assailants are likely to be family members living within the same home (DeJong, Hervada, & Emmett, 1983).

Experiencing loss, victimization (such as physical and sexual abuse), and witnessing violence, may result in long-term consequences that are detrimental to personality development and interpersonal relationships (e.g. Briere 1992; Herman 1997). The extensive array of potentially harmful outcomes for victims of childhood maltreatment include an increased likelihood to abuse alcohol and drugs; attempt suicide; and become violent with intimates and others (Browne & Finkelhor, 1986; Dembo et al. 1989; Smith & Thornberry, 1995). Experiencing traumatic events also may be linked to delinquent behavior and involvement in illegal activities, and that delinquency may be "a direct or indirect reflection of past victimization" (Cauffman, Feldman, Waterman, & Steiner, 1998, p. 1209. Also see Schwab-Stone et al., 1995; Guarino, 1985; Hotaling, Strauss, & Lincoln 1989; Strauss 1991; Widom, 1989).

Cauffman and her colleagues (1998) note that while research findings are mixed as to whether females are more likely to be exposed to trauma than are boys,[2] research has consistently found that among those who are exposed to trauma, females are more likely than males to develop mental health problems as a result, including post traumatic stress syndrome (PTSD) (Breslau, 1991; Dembo, et al., 1993; Horowitz et al., 1995; Kessler, et al., 1995). In the first study of PTSD among incarcerated female delinquents, Cauffman et al. (1998) found that not only was the rate of exposure to trauma extremely high for female juveniles (over 70% reported ever being exposed to some form of trauma), but that females were 50% more likely than incarcerated males to exhibit current

[2] Compare, for example, Kessler, Sonnega, Bromet, Hughes, & Nelson (1995) with Dembo, Williams, & Schmeidler (1993) and Horowitz, Wiene, & Jekel (1995).

symptoms of PTSD. In addition, while males were more likely to report having witnessed a violent event, females were more likely to report being the victim of violence (e.g. more than half of the female sample reported experiencing sexual or physical abuse).

In sum, until very recently, criminological theory has neglected the early experiences of children in relation to delinquent activity, emphasizing instead the adolescent years. In addition, those that have recognized the important effect of early life experiences on the developing child ignore the lives of girls, thereby missing significant experiences that may offer clues to our understanding of female offending. While much of the empirical research specific to violent adolescent female offending is limited to demographic statistical analyses, these studies do at least make evident that there is variation both within and between gender. Developmental psychology, and particularly attachment theory, has always considered early childhood to be of primary importance, and is consistent with feminist research that suggests a link between victimization and later delinquency. In support of this possibility, one of the few studies of incarcerated girls found the rate of exposure to trauma to be extremely high and that females were much more likely than their male counterparts to exhibit PTSD symptoms.

Such data may help to explain how early life experiences contribute to particular girls becoming candidates for violent activity. Furthermore, research has rarely attempted to investigate the context of violent actions or the meanings young women may ascribe to them. Because of these deficiencies in the literature, we know little about the ways in which "violence is uniquely experienced and perpetrated by the young women who end up in the juvenile corrections system" (Schaffner, 1999, p. 43). Clearly, what are needed "are more detailed studies which examine in greater depth and in terms of their own

experiences the contexts and lives of [young] women convicted of violence" (Shaw, 1995, p. 125). The remainder of this dissertation is an initial effort to analyze the lives of one group of adjudicated adolescent female offenders, providing a level of detail that will enable a more comprehensive understanding of their experiences and those of other young women.

CHAPTER THREE

SAMPLE AND METHOD

Sound methodology is, of course, central to the foundation of any study. Thus, this chapter is devoted to a methodological discussion of the investigative procedures used to better understand both the antecedents and context of violent behavior by 24 adolescent females. The questions addressed in this research originated from a larger study titled LAVIDA: Learning About Violence and Drugs among Adolescents. This chapter begins with a brief discussion of the LAVIDA research project, the representativeness of the sample, and the sampling procedures. It continues with an explanation of how I derived a sample of young women from the original study, the development of the instrument, and the data collection processes. Finally, it explains the methods and coding procedures used in this secondary analysis.

The LAVIDA Study

The National Institute on Drug Abuse funded the study "Learning About Violence and Drugs among Adolescents" (LAVIDA), which was conducted under the auspices of the Institute on Trauma and Violence, National Development and Research Institutes, Inc. (NDRI), in New York City. I was the Project Director of LAVIDA and was granted permission to use the data for this dissertation. I joined the research team after the initial interview schedule had been developed, but was otherwise intimately involved with every aspect of the project, including pilot testing and interview schedule revisions, staff training and supervision, data quality control and coding, and data analyses.

The LAVIDA study assessed the role of drug use and trafficking in youth violence, employing self-reports from male and female adolescents who had been adjudicated and remanded to custody for a violent offense (Crimmins, Brownstein, Spunt, Ryder, & Warley, 1998). The primary criteria for participant eligibility in LAVIDA were: 1) adjudication for one of the following violent offenses: assault, homicide, robbery, or sexual assault; and 2) residence in or admission to a New York State Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS)-operated facility[3] between September 1995 and May 1996. These OCFS facilities are of three types: secure, limited secure, and non-secure but non-community-based. The population that met the two sampling criteria consisted of 1,290 youths between the ages of 10 and 21.[4]

To ensure adequate representation by offense and gender, and in recognition of finite resources and the practicalities of attempting to interview the entire population, we employed two separate sampling methods. First, because 90% of the eligible adolescents were male, a disproportionate stratified sampling plan called for including all females. Similarly, the smaller proportion of residents remanded for a homicide or a sexual offense required the inclusion of all such offenders. Second, among those not subject to the disproportionate stratified sampling procedure—that is, males in the remaining offense groups of robbery and assault—a random sample was selected. These procedures generated a sample of 931: 816 males and 115 females.

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[3] Formerly the New York State Division For Youth (DFY).

[4] In response to changes in the administration of New York State correctional policy, many offenders who were age 18 and over and residing in OCFS facilities were moved to the adult Department of Correctional Services beginning in January 1996.

From the sample of 931, LAVIDA staff were able to contact only 441 subjects (51 females and 390 males). Of these, 419 agreed to be interviewed (all the females and all but 22 males) yielding a 95% response rate.[5] Five completed interviews were not included in the study, however, because four were missing large amounts of data and another case was removed because we later learned that the individual had completed a pilot interview for a similar NDRI study. Thus, the LAVIDA study consisted of interviews with 414 subjects: 51 females and 363 males (see Figure 3.1).

Sample Representativeness

Research typically strives to study a sample that is representative or typical of the population of interest. To assess representativeness, we first compared the characteristics of the sample (n=931) with those of the population (N=1,290). We then compared the characteristics of interviewed subjects (n=414) with those of the 517 subjects who met the sampling criteria but were not interviewed (including the 5 that were excluded from the final analysis).[6] The assessment was based on key variables from OCFS official records, including demographic information (age at time the OCFS list was issued, race, Hispanic ethnicity, and residence at time of arrest) and OCFS offense and custody data (offense type and security level of facility where subject resided).

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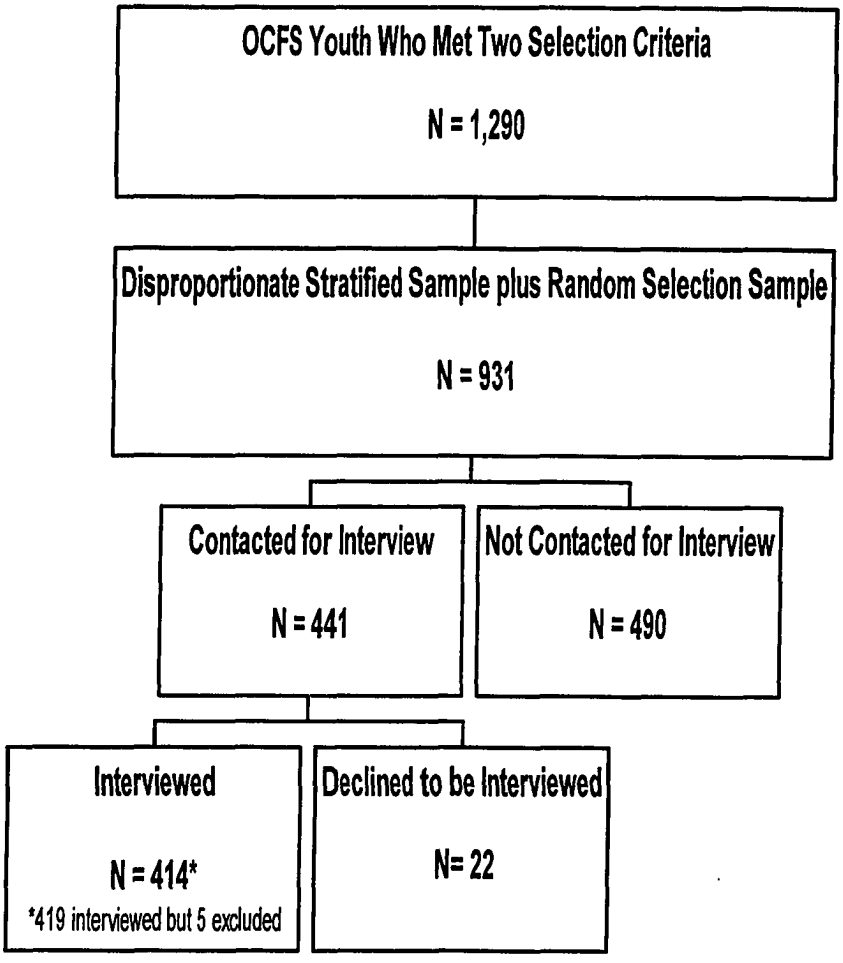
[5] Of the 490 youth who were not contacted, 376 were released from the OCFS system, 75 were transferred from OCFS to the New York Department of Correctional Services adult facilities, three were classified by OCFS as AWOL or having escaped, two had participated in a similar pilot study, and one was deemed to be unstable by OCFS staff and thus we were denied access. Finally, 33 individuals were not approached because of administrative deadlines for completing the field work.

[6] It would be inefficient and inappropriate to compare the interviewed subjects with a randomly selected general community sample of juveniles because too few serious delinquents would be located.

Figure 3.1

LAVIDA Sampling Plan and Outcomes



Because the sample included all female offenders, all homicide offenders, and all sex offenders from the population, only the representativeness of the male assault and male robbery samples were examined separately. These two samples were representative of their populations; the only statistically significant difference was that more Hispanics were in the sample of male assault offenders ($X^2 = 3.96$, $p < .05$) than were in the population.

The two groups that made up the sample (interviewed and non-interviewed) were similar in terms of race and Hispanic ethnicity. Those who participated in an interview, however, tended to be slightly younger, more often residents of the New York City area prior to OCFS custody, and more likely to be located in secure facilities as compared to those adolescents who were not interviewed. In addition, those interviewed differed slightly on offense type.

The differences between those who were interviewed and those who were not were related to operational and administrative concerns of the juvenile justice system. Subjects were released, transferred to lower security level OCFS facilities (to which we did not have access), and transferred to adult corrections. Furthermore, secure facilities (as opposed to the limited secure and non-secure, non-community-based facilities) held the greatest number of potential respondents for our research purposes. Thus, to complete the maximum number of interviews with available resources, we targeted secure facilities first. This decision particularly affected the number of females that we were able to contact. A significantly greater number of females ($X^2 = 41.3$, $p < .05$) in the non-interviewed sample were located in non-secure, non-community-based facilities than

were in other security level types and thus, were released from OCFS custody before we were able to request an interview with them.

The Female Sub-Sample

The original LAVIDA study was designed to examine the link between drug use and trafficking and youth violence. It included only 115 female subjects, 51 of whom completed an interview.[7] In this dissertation, my intent is to analyze the qualitative data from each of the interviews that were conducted with female respondents to develop a theoretical model of young women's pathways into violent behavior. With respondents' permission, each of the 51 female interviews was tape-recorded. All quantitative data were coded and then submitted to the data processing unit at NDRI. The responses to open-ended questions were manually transcribed on the hard copy of the interview schedule (but not electronically stored). All of the tapes and the paper interviews were stored at the NDRI headquarters to protect confidentiality.

To augment my familiarity with the data—that is, to hear the young women's voices and inflections, their silences, and the general tone of the interactions between them and the interviewer—and to convert the data from handwritten to electronic text, I began to listen to the audio tapes and to type the text onto computer disks. At first, I randomly selected the interviews, but as I was also preparing a conference presentation based on these data, I started to select interviews with girls who answered affirmatively to the question "were you a member of a particular group?" as a possible indicator of

[7] Of 115 females in the LAVIDA sample, we were unable to contact 64: 58 were released, four were transferred to adult corrections, one was Absent Without Leave, and one was deemed to be emotionally unstable by OCFS staff and we were denied access.

gang involvement. Unfortunately, I had not finished this process when the September 11, 2001, terrorist attack on the World Trade Center destroyed the office, the tapes, and all accompanying documents. As a result, qualitative data are available for only 24 of the 51 cases. Despite this dramatic loss of data, an examination of key demographic characteristics (as described below) indicates that the surviving study group of 24 is quite similar to the sub-sample from which it came.

Comparison of the female sub-sample and the study group.

The comparative data are displayed in Table 3.1. The age of the 24 respondents in the study group at the time of the interview ranged from 13 to 16 years old, a narrower span than that of the sub-sample (12-17 years old). For both groups, however, the median age was 15 years old. The young women were asked to specify their race or ethnic background (10 categories were offered as probes) and responses were recoded into "White," "Black," "Hispanic/Latina," or "Biracial/Multiracial." For both the sub-sample of 51 and the study group of 24, the percent coded as Black was virtually identical (59% vs. 58%), as was the case for the Hispanic/Latina category (18% vs. 17%). There were larger differences between the two groups for the categories of Biracial and White: in the sub-sample, 12% was coded as Biracial/Multiracial and 12% as White. In the study group, 17% was identified as Biracial/Multiracial, but only 8% as White. Education was measured by the last grade completed and the median level for both groups was the same: eighth grade (ranging from 6th to 10th grade). In terms of the number of children these young women had, five of the 51 respondents (10%) had at least

Table 3.1
Comparison of Female Sub-Sample and Group under Study

	Original Sub-Sample (N=51)		Study Group (N=24)	
Age	Range	Median	Range	Median
	12-17yrs	15yrs	13-16yrs	15 yrs
Race or Ethnicity				
Black	59%		58%	
Hispanic or Latina	18%		17%	
Biracial or Multiracial	12%		17%	
White	12%		8%	
Education	Range	Median	Range	Median
	6-10th	8th grade	6-10th	8th grade
Any Children	10%		12.5%	
Offense				
Assault	75%		79%	
Robbery	25%		21%	
Location				
Secure	Lansing 47%	Tyron 35%	Lansing 54%	Tyron 29%
Nonsecure, noncommunity-based	Brooklyn 10%	Staten Island 8%	Brooklyn 17%	Staten Island --

one child (one of these young women had two children), whereas three of the 24 respondents (12.5%) had one child.

In the sub-sample of 51, 75% had been adjudicated and remanded to custody for assault and 25% for robbery, as compared to 79% for assault and 21% for robbery among the group of 24. Both groups had a similar percentage of interviews conducted in two secure, upstate facilities: Lansing Residential Center (47% sub-sample vs. 54% study group) and Tyron Girls Residential Center (35% sub-sample vs. 29% study group). In addition, interviews were conducted in two non-secure, non-community-based facilities in the New York City area: Brooklyn Residential Center (10% sub-sample vs. 17% study group) and the Staten Island Residential Facility (8% of the sub-sample).

Although extenuating circumstances dictated the selection of 24 cases, and as a result this smaller number further limits variance and my ability to generalize from the findings, the demographic similarities between the two groups suggest a fairly representative study group.

Instrument Development and Data Collection

The original LAVIDA interview schedule was semi-structured, containing both open- and closed-ended questions. The research was designed to generate detailed information about each subject's life prior to incarceration. The interview schedule asked basic demographic information, followed by questions about family functioning, community attributes, and peer relations. Subjects were asked about running away; attempts at self harm; exposure to violence and abuse as both victim and witness; prior involvement in illegal activities including drug use and trafficking; the availability, use

and ownership of guns, and perceptions of future events. They were also encouraged to provide a detailed narrative about the offense for which they had been adjudicated and remanded to the care and custody of OCFS.

For most of these areas of inquiry, subjects were asked the earliest age at which they experienced or participated in the behaviors. Initial age of onset is important for understanding the development of antisocial, delinquent, and violent behaviors (Elliott, Huizinga, & Menard, 1989; Loeber & Stouthamer-Loeber, 1996; Kelley, Loeber, Keenan, & De Lamatre, 1997). The age at which a child experiences a traumatic event, for example, can have a profound effect on how that event is processed and, subsequently, on normative development (Garbarnino, Dubrow, Kostelny, & Pardo, 1992; Eth & Pynoos, 1985). For example, young children who have been abused or otherwise exposed to violence in the home are more likely to engage in delinquent and serious violent behavior during adolescence (Thornberry, Huizinga & Loeber, 1995; Widom & Ames, 1994; Guarino, 1985; Dembo, 1987; Strauss, 1991).

Although an extensive body of research on self-report measures indicates that deliberate falsification is rare, there can be problems related to youths forgetting particular events or being uncertain as to the temporal location of events that are recalled (Elliott et al., 1989.) Using short reporting periods and bounding techniques, however, significantly reduces this source of error (Garofalo & Hindelang, 1977; Sudman & Bradburn, 1983). Thus, to maximize the likelihood of more accurate responses, categories and response time frames on the LAVIDA schedule were designed to be fairly easy to remember, while also allowing room for spontaneous descriptive responses. While all questions pertained to the youth's life prior to OCFS custody, many specifically

referred to the year immediately preceding custody. Other questions were "bounded" by references to family life, community life, or peer activities. This approach facilitates a more accurate description of retrospective, or prior occurrences, than does standard interviewing techniques (McCracken, 1988) and allows interviewers to focus on the set questions while also probing and encouraging respondents to expand upon events, experiences and behaviors.

Fowler and Mangione's (1990) work guided reliability and internal validity concerns during the development of the interview schedule and training of interview staff. Simple, clear, and nonjudgmental language was used so as to be understood by adolescents and to avoid the possibility of influencing their responses, and wording was gender-neutral. Also, staff memorized the interview schedule and engaged in role-playing to promote consistency in asking questions, reduce the likelihood of leading questions, and develop consistent probes for the open-ended questions. It also allowed staff to practice effective strategies for eliciting personal information from subjects.

Staff were trained in the substantive areas of the interview schedule, including, for example, maltreatment, trauma, alcohol and drug abuse, gangs, and interpersonal violence. Such training addressed and sought to minimize interviewer bias and to sensitize them to issues the adolescents may be facing in their lives. Interviewers were trained to record respondents' answers as given, even if they did not seem "to fit" the question being asked. Weekly staff meetings addressed the emotional impact of the interview on both interviewees and interviewers. Strategies for navigating through intense interviews (allowing silences, providing tissues and water, taking breaks) were

reviewed, as were antidotes for the traumatic effects of constant exposure to violent and disturbing stories (see Renzetti & Lee, 1993).

Interviewers were trained to code data, which was done after the interview was completed so as not to influence the interviewer or the subject. Interviewers were not allowed to code an interview that he or she had conducted. Coding questions were addressed in staff meetings, and senior staff conducted quality control checks on randomly-selected interview schedules to identify any areas where staff may require additional training or where a code was not "working."

Prior research has shown that self report interviews with adolescents are reliable and valid in measuring delinquent involvement and drug use, although in some cases criminal behavior may be underreported (Hindelang, Hirschi, & Weis, 1981; Elliott, Knowles & Canter, 1981; Fagan & Wexler, 1987; Dembo et al., 1990). To increase accuracy, questions about serious behaviors, as opposed to trivial ones, were included and subjects were asked for information they would be likely to remember, e.g., offenses committed in the year prior to custody (Inciardi, Horowitz, & Pottieger, 1993). Self reported lifetime involvement in delinquent behavior was measured by a scale adapted from the National Youth Survey (Elliott et al., 1981; Elliott, Huizinga, & Ageton, 1985; Elliot, Huizinga, & Menard, 1989), items and subscales of which have been validated in studies with general youth populations (Elliott et al., 1981); serious or chronic delinquents (Dunford & Elliott, 1984); and delinquents with alcohol, drug use, and mental health problems (Elliott & Huizinga, 1984).

The interview instrument contained internal consistency checks designed to improve the probability of accurate responses. Because the intent of collecting data

through face-to-face interviews was to access the subjects' current perceptions, interview information was considered valid if the subjects consistently were willing and able to provide their perceptions to the interviewer. Although the youths were only interviewed once, the length and intensity of the interview provided many opportunities for staff to follow up on statements and to watch for changes in affect and demeanor. After each interview, staff noted their perceptions of the subject's responses, and cases were discussed in staff meetings if there were any question as to the interview's validity.

To increase the likelihood that adolescents would respond willingly, staff generally met with potential respondents in private rooms. Staff explained the purpose of the research and the protections offered by a Federal Certificate of Confidentiality (including the withholding of participants' names and other identifying characteristics from anyone not directly involved in the research)[8]. Potential subjects were told that participation was voluntary and that responses were both confidential and anonymous. Even if they did agree to the interview, the youths were advised that they could refuse to answer any particular question without consequences. Before initiating an interview, staff reviewed the Informed Consent Form that each participant was required to sign to indicate his or her understanding of the study and willingness to participate.[9] Potential respondents were also told that some of the questions asked may cause them to recall stressful or painful times and events in their lives and that counseling services were available should they want them as a result of the interview; very few requested these

[8] Federal Certificate of Confidentiality No. DA-95-94 was issued May 16, 1995. Pseudonyms are used throughout this dissertation.

[9] Subjects were wards of the State and thus, we obtained written consent from the New York State Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS) and the Division of Criminal Justice Services to interview subjects on a voluntary basis. The OCFS requested that prior to conducting interviews in facilities we make a full presentation to the director and staff of each facility in order to inform them about the research project and to facilitate logistical arrangements for both interviewing and follow up counseling services.

services. Although rarely invoked, adolescents also were given the opportunity to request a male or female interviewer, as well as a Spanish-speaking interviewer. Subjects were provided a rather neutral cover description of the research ("a study about adolescents and violence") that they could use if other residents asked them about the study and they did not want to reveal the nature of the questioning. Staff training emphasized the importance of the initial screening for establishing rapport with potential respondents and clarifying all questions so as to encourage willing participation in the study.

Critics of retrospective studies express concerns that subjects will respond to interviewers in a manner that they perceive to be socially desirable (Widom, 1989). To minimize this effect, staff were trained to refrain from reacting, either positively or negatively, to subjects' responses. In addition, when introducing the study to potential respondents, as well as during the interview, interviewers stressed the importance of hearing the subjects' perspectives. Respondents did describe participating in activities often considered to be socially undesirable, particularly for young women (e.g., personal sexual assault, harming children), suggesting that reporting information for the purpose of being viewed favorably was not a key concern. If subjects were concerned with social desirability in regard to a particular question, the worst case would be an underreporting of the behavior. As subjects did occasionally exercise their right to refuse to answer a question, or claimed a question to be "none of your business" it appears that they generally responded as accurately as possible. I do not claim that all subjects told us exactly how they felt or that they reported all (or even most) of their experiences pertaining to our queries. I do believe, however, that our genuine desire to hear the youths' perspectives, our efforts to minimize bias and protect confidentiality, as well as

our status as "outsiders" to the correctional facility (neither social workers nor law enforcement personnel) were critical in promoting candor. Interviews were a one-time event and thus, interviewers may have been perceived as empathetic "sounding boards" who presented little risk of spreading subjects' life stories among others in the facility.

The interview instrument was pilot tested with 25 (male) residents at one OCFS facility and with 15 (male and female) youths from a New York City teen drop-in center. It was then refined prior to use with those who met the sampling criteria. For example, language that sounded stilted or awkward or was misunderstood in the pilot study was simplified or clarified as needed or dropped altogether. Although the OCFS would not allow "payment" of any sort, each respondent received a certificate of participation, and a copy was placed in the youth's institutional file.

Interviewing the 24 Female Subjects

The interviews with the 24 female subjects took place January through August of 1996. As was the case with all of the LAVIDA cases, a single interview session was conducted with each participant. The interviews with the young women lasted on average, one hour and 45 minutes (the shortest was 49 minutes and the longest was two hours and 45 minutes). It is possible that contextual, institutional, social and interpersonal elements may have affected data outcome. For example, interviews were to be conducted in private rooms within OCFS facilities. While one institution had ample room for interviewers to work in empty offices close to one another and staff available to escort participants, another facility spread interviewers out on different floors and offered walkie-talkies if security was needed. Another non-secure facility was a large

brownstone house and interviews were conducted in an open living room, causing the researchers to be attentive to the possibility of someone "wandering" into the space. As Fontana and Frey (2000, p. 647) have noted, the interaction and relation between individuals and the environment is critical: "the result is as much a product of this social dynamic as it is a product of accurate accounts and replies."

In addition, although some research has indicated that interviewer characteristics such as age, gender, and interviewing experience have a relatively small effect on responses in structured interviews (Singer & Presser, 1989), this may not be the case when researching girls (Brown, 1998), interpersonal violence (see Liebling & Stanko, 2001), or particularly, young women who may be both victims and perpetrators of violence (Gaarder & Belknap, 2002; Burman, Batchelor & Brown, 2001). As in all research, each of the individuals on the research team brought their own unique and gendered biography to the work, differing in terms of age, race, cultural background and research training and experience (see Punch, 1994; Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). Two male and two females (black and white), all in their mid-to late-twenties, conducted 20 of the interviews, while two 40-year-old, white females, including myself, conducted the rest.[10] Individual biographies not only may have effected how each interviewer experienced the research process, but combined with our unique self presentations, probably influenced how each of the female participants (primarily black, 15-year-olds with their own biographies, confined to a correctional facility) perceived and responded to each of us (see Burman, et al., 2001). Despite the difficulties and dilemmas of interviewing adolescent girls about interpersonal violence and victimization, careful instrument

[10] I also conducted three additional interviews with females and 10 with males that were destroyed in the World Trade Center attack.

development and ongoing staff training, as described earlier, helped to ensure the quality of the data collection process, and ultimately, the data.

Interviewees were active in constructing knowledge around the questions posed and the responses given (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995). Although a power imbalance existed between interviewers and interviewees, in that we defined the research situation, steered the agenda, and shaped the production of the data (Holland & Ramazanoglu, 1994), on numerous occasions the young women answered the question presented to them but then segued into a narrative they wished to convey. Oftentimes it was in these narratives that they revealed more latent, as well as manifest, content than in the closed ended questions. For example, a respondent might report in a close ended question that only one loved one had died, but in the course of talking about her life reveal that several loved ones had died, and what that meant to her. Rather than assuming that the young woman was withholding data on purpose, I sought to comprehend the complexity of her life, while also acknowledging that there is no one objective "truth" or reality to be found (Rosenthal, 1993; Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). I began my analyses with the acknowledgment that the data represent what the young women were willing and able to tell interviewers on one particular day (Way, 1998). My task was to examine the transcripts in such a way as to develop an "understanding of an experience, phenomenon or process that is contextual and grounded by the knowledge of those who have had the experience" (O'Connor, 2001, p.140; Morse, 1994).

The Secondary Data Analysis

The number of females in the LAVIDA study was relatively small (N=51) and gender was not the focus of the study. Several LAVIDA analyses, however, did examine the significance of gender on selected variables for the assault and robbery offenders (209 males and 51 females) and found statistically significant differences. For example, females were more than twice as likely to have ever been in foster care than their male counterparts, and they were almost three times more likely to have run away from home overnight, and to have attempted self harm. In addition, females were much less likely to report having a household member to talk with about things that were bothering them (Crimmins, et al, 1998). Among these assault and robbery offenders, however, males were more than twice as likely as females to have ever used a weapon or force to attain money or things. As part of the LAVIDA Final Report (Crimmins, et al, 1998), I wrote a separate chapter that took a closer look at the females, examining particularly their traumatic experiences. Relying on responses to close-ended questions, results indicated that the young women were more likely than the young men to have been sexually bothered or abused in their home, to have witnessed others being sexually bothered or assaulted in their home, and to have witnessed a stabbing or shooting in their home. I was struck by the great amount, and pervasiveness of, traumatic experiences and that they wanted to talk about it—this was important to them. In addition, their interviews generated a great deal of narrative data that could not be captured in the quantitative coding of the semi-structured interview schedule. As the data came in, it was evident that although the young women were adjudicated for a violent offense, they had also been victims. Thus, I sought to learn more about the experiences that preceded their violence.

This secondary analysis relies primarily on narrative data from interviews with 24 adolescent girls incarcerated for a violent offense (robbery or assault) in New York State. Although there has been a dramatic shift in recent years, there is still relatively little scholarly research on violence perpetrated by adolescent girls—despite the increasing number of young women who are arrested, detained, and adjudicated in both the juvenile and adult systems. Furthermore, few prior studies have specifically examined the antecedents and the situational context of young women's violent behavior. Most of what has been written on female criminality has focused on property crime, drug crime, or prostitution.

As described below, I employ a grounded theory approach in which theory is built upon "what is perceived in the data rather than theory that drives the interpretation of the data" (Way, 1998, p. 16). Such a data-driven approach provides strategies for examining experiences and processes (Morse, 1994, p. 223), and is particularly helpful in uncovering and understanding what is behind phenomenon about which little is known. I also used related techniques from content and narrative analyses to help develop a theoretical model explaining how these young women's experiences and behaviors, and their associated motivations and rationales, moved them toward violence.

Responses to close-ended interview questions provided an outline of the young women's lives prior to OCFS custody. Descriptive data regarding the number and percentage of those who ever experienced a particular event or behavior, the median age of first occurrence, and the median frequency of occurrence in the year prior to custody were collected and coded in SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences). These data indicate possible patterns in young women's lives. As Abbott (1997) has stated,

however, "all social facts are located in contexts" and quantitative data alone can not fully ascertain the nuances of female adolescent violence. To gain a richer understanding of the meaning and context of events and patterns than can be derived solely from the quantitative data, I analyzed the young women's free-form responses from "the standpoint of the subjective experience of the actors themselves" (Schur, 1984, p.17; Denzin & Lincoln, 1994).

A Grounded Theory Approach

Grounded theory is one of several qualitative methodologies that provide a general way of thinking about and conceptualizing data (Strauss & Corbin, 1994, p. 275). A major difference between grounded theory's analytic strategies and other approaches to qualitative research, however, is an emphasis upon theory development rather than theory testing and verification. Hypothesis testing with a population that has not been adequately studied is premature: searching for data that fit a pre-established theory, rather than developing a theory to fit the data may prevent researchers from seeing the complexities and contradictions in the lived experience of their subjects. A theory grounded in the data considers how "variables" are given meaning and played out in particular subjects' lives (Prus, 1996), while remaining suggestive and open to refinement (Charmaz, 2000).

Grounded theory methods "consist of systematic inductive guidelines for collecting and analyzing data to build middle-range theoretical frameworks that explain the collected data" (Charmaz, 2000, p. 509). Researchers using these guidelines are interested in examining data for patterns of action, interactions between and among actors, and in discovering processes within those patterns (Strauss & Corbin, 1994, p.

276). Grounded theory is developed by "entering the fieldwork phase without hypotheses; describing what happens; and formulating explanations as to why it happens on the basis of observation" (Glaser & Strauss, 1967)—with the understanding that "reality arises from the interactive process and its temporal, cultural, and structural contexts" (Charmaz, 2000, p. 524). While researchers naturally begin a study with some general themes or concepts derived from their own experiences and reading of the literature (Miles & Huberman, 1984), these are necessarily modified, and must be grounded in the actual study data. Influenced by and schooled in theories of their own particular field or discipline, those using a grounded theory approach seek to maintain a position of theoretical openness in order "to include context-sensitive and data-driven models" (Way, 1998, p. 17). Finally, grounded theory not only describes, conceptualizes and theorizes about a phenomenon, but its findings often form the framework for practical applications (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, 1994).

Coding qualitative data.

Theory development begins with coding, and "coding is analysis" (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 56). Through the coding process the researcher begins to define and categorize the data. Unlike research that requires data to fit into preconceived standardized codes, the grounded theorist's interpretations of data shape the emergent codes and together these codes begin to form a theory that explains the data (Glaser, 1992; Charmaz, 2000). Additional data may confirm or contradict the emergent theory and thus, new categories may be generated and the theory refined or modified.

Initial or "open coding" requires a line-by-line reading of the text, while looking for actions, events, processes, assumptions, and consequences (Silverman, 2000, p. 780). By

breaking the data down into categories, properties, and dimensions, initial coding keeps the researcher studying the data, stimulating ideas inductively and inhibiting the imposition of preconceived theories. It is also a way to prevent the researcher from becoming overwhelmed by data, creating a way to organize and interpret it (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). In the context of grounded theory, codes act as "tags," setting off text for later retrieval and comparison with other units of text (Ryan & Bernard, 2000), because making comparisons is a critical technique in grounded theory. The process of constant comparison (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) means: comparing different people (their actions, experiences, situations); comparing data from the same people with themselves at different points in time; comparing incident with incident across cases; comparing data with the categories; and comparing a category with another category (Charmaz, 2000; Glaser, 1978, 1992). Constant comparisons highlight irregularities, or negative cases, and require the investigator to account for or propose explanations of them (Becker, 1998; Maruna, 2001). By interpreting specific cases within specific contexts, this comparative process facilitates the goal of building new theories (Ragin, 1987, p. 16).

While initial coding breaks the data down, subsequent coding puts it back together again in new ways by examining connections and relationships between categories and subcategories. Strauss and Corbin refer to this process as "axial coding," in which the focus is on:

> specifying a category (*phenomenon*) in terms of the conditions that give rise to it; the *context* (its specific set of properties) in which it is embedded; the action/interactional *strategies* by which it is handled, managed, carried out; and the *consequences* of those strategies (1990, p. 97).

Again, continually comparing categories helps to specify the conditions under which they are linked or related to one another, to determine which conditions best

explains what is going on in the research, and to consider the theoretical implications that may exist among them. Gradually "the theoretical properties of the meaning categories crystallize and form a pattern" (Rudestam & Newton, 1992, p. 36). This pattern may become the "grounded theory"—a theory inductively derived from the study data. Theory development, however, is an iterative process and the data will be read and reread and coded and recoded many times as new ideas develop and new questions are posed. Grounded theory seeks to "define conditional statements that interpret how subjects construct their realities," but it does not approach "one generalizable truth" (Charmaz, 2000, p. 524). Rather, an image of *a* reality is constructed, grounded in the study of one slice of life. Generic concepts are developed that then may be applied by other researchers to similar studies and other fields.

Content and Narrative Analysis Techniques

Both content and narrative analyses have been used to inquire into the symbolic meaning of messages, with the assumption that messages do not necessarily have a single meaning, and that meanings may not be shared (Krippendorff, 1980, p. 22; Rosenthal, 1993). Because messages and symbolic communications are generally about phenomena that are not directly observed, the analyst is required to make inferences from the data, contextualizing it from what is already empirically known. Both methods are consistent with grounded theory strategies (see Reissman, 1993; Charmaz, 2000, p. 521).

Content analysis techniques are often used in conjunction with narrative analyses and grounded theory methods, particularly when latent content (i.e. meanings contained within communications) is studied. In criminal justice, as in other disciplines, this has

proven useful when attempting to "discern trends in existing phenomena" from qualitative data (Hagan, 1982, p.138; Brown, 1995). For example, Maruna (2001) conducted a content analysis of complex personal narrative data, coding for themes or "scripts" that distinguished between those who had desisted from crime and those who remained active offenders. While generally qualitative research is best suited to exploring similarities (Ragin, 1994), systematically establishing differences through content analyses can be enlightening. As in the grounded theory approach, content analysis categories are not predetermined they must be defined and justified in terms of what is known about the data's content and context; data are then coded according to those categories. Holsti (1969, p.95) notes that the categories should "reflect the purposes of the research, be exhaustive, be mutually exclusive, independent, and be derived from a single classification principle."

Narrative analysis (sometimes referred to as "talk organized around consequential events") also allows investigators the opportunity to systematically study "personal experience and meaning: how events have been constructed by active subjects" (Riessman, 1993, p.70). The manner in which a speaker linguistically represents her world, for example, provides the analyst with clues to understanding the speaker's reality (or least a portion of it). Narrative analysis assumes an interpretive perspective, and is useful when, as in the current study, respondents were prompted to "tell me what happened" or spontaneously responded to a close-ended question with a rendition of a complex and oftentimes troubling event. These narrative portions of the transcripts were analyzed for facts as well as for meaning-making structures: a primary way people make

sense of experiences, especially traumatic ones, is to put it in a narrative form that moves "reality" into the "intensely human realm of value" (Cronan, 1992, p. 1349).

Female Offenders' Interview Data

My secondary analysis of transcribed interviews examined the themes that emerged both within and across cases to determine the processes by which the young women came to be involved in violence, to discern the patterns of their violent behavior, and to decipher their understanding of that violence. Of the 24 young women's verbatim transcripts of taped interviews, I first read through a sample to determine the amount and type of data available and to gain an appreciation of the respondents' description of their experiences. The semi-structured interview schedule limited the number and topics of extensive narratives and, while I read the complete interview, I focused on several key sections that were designed to elicit descriptive responses. In particular, each of the sections about family functioning, community attributes, peer relations and activities, traumatic events, drug trafficking and use, and the Instant Offense for which they were remanded to custody, had several open-ended questions that generated some lengthy narratives.

Reviewing these key segments, I initially grouped data under constructs that emanated from the literature and reflected high frequencies in this data set: Traumatic Events; Illegal Activities; Substance Use, and Running Away; and Person-to Person Violence. I sought references to attitudes toward and explanations of these events, as well as connections made between them by the young women. These original guiding themes were modified and new ones added as the data were reviewed, compared and

contextualized (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). By reading the transcripts, underlining key phrases and sections "because they make some as yet inchoate sense" (Sandelowski, 1995, p. 373), and selecting examples of text, I was able to begin the general open coding called for in the grounded theory approach, and to identify a number of potential categories. After a general reading, transcripts were read line-by-line for a more specific and detailed analysis of the actions and statements of the young women. Transcribed data were entered into an information database (a file for each case) using *N5*, a qualitative research software package, which enabled me to organize and search free-form text, using flexible (and changing) multiple codes that I had developed. Gradually, I consolidated some of these codes, some of them I did not use. I first described what I "saw," "heard," and read in the transcripts as thoroughly as possible. Beyond description I coded and recoded, attempting to distill my descriptions by organizing them into themes and concepts.

Data were also organized according to themes within and across cases, and commonalities were assembled and reviewed in order to determine the links between them. Seemingly unique or "odd" cases were examined to see how or why they did not seem to fit emerging categories or codes. So called "negative" cases were used to make adjustments to the model and to refine the nascent theory building (Becker, 1998). All transcripts were systematically read and reread, coded and recoded using the N5 software in order to "dissect" the data into categories and then to reconstruct it, linking the various categories together into a viable whole. Categories and definitions were reexamined to be certain that the developing theory reflected and was grounded in the empirical evidence.

This required general, or open, coding followed by more refined coding as I compared and contrasted incidents, expressions, and experiences across and within cases.

By "listening to girls as authorities about girls' experiences" (Gilligan, Rogers & Tolman, 1991, p.1), and analyzing their words within the specific context of their lives (Messerschmidt, 1997), my intent is to represent segments of their lives without distortion, and to suggest a theoretical understanding of their violent behavior. I identified patterns and specified conditions under which that pattern emerged, and I sought to construct a reality that exemplified the lives of this particular group of young women. For purposes of authenticity, I rely upon direct quotes as much as possible, but do use pseudonyms and study ID numbers throughout the text (see Table 3.2). When referring to an individual, I often include her age as well as her race or ethnicity for descriptive purposes only; they do not reflect an analysis of groups.

The narrative accounts vary, reflecting a number of possibilities such as a girl's memory, personality, desire to talk, or life situation, as well as rapport between interviewer and interviewee, or the physical location or conditions of a particular interviewing session. For example, it appeared as though many of the young women in this study had never been asked about the details of their lives before (or least the aspects we were questioning), and some responded tentatively and shyly, while others with little or no coaxing went on at length. In addition, the ability to clearly articulate thoughts varied from girl to girl. The greater availability of some respondents' words, as well as my interpretation of those words, may have "favored" one girl's story over that of another. As others have noted, "in any research there is always danger that the voices of

Table 3.2
Selected Characteristics of the Study Group
(N=24)

Pseudonym	Project ID Number	OCFS Offense	Age	Race/Ethnicity (Recoded)	Last Grade Completed	Children
Adele	54	Assault	14	Black	7th	No
Jackie	611	Assault	13	Black	7th	No
Paula	612	Assault	16	Black	6th	No
Jill	613	Assault	14	White	7th	No
Gina	616	Assault	14	Black	8th	No
Michelle	619	Assault	16	Black	7th	No
Donna	621	Robbery	15	Black	7th	No
Lauren	622	Assault	15	Black	8th	No
Joanne	627	Assault	15	Hispanic/Latino	8th	No
Valerie	633	Assault	15	Black	9th	No
Christine	639	Assault	14	Black	8th	No
Sherry	888	Assault	15	Black	8th	No
Marcella	892	Assault	15	Hispanic/Latina	6th	No
Diane	895	Robbery	16	Black	9th	No
Rose	906	Assault	16	Hispanic/Latina	8th	No
Kathy	911	Robbery	16	White	9th	Yes
Natalie	1077	Assault	16	Black	9th	No
Elena	1080	Robbery	14	Biracial/Multiracial	9th	Yes
Jennifer	1081	Assault	15	Multiracial	9th	No
Maria	1082	Assault	14	Hispanic/Latina	9th	No
Lisa	1087	Assault	15	Black	8th	No
Gayle	1088	Assault	16	Black	6th	No
Alona	1197	Robbery	15	Black	10th	Yes
Royale	1199	Assault	16	Biracial/Multiracial	8th	No

particular groups or participants become selected out, misinterpreted or misunderstood" (Burman et al., 2001, p.454). On the other hand, by analyzing all the transcripts I began to see patterns wherein the experiences of the young women overlapped, but were not necessarily the same. Those young women who were able to describe and articulate a range of experiences provided important detail that counterbalanced sparser accounts. Sometimes these represented the odd, or extreme, case and other times they reflected a general pattern (Becker, 1998), and the process of constantly comparing cases helped me to interpret the difference (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The key concern was the representativeness of concepts; I was not counting individuals per se (although more observations accumulate more evidence and support wider applicability) but looking for the presence or absence of the phenomena and the conditions under which they exist.

The young women's stories are varied and thus, whenever I present salient themes in the text I first verified that they were data-driven and viable across a significant segment of the study, and that my presentation is supported by representative quotes. Where a relatively unique perspective is presented, or a theme is less prolific, I also indicate that for the reader. Throughout, I sought to represent the young women's lives as authentically as possible, in order to ensure the credibility and confirmability of the data (Lincoln & Guba, 2000). In addition to the spontaneous narrative responses the young women offered in response to questions posed in the semi-structured interview schedule, some of the young women talked about topics not directly related to questions asked, but relevant to their lives. These "ad hoc" or voluntary offerings introduced new themes that sometimes clarified (and just as often "muddied" or complicated) the rendered narrative. As such, these data opened new avenues to investigate, avenues that were only accessible

through the qualitative analyses, and which helped to "center and make problematic" the young women's diverse life situations (Olesen, 1998, p. 300). Thus, despite the constraints of a semi-structured interview schedule, the young women themselves brought to the forefront aspects of their lives they deemed important to reveal, and which became part of their self representation (Goffman, 1959).

As others have noted, the voices of young people are rarely heard (Way, 1998; Leadbeater & Way, 1996), and "girls, in particular, are a socially silenced group" Burman, et al., 2001, p. 455). Hearing young women's perspectives on interpersonal violence is rarer still. In the current study, the qualitative analysis and presentation of the transcribed voices of young women adjudicated for violent offenses is an important means of making private lives more public, for the purpose of increasing understanding and informing social policy. The complexity of these qualitative data is their strength, even as it renders analysis more difficult. Each of these renditions of violence is a complicated, vibrant story, with nuances about young women's lives that statistical data and official labels cannot reveal. Portraying portions of these young women's lives through the extensive use of direct quotations provides a unique opportunity to venture into their world and to thereby gain a better understanding of the antecedents that influenced their pathway into violence.

Study Limitations

The data are limited, consisting of 24 female respondents' answers to a semi-structured questionnaire administered at one point in time. Because it was a "one-time" interview, I was not able to follow up with respondents about topics and themes that emerged from the analysis. In addition, because this research was a secondary analysis,

questions that I would have liked to have asked, and that should be asked in future research, were not. For example, the only question pertaining to pregnancy or motherhood was whether or not the respondent had a child. We don't know anything about the context and process of the pregnancy, such whether it was the result of a sexual assault, nor do we know how becoming a mother may have alleviated or exacerbated the young women's difficulties, or how her own trauma history effected her interactions with her own child. The small number of respondents and the absence of a comparison group, as well as the cross-sectional nature of the data, limit variance and the ability to generalize findings.

Despite these limitations, the study provides a unique entré into the lives of a select group of young offenders whose experiences with violence and trauma have been either ignored or sensationalized. Responding to the call for more detailed studies of young women's lives, this study analyzes the words of young women to suggest a theoretical framework for analyzing violence perpetrated by female adolescents.

CHAPTER FOUR

TRAUMATIC EXPERIENCES: LOSS

Traumatic events are upsetting and substantially change how one thinks and feels about his or her world. While there are many types of upsetting events that could be traumatic, including universal experiences such as the death of a loved one or catastrophic incidents such as the attack on the World Trade Center, experiencing the event in and of itself does not necessarily result in being traumatized. The duration and severity of the event, the age at which one experiences it, personal characteristics, and the availability and effectiveness of social supports, all contribute to how and whether an individual processes an event as traumatic (Luthar & Zigler, 1991; McLeod & Kessler, 1990; Berman et al., 1994). This chapter will first review the many different types of traumatic events that the young women in the study reported experiencing, as well as the frequency of those events and the age at which the events first occurred. The chapter will then focus on traumatic childhood losses as presented in the young women's narratives.

A Range of Possibly Traumatic Experiences

There is an increasing literature on what may constitute trauma, but little attention has focused on the victims' perceptions (Crimmins, Brownstein, Spunt, Ryder & Warley, 1998), particularly, the life experiences of children and adolescents growing up in urban areas. Thus, it is important to assess the extent of possible traumatic experiences in a young person's world. Beyond physical and sexual abuse, the questionnaire presented to adolescents in this study (and in the larger LAVIDA study) attempted to exhaust the range of possible traumatic experiences in a young person's life and consisted of 23

possibly traumatic event items. After reviewing the young women's responses generally, I grouped the data into types of losses and victimizations and explored these in greater depth through their narratives. These findings are discussed below and in Chapter Five.

Respondents were asked how old they were the first time they experienced any of the 23[11] potentially traumatic events and the number of times these events had occurred in their lives prior to custody (see Table 4.1). At a very early age all of the young women in this study experienced significant and often multiple traumatic events. Eighty-eight percent of the respondents (n=21) had experienced their parents' separation or divorce, or stated that the parents "were never together." Eighty-three percent (n=20) had experienced the death of at least one loved one at the median age of eight; the median number of deaths respondents experienced was three[12]. Nearly as many young women (n=19) reported that at the median age of 10, a loved one had been seriously ill or injured (median frequency of two).

The young women also experienced several types of family physical abuse—being kicked, bit, hit, burned or scalded by a family member: 75% (n=18) said they had directly experienced these acts and 54% (n=13) reported witnessing such abuse by family members. Several of the questions on the interview schedule were phrased in general terms that did not specifically ask about the location of the violence; responses do, however, indicate a general pattern of violence that crossed home and community boundaries. Nearly three-fourths of the young women (74%, n=17) had witnessed a

[11] Although asked, none had ever been kidnapped and thus, this is not recorded in the tables.

[12] The standard questions were not explicit and thus, when a young woman responded yes to "Have you ever had someone you loved die?" for example, we did know who that loved one was. If she volunteered the information, the data were collected and examined in this secondary analysis.

Table 4.1
Traumatic Experiences
(N= 24)

	Ever Occurred		Median Earliest Age	Median Frequency
	n	%		
Parents separated/divorced	21	88	3	1
Loved one died	20	83	8	3
Loved one seriously ill/injured	19	79	10	2
Family physical abuse (Kicked, bit, hit, burned, scalded)	18	75	8	5
Witness shooting/stabbing (outside the home)	17	74*	12	3
Awakened by gunfire	16	68	11	7
Witnessed killing	15	65*	12	2
Stranger physical abuse (Kicked, bit, hit, burned, scalded)	15	62	10	7
Witnessed family physical abuse (Kicked, bit, hit, burned, scalded)	13	54	11	3
Accident requiring hospital treatment	10	42	12	1
Fire/explosion	10	42	8	2
Family sexual abuse	7	29	8	4
Stranger sexual abuse	7	29	10	2
Stabbed or shot	7	29	14	1
Witnessed stabbing/shooting in home	6	26*	13	1
Lost home	5	21	7	1
Serious physical illness	4	17	7	2
Mugged	4	17	13	1
Witnessed family sexual abuse	3	13	6	2

* N=23

stabbing or shooting outside the home, and over two-thirds (68%, n=16) had been awakened by gunfire. By the age of 12 years (median), 65% of the girls in this study had witnessed two killings. Sixty-two percent (n=15) of the young women said they had been kicked, bit, hit, burned or scalded by a stranger or acquaintance, and 42% (n=10) reported having experienced a fire or an explosion. Twenty-six percent (n=6) had witnessed a stabbing or shooting in their home.

Respondents were also asked about experiencing or witnessing family sexual abuse. When asked "has anyone in your family bothered you sexually or forced you to have sex against your will?" 29% (n=7) answered affirmatively, with a median initial age of eight; three indicated that they had witnessed sexual abuse by a family member at a median initial age of six. Over a fourth (29%, n=7) had been bothered sexually or forced to have sex against their will by a stranger or acquaintance. Often, the young women themselves had been injured or were sick: 42% (n=12) reported suffering an accident requiring hospital treatment; 29% (n=7) had been stabbed or shot; 17 % (n=4) reported having been seriously ill; and 17% (n=4) reported being mugged. Nearly one fourth of the young women (21%, n=5) reported having first lost their home at the median age of only seven years old. While experiencing any individual event, or even a couple of events, is not necessarily indicative of trauma, the pattern that emerges from the overall numbers is significant. Responses clearly indicate extensive losses and exposure to violence and victimization within the home, as well as within the larger community. In addition, the young women experienced these traumatic events when they were very young, with nearly half of the events initially occurring when they were 10 years old or younger. In Table 4.2 the traumatic events are reordered by initial age of occurrence.

Childhood Losses

Some of the losses may not seem particularly unusual after an initial review of these numbers. Separation and divorce, for example, are extremely common in contemporary America, with approximately one half of all marriages ending in divorce. Although the data do not indicate the specific reasons, and there are likely to be a great many other than divorce, in New York State as of 2000, 34% of children lived in single parent families (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2002, p. 58). Likewise, by the time they reach adolescence, many youths are likely to have experienced the death of at least one loved one, perhaps most commonly the death of elderly grandparents. A variety of factors determine the adjustment of children to such losses, including, for example, the child's age at the time of the loss and the child's gender, with younger children and girls reporting more posttraumatic stress disorder symptoms, anxiety and depression (Stoppelbein, 2000; Allison & Furstenberg, 1989), and the amount of family conflict (Black & Pedro-Carroll, 1993).

Between the ages of six months and one year, children generally develop the ability to become attached to others (Bowlby 1973); the potentially negative effect of losing a significant relationship on a child's developing sense of self has been well documented (Bowlby 1973; Furman 1974, 1986; Wolfenstein 1975). By inhibiting the development of healthy attachments, these losses may cause a child to exhibit both depression and aggression (Ainsworth, 1979) and lay the foundation for developing maladaptive coping mechanisms, including violence (Crimmins, 1995).

Table 4.2
Traumatic Experiences by Median Earliest Age
(N= 24)

	Ever Occurred		Median Earliest Age
	n	%	
Parents separated/divorced	21	88	**3**
Witnessed family sexual abuse	3	13	**6**
Lost home	5	21	**7**
Serious physical illness	4	17	**7**
Loved one died	20	83	**8**
Family physical abuse (Kicked, bit, hit, burned, scalded)	18	75	**8**
Fire/explosion	10	42	**8**
Family sexual abuse	7	29	**8**
Loved one seriously ill/injured	19	79	**10**
Stranger physical abuse (Kicked, bit, hit, burned, scalded)	15	62	**10**
Stranger sexual abuse	7	29	**10**
Awakened by gunfire	16	68	11
Witnessed family physical abuse (Kicked, bit, hit, burned, scalded)	13	54	11
Witness shooting/stabbing (Outside the home)	17	74*	12
Witnessed killing	15	65*	12
Accident requiring hospital treatment	10	42	12
Witnessed stabbing/shooting in home	6	26*	13
Mugged	4	17	13
Stabbed or shot	7	29	14

* N=23

Thus, although the initial number and types of losses among the young women in this study may not appear particularly consequential, the young women's narrative comments describing their experiences reveal children traumatized by numerous and substantial losses. What is remarkable about the adolescents in this study is that very early in life they experienced multiple losses, several different types, and frequently, the losses occurred in a violent or socially stigmatized (AIDS, drug overdose) context. Throughout the interviews, the young women introduced and elaborated on themes of loss in their daily lives. What emerged from these unprompted narratives were complex and nuanced stories of severed bonds between the young women and their parents or primary caretakers. Perhaps a physical connection was disrupted when a loved one died or a divorced parent moved away. Or a parent might have been physically present but the connection with the young woman was deficient in some way as in the case, perhaps, of parental addiction or disability, or other personal problems or distractions. Thus, the described losses generally pertained to early emotional attachments that were disrupted, often generating anger and a sense that the world was unpredictable, dangerous, and lethal.

Four general types of losses, relative to a disrupted attachment, were inductively derived from the data:

1) death of a loved one: any loved one's death, as defined by respondents, and generally refers to parents, grandparents and close relatives.
2) physical absence: a young woman's parent or other loved one was alive but absent from her life for a variety of reasons, often because of divorce or incarceration.

3) psychological unavailability: parents and caretakers were physically present but were detached, self involved and affectless, irresponsible in their child care, or otherwise "unavailable" to provide the young women with the love and support they needed.

4) loss of home: respondents were removed from home and placed in foster care, were institutionalized, or were thrown out by parents or evicted by a landlord.

These categories are data-driven and thus, are much more expansive than, though similar to, the losses identified in the close-ended questions.

In reality, the young women described complicated situations that belie simple and somewhat artificial categorization. One example that demonstrates how closely the four categories are intertwined is that of 16-year-old Gayle[13]. Her father died before she was born (death of a loved one) and her mother often left her alone outside while the mother did drugs with friends in the house (psychological unavailability). Eventually her mother was "busted" for selling drugs: "she went to jail for like two years, [physical absence] and they put me in the foster home [loss of home] and I couldn't get no contact with my mother." Although the four categories are intimately related, examining each separately enables a closer view of the context of each type, as well as the young women's responses to each. After the individual parts are analyzed, the concept of loss as it relates to the lives of these young women will be considered in a more holistic manner.

[13] Throughout this dissertation pseudonyms and project ID numbers are used to distinguish the respondents.

Death of a loved one.

Street shootings and stabbings often formed the backdrop of respondents' neighborhood life and thus, death was not an uncommon occurrence. In addition to this general community violence, however, 20 of the young women in this study had also experienced the death of at least one person with whom they were emotionally close—people whom they loved. They reported on the death of parents as well as siblings, grandparents, aunts, uncles, and friends.

When asked what was the most upsetting event in their lives, 60% of the young women (n=12) said that it was the death of a loved one. Some deaths occurred after a long struggle with an illness, others were accidents, and others were homicides—each of which, depending on circumstances, could be experienced as sudden, unexpected, and violent. Sometimes the young women were present at the time of death and they reported in graphic detail what they witnessed. In other situations, respondents were very young when death occurred and, while they may not remember many details, they do have memories and feelings about the loss. For example, Marcella vividly described being in the back seat of a car with her sister, leaving her home in California and driving to New York. She recalls crying for her grandfather, and her terrible realization at 3 $^{1/2}$ years of age that her grandfather was not going to be there for her anymore—he was dead.

Four of the young women reported that their father had died. Gayle, who had lived in group homes and foster care began her description of her family life by simply stating "My father died before I was born." She offered no additional information about her biological father and revealed no feelings about this man whom she did not know, or about the effect this permanent loss may have had on her. Conversely, Valerie was

extremely upset by the death of her father, which occurred when she was five years old. She was old enough to remember him and that he had been shot and left paralyzed. She said she loved him and was upset, too, by the fact that he was still a young man when he died. Although Alona also had little information about her father or how he died, she had strong feelings about having lost him at the age of nine. Asked to explain what it was that most bothered her about her father's death she cried out: "AYAHH, because I missed him. AYAHH, I loved him and he was my father. I didn't get a chance to say 'goodbye, I love you.' No hug or nothing." Elena was 11 when her much loved father died of an unnamed (in the interview) disease. The effect on this 14-year-old was devastating.

> Before I came to DFY, we had so many family problems because I had just lost a little brother, just lost my father; I was really out of control. My family was really slipping away, oh God. It was just breaking off in pieces. It was so much drama, I can't believe it. We had cops in it too, oh man it was so horrible. .

She was angry and confused as to why her father was dying and directed her anger toward her mother: "Yeah, we don't get—[along] like ever since my father died, I really, oh man! I like, when my father died I hated my mother, I really hated her." Her father's death preceded by "a couple of months" the stabbing death of her younger brother and the imprisonment of an older brother. The family had multiple problems, many of which were apparently long standing, but for this young woman her father's death seemed to signify the demise of any family cohesiveness.

Nine of the 20 young women talked about losing their grandparents, who generally died of disease and complications of age. Young when the grandparent died, respondents did not always know or remember the medical or technical language to describe what happened to their loved ones. Speaking of her grandmother's death Diane

explains that at age five "I was very upset and I was confused too, because I was younger then and I didn't know what was going on." One fifteen-year-old stated that her grandfather died "just laying in bed" (Lauren), and another thought her grandmother had "caught a heart attack" from being 97 years old and frightened by loud noises (Lisa). When asked what happened to four family members who had died, 16-year-old Rose responded: "I don't know, they just died. One of my uncles he died of AIDS. I think the other ones died of cancer or something like that." Another said her uncle "took too many different kinds of drugs and his heart exploded. I don't think it was intentionally." Christine.

Regardless of who it was that died or what was the cause of death, respondents expressed a great deal of confusion, anxiety, and rage. One was angry at the doctors because "they wasn't really doing nothing to help" her ailing relatives. Natalie was angry not only that that her grandmother survived her "best uncle" who died of kidney failure, but that she wasn't told for several days:

> I was real mad, I was upset, 'cause I didn't know or understand why he died and my grandmother didn't die. Cause she was always getting sick. She was older than him too. And I was really upset because nobody told me until five days later. Cause my mother didn't want to tell me, at first. 'Cause he was in the hospital and everybody thought he was going to be fine.

Perhaps her family intended to protect the girl by delaying the news, but from her perspective, the suddenness of the news of his death may have felt as shocking and incomprehensible as a homicide, and certainly aroused much anger. While her grandmother "was always sick," her young uncle appeared fine—and then was gone. Another young woman, Lisa, explained that while her grandparents' deaths were "sad for me," they also made her angry and fearful. These emotions were compounded when two

years later her baby sister "had to go to the hospital to get surgery 'cause she had cancer and a tumor in her head" and her brother was born premature and "almost died, so he had to stay in the hospital, and get fed through a tube." Struggling to explain her feelings, she divulged that she:

> didn't want to go through an experience like that, [and] couldn't hurt myself 'cause somebody else was hurt. So, I was mad. I was real mad. You know, 'cause I had to go through all that, and I didn't wanna to go through all of that. It just made me mad. Because, it made me mad that...my grandmother and grandfather had to die and it made me mad because my baby sister and brother could of died.

Angry and almost indignant that she had to shoulder the burden of both the actual loss of her grandparents and the potential loss of her siblings, Lisa's comments also reveal her fear of others' and, perhaps, even her own death. Similarly, one young woman's aunt had recently died of AIDS, and in telling that story, Marcella switched to that of her young cousin: "he has seizures, that's scary 'cause he had a seizure in front of me—we thought he was gonna die." Similarly reflecting apprehension of future losses, two respondents began talking about how upsetting it was to experience a loved one's death several years earlier but then quickly turned to their mothers' current illnesses. Speaking first of her grandfather Kathy said:

> Yeah, he had cancer. It was like eating the skin and like my mother right now, she's having um, I don't know if it's cancer, but they had to open her throat and put a box in it.

Both of Lauren's grandparents had died, apparently from a stroke. As she described the deaths as extremely upsetting to her, she told of her mother's illness, and then spoke of her mother in the past tense:

> My mother...she got HIV. One of these days she can go, you never know. She can pass away. [She] was somebody that was really, really close to me and the other one is my grandparents.

Thus, not only did a loved one's illness and subsequent death cause immediate distress, but the experience generated additional fears about the future health and safety of other loved ones: if disease could kill one person, it was not unlikely that it could do the same to another. In a different, yet similar vein, Elena, whose father had died and younger brother been killed, described her older brother's incarceration as a form of death:

> My brother got a life sentence. But most likely he be getting probation but I don't look at him like that. He 19, by the time he come out, what's gonna be the use? So there's no point for him to come out. I don't even look at it like that no more.

In fifth grade when her grandfather died of cancer, Joanne regretted that she wasn't able to spend much time with him or to grow into his expectations of her: "He wanted to see me grow up and it's just, I mean he used to tell me you're gonna be so pretty when you grow up and you're gonna do this and that and ... I never got a chance to show him that." In addition to her regret and grief, she also felt a sense of responsibility for her grandfather's death. Describing being on the phone with her grandmother when he died, Joanne stated:

> He was screaming in the background 'I want to see my granddaughter before I die' and I was like 12 hours away and didn't know what to do. If he wouldn't have gotten so upset about that he probably would have lived longer. They would have gotten him to a hospital but he was spas'ing out.

Similarly, Christine felt guilty for watching as her uncle died of a drug overdose:

> It made me feel like it was my fault because its – I know in my, in my mind that it wasn't nothing I could do because his heart was, cuz, the hospital told us his heart was gonna explode even if we would have called right away, his heart still was gonna explode, but in my heart, I just feel like maybe if we would have called the

> ambulance right away when we seen him, he probably would still be alive today. ...He was in the bathtub and he was just shaking and, we was like, cuz, my, my, um, friends and they mother – they was like no, just leave him cuz he's gonna be alright.

In a very different type of incident, 15-year-old Sherry recounted how, when she was 11, her six-year-old brother choked on a balloon at a neighbor's birthday party: "... you know how you play with a balloon—you blow air in and out of it? He was doing that and he swallowed it somehow." Another 'accidental' family death occurred when Donna's father shot and killed her aunt while the family was gathered in the park.

> My father told her to stop playing and she kept on playing, playing. So, my father pulled the .38 out and her husband tried to grab my father. The gun went up in the air. It went out of control and shot her in her stomach. My father knocked the hell out of her husband and he fell out.

This was the most upsetting event for her because, she said, it was her aunt and "if it wasn't for my father she would still be alive." She was in shock for having stood close by and for "see[ing] it with you own eyes."

While many of the deaths from disease and accidents were experienced as violent events, several of the young women also experienced the particular violence of a loved one's death from homicide. Armour (2002) suggests that death by homicide creates a very different experience for its "covictims,"— the families and close friends of victims—than deaths caused by acute causes, terminal illness, suicide or accidental death. Seventy percent (n=17) of the young women indicated that they had witnessed at least one killing,[14] and although it was not always clear from responses who was killed, many

[14] Fifteen respondents said they had witnessed at least one killing, when asked directly. One subject refused to answer whether she had witnessed a killing but responded to the follow-up questions (about her age at the time, the number of killings she had witnessed, and how upset she felt at the time. Another answered "No" but later in the interview admitted that she saw her father shoot and kill her aunt.

of the narratives do describe the experience and complicated emotional responses of witnessing the killing of a loved one.

For example, Elena's younger brother was stabbed to death by a neighborhood boy and she describes how quickly a 'common' fight turned to a killing. "I was getting ready to take him to the movies" and while her brother waited outside on the street "some guy did something to him ...and they just started fighting and the boy must of started stabbing him in the chest." She heard screaming, yet when she looked out the apartment window to the street below her thought was only "oh, it's just my brother fighting." After getting dressed, she "looked out the window again, I saw my brother on the floor" and ran down the stairs. "By the time I got downstairs he was just having, it was, like,— blood." She describes her brother grabbing her hand and kissing her goodbye while she, covered in blood, held him close trying to "keep pressuring him so the blood wouldn't come out [but] by the time he got on the table that was it." In addition to the horror of watching her brother die, Elena said she felt guilty and admonished herself several times throughout the interview for not preventing or intervening in the fight: "I always was blaming myself. I was like, mommy, if I just went outside with [him] just for two more minutes, what could of went on?"

Similarly, Rose told of witnessing "my brother getting killed" by rival gang members and was extremely upset about "not being able to do nothing about it." Five of Jennifer's loved ones had died by the time we interviewed her at the age of 15; two had been shot to death. These were extremely upsetting to her, more upsetting than any other event or experience in her life. When asked if there was anything in particular that upset her about the loss, she simply stated it was " 'cuz I loved them and they died."

Reluctant to speak about the deaths, she did indicate that the killings were in the context of a drug deal: "Alright, it was drug dealers and kids from another place" who were responsible. Christine wasn't certain, but she thought her uncle's death "had something to do with drugs." More important, she does remember

> seeing that he was running down the block, and somebody was chasing him with a gun and they shot him in his head and he fell to the ground. It upset me 'cuz I seen him on the floor bleeding, but I didn't really, I didn't really know about death then 'cuz I was only five or six years old and I didn't really understand it.

Several others described losing loved ones, including peers, in drug-related killings. Early one morning Maria woke up to gunshots and her mother yelling that "somebody got killed." Even though she "saw that obviously somebody was bleeding out of their head" outside her building, she had a difficult time comprehending that this could happen to her friend, despite his well-known role as a "big time drug dealer."

> Everybody used to respect the man. He was like the king of the block. The KING. ...He used to buy everybody breakfast. Christmastime, this man used to waste more than $5,000 in presents.

Seemingly even more upsetting than the actual death was her sense of betrayal as it became clear that the killers were friends from the neighborhood.

> ...the ones that did it was his friends. ...He used to give them money when they needed money, he used to buy them stuff, buy them clothes, he used to take hardly everybody on my block shopping, and they still did that to him.

Similarly, Kathy was affiliated with a gang and had witnessed a great deal of drug-related violence but she experienced a horrible shock when her best friend was killed in a drive-by shooting:

> We were sitting on the corner and she got shot in the back of the neck. I didn't move, I didn't know what to do. I just stood there. And I didn't realize she got shot

> until she fell and she was bleeding on me, and I had blood all over me and stuff too. ...They killed her and her brother, just went crazy, tried to kill everybody. To see her get shot. To see the blood come out of her head. To see her eyes roll back. Started turnin' colors and see her brother screamin', goin' crazy...

Perhaps indicative of the number of deaths surrounding her, it was only in the context of talking about her dating relationships that 15-year-old Joanne revealed that one lover was killed by another male friend, who was subsequently killed by one of her family members:

> So, he was a little over protective and this boy that I grew up with ... he shot him cuz he was getting all in his face and he was saying 'oh, you touch my girl and I'm gonna shoot you' and he was like 'yeah, fine I'm gonna shoot you first'. Then they both pulled a gun out at the same time and they both fired. But the other guy shot my man. He's dead. He died on my birthday.

As "covictims" of homicide, many of these young women struggled with the knowledge that their loved one's death was caused by the willful and violent act of another person (Rando, 1996). On the other hand, as described above, many of the respondents whose loved ones had died from disease and accidents also believed these deaths to be violent, and specifically blamed parents, doctors, or the illness itself. Thus, as Stuckless (1996) found, perhaps any mourners who attribute culpability to a particular person, may feel angrier, have more vengeful emotions, and feel the world is less comprehensible than those whose do not attribute responsibility to any one specific perpetrator. In this study, many of the young women whose loved ones had died, whether by homicide, accident, or illness, directed their anger at particular person. They described vengeful acts, spoke of having vengeful thoughts, and feeling that life was less meaningful and manageable.

For example, Kathy had recognized some of the gang members who killed her best friend. She claimed that at least "one a them's a dead man" because her gang was planning to retaliate. In Maria's case, she had already derived some satisfaction from the fact that two weeks after her drug dealer friend was killed a number of local crews, including hers, joined together and killed some of the dealer's assailants: "I guess they just wanted to have his money. But we got them back!" When Elena learned that the person who killed her brother was likely to be released soon, she became very stressed and suggested that if she were to meet up with the killer she was likely to attack him, causing her own rearrest.

> He was only locked up for two years! What's going on? Everybody was like, he gonna be coming out on probation. I was like, if he come out on probation and I come back home, I'm coming right back upstate cuz, what's going on?

In addition to these thoughts of revenge, Elena noted that "my family, ever since then, we just been separated. We just all go our separate ways." Left on her own to manage overwhelming emotions of guilt, sadness and anger, she attempted to first cover up, or suppress them, but eventually acted them out.

> I always was blaming myself. ...If you was to see me in the community, everybody used to be like oh she's happy and smiley but if you was my boyfriend or something like that, you knock on my door, you know that I'm having family problems and I was really going at it ... I just started flipping and going wild, doing things I wasn't supposed to be doing, then got locked up and that was it.

Clearly from her perspective, feelings generated by the deaths of her father and brother were directly linked to her own subsequent delinquency and violence.

Physical absence.

Death, as devastating and complete as it is, was unfortunately only one type of loss common to the young women. They also suffered the loss of loved ones who, though alive, were physically absent from their lives. Such absences included situations where parents or primary caregivers were hospitalized, divorced or separated, incarcerated, or living in another country. Although this category of loss primarily addresses the circumstances surrounding the physical absence of the young women's parents or primary caretakers, I also reference the loss of close friends later in the youths' lives

Twenty one percent of the young women's parents were divorced, separated or never together. The respondents' median age at the time of parental separation was three years, and the reported low level of upset was coded as "1—not at all upsetting." As one young woman stated "I didn't have no feelings at that time" and another explained "I grew up like that so..." Complicating the responses was the fact that several of the girls had had a number of stepparents or parental figures in addition to their biological parents and it was not always clear whether it was the biological parents or others who were divorcing or separating—or both. Also, sometimes the respondents interpreted "separated" to mean a split in the marriage relationship, and in other contexts they were talking about a parent's physical removal, as in the case of incarceration. Regardless of the individual circumstances, however, it is very clear that among this group of adolescents, numerous parental figures had come into and then left their young lives. Sometimes there were other adults to assuage the loss of the other, but too frequently, even that was problematic, as the youths were often shuffled among relatives, social services, and the juvenile justice system.

As with other types of loss, many complex factors determine the psychological adjustment of children whose parents separate and divorce (Kelly, 2000). Potential modifiers of the impact of a divorce on a child's development and subsequent mental health include the age of the child (Allison & Furstenberg, 1989; Armato, 1994); the frequency and type of contact with the nonresident parent (Armato, 1994), and the parent-child relationship (Armato, 1994; Black & Pedro-Carroll, 1993). In this study, the affect of the young women's spontaneous comments on the absence of parents ranged from blasé and matter-of-fact to very upset. Several respondents, including Joanne, distinguished between not knowing or remembering how they felt at the time of their parents' separation and how they currently felt about it. She was two years old when her parents separated, "and they never got back together again"; Joanne noted "now it was five ["extremely upsetting" on the interview schedule response card] but at the time I don't know." Similarly, Royale was a newborn when her parents divorced and she doesn't know how she felt at the time. Her father lives in her area, however, and for awhile she enjoyed visits with him: "When I was younger my father used to take me to his house and we'd stay like a weekend over there, but after awhile that stopped." The visits ended and now, she sees him only on occasion: "I see him walking down the street sometimes. I'd just say hi and bye..." Thus, despite her father's physical proximity in the neighborhood, his general absence from her life is upsetting to her and she preferred not to talk about it further.

Among those whose had never known their absent parent, many had little to say about the loss. For example, Maria's parents separated when she was two years old, and all she knew was "he just left." Describing her family life she noted that "I don't know

my real father. I know my step father and he's nice. He's the one that raised me and that's about it." Another 14-year-old girl, Adele, did not mention her father throughout the entire interview other than when she was directly asked if her parents had ever been separated or divorced. At that point she stated that "I was like 3 and 7. It [parent's relationship] was off and on, on and off." Her father's absence appeared to be so common as to be unworthy of comment. Another young woman, Gina, who never knew her father seemed a little confused and only slightly skeptical of her mother's explanation:

> Alright, there's a man named R. Hall and there's a man named Calvin Klein. Calvin Klein supposed to be my father, but I got the other one's last name, but I look like Calvin Klein, so my mom says that's my father, but she was on drugs at the time, so she, she's out of it.

In addition to her father's absence, Gina actually had little contact with her mother, because "she used to have a problem with drugs and alcohol and so, she gave me to my grandmother" when she was only a year old. "She was in one of them rehabilitation centers" before reclaiming her daughter four years later.

When Jennifer was six, her parents divorced—an event that she claimed was not at all upsetting. Demonstrating her attachment and, perhaps, idealizing her relationship with her remaining parent, she claimed that "me and my mother, we were like sisters" and her mother let her do "anything I wanted to do." In a striking afterthought, however, she added "my mother, she was alright, she wasn't never really ever there 'cuz she was either locked up or I was locked up. I don't know..." One 16-year old spoke about her generally absent mother in a similar fashion: Gayle lived in foster care and with various relatives, and her mother "lived place to place, Manhattan and Brooklyn. Place to place."

The young woman, however, claimed the two of them had a close relationship. She explains:

> She didn't see me, but it was a close relationship, like if I would see her we would talk... We didn't see each other that often. She'll come see me like every six months. Like that. [So, when did you see each other, how'd you get along?] We got along fine.

At the time of the interview, Jackie was only 13 and her parents had "never been together." She couldn't remember exactly how young she was when her parents abandoned her, only that she had lived most of her life with her aunt. Her mother was incarcerated and she had "never seen her really." She was placed with her aunt:

> Cuz my mom couldn't take care of me. My mom went to jail so they didn't have nowhere to put me and I had to go to court and they gave me to my aunt cuz my moms said she didn't want me – that I should live with somebody else. At that time, my father wasn't available. I don't really know. I just hear little parts of it but I don't really know why he couldn't get me, but they gave me to my aunt – no, yeah, my father choose for me to go with my aunt.

Furthermore, she claimed she felt bad about herself while living with her aunt because "they used to treat me wrong, different. They used to treat me like I was a dog." Jackie related her own delinquent behavior to her aunt's treatment: "That's why I think I was doing stuff I was doing 'cuz they didn't treat me right and I didn't like that and I was getting older and I didn't like being treated like that." While the presumably poor treatment could have been a factor in her problem behavior, it is also very likely that her feelings of abandonment and unworthiness also played a part. Her childhood losses were significant and by age 13, no one had dispelled her belief that her mother "didn't want me," nor offered a satisfactory reason as to why her father "couldn't get me" but chose to let her aunt care for her.

Stating that the adults in her life "just tell me little bits and pieces of the story and stuff," Paula relayed a similar account. She was told that when she was less than a year old, her parents separated for the first time and that several times thereafter "they got back together and broke up again." Unfortunately, she also assumes the separation was somehow her fault, which children often do if not assured otherwise.

> They kept trying, in that time, they kept trying, went back together, but it wasn't working out...for some reason, after me, they just couldn't take each other no more. Before I was born, everything was fine and after I was born, they started arguing and fighting and stuff then she would leave or he would leave and they kept doing that.

She remembers living with an aunt for a couple of years because her mother left and "my father don't know how to take care of a child by himself." She lived with the aunt until she was three, when "I came back to live with my mother...I don't know where she went then she came back and got me later." Not only did the parents separate from one another, but both appeared willing to give up their young daughter during the critical first three years of her life. Psychically defended, perhaps, against the loss of both parents for unknown reasons and the pain of being left behind with a relative, Paula claimed she did not remember how upsetting her parent's separations were for her.

Both of Michelle's parents also were absent for large periods of her early life. The couple had never married and her father was in jail in Barbados during most of her first eight years. When she was only two, her mother sent her to live with her grandparents in New York. She claimed her mother only retrieved her because:

> I was being bad and my grandmother was like I'm not going to take care of her if she keeps on being bad. You are going to have to come and take care of your responsibilities. That what she used to tell my mother.

From Michelle's narrative it is difficult to ascertain exactly when it was, but eventually her mother did come to New York to work. Unfortunately, because of apparent job difficulties her mother saw fit to send Michelle back to Barbados when she was eight years old. The girl stayed on the island with her other grandmother for another two years, during which time her father was released from jail. Only after her mother sent for the father did Michelle and a younger brother join their parents in New York.

Another sixteen-year-old talked of several absences that occurred in her young life, including her parent's separation and incarcerations, her mother's temporary rejection, as well as the appearance and departure of two father figures, in addition to that of her biological father. Natalie's biological father was "getting locked up" off and on from the time she was a baby, and her mother left him because "he used to beat her up some times." Her mother eventually remarried, but Natalie "didn't like my mother's husband [because] he wasn't my father," and claimed "he didn't like me either 'cause I liked my father, cause I was a Daddy's girl." She continued to keep in touch with her father, visiting him and his new girlfriend and their children, and even living with him for a time. This, however, was against her mother's wishes, prompting another loss.

> I seen him all the time. And then I went to live him for like a year...She was mad when I left to go live with my father. She didn't want to speak to me for a while, I was like seven. She didn't want to speak to me for a little while but she got over it. She was getting mad, it' s like she wanted to see me but she was mad cause she didn't understand how I could go live with my father, all he does is selling drugs and stuff like that.

Thus, Natalie's desire to be with her previously absent father, and her parents' ongoing conflict and inability resolve their own differences, brought about the loss of her mother's physical and emotional presence: for some period of time the mother didn't see or talk to

her seven-year-old daughter. This scenario changed again, however, when "while I was living with him he had got arrested for murder" and she returned to live with her mother and her mother's new boyfriend. While her father's incarceration was "a little upsetting" to her, she claimed she was somewhat "used" to it. She was much more upset when several years later her mother was jailed for two months, accused of hiring someone to kill the girl's stepfather. Again, as in the case of several other young women, parental loss involved both mother and father.

When asked if her parents had ever separated or divorced, 14-year-old Christine talked about the physical loss of her incarcerated father. She stated that although her parents were never married, neither were they separated. Her father was in jail "but, when he come home they gonna be back together." She explained that his incarceration was an extremely upsetting situation that had occurred approximately three times prior to her own remand to custody.

> He, my father, he's been in jail off and on, so, I'll say he lived with us for a good one year straight. My mother was still pregnant with me when my father first went to jail. And he came home when I was like, 3. [And went back] when I was like, five.

She also lost her mother for a time "when I was like 8 or 10 or 9, that's when she went to the drug program and she came out, like, 18 months later." Because of her mother's absence Christine was placed in foster care and lived with her grandmother and uncles. In a seemingly rare act (among this sample of adolescents), her mother attempted to explain the changes that were taking place: " 'cuz I was young and I didn't know nothing about drugs but she told me, before she left, she told us why she was going, to get help, so she won't lose us completely." For this young woman, however, one or both of her

parents were gone from the time of her birth until she was 11 years old, and having her father home for "one year straight" was a remarkable experience.

Elena said she primarily lived with her mother and younger sister, and stated that her parents separated (but never divorced) when she was only a year old. Throughout the interview, however, she made references to her father living with them even though "my mother left my father for a female." She tried to explain that:

> my parents were separated since I was a baby. But they still lived together, but they was separated. They was just separated but they still did things that married people do.

Although she felt she had to respect her mother's "lifestyle" and suggested that perhaps her mother "was just with my father and my sister's father so she could just have kids," Elena insisted that her parents "was together for 18 years whether or not she was with a female or not." While the amount of time either parent was actually present is uncertain, their marital status clearly was important to Elena. Her feelings of loss seem to reflect the general desire of many of the other young women to have both parents in their lives:

> I wanted to be different from everybody else. My whole gang they don't have both of them, don't have mothers and fathers and ... I just, I wanted to be different. I wanted to have both. I didn't want to have one or the other.

Elena poignantly specified the type of guidance she desired and needed from each parent as she grew from adolescence into womanhood:

> I wanted both so when I need to talk about boys, I wanna talk to my daddy. When I need to talk about girls I wanna talk to my mother. When I wanna know how to dress I wanna talk to my mother. When I wanna know how to hold a relationship I wanna talk to my father.

As she struggled with the complicating factor of her mother's female lover, however, Elena may have felt that her loss was compounded by the ambiguity of each parent's role and place, which seemed to threaten her perception of established gender norms.

Nineteen of the respondents stated in the initial research questionnaire that someone they loved had had a serious illness or injury (see Table 4.1). While many mentioned the disease or injury that had afflicted their loved ones (e.g., AIDS, heart disease, paralysis), few specifically indicated that the person's particular condition was the impetus or reason for being absent. In some cases, however, the young women spoke of their mother leaving for a period of time while receiving psychological (Marcella) or medical care (Paula) or participating in a drug treatment program (Gina, Christine). For example, Paula said that when she was about three years old, her mother had tuberculosis and "had to get the lining around her heart removed." She described her mother's current scar, and then expressed her own emotional distraught when her mother was admitted to the hospital: "When they taking my mother away, I was crying. I went like mommy! And all that other junk."

Her mother's temporary hospitalization was only one absence. As an example of one of the many girls who had experienced several different types of physical absences, Paula also, as noted earlier, had been left for most of the first three years of her life with an aunt after her parents separated. She was also one of the few who spoke at length about the loss of close friends. At least five of her friends had moved away and were now absent from her life. She explained that one of the most upsetting things in her very troubled life was when her best friend, who lived in the apartment downstairs from her.

"moved somewhere" after their building was destroyed in a fire. Later, a friend in a group home also relocated:

> I didn't see my friend no more cuz ... they moved her somewhere away from me and I never found out cuz you know, social workers ain't supposed to tell you, so I never found out where she was. Paula

She explained that the loss of these friendships and those with "these other kids I used to be with" were very upsetting "cuz, I never seen them again." Another respondent who spoke of an absent friend had a different burden to bear: she claimed her "best friend left me because I was a bad influence on her." Although she explained that the friend's mother "sent" her to Puerto Rico, Valerie appeared to have felt the loss as the friend's betrayal.

Psychological unavailability.

In contrast to situations of loss where the parent is dead or is otherwise physically absent, are those circumstances in which respondents' parents or primary caregivers were physically present but emotionally unavailable—a situation often described as "the atrophy of the [attachment] bond" (Wenar, 1994, p.35). The unavailability may have developed because of substantial drug use or addiction, serious illness, injury or disability, or the distractions of attending to other children, work, or personal problems. Although the young women were not asked a specific question about parental availability, they frequently spoke of feeling detached from parents and primary caregivers and described circumstances where such adults appeared incapable or unwilling to nurture their emotional needs. Again, it is not solely the fact that many respondents experienced their parents' psychological unavailability, as often adolescents feel an emotional gap between themselves and their caregivers. Rather, it is the

pervasiveness and extent to which the adults in these young women's lives were emotionally unavailable at critical points in their psychological and social development.

For example, Gina's mother was physically absent during much of her life because of a substance abuse problem, and her grandmother and aunt who she primarily lived with since she was a year old, felt emotionally unavailable. Gina explained:

> I would want to go outside and do something that like a mother would do with you, but my grandmother wouldn't want to go outside or play cards with me. Or, you wanna go to the mall, but my grandma don't drive. [My aunt] worked at night so she sleeps in the daytime. So, sometimes she was tired. My grandmother watched soap operas and my aunt slept and I be outside, running the streets.

Another young woman lived with her mother, but when asked if there were ever any problems at home, Christine responded "No, just that my mother, she was on drugs." She did not elaborate on this statement, but indicated that she first noticed her mother's use when she was about seven years old and that it continued until she was 10, when her mother entered a drug treatment program. The young woman provided few specifics but claimed her mother smoked crack every day and drank beer a few days a week. Asked if, in her opinion, her mother had a problem with drugs or alcohol, she stated "Yeah, 'cuz if she was doing it every day there's gotta be a problem." Thus, despite the sparse details, one might assume that if the mother used crack daily and drank nearly as often, it is unlikely that she was able to be emotionally available to the needs of her daughter. As 16-year-old Rose keenly observed about her father's daily use of alcohol and cocaine, "I thought my father depended more on that and cared more about that than he did about me."

More obviously psychologically unavailable was Marcella's mother who, paralyzed by a gun shot wound, was confined to a wheelchair. The household seemed to

center on dealing with the mother's infirmities, leaving little time and energy for the needs of an adolescent girl. A home attendant was present during the day but as 15-year-old Marcella explains: "five o'clock up, it was just me and her." She described her routine of going to school, seeing friends, and then coming home to eat and sleep, which at first glance appears similar to any teen's schedule with the addition of caring for a handicapped parent. As Marcella continues, however, she depicts a home where "there was like nobody I could really talk to" after her older sister moved out. Only 10 at the time of her sister's move, Marcella claimed she and her mother "didn't have a lot of communication" and "we had a lot of problems." Furthermore, this young woman had struggled almost single-handedly to control her mother's substance use and attempts at self harm from the time she was 10 years old:

> She became an alcoholic...And bein' that she was drunk, she was real hard to deal with, she would like want to go outside, she always tried to commit suicide a lot, too. So, I could try and stop her from doing that – grabbing pills outta her hand, knives and stuff... A couple of times, she'd punch windows and get her fists sliced up.

Explaining her efforts at protecting and restraining her mother and her frequent calls to the police or the hospital for help, Marcella segued into a story of her own sexual assault:

> ...since she's in a wheelchair a lot of people from around try to take advantage of her, and I don't know if [he] was going for me or my mother, but one day I was in the house by myself and my, my nephew, and some other girl I was babysitting, we was sleeping, and I woke up to this guy named [Joe], he just came from jail. He was one of my mother's friends, and he was butt naked on top of me!

Her mother was present in the home but unavailable to protect her. After fighting off her assailant, Marcella called the police and filed charges. Although she was scheduled to go to court to testify, she claimed "I didn't go 'cause I didn't have nobody to take me."

Thus, alone, she not only cared for her mother and worried about protecting her, but had to defend herself against her mother's "friends" and then was left without emotional support or legal recourse. Later, she rationalizes her own delinquent behaviors, blaming them on her mother's physical difficulties: "Being that she was in a wheelchair, she didn't have enough money to get me things that I wanted, so I would have to, like, go out and sell drugs, or rob people." Clearly, in addition to being confined to a wheelchair and contending with severe physical health problems, Marcella's mother had a substance abuse problem and perhaps other mental health issues and demonstrated that she was unavailable to nurture, protect, or provide, for her daughter in any way.

Parental substance abuse was common among these young women and frequently indicated a parent's unavailability. Absorbed in their own world of drug use, they seemed unaware of the basic emotional needs of their children. Two respondents articulated this void particularly well and exemplify the frustration and anger of many young women who's parents used substances and were seemingly oblivious of their needs. Sixteen-year-old Royale described her family life simply: "I ate regularly, lived in a regular house, like my mother would cook us dinner." But when asked what her relationship with her mother was like she said "it was OK, we, never, we didn't hardly talk." Sounding disgusted she added " 'cause my mother was on drugs so my brother had to take care of us." Some parents attempted to conceal drug and alcohol use, yet such tactics were transparent. Even when the young women did not actually see their parents using alcohol or other drugs, they could feel the disruption or lack of emotional availability. Fourteen-year-old Elena angrily related that while she was enjoying time with her father her mother, who she described as "a Budda-head" and "a chronic for

crack," was getting high at home. The "long, long, long walks" with her father and the trips to her grandfather's house were only ruses designed to get her and her siblings out of the house. Similarly, Royale stated that although she "never seen her [mother] do it, I could just tell...'cuz she act nice. My mother's nice but she act nicer."

On the other hand, Elena's mother sometimes became more punitive when she was high:

> She would put me on punishment for like six months and the next day I would be off punishment. And she be like you can't go outside and the next day I could go outside and I knew there was really something wrong with her. I don't know, it was just the crack just really getting to her.

Her mother's crack binges also resulted in excessive buying, such as when her mother ordered a household of new furniture. Embarrassed by her mother's purchases, Elena said "my house looked so nice but I wasn't dealing with it but I couldn't tell nobody." Likewise, Royale clearly was upset by the changes in her mother: "I didn't like it when she was drunk ...or when she was high. I didn't like the way it made her look and I didn't like the way it made her act." Parental inconsistency was often a flag of drug use that cumulated in emotional unavailability and disengagement, generating anger and humiliation in the young women.

Both these young women also spoke of their efforts to connect with their substance-involved mothers and the difficulty they had with the process. Even calling home when she was out of the house was a frustrating experience for Royale. Angrily she stated that "sometimes, I don't even know where my mother's at sometimes. Like sometimes she be home [but] she just don't answer the phone, she just sleeping." Elena claimed that after her father and brother died, her mother's drug use and isolation worsened:

> My mother's like anti-social. She don't like speaking to nobody. So she just keeps her problems in and then when we try to go for therapy and stuff she don't wanna go. And I was like oh well. And that's why we just don't get along period.

Having experienced the death of two family members, Elena was further burdened by her mother's emotional withdrawal, which exacerbated her feelings of loss and detachment.

Loss of home.

Respondents provided numerous examples of having lost their home. The young women told of being evicted by landlords, or forced to move because their buildings were unlivable. Loss of home in this analysis also was coded to include situations in which state agencies were responsible for removing the young women from their primary caregivers and placing them in foster care, mental health treatment programs, and juvenile justice facilities. In these situations, the loss of home was frequently preceded by the result of a parent's death, absence or unavailability, thereby compounding the young women's sense of loss. In addition to state actions, the young women told of ongoing family arguments over curfews and other "stuff with my mother" that resulted in being placed in group homes. Regardless of the reason, losing one's home can have a devastating effect. A person's home is her "personal and familiar environment" and is an object of attachment that plays a significant role in "determining his emotional state" (Bowlby, 1973, p. 148). Without a place to call "home" it is difficult to maintain one's sense of self and one's social role (Erikson, 1976; Fullilove, 1999).

Several respondents spoke of experiencing a fire or explosion, and for at least two young women, the fire resulted in the loss of their home. When she was nine years old, Marcella and her sister were living temporarily with an aunt. One morning when they woke up "there was a fire, and we evacuated and the building ended up burning down."

Fires occurred many times in Paula's apartment building, so often that she claimed "that building stayed on fire" because "every crack head that had a lighter came to that building to shoot up—to smoke and they kept dropping lighters and stuff." Eventually, someone burned a whole in her apartment's ceiling and they had to move out.

> I used to be crying cuz my building on fire. Where we gonna live at? Also...every time we had a fire, I could never find that darn cat I had cuz my mother bought me a Siamese for my birthday when I was like 7 and every time there was a fire, he - he go hide. ...Last time, after they had the fire, we couldn't live there anymore, we didn't find him till like 4 days later under my high rise.

Her home was gone, and as she explained, so were most of her possessions: "we came in the house—get some stuff—see what could we save." Although her beloved cat had survived the disaster, "he never been right ever since." Others, who also stayed with their families, spoke of evictions as well as several moves made to improve the family's situation. For example, after describing the extensive drug use and related violence in her Bronx neighborhood, Lisa explained "that's how come we be moving. We be moving from place to place, place to place in the Bronx...'cause you know over there, they's like bad, they is real bad, ...I don't like that place."

In addition to losing their physical home, many simultaneously lost their parent, as in the case of state-sponsored placements. Most of the young women (71%) had spent some time in an out-of-home placement, such as foster care or a group home, with the length of placement ranging from a few days to over a decade. Some claimed to have "forced" their own placement by continuing to break rules, while others had no memory or understanding as to how or why they had been removed from their home. Fourteen-year old Elena stated simply that she was in foster care "age one to seven—then I came home." Lisa, who had been placed in foster care at age 10 for "no longer than probably a

year," could not remember why she had been removed from her home: "That's one thing I don't remember. I can't remember all the way back. ...I try, but I can't." The ruptured attachment may have been so difficult to bear that the memories were suppressed or denied, and as a result there is no verbal narrative or context (Herman, 1997).

For some of the young women, the pain of separation may have been eased by the fact that they had been placed in kinship care—foster care with a relative. While in some cases this arrangement may have helped to buffer feelings of abandonment, contending with new circumstances also added to the sense of loss. For example, one 14-year-old was placed in kinship care with her grandmother when her mother was mandated to drug treatment. Living with her grandmother entailed a major shift in the household composition and caused her some adjustment difficulties; Christine went from living only with her mother to sharing space with a sister, several uncles and the grandmother:

> I get along with my uncles but they, they get on my nerves, and we always fight, so I didn't really like living with her because I didn't like being around my uncles 'cuz we don't really get along. I liked them but you know how, you, like if you have a brother, it's like we was brothers and sisters 'cuz we never got along and everything was an argument. If they ate something that I wanted, we would argue about it and if they was in the bathroom and I needed to go to the bathroom, we would fight about that - everything we fought about.

Although placed with a relative Jackie felt unjustly treated because her aunt spent the social security money designated for her care on others, while she went without:

> she get money for me cuz she had custody of me from my mom and she get the money for me but they never gave it to me and she just bought, the money that they gave me, I never seen it, she bought her daughter stuff and herself with it and it made me feel bad cuz I was going [to] school with the same clothes on.

While it is difficult to ascertain all aspects of these household environments, one can not assume that extended families alone automatically or completely offset a child's sense of

emotional loss and detachment from her primary caretaker. Though these young women may (or may not) have been provided for in terms of basic necessities, the loss of their home had larger ramifications. Not only did the young women have to adjust to their parents' absence, but they had to move from their home base into that of another's, exchanging their familiarity with one location and their own life story of events, with that of a new 'other' place (Fullilove, 1999). In this new other place it is not unlikely that their relatives were also financially and emotionally stretched, and more important, there was no guarantee that they would be made to feel significant, special and loved.

English, Widom, & Brandford (2001) cite two studies (Landsverk & Garland, 1999; Sowa, Litrownik, & Landsverk, 1996) that indicate some selection bias associated with child placement, demonstrating that children with fewer behavioral problems are more likely to be placed in relative/kin foster care The researchers' recent longitudinal study suggests, however, that the reverse might be true. These researchers found that children who initially stayed with their primary caregivers and were later placed in non-relative foster care had the highest risk for juvenile, adult, any, or violent arrest. This may be because public welfare systems generally seek to preserve the family composition, removing children only after establishing that the abuse or neglect were serious and the child could not be protected in the home. Coming from more chaotic and abusive homes, these children are then placed in non-relative foster care where they may exhibit more behavioral problems (English, et al., 2001). Thus, in this study the sense of loss experienced by the young women who were placed in relative/kin foster care may have been aggravated, and more complicated than for the young women who were placed with nonrelatives.

A disturbance of the child-parent attachment can be traumatic for the child even when the primary caretaker and the home is not supportive and protective of the child, and the child's relationship with the parent is not 'good' or healthy. Despite the terrible emotional and physical danger of living with her violent and drug abusing mother, Marcella was upset about being placed in a group home:

> Bureau of Child Welfare was trying to take me away from my mother, 'cause they didn't feel she really...couldn't take care of me; they didn't think she was fit for that responsibility. ...So, this social worker was trying to take me away from my mother for the longest, and so, now was his chance, so when I left the hospital, he came and got me and put me in a car and we went straight to the group home.

Clearly, and perhaps not surprisingly, she was angry with the social worker. It is likely that she was also enraged with her mother but, in the face of separation, she sought to preserve her connection and faith with her primary caregiver by absolving her mother of any real blame or responsibility. Although she agreed that her mother wasn't caring for her properly, she chose to minimize or rationalize her mother's abuses "because she was in a wheelchair." Another 15-year-old, Alona, whose parents separated when she was two, and whose father died when she was five, lived with her mother until she was 12. Placed in non-relative foster care, she described ongoing arguments and then finally, losing that "second" home when she was 13. Her language reflects intense feelings:

> My mother kicked me out...'cuz, for her boyfriend....My foster mother. We had this fight and she had took his side. He asked her, that if I don't leave, he gonna leave. You know she love him and stuff like that so she like get out!

She was not "asked to leave," nor had arrangements made for her departure. Rather she was "kicked" out by the foster mother who was supposed to be caring for her but chose instead the love of her boyfriend over that of her foster child.

Many respondents described a pattern of being in and out of foster care several times, as well as in group homes and detention centers. As a result, at least one young woman was not sure where "home" was:

> Mostly, I was back and forth because I was in—it depends—I would be in foster care, then I would be in group homes, then I would go AWOL, go to my house, then leave. Go to, go back into it and I would just go back and forth so I really can't say. I don't know where my house—I would, me saying my house—that meant I would go to my father's house and just he lived there. Other times, I would go to my boyfriend's house or my sister-in-law's house. (Paula)

Another young woman was first placed in foster care when she was a toddler because her mother was selling drugs in the house. Gayle remembers being taken away:

> It was, like, hard to leave her. The BCW [Bureau of Child Welfare] they came to pick me up and it's like I didn't cry or nothin'. It's like I knew, I was young, and I knew that I was gonna get taken away because my aunt used to talk to me about it like someday they're gonna catch your mother.

At 16 years of age, she had already spent a dozen years in "nine, ten" places including foster care, group homes and detention centers; five years was the longest amount of time in any one place. Many other respondents could not remember exactly where their placements had been, only barely distinguishing between foster families and institutional care such as group homes, psychiatric evaluation centers, and juvenile justice facilities. The differences seemed unimportant—what the young women did describe was being without a home base, and the disorienting process of moving among facilities or alternating between the home and these locations. When asked to describe her family life, 13-year-old Jackie struggled to first recount years of different types of out-of-home placements. Frustrated and tired, she finally conceded:

> I haven't been home since, I don't—it's been a while, I think it was since '94. That's been happening since '94, ...I don't know, but I guess it's for a long time

> now. I'm saying that, I been around and around and around. I went back and forth and back and forth. Jackie

Although she notes that "home" is her previously "unavailable" father and his new wife, she also refers to time spent with her aunt, prior to more recent institutional placements. Now, the loss of her parents, her aunt, and the drift between institutions has left her sounding drained, confused and helpless:

> I lived with her [aunt] for a long time—up until now but I don't think I'm living with her. I'm not living with nobody. I'm in DFY. So, I guess I'm up to the custody, up to DFY.[15]

Likewise, a 15-year-old seemed resigned to her loss of home. Never knowing her mother, Valerie was raised by her grandmother who then placed her in a group home when she was 11. Granting that despite "the judge that gave me all those chances," she continued to ignore the rules of the group home and was thus, remanded to custody in a secure juvenile facility. As others have found, the young women in this study had very little residential stability in their lives, but instead endured multiple moves and caregivers (Corrado, Odgers, & Cohen, 2000).

In addition to the four main categories of loss, a small number of young women spoke about losses related to their own health, which were upsetting events in their lives. Ten reported they had been in an accident requiring hospital treatment and four reported having a serious illness. Two in particular spoke about the trauma of losing bodily functions. When Kathy was seven years old, she was told she was 50 percent deaf.

> I had to have an operation with a tube through my eardrum. I was upset about that for like a month. I was so scared— that was my first operation, and they put tubes in my ears.

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[15] The New York State Division For Youth. In 1988 DFY was merged with the former state Department of Social Services to form the Office for Children and Family Services (OCFS).

Of all the events in her life, Paula said that the most upsetting was being shot in the eye when the gun her friend was "playing" with accidentally fired.

> Because now, I gotta go through that for life. The other things, you know, I can cover up. But that, I can't cover because I can't see on the other side of my face. Somebody stand over me. I can't see them. ... I can't do like, some jobs I can't do 'cuz you need your eye sight. All of a sudden, I've gotta wear thick glasses. My eye is getting weak. People be like writing and stuff, I don't see it. You ain't making a noise, I don't know you in that room with me.

Saddened and frustrated by her receding eye sight, she is also fearful of a future where she may not be able to work or protect herself from, literally, unseen danger.

As this chapter demonstrates, the losses in the young women's lives were extensive and occurred at very young ages. Although initial responses to close-ended questions established that a number of losses had occurred, it is the narrative data that underscores the pervasiveness and the meaning of such losses. The trauma of loss was often many-layered and frequently compounded by additional losses. Four general types of losses were derived from the data: death of a loved one, physical absence, psychological unavailability, and loss of home. As noted earlier, it is not uncommon for an adolescent to have experienced the death of a loved one, but these young women experienced the death of loved ones at a median age of only eight, and deaths were numerous and often in violent and socially stigmatized contexts. In addition to the deaths of elderly grandparents, the young women described the details of and their reactions to the death parents, siblings, relatives and friends. Tragically, very few spoke of any adults being available to them to assist them in their bereavement. Instead, the young women were left on their own to manage their feelings of grief.

Likewise, although parental divorce and separation and parental incarceration is not uncommon, such losses can be detrimental to a child's psychological and emotional development. For example, not only did many of these young women experience the divorce or separation of their parents, but in a typical scenario, the father completely disappeared form his daughter's life, making the loss complete. Furthermore, the divorce was often preceded by extensive physical violence, compounding the trauma of the entire experience. When an experience traumatizes a child and removes the parent, as in the case of incarceration, the child no longer has available the parent to help her master the effects of the trauma and to attend to her attachment needs. In addition, the child's identification with the arrested parent, feelings of survivor guilt, and forced silence about the event may increase the child's vulnerability to traumatic effects (Johnston, 1995). The young women here described such separations as often painful, but again, tended to "deal" with their feelings by ignoring or discounting them. Many of the respondents also described parents who though alive and physically present, were generally too involved in their own substance use, illnesses, or activities to provide anything but the barest of necessities. Such psychological unavailability was evident in ineffective, inconsistent, and irresponsible parenting. In addition to the physical and psychological absence of loved ones, parents or primary caregivers, many young women lost their homes because of eviction, fire, arguments, or state interventions. Nearly three-fourths of the respondents (71%) had been placed outside their homes, in places such as foster care, residential treatment centers, or group homes.

Frequently the losses the young women experienced were intertwined with and exacerbated by violence. For example, divorce and parental separation were common

among this group of adolescents. Such a loss by itself, though significant, may be compounded by the marital conflict that proceeded it (Rebellion, 2002; Kelly, 2000). As is made evident in Chapter Five on victimization, the young women in this study not only experienced significant losses, but experienced and were witness to an extreme amount of violent victimization, both in their homes and in their communities.

CHAPTER FIVE

TRAUMA: VICTIMIZATIONS

Trauma includes not only personal loss, but also victimization. Adolescent female victimization has been well-documented. In a national study of violent victimization of youths aged 10-16 years Boney-McCoy and Finkelhor (1995) found that among the 958 females, over a third (33.3%) reported some type of victimization, with the most common forms being sexual assault (15.3%), attempted kidnapping (8%), and simple assault by nonfamily perpetrators (6.6%). Similarly, other studies of adolescents in the general population report physical abuse of girls ranging from 6.4% to 7.0%, and sexual abuse rates ranging from 12.3% to 19.3% (Garnefski & Diekstra, 1997; Silverman Reinherz & Giaconia, 1996). In certain neighborhoods, research has begun to document children's extensive exposure to community violence. Drawig a parallel between children growing up in inner cities in the U.S. and those growing up in war zones, Bell and Jenkins (1991) reported that in a poor neighborhood in Chicago, one third of all school-age children had witnessed a homicide and two thirds had witnessed a serious assault. In Boston, one out of every 10 children under the age of six surveyed at a pediatric clinic reported witnessing a shooting or stabbing (Groves, Zuckerman, Marans, & Cohen, 1993).

Compared to those in the general population, childhood victimization rates are much higher among youth under juvenile justice supervision, including correctional facilities. For example, interviews with 193 female juvenile offenders in California revealed that 81% of the young women had experienced physical abuse and 56% reported sexual abuse; 45% had been beaten or burned; and 25% had been shot or stabbed (Acoca

& Dedel, 1998). In a Canadian study of incarcerated youth, 70% of the females reported physical abuse as compared to 38% of the males (Corrado, Odgers, & Cohen, 2000) and a review of seven studies of female offenders indicated that 45% to 75% of incarcerated girls had been sexually abused, versus approximately 2% to 11% of incarcerated boys (Corrado, Roesch, Hart & Gierowski, 2002, p. 121).

The consequences of victimization have long-term effects that are detrimental to personality development and the attainment of healthy interpersonal relationships (Briere 1992; Herman 1997). Emerging evidence indicates that, as with direct violent experience, witnessing violence can result in behavioral problems (Fantuzzo, DePaola, Lambert, Martino, Anderson & Sutton, 1991; Margolin, 1998; Osofsky, 1995; Marans & Cohen, 1993). These problem behaviors may be expressed internally in the form of anxiety and depression (Hughes, 1988), externally as in delinquency, aggression and violence toward others (Elliott 1994; Fantuzzo & Lindquist, 1989; Rouse, 1991; Thornberry, 1994), or both (Mangold & Koski, 1990).

Data from the present study present a remarkably similar picture in terms of victimization and its consequences. What is especially important about the experiences of the 24 young women in this study is that most of the victimizations occurred in childhood or early adolescence. Victimization included direct experiences, such as being physically or sexually assaulted, as well as the more indirect experience of witnessing violence and other traumatic events. This chapter examines both direct and indirect experiences by roughly dichotomizing between violence in the context of the home or among loved ones violence in the larger community. This, however, is a somewhat artificial division. The young women frequently fended off abusive strangers in their own

homes, and witnessed family members being attacked (as well as attacking others) in the community. The picture is further complicated by the interactional nature of violence: although girls were the targets of family violence, they were also the participants. Upon sustaining abuse themselves or witnessing someone else being harmed, this group of young woman often justified their own attacks as defensive or protective—thereby blurring the boundaries between witnessing and offending, victim and offender. In other instances their motivations are less apparent. What is evident throughout the narratives, however, is a theme of persistent and pervasive violence that tore at the already fragile bonds of attachment.

Violence in the Home

Traditionally, it was assumed that children were safe and protected within the home, and girls in particular were shielded from the dangers of the outside world. Since the 1980s, however, numerous studies have demonstrated that the family home is often a significant source of danger, especially in terms of physical and sexual abuse, and perhaps especially for girls (Mitchell & Finkelhor, 2001).

For many of the respondents, a significant amount of violence in the home was associated with ongoing parental dissension. One young woman (Marcella) described a typical escalation of an argument, demonstrating how quickly it can turn into a physical encounter: "my mother was cooking and she had a step.., a boyfriend, or whatever...and they got into an argument and she went to throw a pot and he kind of smacked it, and it fell all over her hand." Sixteen year old Paula described a vicious fight involving her parents who, she claimed, "can't stand—they try to kill each other. Literally tried to kill

each other." She was very young at the time and only remembers parts of what occurred, but apparently her parents described the events in enough detail that stories of physical fights and animosity are integral to her family's narrative.

> She [her mother] put glass and roaches and bottle tops in his food and he tried to strangle her (laughing). I was little. I remember the glass and stuff in my father's food but he told me after that he was choking her and stuff and she laid there like she was dead. He got scared to he took me over to a neighbor's house, packed up his stuff, and then he saw her move, he was so happy, he ain't know what to do—all he just said was 'you dirty bitch.' He was so mad but he was happy 'cuz she ain't dead, so, you know, they was like—'we won't work out.'

This young woman was witness to both indirect and direct demonstrations of physical violence, as well as verbal abuse. Sounding as though she had told the story many times, she also laughed at the cruelty displayed—perhaps a defense against the reality of a violent home. Later in the interview it became clear that she was also the direct recipient of physical and verbal abuse by both parents.

Although many of the young women witnessed fighting between both parents, the preponderance of violence seemed to have been inflicted upon their mothers by husbands and boyfriends, a situation that frequently also involved their own safety. For example, Gayle described how her stepfather,

> when he get drunk, he like threatens me and my mother with a gun tellin' us to get out of his house cuz my mother used to wreck his house, cuz he gots money hiding in his house so my mother used to wreck his house to find the money. My stepfather used to abuse my mother and me.

Even as young children, the young women attempted to defend or protect their mothers in such instances. Sixteen-year-old Natalie described seeing her father beat her mother up from the time she was a toddler, and then after the mother left and remarried, witnessing her stepfather do the same. In one particular instance, when the mother threatened

divorce after the stepfather had impregnated a woman in the neighborhood, Natalie sought to protect her mother, and perhaps herself.

> he tried to hit her and then I came out you know, I was screaming on him or whatever and then I was telling him to leave and he ain't leave...he tried to hit her, he tried to beat her up.

The stepfather eventually moved out because the mother, "she's a correctional officer so she pressed charges," but he continued to terrorize the household: "he left and he used to like come in the middle of the night, banging on the door and stuff like that." Subsequently, the man claimed the mother had hired someone to kill him and succeeded in having her arrested and jailed for several months—and thereby separating mother and daughter. In another case, Marcella described how just before she went to bed one night she had seen her mother and a boyfriend "both of them sitting there in the kitchen drinking." She was later awakened by her mother's pleas for help:

> I went to sleep, and I wake up and she's screaming, 'get away from me, get off me.' My instinct was to beat him off—that's what I did. She was calling me and I came and I fought the guy off with a broomstick.

The violent attack was confusing, not only because the attacker was a known boyfriend, but because of her mother's mixed messages: "She didn't...she didn't want to tell the police, though. I wanted to call the police, but she didn't, so I wonder to this day, like, did she really want it? I mean, I asked her to call the police, she said no." Regardless of the mother's reasons for not wanting to bring the police into the situation, she conveyed to her daughter that she, an 11-year-old girl at the time of the event, was responsible for her own safety and that of her mother.

Despite mothers' varied responses to their own abuse (wrecking a house, divorce, police involvement, resignation), the daughters who witnessed and directly experienced the violence suffered. In these and other similar cases, dissension and violence in the home robbed the young women of their parents' time and attention, both of which are necessary for guiding healthy development. In addition, witnessing violence of one parent against another can create a frightening and confusing world: when the very person or persons to whom one looks for protection is beating or being beaten, a child's sense of her own physical and psychic security is threatened (Margolin & John, 1997), disrupting her attachment to others.

In addition to witnessing violence perpetrated between and against parental figures, the young women spoke of witnessing adults physically and sexually abusing other children in the home, as well as being victimized themselves. Comments such as "so many times I can't count" referring to parents hitting and fighting the respondents siblings, ("that's between my sister and my mother fighting") were common. In a foster care situation, Michelle described the abuse of another child in the home that caused her to run away:

> I didn't like that lady because she use to beat up [a] boy named Tom. He was sick, he had diabetes and asthma. He had this pump that he breathed in. He used to cough and she'd be like 'he's doing that on purpose.' I said he not doing that on purpose, then she just came out of nowhere and smack him or punch.

The young women talked about their parents and other adults hitting them with fists, shoes, and baseball bats, and cutting them with razor blades, knifes, and bottles. Violent behavior was often the result of substance abuse. Elena quietly described how her mother's drinking contributed to the physical attacks:

> [her drinking effected me] because she used to beat me real bad. And she used to like take, when she was high, she used to like take the hangers and beat me with it and I remember one time she broke a glass on my leg and she, um, took a baseball bat and hit my leg. She used to really abuse me. .

Another girl, Jennifer, similarly believed her mother's crack smoking was a factor in their fighting.

> I didn't like it and me and her was always fighting. 'Cuz, like, she'd come in the house, she'd be cranky, she'd be yelling at me for no reason. Sometimes I'd just ignore her and then sometimes, she'd make me mad, we'd get into an argument, she'll I don't know, she'll pull me and things, and just by reflex I'd swing back, and we'd start fighting.

In other instances, violence was the method for addressing arguments or disagreements and enforcing discipline. Royale was shocked when, at age 13, she was hit by her uncle for yelling at her mother. Apparently, the mother then began to discipline her daughter the same way: "that was the first, first time, and then it started happening a lot." Kathy described an incident when her mother "knew I was drunk or high, so she didn't want me outside," so they started fighting:

> Well, my mother and I got into a fist fight. ...She was kicking me 'cuz I was trying to close the door...She wouldn't let me outside, so she stood in front of the door and I pushed her out of the way and she slapped me and I slapped her back and we started fighting. Kathy

In this case the respondent's eight year-old sister was responsible for physically separating her from her mother and stopping the fight. Gayle reported similar violence when her foster mother tried to discipline her.

> the foster parent used to beat me and stuff cuz I never used to go to school and she was trying to discipline me. I never used to go to school. That's the only way she knew how to take care of me cuz she didn't have no kids, she couldn't have no kids.

Respondents frequently spoke of being hit or beaten as a result of their own actions, stating that they deserved such treatment. Such self blame is congruent with the normal thought patterns of children, as well as the thought processes of all traumatized people (Herman, 1997, p. 103). People, and especially children, look for faults in their own behavior to explain or make sense out of what has happened to them. If a child believes her innate badness is the cause of abusive behavior, then her caretakers (who she needs) are good. She can always try to be good, and she can always try to earn her caretakers forgiveness and gain their protection and care. In this belief, she has the power to change things if she just keeps trying. The young women often rationalized the acts of abusers as appropriate or the best means of addressing a problem.

For example, 14-year-old Gina claimed that because she "caught an attitude" whenever she disagreed with her grandmother's rules, her grandmother would chase her, and hit her with a large wooden stick: "she beat me, but I deserved it. She wouldn't do it just to beat me." Valerie stated that that her relatives frequently hit her, but added that "at the time it was for my own good, though." Her father died when she was five and her mother was incarcerated most of her life. She assumed that the many fist fights with her aunt, cousin, and grandmother, whom she said "loved her deep down inside" were because " something was holding me back and I was messing up."

In another instance, Paula described fighting with her parents, but rather than engaging in physical fights, she sought to avoid them. She tried not to argue with her mother: "what I wanna argue with her for? I don't wanna get slapped down," but suggested that if she was hit, it was her fault.

> Oh, okay...just, I don't know cuz she would get mad, you know how you do stuff—well, I was one of them kids you had to... 'cuz, I used to do very stupid things. No

> reason for it but I did it so I would get beat up for stuff. [Do you know why you did these things?] No. They just seemed like a good thing to do at the time.

She explained that her father could only tolerate so much and then would get to a point where he'd "have to" hit her, eventually becoming more physical with her.

> And the last time that happened, he ain't hit me, he just picked—he just had me by my neck like this—he was like, 'you staying and listening' and I was just steady fighting, fighting and stuff trying to pull away and stuff...I wouldn't hit him and give him a reason to hit me back. No! (612).

Respondents tended to minimize familial assaults. For example, although Elena claimed that she and her mother "used to not fight, but we used to verbally go at it," she subsequently described how she first tried to avoid and then endured, physical blows.

> Like, she used to hit me and she used to hit me with her bare fist and I couldn't, I couldn't hit her back but now if she was to hit me, I still wouldn't hit her back but I would block her from hitting me but all my brothers do that to me, they like hit me with their hands...

Dismissing the pain she may have felt, and focusing on her "triumphs" she stated: "but it don't hurt me no more 'cuz I build strength in myself. I don't even cry. I laugh. That gets them angry." She learned to be tough and to defy others by shutting down her own physical impulses and emotional responses.

Others portrayed violence as a way of connecting and engaging with their otherwise emotionally unavailable parent. Almost with a sense of camaraderie, Joanne describes fighting with her drug-abusing mother:

> Me and my mom, [chuckles] we got into it a lot. We had our fights. We've stabbed each other before, we've done a lot of stuff to each other. I put her in the hospital she put me in the hospital, it's just like that all the time.

In a similar manner, she described fights with her older sister, stating:"I hit her with a car before, and I hit, I used to smash her with bottles and stuff and we used to do that stuff to each other." Her recollection as to when she first was hit, kicked, or bit by a family member was "when I was old enough to fight back, like 6 years old." She sounded almost nostalgic when depicting the circumstances that would set the fighting into motion: "When she took my stuff or she was messing with my boyfriend or I was messing with her boyfriend, or just, we got into stupid little things, it was nothing really big." . Fighting established and protected ownership while maintaining personal relationships.

In addition to physical abuse in the home, respondents told of being sexually abused and of witnessing others being abused by fathers, stepfathers, uncles and a godfather. Ten young women (41.6%) said they had been sexually victimized either by a family member or a stranger or acquaintance, or had witnessed someone else in their family being sexually abused. Of these 10, six had been sexually abused by both a family member and a stranger/acquaintance. A particularly gendered offense, the sexual abuse generated many emotions in the young women including anger and shame. It made them "feel disgusting" and were appalled ("he was my father, I didn't think he was capable of that") and humiliated ("just being disrespected by my own father.") Kathy stated that when she was nine she was raped in her home, by "one of the boys in the neighborhood." She claimed she was not at all upset about it because: "It's that I talked about it before. My mother took me to counseling sessions." When she was only eight, however, her uncle, the husband of her mother's sister, began sexually abusing her. The abuse lasted three years and occurred "whenever we went to visit, holidays, I'd say in a year, about 12,

13 times." As did several of the other young women who were abused by family members, Kathy said she hid her uncle's abuse from her mother.

> I told my sister. I didn't tell my mother. The only thing she knew about was when I was raped [by neighborhood boy]. 'Cuz that was in my home when she was at work and then she came home. Uh-huh, cuz it was her sister's husband and I didn't want to have her think that I'm lying or have her not believe me, so only my sister knew.

Fear of not being believed or accused of lying was very common. The young women did not want to risk disrupting their tenuous relationship with their primary caretakers by accusing another family adult of harming them. In addition, many quickly learned that speaking up would only serve to further humiliate and or endanger them.

Fifteen year old Marcella was fondled by her uncle and did tell her aunt, "not my aunt who's married to him, my other aunt," but "she just said it was probably an accident." It only occurred once, when she was 12, but she was extremely upset, both by the uncle and by her aunt's dismissive reaction. Jennifer's uncle molested and exposed himself to her "a lot" beginning when she was seven years old, but she didn't tell her mother or any one else for years. She had not named the abuse and tried not to think about it. Her confusion is evident:

> It wasn't anything, I really believe, I didn't really, I didn't really think, think [nervous laugh] of it until I was like 13, I didn't really think of it. I didn't really think of it as nothing, I didn't tell nobody until I was 13, I told my mother because, um, my little sister she told me the same thing and she was only 4, and I flipped.

Protective of her younger sister in a way she had not been for herself ("She told me that and I believe her") she revealed the abuse and confronted the uncle: " I told that person, I was like I'll kill you if I ever,...you know." She was uncertain, however, as to whether her mother and grandmother believed her or her sister, and became defensive:

> after awhile I think she started believing me, but I don't know though, but... I don't know if they believed me but I had the feeling that they didn't so I was like I don't care.

She was enraged, perhaps with her mother, but clearly with the uncle who she said she "disowned," and she remained fearful of him and for her sister. Crying, she stated:

> I be thinking about this and I believe I'm gonna kill him. I do. 'Cuz I don't know where he at. No, I'm serious. I know but, um, because I don't know where he at and I don't know if he be going back to my room in the house where my little sister at.

Sometimes, the dismay of not being believed was as devastating as the abuse. When she was eight, Michelle's father began molesting her upon his release from prison, and continued to do so over five years. When asked if her mother knew about it, she responded:

> No, I knew about it, but she didn't believe me. I was trying to get along with her, but every time I tried to talk about it, she be like, 'nah, I don't believe you'... I can't tell nobody 'cuz I knew nobody was going to believe me. Nobody trusted me, 'cuz when I was living with my grandmother here, before I moved back,— remember I told you I did bad things?— I use to steal and stuff and lie about it when I was little. So, nobody believe me.

Prior to moving to New York, Michelle had lived with her grandmother in Barbados while her mother worked in the United States and her father was in prison. Unprotected in two households by either her grandmother or mother, Michelle had no expectation that any one would believe her or save her, because of her own "bad" actions.

In a horrific story of witnessing her stepfather's nightly abuse of her older sister, Joanne spoke to the predicament of a child who finds safety in neither parent. When her mother went to work at the local hospital,

> he used to come in my room and he used to drag her out by her hair, he used to smack her up and just jack her up against the wall and started kissing her and

> stuff, ... and he, he just molest her on the walls, in the closet, in my mom's room, on my mother's bed, in front of my younger brother and sister and in front of me and my older brother. .

When Joanne finally told her mother about the abuse, she learned that "my mother knew, but she didn't know what to do." Because the stepfather had threatened to kill the mother, she said nothing. Instead, she beat her daughter with a switch and demanded she too, remain silent. A year or so later, Joanne went to the police who convinced the mother and her children to leave, and arrested the man. Their terror was not over, however, for upon his release, the stepfather stalked the family and harassed relatives. After he beat and "nearly killed my little cousin" who was close in age to Joanne, he was shot and killed.

In addition to assaults their mother's lovers, many of the young women also were not protected in their own homes from the advances of males who were acquaintances of the adults who should have shielded them. For example, 16-year-old Michelle named five adult men who had made sexual advances toward her, including "my friend's mother's boyfriend. This [other] guy, he used to DJ with my uncle...there was my aunt's boyfriend tried to kiss me one time." Another encountered the building superintendent who, when she was 10, would "make me kiss him on the lips."

Violence in the Community

To better understand the community context in which the young women were living, we asked about their neighborhoods. Respondents indicated that the areas where they mostly lived prior to being remanded to custody were urban (82.6%) and violent

(75%). Twenty-two girls (95.6%) said that in the neighborhood at least some of the people used drugs and all 24 said there was drug dealing in the area where they lived.

Ongoing instability and criminality, characteristics of many economically disadvantaged neighborhoods, can arouse fear levels and foster a preoccupation with danger (Garbarino, Kostelny, & Dubrow, 1991). Among those who have been victimized by interpersonal violence, this environment may exacerbate distress reactions, reinforce perceptions of the world as relentlessly dangerous, and thus contribute to problem behaviors including aggression towards others (Duckworth, Hale, Clair, & Adams, 2000). The girls in this study were no exception to such victimization.

Most of the young women described their neighborhoods as violent and depicted fights, shootings, and killings, not as unique incidents so much as the constant background of daily living. Adele gave the following example:

> They be shooting in the park, shooting off the roof. Shooting in the staircases, shooting in the elevator. Fighting in the park and in the staircases, men beating their girlfriends up.

Christine explained that although the neighborhood was bad, "I'm used to it cuz I've been around that all my life so I still feel safe even though all them things are going on." Marcella claimed that her community, which had "a lot of violence, shooting, a lot of people are killed there," was simply a "typical neighborhood." Jennifer, a ninth grader said the violence was "all over" her area, so that even if a person wasn't directly involved they could not help but be affected:

> You hear a lot of gun shots, um, you see the after effects when somebody get shot, like you could see... you could be driving by and you see somebody laying, there, what happened? They just got shot, or they just stabbed, they just got in a fight.

Although the young women in this study considered certain blocks and buildings more dangerous than others, and noted that certain safety precautions could be taken, their narratives speak of a violence that was everywhere just beneath the surface or around the corner. They knew not to be looking out the window from a low floor and that plexi-glass was installed "because they shoot there." They knew to call up to the apartment for someone to meet them at the elevator, and they knew to stay inside after 10 PM to avoid serious gun fights. Violence was not an abstract concept that was "out there," but rather, a very real presence that could instantaneously alter their lives and the lives of those they loved. Against this general backdrop of community violence, the respondents described their personal experiences. While much community violence research focuses on the experiences of adolescents, these young women witnessed such violence at much earlier ages.

Often, when asked to describe her neighborhood, a young woman would begin with a general statement, but then quickly shift to significant personal victimizations. For example, Natalie described her neighborhood as: "The projects, people selling a lot of drugs, smoking a lot of weed, always shooting each other. A lot of people killing each other." She then quietly added: "We come from school and we see my friend's aunt, somebody raped her, pushed her off the building naked." Natalie went on to explain because she used to accompany her father on drug dealing rounds, she "used to see him shoot people and kill them." She noted that she was with him when he committed the murder for which he was currently serving time.

> First we were in the car, then they was calling him, he didn't come, they went upstairs, and they came back down, got his stuff, he [father] went back up and then I know. When Earl came down (his friend) he was, you know, had blood all over him and then I seen a guy fall from the window. I was like seven.

Thus community violence not only "happened" to "people," but it was also the result of deliberate attacks on friends and relatives, and could be instigated by ones' parents. Such experiences are illustrative of the dramatic permeation of an assumed boundary between home and community.

In addition to the general threat of violence present in the community, the young women described incidents where they had been personally threatened. In another incident that crossed the boundary between community and home, Michelle describes the terrifying experience of a possible attack, in her home, by an external and unknown intruder. While she slept alone in her bedroom, two men "came in through the window." Her grandmother, hearing a noise went to check on the girl. As the grandmother walked down the hall, "the person that was watching started running. The other person jumped out the window and he ran and jumped out the window too. They could have killed me while I was sleep."

Many described the direct threat of being robbed at gun point and others told of arguments with friends that culminated in threats of physical harm. Several threats were in the context of fights with other girls about boys. Noting that she had been threatened a number of times, Kathy noted: "One time [it was] over my baby's father. It was a girl saying she would blow my brains out if I ever messed with him again." Similarly, Donna explained that "this person think I like the boy. She said she was gonna shoot me for that. She said she was going to shoot me, so I told her to bring her mother fucking ass over here and shoot me then."

Other threats concerned the young women's relationship status with certain males. Fifteen-year-old Alona had a gun put to her head by a guy she "used to mess around" with who saw her talking to other boys. Threatening to kill her, he simultaneously claimed he loved her. Defiant and dismissive, she told him to put the gun down: "He thought I was scared and that I suppose to cry, like please, don't kill me, please, please." Although most of the respondent's demonstrated some bravado in these threatening circumstances, which the situation may have required, one young woman expressed her fear. After a couple of girls threatened to kill her and her cousin, Kathy acknowledged:

> I used to think nothin' could happen, people used to threaten me all the time and I was like, OK. No, until I seen it, until I got jumped one time and I got scared, and until that happened I thought nothing could happen.

Respondents were not just threatened, the threats were often enacted. As a second grader, Paula remembers the pain of being jumped by sixth graders, and trying to emulate the Popeye cartoon character:

> You see how he eat a little vegetables and he was strong, he could beat everybody up. That's what I tried to do. It used to never work. I used to get beat up every time. I used to be crying cuz I used to be in pain.

In addition to being sexually assaulted in their homes, some girls reported such victimizations in their neighborhoods. Oftentimes assailants were boys the young women knew, many having grown up together. In the context of dating or neighborhood parties, however, teen sexual experimentation could become sexual assault. As Rose explained, a year prior to her incarceration she met a boy through her group of friends. They were all

at someone's house and "he did... one of them guy things 'let's go into the room so we can talk'." The boy then put a 9mm gun to her head and told her:

> if you don't have sex with me I'm going to shoot you. First I told him go ahead and shoot me, do what he gotta do. Then I just gave in cuz I thought about my little brother.

In a less dramatic incident, but one that is just as disturbing for its disregard for the young woman's wishes, and the potential for greater harm, Valerie explained that while with a neighborhood boy, "I didn't get raped, he was just tryin' to force me."

In contrast to most subjects' descriptions of violence in their homes, the violence that they witnessed and were victims of on the streets was dominated by the use of guns. With the introduction of guns, arguments could quickly escalate into lethal violence. As one Christine explained: "You can get shot over the stupidest things. If you take somebody's bike, you're putting your life in jeopardy 'cuz they will shoot you over a bike or a dollar."

Violence often occurred in the context of the respondents' drug dealing activities, such as disputes over turf, quality of product, or money. Joanne was shot in the leg when "something went wrong with a deal she [her cousin] was making and I got out of the car. When Elena confronted a cheating 'customer':

> The guy pulled out a gun. He shot my brother. My brother shot him then his friend shot my brother and then my brother shot him and then I got shot, but I didn't really get shot, it just skimmed right off me. It was a really bugged out day.

Whether in the illicit (drug) or licit market, the common scenario was that of high stakes over small amounts. For example, Paula describes the result of petty theft:

> My man stole something out of the store. They came out of the store chased him with a stick and, caught him and just started beating him... I got shot at 'cuz ...I

> stole a beer. I went there [to the store] and just ran with it. I was running and he was shooting behind me and I was screaming.

The young women also witnessed terrible acts against their neighbors, friends and family members. One night Elena walked her best friend home, but parted outside the others girl's building: "All of a sudden, two days later they found her body on a roof. She was raped but she wasn't,... she ain't die. She was just on a roof." Another respondent described neighborhood shootings, noting that "it happens in the drug spots. My friend got shot in his face because he was there, just because he was watching." . Others spoke of seeing friends killed in bad drug deals, or watching as others shot dead users who did not pay up. Describing an apparent accident that occurred when she was 10, Maria watched as a "big boy probably like 15, [was] playing with a M80, put it in the little boy's pocket, and the little boy just blew up. He started bleeding, an ambulance came, he was like on fire."

As previously noted, research suggests that adult violent offenders may have first been exposed to violence by directly experiencing violence or witnessing violence against others in their childhood homes (Fantuzzo & Lindquist, 1989; Rouse, 1991; Widom, 1989), as well as in their communities. This was the case for this group of young women. This chapter illustrates how, as children, most of the young women already were hardened to expect victimization and violence as an integral part of everyday life. As with experiences with loss, victimization occurred at very young ages. Both as direct victims and as witnesses, these young women experienced extensive and pervasive traumatic experiences, and very often such victimization was at the hands of those entrusted with their well-being—parents and other primary caregivers. For example, by

the median age of only ten years, 75% (n=8) of the young women had suffered family physical abuse; 29% (n=7) had experienced family sexual abuse; and 13% (n=3) had witnessed family sexual abuse. Many young women's parents also failed to protect them in their homes from predators who were associates of the parents. Furthermore, in contrast to many studies that examine physical and sexual abuse only, this research was much more expansive in its investigation of victimization trauma. The young women had also witnessed stabbings, shootings, and killings, fires and explosions. They had been mugged, threatened at gunpoint, and awakened by gunfire. Thus, in addition to traumatic victimizations in the home, the young women were also prey to such incidences in their neighborhoods, both from strangers and acquaintances. With their expectations of safety violated, the sense of attachment between the young women and their caregivers was seriously disrupted, as the following chapter illustrates, the young women also received little parental support or supervision. As a result, they were left alone to contend with feelings of anger, anxiety, betrayal and hopelessness, which may have contributed to their participation in maladaptive coping strategies, including violence.

Chapter Six

Parental Support, Attachment, and Supervision

Early parental affection, nurturance, and support form the foundation for a secure attachment, which is critical to healthy development and subsequent positive life outcomes (Sroufe & Fleeson, 1986; Coble, Gantt, & Mallinckrodt, 1996). When parents respond to the infant in ways that promote a supportive internal working model, the child feels safe and experiences the parent as available, responsive, and sensitive. Children, however, also become attached to neglectful, insensitive and maltreating parents. In such environments the early parent-child attachment bond is disrupted and a child's working model of the world impaired. Furthermore, because the working model of the parent and the infant develops in a 'complimentary and mutually confirming' manner, if a child is maltreated or unwanted, the child will feel not only that the parent believes them to bad, but that they *are* essentially bad—unloved and unwanted by *anyone* (Bowlby, 1973, p. 238). The resultant insecure attachment patterns may serve to initiate a developmental pathway that increases the likelihood of later antisocial behaviors (Sroufe, Carlson, Levy & Egeland, 1999). This pathway, however, may be interrupted by social networks, including other adults, siblings and friends who can provide instrumental and expressive support (Cullen, 1994; Kruttschnitt, Ward & Sheble, 1987).

Consistent with developmental theories, Wright & Cullen's concept of "parental efficacy" (2001, p. 697) suggests that children's healthy development (and decreased delinquency) is facilitated by parents who "take steps to exercise control and to deliver social support." While direct control theories emphasize efforts to closely monitor and quickly punish wayward behaviors (Patterson, 1980; Gottfredson & Hirschi, 1990), such

parenting techniques may in fact aggravate misconduct and become counterproductive. For example, if a parent reprimands a child without providing a means for improving behavior or ways to appropriately express emotions, the child's 'bad' behavior may only escalate. In time, the misconduct may become functional by virtue of the fact that it is one way for the child to garner the parental attention she needs, but may not have otherwise received (Greenberg, DeKlyen, Speltz, & Endriga, 1997).

The 24 young women in this study indicate that their numerous losses and victimizations were exacerbated by the fact that they received little parental support, felt little parental attachment, and were subject to inconsistent parental monitoring or supervision. These categories were derived from the data and include:

1) *parental support*: the emotional and instrumental support parents or other primary caregivers provided to the young women, such as parental declarations of love and affection, praise and encouragement, the provision of material goods (food, housing, clothes, and "extras"), and joint activities, outings, or vacations;

2) *parental attachment*: young women's statements about and assessments of their emotional relationship with their parents. This concept was examined primarily through responses to questions about who the young women spoke with when something was bothering them and, with whom did they felt the safest and most secure;

3) *parental supervision:* included direct controls and parental awareness of the young women's activities, whereabouts and friends; pertinent indicators included references to curfews and other family rules, and

whether parents knew where the respondents were when they were not home, who they were with, and when they would be back.

While each of these concepts is discussed separately within this chapter, in the every day lives of the respondents, the pattern and quality of parental support, attachment, and supervision were closely intertwined, often in complex and conflicting ways. When the young women described the emotional and instrumental supports that their caregivers provided, they also made statements assessing the emotional bond between them.[16] Sometimes these statements appeared to directly contradict later comments. One young woman (Adele) articulated the scenario this way:

> Anything I had to tell her [mother] I could tell her. It wasn't like she would beat me for it or anything. So she was open minded. [Ever tell any of the people you lived with?] Nope. Cuz I didn't want to. It was, I could of talked to her if I wanted to but I didn't want to.

Although she said that she could always talk to mother, she also claimed she didn't want to talk to anyone in her home when something was bothering her. Perhaps the desire and need to see her mother as available, loving, and supportive was undermined by the reality of a disrupted emotional attachment. Her mother could have been worse (she could have beat her!) but clearly Adele did not feeling genuinely accepted and supported by her mother, which interfered with her ability to feel close and to share her emotional life with her mother.

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[16] Because 15 of the young women (63%) indicated that they mostly lived with their mothers prior to being remanded to custody, most of the following statements pertain to mothers.

Parental Support

The young women described a range of supports that their parents provided, including material goods, family activities, and acts of love. Unfortunately, while most claimed that basic necessities were provided ("I ate regularly, lived in a regular house, like my mother would cook us dinner"), very often the contexts in which the statements were made were not particularly affectionate. One 15-year-old (Valerie) reported "My grandmother gave me a couple of dollars every day. Went shopping like every month. I ate sometimes. Yeah, we don't sit down to eat at the table, but we just eat, you know." With an air more of bravado than warmth, Donna stated "I get money, I get anything I want from them," but admitted that she wasn't often home, and her mother was raising eight children on her own, suggesting, perhaps, a distant relationship. When Michelle was asked to elaborate on her description of what it was like in her home, on the one hand she said, "it was clean, I had my own room, and I always watched TV" on the other hand she also said that her grandmother, who had assumed responsibility for her from her mother, "didn't want me outside most of the time—I was always in the house" and encouraged her to "be religious": "If we're like just sitting around and I was like I'm tired, I'm bored or something, she'll be like go read a Bible. I don't want to read the Bible." The austerity of this girl's life was balanced somewhat, however, by her grandfather's affectionate humor.

> I get along real good with him. It was like 'be good and don't let your grandmother beat you up and stuff.' Like if I did something bad my grandmother would hit me. He would be like, don't let your grandmother down because she is proud of me and stuff. He used to crack jokes and make me laugh with stuff about my grandmother and stuff.

Despite the hardships within the young women's families, many described engaging in activities and spending time with their caregivers. Sherry said her mother "interacted with our schooling" and "takes us places and stuff." Lisa explained that because her neighborhood was so dangerous she and her nine siblings "used to always stay in the house...just sitting in the house watching TV, probably eating." She also described activities with her parents:

> Me and my mother used to do a whole bunch of stuff together. We used to, like, go to the movies, go to the plaza, everything. [And with your father?] Same thing. 'Cause instead of going to the movies, we would go out to eat, and we would go out to Coney Island and stuff and play on the rides and stuff.

Stating that her family life "was pretty fun," Joanne noted that "on weekends we used to go out together and stuff. We used to go to the park in the summertime and in the wintertime we used to go sled riding." Kathy talked about spending time with her mother and sister on the weekends and holidays: "We used to go to church on Sundays, so she used to like that, um, like on the weekends we used to go visit my family in Staten Island – all my cousins, vacations, school vacations, we would stay together." Some of the young women also referred to trips to family reunions and special vacations. For example, Paula noted both a special vacation with her mother and traveling with her aunt to family gatherings—and along the way being taught to drive:

> My mother, we would go places ... like, when I was 13, yeah, I was turning 13, my mother took me to the Bahamas. My aunt used to always take me down south with her when she was driving and stuff. She started to teach me how to drive but that didn't go too well and, you know, we would go down south.

Similarly, Jill described outings with her mother and little sister:

> We'd go to [the] lake, and we'd take little trips to my uncles' house; like the lake, we'd go like once a summer or twice a summer. But when my mom, she had

> vacation from work and stuff, we'd go to my uncle's house whenever she had vacation.

The young women's descriptions of these trips and activities were remembered fondly and appeared to stand in sharp contrast to the many losses and victimizations they had experienced. In addition to activities, a number of respondents recalled compliments and statements of love and affection, as well as supportive actions on the part of their parents. Although these were in relatively short supply, it is significant that some of the young women did recollect such expressions.

Sometimes, just having a parent to talk to and feel comfortable with was extremely supportive. Even though Jill stated that she and her mother "just argued all the time," she also felt that "she's there for me to talk to and when I need something she'll get it for me. And if I'm in trouble she's gonna talk to me about it and help me out." Likewise, Christine claimed that "my mother is like my best friend, ... 'cause I could tell her anything and she won't, she won't get mad." In a more direct helping role, Sherry's mother modeled resolving conflicts through talking. When she argued with her mother about curfews, Sherry learned to work things out by "sitting down asking her why I have to come in so early and stuff like this." The same routine was followed during arguments with her brother: "Well, my mother came back. She sat both of us down and we had to talk about it."

Although Gayle spent much of her life in foster homes, she visited her mother and stepfather, both of whom were heavy drug users. She relished the rare displays of attention:

> when I come around she'd like brag about me, be like this is my daughter, the person I been talkin' about, remember? And then everybody wanna hang with me

> and that's when they find out everything I do. Cuz my mother used to brag, like tell them about me.

Fourteen-year-old Maria said that although she was the only one in her family who had a different biological father, her stepfather loved and frequently complimented her.

> I know he's nice and I know he loves me cuz he tells me, out of the eight kids I got, he was like I love you the most. He be like, because you show me respect ...you the kind of person, you could be outside and, you could be mad at me and if I need some help you still help me or you tell me that Oh Dad, you need this? You need that? He was like none of my kids, not even my oldest sisters and brothers, he be like they don't do that for me. So my father's nice.

Even though she resented her mother's assessment, Maria also said her mother also "tells me I love you more than all my kids 'cuz you got problems, I think." Maria provided numerous examples of her mother's efforts and words of encouragement. These ranged from anti-smoking lectures ("she be like don't do it cuz it ain't doing nothing for you it's messing up your brain, it's messing up your lungs,") to planning to move the entire family out of state in order to protect her daughter upon release from custody. Adjudicated for aggravated assault, Maria was being targeted by her victim's friends and thus, her mother was planning the move " 'cause [she] wouldn't want to come home and [hear] oh, your daughter's dead."

Others told of instances where their parents helped to protect not only them, but their friends as well. For example, even though her friends were gang-involved and caring for them could be dangerous, Kathy's mother would often help out.

> Since, my mother knew my friends she'd always helped them, like if they got kicked out of the house, she would let them spend the night or they needed gas money or something she would always help them. She didn't like it, 'cuz, she knew about stupid things too. She knew how the gangs were, she knew what could

happen, so she knew. We were supposed to keep it quiet.

Once, when Jennifer was threatened by a neighborhood boy who said he was going "to shoot my face" in retaliation for a prior fight, her grandmother interceded: "She must of thought she was bullet proof 'cuz she stuck her head out the window and she was like, excuse me, and she was arguing with him."

Parental Attachment

Parental support helps to maintain affective attachments between parents and adolescents (Cernkovitch & Giordano, 1987; Sroufe & Fleesen (1986). However, if a child's caregiver failed to meet her natural inborn need for attachment in infancy, and there was little in the way of interventions from others, the child is likely to have difficulty forming healthy attachments as she grows older. Psychological strength derives from connections with significant others, first in infancy and then later in life, and this may be especially important for girls (Harris, Blum, & Resnick,1991; Brown & Gilligan, 1992; Ward, 1996). Parental attachment may be especially important for adolescent girls who are particularly vulnerable to stress and distress and who are experiencing "a time of acute conflict over connection, control, and power" (Debold, Brown, Weseen, & Brookins, 1999, p. 189). While exposed to increased sexism, violence, and abuse, female teens need adults to help them develop healthy responses and coping strategies.

In addition to parental supports that may exist in the girls lives, it is important to hear how they personally assess their attachment to and their relationship with their parents and others. To this end, I examined spontaneous comments the young women made throughout the interviews, as well as their responses to two particular questions:

"When something was bothering you did you ever tell any of the people you lived with?" and "Of everyone in the household where you mostly lived, who did you feel the safest and most secure with?"

Sharing confidences.

Overall, only seven (29%) of the young women said they had ever told anyone they lived with when something was bothering them. As noted above, most of the young women (63%) lived primarily with their mothers and thus, it is not surprising that of those seven who did speak with someone, four reported that it was their mother they turned to first. Additional answers from these seven indicated that they also spoke with siblings, fathers, and grandparents. Jennifer said she went to her mother simply because" she was the only one I could talk to," while Christine explained that her mother was the one to talk to "because I feel I can tell her anything because she listens, and she probably can relate to what I'm going through." Stating that she sometimes told her mother about problems, Natalie said her mother encouraged her to do so:

> she always tell me that if you got a problem, just be able to come talk to me about it, like especially if I'm mad at her, don't you know, walk around with an attitude and she wondering why I'm mad and she have no idea, 'cause she can't fix something if she don't know about it.

Lisa said she was equally comfortable speaking about any problems with her mother and her father, declaring that:

> I just like my father and my mother, so I would just tell both of them if something's bothering me. Its not like I went to my mother because it was a girl thing, I went to my father because it was a father thing. ... 'cause, if my mother wasn't around I would tell my father, if my father wasn't around I'd tell my mother.

Indicating a desire for privacy, she also was certain she would not share her troubles with her younger siblings: "I ain't trying to tell none of my sisters and brothers, 'cause they be blowing it around school."

Of the young women who indicated that they spoke with their mothers about things that were bothering them, some also identified stepmothers and foster mothers. For example, Natalie would also go to her stepmother:

> I felt like my stepmother was like my best friend. Cuz its not like she's my "mother" mother. She won't yell, like yell, scream, scream, she'll try to understand or whatever. And then she's got a young mind, you know. Like I know her ever since I was a baby, too.

Similarly, although she had spent only nine months in foster care, Lauren felt comfortable talking with her foster mother, simply "because I can trust her." These relationships might be likened to those of an "othermother" (Collins, 1991), a term used to describe women in African American communities who take a real and persistent interest in the community's children (Sampson, Raudenbush, & Earls, 1997; Debold, Wilson, & Malave, 1993). Perhaps similar in some ways to their own mothers, these "othermothers" are also distinctive enough to allow a young woman space to try out new ideas and develop additional adult relationships uncomplicated by motherhood.

As did a few others, Natalie also found it helpful to speak with male parental figures. Citing her mother's boyfriend, she said that "I just felt like I could talk to him sometimes" because he was someone who "know how it is" and who served as an ally in broaching her mother on certain topics. Joanne spoke with her older brother

> because he, he did the same stuff I did and if I told him he'd understand and he was the only one who really knew who I really was on the inside, and what I wanted to be and stuff. He knew my dreams and all that other good stuff.

Unfortunately, positive father figures were uncommon among this group of young women, but where they existed they may have provided a different perspective from a larger, male, world.

Adolescence can be a difficult time for females under any circumstances. For this particular group of teenagers who had an extensive history of trauma, emotional "deattachment" was of particular significance. Seventeen of the young women (70.8%) said they never spoke to anyone in their home about the things that were troubling them. Their reasons for not speaking revealed concerns with privacy and trust, the desire for attention and understanding, and minimal experience with or models for talking about feelings. A sense of loneliness and the inability to connect with others, or have significant others connect with them, is pervasive. From very early ages, and continuing into the teen years, these young women struggled to traverse very difficult terrain almost entirely on their own. As Marcella noted about her problematic relationship with her mother "we just didn't have that kind of relationship." Put more bluntly, Paula said her family life was hell and indicated no affectional ties:

> It was both of us. We didn't like each other. Well, I figured she didn't like me so I didn't like her and my father, I just ran over him. The way she act, I didn't believe she liked me. 'Cuz, it was like, she has a really stink attitude. She has it with everybody but still, I really felt that she shouldn't, 'cuz I'm her daughter, you know? I could do nothing to her.

Many stated very clearly that they did not know how to even begin a conversation about their emotional state. Asked why she never told anyone when something was bothering her, Elena admitted "I can't talk to nobody. Because I didn't know how to like, just sit there and really start a conversation with somebody in my family." She indicated that she would have liked to have talked to her individual parents about boys, how to

dress, and "how to hold a relationship," but as one of 14 children of a crack using mother and a sporadically available father, she recognized and lamented that family communication was also impeded "because everybody was just so busy and tired and didn't wanna do anything." Gayle disclosed that she was "scared or shy" to talk, adding that "I wasn't brought up like, to talk." Similarly, Sherry said that although she wasn't "shy all the time, I just don't, really, talk about my feelings." Although Maria didn't tell others her troubles because "I never used to trust my mother, I couldn't talk to nobody like that" she nevertheless strives to remain connected with her mother. She described being out with her friends, often for days at a time, but then feeling the need to at least make contact:

> I know when my mother is worried, 'cuz I would, I *feel* when my mother's worried. I be thinking, god, I left my mother home worried, crying about me. Then I just think and like something's telling me, I hear her telling me come home, come home, she's crying, and ...I got to call home, see what's up with my mother.

Paula, who had no formal schooling after the sixth grade, struggled to explain why she "never spoke up for myself" and instead provided an example of her silence. She reveals a desire to please her aunt, at the expense of her own humiliation and rage.

> I graduated sixth grade and everybody told me to bring in a - wear a white dress. My aunt bought me a blue and white dress, right? I went in the room. I was like, I can't wear this dress - supposed to be a white dress, but then I came out, saw how the dress look on me. She was like, do you like the dress? I was like yeah and everything. Didn't tell her I had to wear the dress to my graduation. The only one not wearing a white dress. I was the last one on line too cuz I was the tallest and they was all laughing and stuff. I was mad but I didn't say nothing.

Several respondents indicated that they didn't share their feelings with the people in their home because they "felt it wasn't none of their business" (Alona) or they didn't "like people to be in my business" (Royale). After some reflection, many revealed that

their stance was borne of earlier betrayals of privacy and confidences. Given their histories with adults, it was not surprising that trust was of tremendous concern. Before disclosing that she had been sexually bothered by her father several times, Rose hinted at an incestuous relationship, claiming that: "me and my father we were best friends, if I had a problem I would always go to him and [if] he had a problem and he couldn't talk to his wife, he would come to me." When asked directly if she went to others in her family when something was bothering her, she said she couldn't "because I felt I couldn't trust them." She did, however, turn to her younger sister who she believed "would never let anything happen to me."

Many echoed Adele's sentiments about deciding "to keep it to myself instead of telling her [mother] and then her telling, you know, my grandmother and my grandmother telling my aunt, and so on from there." As Donna explained, "they run their mouth too much. Then they tell every...they tell my family and then they start talking about me." Others said they kept "their business" to themselves because they believed there was no one who was both available and willing to really listen to them. Claiming she had "nobody to talk to," Royale explained that what she really meant was that of the people in her life, "nobody would understand." In a similar vein, Jackie first said she didn't want to tell anybody but then added that "I didn't think nobody would listen to me at home."

Several of the respondents indicated that they felt their caregivers were ill equipped to help them as they attempted to deal on their own with the complexities of becoming a woman in the context of violent families and violent communities. Sometimes this was complicated by the difference in generations. Complaining about the emotional distance

between herself and her grandparents, Michelle stated that "they was old-fashioned" and that despite her desire for communication,

> I can't talk to them like that. I asked them like little questions and things I wanted to know, but ain't nobody tell me nothing. So, when I got into the group home, I just found out everything on my own.

Her statement is perhaps more disturbing than what appears on the surface, given her history of years of paternal sexual abuse and maternal emotional unavailability. In addition, she may have feared that by revealing her troubles she would feel she was a failure or a bad person, as was the case with Jill.

> I didn't think my mom would really understand what I was going through and how I felt. ... I always thought that she's like an old-fashioned mom and that she was, she's different from everybody else's mom. ... A lot of things have happened to me that my mom doesn't know about me and I don't want her to think bad things about me, so I just, I didn't bother with it because I didn't want her go around thinking bad things about me.

While some blamed themselves for not going to others to talk ("cause I was stubborn"), others assumed they should be able to care for themselves: "I thought I could handle it or things would work out. I just had the feeling that I could do things myself."

Feeling safe and secure.

When the 24 young women were asked "of everyone in the household where you mostly lived, who did you feel the safest and most secure with," an equal number of young women (29.2%, n=7), each replied "their mother" or "no one." Three (12.5%) indicated a sibling. Grandmothers and the whole family were each identified by two young women (8.3%) and a father, aunt, and foster mother each were identified by one respondent (4.2%). Speaking about physical protection, Lisa believed that everybody in her home would be ready to help her in time of need, especially her parents. She stated

that "I know a lot of people's families really doesn't care about them. But my family cares about us, so, if something like that happened, they're gonna try to protect me the best way they can."

Those who felt safest with their mothers indicated that it was because they trusted them and felt their mothers would protect them. Natalie said she felt safe and secure with her mother

> Because, like, if I get suspended from school or something she is always there, whatever. Sometime she would talk to me, you know, and just tell me, if she knows it's not my fault or something like that.

Kathy said she felt safe with her mother because she trusted her "with everything" stating that while she is in custody "I got my daughter there with my mother and my sister together and I know nothing will happen to her." On the other hand, at another point in the interview when Kathy was explaining why she rarely stayed at home, she said:

> My mother, she would have her limits but she would understand that we were young and screaming or we'd like to go out or – she didn't really care and me and her, we never really got along or anything.

At the same time many of the girls often physically fought with their mothers. One 15-year-old laughed after she stated that she felt safest with her mother and with her older sister:

> The people .. I used to tell people I hated them the most but I thought, ...because, I mean, 'cause when we fight its like we hate each other then but when it comes down to it, if something were ever to happen to me they'd go nuts and they'd really be there, they always be there.

Likewise, Royale stated that her mother "wouldn't let nothing happen to us," yet she often ran away from home, claiming she hated her mother for yelling at her. Repeating these sentiments practically verbatim, Jennifer said her mother "would never let nothing happen to me. She was always there if anything happened," but she also reported that

her mother was frequently incarcerated, suggesting perhaps a wish for protection on the part of the 15-year-old.

Raised for the most part by their grandmothers, Gina and Valerie felt the safest and most secure with these women, and expressed sadness at being separated from them while in custody. Stating that her grandmother "was like my mother and I seen her face all the time," Gina said her grandmother made her feel safe because:

> I knew her all my life- I slept with her, I did, she cleaned my behind and I was 12 years old - middle of the night, I drink a bottle till I was 12 - she get up and get the juice or the milk or whatever I wanted.

Regretfully she added "when I was with her, I could tell my grandmother anything. I lost contact, like, not I lost contact, but I don't do everything with her no more." Likewise, Valerie said her grandma "always wanted me to do right" and missed her, stating that "even though I didn't listen to her and I disrespected her, I still loved her." Diane felt safe with her Dad "because he's always taken care of me since I was small, he was always there and make sure I was safe."

Three young women said they relied on and felt closest to their siblings, rather than the adults with whom they lived. Describing her relation with her sister, Sherry stated "I know she was looking out for me, 'bout something, if I had a problem. She always took up for me." Michelle trusted her "auntie" and felt safe with her because "I know she loves me. I know she wants the best for me and she knows my capabilities." Alona said that although she got along with her mother superficially, ("I understand her and she understands me,") she felt safest and most secure with her year-old-daughter because "she was there with me and I can talk to her." For others, there appeared to be nobody upon whom they could depend for a sense of safety and security.

Similar to many of the young women, Elena said "I wasn't like really bonded with my family 'cuz I like to isolate myself from people. I don't like to be around a whole group of people. I hate being around people. That's the thing." (Elena had experienced numerous deaths in her family, an extensive number of other losses, and numerous victimizations, without the assistance of guiding adults, thus, she seemed left in a detached emotional state, psychically blocking the need and even desire for loving attachments. Gayle had been placed in a series of foster and group homes, and admitted that it was "a hard question" for her to think about who made her feel safe, submitting that there was no one, "because I used to always run around and I had no time to get to know people and know what they was about. I used to just run around a lot." Both Jill and Marcella lived with their mothers but they did not feel safe with them. Fourteen-year-old Jill acknowledged that although "she's there to protect me and stuff" she "never felt safe with her. Maybe because we didn't have a good relationship." On the other hand, Marcella clearly felt there was no one in the home to protect her: "the only one in the household was me and my mother now, since my sister already left. ... So there was like nobody I could really talk to."

Parental Supervision

Parental supervision is one form of direct control and is important to effective parenting, which stresses being aware, responsive and restrictive (Baumrind, 1991). To investigate the extent to which parents and other caregivers were aware of the young women's activities, friends, and whereabouts, we asked respondents "when you were out of the house, did the adults you lived with usually know: where you were; who you were with; and when you would be home?' In addition, we asked if when they were not with

these adults, "did you usually knew how to get in touch with them if you needed to?" Overall, parents seemed to have only a very general sense about their children's activities. Just over half (52.2%) of the young women said that their parents did not usually know where they were when they were not home and 45.8% said their parents did not know who they were with during these times. Although 75% said the adults in their lives did not usually know when the young women would be home, 87.5% said they knew how to reach the adults if they needed to do so.

Some of the young women indicated that they were generally "hanging out" in the neighborhood and their caregivers knew where to quickly locate them. As Jackie explained "I won't really be nowhere. I just be on the same street." Likewise, the adults knew the girl's peers: "I'll bring my friends over to stay the night with me and they see them and they know." Similarly, Michelle said she was usually home: "I really didn't get a chance to go places by myself." Lisa's parents seemed particularly intent on insulating their large family from the outside community: she repeatedly remarked that her neighborhood was very dangerous and that she and her siblings mostly stayed in the apartment, venturing with her sisters "straight to the store and back home, and school," avoiding the nearby park ("I know what was in the park, that's how come I used to stay in my house"). She had a 9 P.M. curfew and "on weekends, probably like 9:30, and I could ask for permission, 10 o'clock, to like play in the hallway or something, or out in front of the building. 'Cause any later, (pauses) uh-uh, it's real dangerous." Many talked about skipping school to "hang out," even though, as Kathy notes: "in my mother's eyes we would go to school every day."

Although Natalie said her mother was quite strict and "always wanted me to be in the house, around her like underneath her," her parents usually didn't know exactly where she was (but "sometimes I called them and told them") or when she would be home. The exceptions might be if she were "down the block, outside and they could drop by and see me." Most of her arguments were, however, over curfews: "my mother, she was all the time she would tell me to come in early, come in early, and I wasn't trying to hear it." Likewise, Diane admitted that: "I didn't want nobody telling me what to do, I just wanted to do what I wanted to do. Nobody could tell me anything."

Clearly missing her own mother, Rose said she "would just run around the streets and not listen to my parents." She said the core of the problem was "all because my stepmother was in the house." She resented her father's wife trying to "be my mother," and was uncomfortable that "she would pay more attention to me than she would pay attention to her own kids who she gave birth to." With little sense of support or attachment, most of the young women reported that they generally ignored curfews and other rules, even though they knew this was worrisome for their caregivers. For example, Valerie said:

> I made it bad, 'cause I would, I didn't want to follow no rules. I want everything to go my way and came in the house anytime I wanted to, that's when I wanted to. I worried my grandmother a lot and sometime I never come in.

Indeed, many appeared to be "calling the shots" in the household. For example, Paula stated in a matter-of-fact tone that she "ran over" her father.

> He said be in the house at 11:00. I'm leaving at 9:00. There's no way in the world I'll be in at 11:00. He's lucky if I come in the next week. We outside 2, 3, 4 o'clock in the morning. I'll come back, ...get a change of clothes and shower and stuff and I'm gone again.

Testing boundaries and perhaps hoping to be missed, Paula made a minimal effort to stay in relationship with him stating that "sometimes I would call him so at least he'll know I'm still living." While Elena would sometimes tell her mother where she was going, she generally did not bother, especially if she was mad at her mother:

> I be, all right bye, I'll see you later. If she wants, like I had a pager so she could just page me and find out where I was but I wouldn't tell her where I was going 'cuz I just felt that was not her concern. Most of the time she wouldn't really know where I was but once in a blue moon she would. .

On the other hand, Elena's mother demonstrated limited supervisory skills. Despite an alert that a rapist had been in the apartment complex, her mother told her to walk her girlfriend home who had been visiting at their apartment. Sending the two 14-year-old girls out alone, the mother offered only the protection of a cell phone: "Anything happens, you just call me real fast." Elena returned home safely but her friend was attacked and raped. In a very different context, the mother expressed little interest or responsibility for her daughter's activities. For example, Elena wanted to rent a skating rink for $5,000 and needed an adult's signature. Asking her mother to do so, she assured her she could pay the fee (from the profits of her gang's drug sales): I had my mother. She was like 'where did you get all this money from?' I was like don't worry about it. She didn't even ask me no more cuz there was no more need to ask.

While Maria admits that her mother is very nice "she's not like some parents wanna beat on you my mother not like that," she belittles her mother's ineffective attempts at setting a curfew and controlling her whereabouts.

> my mother just used to tell me that you could be home at 9:30, she was like when you be with your friends, what that get you? And I just laugh, I be outside, doing bad stuff, breaking bottles, doing bad stuff to people. And she be like you could be home looking at TV, she was like, doing something positive, rather than doing something negative.

Her mother, however constantly contradicts herself, telling Maria that if she is late she won't be allowed out the next day, but retracts the statement with: "I'll probably let you go outside but you be home at like 6 o'clock, 7 o'clock, I'm not trying to let you lie to me." And then she appears to have given up on trying to control her daughter:

> My mother's like, look there's nothing I could do, she's was out, I try my best to keep you home, keep you safe, keep you out of that community, keep you from doing bad stuff, but you don't understand you don't want to.

Others who totally relinquished all authority and control included parents who used substances with, or in the presence of their daughters, or included them in drug dealing. Describing a visit to her parents, Gayle said:

> once every while I used to meet my mother over there and she used to go across the street and get the drugs and then go in the bathroom. My step father, he ... used to be a big time drug dealer too.

Furthermore, she became a part of her mother's drug dealing operation, providing her home as a place to make and hide the drugs.

> Sometimes, it be like 10, 15 men in there or young boys in there havin' a party. My mother just let them in the house and they spends the night while my mother be out helping them sell the drugs.

In a somewhat reverse situation, Joanne said that she and her siblings sold drugs out of her apartment, and at first it "stressed my mother out." Eventually, however the mother also began to deal, as well as use drugs in the home. Claiming that the family drug use was "fun," Joanne also realized that "it bothered me because it started to take more of the relationship out of all of us." When asked about parental supervision in this context, Joanne said her mother's involvement in drugs effected her school grades

> because my mother used to have people in and out of the house, she used to have,

> she used to just have parties and stuff and it'd be on a school night and then I'd be up to like 3, 4, o'clock in the morning and I'd have to get up at 6 o'clock and get ready for school.

As she grew older she "never really went to school a lot" but instead stayed out late at night and slept during the day. Her mother's efforts at control had little effect at this point:

> my mother used to get all paranoid and stuff and she used to lock me out because she didn't want me to get in trouble and if she locked me out she wouldn't, she thought I wouldn't do it again 'cause I'd want to come home.

A fourth (n=6) of the young women's parents attempted more extreme measures of direct control by signing Persons in Need of Supervision (PINS) warrants against their daughters. Typical offenses were running away numerous times and fighting with a caregiver. Describing her "very strict" mother with a "stink attitude," Paula said she was rarely allowed out to play with friends when she was little, and had to clean the house and do other chores. Clearly angry with her mother, she blurts out: "You know, and she wonder why I was like 8, 9 years old she had to keep putting PINS on me." As a child Paula was shuffled between foster care and group homes, her "patient" aunt who "knows I'm a sick person," and her fighting parents. She'd leave these places and go to her grandmother's house, perhaps seeking her love and support, while also gaining attention (albeit negative) from her mother. The result was, however, more punitive actions: "the only reason I stayed in the house was 'cuz the judge kept saying he was gonna send me, he gonna lock me up and I was scared back then so I listened."

At 15, Marcella was, and had been for several years, responsible for her wheelchair-bound mother's care. Although an attendant was there during certain hours of the day, she explained that

> when she got shot, it messed up her insides, so she had to urinate in a catheter. I help her with that...it's hard for her to get to the toilet as well; I had to put diapers on her, clean her hair, help her bathe, help her move from place to place, had to cook for her... And bein' that she was drunk, she was real hard to deal with.

The two of them often fought, each hitting the other. Marcella's mother often resorted to calling the police:

> since I used to hit my mother and stuff, she would, like, call the police and things, and every time the police came, they would tell her they couldn't do anything about it 'cause they didn't have evidence of this, so they would just tell her, 'go to court and fill out a PINS warrant out on me.

In summary, all too often, the caregivers responsible for these young women's development failed them. While some of the respondents could recall incidents of help and support from their parents, these were generally unique and special occasions, not the norm. In assessing their emotional relationship with their parents and other caregivers, the young women's statements and descriptions of support and attachment were often quite mixed. They indicated that although they felt love toward their caregivers, they generally were uncomfortable in revealing their true feelings to them. Instead, they expressed feeling distant, misunderstood, alone, and often angry. While some of the young women did indicate a close attachment with their parents and described parents as actively providing support and attempting to supervise, many others presented what appeared to be an idealized state, wherein the young women initially described parents who were more loving and supportive than could be sustained in the girls' stories. Although much evidence suggests that adolescence can be a turbulent period in life and conflicting emotions might be considered typical of "normal" development (Erikson, 1965), it is more likely that these young women had to deal with more complicated stresses than most other young people, such as the extensive early childhood losses and

victimizations described in Chapters Four and Five (Browne, 2002). Thus, it may be that such traumas disrupted parental attachments, which in turn generated increased anxiety and rage as the young women continually were confronted with caregivers who were unwilling or unable to attend to their need for love, support and guidance. The expectation of help and support from others, innate in the human child, was constantly thwarted. Early parental failures to establish healthy attachments were exacerbated as the girls developed into teens and their caregivers were often rejecting or nonresponsive. The emotional bond with parents was too often a source of pain, rather than serving as a form of a "relational" or indirect control mechanism (Hirschi, 1969; Hagan, 1989). As a result, the young women frequently sought to reject their own vulnerability and dependency needs, rejecting relations with others, as "it was none of their business." Such feelings contributed to defiant, disruptive, and immature behaviors.

Often, these attitudes and behaviors were met with lax, inconsistent or punitive supervision, further complicating the relationship between the young women and their parents. Unlike the stereotypical image of the protected female, the young women in this study generally had little supervision. Their parents' inconsistent restrictiveness and limited responsiveness "encouraged" greater autonomy, exposing the young women to more opportunities conducive to delinquency and street violence. Thus, rather than being cared for and protected by adults, the young women spoke frequently of being on their own, taking care of their own business, while often taking care of siblings or the parents themselves. Adults offered "little to alleviate, and much to aggravate, the anxieties, lonesome vulnerabilities, and bewildering injustice" many of the girls experienced (Gadd, 2000, p. 443). Having experienced numerous significant losses and

victimizations that left them feeling angry as well as helpless, and burdened with responsibilities for caring for others with minimal adult intervention to provide basic support or supervision, these young women were extremely vulnerable. Their efforts to "manage" the reality of their situation as well as the emotional aspects included a variety of maladaptive coping strategies.

CHAPTER SEVEN

COPING STRATEGIES

Coping is a way of adapting to stressful life events. Stress sets off a process of adaptation and individuals may respond in a variety of ways. Some ways may be more detrimental in the long run, but all are attempts to regulate emotions and solve a problem, i.e., how to feel better, or how to stabilize the self in a stressful or unstable environment. Those who generally cope well in the world tend to employ a broad range of strategies and are flexible in their choices (Holahan, Moos & Schaefer 1996; Strack & Feifel 1996; Weisman 1984). People who have endured traumatic experiences, however, may have a limited, rigid, or even detrimental repertoire of coping strategies, which they employ repetitively, even though the original stressor or situation may have changed (Costa, Somerfield & McCrae, 1996; McCrae 1989; Vaillant, 1977). In addition, children, whose family relationships lack warmth and closeness and include hostility and fighting, may have a preponderance of "dysfunctional coping strategies" (Johnson & Pandina, 1991, p. 72). For example, among young adult male offenders, 89% of whom had experienced physical, sexual, verbal, and/or psychological abuse, prevalent coping strategies included physical fights and arguments, marijuana and alcohol use, and social isolation (Ryder, Cleary, Crimmins, Brownstein, & Spunt, 1997; Crimmins, Brownstein, Spunt, Ryder, & Warley, 1999). Among female homicide offenders, Crimmins (1995) found alcohol and drug use, self harm, and violence often were means by which women attempted to cope with or block feelings and memories of earlier traumatic experiences.

This chapter builds upon the interviews with 24 young women who experienced loss, victimization, and parental neglect, as discussed in previous chapters. Specifically,

it seeks to discover how they coped with traumatic experiences. Many of the young women spoke of feeling angry, overwhelmed and abandoned. They expressed vengeful thoughts toward people closest to them as well as toward acquaintances and strangers. Already made vulnerable by childhood losses, victimizations, minimal parental supports or supervision, and often shouldering the responsibility of caring both for themselves and others, the young women sought ways to cope and psychically defend themselves. The young women were asked if they had ever run away from home overnight, and if so, the number of times, their age the first time, and the reasons they ran away. They also were asked if they had ever tried to hurt themselves, their initial age, methods used and the reasons for trying. Finally, the young women were queried extensively about their drug use history including substances used, frequency of use, age of initial use, and reasons for using.

Coping strategies have been categorized in terms of function, being either emotion-focused or problem-focused (Lazarus, 1993). Emotion-focused coping attempts to regulate the emotions or distress generated by the problem or stressor; it attempts to change how the situation is attended to, or the meaning of what is happening (Shapiro & Levendosky, 1999). Problem-focused coping attempts to change the stressful situation by acting on the environment or oneself. Emotion-focused coping may include, for example, withdrawal, avoidance, minimization and denial. Problem-focused coping may include formulating a plan, disclosing abuse, and seeking help. Although the appropriateness of strategy depends on the situation, research has consistently found that the use of avoidant coping strategies has the highest risk for psychological dysfunction (Spaccarelli, 1994).

Given their experiences of loss and victimization, it is not surprising that behaviorally, the young women tended to rely on emotion-focused coping strategies, especially running away, self harm, and alcohol and use. Unfortunately, these strategies often led to additional pain. Indeed, as we shall see, the young women used alcohol and marijuana extensively, a behavior that can cause additional problems. In other cases, where a problem-focused strategy was employed such as disclosing abuse, girls often were not believed and were subsequently punished. Overall, coping strategies were generally ineffective in alleviating the young women's stress or problems.

Running Away/Leaving

Between 1980 and 1999, females represented the majority of juveniles arrested for running away from home (Snyder, 2001), and thus it is not surprising nearly all of the young women in this study (88%, n=21) reported that they had run away from home overnight at least once. The median earliest age at which respondents reported running away was 12 years, and they reported a median of nine instances. In addition, many spoke about running away from institutional placements. For example, although Christine said she never ran away from her home, she had spent months "on the run" from a state group home. Another young woman Gayle, having lived primarily in foster care and group homes for nearly 13 years, said she had run away many times, the first was when her best friend wanted to leave the group home where Gayle had lived the longest.

When asked if she had ever run away overnight, another said "of course not, no. I don't call it that. I was with my friends," and then acknowledged that while most the

time she came home only "a couple of hours" late, she had on occasion, stayed out overnight. In most instances, the young women did not travel far or stay on the streets, as is suggested by several other studies. The young women, for example, often left their mother's house to stay with their father or extended family or friends, many of whom lived down the block or around the corner. Though they did not stay long, and often found similar difficulties in the other homes, leaving offered some respite. As Stack (1975) has suggested, multiple households can provide a network of support context (Stack, 1975). There are also cases, however, where young women ran away and stayed away for long periods of time. The apparent reasons ranged from seemingly minor events to the potentially traumatic. Indeed, many of the reasons given for leaving, in and of themselves, sound like typical adolescent complaints (i.e., "I didn't get to go shopping," or "I couldn't get my way.") Placed in the larger context of the young women's lives, however, these reasons may represent, for some, a breaking point. This was the point at which they could no longer contain their anger and frustration and sought a way out — the cumulative effect of experiencing numerous losses and victimizations.

The young women often distinguished between just not coming home (even though they might stay away for weeks at a time) and the label of running away. For example, although Royale said she frequently left home for three days at a time, she explained that "It wasn't really running away, I just left." Similarly, Kathy said that "at least once a week" she ran away, but added "it wasn't that we were running away. It's just that we were hanging out and we couldn't come home overnight. We never really packed our bags and left." The difference between staying out and running away for Marcella was determined by whether or not the police were called.

> Only once I really ran away from home, and that was with my sister. But other times, like, my mother was asleep, I would go out, but I would come back later on in the night, without her catching me. I wouldn't call that running away. But I would call that once actually running away, 'cause cops were called, and stuff like that....We wasn't gonna go home, but we was, like, hiding in the garage from the house, and the cops came down with a flashlight and caught us.

Stating that she "practically raised" her little sister because of her parent's work schedule, Natalie was frustrated by the responsibilities placed on her:

> I'd be the only one there so I had to get her dressed, take her to the babysitter, and then go to school and then pick her up, if they had to do overtime, which they was doing most of the time—then I had to, like, take care of her.

She explained that she wanted to go out with friends after baby sitting, but this often was not allowed. To her, going out with friends was not really running away, especially because she called her mother to tell her, but she knew that her mother considered it running away, if not from home, certainly from her responsibilities.

> I wanted to be outside. I didn't want to be in the house. I just didn't like staying in the house, babysitting all the time and whatever... but she always wanted me to be up under her in the house and I didn't want to be in the house. But it's not like I'd just leave, but I'd call her at work and be, "I'm not staying in the house, I'm going outside." And she be like don't leave my kids in the house by themselves, wait until I get home. [so that was running away to you?] To her it was. [but to you?] Not really.

From Natalie's perspective, she only ran away once, which was when she left her parent's home after they moved to a new borough. She left because her mother "moved to Long Island and I didn't want to move to Long Island... it was boring, it's dead out there." She went back to her old neighborhood and stayed with a friend. Apparently this occurred often, however, as she stated that "my mother knew, she knew I was going over there because every time I just don't come home she know I'm over there." Despite her mother's urging to come home and to come in early, "I wasn't trying to hear it."

Eventually, using the state as a form of discipline, her mother placed her in a group home where she remained for seven months.

One 16-year-old explicitly stated that her reason for running or staying out past curfew was a matter of seeking fun or excitement. Asked why she would not come home, Kathy explained that:

> we was havin' fun, didn't want to have to go home, check in and then sneak out again, so we just stayed out. Like daring almost, 'cuz in the neighborhood where I live, there's a curfew for teenagers.

When asked what she did, however, it was evident that little "excitement" was available:

> We'd mostly just hang out on corners in front of the school. We never did anything that was, worthwhile, I'd say. ... staying at friends, while we were out all night. And then we just hang out. We never did anything like go to the movies. We just hung out.

Another respondent, 14-year-old Adele also sought excitement and she would leave for weeks at a time. When asked about her family life, she stated "I was running away with my sister and I wasn't...mainly I wasn't never home. So I can't really tell you." She said she couldn't count the times she ran away from home but stated her reasons as:

> I wanted to for the fun of it. To hang out with the boys and play with my friends more longer, 'cause I had a early curfew so...It was like alright, my mother would let me go out but like when I go out I would stay out, past my curfew and didn't wanna come home and get on punishment or anything. So I stay out like for two weeks or whatever.

Certainly many adolescents are seeking excitement and fun when they leave their homes, whether it is to stay out past a curfew or to leave for days at a time. Given the personal histories of these young women, however, it is likely that many used the "thrill" of "independence" to mask a desperate need for attachment and relationship. Even Maria

who was gone from home for long periods of time, expressed the need "to call home, see what's up with my mother."

Indeed, for most of the respondents, "running away" was less about thrill seeking and more about avoiding unpleasant, difficult, or violent situations in their homes. Sent by her drug addicted mother to live with her grandmother, Gina regularly ran away from her grandmother's home. She explained that she had been in about nine different placements, because she "was too bad." She attributes her current placement in OCFS as stemming directly from her running behavior.

> Alright, when I was 13, I ran away a lot so they placed me and he [judge] kept giving me chances and chances and then I got into selling drugs so he placed me and he kept giving me chances and then I ran away one time, I sold drugs, then this woman set me up to come to that place and said we have a warrant for your arrest – you have to go to Tryon [a secure OCFS facility]. I said where? I tried to leave and I assaulted the probation officer and that's why I'm here. [Why did they want to send you to Tryon?] Cuz I had ran away – running away and selling drugs – so when I tried to leave, they sent me here.

Common reasons for leaving home were arguments with a parent or caregiver, or because they did not like a parent or a parent's partner. As Marcella explained earlier, there was only one time that she actually ran away from home, and that incident was preceded by a major family confrontation. She and her sister left home, angry at relatives who seemed to visit only to reprimand the two adolescents for not taking care of their wheelchair-bound mother.

> The family [grandmother and uncles], they would come to the house once in a blue moon. Like, um, I don't know, special occasions, and, since we had problems with my mother, they would all, like, lecture us, and one day my sister got real upset with them lecturing us and she was leaving and I followed behind her. [What were they lecturing about?] My mother, right? Being that she used to abuse us, we used to...not run away from her, but when she got a hold of us, she used to really beat on...so, like, we used to get tired of it, we used to hit her back, and then she'd tell

> the family we hit her, and so they'd come down on us; that we don't listen to her, and that we run away.

Burdened with an ill and disabled mother who drank excessively, the two young women ran away, not only from their mother but from older family members who offered no support, only further abuse. As it was, the two of them had no place to go and hid in the garage until the police found them.

Describing the constant arguing between herself and her mother, Jill states:

> My mom and I always used to fight over almost everything. If I wanted to do something she's tell me no. So I'd go out and do it anyways and then we'd argue about it. And get into fights and stuff. Like sometimes I'd curse at her and she would get really mad and yell at me. And then I'd just go to my room and not talk to her for days. That's about it. So we just argued all the time.

The first time she ran away from home was because of one of those arguments:

> 'Cuz my mom, we just had an argument and I didn't feel like staying with her anymore. 'Cuz I thought it was always going to be like this and I [would] never get along with her. Sooner or later I was going to leave anyways probably because I always thought of moving out soon as I turned 16, so I never thought that I was going to be able to make it in that house.

Elena first ran away when she was 11, and at 14 says she "can't even count on my fingers" how many times she ran away in the intervening years. She would leave "just for like a day or something,"

> because I was, I was really frustrated 'cuz I couldn't get my way and I didn't know how to handle myself. I went to a friend's house and I went to my cousin's house but I never thought that I was running away but everybody else did. .

Others who claimed they had difficulty getting along with family and household members included Royale who said she left "because I hated my mother, 'cuz she told me, she used to always yell at me for no reason," and Alona who complained that her

foster parents "get me sick...they get me mad [because] they be all up in my business."

In most cases the young women said they were gone for a couple of days at most, but several others left their homes for weeks, months, and in one case, for two years. The first time Joanne recalls running away she was only six years old and she "got mad at my mom because she and her boyfriend were arguing and she threw a bottle at him." That first time she "went a couple blocks down to my grandmother's house," but stayed for three months. As a child she claims she ran away "plenty of times," packing a suitcase and going down the street to stay with her mother's best friend. However "if it was something really serious I used to go away for like weeks, months, I don't know, it was a really long time." Describing her troubled relationship with her mother in her teen years, Joanne seemed to "resolve" problems by avoiding conflict and leaving home:

> I used to like go away for like a month, I'd go downstate, I'd go to Manhattan and stuff, and I'd stay there for like a month, and I used to go to Phoenix for the summer, if she didn't, if she kept bothering me, I used to just go away for a long time and when I'd come back and stuff it'd be different.

While extended family members, such as grandmothers and aunts, often took in the young women when they ran away, other girls relied on friends who were often in similar circumstances, which often made for a more dangerous situation. The experiences of Maria provide an excellent case study. Maria claimed that she was she was only 10 when she ran away for the first time because her mother "just got on my nerves one day."

> She be like look if you want, (I know she don't mean it) you just leave out my house if you have to. And then I was fine with me I'll leave ...and I was like, bye. And my mother was like you ain't going nowhere, I ain't meant to say that. She was I like was just thinking about somcthing. And I just left her.

What is remarkable is that she stayed away for two years, during which time she said she stayed with her boyfriend in another borough or was on the street. When she was 12:

> that's when I start calling back home. When she seen me after two years, she was like where you been? Oh my god it was just a surprise, I felt like I never met my mother before!

Her chronology varies somewhat throughout her interview, but when asked whom she mostly lived with before being remanded to OCFS, she said she "visited her mother but didn't really live with her — I used to run away a lot." On occasion she would "bump" into her older brother who'd bring her home to her mother, until she ran away again. The pervasive theme is one of being on the streets, or with a boyfriend, interspersed with brief stays at home. On the run, she often stayed in abandoned buildings:

> I used to be there by myself sometimes at 12 o'clock, 3 o'clock in the morning. Sometimes I stayed there, just awake, but I used to be scared, I used to be scared, I use to hear noises and there used to be birds flying through.....I was scared and I was not trying to get locked up, I'd rather be there than locked up. I would be scared.

While being away from home seemed to be a viable solution for Maria, it clearly placed her at high risk for assault, disease, and additional loss and victimization.

Several young women specifically sited the men in their caregiver's life as the reason for their own running away claiming, for example, that "I didn't like her husband" (Jennifer) and "me and her boyfriend didn't get along" (Rose). Only in the case of Michelle did a respondent state explicitly that she ran away because a particular person was sexually abusive. Michelle reported that "when I was in Barbados, I was 8 years old and he [her father] was touching me and stuff." She moved to New York City to be with her mother and although she revealed the abuse to her, her mother did not believe her: "I was trying to get along with her, but every time I tried to talk about it,

she be like, nah, I don't believe you." Two years later the father joined them and "he started touching me again and it went on for 3 years." She began to run away from home, her attempts to gain her mother's protection having failed. This action brought further problems:

> When I turned 13, my mother had signed a PINS against me. Me and my mother had our own problems, she didn't know what was going on. I use to run away from home; they was like, either you go back home or you go to a group home. I was like I'll try a group home 'cuz I didn't want to go back there.

Faced with having to confront her abusive father and "unknowing" mother, Michelle "chose" to enter the juvenile system through a group home.

Sixteen-year-old Paula declared she didn't "keep track" of the number of times she ran away or the reason she left the first time, at age eight, but said she generally ran away from her mother because:

> this woman don't love me. I don't wanna be with her. That was mostly it. I went to my father. ... I wanted to be with my father—you know, you think the grass is greener on the other side, so I used to always do that. That's the reason why I always ran away.

She alternated living and running between parents, relatives, and institutions. This was indicative, perhaps, of the larger dynamics of unresolved disputes between her parents, and little sense of a secure home, having been moved from her mother to her aunt, foster care and group homes. Perhaps she was playing one against the other, seeking the love and security of both parents, but her parents also continued to aggravate the process by challenging one another in court and speaking poorly of one another in the presence of their daughter. Thirteen-year-old Jackie also alternated living between parents, relatives and the foster care system, and ran away "from my aunt's house to my father's" where

she stayed for weeks at a time. She ran "because I didn't wanna be there" and, as perhaps was the case with many respondents, "I just run away when I don't like stuff."

The young women had a variety of reasons for leaving that ranged from seeking excitement to trying to alleviate despair, but most also kept coming back. As Peacock (1981) has noted, an unhealthy "push-pull" reliance between caregivers (mostly mothers) and adolescent daughters often developed. This is demonstrative of, perhaps the adolescent's need and desire for attachment and relationship with her primary caregivers no matter how abusive or unloving they may be. It was a way to temporarily avoid rules and regulations, as well as abusive conditions and painful conflicts while still remaining in some form of relationship.

Deliberate Self Harm

Six (25%) of the young women in this study specifically stated that they deliberately tried to harm themselves prior to being remanded to custody. The median initial age was 11 years and attempts included a drug overdose, hanging, jumping off a roof, and scarring. Such acts may be understood as cries for love, attention, and support, yet these cries were often ignored or punished, or both.

At only eight years old, Paula attempted to jump off her building's seventh floor roof, but was too frightened.

> I was gonna jump off the roof but I couldn't do it. I would sit there, at the edge of the roof, but I never jumped. Just sit there, look down and get scared. I just got too scared – I couldn't do it.

Her mother, rather than expressing concern about what might be so upsetting to the seven-year old, punished her behavior

> Yeah, one of my friends from another building saw me on the roof so she told her grandmother and her grandmother called the housing and they went and they brought me back to my mother's house, then, you know, I got in trouble again. [What did she do?] She beat me!

Another respondent's attempt at self harm had a very different reaction from her mother. When she was 13, Jill attempted a drug overdose with prescription pills:

> I don't remember but it was prescribed. It was a prescription that the doctor gave me. I felt like I didn't want to live anymore because I had nothing to live for. I didn't have a relationship with my mother and I don't have a father, or like any one else I could turn to talk to so I just felt like I had nothing to live for.

Her despair, loneliness, and suicidal acts were completely misunderstood and almost unnoticed.

> I just got sick because mostly I didn't take enough of them so I just got sick. And like, basically, I just got sick. And my mom just thought I had the flu.

Marcella stated repeatedly that she fought with her mother, and because she "had a lot of responsibilities" involving her mother's physical care, "it was very stressful for me." Although she laughed at her own attempt to overdose on "Baby Tylenol," ingesting the pills required a trip to the hospital to have her stomach pumped. Her daily life continued for a time as though nothing had happened, but a subsequent suicide threat set in motion a process that eventually had her removed from her home. After fighting over smoking marijuana in the house, Marcella's mother called the police. When the police arrived and found her in the apartment building hallway, Marcella resisted arrest.

> We started fightin' and ... they came in, they dragged me in, we straightened, they hand cuffed me, she told them what happened and...all of a sudden, I said, 'I want to kill myself,' and they sent, they put me in a hospital. I was in pediatrics first, 'cause, you know, it was only the fifth floor that was the psychiatric one, that was only adults. So, then as a minor, they left me in for under, uh, constant observation.

After finally gaining her mother's attention during a hospital visit, Marcella became frantic when her mother started to leave.

> And then, my mother came and saw me, and they had leather on me, and she said she was leaving, and I said, 'you leavin', I'm leaving!' So, I went to the elevator. When I was walkin', the nurse kept following me, so I had scissors – I threw the scissors, and there was a code, or whatever, and all the security guards came off the elevator, and they grabbed me and they straightened me and put me in my hospital bed, stuck me with a needle and I fell asleep and I woke up in the psychiatric floor, with the adults, and I was there for two months.

After the time in the hospital ("I wasn't really crazy, I was just very...I just had a very bad temper") she was moved directly to a group home.

Although she couldn't remember how old she was when she tried to hurt herself, Gayle did remember that she had been afraid of the staff at the group home where she had lived for nearly five years. She explained: "I tried to hang myself once. 'Cuz I didn't like [facility name], 'cuz the people there, they used to hit you." Valerie also said she tried to hang herself at age 10, but then clarified her statement claiming that:

> I didn't try to, you know, I just said it. It was like I'm gonna hang myself. I was mad, angry. I don't remember why, but... it was my family.

Only one young woman spoke of self mutilation as a form of self harm. For 14-year-old Maria, carving her skin held special significance: "I tried to hurt myself which you can see I did a "V" here cuz my nephew's name is Victor... that's my love, I guess, ...the one that just turned five." Clearly, this nephew was her favorite; she had indicated earlier that he was the only person she said she would go to when something was bothering her. The smaller child brought her comfort and having his initial on her body kept him close.

Substance Use

Much research has demonstrated that being a victim of childhood maltreatment increases the likelihood of using alcohol and drugs and subsequently being involved in drug-related crime. Adolescents who have experienced childhood physical and sexual abuse are subsequently more likely to abuse (Harlow, 1999; Ireland & Widom, 1994; Smith & Thornberry, 1995; Dembo, et al., 1989, 1990; Kingery, Pruitt and Hurley 1992). And perhaps not surprisingly, alcohol and drug use has been identified as "an attempt at self help" (Krystal & Raskin 1970). Drug and alcohol use may be a psychological escape from the trauma caused by abuse, and is a common strategy for self-medicating feelings such as anxiety, anger and depression related to childhood victimization and maltreatment (Heide & Solomon 1991; Herman 1997; Ireland & Widom, 1994; Belknap & Holsinger, 1998). Females may be particularly vulnerable to using and abusing drugs and alcohol (Chesney-Lind, 1997; Daly, 1994). In studies that include both males and females, female victims are more likely than males to develop drug problems and to be involved in drug-related crime (Widom, Ireland, & Glynn, 1995; Harlow, 1999).

Most of the young women in this study ingested substances. The young women reported having ever tried tobacco (88%, n=21), marijuana (88%, n=21), and alcohol (83%, n=20). The median initial age was 10 years old for tobacco and alcohol, as compared to 12 years old for marijuana. More telling, perhaps, is the frequency with which respondents used these three substances. As presented in Table 7.1, nearly three-fourths of the sample (71%, n=17) smoked tobacco regularly (at least three to four days a week) during the year prior to OCFS custody, the same number smoked marijuana regularly, and a third (33%, n=8) drank alcohol regularly. Furthermore, a third (33%,

n=8) had used *both* marijuana and alcohol at least three to four days a week in the year prior to custody.

Twenty (83%) said they sometimes combined substances, which, not surprisingly, were variations on the three most common substances: marijuana and alcohol (n=7), marijuana and tobacco (n=5), and marijuana, alcohol, and tobacco (n=4), tobacco and alcohol (n=3). One young woman combined hallucinogens with the other three substances. Four respondents said they had tried hallucinogens, three had tried PCP, and two had tried powdered cocaine. None of the young women had tried crack cocaine, heroin, or inhalants, and none reported ever having injected any drug.

Two of the young women spoke of having been exposed to substances while in the womb. Elena attributed her own current drug use, at least in part, to her mother's long term use of crack cocaine: "...because now I just have a craving for marijuana and, but when I was younger, like my father told me that I was born with crack in my system." Describing her mother's alcoholism, 14-year-old Gina noted that while her mother was pregnant with her, she was drinking and using other drugs and she struggled to describe and come to terms with the effects of this:

> Ain't alcoholism an illness? Well, OK, when I was born. When I was being in her or whatever. When I was still in her, she was using drugs. I don't understand 'cuz she always had that. I don't really think that she, she – she ain't got no illness – she just wanted to – I don't think. She wasn't injured, I was injured, but the illness, she had it since she was like 10, 13, somewhere around there till recently 'cuz now she got 9 years clean and she 40, so – she was 31 – she did drugs till she was 31.

Although Gina was unwilling to see her mother's drinking as an illness, she expressed anger toward her mother and accused her mother of wanting to drink despite the harm to her daughter. She ended with a hopeful statement, lauding her mother's current recovery.

Table 7.1

Most Frequently Used Substances

(N=24)

	Ever Tried	Median Earliest Age	Used at Least 3-4 Days per Week
	% (n)		% (n)
Tobacco	88 (21)	10	71 (17)
Marijuana	88 (21)	12	71 (17)
Alcohol	83 (20)	10	33 (8)
Marijuana & Alcohol			33 (8)

Most of the respondents described their drug and alcohol use as excessive even as they recognized the deleterious results. Gayle provided an example:

> It was like early in the mornin', me and my friend, we went to the weed spot and on the way back we were smokin' and smokin' and smokin' and ....we started fightin'. That's what I think it's from, the weed, cuz if I wasn't using weed I would have used my brain.

Fourteen at the time of the interview, Maria had started smoking angel dust almost every day, and explained sadly, "that's why I hardly have any brain cells right now." She also understood the connection between her drug use and the potential harm to herself and others:

> It could be your mother, you could be talking like, 'What Ma? I smack you!' you tell your mother just like that. That's why I never used to go home like that 'cuz I say, nah, I smoked like, now I'm not trying to go home—probably try to throw my nephew or something, try to throw him off the roof.

> One day I told my friend let's go to the roof, the airplane is waiting for us. We could go to Jamaica. She was like 'nah, you bugging, where you at? There ain't no airplane out there.' I was if you go you just stand on the edge you just jump, you jump right in the plane, she said you gonna jump right in to kill yourself. I said I wasn't gonna never smoke it again but I got addicted to it.

Most of the young women (79%, n=19) said that someone in their household drank alcohol or used drugs, which they first noticed at the median age of 11. In 12 cases (63%), the young women indicated that the person using these substances was their mother, which makes sense given that most lived with their mother. The most frequent substance identified was alcohol. Although for some households and household members, substance use was minimal, such as on holidays or other special occasions, others portrayed homes where substance use was a very regular part of everyday life. In these situations it is casy to see that the young women learned early in life that alcohol

and other drugs could be a means for coping with life's stresses, and could be an avenue of escape from physical and emotional pain and distress.

Although she smoked marijuana only occasionally, 15-year-old Lisa used cigarettes regularly to alleviate the stress she felt in the classroom.

> Every time I be in school, like it just be stressin me out. So I would just smoke cigarettes. [And what did that do for you?] It didn't...it didn't really do nothin. It really didn't do nothin, but just like...nothin. I didn't do nothin...I would just sit there.

Michelle's family used alcohol for medicinal purposes, and she first drank when she was seven: "it was for a chest cold, it broke the cold up." She revealed, however, that at about the same age her father gave her a beer, "he didn't give it to me for colds, he just gave it to me to drink," and when she was 13 he was the first to turn her on to smoking marijuana. She then admitted:

> when I got out in the world by myself I tried it. It didn't work for me, I used to try to get real drunk. ...Yeah, but I was an alcoholic. I smoke weed, but that's cuz I seen my father do that. I was hooked on it some...I wasn't hooked on like that, I was just high almost every day.

Although many began their substance use experimentation with peers outside the home, they were already familiar with their household members' behaviors. As Natalie observed:

> I was used to people around me smoking and like my family being out in the room, catch a contact so I just started smoking it. I just wanted to. I felt like I was already smoking it 'cuz I was already in the room where my aunt and uncle were smoking away.

When asked if her mother's and siblings' daily use of alcohol and blunts had any effect on her, Joanne first responded: "No, because it never really bothered me, it never, I never really paid attention to it, 'cuz it wasn't me doing it, when I was that young it wasn't me

doing it so it didn't really bother me." After thinking about her family's substance use as she became older, the 15-year-old was tentative, and also blamed herself:

> Oh yes, somewhat. Because I guess, if you watch somebody use it for long enough you are gonna want to try it and see how it is and, but then again it didn't because if I had listened to everybody who told me that I shouldn't do it—which is everybody, nobody never wanted me to smoke cigarettes and smoke blunts and drink—I would have been fine but I just wanted to do what I wanted to do.

Drug use was also pervasive in the neighborhoods where most of the young women lived prior to being in custody. One young woman (Jill) described a quiet suburban neighborhood where drugs were easily available, but their use was generally hidden.

> It's not like if you walk out on the street you'll see people smoking, like a marijuana cigarette or something. It's just very seldom. If they go to a party or something they'll go out in the field and smoke a [marijuana] cigarette or if you're going to drop acid you don't just go out in the street. [Where does the drug use occur?] Out in fields, or some people's houses. Maybe in the school bathroom once or twice.

For the other respondents, however, drug use was obvious and commonly practiced among adolescents. For example, Kathy exclaimed: "Well, yeah, everybody was doing, every teenager used marijuana and alcohol. That was like normal." Fourteen-year-old Elena spent much of her time with friends smoking and drinking to excess:

> I smoked...this New Year's that just passed, I smoked seriously I smoked like 100 blunts back to back, nonstop. I was, I can't even say. I drank like 6 bottles of Alize, 7 bottles of Moet, 6 bottles of Bacardi I mean I was really outta my mind. That was just New Year's but that's what we do with the gang.

Although substances were used in different contexts, and perhaps on the surface for different reasons, a common theme among the young women was excessive drug use to block or repress a variety of difficult feelings. For example, when she was 14,

Joanne's boyfriend was shot and killed by a jealous male friend of hers. She describes her own drug use and the ritualistic incorporation of alcohol in the burial.

> We all got *ripped* at the funeral. I mean that was the first time I ever really got so drunk I could hardly even walk, I was so high I couldn't even see straight. That was the first time. They have this thing where you tap a 40 {oz. beer} then you dump it over the casket and then they, um, start to put dirt over the grave and then they put, and then they just, you, we stayed there all night, I cried all night, and then that same night I was already ripped and stuff, I was gone, I was like in another world ...and that's when I had acid and the next day I had to go to court for the shooting, cuz I was there, and I mean it was crazy I couldn't even go to court and I was like tripping for weeks.

Alcohol and other substances were also used in a somewhat ritualistic fashion among a gang of girls, of which Elena was "the mother" or gang leader. She explained some of the rules of this group that pertained to drug use—rules to which she had to adhere to and was now enforcing for others.

> if you're in my gang, that first day there you have to smoke weed, you have to sit there and smoke marijuana, even if you choke, you still 'cuz I had to do it and I was really peer-pressured to do it. I was really peer-pressured. They was like smoke this. I was like oh no I don't know how to smoke and I smoked, I was turning blue all through my face. I was really gonna pass out.

Once initiated in this way, members subsequently smoked a set number of blunts in association with gang violence and "stepping up" through the ranks.

> If you succeed on when we did something violent you have to smoke at least 25 blunts so you could move up. We didn't do nothing else, well, oh yeah, we used to drink.

Presented as a celebratory use of drugs, the ritual of smoking heavily after attacking others may also provide a means for alleviating feelings of remorse for violence toward others and to defend against feelings from past traumatic events and experiences.

Indeed, substance use was often particularly associated with violent activities.

When asked directly if anything violent had ever happened because they were using alcohol or drugs, half of the group (n=12) answered affirmatively. The primary substances the respondents were using at the time of the violence were marijuana (n=6), alcohol (n=4) and PCP (n=1)[17]. One 15-year-old (Marcella) who was adjudicated on an assault charge was quite clear about how her drug use influenced violent events in her life. She said "a lot of things" happened because she was using:

> Basically, all my problems that happened is because I was under the influence of drugs. That's when all my bad behaviors really came out. Once, I was on a train, and I would...I had already smoked marijuana. And there was this bum on the train, and just me and my friend, and I burned his hair.

The young women reported becoming involved in physical fights with strangers, friends and intimates when they were using these substances. For example, Kathy admitted that she used "alcohol and weed" regularly and she often got involved in "fistfights, starting with people walking by." Royale described a similar, and very typical, situation when she "bumped" into another adolescent girl when high on marijuana:

> I bumped into this girl and she bumped me back and we just started arguing. Then my friend came around the corner. I got all hyped up, I threw off my coat and we started fighting. This girl was on top of me and at the end of the fight my friend jumped in, so it was two against one.

Afterwards she said she "just got some more weed and got high and just forgot about it."

In addition to fights, Christine said she "did robberies when I was high, um...that's it—and fights, that's it." Generally high on marijuana when she fought, her fights involved others in the neighborhood: "it's not people I knew, like, we wasn't, it was just like, I knew they names but I didn't know them." She gave an example of her robberies and physical violence:

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[17] One response was missing.

> One day me and my friends, we was on the train, and we got high, we was going to the [unintelligible] and we was like, let's go rob somebody and we robbed somebody and one of my friends stabbed her and we beat her up real bad and she was in the hospital.

The young women also described how, because they were using alcohol or drugs, they directed their physical violence at close friends including their boyfriends. One 16 year old Natalie told of being drunk on beer and fighting with her cousin, who was also intoxicated, because "she almost ran into it, the bus almost hit her cause she was walking real slow in the middle of the street." She went on to describe being so high that "I wasn't able to feel it, it didn't seem like we was fighting until like after I had a scratch." On a regular basis, Kathy explained, "me and my baby's father used to get in fights when we were drunk." In a more detailed narrative, Elena described a near fatal incident with the father of her unborn child:

> I used to fight with my boyfriend. I remember one time when I was pregnant with my boyfriend and I was high, he was really getting on my nerves and I just stabbed him all in his chest, threatened to shoot him, threatened to kill him. I had the bullet and I was getting ready to pull the trigger. Oh, my hand was on the trigger. He was like I know you don't want to do this. He was just standing there. I was like alright and I kept pulling but I just dropped it on the floor.

Perhaps conflicted about his love for her, Kathy berateded her boyfriend as "a fool." "I wouldn't stay with nobody who's gonna be stabbing me all up, put no gun to my head."

In sum, the teens in this study relied on avoidant coping mechanisms, specifically, substance use, running away, and less frequently, deliberate self harm. Their prior relationships and experiences, effected how they learned to cope with current stresses and responsibilities. The often horrific traumas already experienced in early childhood, and the minimal support and supervision provided by the adults in their lives, combined with daily problems and stress, seemed too overwhelming and beyond the young women's

ability to directly control. In addition, minimal parental efficacy had jeopardized learning how to effectively address problems. There were few models for them to employ in managing the numerous problems and difficulties, and no guidance in understanding and appreciating the traumas they had already endured. Moreover, the young women were often penalized for their coping strategies, which were considered her personal "bad" behavior, while the problems within the family and community that had caused many of the respondents' difficulties, persisted unabated and without intervention.

The methods the young women used to cope with their circumstances and emotions may have seemed appropriate at the time, but generally placed them at higher risk for arrest as well as revictimization. For example, substance use was often closely associated with other illegal activities, providing access to people and opportunities, particularly in the business of drug dealing. Similarly, running away helped to alleviate (at least temporarily) the stress of being in a difficult family situation but also lead to contacts with the social service agencies and the justice system, as well as other dangers on the street and in the community. The following chapter examines the young women's involvement in property, drug-related, and violent delinquency, focusing on the violent offense for which they were adjudicated and remanded to custody.

CHAPTER EIGHT

ILLEGAL ACTIVITIES AND THE INSTANT OFFENSE

In addition to experiencing numerous traumas in childhood and adhering to a variety of maladaptive coping strategies, each of the young women in this sample had been remanded to custody for a robbery or assault. As this chapter will demonstrate, by the median age of only 15, these adolescents were very much involved in illegal activities, including violence.

Socially unacceptable behaviors may become functional in an attempt to gain parents' attention, and such defiant, disruptive, and often immature behaviors have been found (in males) to escalate into delinquency (Loeber & Le Blanc, 1990). While others have noted a lack of similar findings among girls, Katz (2000) has suggested that may be because serious maltreatment is omitted and there is little consideration given to the context of girls' and women's lives over time. Furthermore, as Hoffmann and Cerbone (1999) found, although stressful life events are variable among adolescents, experiencing a persistent or increasing number of such events over time may lead to an escalation of delinquency. Traumatized children, perceiving others as nontrustworthy and aggressive may then react aggressively towards those others. In this manner, delinquency may serve to regulate the resultant negative emotions and be an adaptive response to aversive environments (Brezina, 1996). Nonviolent, drug-related, and violent illegal activities all may be another form of coping with early childhood traumas. Given the personal histories of loss and victimization among this group of 24 young women, combined with a lack of parental or other adult support, it is likely that their developmental processes of

learning to trust and anticipate being cared for by others, as well as their ability to form stable, secure relationships was disrupted.

For the most part, the young women's offenses were not the simple assaults, nonserious, mutual combat situations with parents, that Acoca and Dedel (1998) found in their study of adolescent female offenders. Several examples are illustrative.

> This girl, she owed me money and I didn't mean to, I really didn't, I didn't mean to hit her but she was talking about my mother and I was not trying to hear it. So I mauled her. I just beat her down. She had to go to the hospital for a slight concussion. No, not a slight concussion, a concussion. She got knocked out and stuff. And she almost died and the Assault 3 turned out to be attempted murder. (Joanne, Assault)

> The girl that we beat up, her friends was trying to beat up my friends so, the next day, we all went up there and we was on the bus and we just started fighting them. (Christine, Assault)

> Alright, first I cut this girl's throat. Like I cut from her left ear all the way to the middle of her throat. She was 14. It all started over ...first, with me and this girl and then this other girl that I cut got involved; because she so-called said she was cousins with the girl that I originally had beef with... She just ended up getting cut. (Rose, Assault)

> I tried to kill my mother. We had an argument over my boyfriend and then she went into bed and I let her fall asleep and then I went into her room and I took a knife with me and then I tried to kill her. My boyfriend lived with me and he and my mother just had an argument then I got into the argument and so she was going to make him leave and I was never see him any more and I didn't want that to happen so I was gonna kill her and then we was going to go away to another state to live with his brother. (Jill, Assault)

This chapter will explore the young women's participation in illegal activities, first by examining their general involvement, and then looking more closely at the instant offense—the offense for which they were most recently remanded to custody. In most cases, the young women made few distinctions between the two, as their daily existence was marked by violence and crime. It is very likely that they could have been

adjudicated for any number of illegal acts, but were caught for the current offense. As they talked about their activities, violence appears embedded in a pattern that includes a variety of other delinquent behaviors. For example, when asked about violent activities she and her friends might have participated in, Royale provided a general mix of delinquent acts: "We hopped cabs. We used to stole from malls, we jumped girls, robbed people's houses. We sold drugs." Many were even uncertain as to what might be considered violent. Jackie's comment was not unusual when asked if friends did violent things together:

> No, not if, if we had, um, - if we don't like nobody, if we don't like nobody and that person try to jump one of us, we gonna jump them – I don't know if you consider that as violence, but I don't think it is.

Overview of Illegal Activities

The young women were asked if they had ever participated in 18 specific serious or moderately serious delinquent activities. In addition to violent offenses, the young women reported numerous property and drug-related crimes. Indeed, while they had been adjudicated for a violent offense, in the year prior to custody in OCFS more reported committing property and drug-related offenses than violent offenses. In contrast with adolescent girls in the general population, however, this group was much more likely to be engaged in violent behaviors. For example, self reports of adolescent females in grades 9-12 (Kann, et al., 1995) and aged 14-17 (Adams, Schoenborn, Moss, Warren, & Kann, 1995) indicate that approximately a third (32% and 34%, respectively) had been involved in a physical fight in the last year. As Table 8.1 shows, of the young women in this study, in the year prior to custody: 82% had hit someone with the idea of hurting, and 56% had attacked someone with the idea of seriously hurting or killing them.

Table 8.1
Illegal Activities
(N= 24)

	Ever Participated		Earliest Median Age	Prior Year Participation	
Violent Offenses	**n**	**%**		**n**	**%**
Hit to hurt	22	92	12	19	82*
Throw objects at someone	18	75	11	14	58
Attack to hurt or kill	16	67	12	13	56*
Use weapon/force to rob	10	42	13	8	33
Snatched purse/pickpocket	9	38	13	8	33
Set fire to property	9	38	13	5	21
Fondled someone	5	21	13	5	21
Killed someone	1	4	----	----	---
Property Offenses					
Damage/destroyed property	19	79	12	19	79
Prank/obscene phone calls	19	79	11	16	66
Stole money/things $5-$100	13	54	12	11	46
Bought/sold/held stolen goods	13	54	13	9	38
Joyriding	13	54	14	12	50
Stole money/things $100+	12	50	13	10	42
Wrote bad checks/used slugs	3	13	13	3	13
Drug Trafficking	16	67	12	15	62

* 23 cases

Table 8.1 indicates the number and percentage who had *ever* participated in the listed violent, property, and drug-related offenses, as well as those who had participated in such activities in the year preceding OCFS residency. The median earliest age of participation is indicated, as is the median frequency of involvement in the last year.[18] The young women's involvement remained fairly consistent over time: the number of juveniles who had ever participated in any particular activity was higher than the number involved in the prior year, but the difference was minimal. The median earliest age of participation in illegal activities was 12 or 13 years for all offenses, with the exception of making prank phone calls and throwing objects such as rocks and bottles at someone (age 11) and joyriding (age 14). Although none of the subjects were adjudicated for murder or manslaughter, one young woman admitted to participating in a gang-related killing at the age of 11. These ages indicate that the young women report participating in illegal activities a number of years after most of had experienced losses and victimizations (see Chapter Four, Table 4.2).

In addition to hitting and attacking others as noted above, Table 8.1 shows that in the year prior to custody, 58% (n=14) had thrown objects such as rocks and bottles at someone, and a third (n=7) had each used a weapon or force to rob someone, or had snatched someone's purse or wallet. Additional violent offenses included purposely setting fire to a house, building, car or other property (21%, n=5); fondling someone else, exposing oneself, or showing pornography (21%, n=5); and killing someone (4%). In terms of property offenses, 79% (n=19) had damaged or destroyed property; 46% (n=11) had stolen money or goods worth between $5 and $100 and 42% (n=10) stolen

[18] Frequency response categories were: 0 = Never; 1 = Once; 2 = A few times; 3 = About once a month; 4 = About once a week; 5 = About once a day.

money or goods worth $100 or more. Half (n=12) had gone joyriding in a motor vehicle that did not belong to them, and 38% (n=9) had bought, sold or held stolen goods. Three (13%) respondents reported writing a bad check or using a slug in the year prior to custody. Sixty-two percent of these young women (n=15) were involved in some aspect of drug trafficking.

In a separate set of questions about their gun use, 10 of the young women (42%) said they had used or had owned a gun, and seven (29%) said they had done both. Eleven (46%) had been threatened by someone with a gun and 8 (33%) had threatened someone else. Only one respondent who owned or had used a gun had not been threatened herself. Although Gina did not use a gun herself, several of her female friends did, which frightened her. Describing her activities with this group of friends, she said:

> I fought a lot. Sometimes I was quiet 'cuz...they, they, they all had guns. I was, I was scared, so whenever they go to do something to the girl, I'd just sit back and watch, but sometimes I fight with my fist, more than my hands, or more than a weapon. I'd just fight – sometimes I fought.

Paula said guns were easily available in their neighborhoods, and were often incorporated into games challenging an adolescent's toughness. She once threatened to shoot a 11-year-old neighborhood boy after he dared her to a game of Russian roulette:

> He dared me shoot myself in the head with a gun, so I was like gimme it. He gave it to me. I was like now I dare, I shoot you in the head, you know. And he was like go 'head. [She asked] Where the bullet at, right? He acted like he put I [in], I thought he did but he didn't. He rolled it and everything and I took it. He got on the step I was like now I dare--- I shoot you! I ain't gonna shoot me ...I said I'll shoot you in the head with it. He was like stop playing, stop playing. ...He was like I ain't put no bullet in it just in case you did try.

The following sections examine in greater detail the young women's narratives pertaining to sexual offenses, property offenses, and drug trafficking, in order to provide a better

understanding of these activities. To varying degrees, violence was a part of each type of offense.

Sexual Offenses

The number of young women reporting involvement in sexual offenses is small, and thus their actions are analyzed not because of the prevalence, but because they appear to be "differently" involved than males. Three questions designed to capture data on sexual offending were used in the original LAVIDA study with both male and female juveniles. None of the 24 young women reported ever having had or tried to have sexual relations with someone against their will, or physically hurting or threatening to hurt someone to induce them have sex. Indeed, one respondent declared the latter "big bully shit." Five young women did, however, answer affirmatively when asked if they had ever fondled someone, exposed themselves, or shown pornography. When the young women's narratives were examined, the dynamics of what occurred appear very different from what is generally assumed when discussing sexual assault or aggression. As Debold, Brown, Weseen and Brookins (1999, p. 187) observe:

> The realization that their bodies are a site of temptation and conquest provides many girls with a profound sense of anxiety for their own safety and some girls, in addition, with an illusory sense of power that too often backfires.

Of the five who said they had fondled another person, Alona deliberately used her sexual attractiveness to victimize boys. Fondling was a type of sting:

> Suppose my people don't like you and you like me. I saw you and was like, 'what's up baby?' and start feeling up on you. When you get into it, my people just come and beat you up.

When asked directly about sexual offenses, Gina admitted to fondling, stating only that she might have touched "somebody's butt" once. She later described sexually threatening boys as part of her gang activities:

> They threatened boys. ...What's that girl, Lorena Bobbitt? ...I'd go out to a boy who like liked me a little bit, or just some boy, and we be like, come on, you wanna go to my house – my mother ain't home and they'd be like yeah, we go in your house, and then they go and as soon as you get 'em in there, you lock the door and then you pull down their pants and everything, and you be like, yeah, remember you said da da da da da... and he was like no I didn't say that, I didn't say that. She was like why you screaming, like a little girl now and then they threatened to cut off... I just sat back and laughed so... You know, them knives, they got the little ones and then the bigger ones? Yeah. Like, you know how them people that go real fast [chef's chopping)] that's what she had.

Similar to Miller's (1998) description of a tactic of some female robbers, both Alona and Gina manipulated stereotypical perceptions of women to their advantage, e.g. setting up males by appearing sexually available.

Although not acting violently, another young woman indicated that by age 13 she had learned to use her body to gain some power over her 15-year-old boyfriend. She said she liked to taunt him by dressing in a tank top and men's boxer shorts and touching him. She would "wear what I want to wear," despite his demand "to put clothes on":

> he used to really get excited and then when it comes to the point for me to do something I'll be like, no. He be like, you're teasing me, man. I used to be like, I know. .

If he refused her kisses, "I would do it anyway. I would just kiss him and make him know who is boss. He understand." Two other young women said their fondling was part of sexual activity with a boyfriend, but they experienced different degrees of control. Fifteen-year-old Joanne said she first became sexually involved when she was 10 and her "boyfriend" was 16. Although they were "together" for four years and he reportedly wanted to marry her, this young woman found his attentions to be overwhelming: "I

didn't want nobody to feel that way about me. It made me feel like a girl.". In a very different tone, 14-year-old Jill expressed a great deal of shame, claiming she was "being stupid" when she acquiesced to her 20 year old boyfriend's request "to see my body" and to have sex with him.

Of the five, the latter two had experienced sexual abuse as a child: Joanne had witnessed the nightly and very violent sexual abuse of her sister by her stepfather, and by the time she was eight years old, Jill had been sexually abused several times by an acquaintance and a family member. As others have noted, a sexual abuse history is significantly correlated with precocious sexual activity and being used sexually (Friedrich, 2002; Browne & Finkelhor, 1986). Thus, fondling and physical exposure in the contexts described here may be less of a delinquent nature on the part of the young women than a struggle for power between older males and younger females. In at least four of these cases, the male was attracted to and approached the female, although with different outcomes. Clearly, the situations are quite different from those where a male initiates what is perceived as menacing and threatening behaviors toward a female who is not interested or attracted.

Some of the young women who had been sexually abused as children described themselves as bad, and though they did not report sexual acting out, did engage in delinquent activities. Assuming a stigmatized identity was offered as a type of justification for delinquent activities, which in turn assuaged the sense of badness and other uncomfortable feelings. This conflation is evident in Michelle's response when asked to describe her family life:

> I was kinda bad when I was little, but it was because I didn't have what I wanted at the time. So, I started fighting in school, having problems in school and stealing and stuff.

Alternately raised by her strict, religious grandmother, her frequently absent mother, and her sexually abusive father, Michelle became increasingly involved in drugs and violence. She explained that as she grew older, she constantly struggled with feelings of shame and anger and the urge to act: "I'm still trying to be religious, but sometime I get out of control; not out of control, but sometimes I go beat people up or get loose lips."

Property Offenses

As indicated in Table 8.1, the young women were involved in a variety of property offenses. Sometimes even petty theft offered a thrill, especially when, as was often the case in these respondents' neighborhoods, it became entwined in violence. Paula describes escaping a store owner's gunfire as fun and exciting, perhaps a distraction from a practically nonexistent family life she portrayed as "hell."

> It was my 14th birthday...I was at a club, right? Went out the thing and stole a beer ... I went there and just ran with it. I hope to God those was blanks, it was either blanks or he just really did not want to shoot me, cuz I was running and he was shooting behind me and I was screaming. I was like ahh! But I wouldn't let go of the thing or drop it or nothing. You know, you scared, you like ahh! I'm not gonna stop now. ...The club is like 2 doors down from the store! (laughing) And you know, normally, other people would take the other way, but nooo, I got on a car like directly in front of the store and you know, just sat there.

Many talked about robberies in the context of drug sales, while others seemed to lump their activities into one category. Gayle stated that:

> we used to rob people and like, how can I say it? Throw rocks and bats at the cars and stuff while they runnin', while the drivin' back and forth. We used to take taxis and ride, like get to our place and run out without paying, without paying for it.

Kathy described stealing guns with much excitement:

> The area where we hung out - there was a gun shop and we'd rob

> the gun shop maybe like once every six months....Because the trucks used to come by, they'd like carjack the trucks - it was like a movie. It was like unbelievable to me.

In these situations, the likelihood of getting caught was high, which seemed to add to the thrill and to revitalize otherwise stressful and often dreary lives. Placing themselves in the way of danger, these young women often found an intrinsic "sense of recklessness and excitement" (Koroki & Chesney-Lind, 1985, p. 27) in "bad" behaviors, which was enhanced by escaping capture by the many authorities.

Drug Trafficking

The young women also were very much involved in drug trafficking, an activity that also placed them in dangerous situations. As indicated in Table 8.1, over two thirds (67%, n=16) of the young women reported that they had been involved in some aspect of drug trafficking at some point in their lives, beginning at the median age of 12. Of these respondents all but one remained active in the year prior to residing in OCFS. Although some became involved through male recruitment and the suggestion of romance ("this boy was like, what's your name? You look cute, whatever, here's my number, call me"), for others dealing was primarily about the money and the goods that money could buy. For example, Royale was straightforward about why she sold cocaine:

> One day I wanted to buy a pair of sneakers that I saw in TV and I didn't have enough to pay for it and my cousin gave me some drugs to sell and he said this will get you it quick. And I did and I liked it cuz I got money real quick. So I can bought my own stuff, instead of buying my sneakers I bought my own stuff [drugs] and doubled my money and got more than one pair of sneakers!

A simple explanation for selling crack cocaine was because: "you make a living that way."

Although the money was appealing, the drug trade could be very dangerous. Nevertheless, as Kathy noted, substance use, drug sales and violence were simply the norm for many of the young women

> we used to get together and go to the movies sometimes but mainly it was selling drugs and robberies. Just like sometimes we would have fun, sit on the stoop and talk all night. It's like you know, we would be drinking but...

Because of the danger, however, girls often purposively used gender in their drug dealing activities, manipulating their identity to protect themselves on the streets, as well as to entice buyers. One 16-year-old who sold crack with her boyfriend often made her connections in a restaurant, dressed like a young man. Paula did this for protection from both other youths and from the police.

> [I'd] go inside a Chinese restaurant, buy a egg roll or something and I was dressing like a boy just in case I did get caught, -- store mean more time-- 'cuz DOT cop cannot search me. Right? All I gotta do is, like, no sorry, but I'm a female, you can't do that. You know, then, they couldn't search me. I would look just like a guy.

This tactic could backfire when the façade was so convincing that other girls flirted with her:

> I be getting upset cuz one time a girl tried to talk to me. I got upset. Oh, man! Then I started act, like I know they gay and they thought I was gay so I just left it like that. She thought I was a faggot cuz I looked like a boy and I also started getting upset. They didn't bother to ask, you know.

Fourteen-year-old Elena at first assumed an exaggerated femininity in order to improve drug sales.

> people are always talking about they make more money than me and I would sit there and I would be like take this block and I'll take that block and I swear to god I would dress *so* nice and they would see how many guys would come to me, how many would come and they be like oh yeah, Shorty, I'll be back, let me go get some more...come right back to me.

Nevertheless, she was aware of the increased danger street dealing held for young women, and switched to a tough masculine image, while continuing to rely on her older, male "manager," to stay within a short distance in case she needed help.

> He makes sure that I'm safe and secure and he will—I remember one time he was like, I'm getting you a bodyguard, that's it. Cuz guys used to try to gype me and stuff, ...and now I act real tough and I'll act like a guy. He don't even like me dressing all nice and stuff like that.

Just as the young women learned various aspects of drug trafficking—looking out, cutting and packaging the product, selling—they also were trained in the use of violence. For example, when Gina "was just learning" the trade she "was stupid" and allowed another girl to walk away without paying. She quickly learned from "this man I was working for" that she could not afford to let the incident pass. Her dealer told her to wait, find the girl's residence, and then "solve" the problem with violence:

> We went to her building and he went upstairs and was like 'open up, open up' and she opened it and he just hit her in the head with a bottle and her boyfriend just laid there watching TV and then we left. He hit her with the bottle and she fell and we left and her boyfriend didn't do nothing.

Similarly, Joanne noted that in the trade, violence was the cost of not paying:

> when I was selling, me, my cousin and a friend of mine beat this crackhead up so bad because she wouldn't pay us and she was sending people that we never seen before to our house and stuff, and we just beat her so bad, she almost... She went to the hospital...

Violent Activities

For these young women who had all suffered numerous experiences of loss and victimization, the violence involved in many of their delinquent activities might be seen as means of rising above the past pain, if only temporarily. Traumatized children, whose

"internal working model" of relationships is one of distrust and hostility, often perceiving others as aggressive and may react aggressively toward others first. In this way, violence may serve to regulate the resultant negative emotions and be an adaptive response to what is perceived as an aversive environment (Brezina, 1996). Rather than feeling victimized once again, such involvement in violence often enabled the young women to feel as if they were in a position of power. As Royale claimed, she "got heart" from engaging in violence with her gang: "I can do a lot of things and don't regret it. Like before I joined that group I was, I wouldn't cut nobody. I was scared, but then when I joined it, I could cut people and it didn't bother me." Not surprisingly, the young women were involved in a range of violent activities in the community. In addition to specifying what they did (types of violence, use of weapons), and with whom, the young women provided some of their reasons for behaving violently.

For example, as one 14-year-old explained, physical aggression toward others relieved distress: I used to throw bottles when I used to be bored, upset." For Maria and her friends, fighting also was a means for consolidating friendships and solidifying the boundaries between the group and outsiders.

> And one thing about GT Mob, they will have a fight against each other –never shoot each other. They like-- smack each other , but next minute....I could be out in a fight with one of the girls, pow, pow, whatever, I could be having a fight with them, but if another girl try to come in, it'd be like what? I won't be like yo, get her. We'd be like yo, what's this? Even though we go against each other, we still try to play with her, we'll still go against her. That's the way, the guys, the people in my neighborhood be like, yo I like that cuz you all can fight, you all can fight each other but if somebody come try mess with you all, you always protect each other and that's true.

Fighting also maintained borders and established respect, often through fear of retaliation. As Paula explained:

> It's like, you be wanting people to be scared of you and then they be like, girl, get outta here, all of a sudden, you wanna fight? That's just – that's how – people be wanting to be – other people scared of them. ... They would swear to god I'm giving them the evil eye. Any you know, it's just that they come in my face...I'm not one to really walk away from a fight but I'm gonna give you a chance to just get away from me. ... And if it don't work no other way, I gotta, I gotta fight you

Gina also noted the importance of scaring others and being in a position of power:

> They'll like scare people with them [guns] – who they don't like, the boys will go down, sometimes the girls, but mostly boys. It's like yeah, you been messing with my girl, you made me girl do this to you, this and this and they'll scare 'em – just wanna hear 'em say OK, you're the daddy and they'll scare people.

Sometimes a certain look was enough to establish who was "in charge," at least on that day in that neighborhood. Michelle recalled how a fight started with another neighborhood girl:

> She was on my block, I was walking and she was looking at me. I was like what's she looking at? I didn't say it to her, but I was looking at her. I though she was going to look at me and look away, cuz I was gonna look away. She kept on looking, so we followed each others eyes, she walk this way and I way this way. I was like... and she was like what the fuck you looking at. I was like you was looking at me.

The Instant Offense: Robberies and Assaults

An examination of the "instant offense"– the most recent robbery and assault offenses for which each girl was adjudicated, reveal similar themes. Interviewers introduced the topic of the instant offense stating: "The records show that you are here because of a violent event. Please tell me what you did that bought you here." If the young women had difficulty beginning their story, interviewers prompted them to "tell me what happened." Nineteen (79%) of the young women were adjudicated for an assault and five (21%) were adjudicated for a robbery.[19] These official labels, however,

[19] The young women's instant offenses are based on the official OCFS record data (5 robberies, 20%) and 19 assaults, 80%). The 19 assaults included nine "Assault" offenses eight "Assault 3" offenses (assault

have little significance in terms of "type" of offender: most of the young women described their involvement in a range of illegal activities, and did not appear to "specialize." While the juvenile justice system, researchers, and the general public classify violence by offense, an examination of the context of the offense provides a more complete understanding of what occurred.

The instant offense was not necessarily a unique event in the participants' lives, but often reflected a general pattern of activities in which they were involved. [20] Spontaneously throughout the interview, as well as in response to specific questions about illegal activities, the young women spoke of being involved in a variety of delinquent activities, many of which apparently were not reported to law enforcement agencies. For some respondents, the pattern of delinquency was so common and familiar that they had some difficulty distinguishing the specific charge that had brought them to OCFS; this was particularly true among those who had run away many times from less secure facilities operated by social services and thus were moved up to the state juvenile justice system.[21] There were others, however, who though they may have been involved in status offenses or minor illegal activities, were placed in OCFS because of a

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with intent to cause physical injury; causes such injury to such person or a third person; or recklessly causes physical injury; or with criminal negligence causes physical injury to another by means of a deadly weapon); one "Reckless Endangerment" offense (under circumstances evincing a depraved indifference to human life, recklessly engages in conduct which creates grave risk of death to another); and one "Menacing 2" offense (intentionally places or attempts to place another in reasonable fear of physical injury, serious physical injury or death by displaying deadly weapon or firearm; or stalks; or violates order of protection).

[20] Most of the young women had engaged in both robberies and assaults and at the time of the interview, were not always certain as to why they were in custody. When we asked the young women about the instant offense, we asked that they speak as best they could to the official offense data that OCFS provided.

[21] One respondent described an assault but denied any involvement (888) and another was unable to provide many details because of her uncertainty of the specific offense for which she was adjudicated and remanded to custody, though she thought it was for arson. These cases were included in the analyses of the instant offense but are missing some data.

significantly more serious offense. Thus, these respondents were very clear about the particular offense that brought them to OCFS.

To explore the situational context of these offenses and to better understand how these young women made sense of their actions, key variables were examined, including the motivations and planning involved, the location of the event, the use of any weapons, and the role of any substances. I was especially interested in the roles in which the young women cast themselves, the circumstances of and just prior to the "event," and any references to previous traumas. In addition, I reviewed the interactional aspects, including the victim-offender relationship and the involvement of accomplices or any other persons. The motive, circumstance, the young women's role, and the involvement of drugs or alcohol were excerpted from their narrative accounts of the instant offense. Other variables that characterized the event (location, method, victim-offender relationship, victim age and gender, victim precipitation, victim race or ethnicity, others present) were obtained primarily from direct questions such as "where did the incident take place?" The discussion below focuses on answers to these questions and are categorized as follows: motive, method, victim characteristics, involvement of others, drug or alcohol involvement, and location.

Motive.

Analyses of the narrative of the event revealed five motivation categories emerged that encompassed 23 cases[22]: demanding respect; enacting retaliation/revenge; defending self or others; saving face/ peer pressure; and getting money or goods.

[22] The 24th respondent, charged with assault, said she was a passerby and could not offer information on a motive.

Demanding respect was the most common motive. The heightened need and desire for respect in everyday interactions is indicative of what others have found among male street youth (Anderson, 1999; see also Short, 1998). Lacking the resources for achievement in conventional arenas, such youth often feel they must be ever vigilant and ready to respond with violence to any indication of being "dissed." Respect becomes a zero-sum game in which "everyone competes to get what he can of the little that is available" (Anderson, 1999, p. 165). In the current study, eight young women claimed that they or someone they were associated with was disrespected by the victim or, as in the following assault case, the offender explicitly demanding that others demonstrate the appropriate respect:

> We was walking on some block...going to the train station. This lady, she was walking by, so we was like, spread out, she got to say 'excuse me' to get by....So we spreaded out and the lady had bumped me. I turned around and was like 'what you doing?' She was drunk and she came out of her face and was like 'you black bitch'. So, I looked at her and I just swung on her. Adele.

Another assault case began as a drug transaction in which the respondent was trying to collect money owed from the sale of cocaine, but quickly became violent when the subject was disrespectful of the subject's mother:

> This girl owed me money but she was talking about my mother and I was trying not to hear it. So I mauled her. I just beat her down....She was like 'your mother did this this and this with this this this and this person. The ho [whore] did this this and this... She got into my personal issues and if it becomes personal—she's not getting up. .

Paula was enraged and attacked a man because first he referred to her friend's drug-abusing mother (even though he didn't know that she was) and then racially insulted her:

> This man was in his front yard and Lovely ask him for a dollar and he said go ask your mother for a dollar. I was like what did you say? He was like you heard me; I was like you don't speak to nobody like that. He just calling us all different

> types of black this, that and a third. ...He's like go ask your mother for a dollar; her mother is a crack head. .... I knew that and I know he didn't know that but still how you just gonna come out and say that. Because that's disrespectful.

Enacting retaliation or revenge was also a common motive. Interestingly, two young women adjudicated for robbery were motivated by retaliation or revenge, rather than for money or goods. One was of a group home, indicating perhaps, Alona's resistance to the authority of the facility and its staff:

> I was living in a group home in Queens and they kicked me out. So I went to a group home in Brooklyn. I got upset and told them I was going to get them back cuz I didn't want to move so me and [accomplices' name] we robbed the group home. I told them I ain't wanna go to Brooklyn. I told them and they didn't wanna listen to me.

In the course of the robbery, however, Alona beat up a staff person who happened to be in the office:

> She scared the shit out of us all. We had went upstairs and she was talking on the phone, but I didn't see her cuz I had this thing on my face. So she turned around and I screamed and then she screamed; and we then just like beat her up.

Although Donna was charged for a robbery and did admit to taking another girl's earrings by force (used a screwdriver as a threat), the motivation was because her sister had had problems and had subsequently fought Donna's victim:

> So, we was walking down Broadway, so I saw them and I went across the street with my friend, sister, and my cousin. So, we went up to their face and was like you got beef with my sister? She was like nah, we fought and it's over. I said shut up bitch ...I'm ready to fight that ass again. I'll bust that ass, she's talking about it was a tie; it was not no tie. So, we was gonna fight.

Sounding similar to these robberies was the following assault case in which Lisa's rage at an absent mother was directed toward the children she was babysitting.

> I was baby sitting somebody's kids, ...then one day she went out, and she didn't come back for a whole weekend, so, me and my sister got mad. So we got, um...turned on the hot water, we put her kids hands under the hot water, cause it wasn't like for five minutes, it was like...We had burnt their hands. 'Cause I was mad that she didn't, she didn't even, she didn't even come in, she didn't even call.

In the only case that appeared to have been instigated by a young man, when Jill's mother threatened to kick him out of their home, the 14-year-old retaliated by attempting to cut her mother's throat.

> I didn't really want to kill her but I didn't want to never see my boyfriend again. So I was very confused but I didn't know what to do....At first I walked into the room but I made too much noise so then I got down on my knees... I thought I wasn't going to do it so I came back out of the room... and then I crawled back into the room.... I got down on my knees and I looked up at her neck and I just, did it without thinking.

Defending the self or others was the motive for three assaults. Although Marcella intended to rob one male acquaintance, she ended up stabbing another young man who had arrived in the home unexpectedly and who proceeded to get into an argument with the first male.

> all I know is these two guys are arguing with each other and my friend Gloria[23], that her name, comes between them and she's trying to stop them from fighting or whatever and the guy pushes her on the floor. And so that guy pushes her on the floor and I go to help her up and instead...she passes me a knife. So I turn around and I'm face to face with the guy who pushed her on the floor. And I push him and I tell [him] reach the knife and then he steps back in my face and I stabbed him and I ran.

In another case, Maria felt she was was defending herself from a "sneak" move and a probation officer's restraints:

> I called my social worker (name) and she was like are you alright, are you alright? She was like, come down to my building, I want to speak to you for a minute. ...She was like I left your papers over at the other building, can we go over there and get 'em? I was like alright, so I went over there and then she put me in a

[23] A pseudonym.

> room and she left, she closed the door and then five minutes later, she came back with like these 2 or 3 guys and they sat down on the table by me and they was like we have a warrant out for your arrest. For running away. ... They was like you're gonna have to go to Tryon [OCFS secure facility]. And then, I tried, I said I ain't going nowhere and I tried to get up and the man stood up and I kneed him in his genitals whatever and then, the other guy went to go restrain me and then I hit somebody and I scratched somebody and I bit somebody and then they just, they restrained me.

Two cases were similar to demanding respect but more accurately reflect saving face or peer pressure. The situation is effected by the "amping up" of the "audience" and there is frequently an element of entertainment. Jackie described her situation as follows:

> ...I didn't feel like fighting. When I look nice and stuff I definitely don't feel like fighting somebody. ...When I came on the street, all my boy cousins and them was on the streets already. It was a lot of people--the street was packed, man. ...I was the best fighter out of half the girls on my street. I'm the smallest, the shortest and the youngest but I can fight. She thought she could beat me cuz she was stronger..we was just fighting to see who can fight, that's what they wanted to see. They told her I better not back up from her, and I wasn't gonna back up from her so her and me fought. They thought she could beat me, everybody thought she could beat me in fighting but I beat her. ....The fight was really about who could beat whoever ....that's what they all really wanted to see, who was the best fighter.

In the other case, Royale was in a public place when another young women who had told others that she had previously beaten up Royale walked past.

> I always wanted to fight her, cause she used to tell everybody that she beat me up. I did not like that. So one time I was out, downtown eating pizza, and this girl I knew she walked past me and bumped into me, ... and she said you shouldn't be in my way. I was like you said this and this and she was like no no! And then she started walking away from me and I say don't walk away from me and I pulled her and she swung at me but I swung at her and we was fighting. We was fighting in front of the pizza place. Then my friend just jumped in. We was fighting. And me and my friend we were beating her up.

Interestingly, only two of the five robberies were motivated by pecuniary goals. Although Diane claimed she was only a bystander, the girlfriends she was with were specific in their intent: "they need some cash, some money, whatever, so they's talking

about catching a pocket. Rob somebody for their cash." The other young woman (Kathy) who was involved in a carjacking ring claimed: "It was just the way we grew up—we couldn't make money on our own." Thus, in these two cases robbery was a quick solution to a lack of money.

Method.

An equal number of young women primarily used either a cutting instrument such as a boxcutter or knife (n=9, 38%) or their own body, specifically fists, feet and teeth (n=9, 38%). Explaining why a boxcutter might be used, Elena was pragmatic:

> Like say if I'm 5'4" if a girl was like 6'2" and I can't really reach her to fight her and she just constantly punching me in my face and I'm hitting her but it's not working, I would just pull out a blade and just stab her in her side or something like that so she'll come down.

Three of the participants (13%) said that in the course of the instant offense they used a blunt object, such as a pipe. One of these young women who was adjudicated for a robbery threatened her victim with a screwdriver but did not use it. In one case, the "weapon" was hot bath water, with which the young woman burned a child's hand. Several said they physically fought an opponent, but also used a weapon. For example, one young woman carried a gun and did at one point "smack" a woman with it, but that she first punched and slapped her. A gun was used in one other case, where the respondent's boyfriend held a gun to the head of a driver in the course of a carjacking.

Victim characteristics.

Victims were nearly equally as likely to be children under the age of 18 (n=11) as adults (n=12), and 71% of all victims were female (n=17). At the median age of 15, these young women were still very much enmeshed in a female universe, hanging out with

other girls, generally, and perhaps attacking those who were deemed less threatening, or less likely to prove difficult to beat. All of the robbery victims were strangers to the young women, as were all but three of the assault victims (two were friends and one was a family member). Although many of the assault offenders did not "know" their victims, they were not complete strangers either—oftentimes they were familiar to them as schoolmates or neighborhood residents. Typical was (1081's) assessment: No relation, she was my cousin's old girl friend." Several others indicated a sharp delineation between themselves and "the other," referring to their victim as "Nothing, she was nothing," or "More or less a stranger...she was, to me she could have been almost nothing."

Planning and the involvement of others.

Some of the young women planned basic tactics when engaged in a street fight. Gayle stated: "we used to get together and bring our weapons and we would say, like, who will do what or who wants to do what, and once we see the person we'll just go after them," and in a rare case of organization, Elena described how, after given orders to kill another girl, the gang members "had to practice shooting and stuff like that. We had to set it up. We was writing down, jotting down on a piece of paper who gonna set it off, who gonna do this. Who gonna do that." In Jill's case, her boyfriend helped to plan her attack after he had argued with the mother: "he's the one who gave me the idea. He told me to cut her jugular vein and my mom had a bunch of money in the back of her trunk and we would take the car and go to Colorado."

The narrative analyses of the instant offenses indicated that only seven of the offenses were planned, and even these involved minimal planning that was subject to

changing conditions. Similar to Baskin and Sommers' findings (1993), however, the young women in this study indicated that though unplanned, most offenses were not 'out of the blue,' irrational and purely emotional reactions. Frequently they represented a rational response to an escalating problem or history of conflict with the victim.

Much delinquent activity generally involves others, and among these cases 17 (71%) of the young women were with friends. Contradicting the stereotype of female offenders acting in concert with males, however, when the young women acted with others, those others were typically female. In one case a young woman and a girl friend committed a robbery and their male friend drove the get-away car. Finally, a carjacking case included one other female and two males. In this case, the females backed up the males who approached the targeted car and held the occupants at gun point. Although few males were directly involved in any of the offenses, they were occasionally mentioned as instigators, and frequently mentioned as part of an "audience"—generally peers and often males, who are described as "amping it up" or "egging" the young women to participate. In two cases of these cases, observers actually jumped into the fight.

Drug or alcohol involvement.

Less than half (n=11, 45%) of the 24 young women indicated that drugs or alcohol were involved in any way, whether on their part, the victim, others present, or the situational context. Of these, eight said they were high or drunk at the time of the offense. As 16-year-old Gayle explained, "I just finished smokin' marijuana. I think, I guess I wasn't thinkin' right. It's like whatever came to my mind, I did it." In one of these cases, not only was Maria drunk, but so were her codefendant and victim: "she was

drunk and I was kinda drunk too so I was like yo, word, and the lady was drunk. She was over there talking about-she was about falling and stuff." One assault occurred in the context of the drug trade whereby the victim owed money for drugs. Another young woman, Diane, who said she was with a group of friends but didn't do anything, suggested that the money gained in a robbery might have been used to buy marijuana: "Yes and No. 'Cuz it could it been for that or money for other things too. But that would be probably one of the products it was for though, yeah." Finally, Adele indicated that the woman she assaulted "was drunk and she came out of her face," insulting her and her friends.

Location.

Most of the violent events occurred out of doors, usually in a public area such as a street, park, or a city bus or subway (n=15) as compared to indoors (n=8). Unlike the stereotypical scenario of girls engaging in home-based violence, clearly these young women were familiar with the streets and engaged in violence there. Typical renditions of events that occurred in public began with "We was walking on some block, I don't know, we going to the train station." The indoor locations included group homes where the offenders were living, private residences, and in one case, the office of a probation officer. Four of the five robberies occurred in a public space, as did 11 of the 18 assaults.

Preventing the event.

The young women were asked to reflect on the event that brought them into OCFS custody and what they thought could have prevented it from happening. Nineteen responded and of these, 10 believed that they could "have prevented the whole thing" if they had avoided the situation. This included eight who considered physically avoiding

or removing themselves from the scene, suggesting that they should have gone "straight home from school," "stayed at my mother's house," or "just moved to another seat." Although Sherry insisted she was only a bystander to an assault on a teen age boy, she realized that if she had not skipped school that day she would have avoided even witnessing the attack and the beginning of a series of events:

> If I woulda stayed in school. Then, if I wouldn't have got suspended at all and been goin' to probation like I was suppose to, and probably pickin' better peers to hang around. Spendin' useful time doin' something.'

Two others thought that if they had avoided a verbal confrontation with the other person, but instead had "let it go," the incident would not have escalated. Royale realized she could have ignored the girl she fought: "when she bumped me I could have just kept on doing what I was doing." In another situation the young woman Jill argued with and was resistant to her mother's demand that her boyfriend move out of their home. In the other, Michelle chastised a male friend for using derogatory terms for females.

> He came to me and was like 'that fucking bitch.' We was cool and everything, but I thought he was talking to me. I said ... you're talking to me, you're calling me a fucking bitch? He said am I talking to you, did I say your name, why would I sit up here and call you a fucking bitch? I was like 'cuz I'm the only girl in here, why must you call a girl a "B" [bitch], then after that I was like you better not be talking to me.

Her confrontation angered him and he punched her. She blamed herself for the incident, claiming that if she "didn't say nothing" to the boy she could have prevented the fight.

Three respondents suggested that if they had not been high or using drugs, the event probably would not have occurred. While Valerie spoke about her drug use as if marijuana had its own agency ("It's the weed that made me stay out late. And it stopped me from going to school, too"), Maria divided blame between her drinking and the victim's actions: "I would have, if we wouldn't have been drunk and she had left us

alone." When asked how her violent offense (robbery) might have been prevented, Elena seemed to blame her drug use for getting caught: "if I wasn't high I wouldn't have got in trouble." This was similar to the reasoning of Lauren: "Well, if I wouldn't have beat her up so hard...I wouldn't be here" and Paula who, after first saying she could have prevented the incident if she had gone home, added "if I would have just fought with my fists and not fought her with the box cutter."

Three respondents felt there was nothing they or anyone else could have done to prevent the violent incident. Explaining that "no matter where I go they fight" Natalie didn't think there was a way to avert her own offense or that of others in her neighborhood. An accessory to a robbery, Diane stated that her friend had "already had her mind made up so she going to do what she had to do....when she had her mind made up you can't change it."

Finally, Lisa placed blame squarely with the mother of the children she was babysitting, stating that she would not have scalded the child's hand "probably if the mother woulda came home on time." Only Rose thought talking things out may have prevented an assault: "just me, like, talking to the girl instead of fighting with her."

In addition to speaking about how their violence might be prevented, the young women described their emotional responses. Some felt bad about themselves and vowed to change, while others specifically noted their concern for others and the harm they inflicted on them. Sixteen-year-old Paula reflected on her past:

> I was almost turning 15 and I was in a foster home... I was thinking that when I was like 12, so I was like what I got to show for this? I been stabbed, sliced, shot and stitched up. I don't need this no more. No wonder they keep telling me I'm gonna be dead before 19. I don't need ya, need this no more, right.

Likewise, Michelle realized the futility of her actions: "there's nothing to show for what I did. I don't have no education and some of my brain cell are probably gone." Regretting her attempt to kill her mother, Jill was puzzled by her own actions:

> I just have a hard time talking about what I did. Sometimes I look at it and I think, cuz, like no one in my community or in my home is violent but I used to be a very violent person but I never thought I could get to the point where I could actually try to take someone's life.

Several others, including Royale, also expressed remorse, and seemingly surprised at the consequences of their violence:

> I couldn't believe that I did that to her face. [why?] cuz, I didn't know I could punch that hard. [her friend] was only hitting her in the stomach. And I was hitting her face. I was sad for her even though we hit her.

General Violence Prevention

When asked how violence in general could be prevented, six out of 18 respondents said either that it definitely could not be prevented, or if it could, they had no idea how. Diane's explanation seemed to exemplify what many of the young women thought, and perhaps reflected her own experiences:

> I don't think it can be prevented 'cuz there are just angry people out there. Maybe they had a hard life or maybe they probably don't have nobody there for them, they experience life that's been hurtful and all they do is go out to hurt other people. They just angry.

Others suggested that "self control have to do with it a lot," and people should "think before they get up and try to burn somebody or shoot somebody, or whatever they gonna do, think about it first before you do it." Looking at broader social aspects, it was Paula's contention that "a lotta people would be outta work if violence could prevented." In particular, gun manufacturers and drug traffickers were mentioned by four of the

respondents. Much of the violence would be alleviated if, as Adele suggested "they take guns away and stop making all these types of chemicals for drugs." In addition, she contended that "having less jails and more programs for kids to go to instead of them hanging out on the streets and things like that" would ease problems with violence. Despite a variety of opinions as to how violence in general could be prevented, most did not see these suggestions as applicable to their own situations.

In sum, the young women were involved in a range of illegal activities, most of which contained a violent component. For most respondents, the instant offenses varied little from the offenses in which they regularly engaged—violence was part of everyday life. Their motives in the instant offense were classified into five categories: demanding respect; enacting retaliation/revenge; defending self or others; saving face/ peer pressure; and, to a lesser degree, getting money or goods. Thus, the young women generally attacked others in an effort to maintain a modicum of self respect and power in a world perceived as hostile and dangerous. Most victims were other females, and often the violence was a rational response to an escalating problem or history of conflict with the victim. Knives and fists were the primary modes of attack and alcohol and other drugs were usually not a part of the scenario. While these young women are not "cold-blooded," and often expressed empathy and remorse, they nevertheless were quick to react to perceived insults and disrespect, as well as racist and sexist comments. Furthermore, they saw little recourse from engaging in violence.

Without parental guidance or supervision, and without other models or solutions at their disposal, their traumatic early childhoods may have predisposed them to use violence to "solve" the problems they confronted. Vigilant for cues that may signal a

threat reminiscent of earlier danger, they remained in "a physiological state of preparedness to face the danger" even years later in a nonthreatening environment (Karr-Morse & Wiley, 1997). Asked directly about violence prevention, the young women generally suggested avoidant strategies, but failed to apply these to their own situations in the community and on the streets. Thus, pervasive expectations of threat undermined their ability to regulate their strong emotions associated with earlier traumas. Chapter Nine presents a general framework that incorporates these narratives and the concepts discussed in prior chapters to help explain the antecedents of violence among this group of adolescent girls.

CHAPTER NINE

A FRAMEWORK FOR UNDERSTANDING ADOLESCENT FEMALE VIOLENT OFFENDING

This study is a secondary analysis of interviews with adolescent female offenders, which examined the processes through which these particular young women came to be involved in violent behavior. Using a grounded theory approach, the study assumed a developmental psychology perspective that emphasizes attachment theory. In addition to variables traditionally included in studies of juvenile male delinquents, traumatic events were analyzed, as were variables found to correlate with female delinquency such as running away from home and self-harming behaviors. The study illustrates how the cumulative effect of traumatic events experienced in childhood, combined with a lack of parental attachment and social supports, contribute to the use of maladaptive coping strategies, including violence.

Chapters Four, Five and Six analyzed the numerous and extensive traumas, generally grouped into losses and victimizations, that these young women experienced, as well as the minimal parental attachment, support and supervision that was provided to them. Chapter Seven examined the ways in which the young women strove to manage these traumatic experiences on their own, primarily employing the avoidant coping strategies of running away, substance use, and to a lesser extent, deliberate self harm. Chapter Eight presented of the consequences of earlier traumatic experiences, and examined the young women's involvement in a range of property, drug-related, and violent illegal activities, and in particular, the characteristics and contexts of the robbery and assaults for which they were adjudicated. These detailed analyses of childhood experiences and events, as well as the social contexts within which the 24 respondents

grew into adolescence, help to explain how prior traumatic experiences and the disruption of parental bonds of attachment contributed to these young women becoming candidates for engaging in violence.

As the narratives of the young women reveal, their lives and behaviors are far more complicated than what can be garnered from the offense labels of robbery and assault. This group of offenders suffered numerous losses and victimizations, and also inflicted harm on others—yet they are neither helpless victims nor cold- blooded perpetrators. They are for the most part multi-problem youth, and how each came to be residing in a state juvenile correctional facility is a unique and intricate tale. Like anyone's life, only parts of their stories can be represented in the medium of a transcribed interview. The interviews, however, do reveal some general patterns among the young women, including a tremendous amount and variety of childhood trauma, a dearth of social supports, as well a number of maladaptive coping strategies employed to counter feelings of anxiety, rage, and shame. These data contribute to our knowledge of the processes underlying the initiation of female adolescents' violent behaviors. Although we may not have all the pieces or "know" the exact path that each of the young women took, it is possible to sort out their stories and develop a framework that helps to explain their complex journey toward violent behavior.

This final chapter summarizes the study's findings and makes explicit a model for interpreting the violent actions of adolescent girls and presents some implications of the findings, as well as related recommendations.

General Findings

Unlike many studies that examine maltreatment generally or physical or sexual abuse specifically, this research employed a broad definition of traumatic events, which was generally divided into losses and victimizations for analytic purposes. These traumatic events were extensive and occurred when the respondents were very young, profoundly effecting how the young women processed such events. The young women experienced four general types of losses: death of a loved one, physical absence, psychological unavailability, and loss of home. The loss of personal health was also traumatic for some of these young women.

Adapting to the disappearance of a significant person or object is a long term process that may have consequences for the entire life span, and requires individuals to invest a major effort in coping strategies. While it is not uncommon for a child to have experienced the death of a loved one, these young women experienced numerous deaths at a median age of only eight, and the deaths often occurred in violent and socially stigmatized contexts. Similarly, divorce and incarceration are common in the United States, particularly among minority populations, but such separations can be extremely detrimental to a child's psychological and emotional development. This is especially true when, in addition to the loss, there is not another loving caregiver who can aid the child in understanding and incorporating the trauma into her life. For these young women, death, divorce, and parental separation were prominent losses.

Respondents also described parents who, though alive and physically present, were absorbed or otherwise engaged in their own substance use, illness, and activities, and were unable to emotionally provide for their daughters. The young women spoke of

their parents' extensive involvement in drug use and trafficking and frequently indicated that they felt their parent had more of a relationship with the drug then with them, their daughter. Others were forced to assume emotional and physical responsibility and support of parents who, for a variety of reasons, could not care for themselves.

In addition to the physical and psychological absence of parents or primary caregivers, many respondents had lost their homes; almost three-fourths of the girls reported placements in foster care, residential treatment centers, or group homes. Others were kicked out, burned out, or evicted from their homes. As revealed in the narratives, the young women experienced losses early in life, and the losses were both extensive and cumulative.

The young women in this study also experienced and were witness to an extreme amount and array of violent victimization, both in their homes and in their communities. As with losses, victimizations occurred at very young ages: most had occurred when respondents were only 10 years old or younger. The young women were victim to both physical and sexual abuse, by both family members and strangers or acquaintances, and had witnessed the same against their siblings and especially their mothers within their homes. In addition, they had been stabbed or shot, and had witnessed stabbings and shootings both in the home and in their communities. The young women had been awakened by gunfire and had experienced fires and explosions. Incredibly, 15 of the 24 young women had witnessed a killing by the median age of 12 years. In describing homes and communities that conjure up images of war zones, these adolescents expressed anger as well as resignation at their own vulnerability and the lack of support, protection and guidance from the adults in their life. These experiences of victimization s generated a

number of negative emotions including anger, shame, guilt and sadness. Tragically, no one was present to help these children integrate the traumas into their lives. Instead, they were betrayed, ignored, or punished. Indeed much of the trauma was inflicted by those persons responsible for their care and whom they should have been able to trust, thereby disrupting the natural attachment between child and primary caregiver.

Parental involvement was striking in its absence. Parental attachment, support and supervision were examined, and each was found lacking. The young women primarily lived with their mothers and although they sometimes described their relationship with them as close and one in which they felt safe, accepted and understood, more frequently they described it as distant and rejecting. Emotional and instrumental support was rarely described, and the young women indicated that they did not speak with their caregivers was something was bothering them. Primary caregivers usually did not know where they were when not at home, who they were with, or when they would be home. The family is the context for identity development and interpersonal development, and these young women struggled to mature in homes that were often characterized by loss and were the source of victimization and neglect.

The young women's expectation of love and protection was thwarted by caregivers who were unwilling or unable to attend to their needs. Though the young women often idealized the emotional bond with their parents, too often it was an obvious source of pain. Unable to gain their parents' love and affection, the young women frequently minimized their need for relations with others, and verbally and emotionally closed down. This contributed to subsequent defiant, disruptive, and immature behaviors. Such attitudes and behaviors were met with lax, inconsistent or punitive supervision.

Thus, rather than being cared for and protected by adults, the young women described being on their own to negotiate an inhospitable and difficult world. This was further exacerbated when the young women were simultaneously forced to care for siblings or even the parents themselves. Indeed, while many of the young women in this study asserted a tone of self direction and control: "I'm my own person, I'm my own leader," but such talk was also likely to mask more vulnerable feelings. Without minimizing the resiliency and vitality that many of the young women in this study did demonstrate, it is also important to remember that the average age of the respondents was only 15. Their histories of numerous and extensive traumas, compounded by a lack of supportive parenting, left these young women very much alone, forced to adapt as best they could.

In the minds of these adolescents the "solutions" of running away, self-harm, and substance use may have seemed a reasonable and proactive means for resisting abusive treatment or to allay feelings of rage and shame. Not only did these strategies help the young women to avoid problems, but also to survive what were often quite terrible conditions, even as they led them into other, sometimes more dangerous, situations. Research "consistently validates the negative impact of avoidance coping" (Mikulincer & Florian, 1996), yet the young women's use of such strategies made sense to them and may have temporarily assisted in their psychological adjustment to what were, for some, uncontrollable conditions.

Such avoidant coping, however, was temporary and insufficient in containing the reality of the young women's problems or the painful emotions generated by earlier traumas. Numerous studies have found that girls generally internalize stress, and this was true among this group of young women. Internalizing and avoidant strategies, however,

contributed to additional emotional distress, and the young women came to externalize their stress and aggression by engaging in a variety of illegal, and violent, behaviors. Perceiving the world through the lens of a traumatized childhood, others were considered dangerous and threatening, just as their parents and caregivers had been toward them. Thus, self-control and empathy for others were significantly undermined, and the young women were ever prepared to take "protective" action in order to survive. Anticipating a hostile world, and surrounded by perceived, as well as actual threats, the women directed their pain outward, engaging in violence toward others. Furthermore, the young women in this study inhabited violent worlds, where they also were likely to learn from others that violence could be a solution, however temporary. They learned to engage in violence, not as a one-time event, but on a regular basis, and much of their violence was motivated by the need for protecting the emotional self, in terms of maintaining personal respect and status. In addition, the violence was frequently a rational response to an escalating problem or history of conflict with (generally) female victims.

A Developmental Model

As briefly described above and presented in more depth in the previous chapters, the narratives of the adolescent female offenders suggest a model, or framework, for understanding their violent behaviors. This model draws primarily from the developmental psychology literature, with special attention to the importance of early childhood and attachment theory, and contends that the disruption in attachments to primary caregivers in early childhood, including traumatic losses and victimizations, has long-term negative consequences. The disruption of parental attachment and the lack of

supervision and support, contributes to the use of maladaptive coping strategies, including violence. The following section reviews the main concepts shaping this understanding of the respondent's involvement in violence.

Theoretical overview.

Most criminological studies ignore early infant attachment when attempting to explain delinquency and violence. In addition, the early experiences of children, in relation to delinquent activity, have been neglected in favor of a focus on the adolescent years. Furthermore, until recently most studies of violent behaviors considered only those of men and boys. Feminist research has long contended the existence of a pathway between victimization and later delinquency, and has urged the development of theory that incorporates the victimization experiences of girls and women. Although emerging criminological research has begun to examine childhood victimization and neglect as a possible cause of delinquency, it generally excludes females and falls short of explaining how and why victimizations and other traumas promote delinquency and violence.

Although control theories, for example, do consider attachment bonds, this paradigm assumes that the natural state is the absence of attachment to others (Hirschi, 1969). Socialization, and thereby attachment, is imposed by parental monitoring and punishment (Gottfredson & Hirschi, 1990). "Ineffective" parenting results in individuals with low self-control, i.e., those with 'impulsive, insensitive, physical (as opposed to mental), risk taking, short-sighted, and nonverbal' (Gottfredson & Hirschi, 1990, p.94). Thus, victimization, for example, may promote delinquency because it erodes sources of social control, freeing individuals to engage in illegal activities (Brezina, 1998, p. 77).

In contrast to this perspective, and those of several other criminological theories, developmental psychology has always considered early childhood to be of primary importance, and takes a different view of human nature. Specifically, Bowlby's attachment theory assumes that the attachment bond between the primary caretaker and the child is instinctual and forms the foundation for the child's future development (Bowlby, 1969, 1988). The parent meets a child's needs by providing safety and security, and based on these early experiences, the child develops expectations about future relationships. While a secure attachment between caregiver and child fosters long-term positive outcomes, the parent's failure to meet the child's attachment needs (such as in the case of neglect, abandonment, or abuse), traumatically disrupts the attachment bond. This culminates in an acquired state of social "detachment," associated with long-term negative outcomes, including the inhibition of healthy relationships with others (Bowlby, 1973; Ainsworth. 1972, 1979).

The model and a case study.

The data from this study suggest a model or framework that supports the critical affect of early childhood trauma, particularly losses and victimizations, on the later development of violent behaviors. (See Figure 9.1) The rich narrative data provided by these young women present ample evidence of pervasive, extensive and varied traumas. The young women described their own physical and sexual abuse, as well as witnessing that of others. They were exposed to community and domestic violence, and suffered numerous physical and emotional losses, mostly that of their primary caregivers. The lack of parental support, supervision or attachment left these young women to "manage" their physical and emotional lives on their own.

Figure 9.1
A Model of Female Adolescent Violence

Early Childhood Trauma	Emotional Responses	Weak Parental "Efficacy"	Maladaptive Coping Strategies	Violence
Loss Death of Loved One Physical Absence Psychological Unavailability Loss of Home	Anger Anxiety Shame Sadness Guilt	*Minimal Attachment* Share Confidences Safe & Secure	*Avoidant Coping* Run Away/Leave Temporarily Drug & Alcohol Use Deliberate Self Harm Delinquency	
		Minimal Support Material Goods Family Activities Expressions of Love		
Victimization Home Direct/Witness Community Direct/Witness		*Minimal Supervision* Where With Whom When Home		

As a result, the young women suffered emotionally as well as physically, and described feeling overwhelmed by anger and shame, seemingly unable to assimilate these negative experiences and emotions in a healthy manner. In their efforts to do so, they generally chose maladaptive coping strategies, including running away, extensive substance use, and to a lesser extent, attempts at self-mutilation and suicide. Without caring adults to model more appropriate behaviors, when these modes of coping failed and the young women were faced with a threat to self, they reacted with violence. Thus, the cumulative effects of traumatic experiences, including the disruption of the innate need for attachment and the lack of supports, became key factors in explaining pathways into violent behavior.

Although each young woman's story is complex and unique, a general (albeit nonlinear) pattern emerged. An excessive amount of traumatic experiences in early childhood caused by the actions of parents or other primary caregivers, resulted in disruptions in the girls' natural attachment to those adults. Subsequently, these disruptions produced an expectation of a hostile and dangerous world. The disruptions generated anger and other negative affects, and without the intervention of other loving and supportive caregivers to aid in processing the events and their emotional sequela, the young women sought to otherwise alleviate their distress, turning to a number of avoidant coping strategies. These measures were insufficient in defending against the emotional distress, and when faced with new threats (real or perceived), and knowing from early childhood the consequences of not protecting against those threats, among this group of young women, violence became an alternative course.

Returning to the case study that opened this study, 14-year-old Elena was adjudicated for a robbery in which she, in the company of two other young women, attacked a woman in her mid-thirties on a subway train. To an observer, this "simply" may have been a case of a young woman, high on marijuana, "losing it" over a minor insult. Her history, however, suggests otherwise. Her abbreviated case follows:

> The eleventh of 14 children, Elena was placed in foster care as an infant, at which time her parents separated, but did not divorce. She claimed her parent's separation was the most upsetting thing that had happened to her, for she desperately "wanted to have both" parents. Elena came home from foster care when she was seven, and although she had "a lot of family in my house" she lived mostly with her mother, who worked as a peace officer, and her younger sister and brother. Her mother had a female lover, much to Elena's confusion and dismay. Her father, who visited often, was diagnosed with a serious illness when she was eight; she was diagnosed with asthma a year later. She was hospitalized seven times, beginning at age 11.
>
> Her father often took Elena and her sister on day trips, but as she learned later, this was to remove the children from witnessing their mother's crack and marijuana use. Born "with crack in my system," she was fearful of the long term consequences. She referred to her mother as "the addict" and a Budda-head" who beat her with a baseball bat, hangers, and her fists, especially when she was high. Elena said she ran away countless times because "I was really frustrated...and I didn't know how to handle myself." She would go to a cousin's or friend's house for a day or so before returning home. Her exact age is unclear, but when she was less than 10 years old, her 19-year-old brother was incarcerated with a life sentence for beating a young man who had been fighting with Elena. She described her brother's incarceration as being dead. Describing a neighborhood where violence was a constant, Elena told how, when she was 14 her girlfriend, who she had just walked home, was raped and left to die on the building rooftop. In the building elevator, while coming home from the grocery store on fternoon, Elena witnessed a woman stabbing a man: "She was just stabbing him all in his chest. I was standing right there. Blood was all over my shirt. But I don't see no other violence with drug using."
>
> When she was 11 her father died, and months later, as she was preparing to take her younger brother to the movies, the boy was stabbed to death on the street in front of their building. It was "ever since then, we [the family] just been separated. We just all go our separate ways." She claimed not to have talked to anyone when was something was bothering her "because I didn't know how to like, just sit there and really start a conversation with somebody in my family." She said she didn't trust anybody, and added "I wasn't really

> bonded with my family cuz I like to isolate myself from people." Her mother rarely knew where she was or who she was with and seemed to have little interest, only "in a blue moon" paging her daughter. The only person Elena confided in was her older, male drug dealer.
>
> Elena linked her feelings generated by the deaths of her father and brother directly to her subsequent delinquency and violence: "I just started flipping and going wild, doing things I wasn't supposed to be doing." She joined a female gang shortly thereafter, drinking and smoking heavily, and participating in drug dealing, property and violent activities. She eventually distinguishing herself in a gang killing of an adolescent girl, and thereby became the "mother" of the group, responsible for creating and enforcing the rules. When asked what she got out of being a member of this group, Elena declared, "I got respect. People trust me." At 13, she had her own child, fathered by a former neighborhood boy.

Like many of the young women in this study, Elena had experienced extensive losses and victimizations. These were not minor stressors, but traumatic events that altered her sense of safety in the world. She spent her formative years in foster care, and although no reason is given for the placement, her mother's substance abuse and the family environment seem likely candidates. Thus, very early in life, her predisposition toward closeness was disrupted and her expectations about relationships colored by the tremendous loss of her mother. Upon her return to her family of origin, she experienced ongoing physical abuse, and lost several family members to incarceration, violence and illness, including the one parent who provided some support and supervision and whom she clearly loved. Her mother was abusive and inconsistent and demonstrated little interested in her daughter. Expecting little form others, Elena walled off her need for others, and used avoidant coping strategies such as drinking and smoking excessively and running away to "manage" or regulate strong emotions of anger, fear, hate, and guilt. She was involved in an extensive amount and range of illegal activities, including violence against others. Her all-girl gang made

her the "mother" and her violent activities gained her the respect and support missing from her own home. From her child, she perhaps hoped to also gain the missing love.

Unlike most criminological theories that advocate the need for social control in terms of more monitoring and punishment, this research contends that the greater need is for social support in terms of increased parental acceptance, affection, and guidance. In contrast to theories suggesting that poor parenting may lead to the erosion of social control and its restraints on delinquency, is the perspective of attachment theory. Here, traumatic experiences (including loss and victimization) disrupt the innate attachment bond, and without the intervention of other loving caretakers, a child may engage in delinquency and violence as a means of diffusing the emotional pain of the disrupted attachment. Consistent with other emerging developmental theories, such as self-in-relation-in-self theory (See Surrey, 1991; Gilligan, 1982; Chodorow, 1978, 1989) the young women in this study attempted to remain connected to others in their lives, even as they used violence to deal with their emotional pain. For example, although the girls ran away frequently to avoid conflict in the home and the emotional trauma of disrupted attachments, they continually came back. Their actions may be interpreted as an effort to maintain relationships despite the trauma, emotionally still holding on—not to a healthy attachment born of mutual respect and caring—but as an attempt to restore or repair their disrupted attachments. Because attachment is a primary need and the natural state, the young women in this study often continued to struggle for reattachment, though their efforts were generally ineffective. Although evidence exists to indicate a developmental pathway for females based on interpersonal, empathetic relatedness (Cosse, 1992), the findings here suggest that early disruptions in attachment to primary caregivers, and the

culmination of traumatic events and experiences, dramatically interfered with relationships and contributed to interpersonal violence.

This model developed from analyses of qualitative data provided by adolescent girls. Their interviews provide a rare opportunity to enter a portion of their mental universe: a chance to learn more about their "emotional attitudes, mental conflicts and the ideational life of the delinquent child" (Shaw, 1966, p. 4). A significant finding was the amount and pervasiveness of early childhood traumatic events and the lack of parental attachment, support, and supervision. The model is neither wholly gender-neutral nor gender-specific. It is very likely that boys and girls will be affected similarly by disruptions in parental attachment. Indeed, Hayslett-McCall and Bernard (2002) have proposed a theory of disproportionate male offending that contends that American masculine culture, as promoted by standard parenting practices contribute to an "aggregate-level effect of disproportionately disrupted early attachment in boys." Perhaps the girls in this study were subject to similar harsh parenting techniques resulted in a traumatic failure to meet their attachment needs. As children grow up in a gendered world, however, their choices, opportunities, and experiences are most assuredly different from one another and thus, their resultant emotional distress is likely to manifest itself differently. Young women, for example, are more likely to be sexually harassed, bothered and assaulted, both within and outside the home and this fact will affect how they are perceived by and perceive others, as well as their emotional (i.e., level of fear, anxiety, anger) and physical (i.e., how to dress, act, move, where to go) states. Different ways of coping with the emotions are likely to be employed, and perhaps in a different temporal order. Violence, however, is likely to be one of the outcomes, give the cumulative effect

of extensive early disattachment, victimization, and loss, and the lack of support and supervision. While some forms of victimization have been examined with both males and females, there is a great need for more research, in terms of early childhood trauma and later manifestations, analyzed by gender. Thus, while this research sought to better understand violence perpetrated by young women, an area sorely in need of empirical studies, its findings also have important implications youth violence in general, including males.

Implications and Recommendations

The findings from this research suggest a number of theoretical, methodological and programmatic implications and associated recommendations for the field criminal justice. Many of the mainstream theories of crime have been found lacking when female offending is considered. This is especially true for violent offenders. While the concepts of early attachment and social support have a long history in developmental psychology, they are just beginning to come to the attention of criminologists. Examining the early experiences of children and their relations with others is important for understanding later developments, for both females and males. Interestingly, the characteristics of a person with low self control (Gottfredson & Hirschi, 1990) may indeed be similar to the long-term consequences of a disruption in secure attachments (Hayslett-McCall & Bernard, 2002, p. 17), a possibility indicative of some affiliation between two distinct bodies of literature. Although the basic assumptions of human nature in each perspective is very different, as are the implications that flow from those assumptions, by closely examining both boys' and girls' early childhood traumatic experiences, there may be a foundation

for merging developmental psychology and trauma literature with established criminology theories to better understand experiences and behaviors of young offenders. This may be particularly important for young women, but certainly is applicable and important to the study of boys.

Childhood and adolescence are both periods of tremendous change in cognitive capacities, size, strength, gender differentiation, relationships, social environments—all of which affect the potential for victimization as well as offending. Longitudinal studies are well suited to track changes over time and determine the temporal ordering of experiences and behaviors, and such data are critical for charting developmental pathways into as well as out of delinquency and crime. Such studies, however, tend to employ structured survey instruments. As is evidenced in this study, narrative data are much better for learning the nature and context and meaning of actions, and thus it is important that more qualitative, conversational interviewing methods be incorporated into such longitudinal studies. There is still a great deal to be learned about young women and violence, and as was the case in this study, most of the young women wanted to talk about their lives—perhaps because few have demonstrated an interest in really listening to them. Also, interviews will benefit from the inclusion of a range of problem behaviors that are common among female adolescents; this may result in new data for interpreting violent delinquency by both females and males.

The young women's responses in this study indicate the importance of wording in interview schedules, particularly when referring to sensitive subjects such as sex and violence. It is possible that young women are exposed to so much violence that it has become the norm and they speak of personal victimizations in a matter-of-fact-fashion,

masking any emotions, and minimizing amount and effect of violence in their lives. If they are asked about ever having been "physically or sexually abused," for example, one must be cautious about taking answer at face value. A better method, perhaps, is to ask about the developmental environment in which they grew up to learn how they were socialized to violence, and how did they come to accept as normal loved ones hurting other loved ones? Furthermore, questions must be specific as to what the interviewer is trying to ask about: "abused" means many different things to different people; people, especially females often have difficulty naming that which has happened, minimizing it instead. This also has implications for the training of interviewers.

Research should also look beyond official offense labels. Typically, the official label dictates the disposition, the research protocol and the media image brought to the public. Researchers are especially vulnerable if they do not go beyond the label to consider the context of the offense, for they are bound to miss the circumstances and intricacies of violence committed by girls and young women.

Given that an increasing number of young women are being arrested and adjudicated to custody for violent offenses, understanding the links between early childhood traumatic experiences and adolescent violent offending also has important programmatic and policy implications. It is necessary to implement programmatic changes that effect youth facilities and the juvenile justice system, local communities, individuals. This research makes a strong case for the need for preventive measures. There were numerous junctures where the young women could have been assisted and perhaps diverted from violent behaviors that caused their incarceration. Certainly a starting point for such research is to ask young women themselves if they could identify

the point at which they first believed they were at risk, and what or who could have intervened. Risk-based prevention and early intervention programs in the schools, as well as in the community and homes are needed to help strengthen families, including training in and support for parenting skills and access to resources.

Recognizing the extensive amount of trauma that may be experienced by young women living in poor and dangerous neighborhoods, it is critical that programs be established in communities and schools, as well as in juvenile facilities, to provide age-appropriate, trauma-related information for adolescent girls (and boys). Training in PTSD symptomology would be extremely helpful for those involved in the juvenile justice system in both community settings and in juvenile facilities, helping staff to relate to their role and interactions with the juvenile and her family.

Such programming should provide training in a variety of healthy coping strategies and violence prevention tools. Most of the young women believed that they personally had very few options for preventing violence and many also believed that violence in general could not be prevented. When asked what could have prevented their own violent actions, a third suggested physically avoiding the situation, but had no idea how to apply this abstract thought in their daily lives. Violence prevention/intervention programs must address gender and culture, and young women need programs that can speak directly to their concerns and lived experience and can translate general anti-violence messages into practical skills. Furthermore, programming is needed that explains the dynamics of interpersonal and gender-related violence. While not absolving young women from violent actions, programs need to teach young women not accept male (or others) violence against them: How to resist abuse, whether by adults or

boyfriends, in nonviolent manner. Daughters of battered women often do not understand these dynamics; often assume that violence is the norm in close personal relationships. Programs must provide very practical tools and information, and include family members and key community stakeholders. Individual girls can not do it alone. Teen's perspectives need to be incorporated into program design, in order not to miss significant and important pieces.

Programs also need to provide young women with a safe place to share their traumatic experiences and to receive appropriate clinical care. Most of the young women indicated they rarely went to a family member or someone else in the community when something was bothering them, oftentimes because the very people who should have provided nurturance and love and protection from harm had instead maltreated or neglected them. Offenders need supervision and controls, but they also need support and services, and connections with caring adults. Often lacking such caring adults at home, other social institutions must help fill the gap. Mentoring programs with older adolescents and adult women, and men are critical to providing consistent and stable nurturing until a traumatized juvenile's ability to accept nurturing and caregiving is restored.

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