

RUNNING HEADER: Restorative Justice and Family Violence

Restorative Justice and Family Violence: Youth-to-Parent Abuse

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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to the courageous parents who shared their stories with me. I also wish to dedicate it to my brothers and sisters. May the cycle be broken.

ABSTRACT

Youth-to-Parent abuse is a form of family violence that has received minimal attention both at a societal level and in the academic literature. Researchers are unable to say with any degree of certainty if or how youth-to-parent abuse is different than spousal/partner, child or elder abuse. The Restorative Justice Program in Halifax, Nova Scotia receives approximately sixty such cases a year. Using a qualitative phenomenological approach that incorporated feminist-informed research principles, this study investigated the experiences of six parents, four mothers and one couple. All five cases involved families where the youth had acted out violently against his/her parents. Subsequently the parents called the police and in all cases the youth were referred to the Restorative Justice program for resolution. Participants took part in audio-taped interviews that lasted from ninety minutes to two and a half hours. A semi-structured interview with open-ended questions encouraged parents to reconstruct their experiences as narratives. The findings were analyzed using a reflective structural analysis (Moustakas, 1994) and Kirby & McKenna's (1989) adaptation of the constant comparison method.

Parents' descriptions of their youths' behaviors met the definition of youth-to-parent abuse. The findings are organized around five focus areas: Power Struggles, Parents' Construction of their Children's Problems, Parents' Perceptions of Their Roles and Responsibilities, Negative Responses from the Systems and Positive Responses from the Systems. Themes emerged from each focus area and include: negative school experiences, family influences, labeling, cultural influences, negative peer influences, setting limits, persuasive talks, ambivalence, never give up, blaming the parents,

ineffectual solutions/band-aid solutions, some solutions made the problems worse, not taking the problem seriously, parents felt heard, non-judgmental, help provided for parents and youth, complex solutions, hopeful futures.

A nested ecological theoretical model (Cottrell & Monk, 2004) captured the myriad of influences found to contribute to youth-to-parent abuse. Four levels contribute to the model: Ontogenetic (individual characteristics), Macrosystem (media images), Exosystem (social services, schools, peers), and the Microsystem (family influences). The findings supported that a complex interrelatedness between the four levels influenced the youths' behavior. The findings of this project illuminate the need for an integrated holistic approach when providing support to parents who suffer youth-to-parent abuse. Implications for future research highlight the need for research that investigates individual characteristics of the youth such as early aggression, mental health issues, and substance abuse. Further investigation into how negative school experiences affect youth and what role power dynamics play on the family warrant exploration.

An integrated approach to youth-to-parent abuse is suggested where a family-systems modal of intervention addresses individual needs separately and family's need simultaneously. The Restorative Justice process was successful from some of the parents' perspective because the needs of the youth (offender) and the victims (mothers) were addressed.

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Chapter One

1.0 Introduction: Family Violence and the Role of Restorative Justice

When I walked in the door I was just so shocked. The dining-room table was overturned, there was broken glass everywhere, and he was standing there saying, “why didn’t you call, why didn’t you let me know you’d be late?” That’s one of the most upsetting memories but then of course, there’s the time...

Family violence has become recognized as a serious societal concern. Violence against women, children and the elderly is considered a problem worthy of coordinated social action and serious academic inquiry. There is another form of family violence that has received minimal attention both at a societal level and in the academic literature: youth-to-parent abuse. This topic is under-discussed and under-researched. Researchers are unable to say with any degree of certainty if or how youth-to-parent abuse is different than spousal/partner, child or elder abuse. In Health Canada’s 2002 Family Violence Initiative Report this form of family violence was not even mentioned. At the same time, there is increasing evidence that teenage aggression toward parents and guardians is a serious issue for Canadians.

According to anecdotal reports, parents are searching for help and support for dealing with their volatile teens. Police are being called in to help. The *Canadian Youth Criminal Justice Act* emphasizes the rehabilitation and reintegration of a young offender into society. The Restorative Justice model works well with the Act because it is based on a philosophy that focuses on achieving a sense of healing for both victim and offender, while engaging the community at the same time. It is structured so that teens and parents will get a chance to come together to repair the harm that has been caused, while

permitting the youth to avoid a criminal record. Although Restorative Justice work is going on with youth and their parents, there has not been any research in the area.

1.1 Motivation for Research

The research project I conducted came out of a personal experience with family violence. The opening excerpt in this document could be conceptualized as an example of youth-to-parent abuse. It is one of my memories. I am the researcher and I am the mother who lived through that scene. While I was volunteering with the Restorative Justice Program as a facilitator, the Executive Director at that time, told me about a new phenomenon they were seeing with alarming increase: teens abusing their parents. As a mother who lived through this experience and as a volunteer with the Restorative Justice Program, I recognized a topic that was not being talked about or researched enough. The motivation for conducting this research was to hear the stories of parents in these situations.

1.2 Goals of Research

My goals in conducting this research were twofold: to gain a better understanding of the family dynamics at work in this form of family violence through the perspective of the parents and to learn how Restorative Justice met or did not meet their needs.

In the following chapter I will give a brief history of the family violence research, a literature review on youth-to-parent abuse, an overview of restorative justice, and its role with family violence.

Chapter Two Literature Review

2.0 Brief History of Family Violence Research

Family violence has been recognized as an issue in Canada since the 19th century. The first focus was the maltreatment of women and children. Terms such as *battered babies* became used during the early 1960s with the publication of *The Battered Child Syndrome* by a group of pediatricians. During the late 1960s and 1970s feminists advocating for the rights of women, brought the issue of male violence against women into the public light and terms such as *battered wives* and *wife abuse* were adapted from the terminology being used for children (Walker, 1990). Elder abuse and neglect began receiving public attention in the mid-1970s when the term *granny battering* was first coined (Vida, Monks, & DesKosiers, 2002). *Battered Parents Syndrome* was first described by Harbin & Madden in 1979.

In the last twenty-five years great strides have been made toward understanding and intervening in family violence. Feminist grassroots organizations lobbied for change in legislative laws while developing services for victims of spousal abuse (Gullota & McElhaney, 1996). Today violence against women is not considered a private matter but a serious criminal offence. In 1989, the Children's Act was adopted to reform Canadian law and the health, welfare and rights of children were incorporated into the Charter of Rights. The abuse of children has become an important focus of public and scholarly attention. Elderly abuse is also now considered a form of family violence and a problem worthy of coordinated social action and serious academic inquiry (McDonald & Collins, 2000). While these forms of family violence have become recognized as legitimate

societal concerns, youth-to-parent violence has received minimal attention both at a societal level and in the academic literature.

2.1 Definitions of Family Violence

Definitions of family violence often vary depending on who is doing the defining or describing. For example, within the *Criminal Code of Canada*, family violence is defined in terms of the *acts*. These can be placed on a spectrum from uttering threats to mischief, intimidation, forcible confinement, violation of a protective court order (that is, peace bond or a prohibition order), assault, assault causing bodily harm, sexual assault, sexual assault causing bodily harm, sexual assault with a weapon, criminal harassment (sometimes called stalking), attempted murder and murder (Department of Justice Canada Website, 2006). Other definitions offered by academic researchers focus on the *relationships*: “Canadians define family violence in broad terms to include violence among immediate family members, including parent-adult child relationships and most include violence occurring within relationships of trust” (Family Violence Initiative, 2005, p. ii). Some feminists focus on the larger *system* and view violence as part of the systemic oppression of women by men. They believe that gender inequality is at the root of wife-battering (Walker, 1990). From a feminist perspective, family violence is about power where the more powerful person dominates or abuses the less powerful. Violence and abuse take many forms and are relative to contexts and relationships in which girls and women’s lives are embedded (Muriel McQueen Center for Family Violence, 2006).

Youth-to-parent abuse has been given many different names. For example, *adolescent-to-parent abuse* (Cottrell & Monk, 2004; Eckstein, 2004); *youth who physically assault their parents* (Paulson, Coombs, & Landsverk, 1990); *teenage violence*

toward parents (Brezina, 1999); *adolescent violence toward parents* (Agnew & Huguley, 1989); *child-to-mother violence* (Jackson, 2004; Stewart, Jackson, Mannix, Wilkes, & Lines, 2006); and *parent(al) abuse* (Cottrell, 2001, 2004). The term *youth-to-parent abuse* will be used for the purposes of this thesis because it best captures the focus of this research project. Youth is defined as the period in one's life between childhood and adulthood. The focus of this thesis will be face-to-face interviews with parents whose youth (aged 12-17 years) have been referred to the Restorative Justice Program in Nova Scotia, Canada, because of conflict with their parent(s). The term *youth-to-parent abuse* shows directionality and youth is also the descriptor that is used in the *Canadian Youth Criminal Justice Act*. The term *abuse* will be used to encourage the use of consistent terminology. Currently researchers and the general public use the term *abuse* (spousal/partner abuse, child abuse and elder abuse).

Researchers have defined youth-to-parent abuse in a variety of ways. Some, like Harbin & Madden (1979) focus on the "physical assaults or verbal and non-verbal threats of physical harm" (p.1288). Researchers who drew their data from large-scale National Surveys (Agnew & Huguley, 1989; Brezina, 1999; Peek, Fisher & Kidwell, 1985) measured parent assault based on a single-item question that asked the youth how many times he/she had hit his/her parent(s) in the last three years. Paulson et al. (1990) measured assault where "a *hitter* was defined as any youth who admitted hitting one or both parents one or more times during the last five years" (p.123). Others, such as Cottrell & Finlayson (1996), provided a more comprehensive definition that includes intent, and emphasizes giving equal weight to all types of violence already recognized in other family violence literature (that is, verbal, physical, emotional).

Eckstein (2004) interviewed twenty parents who had been abused by their adolescent children. She defined abuse as “verbal, physical and emotional means of inflicting hurt upon another that violates socially accepted standards” (p.367). Examples of verbal abuse include “name-calling, insults, accusations, character attacks, swearing... or ridicule” (p.372). Physical abuse was described as “acts that are intentional or perceived as intentional...and include hitting, kicking, shoving, pushing, slapping, biting of a family member, hitting with an object, beating up, or attempting to shoot, stab, or strangle another family member” (p.367). Eckstein stated that it is important to distinguish between emotional abuse and emotional distress. While emotional distress is the result of verbal or physical abuse, “emotionally abusive tactics undermine parents’ personal or interpersonal competence, affects esteem, and instills the belief in negative personality characteristics resulting in emotional distress” (Price, 1996, as cited in Eckstein, 2004, p.367). Examples of emotional abuse include volatile reactions to everyday occurrences, inflicting humiliation by personally attacking character, threats of physical assault, withdrawal, threats of suicide or self-harm, and threats to report parents to social services for child abuse. An Australian definition broadened the conceptualization to include behavior “as violent if others in the family feel threatened, intimidated and controlled” (Stewart et al., 2006).

The definition of youth-to-parent abuse that will be used in this thesis has been adapted from Cottrell & Monk (2004). Youth-to-parent abuse is used to describe actions by youth that are intended to cause verbal, psychological, physical or financial harm to parents. Cottrell & Monk’s definition has been expanded to include the idea that abuse is on a continuum of intensity and duration. It can range from one abusive act to the more

frequent, persistent abusive behaviors of a youth who terrorizes and threatens personal harm on a regular basis.

2.2 Reasons for Lack of Academic Research

There has been limited research done on youth-to-parent abuse, and researchers have speculated why that is the case. Agnew & Huguley (1989) suggest that youth-to-parent abuse represents a shift in the familial power dynamics. Typically, in spousal/partner and child abuse, the less powerful are subjected to violence by the more powerful. In the case of youth-to-parent abuse, the apparently less powerful are attacking the more powerful. Agnew and Huguley have proposed that because of this expectation that only the more powerful can abuse, researchers have minimized the prevalence of youth-to-parent abuse.

As well, this type of violence is shrouded in secrecy. Parents do not easily disclose that their children have been violent toward them. Similar to other victims of family violence, the abused parent may not disclose abuse because of the stigma and shame they feel (Cornell & Gelles, 1982; Harbin & Madden, 1979; Jackson, 2003). Stewart et al. (2006) suggest that *perception* plays a role. Parents are likely to minimize the prevalence and severity of their children's violence against them (Agnew & Huguley, 1989; Paterson, Luntz, Pelesz, & Cotton, 2002). Cottrell & Monk (2004) state that this denial and minimizing of abuse is often reinforced by a lack of support from service providers. In part, this may be because it is not always easy to distinguish the difference between acceptable and abusive behaviors (Cottrell, 2001; Cottrell & Finlayson, 1996). Cottrell (2004) in her book *When Teens Abuse their Parents* states that the general public, parents, various service providers, as well as teachers and police all have difficulty

recognizing and naming youth-to-parent abuse. So-called normal teenage behavior brings with it an expectation of rudeness and unpleasantness. Since G. Stanley Hall's conceptualization of adolescence as a time of *storm and stress* back in the early 1900s, adolescence has been recognized as a difficult time for some youth as they transition from childhood to adulthood. While some youth may resist adult authority while searching for *individuation*, Cottrell points out, there is a difference between resistance and aggression. Violent acts are minimized and condoned by terms such as *challenging behavior* (Cummings & Clinton 1996 as cited in Stewart et al., 2006). Stewart et al. claim it is important to refer to this type of behavior as abusive and youth-to-parent abuse should take its place within the family violence literature.

A further obstacle is that abused parents have not had any advocates to bring their story to the public (Agnew & Huguley, 1989). In Western society parents are viewed as the responsible agents for their children until they are eighteen and if they cannot handle them, they are considered *bad parents* who raise *bad kids* (Eckstein 2004). Frizzell (1995) claimed that while service providers may construct adolescent aggression as abuse, parents are loath to define their youth's actions as abusive. Harbin & Madden (1979) referred to the *myth of family harmony*, describing protective and secretive parents who do not report aggression on the part of their youth in order to preserve their self-image as parents. Finally, the cultural implications of viewing adolescents' aggression as a form of abuse, equal to the other types of family violence, are unsettling. Agnew & Huguley refer to the *myth* that all children love their parents and all parents display unconditional love. Revealing that this final bastion of intimate familial bonding may in

fact be just as susceptible to family violence as the other relationships would be upsetting the proverbial cart.

2.3 Empirical Study of Youth-to-Parent Abuse

In this section, a literature review of youth-to-parent abuse will be presented. Several studies published in the 1980s (Agnew & Huguley, 1989; Cornell & Gelles, 1982; Peek et al., 1985) and Brezina in 1999, used data obtained from National Youth Surveys conducted in the United States between 1966 and 1975 to examine sociodemographic variables and risk factors and to develop theoretical frameworks from which to understand youth-to-parent abuse. As well in the 1980s, Meredith, Abbott and Adams (1986) explored the negative effects of violence on family relationships while Evans & Warren-Sohlberg (1988) examined police records and reported on the characteristics of youth who abuse their parents. Widom (1989) conducted a critical review of the family violence literature to examine the *violence-breeds-violence* hypothesis.

During the 1990s some researchers investigated the relationship between youth-to-parent abuse and social and psychological risk factors, such as observation of marital violence, parental conflict tactics, peer influences and family relationships (Browne & Hamilton, 1998; Carlson, 1990; Paulson et al., 1990). Frizzel (1995) explored the sociological construction of youth-to-parent abuse as a social problem. Canadian researchers, commissioned through the Family Violence Prevention Unit, examined parent-to-youth abuse through individual interviews and focus groups with youth, parents and service providers (Cottrell, 2001; Cottrell & Finlayson, 1996).

In the last five years, research has been limited to one quantitative and three qualitative studies, as well as one literature review. Pagani, Larocque, Vitaro & Tremblay

(2003) used existing data from a Canadian large-scale longitudinal survey to examine risk factors. Three qualitative studies have focussed on hearing the stories of abused mothers (Jackson, 2003), abused parents (Eckstein, 2004), and abused parents, abusive youth, and service providers, such as counselors and social workers (Cottrell & Monk, 2004).

Stewart et al. (2006) provide a comprehensive review of the existing empirical research.

The following section reports the evidence found for incidence, characteristics of youth who abuse their parents, proposed risk factors, family dynamics, response of the criminal justice system, qualitative research, and theoretical models for understanding youth-to-parent abuse.

2.4 Incidence.

Current incidence rates are mostly drawn from data from studies that were conducted 30 to 40 years ago. This is problematic, especially given the debate surrounding the definition of parent-to-youth abuse. Researchers estimate that between 9% to 14% of parents have experienced some form of abuse at the hands of their adolescents (Browne & Hamilton, 1998, Cornell & Gelles, 1982; Peek et al., 1985) with about 3% of this aggression resulting in injury (broken bones, cuts, bruises) from tactics such as kicks, punches, bites and weapons (Cornell & Gelles, 1982). While prevalence rates may be controversial, the increasing amount of evidence illustrates that the problem exists and is relatively widespread (Browne & Hamilton, 1998; Eckstein, 2004; Monk & Cottrell, 2004; Pagani et al., 2003; Stewart et al., 2006).

The available data on the relationship between age and youth-to-parent abuse is inconclusive, but it appears as though the intensity and target of the abuse, is age and gender-related. Overall, it appears that mothers are more likely to be the targets (Browne

& Hamilton, 1998; Cornell & Gelles, 1982) but as adolescent children grow older they are more likely to target fathers (Agnew & Huguley, 1989; Evans & Warren-Sohlberg, 1988; Paulson, et al, 1990; Peek et al., 1985).

Conflicting evidence exists for the gender, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status of youth who abuse their parents. Earlier studies found no significant differences between males and females (Agnew & Huguley, 1989; Cornell & Gelles, 1982; Peek et al., 1985). More recent research found that girls, rather than boys were more likely to hit their mothers (Carlson, 1990) while still others reported no gender differences (Paulson et al., 1990). Regarding ethnicity, some researchers found no differences (Browne & Hamilton, 1998; Cornell & Gelles, 1989; Paulson et al., 1990), while still other studies (Agnew & Huguley) reported higher rates of violence in White families when compared to Black families. Paulson et al., (1990) studied Anglo-American and Hispanic-American youth and parents and found that 72% of the Anglo population had assaulted their parents compared to 28% of the Hispanic population. While early research reported no relationship between socioeconomic status and youth-to-parent abuse (Agnew & Huguley, 1989; Cornell & Gelles, 1982), more recent studies found that the majority of abusive youth come from middle to upper-middle classes (Eckstein, 2004; Paulson, et al., 1990), or poverty can increase the potential for youth-to-parent abuse (Cottrell & Monk, 2004).

2.5 Characteristics of Youth.

There has been some research regarding individual characteristics of youth who abuse their parents. Parents have consistently reported that as their adolescent children grew in size and strength, the intensity of their abuse grew proportionately (Agnew &

Huguley, 1989; Eckstein, 2004; Harbin & Maddin, 1979). Although substance abuse has been related to youth-to-parent abuse no research to date has examined this exclusively (Browne & Hamilton, 1998; Cottrell & Monk, 2004; Eckstein, 2004; Evans & Warren-Sohlberg, 1988; Jackson, 2004). Some researchers have found that youth-to-parent abuse has been related to mental health issues, such as schizophrenia and bipolar disorder, as well as attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder, or reactive attachment disorder (Cottrell & Monk, 2004; Evans & Warren-Sohlberg, 1988; Jackson, 2004).

Negative school experiences is another characteristic of youth who abuse their parents. Whether this is because of learning disabilities or mental health issues or other unknown related factors, there appears to be a relationship between failure in school and youth-to-parent abuse (Cottrell & Monk, 2004). A few researchers have reported the possibility of a link between delinquency (Agnew & Huguley, 1989; Cottrell & Monk, 2004), prior criminal charges, and youth-to-parent abuse (Evans & Warren-Sohlberg, 1988)

2.6 Risk Factors.

Currently, there is not enough evidence to state with any amount of certainty the causes of youth-to-parent abuse. A number of potential risk factors have been identified, however. Agnew & Huguley (1989) used data from a national sample of youth in the United States to examine the sociodemographic correlates, the extent, and the causes of assaults on parents. They identified risk factors such as negative peer influences, and individual characteristics such as low attachment to parents. More recent Canadian research has focussed on the relationship between parental divorce, and verbal and physical aggression toward mothers. Pagani et al., (2003), used data from a large-scale

sample (437 girls and 358 boys) of 15 year-old youth who had been followed since Grade Primary. Both mother and youth filled out self-report questionnaires reflecting the youth's aggression over the last six-month period. All youth in this study were in intact families at age 6 and by age 15 there were three classifications for family configurations: always-intact, divorced and remarried. The researchers found that divorced and remarried families were at greater risk for youth-to-parent abuse than families that were intact. Overall, 13% of the youth, as reported by the mothers, engaged in physical abuse that ranged from shoving or pushing, to punching, kicking, throwing objects or attacking their mothers with a weapon. Disruptiveness during kindergarten also appeared to be a predictor of aggression toward parent in mid-adolescence. Two variables partially mediated the relationship between divorce and physical aggression, family functioning, and support-seeking behavior of mothers. While better family functioning encouraged better relations, the more a mother sought support through a social network the greater the likelihood of increased youth-to-parent abuse. Despite the fact that this study is over 10 years old, and was gathered from retrospective self-report questionnaires, it provides valuable insights into youth-to-parent abuse and encourages further investigation into the possible risk factors examined.

2.7 Family Dynamics.

Meredith et al., (1986) surveyed 304 married parents using the following scales: family strengths, marital satisfaction, conflict tactics, and parent satisfaction. They concluded that family violence has a negative effect on individual family members and family life is adversely affected. Results indicated that as violence increased, marital satisfaction and satisfaction with parenting decreased and that the various forms of

violence were interrelated and mutual. In most cases, both spouses inflicted violence on each other, and both the child and the parent engaged in reciprocal violence. For spousal, and parent-child relationships, as verbal aggression increased, so too did physical violence.

Paulson et al., (1990) surveyed 445 youth and parents three times over a five-year period to examine demographic and correlate variables. The authors compared youth who hit their parents (one or more times over the past five years) with youth who did not. The results indicated a negative parent-child relationship with a diminished sense of well-being by youngsters contributed to youth assaulting their parents. Browne & Hamilton (1998) used a sample of 469 British undergraduate students to investigate the relationship between parent conflict tactics, maltreatment during childhood, and the conflict style adopted by the respondent during young adulthood. Maltreatment was defined as “activities of a physical, emotional, or sexual kind, which represents the exercise of force or coercion so as to cause physical injury or forcibly interfere with personal freedom” (p.65). Results indicated support for the hypothesis that children adopt the conflict tactics they learn from their parents. Youth who had been aggressive with their parents had experienced aggression at the hands of their parents. If respondents reported one type of maltreatment, they were significantly more likely to report another type of maltreatment. Results also indicated that those respondents who had been emotionally, physically, or sexually maltreated as children were more likely to use violence toward their parents than those who had not been abused. Carlson (1990) interviewed 101, mostly White, 13-to-18 year-olds from residential treatment agencies and one youth shelter. She examined the relationship between witnessing marital violence and

adolescent behavior and adjustment. Overall, almost half of the youth surveyed reported that they had witnessed their mothers being physically abused (slapped, hit, punched, or pushed) by their biological father or some other male partner. One-quarter of the youth reported that they had witnessed mothers perpetrating violence on her male partner. Carlson found that 52% of females hit their mothers compared to 20% of the males interviewed. Results indicated that youth who witnessed marital violence were not any more likely to engage in youth-to-parent abuse than those youth who had not witnessed marital violence. The results of Carlson's study should be interpreted with caution. The youth interviewed were from residential treatment facilities and a homeless youth shelter. All of these youth had suffered serious difficulties in life so determining causal relationships is nearly impossible.

Brezina (1999), using data gathered over forty years ago from tenth-grade males, examined youth aggression using Adolescent Strain and Social Learning Theory models. One of the major findings of this study was that physical aggression by a parent is more likely to lead to physical aggression on the part of the child, whereas physical aggression by the youth directed at the parent is more likely to deter further physical aggression on the part of the parent. This finding is similar to Eckstein's (2004) study that found, the use of violence on the part of the parents resulted in an escalation of conflict, whereas parents were more likely to *back down* when confronted with youth violence.

Widom (1989) conducted an extensive literature review to examine the hypothesis that violence breeds violence. Widom concluded, that due to methodological problems characteristic of the *cycle of violence* literature, such as questionable criteria for neglect and abuse, ex post facto studies, lack of appropriate comparison or control groups, and

lack of knowledge regarding long-term consequences of neglect and abuse, further convincing evidence was needed before the *violence-breeds-violence* hypothesis could be accepted.

2.8 Response of the Criminal Justice System

There has been little research on how the police and legal system have responded to youth-to-parent abuse. While there is generally mandatory arrest for spousal/partner violence, and child abuse reports are taken seriously, in the case of adolescent violence toward parents, police have discretionary power and often figure strongly in resolution of cases. Using the Adolescent Stress and Family Conflict Theory models to frame youth-to-parent abuse, Evans & Warren-Sohlberg (1988) examined the official police records of a community in Nebraska, providing a unique look at the issue of law enforcement in this type of family violence.

The official definition of domestic violence in the community under study was “*the actual or threatened use of force by one family member toward another*” (p.203). Cases involving adolescents 12 to 17 years were examined from the formal records of all domestic violence during the period from November 1984 to 1987. Data examined were from 65 cases where the adolescent was the primary aggressor, and included age and gender, family background variables, relationship between the antagonists, circumstances of the incident, instigator of the police complaint, and resolution of the case. Males were the predominant aggressors with 49.3% of sons displaying aggression against their mothers and 16.4% sons against fathers. Daughters displaying aggression toward mothers accounted for 32.9% with 1.4% daughters against fathers. The majority of cases were by the 15-17 year-olds. Thirty-six percent of the youth had prior juvenile records for

shoplifting, drug or alcohol possession, assault, possession of stolen property, and had been reported as runaways. The type of violence varied widely from 56% physically assaulting their parents, while 16% threatened to use a weapon. Verbal-only threats occurred mostly with females, and property damage, for example, kicking or breaking furniture, involved only males.

Reasons for dispute were similar across gender and age with the exception of disputes between daughters and mothers regarding sexuality. *Homelife* constituted the widest variety ranging from disagreement about privileges and home responsibilities to sibling fights, and transportation problems (for example, rides to the local mall). *Money Problems* constituted the second-ranked category with disputes over spending patterns and allowances high on the list of concerns. *Alcohol/Drug Abuse* was the third-ranked category.

Data gathered revealed that 34% of the adolescent aggressors were arrested, police transported 9% to the home of a friend, and 7% were placed immediately in a child protective services facility. In most cases the arrest of the youth resulted in release and referral to a diversion program where the youth typically was required to serve eight hours community service and attend two hours of anger management counseling. A behavioral contract was drawn up and a juvenile probation officer would be responsible for periodic monitoring. Two-thirds of the adolescent aggressors had had some prior contact with the criminal justice system or social services (predominately mental health services). This study is unique in that it offers a criminal justice perspective on youth-to-parent abuse. The authors identified some common characteristics of the youth, provided some incidence rates and reported how the cases were resolved. The study's limitation is

that it was carried out in the United States over 20 years ago, and its relevancy to the current Canadian context is questionable; however the methods used in this study to gather data through police records may be a good starting place for uncovering information about youth-to-parent abuse in Nova Scotia.

2.9 Qualitative Research

More recently, a few researchers have used qualitative methodology to examine youth-to-parent abuse (Cottrell & Monk, 2004; Eckstein, 2004; Jackson, 2003). Jackson conducted a qualitative study using a feminist-informed framework to explore the experiences of six women who had been victims of youth-to-mother violence. The Australian exploratory-descriptive study was drawn from a larger study with twenty mothers with youth 17 years old or older, the aim of which was to explore women's experiences and perceptions of motherhood. All perpetrators were male children between the ages of 14-16. All boys had substance-abuse problems. The women reported they felt ineffectual faced with the physical size of their sons and although they sought help from partners, the family was unable to effectively modify the youth's behavior. In one family the children had grown up witnessing frequent outbursts of hostility and violence between their parents but the other five families had not experienced family violence before this. In hindsight all women reported they could have used professional support but they did not know where to go or who to ask. They had not heard of this type of violence and were unprepared for it. Jackson uncovered three themes in the women's narratives: "*It was only a matter of time: Feeling intimidated and under threat; He just punched me: Physical violence from child to mother; and Other men in the house: Violence directed toward mothers by child's friends and associates*" (p. 324). All women

described their fear and concern and expressed that it was generated by the changes in their relationships with their sons. Previously affectionate relationships had become strained and fraught with tension. These mothers described their ever-increasing attempts to control and discipline their sons. In two cases the women were single parents and they described how not feeling safe in their own homes led them to lock their bedroom doors. Words used to describe their sons were *menacing, intimidating, threatening, hostile, abusive, and belligerent*. Mothers felt they had been put at risk because of their son's lifestyles and frequently faced distressing events. Finally, some of the women felt that they were to blame, that in some way they had failed as mothers and this led to the violence. The main limitation of Jackson's study is its lack of generalizability. It represented the views of six Western Caucasian middle-class, educated women.

Eckstein (2004) explored youth-to-parent violence, through face-to-face in-depth interviews with twenty parents whose adolescent children had verbally, physically and emotionally abused them. The purpose of Eckstein's study was to explore youth-to-parent abuse through the victims' reports while at the same time identify interpretations of the meanings parents gave to these episodes. Eckstein used the Family Systems Theory model to frame the following three questions: "How do adolescent-to-parent abuse episodes progress and escalate over time? How does adolescent-to-parent abuse affect parents' perception of their parenting role within the family? How does adolescent-to-parent abuse affect parents' perception of their parenting role outside the family?" (p.370). A qualitative/interpretive method was used in the analysis.

Participants' reports were analyzed for recurring themes. All of the parents interviewed agreed that there was a continuum of seriousness with the abuse. Verbal

abuse was seen as the least hurtful, physical abuse was the second most hurtful and emotional abuse was seen as the most damaging and hurtful, and was considered the longest-lasting type. Parents reported a pattern of escalation from verbal abuse to physical or emotional abuse and stated that their inability to prevent it from occurring allowed the verbal abuse to escalate. Once the conflict episodes escalated parents were unable to control the abuse.

Eckstein found that parents' perceptions of their role within the family changed. They experienced a loss of control. This was related to age, size and parents' ineffectiveness at delivering consequences. During initial verbal attacks most parents challenged their children, demanding respect but all parents reported that the adolescents "got into their faces" and would not back down which further escalated the situation (p.376). Eventually the parents relinquished their authority in the hopes of maintaining peace. With this loss of power in the home, parents perceived their roles changing outside the family as well. Adults of abusive teens found they had very little power and suffered severe consequences from the judicial system if their youth reported abuse. Eckstein revealed that power had inadvertently been placed in the hands of abusive youth because they could call the police to report child abuse at the hands of their parents.

Two limitations of Eckstein's study are that the reports of abusive episodes were limited to the parents' perspectives and were retrospective. Generalizability is limited since all participants were European American, and had participated in some type of family counseling program. As well some of the social and psychological factors thought to be associated with parent-to-youth abuse were not explored. For example, Eckstein did

not ask parents if their children had witnessed marital violence or if their children had been subjected to verbal, physical, emotional or sexual abuse.

Cottrell & Monk (2004) combined their findings from two research studies. Cottrell and Finlayson gathered qualitative data between 1995-1996 in Nova Scotia, Canada, from thirty-four abused parents, thirty-nine abusive youth and twenty-nine service providers. Participants were Caucasian (94%), with 5% Black and 1% First Nations. Monk's study was carried out in Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada in 1997. Participants were community counselors who had been identified as having clinical experience with adolescent-to-parent abuse (10 men and 11 women), seven parents who had experienced abuse, and five youth who had abused their parents. The majority of the participants were Caucasian (82%), with 15% First Nations and 3% Indo-Canadian. Cottrell and Monk used a Nested Ecological Theory of Family Violence to frame their questions, exploring whether or not hypothesized factors were contributing to the abuse.

They found that typically abuse began between the ages of 12-16 years, youth who were larger and stronger than their parents used intimidation to control, whereas the smaller, less powerful caused injury to establish power. Mothers and stepmothers, as the sole or predominant parent, were the parent most frequently abused. A number of themes emerged from their research: Socialization of male power, youth response to victimization, parenting styles and family dynamics, poverty and related stressors, mental health issues, effects of substance abuse, peer influence and the role of schools, maintaining family secrecy, and the lack of information and community supports.

The *Socialization of Male Power* reflected the belief that "it is acceptable to control and dominate women" (p.1081). Parents and service providers consistently

described adolescent male's abusive power as stemming from the role modeling of masculine stereotypes that promote the manipulation of power and control in relationships. Females viewed their mothers as powerless, and in an attempt to distance themselves from this weakness, they identified with the male stereotype and used aggressive behavior. Finally, most fathers were seen as strong and powerful and this decreased the possibility of abuse against them.

Another common theme was *Youth Response to Victimization*. It appeared that youth who engaged in youth-to-parent abuse had witnessed marital/partner violence, been physically abused themselves, or had been sexually abused by their fathers or stepfathers. Their aggression usually followed a lengthy period of abuse and was often motivated by the need for self-protection or in some cases as a means to protect younger siblings from sexual abuse. Emotional abuse and neglect were also common themes revealed by youth and service providers. Many youth had been raised in emotionally abusive environments and suffered from poor parental attachments and internalized negative self-images.

Parenting Styles and Family Dynamics referred to a common family pattern where the parents were either too controlling or overly permissive. Youth in the studies responded to conflicting child-rearing styles by either increased resentment and conflict toward the *firm* parent or intimidating behavior toward the *permissive* parent. *Poverty* often increased the potential for youth-to-parent abuse. *Related Stressors* such as the stress and strain experienced in the family environment where the single mother tried to cope with child care, finances and social isolation often left youth feeling alienated and aggression was a means of expressing this frustration and anger. Many youth had problems with *Mental Health Issues*. Although the causal relationship was not clear many of these youth

had problems with impulse control, affect regulation, and interpersonal skills and had received DSM-IV diagnoses such as, schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, reactive attachment disorder, attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder, learning disorders, and disruptive behavior disorders. *Effects of Substance Abuse* was a common theme for many. Alcohol and drug use by both youth and parents were often linked to aggressive behaviors and increased conflict. *Peer Influence* was related to youth-to-parent abuse in two ways. Peers influenced the development of youth-to-parent abuse by modeling how violent behavior at home could lead to gaining power and control over parents. Youth were also influenced by peers when they got into trouble together. When parents tried to establish firmer rules, power struggles ensued. *The Role of Schools* reflected that the youth often had been victimized at school and used abusive behavior toward their parents to compensate for feelings of powerlessness. Some other youth had not experienced success at school and had histories of academic and behavioral problems. This failure often led to antisocial activities which increased the likelihood for more conflict at school and home. *Maintaining Family Secrecy* was related to denial, self-blame, family loyalty, and fear on the part of the parents. *Lack of Information and Community Supports* theme reflected that often the police minimized the victimization and even when the youth were charged the slow response of the judicial system required that the youth remain in the family home until the court date. The youth's power to call the authorities and charge the parent with child abuse has been called the Hammer of the 90s (Price, 1996). Clearly these combined studies are not without limitations but the qualitative approach used has identified similarities and common themes between people in British Columbia and Nova Scotia.

Quantitative research would help determine the extent to which the various themes uncovered contribute to youth-to-parent abuse.

2.10 Theoretical Models

Youth-to-parent abuse has been framed within a number of theoretical models. The most common approach used by researchers has been to integrate existing theories from psychology, sociology and criminology. Some researchers have proposed models that combine family violence theories with theories of juvenile delinquency. Agnew & Huguley (1989) offered a comprehensive integrated framework combining family violence theories with theories of juvenile delinquency (social control, differential association and strain theory). Other researchers (Brezina, 1999; Carlson, 1990; Evans & Warren-Sohlberg, 1998) have proposed psychosocial models drawing on theories such as Stress Theory and Social Learning Theory. Eckstein (2004) proposed a Family Systems Theory model which hypothesized that the communication styles of parent and youth create reciprocal escalating patterns of interactions that can lead to youth-to-parent abuse. One debate is about where to place youth-to-parent abuse. Jackson (2003) believed that by situating youth-to-parent abuse within the juvenile delinquency literature, it is not subject to the scrutiny of feminist researchers. She makes a case for placing youth-to-parent abuse within the family violence literature.

Cottrell & Monk (2004) proposed a nested ecological framework (Belsky, 1980; Dutton, 1985) from which to understand this form of family violence. This model is premised on reciprocal interactions of four levels: the societal contexts, which are the *Macrosystem* and the *Exosystem*, the familial context, which is the *Microsystem*, and the individual characteristics, which is the *Ontogenetic*. The *Macrosystem* includes cultural

values and belief systems. Examining these influences on a youth's life can help in the understanding of how he/she was shaped. Cultural acceptance and reinforcement of gender inequality and violent media images have been hypothesized to contribute to youth-to-parent abuse (Cottrell & Monk 2004; Jackson, 2003). The next level within the ecological model is the Exosystem and this includes the social structures that influence the development of the child and family functioning, such as workplaces, community centers, and school boards. Although a child may not be directly involved in these areas their effects play a shaping role. For example, socioeconomic status (financial strain), lack of community supports, and social isolation are some of the influences hypothesized to play a role in youth-to-parent abuse (Cottrell & Monk 2004). The familial context is referred to as the Microsystem. Within this sphere some examples of risk factors would be harsh or inconsistent parenting, negative communication styles, and adolescent stress, and strain from lack of healthy conflict-resolution skills. The fourth level within the nested ecological theory focuses on individual characteristics of the youth such as the youth's attachment style, interpersonal skills or mental illnesses such as schizophrenia. The Ontogenetic factors are shaped, or influenced by factors from the Macrosystem, the Exosystem, and the Microsystem. For the purposes of this thesis this theoretical model will be used as it captures the complexity involved when considering youth-to-parent abuse and considers multiple influences.

2.11 Criminal Justice Response to Young Offenders

In this section the criminal justice system's current response to youth who commit crimes will be described. The first section provides a brief overview of the Youth

Criminal Justice Act and the second section describes Restorative Justice, which is an alternative to the traditional criminal court system.

2.12 Canadian Youth Criminal Justice Act

Currently, Canadian youth who commit crimes are subject to the law under Bill C-7, the Youth Criminal Justice Act. This law replaced the Young Offender's Act and came into force on April 1, 2003. The Youth Criminal Justice Act introduced significant reforms designed to address the weaknesses of the Young Offender's Act. The Young Offender's Act, enacted in the late 1980s as a response to the Juvenile Delinquent Act, which treated youth more as criminals than misguided children, was criticized on many counts. It did not provide clear legislative direction, it lacked a clear and coherent youth justice philosophy and it promoted the overuse of incarceration (Canada has the highest youth incarceration in the Western world, including the United States). Under the old Act, the young offender was not ensured effective reintegration after incarceration and the concerns and interests of victims were not sufficiently recognized. There were unfairness and disparities in youth sentencing, overuse of courts for minor cases that could be dealt with better outside of courts, and an unfair, complex system for transferring youth to adult systems. The Youth Criminal Justice Act, by contrast, emphasizes the rehabilitation and reintegration of a young offender into society. The youth justice system is held responsible for providing a youth system that is different from the adult system. The youth's reduced level of maturity must be considered, timely intervention is required, intervention must be fair and in proportion to the seriousness of the crime, less emphasis is placed on custody and more emphasis placed on alternative youth sentencing methods, and more opportunity is provided for victims and parents to be

informed about and participate in addressing the youth's offences (Department of Justice Canada, 2006).

2.13 What is Restorative Justice?

Restorative justice offers an alternative approach to the traditional criminal justice system (Latimer, Dowden & Muise, 2005). Crime is viewed as a violation of people and relationships and as such, offenders, victims and the community are brought together in an attempt to arrive at a solution that will benefit all. The goals of Restorative Justice are the promotion of effective crime control, offender accountability, education and reintegration, as well as reparation that promotes healing for all involved. In contrast, the goals of the current 'retributive' approach of the criminal justice system are to determine blame and administer consequences (Mediation Services, 2004).

Providing a universally accepted definition of restorative justice is challenging. Because it is not a distinct model or system of law and is a socially constructed philosophical movement, Restorative Justice varies in application and interpretation. Placing narrow limits on the definition of restorative justice affects its wide applicability as an alternative system (Bonta, Wallace-Capretta, Rooney & McAnoy, 2002). There are core beliefs and principles of restorative justice which are shared by those in the field and provide a framework from which to design various programs and applications but there is also a recognition that there has to be room for different interpretations based on a community's values and needs. As Umbriet, Coates & Vos (2004) state: "there exists a strong temptation when working with emerging paradigms, models, and approaches to lock in what *is* as the final statement on what *should be*" (p.88). Restorative Justice is evolving and it is necessary to remain open to new ideas and possibilities while retaining

the underlying principles (Umbreit et al., 2004). The following section will describe the history of Restorative Justice, its principles and values, victims' roles and needs, offenders, community, and community volunteers.

2.14 History of Restorative Justice.

The current Restorative Justice Movement began in the 1960s and 1970s in various locations around the world (that is, Canada, United States, New Zealand and England). It was based on a belief that the criminal justice system had had limited effectiveness in meeting the needs of victims, offenders, and communities and that there was a need for an alternative framework for thinking about crime, conflict, and community involvement. Pioneers of the movement advocated for more active involvement of the victims, offenders, and community members in the justice process. Divergent conceptualizations emerged depending on the particular lens through which restorative justice was viewed. The religious-based groups, such as the Quakers and prison chaplains, saw restorative justice as an opportunity for apology and forgiveness and focussed on personal and interpersonal relationships. Other advocates of a restorative justice approach (that is, judges, police, academics, bureaucrats) saw it as an opportunity to get to the root of the problems of recidivism and victimization by eliciting the support of family and community members. Others believed that the restorative justice movement could promote positive social change and community mobilization. For Aboriginal communities, the restorative justice approach was a way to rebuild their communities, reassert control over their lives, and return the ownership of justice to the community where they felt it belonged (Clairmont, 2000).

These varying conceptualizations translated into diverse programs which can be grouped into three major categories: victim-offender mediation, conferences, and circles. These models, while differing in practice employ similar principles (Latimer et al., 2005). For example, in the 1970s, a large Mennonite community in Ontario, Canada experimented with victim-offender meetings that led to programs in their communities and developed into Victim-Offender models that became used worldwide (Zehr, 2002). Other projects were designed to complement the Western legal system and agencies (e.g. the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, paroling authorities) and were intended to work side-by-side with the mainstream justice system utilizing practices such as court-based mediation. For example, a judge might request a *restorative* conference for the offender, offender's support person, and possibly a victim (Clairmont, 2000).

First Nations peoples in Canada and New Zealand utilized restorative approaches such as *circles* and *conferences*. Peacemaking Circles or *sentencing circles*, as fitting approaches for a restorative process, were resurrected by Judge Barry Stuart in the Yukon in 1991. These updated versions of traditional sanctioning and healing practices are currently used for a variety of situations. For example, sentencing circles (sentences are determined in criminal cases), healing circles (sometimes used in preparation for sentencing circles), and workplace conflict circles are used as a means of encouraging partnerships between justice agencies and communities to participate in resolving conflict and creating resolutions (Stuart, 1996).

In 1989 in New Zealand, a revolutionary approach to the juvenile justice system was adopted when officials introduced the use of restorative conferences for dealing with juvenile crime. The New Zealand model of conferencing uses professional social services

personnel to design and implement a process that will meet the needs and cultures of the victims and families involved (Zehr, 2002). This paradigm shift, which demands a response to youth crime that is flexible and diverse, was the result of a crisis in the welfare and justice system and the criticisms of the native Maori population which viewed the justice system as “imposed, alien and colonial” (Zehr, 2002, p. 48). Today New Zealand and Australia are actively involved in the development and implementation of many restorative justice initiatives aimed toward youth (Strang & Braithwaite, 2002).

Current restorative justice initiatives are international with diverse programs (that is, Victim-Offender and Family Group Conferences, Peacemaking Circles) operating all over the world including the United States, Canada, United Kingdom, New Zealand, Australia, Norway, and Asia (Hughes & Mossman, 2001). In 1996 the United Nations Working Group on Restorative Justice defined restorative justice as, “a process whereby all parties with a stake in a particular offence come together to resolve collectively how to deal with the aftermath of the offence and its implications for the future” (Clairmont, 2000, p. 145).

2.15 Restorative Justice: Principles and Values.

Howard Zehr (2000), credited with being the first writer to create an integrated and comprehensive model of Restorative Justice (Marshall, 1998), states that in order for restorative justice to work with integrity and creativity a clear vision of principles and goals must guide the process. Those five key principles are: a focus on the harms and needs of those affected by wrongdoing (that is, victims, offenders, communities and society); addressing the obligations that result from those harms (that is, offender’s obligations, as well as the community’s and society’s); the use of a collaborative process;

involvement of all those with a stake in the situation (victims, offenders, community, society); and finally, putting right the wrongs. Marshall (1998) outlines similar principles in advocating the need for those directly involved to participate (offender, victim) while simultaneously calling upon family and community members to participate. Marshall also outlines three additional principles: a need to view crime in its social context, a preventative, problem-solving approach, and creativity or flexibility. A further principle necessary for the restorative process to work is the need for voluntariness and truth-telling. The participants involved in coming together to discuss the criminal event must do so willingly. They must be able to discuss openly and honestly in a safe, organized setting in order to collectively agree on an appropriate resolution (Llewellyn and Howse, 1998). Values such as respect, honesty, mutual care, humility, trust, and accountability define the restorative justice process. These values, considered essential to healthy, just and equitable relationships, are the determinants of a restorative justice process.

2.16 Victims: Roles and Needs.

One of the key features of restorative justice is that the victim is given a voice. This is in contrast to the traditional criminal justice system where the victim's voice is silent and the state is designated to speak on behalf of the victims. One of the major drawbacks of the current criminal justice system is its lack of victim involvement (Kenny, 1995). Victims have expressed their dissatisfaction with a process that does not allow them a voice. Because they have a limited role in the Justice System, they often believe their needs and concerns are not adequately met (Roach, 1999; Strang, 2002; Marshall, 1998). As victims of crime, they often feel as though their control was taken away. Being involved in their own case can return a sense of empowerment. Zehr (2002)

offers a possible explanation for why the restorative process can be beneficial for victims. He claims that in order for victims to transcend an experience, *restorying* their lives is necessary. By retelling the *story* of victimization over and over and receiving public acknowledgement, victims are able to move on with a better understanding of why the crime was committed. As well, the retelling of the story facilitates a new construction of the story and another way of viewing themselves.

A model of restorative justice where victims have an opportunity to be heard is *family group conferencing*. This type of restorative justice calls on the support of both the victims' and offenders' families and friends. Victims who participate in these family conferences generally express satisfaction, feeling that their voices have been heard (Clairmont, 2005; Roach, 1999) and report that they have been treated fairly, had their rights respected, were not discriminated against because of gender or race, had their anger, and their fear of being revictimized reduced (Braithwaite, 2002; Poulson, 2003; Strang, 2002; Zehr, 2002). Maxwell and Morris (1996) pointed out that it would be unrealistic to expect all victims to be healed or for all offenders to be remorseful; however, the restorative justice model of family conferencing can potentially offer considerably more positive outcomes than can the criminal courts (Bonta et al., 2002).

One of the mechanisms used in the restorative justice process is the option of a face-to-face meeting between offender(s), victim(s), their supports, and engaged community members (that is, volunteers, police officers). Through this venue victims have an opportunity to describe the impact the crime had on them, offenders accept responsibility for the crime, and together all parties involved formulate plans for an appropriate resolution, one that is healing for those affected. Examples of successful

resolutions include but are not limited to financial payments, specific undertakings (that is, anger management classes or counseling for the offender), or work for the victim or community (Marshall, 1998). For some victims, meeting the offender is not possible or desirable. In this case, symbolic restitution in the form of a letter of apology, a video exchange or a representative for the victim expressing the harm incurred is a means of an indirect encounter that is adequately effective (Rugge, Bonta, & Wallace-Capretta, 2005).

2.17 Offenders.

In the restorative justice model, an offender is encouraged to follow a process of self-examination that leads to accountability and an acceptance of the responsibility for the crime committed. Pranis (1998) outlines the necessary components: the offender understands how the behavior affected other human beings and not just the courts or officials, acknowledges that the behavior was a choice which could have been made differently, acknowledges to all those affected that the behavior was harmful to others, takes action to repair the harm where possible, and makes changes necessary to avoid such behavior in the future. Without these components a restorative justice encounter cannot be considered successful.

The implementation of a restorative justice process requires the examination into what caused an offender to act in such a manner and what can be done to help that person fully understand the impact his/her actions have had on all those involved. An offender's self-determination, the idea that people are their own best experts, is considered key in achieving a successful restorative outcome. It is believed that, by giving people a chance to analyze and understand their own situations, they will arrive at interpretations and actions that are more realistic, helpful, and lasting than those arrived at through the

traditional retributive system (Mediation Services, 2004). Strang (2002) emphasizes the importance of the victim's role in compelling offenders to understand and take responsibility for their actions. A restorative justice encounter where victim meets offender is often exceptionally powerful in that the victim has the "legitimacy to cut through the denial and defiance that offenders frequently exhibit at the beginning of a restorative justice encounter" (Strang, p. 78). The adversarial nature of the traditional criminal system encourages offenders to look out for themselves and they are given little opportunity to acknowledge and act on their responsibility for the crime. Offenders are advised by legal counsel to distance themselves from the people they have hurt which does not allow the offender to *put right* the wrong (as much as possible) he/she has committed from the point of view of the victim.

A further principle of restorative justice is to acknowledge that many offenders have been victimized and traumatized themselves and, while this does not excuse their criminal behavior, restorative justice principles and values require supporting the education and reintegration of the offender into the community where the harm was committed (Marshall, 1998; Pranis, 1998; Zehr, 2002). During the restorative process all attempts are made to address the harms and needs of the offender. Supports may be put in place (for example, counseling), or programs may be offered (anger management) designed to help an offender regain control of his/her life, ultimately in order to prevent re-offending. Some young persons who are referred to Restorative Justice have spent years in and out of foster homes, group homes, and various facilities and they have no familial support. The traditional criminal justice system would send the youth to court and then possibly to jail where few opportunities would be presented for the youth to turn

his/her life around. Once incarcerated, these young people quickly become further immersed in criminality and often find their role models and mentors amongst the older inmates.

Restorative Justice brings together people of the community (police officers, facilitators, adults who act as Community representatives) interested in helping these youth before they go to jail. At the very least the youth is given some support from adults who are seeking his/her best interests. The difference between a restorative justice approach and the criminal system's approach, where there is no investigation into the root causes or aftermaths of the youth's aggressive behavior, is that interested community members volunteer their time to help the youth become accountable.

2.18 Community.

A restorative approach views crime as a violation of people and relationships and calls upon the community to claim responsibility for that conflict, for it is within the context of the community that relationships are damaged by crime (Dyck, 2004). Those who have been affected have the power to come together to help heal and repair the harm. Pranis (1998) stated that: "communities themselves do not worry much about academic definitions. They soon define themselves based on the issue at hand" (p.1). Pranis describes community in two ways. Firstly, in the context of crime, the geographic location (community of place) around a crime is affected and therefore has a stake in the resolution of the crime. Within the community three relationships are harmed when a crime is committed: the relationship between the victim and the community, between the offender and the community, and between the victim and the offender. The victim often experiences isolation because other community members may blame the victim or may

not want to hear about the victimization. The victim may feel let down because the community did not provide protection and may be left wondering who can be trusted. The relationship between the offender and the community is damaged because the offender has caused harm to the community and lost its trust. Finally, the relationship between the victim and the offender is damaged because the offender has violated the victim, taking away his/her power (Pranis, 1998). In order for healing and reparation to rebuild and strengthen the community, an appropriate power balance must be restored.

Community of place (geographic) is also very important when considering prevention of crime. A sense of security is directly related to crime and many correlates of crime relate to characteristics of place. Pranis (1998) calls for wider community of place (geographic) involvement stating: "Harmony among people who live near each other provides greater safety than weapons, walls or security systems" (p.16).

Secondly, community in the restorative justice sense is not confined to geographic location since those who are not geographically close may also have a stake in the resolution of a crime. This has been described as the community of interest and has been defined as a group of people experiencing a sense of connection because of a shared interest. The community of interest is identified by answering the question: "Who has a stake in the outcome?" Marshall (1998) suggests any "relatives, supporters and significant others that each party has is sufficient basis for involvement and intervention" (p. 31). Zehr (2002) asks: "Who in the community cares about the people involved in the offense?" and "How can they be involved?"(p.28).

2.19 Community Volunteers.

Many restorative initiatives rely heavily on volunteers from the community (Umbriet et al., 2004). Volunteer facilitators are provided with initial and ongoing training in the area of justice conference facilitation. Facilitators guide the conversation between the young person, and the parties involved (victim, support persons, community representatives) providing the tools and encouragement needed to arrive at an adequate resolution.

Another role played by volunteer community members is for them to join the facilitators as representatives of the community. This point of view can be expressed by any concerned citizen (local business owner, a police officer, or a neighbor), and provides another voice to ensure that youth understand the impact their crime has had on the community. When interested parties collaborate to take ownership of crime and conflict, an opportunity arises to repair and build relationships, which in turn can build healthy, safe communities.

2.20 Nova Scotia Restorative Justice Initiative

The restorative justice model currently in operation in Halifax, Nova Scotia dates from 1997 when the Department of Justice in Nova Scotia began pre-implementation planning for a system-wide Restorative Justice Initiative. In large part due to the efforts of a local defense lawyer, senior politicians and criminal justice officials were persuaded to work toward the adoption of a restorative justice approach. At that time, seven non-profit agencies were delivering alternative measures (AM) programs for youth aged twelve to seventeen, on behalf of Nova Scotia's Department of Justice. These agencies were restricted in their attempts to offer viable alternatives to youth because they were

limited in their referral sources, (usually just the police), their restriction to first-time offenders, (except in unusual circumstances), and in the type of offences they could handle. The restorative justice initiative was viewed as an opportunity to *add value* to the alternative measures programming (Clairmont, Thomson, Kenney, & Graham, 2002). In 1999, three key partners (federal and provincial governments and non-profit organizations that had been delivering the alternative measures programs) introduced the Nova Scotia Restorative Justice Initiative (NSRJ), which was implemented throughout the province for youth offenders between the ages of twelve and seventeen. Thus far, cases involving sexual assault, and/or partner/spousal violence, and adult offenders are not referred to the alternative justice programs in Nova Scotia. Currently, Nova Scotia leads the way in Canada with a unique, elaborate, province-wide program that is supported provincially.

With the implementation of the Youth Criminal Justice Act in 2003, an emphasis on the rehabilitation and reintegration of the young offender into society meant an expanded role for alternative measures such as Restorative Justice programs. Referrals for a restorative justice forum can come from within the justice system and depending on the case and community involved, alternative measures can be implemented at four entry points: 1) Police entry point-- referral by police officers (pre-charge); 2) Crown entry point—referral by Crown Attorneys (post-charge/pre-conviction); 3) Court entry point—referral by Judges (post-conviction/pre-sentence); 4) Corrections entry point—referral by Correctional Services or Victims' Services staff (post-sentence). Nova Scotia is the only province where referrals can be made from any place in the justice system.

The success of this four-entry point approach depends on close co-operation

between criminal justice officials (police, crown attorneys, judges, and correctional officials) and agencies providing the services. The referrals must come to the agencies from these various entry points, and in order to provide alternative justice practices to cases of more serious offence the referrals would have to be made post-charge, post-conviction, and post-sentence. The criminal justice officials (that is, police, crown attorneys, judges, and correctional services officials) have recently been referring more serious crimes to the Halifax agency. The offences dealt with range from minor to serious, including shoplifting, vandalism to assault, and assault with a deadly weapon.

Participant's satisfaction with the Restorative Justice program in Nova Scotia has recently been evaluated. Clairmont (2005) found that 90% of the participants expressed overall satisfaction with the conference's outcome. Data were from 4000 exit surveys of Restorative conferences and over 1350 follow-up interviews with offender(s), their support(s), victim(s), their support(s), and others (police officers, community representatives, specialists, trainees). The exit surveys required participants to respond to twelve statements that were related to *process* issues and *outcome* aspects. Most participants agreed with the positive statements and disagreed with the negative. Process statements included items such as: "I was able to take an active part and have my say, there were people ...who supported me, people seemed to understand my side of things" (p.72). Outcome statements included: "This kind of conference helps the offender more than the victim, I think this kind of conference will help the offender to stay away from crime, and I would recommend conferences like this to deal with offenses like this one" (p.72). As Clairmont (2005) pointed out, the forms were completed on-site immediately after a *consensus-based decision* had been made, so a high level of satisfaction was

expected. The follow-up telephone interviews with over 1350 participants provided a rich source of information regarding the participants' views with "both strong patterns of consensus and much diversity in participants' views" (Clairmont, 2005, p. 88).

Undoubtedly there would have been cases of youth-to-parent abuse within this study but this information is not available.

2.21 Restorative Justice and Family Violence

There has been some research on restorative justice and family violence in Australia and New Zealand (Daly & Stubbs, 2006; Strang & Braithwaite, 2002), United States (Grauwiler & Mills, 2004), and Canada (Cameron, 2006; Rubin, 2003), but this research deals almost exclusively with spousal/partner or child abuse. There has been no research specifically focussed on youth-to-parent abuse. Morris (2002), in a discussion paper on family violence and restorative justice, included a case study of youth-to-parent abuse, where a youth had assaulted his mother and a resolution was reached through a Restorative Justice conference. The conference participants were the youth, his lawyer, his mother, seven whanau (extended family members), and a number of professionals. An holistic approach was decided upon where the youth's problems were addressed on all levels, emotional, spiritual, physical, and cultural. As part of the resolution the youth, his mother, and the whanau spent time together working on a detailed plan for the future. When the youth went to court the judge accepted the recommendations and the youth avoided a possible two-year jail sentence (Morris, 2002). In conclusion, Morris states that restorative justice forums provide an ideal opportunity for families to display their strengths. With the support of the extended family arranging networks of support and surveillance, monitoring safety plans, risks can be minimized.

2.22 Restorative Justice and Youth-to-Parent Abuse

Youth-to-parent abuse is addressed through the Restorative Justice program in Nova Scotia. Local feminists argue that the principles and policies of Restorative Justice do not address systemic violence and victim/abuser dynamics. Advocacy on the part of various local groups has resulted in no sexual assault or domestic violence (spousal/partner abuse) cases being handled in the Nova Scotia agencies (Avalon Sexual Center, 1999). Currently, there are a number of avenues that can lead to a youth ending up at a restorative justice forum because of youth-to-parent abuse. Typically, in a volatile situation where the youth is acting out, the police are called. At that point the police can simply issue a warning to the young person, the police can refer the youth to the Restorative Justice program directly, or the youth can be charged and arrested. While awaiting the court date, the youth will be sent back home. Once the case makes it to court, often the crown attorney will refer the youth to the Restorative Justice program to seek resolution.

Usually, in the restorative justice process, a youth's parents accompany their son/daughter to the contract session, to provide support. In the case of youth-to-parent abuse the parent attends the session as the victim, and the young person is the offender. Whether or not Restorative Justice principles and policies can adequately address this form of family violence remains to be seen. Generally, research has shown that participants are, for the most part, pleased with the restorative process and outcomes. Therefore, it seems reasonable to assume that given the restorative justice philosophy of healing and reparation for all, this venue would be an ideal response to youth-to-parent abuse. Complicating the assumption, however, is the fact that this is a form of family

violence. Perhaps the concerns put forth by feminists that the restorative venue does not adequately address systemic violence and victim/abuser dynamics are warranted.

Currently, we just do not know. There is a need for further research into this most important issue.

2.23 Conclusion

A brief history of family violence research reveals that in the last twenty-five years great strides have been made toward understanding and intervening in violence against women, children and the elderly. Research on youth-to-parent abuse is limited but early research and increasing anecdotal and qualitative reports indicate the existence of this form of family violence. Some parents turn to the police and the criminal justice system for help with their out-of-control youth. That fact, coupled with the emphasis on alternative solutions for young offenders based on the *Youth Criminal Justice Act*, has meant more and more youth are being referred to the Restorative Justice program. These are the cases I was interested in researching. By listening to the stories of the parents in these situations, I hoped to accomplish two main goals: to gain a better understanding of the family dynamics at work in this form of family violence and to learn how Restorative Justice met or did not meet their needs.

Chapter Three **Methodology/Methods**

3.0 Methodology

This project was a qualitative phenomenological investigation that incorporated feminist research principles. The project explored the lived experiences of parents who had gone through the Restorative Justice process because of conflict with their son or daughter. A qualitative inquiry is often a useful method when there has not been much research done on a topic. Currently, no known published research has investigated this particular form of family violence and its relation to the Restorative Justice process. Moustakas (1994) describes phenomenological research as: “pre-empirical, pre-experimental, and pre-statistical; it is experiential and qualitative” (p.12). I was interested in examining comprehensive descriptions of the phenomena to acquire knowledge that revealed more fully the meanings of human experience rather than using a quantitative inquiry that would focus on determining or predicting causal relationships. Kvale (1996) stated that the purpose of qualitative interviews is not to arrive at unequivocal and quantifiable meanings on the themes but to “describe precisely the possibly ambiguous and contradictory meanings expressed” (p.34). We must be mindful that ambiguity and contradictions in the interview situation may be adequate reflections of the contradictions in the interviewees’ lives.

Central to this project is the assumption that knowledge about the social world can be conceptualized in alternative ways where “meaning is situated in a particular perspective or context, and, since different people and groups have different perspectives and contexts, there are many different meanings in the world, none of which is necessarily more valid or true than another” (Gay & Airasian, 1999). In other words the

purpose of this research was not to establish objective facts about family violence and restorative justice, but to explore the participants' understanding of this topic. Feminist research principles work well with this view. As Reinharz (1992) pointed out, "at the core of feminist ideas is the crucial insight that there is no one truth, no one authority, no one objective method which leads to the production of pure knowledge" (p.7).

Kvale (1996) emphasized that the phenomenological approach is concerned with understanding the phenomena from the participants' perspective where the important reality is what they perceive it to be. One of the preferred methods of gathering this type of information is by using semi-structured interviewing with open-ended questions. In this way detailed descriptions of peoples' lived experiences are gathered (Patton, 1996) and researchers are provided "access to people's ideas, thoughts, and memories in their own words rather than in the words of the researcher" (Reinharz, 1992, p.19). The parents in this study described their experiences, retrospectively constructing the story through their lenses. These descriptions provided valuable insight into how the parents have made meaning out of their experiences with their son or daughter, how they have constructed their truth.

Another reason I chose a phenomenological approach for this research project is because it takes into consideration the importance of the researcher's personal history. "In a phenomenological investigation the researcher has a personal interest in whatever he or she seeks to know; the researcher is intimately connected with the phenomenon. The puzzlement is autobiographical, making memory and history essential dimensions of discovery, in the present and extensions into the future" (Moustakas, 1994, p.59). I chose

this topic because of a deep personal interest in trying to understand youth-to-parent abuse.

This method of inquiry is similar to the feminist research approach where an emphasis is placed on the value of subjectivity and personal experience (Reinharz, 1992). As the researcher, it was important to acknowledge my subjectivity and position myself within this project. I examined my ideological and cultural biases in the hopes that once identified, a constant self-reflection would inform the research processes. Scheurich (1995) referred to a researcher's "conscious and unconscious baggage" as those parts of the researcher that influence his/her perception and stated that although it is impossible to name exhaustively all the researcher's "interpretive baggage," one should provide a reasonably comprehensive statement of what the researcher is bringing to the project.

In order to understand how I could leave my "baggage" during an interview I relied heavily on the phenomenological methods of inquiry as described by Moustakas (1994). He defines the *epoche* as the starting point for investigating any phenomenon. That starting point demands freshness and naivety, an admirable but elusive way-of-being in relation to others for we are all made up of our biases and frames of reference. The assumption is that the more we are aware of those biases, the more likely we are to set them aside as much as possible, to suspend judgment and to listen to the other story without undue comparison back and forth. In an effort to remove our prejudices we return each time to the *epoche*, to the recognition of the importance of starting fresh in all searches for meaning or knowledge. The researcher attempts to look at each experience in and of itself, look at its singularity...ultimately arriving at "a textual description of the meanings and essences of the phenomenon" (Moustakas, 1994, pp.33-34).

In an attempt to provide researcher transparency and start from the epoche, that desired place of freshness and naivety, I began with self-examination or reflexivity. I asked what do I bring to the table? What is important from my life experiences that may have influenced this research project? In answering that question I arrived at four positions.

First, through the literature reviews, anecdotal information, and personal conversations I had become familiar with what knowledge had been disseminated on youth-to-parent abuse and Restorative Justice. This provided me with a knowledge base and allowed me to ask questions pertinent to the topic. At the same time, this knowledge made it hard to approach the phenomena from a fresh naïve position and consequently, the questions I asked the participants sprung from that knowledge. This in turn directed the area of topic during the interview so, in spite of valiant attempts at achieving a naïve starting point, my knowledge influenced the content and process of the interview.

Second, my position as a volunteer with the Restorative Justice program meant that I had considerable background knowledge about the way the process works and through the research process I had become quite familiar with its philosophy and best practices. Coming from this position allowed me the opportunity to draw connections between similarities, recognize differences, and it informed my interviewing skills. Due in large part to my volunteer experiences and my familiarity with the philosophy and best practices of Restorative Justice, my personal bias is that I believe Restorative Justice to be a viable positive alternative to the traditional criminal justice system processes. At the same time I had to be cognizant of the fact that, for a multitude of reasons, not all cases

referred to Restorative Justice will meet the needs of those affected by crime and not all referrals will have successful outcomes.

I am also a mother who has had considerable conflicts with my son. Telling the parents before the interview that I had this experience may have encouraged more openness on their part. Often there is shame and blame connected with these issues and knowing that I have experienced something similar may have helped in getting the parents to open up, to talk more freely about their experiences (Kenney, 2005). As a mother who has struggled to make meaning out of the experience I am privy to the wide range of thoughts and emotions a mother can experience when faced with such conflict. Therefore, I saw myself as particularly in-tune with other parents' struggles. This shared perspective and empathy may have helped to create a close rapport with the parents. The downside to this was that during two interviews where the parents' stories resonated with my own experiences, I found myself momentarily removed from that naïve *epoché* (Moustakas, 1994). I became emotionally engaged and was filtering their situation through my lenses, comparing back and forth.

Finally, I need to recognize my education as contributing to the view I brought to the interview (Kvale, 1996). As a psychology student I am devoted to understanding the human psyche and behavior. This awareness of and sensitivity to understanding people and interpersonal relationships allowed me to be more receptive to the parents, to know what leads to follow, when to ask further questions, or when to be silent and listen further. A consequence of this position was that I found myself slipping into a therapeutic role with one of the parents. I was concerned with trying to help her and instead of letting the natural flow of her story continue I was directing the interview in order to get her to

think about certain things. For example, I asked her what would happen to her son if he got caught stealing? I asked her if she could fix the situation what would she like to see done? What would be an ideal solution? I also asked her if she had tried counseling recently? By becoming involved at this level I was no longer listening from a naïve epoche position; rather I was emotionally involved in her story and without even realizing it I took on a different role than ‘listener.’

I diligently reflected on these personal positions. I examined my own reactions, thoughts, feelings, and insights after each interview, and recorded them in a reflexivity journal throughout the research process. By critically examining my self in this way I attempted to become more aware of the influence my subjectivity had on the research process. As well, I attempted to explore and examine the influence the research process had on me (Hall & Zvonkovic, 1996).

3.1 Methods

3.11 Participants.

The participants for this study were parents who had gone through the Restorative Justice program in Halifax, Nova Scotia, as a result of their experience of youth-to-parent abuse. Six parents agreed to participate. One married couple was interviewed and four mothers. The first parent I interviewed was a single mother. She went through the Restorative Justice process with her 16-year-old son who had been charged with property damage. The second case was an interview with a married couple who took part in Restorative Justice because of the actions of their 18-year-old son. He was charged with property damage and uttering threats. The third interview was with a married mother who described herself as functioning as a single parent. Her 16-year-old daughter had been

charged with assault. The fourth interview was with a mother who was living common law with a man who was not her daughter's biological father. She went through Restorative Justice because her 16-year-old daughter assaulted her. The final interview was with the mother of a 14-year-old boy who lived at home with his mother, father, and brother and had been referred to Restorative Justice on charges of property damage. All five cases involved families where the youth had acted out violently against his/her parents. Subsequently the parents called the police and in all cases the youth were referred to the Restorative Justice program for resolution. At the time of the interview all parents had completed the Restorative Justice process, some had completed the contract session one month prior, and others had been completed for six months.

3.12 Procedure

3.13 Permission from Community Justice Society Agency.

The Community Justice Society Agency was approached and its Board agreed to endorse and assist with this research project. The agency's casework supervisor for the Restorative Justice program volunteered to be my liaison. Upon approval from the University Research Ethics Board, I contacted her and she arranged for me to meet the caseworkers at the Community Justice Society office. I explained the project and the caseworkers were asked to contact parents who had completed a restorative contract session with their son or daughter where the parents were considered the victims and their son/daughter the offender. The caseworkers were provided with a telephone protocol designed by me and approved by the Community Justice liaison (Appendix A).

Within the time frame of one month, the agency's caseworkers had found five cases. When I received word that parents had provided their consent to be contacted, I

phoned them, answered any questions they had, and arranged a place and time to meet that was convenient for them. I met with four participants in their homes and two mothers were interviewed at the Community Justice Society office.

Before the interview began I reviewed the contents of the Informed Consent form (Appendix B). Parents were reminded of the purpose of the interview and were told that their participation was voluntary and they could discontinue at any time. As well, the participants were provided with contact information for the Halifax Police Victim Services in case they found themselves in need of counseling support because the interview caused distressing feelings. Confidentiality was assured in two ways: participants' names or information were not shared with anyone and the only people who had access to the transcripts were my supervisor, Dr. Elizabeth Church, and me. When transcribing the interviews I removed all names and identifying information and the tapes were erased. The transcripts and all field notes were kept in a locked filing cabinet and after seven years will be shredded.

After each parent signed the consent form, I conducted the interview. Before I began the interview I informed the parents that I had my own experience with youth-to-parent abuse with my son and I would be willing to discuss it after the interview if they so desired. Finally, all parents were asked if they were interested in a thirty-minute follow-up meeting where the results of the project would be reviewed and a copy of the thesis would be presented to them. All parents wanted both. At the end of the interview I turned the tape-recorder off and I shared my story of youth-to-parent abuse with the parents. Immediately after leaving the parents I tape-recorded my reflections on the interview, which were later transcribed and placed in my reflexivity journal.

3.14 Format of Interview.

A semi-structured interview with open-ended questions (Appendix C) was chosen because this style of interviewing was intended to encourage the parents to reconstruct their experiences as narratives. The participants provided their own perspective on what dimensions were important within the focus area (Kvale, 1996). The questions around abuse were designed using an ecological theoretical framework proposed by Cottrell & Monk (2004). They outline four levels: the Macrosystem which taps into cultural values and belief systems including core themes such as gender equality and media images; the Exosystem which encompasses the societal structures that influence the development of the child and family functioning, such as workplaces, community centers and school boards; the Microsystem which is the familial level and includes themes such as parenting and communication styles within the family; and the Ontogenetic level which includes individual characteristics such as the youth's interpersonal skills, mental illnesses, and substance abuse. The core thematic questions required that parents relate how various influences may have affected their youth's behavior. The next section of the interview guidelines dealt with the outcome of the Restorative Justice process and the questions tapped into the parents' sense of changes that had taken place within the four systems of the ecological framework.

The interviews ranged in length from ninety minutes to two and a half hours. All parents appeared to be comfortable talking about their experiences. Each parent described the reconstruction of events through his or her lenses: what happened, how it happened, and why it happened. The interview protocol was not followed in any particular order and each parent was encouraged to reconstruct his/her experience as he/she wished. During

each interview I listened carefully to what was important to the parent and kept in mind the research questions (Kvale, 1996). By following the content of their narratives I was able to understand whether or not a particular section or topic from the protocol had been covered. If it had not been addressed I would refer to the protocol for a specific question as the opportunity arose. At the end of the interview I asked the parents to describe how meeting to talk about what had happened had been beneficial or not and invited their suggestions for improvement on the interview.

3.15 Data Analysis

After the interviews were recorded, I transcribed all tapes, removed all identifying details and assigned each person a pseudonym. Each tape-recorded personal reflection after the interviews was transcribed and entered into my reflexivity journal. Within this journal I recorded intellectual thinking and emotional comments on each interview and the research process in general (Kirby & McKenna, 1989). These reflections are found in the analysis section “Researcher’s Reflections.”

Analysis began by using Giorgio’s method, as described by Moustakas (1994), where first the verbatim transcripts of each interview were read in their entirety to get a sense of the whole. I then wrote a synopsis of each transcript. I reread the transcripts and synopses more slowly and by engaging in this constant back and forth process a series of *meaning units* or foci emerged. The comprehensive descriptions gathered by using semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions provided the basis for “reflective structural analysis that portrays the essences of the experience” (Moustakas, 1994, 13). I referred to the transcripts and grouped together all invariant horizons or constituents as described by Moustakas (1994): “Invariant horizons point to the unique qualities of an experience,

those that stand out”(p.128). By delineating or finding the invariant constituents, every instance related to the emerging foci, a full description was created. These sections were then read carefully and compared back to the transcripts. Through reflective analysis and using Kirby & McKenna’s (1989) adaptation of the constant comparison method between synopses and the original transcripts, superordinate or main themes emerged. From the parents’ descriptions, essences or structures of the experience were derived by clarifying or elaborating on the meanings and by relating them to each other and the sense of the whole. Similar themes expressed by parents were identified, as well as those experiences that were unique. The final steps required that each unit was synthesized and integrated into a consistent description of the experience (Moustakas, 1994).

Chapter Four Findings

4.0 Framework for Findings

The findings are organized around five focus areas that encapsulate the foci of the interviews. The first section, “Power Struggles,” provides the reader with a description of the *event* that led to the youth being referred to the Restorative Justice Program. Usually the first question asked during the Restorative Justice contract session facilitation is about the event. The next section, “Parents’ Construction of their Children’s Problems,” addresses parents’ interpretations of their children’s problems that had led to the *event*. “Parents’ Perceptions of Their Roles and Responsibilities,” describes how parents see themselves in relation to their children. The following two sections address how the various systems responded: “Negative Responses from the Systems” and “Positive Responses from the Systems.”

4.1 Power Struggles

A power struggle in this study was defined as parents and their youth in conflict. There were two scenarios: the youth demanded something from their parents, like money or permission to do something and the parents refused to give it or the youth refused to comply with their parents’ wishes. The parents I interviewed reported that the violent outbursts that precipitated calling the police to intervene happened because their children were unable to get what they wanted from their parents. Parents indicated that their adolescents either did not comply with their wishes or they refused to accept “no” for an answer. These youth challenged their parents’ authority and lashed out by threatening harm or causing physical harm and/or property damage.

4. 11 The Event.

The interview began by me asking each parent to describe in as much detail as possible the “event” that led up to his/her youth being referred to the Restorative Justice process. The parents indicated that their inability to control their youth, coupled with the intensity of the violence in four out of five cases, led them to seek police intervention as a solution. In some cases siblings were present during the outburst and in one case the youth assaulted her mother and sister. In three cases the youth had been partying just prior to the violent incident and in two of those substance use was involved. In all cases when the parents asserted their authority, the conflict escalated:

She just couldn't let it go. She just kept going on and on and then she got in my face...right up really close in a wild, threatening way.

He hit me, pushed me....He had a knife in his hand, threatening me and his father with a knife.... He did...roughly over \$2000.00 damage in that house.

...he wanted money and he got very aggressive and we said no more. It escalated more and more. He was getting more and more wound up.

Four of the parents had experienced prior repeated outbursts of verbal and physical violence directed at them, other siblings, and their property. The violence ranged from screaming to destroying the home: “She got really violent; kicking, screaming, hollering, putting holes in the wall;” “He would...literally punch us;” “She tends to lash out and break things, break walls and break doors or dishes or hit something.” What was different about this time was that either the police persuaded the mothers to press charges or the parents had reached a point where they would no longer tolerate the violence and they called the police and charged their youth in the hopes that this would end the

violence. In contrast to the other four situations, one family called the police the first time their son acted out violently and had him charged.

4.2 Parents' Construction of their Children's Problems

At the beginning of the interviews four of the five parents spontaneously volunteered an explanation for why their child had these problems. It appeared that they had tried to make sense out of why their children had ended up in the criminal justice system. Two parents felt they had inadvertently encouraged their son/daughter's aggressive behavior by not stopping it when it first began. Others postulated that their children suffered from mental illness and/or substance abuse. One mother felt her son did not show respect for her and her daughter because "he had grown up watching his father be disrespectful." That is, some located the cause of problems inside their child and some located them in the environment. Four of the five parents identified early signs of aggression as an indication of their child's problem: "I think she was always a problem though because as a baby I'd have to swaddle her to get her to go to sleep at night; she'd get into rages." Another mother said that her daughter had "temper tantrums" and she would call the police to get her calmed down. One parent recalled how at an early age her son would rip up his books or pictures when he was sent to his room. Parents believed that as a result of their children's problems, such as poor social skills, learning disabilities, or mental health issues, they experienced more challenges at school.

4.21 Negative School Experiences.

All parents indicated that negative school experiences exacerbated existing problems. They identified a number of challenges but most commonly they felt their children had not fit into the school environment. One mother believed her daughter's

mental health issues caused her impulsive, violent behavior. She placed her child in a private school in grade primary thinking that the small class size and extra attention would benefit her. She said that it was the worst thing she could have done: “She stood out like a sore thumb because she was so different behavior wise....they weren’t cut out to deal with somebody like that.” Four parents indicated that learning disabilities or below average intelligence contributed to the challenges they faced. In these cases the children had been assessed by a school psychologist and were either on Individual Program Plans or received adaptations to their academic programs. Problems associated with these diagnoses, such as stress and isolation, exacerbated their children’s challenges. One mother, who believed her daughter had “a severe learning disorder that had never been properly treated,” provided a description of how her daughter had not fit in and had been ostracized throughout school: “She was bullied all her life. People pick on her, call her four eyes, you don’t clean yourself, same clothes. You don’t dress very nice. She got kicked out of school. It was too hard for her there. People were picking on her.” Another mother whose son had been assessed as having below average intelligence described how “there was great concern at school.” She said her son “was getting into fights...pulling his hair out at school. He was under a lot of stress.” Isolation and lack of friends made school more difficult, according to the parents. One mother described how her son did not fit in socially:

I don’t know if it’s that he didn’t have the social skills or if, due to his learning disability he can be annoying. He’s immature. A lot of the kids would think, “oh you’re weird, why did you say that, that’s out of place or that’s just random” so he really didn’t feel like he fit in.

Loneliness, as a result of not having friends, made school harder: “She was a lonely kid and that hurt her; that made her feel different.” Being removed from his community and bused to school was an environmental factor that negatively impacted one youth. His mother said, “(He) felt like (he) wasn’t fitting in.”

Parents felt these negative school experiences were compounded with other influences, which in turn complicated and exacerbated existing problems. Factors such as labeling, cultural influences, and negative home and peer relations contributed to their children’s problems.

4.22 Family Influences.

One mother believed that the conflict at home between her partner and herself was one reason her daughter was running away. Her daughter had confided in her after she was arrested for assaulting her mother: “That’s why she wanted to get out, to run away. She didn’t want to hear the arguing and fighting.” A further negative influence was that her partner was verbally abusive to her and her daughter: “There’s a lot of name-calling, verbal abuse and stuff and he’s always telling her she’s no good, she’s worth nothing, she don’t do anything in school, she don’t do no dishes, she don’t do nothing in high school.” Another mother attributed her son’s behavior to watching his father behave in a rude aggressive manner. The parents of one youth felt they had “spoiled” him, that they had given him his own way too often. When he “came home and wanted money...he got very aggressive and we said, ‘no more.’” They believed that their son felt “he was grown up and (didn’t) have to listen to any laws or rules.” These parents indicated that they called the police because “enough is enough” and they had to let their son know that he lived in their house and the rules were for everybody.

From these parents' perspective their youth had been influenced by the home environment. Whether it was because of direct conflict, modeling or unclear expectations these parents felt responsible for helping shape their children's aggressive behavior.

4.23 Labeling.

According to some parents, labeling had detrimental effects. In some cases the label of learning disabled negatively affected them. One mother felt that her son had become so "dependent on somebody else's help constantly ever since grade two" he did not believe in himself. He thought he could not do the work and this impeded his academic growth:

The fact is, they start labeling and once it starts...a child starts to feel less about himself. He was constantly taken out of class, constantly one-on-one so he got dependent on that. Every time he was made to read he'd say, "You know I got a problem, I can't do that."

Another mother felt that labeling and a lack of understanding of her daughter's problem had negatively impacted her daughter's life. She told me that her daughter had learning problems and this created huge frustration for her. This caused her to act out school personnel's lack of understanding "nurtured her aggressive tendencies:"

She had an absolutely disastrous time of it at school. I would say the school system was thankful she dropped out. In junior high she was labeled right away as violent, nasty, horrible person, person who swears, hits people, which she did do but remember this is a kid in the mental health system and I tried to explain to them that she is officially a special ed. student and special ed. students are dealt with differently.

One mother told me that a negative experience with a teacher at school exacerbated her son's problems. She related how her son had always done well in school: "All the teachers just loved Carl from Grade primary to Grade five." After he was diagnosed with an eating disorder, he isolated himself from his former classmates and his schooling

became unimportant to him. In Grade six a negative experience with “a really nasty teacher” resulted in him staying home from school a lot. This teacher told the parent: “We’re gonna bump heads, he’s got an attitude.” He missed a lot of school that year and in grade eight he went for the first week and then missed a whole year of school. This mother tried to get him into another school but the principal told her he would let her know if there was room because the school was really crowded. She said, “he never got back to me.” Parents believed that labeling contributed to their children not being understood or created more problems for them.

4.24 Cultural Influences.

Two of the parents felt that cultural influences had played a role in shaping their youth’s behavior. They believed rap music and its culture was a negative influence. One young man’s parents believed their son was part of a culture where the youth felt they were invincible and they were not afraid of anything. This mother said that she tried to explain to her son that what he was seeing was not the real culture of the Black people:

They don’t act like this. They’re demeaned by what’s going on but then there’s the violence of the chains, the talk, the disrespect for society...it’s shocking what’s in their minds; their pants down and that... cocky attitude that nobody can touch us until we turn eighteen.

Another mother saw Black Entertainment Television as a contributing factor. She said her daughter liked the cursing and swearing in the music and she acted “overboard Black.” This mother felt the media images did not represent her daughter’s true identity:

She watches BET all the time, Black Entertainment, with the rappers and the thugs and the ghetto and she’s involved with kids in the pubs but she watches BET all the time and my husband wants me to get it cut off but like I said to him “At this point it’s too late and it’s only one of the influences.”

These parents believed that the media images helped perpetuate a stereotype that their youth thought was “cool.” The violence and lack of respect in these images were being mimicked by their youth.

4.25 Negative Peer Influences.

Most of the parents believed that peers had had a harmful influence on their children. In one case the mother reported that her daughter used to run away from home to be with her friends. Her friends, who were wards of the court, lived in group homes and would often run away. Her daughter “wanted to follow in their footsteps...she thought it was cool to be tough....that’s how she got into the trouble that she was into.” Another mother felt because her daughter had been so isolated for such a long time she kept company with friends who were not good role models: “(She) drinks up any kind of friendship and of course who are the persons she’s friends with, the ones who can’t get friends themselves; the people who are in trouble.”

Parents focussed on the problem within their child and relatively little was said about their positive attributes; however it must be kept in mind that the interview focussed on the influences that had caused their youth’s violent behavior. They described their children’s problems as a complex interrelation of factors such as negative school experiences, mental health issues, peer pressure or substance abuse.

4.3 Parents’ Relationship with their Children: Roles and Responsibilities

All parents saw themselves as responsible for their children. Some of the roles described during the interview were provider, advisor, caretaker, advocate, mediator and protector. At the same time they considered themselves responsible for instilling values and morals, setting limits, protecting other family members, and disciplining. Parents

indicated that these multiple roles often created problems for them. Everyday situations like setting limits or providing advice were complicated because of their children's oppositional behavior.

4.31 Setting Limits.

Parents in the interview indicated that one of their roles and duties was to set limits on their children's behavior. Deciding what their offspring could or could not do was part of what it meant to be a parent. Some parents indicated that when they tried to set limits or discipline their children they would be violently attacked. For example in two cases conflict over the computer or the X-Box triggered violent episodes:

He'd fight with me if I wanted to take the machine, he'd grab it from me...he'd push me. It was escalating so this one day I said, "That's it Mike, you have lost it for good. You will not be getting it back again." Well, he flipped out. He picked up the chair and he was lifting it up and down and he was banging it on the floor until the leg broke. He went over and there is a hockey table down there, he took the hockey table and pushed it against the wall and put a huge hole in the wall and then he picked up a glass or something and threw it against the wall and made a hole and glass (was) everywhere...

You know what it was over, every time these incidents happened that the police had to be called for the violence, it was over a computer...We were taking the cord out of the computer so he couldn't play it and that's when he got violent.

In both these cases the parents felt they were unable to enforce these limits without getting some kind of outside help. One mother went to her pediatrician and the other called the police. Another mother told me that when her daughter was younger she used to give her "her own way all the time...then she started to do all these things. I tried to stop it all, put her in the right direction, it wasn't working...harder than I thought."

For still another family the roles and responsibilities of parenthood shifted because the father worked out of town for a month at a time. While he was away the mother was the disciplinarian and when he came home there was an adjustment time where their children

tried to take advantage of him: "...you know you aren't supposed to be doing it and here they are trying to get it by me." The mother said it was frustrating because, "they're pulling out all the rules out of the book and...I'm following them here and out the door." In this family it was their oldest boy who acted out violently. She felt her son had received the message that he could get what he wanted by force:

The more he raises his voice he thinks you're going to give in...I don't necessarily give in all the time...out the door...I think he thought he could push the buttons with (his father) cause he keeps saying himself, "he's such a big boy" ...but I don't ever say that; I don't give him that luxury.

These parents decided together their son had to know who was in charge and that the rules in the house applied for everybody. They wanted "what was best for (him) and make sure he knows what's best for himself. We're not going to be there forever for him." They wanted their son "to take responsibility for himself."

In one case the parents felt completely helpless. Every time they tried to enforce rules and limits their son acted out violently. This mother described the situation as "going through hell and back again for nothing." The parents of this young man had tried every avenue to get some help with controlling his behavior but at the time of the interview this mother told me they were "walking on ice around him." She said that what caused the problem was that they were trying to be "parents" before and now they were not. For example, before they would set time limits on his computer use or they told him to be home at a certain time, but now he does whatever he wants. They stopped enforcing rules or limits because "we're not going through that again and have all the rest of my stuff destroyed." In this case the mother said nothing would help and they had given up trying to discipline their 14-year-old son. For these parents, not being able to set limits meant they were not being "parents" anymore.

The parents I interviewed saw setting limits as part of their role of being parents. Setting limits was a way to ensure the youth understood boundaries and at the same time it provided the structure they felt their children needed to be able to grow up responsibly, by understanding that actions have consequences.

4.32 Persuasive Talks.

Parents in this study used persuasion as a method to guide and “parent” their children. All parents reported trying to persuade their children to do what they considered was the best thing for them. This was particularly obvious during the Restorative Justice process. In two cases the mothers appealed to their children to accept the Restorative Justice process rather than a criminal conviction. One mother tried to explain to her son what it meant to have a criminal record. She believed he did not understand what the lawyer was telling him and wanted to plead guilty. At this time her son was not talking to her but she felt he needed to understand the consequences of having a criminal record. Finally the son agreed to go through the Restorative Justice process. When it came to the contract session her son wanted to end the session without a contract which meant the case would go back to the Crown. The mother told me that she had to explain it to him repeatedly because he did not understand: “I don’t want him to have a record...I’m like, Carl you don’t know what they’re saying... think about what they’re saying to you.” Another mother related how she persuaded her daughter to accept what was being offered through the Restorative Justice process because “she would have a criminal record against her so I really don’t want that.” Her daughter wanted to go to court because her friend told her “it’s okay to go to court.” This mother explained to her youth that a criminal record would take away some of her freedom: “you won’t be able to go

nowhere.” After this conversation the daughter accepted the terms of community service hours rather than a criminal record.

In another case the mother’s persuasion occurred after the contract session and the son had attended his first day at a treatment center. He “was pretty angry and he didn’t want to go there and he said, ‘You can’t force me, they don’t want you there if it’s not something you want to do.’” This mother then explained to him that he had signed a legal document and that he had to be willing to give it a couple of weeks. She appealed to him:

I explained to him that I care about him and we’ve been through a lot throughout the years.... We don’t go through life trying to avoid things, you have to deal with things head on. I’ve shown you an example of that...by going here it’s going to help us. There will be growth and change...give it a chance...I love you.

She told me that after this conversation he went back to the program the next day and he never mentioned again that he did not want to go back. The parents who persuaded their children to recognize the consequences of their actions were acting out of their sense of responsibility for them. They perceived this role as part of what it meant to be a parent. Similar to setting limits, the role of persuading their children to act in a way that they perceived would be in their best interest, the parents in this study wanted their youth to make good choices so that they would grow and change in a positive way. They were concerned that their children would suffer the negative consequences of bad choices.

4.33 Ambivalence.

Several mothers described how parenting their frequently violent children had left them with mixed feelings. They indicated that, while they felt love for their children, they sometimes did not want to see them or have them in their home. In the two cases where the youth had a history of violent behaviors and a long list of interventions that had not been successful, the mothers expressed feelings of ambivalence. As one mother put it:

“It’s been an incredibly challenging experience being the mother of this child.” She described herself as persistently there for her: “I was trying to counter all the negative messages coming at her and fighting for her like you wouldn’t believe.” This mother said that it got difficult “over the years to be always trying to stay calm and keep her calm.” She shared that there were times when she was frightened of her daughter and times when she just wanted her out of the house but then there were the times when her daughter was “gentle, compassionate, caring and helpful.” This mother described her mixed feelings: “She knows I’m frightened of her but it only matters to her when she’s in this other state, like I’m not really frightened of her, I’m frightened of her when she’s violent.” Another mother spoke about loving her son “with all her heart” but not being able to look at him anymore. The conflict in the home reached such a level that the father had disengaged and the couple was now affected but she said there was nothing she could do about her son’s violent behaviors: “We’ve gone through too much with everyone and nothing helps.” These parents revealed that they felt unable to maintain close loving relations with their children at times and this conflicted with their perception of what it meant to be a loving parent.

4.34 Never Give Up.

In spite of feelings of ambivalence and frustration with their youth’s behavior, all parents said that they wanted what was best for their children and they would not give up trying to help them. They continued the nurturing role, and even for those parents who identified themselves as victims, they still wanted what was best for their youth. As one mother poignantly put it: “I never gave up. The police officer said, ‘You never give up.’”

I'm still hanging in there. If you give up on them, they know you give up on them and they go the other way.”

Parents viewed their children as their responsibility. They had to feed them, clothe them, attend school meetings, nurture and love them. They also had to set limits and try to persuade them to make the right choices so that they would become responsible for themselves. These parents had difficulty fulfilling their perceived roles and responsibilities because of the complex problems they encountered while trying to parent these obstinate children. One mother described parenting as “frustrating.” She shared that “a less than conscientious mother than I might have given up on her a long time ago...but I'm a resilient Scot and I had a tough life growing up too.” The parents of one youth believed their duty as parents was to teach their children “the lessons of life,” because if they did not, then when their sons grew up they would expect somebody else to do their work for them. One mother described herself as “deal(ing) with things.” She explained to her son that “I haven't developed any addictions, that's not how I hide away from life and I want you to do the same.” For these parents giving up on their children was not considered an option and part of their perception of being parents meant they had to find help for their children. They relied on help from counseling, medication, and intervention or referrals from the school to help them control their children's behavior. Some things seemed to work or the situation would be a little better for a while but most solutions were temporary, did not help at all or made things worse.

4.4 Negative Responses of Systems

In all cases parents sought help from various outside sources including the mental health system, the medical community, the school system, social services, and the

criminal justice system. Recognizing early on that they needed some kind of help, they trusted professionals to find solutions or give advice that would help them control their children's aggressive behavior. Often the responses felt negative to them.

4.41 Blaming the Parents.

The parents often felt that they were judged as “bad” mothers or blamed for their children's behaviors because they had not enforced consequences. Mothers reported that they were seen as “whiny,” “bad parents” who did not know how to control their children:

It was almost like they were just listening to me, that was it. Nobody was really giving me any advice, suggestions. I just felt completely isolated and I felt like I was going in there and I was nothing but a whiny complaining mother who can't handle her son.

They felt that others saw them as responsible for their children's disobedience because they had not enforced consequences for their negative behaviors:

I think they looked at me as a parent who didn't have parent skills who spoiled the kid. I was insulted because they basically were calling me a bad parent and that I had brought it on myself. It really ticked me off.

Other parents believed they were blamed for their youth's behaviors but they did not accept that blame. They saw cultural influences as playing a role. They felt the youth were part of a culture where they had too many freedoms. The laws and rules protected them and the youth were aware of this and used it to their advantage:

They blame it on the parents but you try and you try and you preach but how much can you do when they are taught they have their freedoms, their freedom of speech....the cocky attitude that nobody can touch us until we turn 18.

Parents believed they were judged and blamed by some service providers and this added to their frustration and sense of helplessness when seeking advice from professionals.

4.42 Passing the Buck.

The inability to find a service provider that would take the responsibility for helping their son angered one mother. This family who sought help from the police, the local hospital, Community Services, and the school, felt that “everybody was passing the buck.” The adolescent’s mother described how her son’s behavior changed when he was diagnosed with an eating disorder. He started to act out violently and when she called the police to control him they would tell her to take him to the local hospital. When she took him there they would tell her she was doing the right thing by bringing him into the hospital but they would send him back home with them and within a short time there would be another violent outbreak:

What happened is that the officers would send us to the (hospital) and (they) would say, “Oh yeah, every time he freaks out like this you’re doing the right thing. Bring him down here.” But then we get down there and the social worker would be saying one thing and everybody was passing the buck.

The parents wanted their son taken out of the home and put into foster care because they were afraid of their son’s violence but they were told by social workers that they could not take him out of the house unless he was in danger. His mother believed the only thing they cared about was whether or not she had hit him: “We went through hell with Community Services.” She told them that he was in danger and that somebody was going to get hurt: “I’m not telling you I’m going to hurt him, I’m telling you he’s going to get hurt, regardless if it’s accidental or if his brother comes in and does something.” She spoke about a meeting she had arranged:

I told them all I want a meeting with everyone because I’m getting tired of...this was Community Services, the police, the psychiatrist everyone telling me, “oh well that’s their problem,” “oh well that’s not my problem that’s their problem.” Come on guys, I want a meeting with everyone cause I told them I’m tired of everyone passing the buck.

But even after the meeting there was no satisfactory solution for these parents.

Community Services tried to find a placement for their son but after months of “broken promises” they were offered a bed in an emergency residential setting. This placed them in a dilemma. These parents had been told by people from Community Services, the police and the local hospital that: “...that’s where you don’t want to send him. There’s gangs, they get into drugs, there’s alcohol, they get beat up.” The mother said she did not know what to do and because they told them this was the only place he could go these parents felt like they had been advised to keep him at home. They were not willing to send their son into a situation that they perceived would lead him to more trouble. Their perception of being parents meant they had to protect him at the risk of their own peace. This mother believed that she and her family had been “through hell and back for nothing.” She felt the systems had let her down by not accepting responsibility for helping her family and her son.

4.43 Ineffectual Solutions/ Band-Aid Solutions.

Even when solutions were proposed they often did not solve the problems. Of the many services tried by the parents in the excerpt above, the mother felt the only support that was useful came from a worker with a community-based team who met with her and her husband. The caseworker was described by the mother as understanding and together they formulated plans to make things better. They discussed strategies to help them control their son’s behavior, such as tying incentives into good behavior. This support was in place for approximately three months and was somewhat effective but then they were left on their own again.

In another case an adolescent saw a psychiatrist, a neurologist, was assessed by the school psychologist, and put on medication by a pediatrician. He had tried different medications over the years and although some areas of his life improved for a while this mother felt they had never really “gotten to the heart of the matter.” She found herself asking what was her son’s problem: “Was it psychological, biological or what?”

Another mother sought help to deal with her daughter’s violent outbursts: “She’s been in the system and she’s been a ward of the court and we weren’t getting any help.” She believed her daughter would benefit from a diagnosis of bi-polar disorder: “If we had a diagnosis people would look at her differently and she would look at herself differently.” Her experiences with the medical and mental health systems did not yield a diagnosis or a treatment that worked. She was left feeling frustrated and unsupported:

I felt that because I had to be her spokesperson, her psychiatrist, her psychologist, her teacher, her advocate, because basically the school system, the psychiatric system, the health system, they all just basically labeled her...She was in Children’s Aid care ...because she was getting too violent and we removed her from the home for Mary’s safety....she was a resident of the (...) program... they discharged her after a year and abandoned her in my opinion and me too.

In another case the mother called the police every time her daughter acted out. She felt supported by the police in that they would come but this was a temporary solution because within a short time her daughter would act violently again. She tried putting her out into respite care to “get a break” and she sent her to her stepfather’s for a time in the hopes that he could help control her behavior but nothing had worked. Her daughter had been receiving counseling for years because of sexual abuse but this did not seem to be working and at the time of the interview her daughter was going to try a new counselor.

These solutions were ineffective or temporary because the children continued their violent behaviors.

4.44 Some Solutions Made the Problems Worse.

Some responses from the systems made the situations worse. One mother's experiences with the criminal justice system left her feeling that it had been a waste of time to charge her son because it just "went on and on." Her son missed one court date and when she called to find out the consequences of this she was told that there would be a warrant out for his arrest and if picked up he would be put in jail until the next court date. A few days later when he "was freaking out" again, she called the police but he was not detained. She felt that her son got the message that he could do whatever he wanted without any consequences. This same family had a negative experience with the Restorative Justice program. The mother believed her son had been rewarded for his bad behavior. She had mistakenly understood that the restorative process was a form of punishment. She thought the community service hours he received at a local boxing club would involve him cleaning up messes and holding the bag while others boxed and believed that the solution ended up causing more harm according to the mother: "What does that teach him?...it was like getting a reward for something bad he did...he didn't have to clean up any mess, they gave him a full work-out for free." This mother felt that Restorative Justice did not work for her son because he did not receive consequences for his actions.

In one case the parents felt a decision made during their son's court appearance had made things worse. These parents had requested that their son be put on a curfew. The parents felt this helped control his behavior: "We thought that was the best thing he

ever had going for him...(The police) could call anytime and that scared him.” They were shocked and disappointed when the curfew was lifted without being consulted.

Another mother felt the mental health system had made things worse for her daughter. “She’s been 13, 14 years in the mental health system in and out and all it’s done is screw her head because they’ve never been able to diagnose her; they’ve put her on drugs and made her like a Goodyear blimp and ...they gave her drugs and they’d make her anemic and then take her off.”

One mother expressed her frustration with the various systems: “They give kids too many rights and the parents no rights.” She said that several of the programs that were offered through the local hospital were voluntary. If her son did not want to go into the programs he did not have to. She felt this was a problem. As parents they believed their son “need(ed) to be out of the home (to) get the help he needed...(but) all these programs are volunteer and he’s not willing to get help.”

All parents indicated their frustration with the systems that had made the situations worse. They not been given any lasting solutions and in most cases they felt let down and judged. These parents had put their trust in professionals in the various systems and had followed advice, whether it was medication for their children or them being removed from the home, the parents listened to the experts, but they felt they had received inadequate help.

4.45 Not Taking the Problem Seriously.

Another factor that contributed to the negative experiences of some parents was how the severity of the youths’ actions was minimized. Two parents who went to court with their son the day after he had spent the night in jail said that they were shocked at

the way the youth and the clerks were laughing: “they seemed to be taking it as a joke.” The parents expected the judge to be more authoritative and the youth to display more respect but instead “they were in there high-fiving each other like it was a social event.” They believed that this lack of respect in the juvenile court system led to an environment where the youth abused the system: “You could just hear some of them, the one guy ... was through the system five or six times; they assessed him and he wanted to be assessed again...they were picking up each other’s ‘how to get out of there.’” These parents believed that the lack of respect for authority was perceived as a problem because it contributed to the youths’ perception that their crimes were not serious. The consequences were not severe enough to discourage the youth from recommitting similar crimes.

4.5 Positive Responses from the Systems

The Restorative Justice process and one Crown Prosecutor provided positive responses for most of the parents interviewed. Four parents indicated that they had sought help from many different sources, such as the medical and mental health systems, social services and schools, but Restorative Justice had offered the first useful response. Only one parent who went to juvenile court with her child described it as a positive experience. Prior to her court date she had called the Crown Prosecutor to see if she could drop the charges against her daughter, but he had convinced her to go through Restorative Justice because “...basically the RJ people would have connections like to mental health.” This mother described her daughter as “a complex kid who was falling through the cracks in the system despite her best efforts over the years.” She felt they had “lucked into” this Crown Prosecutor and that she owed him a lot because the Restorative Justice process for

her and her daughter resulted in “an ideal solution” because the contract conditions helped her daughter get the support she needed (this story is elaborated on in the section, “Help Provided for Parents and Youth”).

4.51 Parents Felt Heard.

Parents indicated that the caseworkers at the Community Justice Society offered them an opportunity to talk about what had happened with their youth and they unequivocally felt heard. The typical Restorative Justice process was followed: they were contacted by their caseworkers and appointments were made for them to meet. There were separate meetings between the caseworker and the parents, then separate meetings with the youth and the caseworker, and finally meetings together:

That went quite well... because we could get our own story in and then hear what he had to say and see how it interacts with our story; about the third time I think we got more to what was going on because I think he was out of it himself; he didn't know what was going on himself; That's the god's truth after a week of partying he was a zombie.

Parents spoke about feeling “at ease” with the caseworkers. They were described as “nice and easy to talk to:” “I went down to the office and I found it was a very relaxed atmosphere and I found her to be very approachable, very kind and non-judgmental. I was very at ease with all that. I felt very supported.” The parents believed that these meetings provided them with the opportunity, not only to talk about the violence they had experienced, but also they talked about the distinctive family issues they were dealing with. Some parents felt that for the first time they were being heard.

4.52 Non-Judgmental.

Some parents, who had dealt with service providers that had judged and blamed them, felt comfortable with the Restorative Justice personnel and volunteers. The parents

and the youth were able to converse easily in a non-judgmental environment. They found the contract sessions a good opportunity to “get some things out on the table” in a non-threatening, “non-invasive” atmosphere. They felt at ease because the caseworkers treated them as equals whose stories were important. One mother described how her daughter had not been receptive to the meeting in the beginning and had cursed and acted very angrily but the non-judgmental accepting demeanors of the volunteer facilitators kept the process moving. Several ‘heated’ discussions, such as her daughter’s drug use, were held, and although at one point the youth left the meeting, she came back in and it continued on with the final contract addressing three major areas of her life where her mother felt she needed support: school, a job, and treatment for drug abuse. Overall parents indicated that they were able to “open up” and discuss matters in this non-judgmental environment. For some parents this was the first opportunity they had to talk with their youth about their behavior in a safe environment. Lines of communication that had been closed, in some cases for a long time, were opened. The youth, other supportive adults, and the parents were comfortable enough to discuss relevant issues. The parents indicated that these meetings had helped by getting the stories “out on the table.”

4.53 Help Provided for Parents and Youth.

What was different about the Restorative Justice process was that it offered help to the parents and the youth. In prior experiences with systems, help was directed at the child only and the whole family was not considered. Parents described the caseworkers as “open and accommodating,” for example, the caseworkers provided them with convenient meeting times. There was “good communication” between them and frequent phone calls kept them “informed and up to date.” One mother described in detail why she

felt the Restorative Justice process had worked so well for herself and her daughter. She explained that in this case her daughter was targeted as needing help, more than the victim. As the victim and the mother what she wanted was for her daughter to get the help she believed she needed. The caseworker recognized: "... I'm bearing the load here, as every single mother does, but it's an unfair load because I'm dealing with trying to be the mother who gets things in place but also the mother who's the victim and the mother who's everything because basically the system couldn't cope." This caseworker really engaged with her daughter and "whatever they talked about in their sessions was obviously excellent because the bond was there." This mother believed that her daughter felt she could trust the caseworker and while acting as her support person during the contract session she kept the youth "calm and the process flowing" by "soothingly talking to her." The caseworker assured her:

We're not here to get you or make you feel bad, or do anything that you really feel is totally outside your realm of comfortability. We want to come up with something that results in a contract that everybody in this room is comfortable with and also one that you feel does something to help you (caseworker).

This mother said that the caseworker recognized how to help and "bonded with (her daughter) in a mentoring, nurturing way and ...an action plan was developed out of the contract." From the mother's perspective what differentiated this situation from others was that the caseworker "was able to guide (her daughter) toward people who were positive support and positive role models." She believed that she would not have been able to come up with the workable solution, because "(I) would have gone a totally different route and the route that was taken for (my daughter) was the ideal solution."

For another mother the caseworker's support was reassuring when she was afraid of losing the resources she had found. This mother had spent months "reaching out to find ... whatever was out there for teens." When she realized that her son would be attending a day program that was designed to address his specific needs she worried that she might lose the support that was being offered through the Restorative Justice program but her caseworker assured her "she would be with her throughout this process." She felt the Restorative Justice process had been "an answer to her prayers":

Sometimes with people or agencies they'll find out, "Oh, she's got the help here so we don't need to help her, we've got to help this guy over here because he doesn't have any resources" so I was afraid...that I might lose one or the other so the caseworker reassured me that she would be there throughout the process with the (outpatient program) and if there was a chance that Mike didn't go into it or whatever she would still have him on the list for the anger management and that sort of thing.

For this mother another reason for the success of the Restorative Justice process was because the contract was a legal binding document, so when later, her son did not want to follow through on the agreements reached during session, she could remind him that he had signed the contract. She also felt that having a police officer there that night affected the outcome. Her son was told by this authority figure that what he was doing was wrong:

He had never had that fear instilled in him, being a woman I guess I wasn't the strongest disciplinarian type of person. He just wasn't afraid of me or took me serious enough...he realizes that (his violent behavior) is not acceptable even though I would tell him that; it's somewhat different with someone else telling him that. That was positive.

Most of the parents and youth in this study experienced what Restorative Justice advocates consider to be one of the most important tenets of its philosophy, that is, that all people affected by a crime have a voice.

4.54 Complex Solutions: Hopeful Futures.

I interviewed these parents after they had completed the Restorative Justice process with their youth. In four of the five cases the mothers felt hopeful about the future. There were a variety of reasons for their positive outlook. Each case was unique and the parents described the changes that had occurred such that they now felt hopeful. In one case the youth's single episode of violence was met with zero tolerance by his parents. They called the police and he spent the night in jail. His parents felt that this "shocked him; he thought he was just going to get let go...he got a rude awakening." These parents believed that their son would stay out of trouble for several reasons. He received the proper consequences for what he did, he was finished school, and he had a job. They shared with me that they wanted him to be responsible for his actions. Another mother described the Restorative Justice process as the "ideal solution." She reported that her daughter's "whole life had changed." There were multiple solutions recommended, for example, the daughter would return to school, find a job, and attend counseling for her drug use. Collaboration between community support people and various other systems made this youth's mother feel the process was "an incredibly positive experience." "What's changed is she has support she respects in the community...she is being respected...she feels like a person who is worthwhile...that's huge, huge, absolutely huge."

Two other mothers felt that their relationship with their youth had changed for the better. Their children were not as confrontational or aggressive and had started to make other changes in their lives such as creating more positive relationships with peers. Again it was not the result of one event but rather the combination of a number of factors that

had led to their current situation. One mother said that before she had not had “any resources, any help and all of a sudden things started to come together”:

I feel a lot better because I feel now there is hope...that there is going to be change whereas before I felt helpless like there wasn't anything...now I feel a little more relaxed and open to say, “Okay, let's see what's going to happen now.”

A fourth mother said that she and her daughter were much closer: they “did everything together now.” She felt several factors were responsible for these changes: the mother decided to change her discipline strategy and to trust her daughter more, they had moved, and the girl liked her new school. Although the youth had not yet completed her contract obligations, the mother said that if it did not work she would be back again and would try something else. She was “determined to make things work now.”

Overall, the parents' impression of Restorative Justice was that it had considered the whole picture when dealing with their situation. The complexity of their children's problems needed complex solutions. The Restorative Justice philosophy, which views crime as a violation of people and relationships, involves healing for all parties. These parents had been violated, in some cases repeatedly, and violently. Some youth broke their parents' bones by punching them in the face, some destroyed their homes and scissored up their clothing, and the parents indicated they had undergone anguish and heartache. With Restorative Justice, offenders, victims, and the community are brought together in order to arrive at a solution that benefited all. In four out of the five cases parents indicated this goal had been achieved.

In the discussion section that follows I will contextualize the findings within the theoretical framework chosen for this project.

Chapter Five Discussion

5.0 Discussion of the Findings

The parents' experiences fit within the definition of youth-to-parent abuse that was adapted from Cottrell & Monk (2004). Cottrell & Monk described youth-to-parent abuse as actions by youth that are intended to cause verbal, psychological, physical or financial harm to parents. All youth had subjected their parents to verbal, psychological, and physical abuse. The findings also support the notion of a continuum as described by Eckstein (2004). These parents reported abuse that ranged from a single explosive case of violence to a situation where the youth had acted out several times to cases where the youth frequently and repeatedly lashed out violently. Two of the parents self-identified as victims who had suffered years of abuse from their offspring.

Cottrell & Monk's nested ecological theory was chosen as the framework for this project because it captures the multiple influences hypothesized to contribute to youth-to-parent abuse. The assumption is that the youth's behavior is shaped by a reciprocal interaction between the four levels of the *Macrosystem* (for example, gender inequality, media violence), the *Exosystem* (for example, lack of social supports, negative school experiences, negative peer influences), the *Microsystem* (for example, parental conflict, ineffective parenting), and the *Ontogenetic* (for example, substance abuse, mental health issues).

The findings from this research supported this theoretical model as a means of understanding the complexity involved in this form of family violence. It is important to note that the interview questions were designed specifically to tap into these four areas

and therefore the content of the interviews may have been influenced by this.

Nevertheless, the accounts parents provided of their experiences with youth-to-parent abuse and the influences described can all be placed within this framework.

The youth were influenced by the *Macrosystem* in three ways: media images, too much freedom for youth, and minimization of seriousness. Some parents believed that their children's aggression was encouraged by popular media images of the Black culture. They saw these images presenting social modeling of disrespect and violence. Other parents stated that today's youth were allowed too many freedoms. They felt that voluntary programs for youth prevented the youth from getting the help their parents felt they needed. Parents indicated that a lack of seriousness displayed by criminal justice officials in juvenile court contributed to an atmosphere of mayhem and encouraged the youth to engage in disrespectful behavior.

Parents' perceptions of the influences of the *Exosystem* included: negative school experiences, negative peer influences, lack of social services, and temporary and/or ineffectual interventions. Parents believed that their children did not fit into the school environment and this increased their challenges. The parents hypothesized that their children's inability to meet academic requirements and their social isolation made school an unfriendly environment. A lack of understanding from school personnel contributed to an increase in aggressive, anti-social behaviors. Cottrell & Monk (2004) reported similar findings. Youth who had not experienced success at school and had histories of academic and behavioral problems were more likely to create conflict at home and at school. Parents also saw negative peer influences providing direct models of behaviors such as running away and parental disobedience. Cottrell & Monk (2004) reported similar

findings: the youth in their study had been influenced by peers through modeling of how violent behaviors at home could lead to gaining power and control over parents.

Parents in this study indicated that comprehensive holistic solutions designed to address the needs of the youth and their families were unavailable from social services and responses sometimes made situations worse. Cottrell & Monk also identified a “lack of information and community support,” where the police minimized the victimization, and even when the youth were charged, they remained in the family home. The *Microsystem* influences were parenting styles and attitudes, modeling of aggressive behavior, and conflict in the family home. Some parents believed they had been too controlling or not controlling enough and the lack of clear boundaries resulted in youth taking advantage of leniency or rebelling against control. Parents perceived other family influences such as witnessing conflict and aggressive behavior as contributing to the development of their children’s aggressive behavior.

The influences of the *Ontogenetic* system appeared to be mental health issues and substance misuse. Some parents felt mental health issues engendered impulsive aggressive behavior and lack of interpersonal skills. Substance use was postulated to cause volatile confrontational behaviors. Individual characteristics of youth such as mental health issues and substance abuse have been found to contribute to youth-to-parent abuse by other researchers (Cottrell & Monk, 2004; Eckstein, 2004; Browne & Hamilton, 1998; Evans & Warren-Sohlberg, 1988; Jackson, 2004).

The findings from this project suggest that Restorative Justice provided comprehensive solutions for some parents. Those parents who reported a successful outcome with Restorative Justice described interventions that met the needs of the youth

and the family simultaneously. Through lengthy discussions with the caseworkers and volunteer facilitators, community members and service professionals were called upon to provide the individualized support that led to change. These parents experienced the actualization of the principles of Restorative Justice. All parties affected by the crime came together in a safe, non-invasive environment. According to the parents, the offenders' (youth) needs were addressed, the victims' (mothers) voices were heard, youth accepted responsibility for their actions, and healing was experienced. The parents also stated that they now enjoyed a better relationship with their youth. In these cases the parents had advocated for the necessity of programs and supports for their youth and the caseworkers acted in collaboration with them to find the effective interventions and support that would promote action plans for success. For the one family where Restorative Justice was not successful there are three differences from the other cases. Firstly, the contract conditions were not specifically geared toward meeting the needs of the youth, so interventions such as anger management or counseling were not offered. Secondly, these parents believed the Restorative Justice process would provide a means of punishment for their son but he received community service hours that inadvertently rewarded him. The parents felt this had given their son the message that he could do whatever he wanted without suffering any consequences. Thirdly, the youth admitted to abusing his parents but he did not express remorse. An offender's expression of remorse, according to the principles and values of Restorative Justice, may provide an opportunity for the victim to experience healing. For this family, Restorative Justice did not realize its goal of healing for all parties affected by crime.

5.1 Implications

The parents interviewed in this study believed that there were multiple reasons their youth had ended up in the criminal justice system. The influences identified by these parents can be located within the cultural, social, familial, and individual systems of an ecological model (Cottrell & Monk, 2004). In order for researchers to adequately understand the interrelatedness of the multiple factors an investigation into some of the more salient influences may be a helpful starting place. Individual characteristics of the youth, such as early aggression, have been shown to predict aggressiveness (Pagani, Larocque, Vitaro & Tremblay, 2003) and warrant further investigation. Negative school experiences have been reported as possible contributions to the development of youth-to-parent abuse (Cottrell & Monk, 2004) but there is no conclusive evidence to suggest why this is the case. Longitudinal research, which would investigate what is happening for these children at school and at home, would help by determining causal links that could be further investigated. Researchers have identified some further risk factors that warrant investigation such as negative peer influences, mental health issues and substance abuse (Agnew & Hugely, 1989; Cottrell & Monk, 2004; Evans & Warren-Sohlberg, 1988). Some researchers (Agnew & Hugely, 1989; Jackson, 2004) have postulated that a shift in the usual family power dynamics takes place in the case of youth-to-parent abuse, where the seemingly less powerful becomes more powerful. Jackson (2004) advocates for placing youth-to-parent abuse within the family violence literature where feminist inquiry could examine power relations within the family.

The Restorative Justice process, according to findings from this study, provided a successful outcome when a complex solution was provided, one that encompassed the

needs of the offender and the victim. This type of family violence is being dealt with through the Restorative Justice program in Halifax, Nova Scotia and little is known about how it is working. Given the experiences of these few parents it would appear that collaboration between caseworkers and parents is essential. Research that investigates what the offender is experiencing, as well as the caseworkers and parents would shed light on this important topic.

5.3 Limitations and Strengths

A strength of this project is that it provides a unique glimpse of how Restorative Justice can successfully provide solutions for families suffering this type of violence. The parents who perceived Restorative Justice as working for them felt it worked because of several reasons. They felt heard and were given the opportunity to talk about the history behind their youth's behavior. Solutions were offered that involved engaging people and services from the community to assist with getting the youth the "ideal" support for them. The one mother, who felt that the Restorative Justice process did not work, perceived the process as giving her son a reward for what he had done. She had expected that he would be punished and when this did not happen she felt the process did not adequately address her needs, that is, her son did not meet with the appropriate consequences for his behavior.

There are a number of limitations to this study. Only six parents related their experiences retrospectively. The voices of the youth were not heard nor were the service providers given an opportunity to relate their experiences. Future studies involving the voices of all parties are needed. The findings of the study are not generalizable to the wider population. The five women and one man that participated in this study were

Canadian Caucasian middle-class parents. None of the participants was affected by poverty. While these parents were willing to talk with me about their experiences, the caseworkers at the Community Justice Society office reported that there were other cases that had not gone very well and these parents refused to be interviewed. It is likely that these parents would have had very different perceptions of the Restorative Justice process.

5.4 Researcher's Reflections

Interviewing parents who had experienced youth-to-parent abuse was close to my world. As mentioned previously I have had similar experiences with my son. At the end of this project I am left asking: What have I learned? I reviewed the goals of the research: to understand the family dynamics at play in this form of family violence and to discover how the Restorative Justice met or did not meet the needs of the parents. The second goal was adequately achieved but the first was not fully explored. Although I had indicated that this was my goal I chose a theoretical framework that would answer a different question: how did these parents arrive at a place where they had to call for criminal justice intervention? In retrospect I realize I was trying to understand how the parents had made sense out of their children's behavior and how had it affected them as parents. In spite of my intentions to be aware of my biases, I recognize in retrospect that I was searching for causal answers. I believe the interviewing process with these parents was influenced by my own desires to understand what had happened in my own life. I missed out on adequately exploring the parents' perception of themselves and how their roles had changed, if they had, because of their experiences.

If I had the opportunity to conduct these interviews again I would follow the advice given by Kvale (1996) and rephrase and reflect feelings of the parents. By following factual leads I was able to get a description of what had happened and even why they thought it had happened but I did not explore the parents' perceptions of themselves and how they had been affected. The main focus of the interview was on the youth, from the parents' perspective.

I kept a reflexivity journal in order to reflect on the interviews and record intellectual thoughts as well as feelings. A further purpose was to provide a means by which I could reflect on the research process in general. As I read through these reflections I recognized how I was filtering these parents' experiences through my own lenses, comparing their experiences with my own. In spite of putting my "baggage" on the table in the methodology section, I had in fact not reached that ideal "epoche" as described by Moustakas. During the analysis stage of this research I was able to separate the parents' meanings from my own. Perhaps to believe one can be aware of all of one's own biases is naïve, but at least through the recording of these a researcher can come closer to recognizing the many influences that are at play when one attempts to make meaning for others.

5.5 Conclusion

In this project four mothers and one couple spoke about their experiences with youth-to-parent abuse. They called the police to de-escalate volatile situations where their youth were acting violently (that is, threatening to harm them with deadly weapons, punching holes in walls and doors, breaking windows with bricks, destroying furniture, and/or hitting and punching parents and siblings). The family violence literature review

stated that there has not been adequate recognition of this form of family violence and that youth-to-parent abuse has not been recognized as a legitimate societal concern. In the last five years there has been research that indicates youth are abusing their parents. One quantitative and three qualitative studies, as well as one literature review have addressed this issue (Cottrell & Monk, 2004; Eckstein, 2004; Jackson, 2003; Pagani, et al., 2003; Stewart et al.). The findings from this project, although limited to five families, add to the literature in this area. These parents sought help controlling their children and they believed they did not find adequate, lasting solutions. They felt judged and blamed by some service providers and they felt frustrated and ambivalent about their children after enduring years of aggressive behaviors. In trying to make sense out of what had happened to their children they constructed their own personal explanations. In some cases the parents felt they were responsible, various familial circumstances were to blame, while others believed their children had personal problems such as mental health issues, and still others felt their youths' behaviors could be attributed to negative cultural influences. However, whether the causes could be located within the child or the environment all parents believed their situations had become more complicated over the years and an interrelation of problems required holistic integrated solutions. In this study, Restorative Justice addressed the needs of some parents and youth and interventions were designed to effect change in the appropriate areas. For others, the Restorative Justice process did not work.

From my study it was clear that youth-to-parent abuse had a profound effect on the parents I interviewed. While legislative laws have been developed for the protection of victims of child, spousal/partner, and elderly abuse, parents of young offenders are

mostly unheard and unprotected. This form of family violence is a serious societal issue that deserves further attention from researchers, service providers, and policy makers.

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APPENDIX A
Telephone Protocol

- Hello My name is, a caseworker with Restorative Justice, and I am calling on behalf of Joann Doran.
- Joann is a student at Mount Saint Vincent, conducting a study on family violence and Restorative Justice and she is interested in meeting with parents who have gone through the RJ process and would be willing to speak about their experiences as parents who have gone through the process because of conflict with their son/daughter.
- The focus of the study is to hear how RJ worked or did not work for them and their families.
- She is conducting this research as part of her requirements for her Masters degree. Everything discussed would be confidential. No information from individual interviews will be disclosed to Restorative Justice staff or volunteers. Your participation is completely voluntary and will not affect access to services or programs offered by the Community Justice Society.
- If you agree to meet with Joann, it would consist of a face-to-face interview that would last for approximately 90 minutes. The interview would be recorded and the tapes transcribed. If you are interested in hearing the results of the study, Joann would be happy to meet with you or to send you a report.
- Strict measures are employed to protect the identity of all participants and no identifying information will appear in the Thesis report, and all tapes will be erased. All electronic files will be password protected.
- Joann is willing to meet you at a location of your convenience. You could come to Mount Saint Vincent or the Community Justice Office or Joann would come to you in your community at a neutral setting of your choice. Arrangements can be made for transportation if this is a problem.
- The reason I am calling is to see if you would be interested in speaking with Joann about her project. The Community Justice Society could provide you with her contact information or if you prefer she can contact you.

Contact Information: Joann Doran [REDACTED] or [REDACTED]; My supervisor, Dr. E. Church, Elizabeth.Church@msvu.ca or 457-6721.

APPENDIX B
Interview Consent Form

I, _____, agree to participate in the research entitled *Restorative*
(please print name)

Justice and Family Violence: Youth-to-Parent Abuse. The purpose of this study is to explore a form of family conflict currently being handled through the Restorative Justice (RJ) program: youth-to-parent abuse. The participants (parents of youth who have gone through the Restorative Justice process because of conflict with their son/daughter) have been selected because of their unique perspective on this topic.

I understand that the interview with Joann Doran, student in the Master of Arts in School Psychology program, will last approximately 90 minutes, and it will be audiotaped.

I understand that my participation is completely voluntary and will not affect access to services or programs offered by the Community Justice Society. Although there is no anticipated harm or risk related to my participation, the topic may cause distressing feelings. I have the right to refuse to answer any questions and/or be audiotaped at any time. I understand I may decline participation or withdraw from this study at any time without any consequences. Should I decide to withdraw from the study at any time, the tapes from the interview will be erased and transcripts will be shredded.

I understand that strict measures are in place to protect my identity. I understand that everything we discuss during the interview will remain confidential unless information is revealed that would require disclosure. Confidentiality must be broken if I reveal an intention to harm myself or others, or if allegations of abuse or neglect are revealed about someone under the age of 16. I understand it is the legal duty of the interviewer to reveal any such information. The audiotape of the interview will be erased after it is transcribed. All electronic files will be password protected. All identifying names and details will be removed by the interviewer and will not appear in reports resulting from this study. No personally identifying information from individual interviews will be disclosed to Restorative Justice staff or volunteers.

I understand that if I wish, there will be one more meeting of 30 minutes where the results of the study will be shared with me and a final copy of the report based on this research will be made available to me and the Restorative Justice Board.

If I have any questions or wish more information about the project, I can contact the interviewer or her supervisor Dr. Elizabeth Church. Joann can be reached via telephone (_____) or email (_____) and Dr. Church can also be reached via telephone (902-457-7621) or email (Elizabeth.church@msvu.ca). If I have questions about how the study is being conducted and wish to speak with someone who is not directly involved in the study, I may contact the Chair of the University Research Ethics Board (UREB) c/o MSVU Research and International Office at 457-6350 or via e-mail at research@MSVU.ca.

Should I require professional assistance because of participating in this interview, I am encouraged to contact Victims' Services where I can receive a referral for counselling services. I can contact them in Halifax at: Halifax Regional Police, Victim Service Unit, 1975 Gottingen Street, Halifax, Nova Scotia B3J 2H1, Telephone: _____, www.police.halifax.ns.ca; or Dartmouth at: Cole Harbour RCMP Community Assistance, 1171 Cole Harbour Road, Dartmouth, Nova Scotia B2V 1E8. Telephone: _____.

Date: _____

Participant Signature: _____

Interviewer Signature: _____

APPENDIX C

Interview Guidelines

Background Information Questions:

- What is your relationship to the young person who was referred to Restorative Justice?
- What is your marital status? What level of education did you complete? Occupation?
- Tell me a little about your son/daughter. Name, age, gender?
- Who currently lives at home?

Core Thematic Questions: Exploring the event/abuse and the Restorative Justice process

The Event: Please describe the event that led to your son/daughter being referred to Restorative Justice?

Macrosystem: (Attitudes, media images, gender equality)

Please describe to me what kinds of attitudes may have influenced your son/daughter's behavior.

Exosystem: (community, peers, school)

Please describe what influences may have contributed to the development of your son/daughter's behavior. For example, did peer pressure, problems at school or lack of community resources play a role?

Microsystem: (Familial, relationships, parenting styles)

Please describe to me the family atmosphere leading up to the event.

Ontogenetic: (mental health issues, substance abuse)

Please describe in as much detail as possible your son/daughter's individual characteristics, his/her personality.

Restorative Justice Process:

Please describe in as much detail as you can, what you remember about the Restorative Justice process.

Referral:

Who referred your son/daughter to the Restorative Justice Program? Describe your experiences with the criminal justice system. How supported did you feel throughout the process?

Contract Session:

Please describe in as much detail as you can, the contract session. What were the terms of the contract?

Outcome: Please describe to me your overall level of satisfaction with the RJ process?

Macrosystem: What kinds of attitude changes were evident?

Exosystem: Please describe any evident changes in your child's relationships with peers, school or the community.

Microsystem: Please describe any changes in the family atmosphere?

Ontogenetic: What kinds of changes took place with your son/daughter?

Debriefing: Describe how meeting like this to talk about what happened has been beneficial or not? Describe how this type of interview could be improved.