

**GENDER TYPIFICATIONS AND THE EXPERIENCES OF SURVIVORS OF
CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE BY FEMALE PERPETRATORS:
A QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS**

by

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In memory of Larry Bruner, who always taught me to question the unquestionable.

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ABSTRACT

This study examines gender typifications in contemporary North American culture and the ways in which such typifications have influenced the perceptions and experiences of survivors of child sexual abuse by female perpetrators.

The data for this study were derived from in-depth interviews with five men and three women who self-identified as survivors of sexual abuse by females. Participants were recruited using purposive sampling techniques. A largely unstructured approach to interviewing was used. The interviews were analyzed using inductive forms of analysis where the categories or dimensions of analysis emerged from the data.

As a result of contemporary North American culture's reliance on the gender typifications that females are nurturing, sexually passive, and frequent victims of abuse, and that males are assertive, sexually aggressive, and frequent perpetrators of abuse, people are more likely to perceive of females in the role of sexual abuse victims and males in the role of sexual abuse perpetrators. Furthermore, males are assumed to enjoy or profit from any form of sexual contact with females, and females are assumed to be incapable of causing harm through coercive sexual contact.

This study demonstrates that such gender typifications overlook other "atypical" or "deviant" realities, namely the reality where females are perpetrators of sexual abuse and males or females are their victims. Moreover, the experiences of victims of sexual abuse by females clearly defy conventional gender typifications. Their reported experiences reveal that females can be perpetrators of sexual abuse, males can be sexually victimized by females, males do not enjoy or profit from coerced sexual contact with females, and that there can be varying degrees of psychological harm following coerced sexual contact with a female.

Finally, this study reveals that there are consequences to opposing gender typifications. The survivors of sexual abuse in this study faced negative consequences as a result of reporting a reality that defied the "typical". Participants maintained that professionals, be they, police officers, child protection agents and mental health professionals, responded to their claims of sexual abuse with shock, disbelief, and denied their victimization and injury as a result of the gender of their sexual abuse perpetrator. Professionals often renegotiated the behaviours of alleged female perpetrators so that they were more consistent with conventional gender roles. According to respondents, the responses of professionals' heightened their feelings of self-blame, denial, resignation, anger and helplessness.

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INTRODUCTION

In the United States, a *real* boy climbs trees, disdains girls, dirties his knees, plays with soldiers, and takes blue for his favourite colour. When they go to school, real boys prefer manual training, gym, and arithmetic. In college the boys smoke pipes, drink beer, and major in engineering or physics. The real boy matures into a "man's man" who plays poker, goes hunting, drinks brandy, and dies in the war (Brown cited in Messner and Kimmel, 1989:97, italics in original).

I started life as a little tomboy but as I grew older, Mother got worried about my unladylike ways. She removed my marbles, football and skates and tried to replace these with dolls, tea sets and sewing games...When despite her efforts she caught me one day trying to climb a tree in the park she became thoroughly exasperated and called me a little "freak" (Lipman-Blumen, 1984:57).

Perceptions as to what is appropriate gender¹ behaviour have a strong impact on how situations are negotiated in everyday life. This study focuses on how perceptions of gender in contemporary North America influence common beliefs about sexual abuse perpetrators and victims, as well as the experiences of these victims. Gender typifications, that is, the predefined "typical" behaviours that are assigned to each gender, have assumed that males are most likely to be the perpetrators of sexual abuse and females are most likely to be their victims. However, these typifications represent one portion of the complex reality of sexual abuse. Other realities of sexual abuse do exist, including the reality of males who sexually abuse other males. Least recognized, but nonetheless important, are female perpetrators of sexual abuse and their victims, whether male or female.

This study will analyze the experiences of individuals, both males and females, who claim to be victims of sexual abuse where the perpetrator has been female. The principal research

¹ Gender refers to the socio-cultural elaborations upon physiology (Mackie, 1987).

question that this study seeks to answer is:

- 1) **How do conventional gender typifications influence common beliefs about female sexual abuse perpetrators and their victims, and the experiences of these victims?**

There are also several important sub-questions related to the notion of gender typifications:

- 1) What are the predominant gender typifications held in contemporary North American culture?
- 2) Do gender typifications surrounding sexual abuse perpetrators and victims accurately reflect the reality of sexual abuse?
- 3) What are the consequences for individuals whose experiences defy or oppose conventional gender typifications?

Mainstream North American society assumes that males are likely to be perpetrators of sexual abuse and that females are likely to be their victims. As a result of our reliance on such gender typifications and the beliefs that females are incapable of committing sexual offenses and that males are not likely to be sexually victimized, other realities of sexual abuse have been overlooked. The reality that is focused upon in this study is that of individuals, both males and females, who claim to have been sexually abused by a female. This obscured reality of sexual abuse will be described and it will be demonstrated that these victims and their experiences not only challenge pervasive gender typifications, but also that they are deeply affected by them. Those respondents who came forward to reveal their sexual abuse to a professional claim to have been treated with shock, denial and disbelief as a result of the gender of their perpetrator. These reactions ultimately added to their personal trauma. The failure of mainstream North American

culture to acknowledge or recognize cases which deviate from what is considered "typical" or "the norm", may ultimately give us a skewed picture of our social reality and have negative consequences for the so-called "deviants."

There are several reasons why this study is theoretically, empirically and practically important. Theoretically, this study sheds light on the key role that perceptions of gender and more specifically, gender typifications play in the everyday lives of North Americans in the late twentieth century. Gender, the complex of social meanings that is attached to biological sex, remains one of the organizing principles and central features of social life. People come to know themselves and their world through the prism of gender. As well as highlighting the role of gender typifications in relation to the sexual abuse of children by women, this study shows how an understanding of gender affects many facets of our daily lives, whether they be the simple gender typifications surrounding male and female behaviour, or more complex ones relating to perceptions of sexual abuse perpetrators and victims. My examination of the pervasive gender typifications held in contemporary North American culture also illustrate their essential role in creating order and formulating meaning in society: their conveniences as well as their dangers.

In the last two decades, there has been a surge of attention to the issue of child sexual abuse. However, the majority of studies have focused on one domain of sexual abuse: male offenders and their female victims. Female sexual offenders and their victims have been virtually ignored. It is only within the last few years that social scientists and clinicians have begun to acknowledge their existence. Although several studies have been carried out on the

female perpetrators of sexual abuse, (Faller, 1987; Fehrenbach and Monasterysky, 1988; Mathews, 1989; McCarty, 1986) scant in-depth research has been done on their victims. This study will help to fill the substantial void on the issue of survivors of sexual abuse by women. It will also help to shed some light on the experiences of survivors of sexual abuse by women, how perceptions of gender and gender typifications influence their experiences, and how the sexual abuse has affected their lives.

Practically speaking, a study of this nature has an important role to play in terms of both policy and intervention. In terms of policy, the silence around the issue of females perpetrating sexual abuse has prevented any recognition of its seriousness. Addressing the fact that women can be perpetrators of sexual abuse and that their victims can be both male and female, is exposing a "hidden" reality. This further expands the notion of child sexual abuse and opens the door to the "discovery" of a "new" social problem. Consequently, policies will be needed in areas such as prevention, and educating professionals in the field of child sexual abuse as to appropriate protocol for investigation, and strategies for counselling and intervention.

In terms of intervention, there is little knowledge as to the unique therapeutic needs of survivors of sexual abuse by women and the role of professionals in this regard. Professionals working in the area of sexual abuse are often ill-equipped and unprepared to deal with cases that come forward where the perpetrator is a woman. Personal values, biases and typifications may interfere with the professional's goal of helping their client. To avoid amplifying a victim's trauma, it is crucial that professionals are familiar with the issues that these individuals may

encounter. This study may assist professionals in examining some of the unique issues that survivors of sexual abuse by women face and what they can do to better meet the needs of this population.

I have chosen this as a topic of study not only because it remains an unexplored area of social science research, but also because the notion of perceptions of gender and its relationship to sexual abuse perpetrators had, at one time, affected me personally. As a clinical social worker who provided counselling to both victims and perpetrators of sexual abuse, I had reached the point in my work where I naively thought I had seen and heard everything, and that nothing could possibly surprise me. That was until a client walked into my office and began recounting experiences of sexual abuse perpetrated by a woman. The training that I had received in both social work and criminology had never once mentioned or even insinuated that women could be perpetrators of sexual abuse. I suppose I, like many others, erroneously assumed that it simply did not exist. However, the more cases that I heard from social work colleagues who worked in schools, and other clinics, I realized that it might not be as rare as I had previously thought. The taboo nature of the topic intrigued me, and I tried to find as much information as I could.

² A note with regard to the use of the first person pronoun in this thesis. One of the thesis examiners argued that it would be preferable to replace the first person singular ("I") with the first person plural ("we"). After much consideration, I concluded that it would be preferable to retain the first person singular when making statements from my perspective, as author of the thesis. In contemporary English, the use of the first person singular is generally considered to be preferable to the use of the first person plural which is often pejoratively referred to as the "royal we". Using the "royal we" can lead to confusion with the "we" that is often used when referring to "society". Moreover, the use of the first person singular is appropriate for this thesis as it follows the convention of interactionist and constructivist social science, as noted by Howard Becker (1986).

The literature that I found was more extensive than I had expected and assisted me in establishing some initial areas of inquiry. I was particularly interested in survivors and how they dealt with their experiences, whether they disclosed what had happened to them to others, how other clinicians dealt with the issue, and most importantly, how societal perceptions of women and men influence whether or not cases of this nature are likely to be exposed.

This study was conducted by interviewing eight individuals who self-identify as being survivors of sexual abuse where the perpetrator was a woman. The analysis of the eight interviews was informed by the grounded theory method. This approach relies mainly on inductive forms of analysis where the categories or dimensions of analysis emerge from the data itself. The stories and experiences of the respondents were studied at length. With time, patterns and categories began to emerge from the data. The data was ultimately analyzed according to these categories.

This study is composed of four chapters. The first chapter will establish the object of study and the theoretical approach. The second chapter will outline the methodological approach, and the two remaining chapters will constitute the analysis of the study.

CHAPTER I:
THE THEORETICAL APPROACH

What are little girls made of?
Sugar and spice and everything nice,
That's what little girls are made of.

What are little boys made of?
Snips and snails and puppy dog tails,
That's what little boys are made of.

- Children's Nursery Rhyme

L. GENDER AND SOCIETY

Although societies vary in the degree to which they socialize children differently according to their sex group, differentiating between activities that are assigned to females and those that are assigned to males is said to be basic to all cultures (Stockard and Johnson, 1992). However, the way gender is symbolized does vary cross-culturally. While some cultures have highly elaborate and complex notions of gender which regulate virtually all aspects of social life, others have less elaborate conceptions of gender, which are less important in defining everyday activities and social roles. While many cultures such as our own conceive of males and females as opposites to each other, some cultures have highly elaborated notions of only one sex group (Stockard and Johnson, 1992).

In the context of the last quarter of the twentieth century in North America, the time and place I will be examining, a strict dichotomy has been created in mainstream society which differentiates the masculine from the feminine. The gender dichotomy begins from the moment

people are born³ and are wrapped in either a pink blanket or a blue one, and continues throughout adult life. Whether it be through education, in the form of children's literature or the school system, through the media in the form of advertising, popular music, television, or film, through familial roles, or religious beliefs, there is a continual bombardment of messages as to what is appropriate and what is inappropriate behaviour in relation to gender. The conventional notion of gender is not fluid or pliant. Instead, I would argue that conventional gender roles constitute a rigid institutional-like structure that demands strict compliance and conformity. In essence, boys or men are expected to follow the necessary behaviours that have been designated for males. Girls or women are expected to emulate the required traits and "typical" behaviours designated for females. It is therefore no surprise that one's gender greatly determines and predefines the way in which one relates to others, and to the world around us.

I intend to demonstrate both the extent to which society relies on an uncompromising gendered reality, how this gendered reality has diffused into many realms of social life, as well as the impact that this rigid reality can have on those whose experiences counter such a reality, by using the example of victims of sexual abuse where the perpetrator has been a woman. Female sexual offending⁴, contradicts the very core of what it means to be a "woman". By focusing on individuals whose experiences challenge society's notions of "typical" gender

³ And perhaps before with the advent of ultrasound procedures.

⁴ For the purposes of this study, when I refer to female sexual offending, prostitution will be excluded from this definition. Not only is prostitution considered a victimless crime, as there is mutual consent, but it is also considered more of a public order offense than a sexual one.

behaviour by having been sexually victimized by a woman, as well as examining the less visible level of the self-image and emotional experiences of these individuals, I will be able to ascertain how these experiences have affected their lives and their outlooks.

What will become evident throughout this study is that the inflexibility imposed upon the perceived notion of gender may prevent society from accepting other, perhaps less typical, "gender realities", namely that females are capable of committing sexual offenses, and that both males and females may be their victims. Gender typifications may also have negative consequences for survivors of sexual abuse by women, whose experiences defy and deviate from the "typical" gender reality.

Before these issues are addressed, it is important to establish just how and why the notions of "femininity" and "masculinity" emerge. In the case of contemporary North America, how are notions of femininity in women and masculinity in men constructed and maintained? How do these notions effect our perceptions of sexual abuse perpetrators and victims? To examine and explore perceptions of gender and its relationship to beliefs about sexual abuse perpetrators and victims as well as the experiences of victims, I will rely on a social constructionist perspective.

2. THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIONIST PERSPECTIVE

The social constructionist approach was initially advanced as a response and an alternative

to the structural functionalist framework which assumes that social conditions exist separately from an individual's interpretation of them (Holstein and Miller, 1993:7). In contrast to the structural functionalist perspective, the central tenet of social constructionism is that "reality" as people know it and the reality that members of society come to accept, is a socially constructed reality. What people commonly accept as real, and the familiar world within which and in relation to which they plan out their activities and act them out, is an artifact of the way in which they have given shape to their particular culture or society (Bash, 1995).

Therefore, social existence, according to the constructionist perspective is quite paradoxical. What people consider "reality", that abstract entity that is often perceived as existing outside of ourselves and separate from ourselves, and yet an entity that is assumed to define who we are, is actually our own creation. Peter Berger (1963:129) aptly explains this dialectic: "society defines us, but is in turn defined by us."

When sociologists speak of social construction, they draw attention to the processes by which people assign meaning to the world (Best, 1989:xxi). People lend objectification to their reality, consciously or not, simply in the course of engaging in normal social interaction. Members of society collaborate in contriving their reality. They mutually validate and continually revalidate it for themselves and to one another, and through their reciprocal negotiations, they either sustain, modify or recreate that reality (Bash, 1995). Individuals are therefore active producers of their social world. As Hale (1990:31) writes:

The patterns of behaviour that people come to interpret as roles are actively created and negotiated, sustained or abandoned in ongoing interaction...from this perspective the fundamental problem for sociology is to understand how people actively produce their social world as a mutually comprehensive reality.

What is perceived and established as "reality" in one culture, may be completely different in another. There will be variations in the conceptions and meanings of reality from society to society, and within a given society over time. Particularly in industrial societies that are characterized by cultural heterogeneity and structural complexity, there are likely to be subtle variations in how reality is constructed and conceived among the various subcultural groups. How one perceives "reality" may vary according to one's social class, race, ethnicity, gender, religion, occupation, education, age and ideological preferences. Every society or culture represents the institutionalization of a constructed reality, one that is relatively unique and that all "properly" socialized members of that society recognize as "common sense" or perceive as "conventional wisdom" (Bash, 1995).

The social constructionist approach is pertinent for this research. It will not only help to explain how gender is constructed and maintained in contemporary North American culture, but also how members of society, are more likely to perceive males in the role of sexual abuse perpetrator and females in the role of sexual abuse victim.

The social constructionist approach used in this research will reflect the theory and ideas of Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann as presented in their now classic text The Social Construction of Reality (1966). This particular book was chosen not only because Berger and

Luckmann provide a comprehensive explanation as to how societal "realities" emerge, are maintained, and how they are transmitted from one generation to the next, but also because Berger and Luckmann's concepts can be applied to a myriad of social issues, including common beliefs about gender. I will begin my theoretical section by outlining Berger and Luckmann's general theory and will then apply their ideas, particularly their notion of "typifications" to perceptions of gender and its relationship to beliefs about perpetrators and victims of sexual abuse.

3. BERGER AND LUCKMANN: HOW WE CONSTRUCT REALITY

Berger and Luckmann (1966) argue that all reality and the knowledge that makes up that reality is constructed and formulated by humans through a dialectical process between themselves and their social world. To Berger and Luckmann, all knowledge is a social product or a social construction. What people know and how they learn to know it, is a result of their own creations: "man constructs his own nature, or more simply, man produces himself" (Berger and Luckmann, 1966:49). Through the accumulation of consciousness, common sense, language and symbols, and through intense social interaction with others, humanity creates a social stock of knowledge - a code of conduct for every day practices, and the standards by which one must live and behave in a given society. This social stock of knowledge is passed down from one generation to the next. By sharing this knowledge with a new generation, knowledge becomes "institutionalized" - a rigid and structured way in which things are done.

Berger and Luckmann contend that "typifications" are a key factor in the acquisition and perpetuation of knowledge. I use Berger and Luckmann's notion of typifications to form the foundations of my research on perceptions of gender and its relationship to beliefs about sexual abuse perpetrators and victims. I will discuss the origins and role of typifications and how they are institutionalized and legitimated by society. I will also discuss their inherent dangers. I will then apply Berger and Luckmann's notion of typifications to the notion of gender.

3.1 UNDERSTANDING TYPIFICATIONS

For Berger and Luckmann, knowledge is founded on "typifications". They argue that the whole of our social reality is apprehended in a continuum of typifications (Berger and Luckmann, 1966:31). Typifications are categories that people rely on to create and organize meaning. They help us to make sense of our world and assist us in dealing with face to face encounters. As Berger and Luckmann (1966:31) indicate, "I apprehend the other as a type and I interact with him in a situation that is itself typical."

Our typifications are endless and can be applied to a myriad of situations. People hold typifications of teachers, students, police officers, inmates, judges, sales people, factory workers. A "typified" individual is assumed to act a certain way, dress a certain way, hold certain values and attitudes. For example, in the case of police officers, depending on the context and on our perspectives, people have typified them positively as "crime fighters" and "protectors of the public" or negatively as "racists", as "trigger-happy", as "donut lovers". People may typify

factory workers positively as "hardworking", or negatively as "uneducated" or "unintelligent". Members of society may typify judges positively as "dignified" or negatively as "elitist" or "sexist". Once a typification of a category of persons has been established, people interact with members of that category on the basis of this typification. Furthermore, these typifications are constantly being built upon. If an individual is typified as being a member of category "X", such as a factory worker, certain aspects of their behaviour will be interpreted as resulting from being in the category of "factory worker". The individual's values, manners, taste in food, and certain emotional reactions will be interpreted as being typical of being a member of the category of "factory worker".

If individuals go against the typificatory schemes created for them, for example a highly educated factory worker or a police officer who hates donuts, those who note such departures are likely to experience pressure to modify these schemes accordingly. In this sense, typifications are "negotiated" or revised in face-to-face encounters.

In contemporary North American society which is differentiated by socio-economic status, race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, occupation, age etc, the typifications are likely to vary according to one's social position. For example, a young black working class male may hold drastically different typifications of police officers than an older upper-class white male.

3.2 THE INSTITUTIONALIZATION OF TYPIFICATIONS

Although some typifications may be altered during personal interaction, in most instances typifications become institutions in their own right - a rigid and structured way of viewing and dealing with the world and part of the social stock of knowledge that is passed down from one generation to the next (Berger and Luckmann, 1966:54). Individuals in North American society, like in many other societies, often come to fit the typificatory scheme that has been established for the roles they occupy, whether the role is that of a police officer, a factory worker, or a doctor. However, it is not enough to simply acquire the routines that are necessary to consider oneself a police officer or a factory worker. One must gain the "inside knowledge" or the "social stock of knowledge" appropriate to the role. As Berger and Luckmann (1966:77) indicate: "one must be initiated into the various cognitive and even affective layers of the body of knowledge that is directly and indirectly appropriate to [the] role". Learning the appropriate social stock of knowledge and carrying it out as required is critical. Failure to do so can lead to severe sanctions and negative consequences. For example, if a police officer fails to integrate him or herself into the typificatory scheme or reality of a "police officer", he or she may be reprimanded. Continued avoidance of one's typified role could result in the loss of one's position. Thus, once typifications have been institutionalized, they have an enormous impact on human behaviour. They "control human conduct by setting up predefined patterns of conduct, which channel it in one direction as against the many other directions that would theoretically be possible" (Berger and Luckmann, 1966:55). In the end, the institutionalization of typifications ensures that behaviours and actions become predictable, solid, relatively

unquestioned and "the way things are done".

3.3 THE LEGITIMATION OF TYPIFICATIONS

Once a typification has been institutionalized, explanations or justifications must be created to clarify to the individual why he or she should perform one action or role over another. Berger and Luckmann refer to these justifications as "legitimations". Legitimations may be used in the form of language, where simple vocabulary legitimates the desired structure; explanatory schemes, which are derived from myths and proverbs and legends; and finally, explicit theories which provide comprehensive and elaborate ideologies that are transmitted by specialized personnel or "experts" (p. 103).

The use of legitimations is extremely important because of the belief that all social realities are precarious and all societies are constructions in the face of chaos (Berger and Luckmann, 1966:103). Indeed, there is a constant threat and possibility of "deviant" versions of reality challenging the "official" or "institutionalized" version of reality. Therefore, techniques may develop to repress the deviant realities and maintain the official reality. Berger and Luckmann refer to such techniques as "conceptual machineries". Examples of such conceptual machineries are "therapy" and "nihilation". The function of each is to prevent the emergence of alternative realities and to keep chaos at bay. Therapy is a way of trying to ensure that potential "deviants" remain within the institutionalized definition of reality instead of "emigrating" to a deviant reality (p. 113). Nihilation, on the other hand seeks to liquidate or

to rid society of all that does not "fit" or is considered "deviant". This is done to guard the rest of society from being affected or influenced by deviant ideologies. Without such techniques, society would be under the constant threat of conflicting ideologies and practices.

3.4 THE DANGERS OF TYPIFICATIONS

Typifications are extremely efficient; by creating them, people can easily make sense of an individual, a situation, and understand the meaning behind a given interaction. However, typifications can be extremely misleading and even dangerous. Although Berger and Luckmann do not discuss the danger of typifications in their book, it is important to address it. The main danger of a typification is that it represents only one portion or segment of reality in a complex whole. This means that when we rely upon a specific typification, we may overlook or ignore other segments of the reality that would enable us to understand the complex whole of the phenomenon. For example, by relying on the typification that police officers are all donut lovers, we may disregard that a segment of police officers actually prefer croissants. Relying on cases that are "typical" may give a skewed picture of reality as people may assume the typifications reflect the whole, when in actuality what is considered the "atypical" or "deviant" has been overlooked.

3.5 EXPANDING ON THE WORK OF BERGER AND LUCKMANN

The work of Berger and Luckmann is unique and when considering their time of writing,

highly progressive. However, their work can be expanded to take into account recent developments. From a contemporary perspective, the concept of typifications can easily be applied to such topical issues as race, gender, and sexual orientation. It is clear that the notion of typifications and their subsequent forms of legitimation are significant in these areas and affect the lives and social realities of individuals everywhere.

In view of the nature of my research, I intend to expand on Berger and Luckmann's work and apply their concept of typifications to the notion of gender and how typifications according to gender influence the way people perceive men, women, sexual abuse perpetrators, and sexual abuse victims. It will be demonstrated that the notion of gender, like human knowledge and typifications in general, is a social product and one that affects the way people view and adapt to the social world.

4. GENDER TYPIFICATIONS: THE CREATED DICHOTOMY

In expanding on Berger and Luckmann's work, I would argue that typificatory schemes have diffused into every aspect of our social reality. Gender is no exception. In the context of contemporary North America, a dichotomy between men and women has been socially constructed and gender differences are continually being emphasized. As Goffman (1977:301) articulates:

In modern industrial society, as apparently in all others, [gender] is at the base of a fundamental code in accordance with which social interactions and social structures are built up, a code which also establishes the conceptions individuals have concerning their

fundamental human nature.

As with typifications in general, we have created "typical" male and female behaviour. A "typical" man and a "typical" woman in contemporary North American society must act a certain way, dress a certain way, hold certain values and attitudes. As well, aspects of their behaviour will be interpreted as resulting from the typification of "man" or "woman". As one transsexual noted: "Gender is an anchor, and once people decide what you are, they interpret everything you do in light of that" (Kessler and McKenna, 1978:6).

An individual's manners, emotional reactions, presentation of self in conversation and even eating habits may all be understood as gender typical behaviour. For example, in North American society today, it is customary for women to limit their food intake in order to achieve the current ideal image of beauty - thinness. For a woman to overeat or to eat with fervour and enthusiasm may, in some circumstances, be viewed as "unladylike" or "aberrant". All of these elements demonstrate that society relies heavily upon "typical" gender behaviour, or what I will refer to from hereon as "gender typifications".

Like typifications in general, gender typifications are highly efficient. They save time, effort and in using them, enable us to predict the actions of another. Gender typifications allow us to easily make sense of a man or a woman, a situation involving both genders, and the meaning behind a given interaction.

In the highly complex and diverse contemporary North American society, gender

typifications are likely to vary according to class, culture, race, ethnicity, age, etc. For example, gender typifications for those of black heritage may differ from those of white heritage, yet each of them is also furthered modified by class, age and sexual orientation. Majors (1989:132) points out that because black men are denied access to the dominant culture's acceptable avenues of expression, they have created their own form of self-expression and unique forms of acceptable masculinity. Majors refers to this form of expression as the "cool pose". Black men adopt unique "poses" and "postures" which connote control, toughness and detachment (Majors, 1989:132). These poses and postures can be seen in their different styles of handshakes (eg - "high fives"), in black male entertainers with their choreographed "cool" dance steps (such as breakdancing) and in the most recent form of self-expression through "rap-talking". The cool pose, which represents a variety of attitudes and actions that serve the black man as mechanisms for survival, defense and social competence, has become a cultural signature and part of the typificatory scheme of the black male.

Although gender typifications vary by class, culture, race, ethnicity and age, I am unable, because of the constraints of this research, to deal with each of these components separately. As a result, I discuss gender typifications in North American society in a broad and generalized sense. In doing so, however, I risk collapsing all gender typifications into one hegemonic version. This can be considered a limitation of my study but is one that is difficult to address given the practical constraints of a masters thesis.

4.1 GENDER TYPIFICATIONS HISTORICALLY AND ACROSS CULTURES

Although there may be some similarities in gender typifications across cultures and throughout history, typifications according to gender are not transhistorical nor culturally universal, but rather vary from culture to culture and within one culture over time.

What is referred to as "reality" varies from society to society and depends very much on the socio-historical context. "Reality" is never stagnant, but in constant flux. In this sense, what is considered "typical" gender behaviour at one point in time, may alter at another point. For example, a "typical" woman in contemporary North America is vastly different from the "typical" woman of seventeenth century North America. The same is true of men. Take for example the typical upper-class man in seventeenth-century France. This "typical" upper-class man sported high heel patent leather shoes, red velvet jackets covering frilly white lace shirts. He wore long elaborate wigs, rouge and white powder make up, and had a taste for the elegant refinement of ornate furniture (Messner and Kimmel, 1989). This image bears little resemblance to a typical male in upper-class French culture of today. Clearly, gender typifications change and are replaced with newer typifications that correspond to the socio-historical context of the society in question.

Like contemporary North American society, there are other cultures that have a strict gender dichotomy differentiating the masculine from the feminine. For example, in Moslem cultures, a "typical" woman must dress according to the prescribed dress code which decrees that

women wear veils and loose clothing to cover their hair and bodies (Hale, 1990:207). Similarly, a "typical" man who is of the orthodox Jewish faith must always keep his head covered with a skull cap. In both Moslem and orthodox Jewish cultures, men and women have predefined yet opposite roles and feminine behaviour is positioned in vast opposition to masculine behaviour. However, this by no means demonstrates that the gender typifications that exist in mainstream North American culture, exist in all cultures. The work of Margaret Mead, especially her Sex and Temperament in Three Primitive Societies (1963), challenges the idea that gender typifications are similar all over the world. In comparing the Arapesh and the Mundugamor peoples in New Guinea, Mead noted that many of the characteristics that North Americans would classify as "typically" male or female, were classified differently in these cultures. Among the Arapesh, Mead noted that both men and women were nurturant, gentle, and compliant. The personalities of males and females were not sharply differentiated by gender. Both boys and girls learned to be cooperative, unaggressive, and responsive to the needs and demands of others (Mead, 1963:59). Mead writes:

[The Arapesh] regard both men and women as inherently nurturing, responsive and cooperative, able and willing to subordinate the self to the needs of those who are younger and weaker, and to derive a major satisfaction from doing so (p.134).

In contrast, among the Mundugamor, whom Mead described as headhunters and cannibals, both males and females were aggressive, highly sexed and non-nurturant:

The Mundugamor ideal of character is identical for the two sexes; how both men and women are expected to be violent, competitive, aggressively sexed, jealous, and ready to see and avenge in insult, delighting in display, in action, in fighting (p.225).

Thus, among the Arapesh, both sex groups could be considered feminine according to conventional North American standards, whereas both sex groups among the Mundugamor would seem exaggeratedly masculine. However, neither the Arapesh nor the Mundugamor make aggressiveness or nurturance specific to one sex group.

Perhaps the most interesting group Mead described was the Tchambuli. This society, according to Mead, virtually reversed our own gender roles and typifications. The women were brisk, efficient, managerial, impersonal and unadorned, whereas the men decorated themselves, appeared vain and spent their time carving, painting, and practising dance steps (Mead, 1963:245). These sharp contrasts with conventional North American standards indicate the extent to which gender roles, norms and typifications are socially constructed and vary from society to society⁵.

4.2 *TYPIFICATIONS OF WOMEN IN CONTEMPORARY NORTH AMERICA*

In contemporary North America, women are likely to be typified as passive, weak, emotional, obedient, caring, nurturing, and natural mothers (Lipman-Blumen, 1984:76). In terms of sexuality, a typical woman is not only assumed to be heterosexual but must also remain sexually passive. Although women may be typified as "temptresses" or "seductresses", an image

⁵ Mead's work, particularly her book on female adolescence in Samoa - Coming of Age in Samoa, has, over the years, become an issue of controversy. Derek Freeman, a well known anthropologist, has challenged many of Mead's findings on Samoan culture. Freeman, who visited Samoa in the 1960's and 1970's and found a very different picture than was reported by Mead, has maintained that Mead's work did not follow proper scientific procedure and that she had "seen only what she set out to see" (Freeman, 1983; Ornstein, 1993).

that is quite pervasive in the media, this is more often a submissive and coy role than an aggressive one. Women are to be desired by the male onlooker, however: they are rarely the active initiators of sexuality.

Before meeting a woman, people may believe that they have a sense as to her interests. Because she belongs in the category of "woman" one may assume that she enjoys cooking, home decorating, the arts, has an interest in children, has a strong contempt or at least a disinterest in football, hockey, cars, or corporate business. A woman's values, attitudes, her way of viewing the world, her speech style, and her emotional reactions will likely be interpreted as being a result of her gender. Despite challenges to such images of women that have been brought forth by feminist ideology, to a large extent, these views of women remain strong. As Morris and Wilczynski (1993:199) note: "to be a "woman" or a "mother" carries with it certain social expectations: to want to have children...to enjoy every aspect of child care and domestic responsibilities; and to be ever smiling, ever-cheerful, all-perfect. And all of this, of course, comes "naturally". Consider the following comments which assume that to truly achieve happiness and find feminine self-actualization, the typical woman must have children:

The woman who has not had a child remains incomplete, ill at ease, and more than a little ridiculous. She is in the position of a man who has never stood in battle; she has missed the most colossal experience of her sex (Esquire, June 1984, Vol 101, p.141).

There are many other examples which demonstrate the extent to which society has created typically female behaviour. For example, the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory (MMPI) has quite a rigid gender typificatory scheme: to enjoy cooking gets classified as feminine.

4.3 *TYPIFICATIONS OF MEN IN CONTEMPORARY NORTH AMERICA*

In contrast to women, men in mainstream North America are typified as assertive, strong, independent, aggressive, logical, controlled, bold and virile. When one envisions "typical" male behaviour, one has the tendency to equate these traits. Typical male interests are imagined to be diametrically opposed to those of women (Messner and Kimmel, 1989). Men are "supposed" to enjoy activities that are equated with masculinity such as contact sports, cars, and household repairs. They are considered likely to have an affinity for the physical or applied sciences, or business. According to the gendered typificatory scheme, men are apt to have little interest in cooking, home decorating, or child care.

Kessler and McKenna (1978) note that gender roles are so firmly in place that when dictionaries attempt to define men and women, they often do so by listing gender role behaviours. They note that in the 1973 edition of the Webster's dictionary, a man was defined as: "one possessing a high degree of...courage, strength and vigour" (Kessler and McKenna, 1978:11).

Brannon and David (1976:12) demonstrate the magnitude of male gender typifications by grouping "typical" male behaviour into four basic themes:

(1) *No Sissy Stuff*: anything that even remotely hints of femininity is prohibited. A "real man" must avoid any behaviour or characteristic associated with women;

(2) *Be A Big Wheel*: masculinity is measured by success, power, and the admiration of others.

One must possess wealth, fame and status to be considered manly;

(3) *Be A Sturdy Oak*: manliness requires rationality, toughness and self-reliance. A man must remain calm in any situation, show no emotion, and admit no weakness;

(4) *Give 'em Hell*: men must exude an aura of daring aggression, and must be willing to take risks, to "go for it" even when reason and fear suggest otherwise.

Finally, in terms of male sexuality, heterosexuality, virility and aggression are key. Males are typified as the initiators and the "conquerors" in sexual relations. Adolescent boys and men are often heard boasting about their sexual conquests. Even the language used to relay their sexual experiences, for example such words as "scoring" or "banging", connotes aggression and conquest.

The extent to which gender typifications of both men and women prevail in contemporary North America can be demonstrated through the work of Broverman et al. (1972) and Garfinkel (1967). Broverman et al. conducted a series of studies on gender stereotyping of personality characteristics. They asked a group of undergraduate men and women in the northeast United States to list all the ways that they thought men and women differed psychologically. The researchers found extensive agreement on the nature of these stereotypes. Men were consistently characterized as more aggressive, independent, objective, dominant, active, competitive, logical,

worldly, and ambitious than women. Women were stereotyped as more talkative, tactful, gentle, religious, neat and sensitive to others than men. In later years many other studies replicated these results, both in the United States and to a large extent, cross-culturally (Archer and Lloyd, 1985; Martin, 1987; Williams and Best, 1982).

Garfinkel's (1967) work also demonstrates the strict gender dichotomy that exists between men and women and confirms that "typical" gender behaviour is socially constructed. Garfinkel's work on gender is based on extensive interviews with "Agnes", a transsexual who was born a boy but chose to be a girl. Garfinkel met Agnes when she was 19 and had entered the hospital for a sex change operation. Agnes was born and raised a boy and had the normal sexual characteristics of a boy until puberty when she developed the secondary sexual characteristics of a female: body shape, breasts, and an absence of facial hair. Agnes insisted that she had been a girl all along, and that her male genitalia were simply a result of some bio-medical abnormality. Agnes convinced surgeons to amputate her genitals and to surgically construct a vagina. Years later, Agnes confided to Garfinkel that she had developed female sexual characteristics at puberty by taking estrogen, which she had obtained by forging her mother's prescription. At the time when Garfinkel carried out his initial interviews with Agnes, he had no knowledge of this.

What is fascinating about Agnes' case is that she reiterates to Garfinkel the process whereby she "learned" to be female. Despite possessing male sexual organs before her sex change operation and her upbringing as a boy, Agnes controlled surface appearances with others,

negated efforts to define her as a male and attempted to adopt "typical" female behaviour. Agnes developed an acute awareness of social and gender relations and how they were structured. These structured patterns of behaviour or "typical" gender behaviour are part of the routinized "seen but unnoticed" backgrounds of everyday affairs (Garfinkel, 1967:118). However, for individuals who choose to adopt a sexual identity that is different from the one they were born and raised with, they need to develop an awareness of these "typical" patterns of behaviour and how to conform to them. Agnes, who was so anxious to pass as a female, became preoccupied with conforming to all the surface features consistent with being typically female. She studied how to convincingly come across as feminine through dress, make-up, and grooming. She had to ensure that the way she walked, how she sat and how she talked were consistent with typical female behaviour. Take the act of sitting with legs crossed, for example. A man tends to rest one ankle on the opposite knee; a woman is more likely to place one knee on top of the other (Mackie, 1987:18). Voice pitch and resonance needed to be adjusted. "Proper talk" needed to be learned, that is, how to talk about boyfriends, dates, clothes, and other topics typical of teenage girls. Everything that Agnes said or did required knowing a wide range of issues from the perspective of a typical North American female rather than a typical North American male. Agnes became a "secret apprentice", gaining detailed knowledge of the experiences of girls and women through observing roommates, and girlfriends and talking with them. It is also likely that she picked up clues from books and the mass media.

The case of Agnes ultimately illustrates the strict gender dichotomy that exists in North American society. To be a male or to be a female requires that one gain gender-specific

knowledge that enables us to carry out the distinct behaviours designated to each sex. Agnes' case also demonstrates that what is considered "typical" gender behaviour is socially constructed as it can be learned and carried out by either sex. Agnes, although visibly male by birth, learned and eventually embodied the gender typifications associated with girls and women.

4.4 THE INSTITUTIONALIZATION OF GENDER TYPIFICATIONS

Where a strict differentiation between males and females exists, the constructed gender typifications have been institutionalized - they have become part of the social stock of knowledge that is transmitted from one generation of men and women to the next. However, it is more complex than simple transmission. Because of their differing socialization into these typificatory schemes, men and women can be said to have developed separate social stocks of knowledge. Each gender must gain the "inside knowledge" of their role in the gender reality. In a woman's social stock of knowledge in contemporary North American society, she must "remember" to be feminine, quiet and obedient. In their social stock of knowledge, North American men must "remember" to be bold, masculine, and virile:

Children, from the time they are born both explicitly and implicitly are taught how to be a man or how to be a woman. While the girl is taught to act "feminine"...the boy is taught to be "a man". In learning to be a man, the boy in American society comes to value expressions of masculinity...[such as] physical courage, toughness, competitiveness and aggressiveness (Balswick and Peek, 1971:363-364).

How men and women perform everyday tasks is very much dependent upon each gender's unique social stock of knowledge. Gendered knowledge is therefore an "assemblage

of maxims, morals, proverbial nuggets of wisdom, values, beliefs, myths and so forth. It is socially objectivated as knowledge, that is, as a body of generally valid truths about [gender] reality" (Berger and Luckmann, 1966:65).

In essence, in mainstream North American culture, we have constructed a gendered reality in which two types of social beings have very different ways of relating to the world. Gender typifications can be considered institutions in and of themselves as they control human behaviour by setting up predefined patterns of conduct which guides behaviour in one direction against the many other possibilities.

4.5 THE LEGITIMATION OF GENDER TYPIFICATIONS

As in the case of typifications in general, gender realities need to be justified and legitimated in order to explain to members of our society why it is that women should take on the roles in one set of typifications and why men should take over another. How is the gender dichotomy sustained and perpetuated in our society? The use of "explicit theories", where comprehensive and elaborate ideologies are transmitted by experts, has been a major method to justify the gendered institutional order. Most important in the establishment of the gender dichotomy has been a focus on the biological differences between men and women. As the argument goes, because women and men are anatomically different, distinct behaviours and tendencies are said to "naturally" emerge out of each gender. As Mackie (1987:5) notes: "gender implies noticing the female-male sex difference. In our society, a great fuss is made

over this biological distinction, and elaborate sets of meanings are built upon it."

By relying on "objective" and "rational" scientists who act as "experts", the gender dichotomy is legitimated. As Goffman (1977:302) writes:

innate sex differences...were and are put forward as a warrant for social arrangements, and, most important of all, the institutional workings of society ensured that this accounting would seem sound.

It is not accidental that legitimations have found their way into gender typifications, as the gendered social reality can be considered a precarious one. There is a real and constant threat that "deviant" versions of reality will challenge the institutionalized gender reality. In this sense, those who wish to maintain the status quo feel that our society needs to "protect" itself against aggressive or assertive women, nurturing or emotional men, or at the other extreme, those who engage in "gender-bending" behaviour, as well as challenges to norms governing sexual orientation such as cross-dressing, same sex erotic contacts, or in the case of transsexuals, surgery, hormones and prostheses. These behaviours are of particular concern as they pose a serious risk to the stability of the gendered institutional order. As a result, conceptual machineries much like nihilation and therapy have been developed to repress any "deviant" or "alternative" gender realities and ensure the existing gender reality remains intact. Severe sanctions and subtle techniques of coercion have developed to ensure proper socialization and compliance into the gendered institutional order and assure that people remain in their allotted gender roles.

To ignore or to oppose gender typifications and challenge the norms governing dress, behaviour, sexual orientation etc. is met with severe social ridicule. For example, to be an effeminate man, or to be a sexually victimized man, is sometimes equated with homosexuality, being "less of a man", or being weak, and pathetic. When a father was asked whether he would be upset by signs of femininity in his son, he replied: "Yes, I would be. Very, very much. Terrifically disturbed - couldn't tell you the extent of my disturbance. *I can't bear female characteristics in a man. I abhor them*" (Mackie 1987:4; italics in original). Similarly, Mackie (1987:4) notes that "some people were quite disturbed by mid-1980's "gender-blender" rock stars like Boy George, who sported pancake makeup, eyeliner and lip gloss." Although the same might be said for other music celebrities such as Annie Lennox, and Madonna, the move from male to female tends to be far less acceptable than female to male.

In his discussion of masculinity and the army, Levy (1989:183) notes that when marine recruits did not perform well, they were often called "faggots" and "girls" by their drill sergeants. Similarly, one father with whom I discussed my research noted that his son's baseball and hockey coaches referred to wayward male players as "pussies" and "Edna's". For men to be associated with typically female qualities is the deepest of social insults. Levy argues that in the marines, "effeminate" men are considered "the enemy" and will not be tolerated. As one former marine explained:

A lot of [men] were like prissy. I mean faggoty-type side...But I mean if that guy was in marine boot camp he'd of got bounced out. Or he'd have so many problems within the system that he fucking wouldn't be able to hack it. He'd go out of his mind. He'd be called a "faggot" (Levy, 1989:183).

Kinsman (1989:483) gives an explanation as to the root and meaning of such language:

As boys and men we have heard...the words "queer," "faggot," and "sissy" all our lives. These words encourage certain types of male behaviour and serve to define, regulate and limit our lives, whether we consider ourselves straight or gay. Depending on who is speaking and who is listening, they incite fear or hatred.

Similarly, in his discussion of homophobia, Lehne (1989:389) argues:

Men use the norm of homophobia to control other men...homophobia is a threat used by societies and individuals to enforce social conformity in the male role and enforce social control. The taunt "what are you, a fag?" is used in many ways to encourage certain types of male behaviour and to define the limits of "acceptable" masculinity.

In this way, homophobia can be seen as a mechanism of legitimation, a form of therapy to ensure that potential gender "deviants" remain within the institutionalized definition of masculinity and deter them from "emigrating" to a "deviant" gender reality.

What is clear is that for the man or boy who fails to conform to the male gender typification, life can be a living hell. As Lew (1990:36) comments:

[The man or boy] may be teased, ridiculed, shunned or even brutalized. It may be difficult for him to achieve credibility in social, educational, and professional environments. He may be rejected by his family as a source of embarrassment. Faced with this type of pressure to conform, he may continually strive to meet society's expectations of a man, exhausting his energies and denying his essential nature in order to gain acceptance. Failing to develop into the male ideal, some men pretend to be what they are not, turning themselves into a parody of traditional machismo. Others give up the attempt, rejecting themselves because of their perceived failure as men.

Thus, the pressure to conform to the "typical" male is crucial for social acceptance and approval.

The situation is entirely the opposite for women. To be an aggressive woman is to be considered a bitch, a witch, unattractive and unappealing. Women who counter the female gender typification by not deferring to men, by not marrying, by advocating changes in women's roles are often viewed as lesbians, and may be referred to by such terms as "dykes" (Lehne, 1989:391). Severe social sanctions arise when women are seen as invading typically "male" territory. Even the notion of language and speech styles have been typified according to gender. In her book Language and Woman's Place, Robin Lakoff (1975) argues that women have been socialized linguistically into a "powerless" style of speech as part of the feminine identity. Women are more likely to employ hedges, empty adjectives, hypercorrect grammar, and polite discourse, all of which, Lakoff argues, render a woman linguistically inferior. If a woman employs the feminine/powerless speech style in conversations with both men and women, she may not be taken seriously and may be considered less intelligent. However, if a woman or girl fails to employ the feminine style of speech, there can be, depending in part on class, ethnic and religious considerations, serious implications:

If a little girl "talks rough" like a boy, she will normally be ostracized, scolded, or made fun of, she is ridiculed and subjected to criticism as unfeminine. In this way society, in the form of a child's parents and friends, keeps her in line, in her place (Lakoff, 1975:5).

Thus, the gender dichotomy or typificatory scheme begins when a newborn girl is wrapped in a pink blanket and a boy is wrapped in a blue one. Girls are more often rewarded if they are perceived to be quiet, obedient, passive, emotional, and caring, while boys are more often rewarded when they are perceived to be strong, independent, aggressive, assertive and logical. Children internalize these roles, identify with them, and realize the serious consequences

of deviating from them. Take the following example:

In one case, an aggressive five year old girl persisted in labelling her male playmate "mother". He was quite upset, and kept protesting that he wasn't mother, but was "father." His playmate reluctantly relinquished the role of father only when he threatened to tell on her if she continued calling him mother (Mackie, 1987:132).

As Lambert (1971) notes:

In acquiring images of the sexes, children are learning what is appropriate to the sexes. They develop ideas as what is right or proper for them as boys or girls to do, to believe, to aspire to, and ways to relate to others. They are learning about the social order, which in time will appear to them to be a natural order in the sense that they will come to take it for granted as the framework within which they think and act (cited in Mackie, 1987:83).

4.6 THE DANGERS OF GENDER TYPIFICATIONS

Although gender typifications can be highly practical and efficient, like typifications in general, they can be dangerous. There are four significant dangers inherent in gender typifications. Firstly, because people have been accustomed to rely typificatory schemes, as a society we may become rigid and reject anything that falls outside of the accepted gender realm. Men or boys who exhibit "feminine" characteristics and women or girls who exhibit "masculine" characteristics are likely to be shunned and stigmatized, especially by those who strongly adhere to conventional typifications.

Secondly, gender typifications represent only one portion or segment of a complex whole. By relying on the gender typifications that "men are aggressive" or "women are passive", people

are placing both genders in limiting boxes which overlook and ignore their many other facets. The intrinsic inflexibility of gender typifications prevent us from seeing the complexity of both genders, and also give us a skewed picture of the gender reality. Not all men are aggressive and not all women are passive.

Thirdly, gender typifications may prevent other realities from presenting themselves and thus give us a skewed picture of reality. This process may work something like this: a reality may exist that deviates from the predefined gender typifications. Because of the fear of departing from the established norms and enduring social ridicule, an individual who is experiencing this "deviant" reality may never come forward to reveal its presence. By remaining silent, other members of society will assume that this reality does not exist and treat it as if it is not an important issue, despite that it could have a significant impact on society as a whole.

Finally, our rejection of other gender realities may prove to have negative consequences for the individuals whose experiences fall outside of the accepted gender realm. These issues will be dealt with in more detail further on in this text.

5. GENDER TYPIIFICATIONS AND THE SEXUAL ABUSE OF CHILDREN

To demonstrate the prevalence of gender typifications and how they have diffused into our perceptions as to sexual abuse perpetrators and victims, as well as to illustrate the negative consequences for those who deviate from the predetermined gender typifications, I will use the

example of the perpetration of sexual abuse by adolescent and adult females and the experience of such abuse by both male and female children. I have chosen to focus on sexual abuse by females because in a variety of ways, it counters major gender typifications. As such, it will permit me to analyze what is considered an "atypical" or "deviant" portion of the gender reality, society's reactions to a phenomenon that opposes the gendered institutionalized order, as well as explore the consequences for those who are perceived to deviate from this order. However, before I embark on an examination of the sexual abuse of children by females and the experiences of survivors of such abuse, it is important to note the changes that have occurred historically in the area of sexual relations between children and adults.

5.1 A NOTE ON THE HISTORY OF CHILD AND ADULT SEXUAL RELATIONS

Values, beliefs, and practices pertaining to all aspects of sexuality have altered throughout time. Attitudes about the existence of childhood sexuality and about the occurrence of sexual practices between adults and children are no exception - there have been substantial changes in thought in these areas as well. While sexual relations between adults and children have existed throughout history and across cultures, whether such behaviour was conceived of and defined as "abuse" has been dependent on the societal values of the particular period (Mrazek, 1981). For example, In ancient Greece and Rome there was an atmosphere of acceptance of sexual practices between adults and children. Child prostitution was widespread and slave children, particularly boys, were used for sexual gratification by adult men with the approval of the community. Castration of young boys to "feminize" them for sexual purposes was not uncommon, as was

anal intercourse between male teachers and their male pupils. In other ancient civilizations, such as the Incan of pre-Spanish Peru, the Ptolemaic Egyptian, and old Hawaiian, certain types of incest were permitted in isolated, privileged classes (Banning, 1989; Mrazek, 1981; Schultz, 1982).

In seventeenth century France, from infancy until the age of seven Louis XIII was depicted as naked. He was taken to bed with the king, the queen and various servants. He had his penis and nipples kissed by the people around him. His diarist described Louis XIII as extremely sexually active, ascribing him to the role of the initiator of sexual activities before he could walk (Banning, 1989). Henry IV's physician, Heroard, recorded the details of the young Louis XIII's life:

[Louis XIII was not yet one year old] He laughed uproariously when his nanny wagged his cock with her fingers. An amusing trick which the child soon copied. Calling a page he shouted "Hey there!" and pulled up his robe, showing him his cock...he made everyone kiss his cock...[when Louis XIII was three years old] The Queen, his mother, touching his cock said: "Son, I am holding your spout"...[Louis XIII] was undressed and Madame too [Louis' sister] was placed naked in the bed with the King, where they kissed and twittered and gave great amusement to the King (Ariès, 1960:210-211).

As a culture that has become obsessed with abuse in general (Coward, 1993) the practice of sexual relations between children and adults is increasingly being prosecuted in contemporary North American society. The adult and child sexual relations described above would not only be considered morally unacceptable in mainstream society today, but also criminal. This further emphasizes that what is considered socially acceptable at one time and place, is not in another. Applied to the issue at hand, while it may be socially acceptable for a female to caress a child,

for a male to engage in the same behaviour may be viewed with suspicion.

5.2 THE FEMALE SEXUAL ABUSE OF CHILDREN: AN UNEXPLORED PHENOMENON

The issue of women committing sexual offenses against children has received minimal attention in social science research. Although there has been a surge of attention to the topic of child sexual abuse in recent years, the majority of research has focused on male offenders and their female victims. Scant regard has been paid to female sexual offenders and the consequences for survivors, whether they be male or female. For example, the overwhelming majority of self-help books for survivors of sexual abuse address those who were abused by a male (Jennings, 1994:242). In their book The Courage to Heal, Bass and Davis (1988:96) note: "since much of the literature has focused on father-daughter incest, or solely on abuse with a male perpetrator, those survivors who were abused by women have felt even more isolated than those abused by men". However, they devote only 3 out of 495 pages of the book to the female sexual abuse of children.

Kathy Evert, a survivor of sexual and physical abuse by her mother, is perhaps the first survivor to come forward publicly and write about her experiences. In her book entitled When You're Ready, Evert (1987:2) writes:

Why are there books around about fathers or other males sexually abusing their children and yet nothing about female abusers? Is it rare? Maybe. But my gynaecologist tells me he has six patients who have reported it to him to explain their difficulty with vaginal exams...Thinking of my own deep and heavily guarded repression of my experience I have to wonder if as a society we've now reached the point where we can talk about

rape, spouse abuse, and father/male child incest, but that mother/female child incest is so buried that it can only emerge in situations such as lying naked under a paper sheet in the doctor's office with someone about to touch the source of your physical/emotional/sexual agony.

There is a strong socio-political resistance to identifying the problem of female sexual offending (Fine, 1991; MacFarlane, 1994; Young, 1994). As Elliott (1994:11) indicates: "Uncovering cases of female sexual abuse has been traumatic. There is a strongly held view that the issue of female sexual abuse should not be raised publicly, but should only be dealt with in private". The reasoning behind this stance varies. Some authors have suggested that it is not an issue prevalent enough to warrant an in-depth focus. These authors assert that the scant number of reported cases reveal an insignificant social problem (Mathis, 1972; Russell, 1984). For example, in her book for professionals working with survivors of child sexual abuse, O'Hagan (1989) cites a case example in which a boy was sexually abused by his mother. However, she later includes this disclaimer: "The example of mothers sexually abusing their own children, which have been mentioned in previous chapters, *can be safely interpreted as aberrations, having little or no significance for the training of professionals in working with child sexual abuse*" (p.113; my italics).

Others fear that by focusing on this small population of offenders, attention will be diverted from the much larger problem of sexual abuse by men against female children (Elliott, 1994; Russell, 1984). As Elliott (1994:11) reports: "A journalist in a recent article in a national newspaper insisted that it was wrong to give all this attention to female sexual abuse and that a conference to be held [in England] about the issue was "political". As one male survivor of

sexual abuse writes:

It is a highly political issue both for those who insist that incest rarely happens to anyone as well as for those who contend it is purely a male perpetrator-female victim issue. Yet for most of us who have been victimized by sexual violence, it is a deeply personal issue transcending sexual stereotypes and demanding a lifegiving restructuring of the social order (Thomas, 1989:xiii).

Some feminist writers and clinicians assert that the topic of female sexual offending is "anti-female" and treasonous to the cause of feminism (Elliott, 1994). In doing this research, I found this stance to be quite prevalent. Of the five social service agencies that I visited with the intention of advertising my research, three organizations refused to allow me to put up a poster to recruit participants. They claimed that the topic was "too anti-woman".

The refusal to acknowledge female sexual abuse may also be related to the strong feelings of revulsion, fear, and repugnance that such abuse may rouse. Cooper and Cormier (1990) and Gentry (1978) note that the forementioned feelings are frequent responses to child sexual abuse and that these responses will usually lead to widespread denial.

The various forms of resistance to acknowledging the problem of female sexual offending constitute a "conspiracy of silence", as much dialogue and discussion on the issue have been suppressed (Elliott, 1994:13). More importantly, however, the imposed silence on the issue has prevented many survivors from coming forward to disclose sexual abuse by women out of fear of going against established opinion.

5.3 THE DIMENSIONS OF THE PROBLEM

In the social construction of sexual offence perpetrators and victims, gender has assumed primary salience (Nelson, 1994). When one thinks of a sexual offender, one tends to immediately envision a male; when one thinks of a victim of a sexual offense, one tends to think of a female. Many studies have concluded that the overwhelming majority of sexual offenders are indeed male. For example, Jennings (1994:242) suggests that men represent from 80 to 95 per cent of cases of sexual abuse. Other authors have suggested that the small numbers of female sexual offenders are the main reason why female sexual offending was, and continues to be, virtually ignored in the literature on sexual abuse (Banning, 1989, Jennings, 1994; Hunter, 1990). However, as will be noted further on in this section, researchers have begun to throw into question the reliability of statistics on sexual offenses, particularly when they pertain to female perpetrators.

Early work on sexual offenders suggested that female sexual offending was "virtually unknown among women" (Mohr et al., 1964). Similarly, Mathis (1972) claimed that sexual offending among females was "so rare that it was of little significance". However, more recent studies have begun to acknowledge the existence of female sexual offenders (Elliott, 1994; Faller, 1987; Krug, 1989; Mathews, 1989; McCarty, 1986). Due to the limited research, our understanding of the issue remains extremely narrow and the prevalence of sexual abuse by women remains an issue of controversy (Faller, 1987; Jennings, 1994). It is, however, important to outline the debate surrounding the numbers, as it is intimately connected with the experiences of survivors.

The Solicitor General of Canada states that 2.8 per cent of on-register⁶ female offenders have committed a sexual offence. Although they do not provide a definition as to what constitutes a sexual offense, they note that "this number underestimates the true sex offender population by about 17%" (Solicitor General of Canada, 1993).

Finkelhor and Russell (1984:224) assert that the most accurate estimate of sexual abuse by older females is about 5 per cent for female children (ranging from 0-10%) and about 20 per cent for male children (ranging from 14-27%).

Finkelhor's (1988) study of sexual abuse in day care revealed that women were significantly involved in sexual abuse of both boys and girls in day care settings. Upon investigating 270 cases that had been substantiated as child sexual abuse by child protection agencies or the police, Finkelhor discovered that 147 or 40% of the perpetrators were women. Of the 293 boys who were sexually abused, 59% were abused by at least one woman. Of the 471 girls who were sexually abused, 50% were abused by a woman (Finkelhor, 1988:41). As Finkelhor notes, the high rates of female perpetrators is likely to be related to the high proportion of women working in day care settings.

The Canadian Badgley Commission (1984) found that a mere 1.2 per cent of sexual offenders were female. However, these numbers can be misleading not only because offenses

⁶ "on-register" offenders include those presently incarcerated in federal and provincial institutions, and those on federal day parole, temporary absence, or work release.

by females may not be recognized or detected, but also as a result of the laws themselves. Until very recently, the large majority of sexual offenses defined within the Canadian Criminal Code were gender-specific. Before the 1983 amendment, the sexual behaviour of men and women was differentially controlled by the law. Sexual offenses perpetrated by women were ignored or excluded from consideration. Similarly, before its amendment in 1986, section 150 of the Canadian Criminal Code, which outlined the crime of incest, assumed that a female, and not a male, would be the victim of such an offense (Nelson, 1994).

Laws are very much the embodiment of societal norms and values. I would argue that the disregard for both female sexual offending and male sexual victimization is related to pervasive ideologies and typifications as to appropriate gender roles and behaviour. Clearly, the notions of female sexual offenders and male victims of sexual abuse disrupt the very terms which hold gender in place. As such, Canadian society did not even have the language within the Criminal Code to represent these cases.

Throwing the Numbers into Question

Many authors reject predominant statistics on female sexual offenders and claim that there are many other factors at play that obscure the true extent of the problem. Plummer (1981:228) argues that "there is a considerable degree of female-child sexuality" and that the stereotype of the pedophile as exclusively male is both naive and false. He claims that much of the abuse perpetrated by women is hidden because women, who are viewed as naturally nurturing and

maternal, are assumed to have a degree of bodily contact with children. He argues that a woman who is seen caressing a child would not be viewed with suspicion while a man would be. Plummer comments: "What may be socially prescribed for a woman, may lead a man to a term of imprisonment" (p. 228).

Justice and Justice (1979:179) suggest that mother-son incest may be less likely to come to light because mothers engage more frequently in sexual activity that does not get reported: fondling, sleeping with a son, caressing him in a sexual way, and keeping him tied to her emotionally with implied promises of a sexual payoff.

Hunter (1990:39) points out that female sexual offenders do not fit the "dirty old man offering candy to the little girl" stereotype that society has of sexual offenders, and therefore women do not get identified. Hunter compares the situation of female sexual offenders to the situation of female alcoholics in the past. Twenty years ago, many treatment professionals thought there were very few women alcoholics because females did not show up in court records for driving-while-intoxicated charges or in "detox" units. However, it was later discovered that women who were stopped by police officers (who were usually male at the time) were not charged or put "into detox", but were taken home because it would have been "unlady like and too embarrassing for her" to be taken to the police station. Hunter suggests that similar circumstances may also be applicable to female sexual offenders.

It has also been argued that boys, who are more often than girls the victims of female

sexual abuse, are reluctant to come forward and report the abuse, thus the low numbers of reported cases (Krug, 1989). Krug offers some possible explanations as to why males may not report the offence and why the topic has not received more attention:

The possibilities include: (1) Males do not get pregnant, and the evidence of sexual abuse has not been present; (2) A double standard in belief systems has existed in which fathers have the potential for evil and mothers are "all good"; (3) Adult males have been too embarrassed to reveal their sexual activity with and arousal by their mothers; (4) Male children have been presumed to be unaffected by sexual abuse, and reports by sons have been ignored; and/or (5) Patients and therapists alike have been unaware of the connection between the sexual abuse of males by mothers and later interpersonal relationship problems (Krug, 1989: 117-118).

Evert's (1995) study also supports the idea that victims of female abusers are unlikely to report the abuse. She notes that approximately 80 percent of the 93 women and the 9 men in her sample viewed their sexually abusive treatment by their mother as the "most hidden" aspect of their lives. Evert's research reveals that only 3 per cent of the women, and none of the men told anyone about the sexual abuse during their childhood even though 100% reported that it was damaging (Evert, 1995).

Nasjleti (1980:270) has suggested that the failure of boys to report sexual contact with an older female is related to their gender socialization. Boys are socialized to be physically aggressive, self-reliant, independent, and are not permitted to express feelings of helplessness and vulnerability. To report such victimization would highlight their vulnerability and emphasize their "unmanliness". As a result, male survivors have suffered silently.

The extent of the problem of female sexual offending remains inconclusive although it is likely that the numbers are relatively small. However, as Dr. Fred Mathews, a community psychologist in Toronto argues, the small numbers do warrant attention. At a conference in Toronto in 1991, he stated:

[assuming that 10 per cent of sexual offenders are female] "...if one in seven Canadian men and one in four Canadian women were sexually abused as a child, as a study has indicated, that works out to about five million people. *Ten per cent of that figure would mean 500,000 Canadians have been abused by girls or women; one per cent would mean about 50,000.* I don't know about you, but that doesn't seem like a minor number" (Fine, 1991; italics in original).

5.4 GENDER TYPIFICATIONS AND THEIR RELATIONSHIP TO PERCEPTIONS ABOUT SEXUAL ABUSE VICTIMS AND PERPETRATORS

Gender typifications play a crucial role in how society comes to perceive the perpetrators and victims of sexual abuse. As a result of the gender typificatory scheme, people are likely to perceive women or girls as sexual abuse victims and men or boys as sexual abuse perpetrators. Why is this the case? There are at least four gender typifications that play a key role in influencing these perceptions. The first involves the idea that women, who are frequently typified as "victims", are incapable of being "aggressors", especially not sexual aggressors. The second centres around the notion that men, who are the "stronger" and "more aggressive" sex, are not likely to be victimized, particularly not sexually, and especially not by a woman. The third involves the idea that males enjoy or profit from all heterosexual contact, regardless of the circumstances. In this sense, males cannot be "victimized" by females. The fourth relates to the belief that women, because of their biological and psychological makeup, are unlikely to

perpetrate sexual offenses. These four gender typifications are widespread and influence the way one perceives sexual abuse perpetrators and victims and the way that society deals with victims. By analyzing each of these four typifications, we may get a clearer sense as to why the issue of female sexual abuse of children has been overlooked for so long.

5.4.1 "Women Are Victims, Not Aggressors"

A prevalent gender typification is that women are rarely, if ever, aggressors but are frequently victims. Elshtain (1993) notes that in North American society, women are portrayed as "prototypical victims" of crime. Whether it be in literature, in film or on television, women are often shown in victimized roles. Elshtain notes that, in 1991 in the United States, half of the 250 made-for-television movies depicted women undergoing abuse of one kind or another. However, statistics on violent crime reveal that most victims of violent crime are male similar in age and race to the perpetrator (Elshtain, 1993:51).

Elshtain argues that although there are far too many women victims in the world who are assaulted, degraded and denied dignity, creating an ideology of female victimhood is inherently dangerous, as it instills fear in women as well as prevents them from seeing themselves as responsible citizens. She writes:

The aim is to promote what can only be called moral panic, as women are routinely portrayed as deformed and mutilated, helpless and demeaned...By losing all of the complexities of real victimization, women are recast as helpless prey...All women – all – are assaulted, although some may not recognize this; all are harmed one way or another. Victimization ideology fuels female fear and, paradoxically, disempowers

women rather than enabling them to see themselves as citizens with both rights and responsibilities (p.50).

Because of this typification of women as victims, accepting that women can be aggressors is difficult. As Morse (cited in Bruce, 1995:A17) notes:

The issue [of female violence] is not often raised in polite company. We are not used to the idea that women may be as guilty as men of family violence because the women's movement and the media both portray women as perennial victims.

There has been a significant amount of research supporting the claim that when women engage in "serious" crimes such as murder or sexual offenses, officials of either the criminal justice system, or social service agencies, re-negotiate women's crimes to reduce their seriousness and maintain the woman in their typical role as a passive victim (Edwards, 1984; Levin and Fox, 1993; Nelson, 1994). In their discussion of female serial killers, Levin and Fox (1993) reveal that more often than not, a woman's role in serial killing is likely to be downplayed. In cases where a man and a woman are involved in serial killing as a pair, the man is usually considered the deviant actor as well as responsible for the crimes, while the woman is viewed as a passive follower. As Pearson (1995:52) indicates:

The woman in a criminal team is more likely to be dismissed as a dupe, love-struck Bonnie simpering along after Clyde...dismissing women as too passive to be aggressors has a long tradition in the judicial system, particularly if the woman is middle-class, heterosexual, or stereotypically feminine.

The recent Toronto trial of Paul Bernardo, who was convicted of the sexual assault and first degree murder of two teenage girls, is a strong example of this. During the trial, which received a massive media following, Paul Bernardo's former wife Karla Homolka, was

unquestionably implicated in the crimes. The sexual assaults of the victims were videotaped by the couple and reveal Homolka laughing and playacting for the camera while both she and Bernardo sexually assaulted the two girls. However, expert witnesses for the Crown explained that Homolka's participation in the crimes was a result of her suffering from the "Battered Woman's Syndrome". According to these witnesses, Homolka, out of fear for her life, had no choice but to passively follow the orders of her husband.

It is evident that when men and women engage in similar behaviour, that behaviour is often interpreted very differently. As Stockard and Johnson (1992:135) note:

Because people hold gender stereotypes, they often attribute one meaning to behaviour exhibited by a man and a different meaning when the same behaviour is exhibited by a woman, even in tightly controlled and carefully devised experimental settings. In other words, even when men and women behave the same, people interpret their behaviour in different ways.

As Birch (1993:48) indicates, in the past, society has tended to excuse a woman's involvement in violent crime when committed with a male partner by arguing that the relationship between the couple must have been a "folie à deux", by which one partner (namely the woman) becomes "infected" with the unhealthy obsessions of the other (the man). Birch argues that this explanation has been put forth because as a society, we are unable to conceive that a woman might be capable of such heinous crimes.

Pearson (1995) claims that academia has been equally reductive of women's agency, in part because feminists have refused to confront female aggression. Pearson cites the comments

of the well-known writer Joyce Carol Oates in the New York Review of Books as an example. Oates writes that: "Most often, [women] are merely the distaff half of a murderous couple whose brain-power is supplied by the man" (cited in Pearson, 1995:52). According to Pearson, Oates' opinion was based on the FBI Behavioral Science Services Unit in Virginia, famous for its intricate psychological profiles of male serial killers. Of female perpetrators, the FBI unit has only one category - "compliant victims" and nothing further to say (Pearson, 1995).

In their discussion of female serial killers, Levin and Fox (1993) give two strong examples where women are clearly implicated in violent crimes and yet are given the status of "victims" - the Sunset Strip Killer Case, and the 1958 serial killings across Nebraska and Wyoming.

In the Sunset Strip Killer Case, Carol Bundy, a divorced housewife, went on a killing spree with Douglas Clark. The search for the "Sunset Strip Killer", as the Los Angeles Police Department dubbed the man they thought they were hunting, ended in 1980 after Carol Bundy sawed off a man's head with a boning knife (Pearson, 1995). Needless to say, the prosecutor chose to plea bargain with the female rather than the male defendant, and used Carol Bundy's version of the crimes against Douglas Clark. According to Pearson (1995), Carol Bundy wrote the following to Douglas Clark from jail: "If it happens we have to go against each other, remember, I look innocent. Impression is worth as much as facts." During Clark's trial, Bundy announced to the court: "Mr. Clark had virtual total control over my personality and behaviour, my wants, my desires, my dreams" (cited in Pearson, 1995).

In the 1958 case, Charles Starkweather and Caril Fugate went on an 8 day killing spree across Nebraska and Wyoming that resulted in the murder of 10 victims. According to Levin and Fox, jurors heard testimony that implicated both defendants. However, only Starkweather went to the electric chair. His female partner was released from prison in 1976 following "an outpouring of public sentiment on her behalf" (Levin and Fox, 1993).

The Bernardo/Homolka case is also a strong example of how North American society tends to negotiate a non-deviant identity for women charged with violent crimes. Despite evidence implicating Karla Homolka in the crimes against the two teenage girls, the prosecution chose to plea bargain with Homolka and use her version of the crimes against Bernardo. Homolka received a twelve year manslaughter sentence in return for testifying against Bernardo. During her testimony, Homolka consistently claimed that she was beaten and intimidated by her former husband into co-operating with the abductions, rapes and murders of the teenagers. Both the Crown prosecutor and Homolka herself insisted that she was a victim of abuse (Makin, 1995). However, not all are in agreement that Homolka was a victim. Pearson (1995) notes that in Homolka's letters and notes to both her friends and her lover Bernardo, which were read out in endless succession during the trial, Homolka's voice was "exuberant, lustful, sarcastic, snobbish about the people she worked with, jealous of her lover's time, angry when he got mad at her "for a fucking ridiculous reason", unmoved when he pouted - "Boo Fucking Hoo" (Pearson, 1995:53). Despite these illuminating letters and notes, the Crown insisted that this was not Karla Homolka's voice. Karla had no voice. Karla was a Battered Woman. Pearson explains the serious implications of such a stance:

Everything [Homolka] said and did was at the bidding of her man...by attributing every move, every want, every look on her fiercely intelligent face to the machinations of Paul Bernardo, Homolka renounced herself, relinquishing spirit, will, passion, pride, resourcefulness and rage.

Levin and Fox assert that the leniency toward female defendants accused of violent crimes is "nothing new". They write:

There seems to be a consistent willingness for juries, prosecuting attorneys and citizens generally to side with female defendants who stand accused of committing heinous crimes. At least in some cases, longstanding prejudice against women - the stereotype according to which they are capable of nothing more than submissively following orders - may become the basis for discrimination against men (Levin and Fox, 1993:258).

Makin also emphasizes that women may often "get away with murder" when their male co-defendants do not:

History takes issue with any notion that the women [who kill with male partners] are as culpable as the men. As with Ms. Homolka, plea bargains are relatively common, and women who kill receive lighter sentences than their male counterparts. In one US case 15 years ago involving 10 murders, a woman plea bargained down to second degree murder despite physical evidence of her involvement because prosecutors wanted to ensure that the man was convicted....There is still a reluctance by the legal system to believe that nice girls can kill (Makin, 1995:A6).

Research has also found that women who display typically "female behaviour" will likely receive preferential treatment by the criminal justice system. As one defense lawyer commented:

If my client listens to me and does as I suggest, her chances of avoiding jail time are excellent...look and act like a responsible person. Dress conservatively. Avoid violence and swearing. Be contrite and deferential in court. Stay at home at night...it works like a magic charm for women. It seems to affect some judges and jurors, even some

prosecutors. I hate to say this, I really do, but a young, attractive, feminine, demure woman is a cinch to defend (Julian, 1993:343).

Edwards (1984:16) notes that judges are often reluctant to impose sentences of imprisonment on women. As one trial judge stated: "It's difficult to send a mature woman to prison. I keep thinking...Hey! She is somebody's mother!" (Julian, 1993:343).

Just as it is difficult to conceive a woman as an aggressor, it is even more difficult to envision a woman in the role of a sexual aggressor. A female sexual offender is, in itself, a contradiction in terms. Inherent in the notion of "woman" and are the notions of caretaker, comfort, security, purity, gentleness, but certainly not "sexual deviant". Even contemplating the notion of a female sexual offender is profoundly disturbing to some, as according to the predefined gender typifications, the male is expected to be the aggressive, dominant sexual partner while the woman is to remain passive, tentative and submissive (Lew, 1990:40). Although at times, especially in the media, women are described as "seductresses", their actions are usually seen in a passive or coy light. A woman is rarely the one to instigate or be the aggressor in sexual relations.

As Birch (1993:53) comments in her discussion of women who engage in non-traditional or violent crimes: "it is the ultimate outrage and rejection of the much vaunted maternal instinct; as such, it tears across the boundary of sexual difference". Similarly, as Mathews and Speltz point out:

Viewing females as perpetrators of sexual abuse, perhaps parallel to viewing males as victims, challenges traditional cultural stereotypes. Females are thought of as mothers, nurturers, those who provide care for others; not as people who harm or abuse them. Since, historically, females have been viewed as non-initiators, limit-setters, and anatomically the receivers of sexuality, it is difficult for some to imagine a female sexually abusing others (cited in Jennings, 1994:244).

What is interesting is that even the survivors of female sexual abuse themselves have a difficult time accepting that a woman perpetrated the abuse. Sgroi and Sargent (1994:21) found that all eight adult female survivors that they interviewed reported that it was harder for them to sustain the belief that they had been sexually abused by a female relative than to acknowledge that they had been physically and/or emotionally abused by their mothers and sexually and/or physically abused by their fathers. Also, all of the survivors in this study recounted that they found it more difficult to disclose the sexual abuse by their mothers than their other victimizations by male abusers. As one survivor noted:

It's odd that the [sexual] abuse by my father was not as awful as the [sexual] abuse by my mother. There's something about a mother. When you're small, she should be the first person you go to if you're hurt, the first person to cuddle you. She should clothe you, feed you and give you physical love and care, as well as emotional support. So when she's the one who abuses, it leads to an even greater sense of despair than when your father abuses you (Elliott, 1994:25).

As Elliott (1994:49) comments:

Before we can begin to change the conspiracy of silence which surrounds female sexual abuse, we need to understand why it exists. Why is it such a shocking idea to believe that women can, and do, sexually abuse? One of the reasons I believe is that for so long now we have accepted that small children are safe with women. We do not want to acknowledge that this may not be the case as it creates insecurity and fear. It raises the question "Is there no one who can be trusted with our children?"

By relying on the gender typification that women are perpetual victims when it comes to crime, people are likely to assume that women are also likely to be the victims of sexual offenses. The fact that North American society seems to rely so heavily on these typifications may make the process of accepting that a woman can perpetrate sexual abuse that much more difficult.

5.4.2 "Men Are Aggressors, Not Victims"

Unlike women, who are typified as victims, men are typified as aggressors. Men are the gender to be feared when it comes to crime and criminal activity. As Bruce (1995) notes, while people think of women as healers, nurturers and peacemakers, people think of men as history's bullies and murderers. As a result, society is likely to perceive males in the role of perpetrator and not of victim. In fact, being perceived as a male victim counters the very essence of masculinity. As noted earlier, boys are socialized into gender typificatory schemes that dictate that males should be powerful, self-reliant, virile and bold. They are brought up to develop physical strength and power to protect themselves from any form of victimization. As Nasjleti (1980:271) notes:

The underlying message [for men] is that to be non-aggressive, non-assertive, non-competitive, and nonself-reliant is not masculine. From early childhood boys learn that masculinity means not depending on anyone, not being weak, not being passive, not being a loser, in short, *not being a victim* (my italics).

The perception that males are likely to be aggressors and not victims has diffused into many facets of life, including sexuality. Males have been typified as the aggressors and initiators of sexual activity with women. As Jackson (1978) writes in her discussion of sexual scripts:

From the beginning boys learn to be independent...while girls are encouraged to be dependent...It is hardly surprising that when they learn of the erotic implications of relationships between them they should express their sexuality this way. Man becomes the seducer, the woman the seduced, he the hunter, she the prey. It is he who is expected to initiate sexual encounters and to determine the direction in which they develop, her part is merely to acquiesce or refuse. Aggression is part of man's activity. He is not only expected to take the lead but to establish dominance over the woman, to make her please him, and his "masculinity" is threatened if he fails to do so. Sexual conquest becomes an acceptable way of validating masculinity, of demonstrating dominance of and superiority over women (p.31).

The predominant gender typification that males are the sexual "hunters" implies that they are not likely to be perceived as victims of sexual abuse.

In their discussion of the intimate connection between gender and sexuality, Fracher and Kimmel (1989:441) comment on the consequences of being male and confronting a sexual problem:

For men, the notion of masculinity, the cultural definition of manhood, serves as the primary building block of sexuality. It is through our understanding of masculinity that we construct a sexuality, and it is through our sexualities that we confirm the successful construction of our gender identity. Gender informs sexuality; sexuality confirms gender. Thus men have a lot at stake when they confront a sexual problem: they risk their self-image as a man.

Therefore, for a male to be a victim of sexual abuse is not only difficult to envision, but the individual in question may face severe consequences. He may begin to question his masculinity,

his identity as a man and his self-worth. Lew (1990) discusses the impact of sexual victimization on males:

Since men "are not supposed to be victims," abuse, and particularly sexual abuse, becomes a process of demasculization (or emasculation). If men aren't to be victims, the equation reads, then victims aren't men. The victimized male wonders and worries about what the abuse has turned him into. Believing that he is no longer an adequate man, he may see himself as a child, a woman, gay, or less than human - an irreparably damaged freak (p.41).

When the perpetrator of the sexual abuse is a woman - someone who is typically seen as passive, nurturing, gentle and harmless - the impact and shame attached to the abuse may be even greater (Sarrel and Masters, 1982). As one male survivor of sexual abuse by his mother explains:

One of the difficulties for men dealing with [the female sexual abuse of children] is that it's hard enough to accept that you were sexually involved with a parent; it's doubly hard for a male because boys are supposed to be able to fight and defend themselves. On top of that, to think of accusing your mother... (Steed, 1991).

Sarrel and Masters (1982:121) describe the experience of a 27 year old truck driver who was sexually assaulted by three women. The man had been drinking in a bar and later left with a woman companion who he had not known previously. They went to a motel where he was given another drink and then fell asleep. He awoke to find himself naked, tied hand and foot to the bed, gagged and blindfolded. As he listened to the voices in the room, it was evident that several women were present. He was then told that he had to have sex with all of them. During the incident, four different women used him sexually, some of them a number of times. When

he was unable to obtain an erection, he was threatened with castration and felt a knife held to his scrotum. The man states that he was forcibly restrained and sexually assaulted for more than 24 hours. When the women decided to release him, his feet were untied and he was dressed and taken by car to an isolated area where, still blindfolded, but his hands only loosely tied, he was pushed from the car and was able to free himself without difficulty. He did not report the incident to police or tell anyone of his experience. He was terrified that if his friends found out about his "disgrace" they would think of him "as less of a man" because he had been "raped by women".

This example clearly demonstrates the feelings that males may go through when their situation or experience counters the socially constructed gender typifications. These factors may play a important role in understanding why the issue of females as perpetrators of sexual abuse has remained unexposed and why males are unlikely to report such abuse. Being a victim counters major gender typifications for males. To remain within the proper gender realm is to be safe from social and emotional ridicule. To deviate from them however, can lead to subtle yet harsh social sanctions.

5.4.3 "Men Enjoy or Profit From All Sexual Contact With Women"

Males have not only been typified as the initiators of sexuality, but also as able to enjoy and profit from any form of sexuality with a female. As Tiefer (1989:451) notes, there is a pervasive belief that most men "are ready, willing and eager for as much sex as they can get."

As a result, when sexual abuse has been perpetrated by a women on a child or adolescent boy, it may not be regarded as abusive but as "seduction" or "initiation" to sexuality (Hunter, 1990). As Lew (1990:58) underscores: "sexual activity between older women and young boys is rarely treated as abusive. It may be ignored, discounted or disbelieved."

The message that is widely emphasized in contemporary North American society is that young boys ought to feel happy and fortunate to have the opportunity to be sexual with an older woman: "It is shameful for a man to admit to not having enjoyed any form of sex with a woman. The victim is faced with the expectation that he should enjoy his victimization" (Lew, 1990:58).

Films, for example, are full of such messages and frequently portray women being sexual with boys as harmless and glamorous. I recently came across a film in a local video store entitled Homework starring Joan Collins. The cover read:

"Every young man needs a teacher"

In Homework, Joan Collins proves the perfect teacher for young Tommy, but her classes are conducted after school and definitely do not include the three r's. But who's complaining? Not Tommy. Meanwhile, back in the schoolyard, Tommy's buddy Ralph has his own private tutor, Ms. Jackson, who teaches those tricky French conjugations.

Hunter (1990:36) comments on the impact of such films for the males involved:

These films are not about young men having an opportunity to learn about sex with their peers. They are about women using their positions of power to abuse those in their care sexually. These films are widely available and are classified as comedies. They teach males who were abused that they should have enjoyed the sexual contact.

For some male victims, the only answer is to give in to the institutionalized gender typification and "re-negotiate" their experience so that it does not deviate from the norm. In this way, they avoid social ridicule:

Faced with a society that seems to be celebrating his pain, the [male] incest victim [of a female perpetrator] is unlikely to risk talking about it. He may try to redefine the experience to fit in with other people's perceptions, even to the point of bragging or joking about it (Lew, 1990:58).

For other survivors however, this process of re-negotiation becomes a confusing one. Since sex between women and boys is supposed to be glamorous and enjoyable, boys who do not enjoy it are likely to question their masculinity or sexual orientation. The equation therefore reads, if he enjoyed the experience it was not abusive. If he did not, he must be homosexual or sexually inadequate (Lew, 1990).

The other interesting component of this gender typification is the notion of responsibility. In cases of sexual contact between an older woman and a younger boy, while the woman is likely to be exempt from responsibility, the boy is likely to be held responsible for the incident. Take, for example, the following Bible verse where the boy is believed to be accountable for sexual contact with his mother: "Cursed is the man who sleeps with his father's wife, for he dishonours his father's bed" (Hunter, 1990:34). Similarly, note the significance of the term "motherfucker" as an insult. Taken in a strict sense, the insult refers to the son who has had sex with his mother, and not the mother.

The assumption that boys or men enjoy all sexual contact with women implies that men will not likely be perceived as victims in sexual relations with women. Even if the male in question perceives the sexual experience as abusive, he and others around him will likely renegotiate the experience as seduction or initiation to sexuality. In this way, they can remain within the gendered institutional order without the risk of social ridicule.

5.4.4 "Sexual Aggression by Women is Not Harmful"

It is presumed that women not only are unlikely to be aggressors, they are particularly unlikely to be sexual aggressors. As Mathis (1972:53) noted: "what harm can be done without a penis?" This typification of women as incapable of sexual assault is an important issue in the area of child sexual abuse perpetrated by women. While the actions of the women are likely to be exempted or viewed as harmless (Hunter, 1990), the boys may be more apt to be viewed, if not as sexually delinquent, as somehow having profited from the experience.

Stereotypical views of women as incapable of committing sexual offenses and males as incapable of being sexually victimized have been substantiated in a study done by Broussard et al. (1991). In this study, the authors asked 180 female and 180 male undergraduate students about their perceptions of child sexual abuse on the victim. Participants tended to view the interaction of a male victim with a female perpetrator as less representative of child sexual abuse. They also believed that male victims of female perpetrators would experience less harm than if the victim was a female and the perpetrator a male.

Similarly, Finkelhor found that his survey respondents tended to view the sexual offenses of women as relatively insignificant. When he asked 521 parents about the seriousness of different types of sexual abuse, they rated adult female perpetrators' actions with both males and female victims as less abusive than those of adult male perpetrators with male or female victims (Finkelhor, 1984). He points out that these attitudes are important as they affect which cases get identified and treated as child sexual abuse.

In many cases, the actions of the female perpetrator are "re-negotiated" by society so that they more easily fit into the gender typification of women as harmless. As Lew (1990:58) notes, when the perpetrator of the sexual abuse is female, the case "is often greeted by disbelief, denial, trivializing and romanticizing of [the] story by police, doctors, therapists, media and the general public." Similarly, Nelson (1994) found that police officers who dealt with cases of child sexual abuse where the perpetrator was a woman reconstructed the offender and the offense in accordance with a "fantasy model" that was more fitting with conventional images of gender and sexuality. In doing so, the severity of the sexual offense, its deviant nature, and the impact on the victim were greatly diminished. The following case examples, which have all been cited from Nelson (1994), strongly demonstrate the extent to which both police officers and other helping professionals rely on the notion that "sexual aggression by women is not harmful." While reading through these cases, it is important to keep in mind how authorities would be likely to treat each of these cases had the perpetrator been male.

Case #1

In 1987, a 24 year old teacher was indicted on 235 counts of child sexual abuse after more than 30 children in a US day care centre testified that they had been sexually abused by her. She was said to have forced the children to perform sexual acts on each other and to perform other sexual games which included removing their clothing and "piling on top of one another". At the preliminary hearing, a psychiatrist testified: "If the children at "Wee Care" were abused, it was nearly inconceivable that the defendant could have done the things she was charged with because she did not conform with the profile of a child sexual abuser. That is, she was female (Nelson, 1994:66).

In this case, gender typifications were used as the primary means of evaluating the perpetrators actions. The psychiatrist's comments imply that it is virtually impossible for a female to commit a sexual offense simply on the basis of her gender. Her role as "woman", and all that is included in the typification of a "woman", nullifies her deviant actions and the possible harm she may cause, regardless of the evidence against her.

Case #2

A divorced mother of three was told by her children that the fourteen year old female babysitter made them run around the house nude. The babysitter would put the female children to bed, bring the five year old boy downstairs, set him on her knee and "french kiss" him. She would repeatedly lower the boys pants and fondle his penis. When the boy protested, she would spank him for his disobedience. Upon bringing the case to the attention of the police, the mother

of the children felt that the police were indifferent to the case and seemed very reluctant to charge the female perpetrator. The mother was informed by the police that the girl in question was under fourteen years of age and thus, no criminal charges could be laid. In fact, the mother later learned that the girl was several months shy of her fifteenth birthday. When questioned by Nelson (the researcher) as to the status of the case, the investigating detective gave a most interesting view of the case. He stated:

Shit, I wish that someone that looked like her [the babysitter] had sexually abused me when I was a kid...the kid's mother is overreacting because someone popped her kid's cherry. Hell, it's every guy's dream (Nelson, 1994:74).

The detective's comments rely on typifications of both males and females that reduce the seriousness of the act and deny responsibility on the part of the female perpetrator. Firstly, his comments underscore that a five year old male having sexual relations with a fourteen year old female is not a serious matter and should not be considered abusive. There is a strong message attached to this - not only are such sexual "relations" not harmful to the victim, but it also plays on the notion that boys enjoy all heterosexual contact, at any age, regardless of the circumstances. Much like male gender typifications suggest, heterosexual virility in males is encouraged and even required, despite the boy's age. Finally, by emphasizing physical attractiveness, the detective is sending the message that as long as a female perpetrator is attractive, sexual contact between an adult female (or an older adolescent female) and a male youth or child is not abusive or at least less abusive than if the genders were reversed.

Case #3

A four year old boy reported to the director of his daycare centre that he had been sexually abused by his fourteen year old babysitter. The boy informed the child welfare worker who interviewed him that he would lay on his bed with the babysitter and both would remove their clothing and then would play a game of "Fuck" and "Sucky". Apparently intercourse, fellatio and cunnilingus had taken place. It was later found that the alleged perpetrator was herself a victim of sexual abuse by her step-father. The detective in the case advised the alleged perpetrator's mother that because the girl had been a victim of sexual assault herself, he would not be charging her. The detective made the informal recommendations that the girl seek treatment by a therapist or charges of sexual assault and gross indecency would be laid against her. He also advised her not to babysit until she had completed treatment. The detective's report concluded with the following statement: "Both [mother of suspect] and [mother of complainant] were in agreement with this (course of action) and indicated that they would cooperate" (Nelson, 1994:76). However, comments made elsewhere in the police report contradict the detective's concluding statement. According to these comments, throughout the investigation the mother of the four year old boy complained about the police lack of action in the case. She was insistent on wanting police to lay charges against the babysitter regardless of her having been a victim of sexual assault herself. The mother was reported to have made several calls to different agencies complaining to them about the police lack of action in the case. However, the detective's decision remained unchanged. When Nelson questioned the detective about his failure to charge the perpetrator given the mother's insistence that charges be laid, he stated:

I don't get what all the fuss is about. She's a great looking girl. What's the big deal? It's not like some big fat cow came on to the kid. You know, the kind you have to roll in flour to find the sticky part? Hell, do you know what sexual assault is? When it's a female? That's when you're working the street and some dirty, fat Indian broad who works the drag comes up to the (police) car and says, [imitating a Native Indian "accent"] "Heya honey, wanta see my boobs?", and shows them to you. Now that's sexual abuse (Nelson, 1994:77).

The detective's comments equate femininity and female attractiveness with harmlessness. He assumes that as long as the female perpetrator is attractive, there is no harm in her actions. This line of argumentation would be highly unlikely in the case of a male perpetrator, as would the detective's stance that the babysitter should not be charged for the crimes because she herself had been a victim of sexual assault. It clearly demonstrates the extent to which the female sexual perpetrator in the case is negotiated a non-deviant identity. The light-hearted tone of the detective and his reliance on vulgar humour indicates the lack of seriousness that he attributes to the case. It also underscores the belief that women, simply as a result of their gender, are incapable of committing sexual offenses against children.

The preceding cases demonstrate how officials struggle to maintain the female sex offender within the typificatory scheme of "woman" and all that is associated with it. Unable to envision a woman deviating so severely from this scheme, the identity of the female sexual perpetrator has been re-negotiated as the harmless, non-deviant. These examples also demonstrate the extent to which gender typifications have been institutionalized. Gender is a rigid arena where female and male behaviour are viewed strictly in opposing lights. In turn, by heavily relying on gender typifications, society "genders" social problems like child sexual abuse thus further cementing the gender typified reality.

The four gender typifications that "women are victims, not aggressors", that "men are aggressors, not victims", that "men enjoy or profit from all heterosexual contact" and that "sexual aggression by females is not harmful" have an important influence on how sexual abuse perpetrators and victims are perceived. They cement the rigid gender reality and encourage perceptions of adult and adolescent males in the role of sexual abuse perpetrators and females, whether children, adolescents or adults, in the role of sexual abuse victims.

5.5 OFFICIAL RESPONSES TO SURVIVORS OF SEXUAL ABUSE BY WOMEN

An important area of inquiry is whether or not gender typifications are relied upon by those peripheral to the situation who are trained to deal with cases of child sexual abuse. How do professionals, be they the police, or helping professionals such as psychiatrists, psychologists or social workers respond to cases that come forward that oppose gender typifications? How do trained professionals react to cases where the sexual perpetrator is female? In this section, the research that has been carried out on the official responses to the victims of sexual abuse by adult and adolescent females will be outlined. This will give us a sense as to what extent gender typifications are actually relied upon by officials.

The limited research on the topic reveals that upon disclosure of sexual abuse perpetrated by females, officials are not likely to believe the victim. Elliott (1994:11) reports that 78% of her sample of 127 male and female survivors of female sexual abuse said they could find no one willing to help or believe them. In fact, one survivor in her sample was told that the abuser

must have been male and was offered help to deal with the "real" abuser. Another survivor of sexual abuse by her mother attempted to tell a school official, who was also a nun, what was going on at home. The reaction was not unlike those mentioned above:

My father was absent most of the time due to his work...the first time I remember being sexually tortured was when Mother took me into a wooded area, fondled me, had oral sex with me, and inserted her fingers into my vagina. I cried and screamed because of the severe pain. This only made mother angry; so, to shut me up and threaten me, she picked up a large stick and shoved it inside my vagina. This incident taught me the lesson of silence and to turn off feelings of pain. I was threatened not to tell anything that went on in our house, but at age 10, I attempted to tell the nun who was a catechism teacher. She slapped me across the face telling me "never to lie and to honour my parents". I never found the courage to tell anyone again until just recently when I began therapy (Elliott, 1994:121).

Many professionals working in the area of child sexual abuse concur that survivors of sexual abuse by women have not received appropriate concern or attention. Many of these professionals have resorted to ingenious and creative ways of ensuring that their clients receive the attention they need and deserve. As one therapist noted:

When I first began working in a mental health clinic, I would contact child protection workers as required by law when I suspected child abuse in a family. After several cases I began to notice a disturbing pattern. When I reported a case involving a girl or boy being abused by an adult male, there was rapid action. However, when I reported a boy being abused by an adult female, very little was done; in many cases nothing was done. My clients saw the agency's lack of concern as a sign that what had been done to them was acceptable and that they had no business calling it abuse; this only added to the trauma they had experienced. In anger I began calling the agency, saying, "I have a case here where it appears that a 23 year old male is having intercourse with a 13 year old female. Do you think a child abuse investigation is in order?" Only after I was told "Absolutely, this clearly is a case of abuse" would I say that I must have "misspoken," that I meant to say that it was a 23 year old *female* having sex with a 13 year old *male*. I found then that my clients began to get better attention (Hunter, 1990:37).

Longdon (1994) points out that because female sexual abuse arouses such strong reactions,

particularly in other women, survivors fear being ostracized, receiving anger or criticism, or being gossiped about. She claims that either from fear or ridicule or from having previously received negative responses upon disclosure, many survivors have, in desperation and from a desire to receive help of any sort, said that their abuser was a man.

These cases support the notion that officials are relying heavily on gender typifications in cases of female sexual abuse of children. Much like Edwards (1984:1) indicates, the criminal justice system and other social service professionals draw on their "everyday" assumptions of "what kinds of people do what kinds of things".

The question that must now be addressed is do the four gender typifications of "women are victims, not aggressors"; "men are aggressors, not victims"; "men enjoy or profit from all sexual contact"; and "sexual aggression by females is not harmful" accurately reflect the complex reality of sexual abuse in contemporary North American society? Moreover, what impact do these gender typifications have on survivors of sexual abuse by women? These questions will be answered in chapters three and four by analyzing the experiences of five men and three women who self-identify as survivors of female sexual abuse.

5.6 THE IRONY OF BLENDING FEMALE SEXUAL ABUSE AND SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIONISM

There is a strong irony attached to addressing the issue of female sexual offending and its impact on survivors, especially when using a social constructionist approach. The irony stems from the social constructionist view of social problems. According to social constructionist

thought, social problems do not lie in the objective social conditions. Instead, our sense of what is or is not a social problem is a social product. In essence, no condition is a social problem until someone considers it a social problem (Best, 1989:xv). Social constructionists therefore focus on the "claims-making" in social problems, meaning the "activities of individuals or groups making assertions of grievances and claims with respect to some putative conditions" (Spector and Kitsuse, 1977:75). In this view, social problems are merely the subject of claims. Constructionists examine what claims-makers say about conditions, and not the conditions themselves (Best, 1989:xviii). Claims-makers are said to characterize problems in particular ways, intentionally emphasizing some aspects and not others, and shaping our sense of just what the problem is. Of course, no one, social constructionists included, can be exempted from being considered claimsmakers.

Following the above discussion, female sexual offending would not be considered to be a social problem until someone "claims" it to be one. As a result, to the extent that I identify the issue of female sexual offending and the consequences for the victims of such offenses, both issues that have not yet been considered to be "social problems" in mainstream circles, I become a "claims-maker" myself. This paradox cannot be avoided. By recognizing what has not yet been socially identified as a problem automatically places one in this role. The manner and the extent in which I fit the definition of a claims-maker and the repercussions of this, is not an issue that I will examine, as it is a philosophical debate that is beyond the constraints of my research. However, it is important to at least raise the irony of linking female sexual offending to the social constructionist perspective.

CHAPTER II:
THE QUESTION OF METHODOLOGY

L. QUALITATIVE METHODOLOGY

My research is exclusively qualitative in nature. Van Maanen (1983:9) argues that qualitative methodology is a broad term covering a wide range of interpretive techniques (normally participant observation and/or intense interviewing) which seek to describe, decode, and translate naturally occurring phenomena in the social world. Qualitative research is concerned more with the meaning than the frequency of the phenomenon under study.

1.1 THE TARGET POPULATIONS

In using qualitative methods, a researcher figuratively puts brackets around a temporal and spatial domain of the social world. The brackets define the territory through which descriptions are made (Van Maanen, 1983:9). The temporal domain of this research comprises the last quarter of the twentieth century, and the spatial domain is that of North America. There are two populations of the social world or what are often referred to as "target populations" that I examine in depth, the first being far more broad than the second. The first population I investigate is mainstream North American culture. I explore the conventional typifications and taken for granted "truths" held by this culture in relation to perceptions of gender, and its relationship to beliefs about sexual abuse perpetrators and victims. This exploration is done through extensive literature reviews on popular culture which outline common beliefs about gender norms and behaviours, and sexual abuse perpetrators and victims in contemporary North American society. A social constructionist perspective is used to guide this inquiry. Having

established the conventional gender typifications in this regard, I analyze the social implications of these typifications using my second target population.

My second target population consists of individuals, both male and female, who self-identify as victims/survivors of sexual abuse where the perpetrator has been reported to be a woman⁷. I examine how gender typifications can be related to the reported experiences of these survivors. Finally, by exploring survivors' reports, I note some consequences of defying gender typifications.

1.2 A DEFINITION OF TERMS

For my second target population, some clarification is needed as to what signifies "sexual abuse", and what connotes a "perpetrator" or a "victim" or "survivor" for the purposes of this study. In regard to the term "sexual abuse" in the past, many attempts have been made to define the term. However, the many definitions that have been suggested have been plagued with controversy. There is little agreement in professional circles as to a comprehensive definition. Mrazek (1981) cogently explains the reasons behind the controversy:

Any attempt to define "sexual abuse"...is fraught with difficulties, for all definitions are culture and time bound. They are not based on rigorous scientific inquiry, but on values and beliefs of individuals, professionals and society at large (p.11).

⁷ Two participants who self-identified as survivors of sexual abuse by women also acknowledged that they had perpetrated sexual abuse against children at some point in their lives.

Assuming that Mrazek is correct in her assertion that any attempted definition is in fact culture and time bound, because I am examining contemporary North America, it is necessary to employ a definition that adequately represents this culture and time period. I will therefore utilize what Mrazek (1981:11) declares as being the "most widely referenced definitions of sexual abuse", given by Schecter and Roberge in 1976. I not only refer to their definition because of its widespread usage, but also because it is a broad and comprehensive definition. "Sexual abuse" will therefore be defined as "the involvement of dependent, developmentally immature children and adolescents, [under the age of 14], in sexual activities that they do not fully comprehend, are unable to give informed consent to, and [in the case of incest] violate the social taboos of family roles" (Schecter and Roberge, 1976).

A "perpetrator" of sexual abuse refers to any individual who commits sexual abuse as defined above.

Upon the "discovery" of child sexual abuse in the mid-1970's, children believed to have been subjected to sexual abuse were referred to by clinicians as "victims" of child sexual abuse. The dictionary definition of victim is "a person who suffers through no fault of their own; one who is made to suffer by persons or forces beyond their control" (Lew, 1990:7). This is an accurate description of the reality of child sexual abuse and it continues to be widely used in mainstream North American culture. Recently, however, clinicians as well as the "victims" themselves have taken issue with the pervasive use of the term. They have argued that the word "victim" denotes powerlessness, hopelessness and vulnerability (Lew, 1990:7). As a result, there

has been a move to modify the use of the word victim and replace it with "survivor", a more positive and affirming term.

For this study, I use the terms "victim" and "survivor" interchangeably. A victim or survivor of sexual abuse refers to an individual who affirms that he or she experienced the above definition of "sexual abuse." These individuals are the human actors or what Babbie (1986) refers to as "individual units of analysis" around which my study is based. These individuals provided the crux of the information in regard to my research questions. Through extensive interviews with 5 adult male and 3 adult female survivors of sexual abuse, I gathered information on their reported experiences, what these reported experiences tell us about certain gender typifications, how accurately these gender typifications reflect the complex reality of sexual abuse, and the consequences of these typifications for the survivors.

Although I did not know the survivors personally before I met them for the purposes of interviewing, and had little knowledge as to the reliability or the credibility of their reports of sexual abuse, as the researcher, I considered all of their reports of sexual abuse to be truthful⁸. It is important to note that demonstrably false claims of childhood sexual abuse are rare in both children and adults (Galey, 1995). In the case of children, it is apparently more common for children to retract true allegations of sexual abuse because of pressure from either the perpetrator

⁸ Three of the participants were recruited through a social worker who facilitated a therapy group for survivors of sexual abuse. This social worker had counselled these three individuals in the group context, and was able to corroborate their stories. This was not possible for the remaining five participants.

or the victim's family members, than to falsely accuse (Elliott, 1994; Galey, 1995). Contrary to those who assert the pervasiveness of the "false memory syndrome"⁹, some research has shown that demonstrably false allegations by adults who report recovered memories of childhood sexual abuse are also rare. Galey (1995:24) cites one recent study on recovered false memory that claims that of 53 self-identified survivors, 74% were able to find independent corroborative evidence. False memory syndrome advocates note the lack of hard evidence to support the existence of repressed memory and assert that traumatic childhood memories can rarely, if at all, be repressed for a decade or more and then suddenly be remembered in the context of a therapist's office. However, Galey notes that in a follow-up study of 200 adults who had been treated as children for sexual abuse, Linda Mever Williams found that one in three did not recall the experiences that were on their hospital records twenty years before (cited in Galey, 1995:24).

2. SAMPLING

Qualitative research is not concerned with ensuring representativeness or making inferences about the broader population from a selected sample (Bertaux, 1981). Instead,

⁹ A psychological condition where a patient is convinced by a therapist that he or she was a victim of childhood sexual abuse that never happened. The False Memory Syndrome Foundation was founded by Dr. Pamela Freyd and her husband Dr. Peter Freyd in reaction to alleged false allegations of sexual abuse by their daughter, Dr. Jennifer Freyd, a professor of psychology at the University of Oregon who has recently come forward to rebut the story maintained by her parents and to charge that the Foundation is an organization created by a family struggling with pain and denial, rather than an organization committed to scientific memory research (Galey, 1995).

qualitative research seeks to gain rich, in-depth and penetrating data from a small number of participants who need not be representative of the population at large (Michelat, 1975:236). The size of a qualitative sample usually varies from study to study. In fact, researchers conducting qualitative research cannot state at the outset of the research how many individuals they will interview during the entire study. Because they are generating theory throughout the research process, and the number of participants recruited depends on the amount of theory generated at a given moment, the size of the sample can only be determined toward the end of the study (Glaser and Strauss, 1967:61). The criterion for judging when to stop sampling lies in the notion of theoretical saturation. When one reaches the "saturation point" this means that no data providing new theoretical insights is being generated from the group under study (Bertaux, 1981).

I collected my sample of five male and three female survivors of sexual abuse where the perpetrator had been a woman, by using purposive sampling. Purposive sampling is a type of non-probability sampling method in which the researcher uses his or her own judgement in the selection of sample members, which is largely based on the researcher's knowledge of the population under study, and the nature of their research aims (Babbie, 1986:176). Because the goal of my research was to obtain the reported experiences of survivors of sexual abuse by female perpetrators and to determine if and how their experiences were influenced by conventional gender typifications, and some consequences of this, I knew that the population of people from whom I sought to gather data were the survivors themselves. Therefore, I had a clear picture of *who* I wanted in my sample. However, what was less clear was how I would

find such individuals who would be willing to participate in my research. To find a suitable sample, I decided to follow two main strategies. The first was to contact individuals working in the area of sexual abuse to gain information on the sample population and how to reach such individuals. The second strategy was to target social service agencies where survivors of sexual abuse by women may frequent as patients or clients. It was my intention to recruit participants by displaying posters which outlined the goals of my research in these agencies.

2.1 THE RECRUITMENT OF PARTICIPANTS

Strategy #1: Contacting Resource Persons

Although I had some connections in the general area of child sexual abuse through my work as a social worker counselling in this area, I had relatively few connections in the particular area of survivors of female perpetrators. To gather as much information as I could, I telephoned several individuals working in the area of child sexual abuse. I was especially interested in finding therapists who had experience working with survivors of sexual abuse by women. I was able to find one organization that dealt specifically with female perpetrators of sexual abuse and their victims. However, this organization had extremely stringent policies for accepting outside research projects. I was informed that, although they were interested in my research and were willing to provide me with subjects for my study, it was essential that I go through a formal committee that screened all research proposals. I was warned that the process could take several months and that there was no guarantee that the potential participants would agree to partake in

the research once it had been approved by the committee. Moreover, the agency was in a different city and would require travelling great distances to meet with participants. Due to obvious time and financial constraints, I decided to pursue other avenues.

I then contacted various professionals working in the area of sexual abuse. One individual, a social worker colleague who facilitates a therapy group for survivors of sexual abuse, was of particularly great assistance. He informed me that several of his clients had been sexually abused by women and might be interested in participating in my study. These potential participants were first briefed by the social worker as to the nature of my research. If they were interested in hearing more about the study, I contacted them by phone at a later date to provide them with further information. If they agreed to partake in the research, an interview was arranged at their convenience. Three participants were recruited in this manner.

One participant was recruited through a "snowball" sampling technique. A participant informed me during our interview that a friend, who was a survivor of sexual abuse by his mother, was interested in participating in the study. This individual telephoned me soon after and an interview time was set up.

Strategy #2: Targeting Social Service Agencies

While I had recruited four participants through resource persons, this was clearly not a large enough sample to gather adequate data on the survivor population. I decided to target

social service agencies in the Ottawa area where survivors of sexual abuse by women might frequent as patients or clients. It was my intention to recruit participants by displaying posters which outlined the goals of my research.

I visited a number of social service agencies in this regard. I explained the nature of my research, and requested that with their permission, I would appreciate being able to display a poster advertising my research. Their responses to my study varied. Two agencies were supportive of my research and allowed my poster to be displayed. Three others declined my request, stating that the topic was "too anti-woman" for their agency's mandate.

Four participants were recruited through poster advertisements strategically placed in counselling and social service agencies or clinics. The posters briefly explained the goal of my research. The poster's heading read: "Survivors of Sexual Abuse by Women". I specifically did not define "sexual abuse" and left it up to potential participants to determine whether they considered their personal experience(s) to be abusive. In this way, all of those who were to contact me would identify themselves as survivors of sexual abuse by women. However, once the potential participant contacted me, I verified with them as to whether their experiences concurred with the definition of sexual abuse that I defined earlier on in this chapter.

Briefing the Participants

Anyone interested in participating in the research was asked to contact me by telephone.

During this contact, I would ascertain as to whether the individual's case conformed to my definition of "sexual abuse". In only one instance was an individual not suitable as a participant. I briefed this individual as to the nature of the research, why he was not suitable for the research, and thanked him for his interest in the study. With the rest of the potential participants, I explained in detail the goals of the research, and what would be required of them as participants. I indicated that if they agreed to participate, they would be asked to partake in an interview that would last approximately two hours. I stated that I was interested in uncovering during the course of the interview their personal experiences in relation to the sexual abuse, how gender played a role in how they, as well as others, had perceived the abuse, and how the abuse had effected their lives. I informed them that although the interview was to be very open and unstructured in nature, depending on what issues they did or did not address during the interview, I would likely ask them several open-ended questions related to the previously mentioned issues that formed the crux of my research questions and goals. I emphasized that they could refuse to answer any question during the interview, and that at any sign of discomfort, I was prepared to halt the interview. I informed them that with their permission, the interview would be audiotaped and later transcribed verbatim. Once transcribed, the tapes would be destroyed. I ensured the potential participants that all information gathered for the research would remain confidential and used for research purposes only. Also, participants were guaranteed anonymity. All identifying characteristics such as names, and places would be omitted from the transcript and each participant would be referred to in the final paper using a pseudonym.

If the individual agreed to participate, an interview was arranged at his or her convenience. To minimize the possibility of discomfort, the interview was arranged in a location in which the participant felt most at ease. In most cases the interview was held at the residence of the participant, although to ensure anonymity, three participants chose to be interviewed at my place of residence.

I received twelve calls from potential participants regarding the research. However, in the end only eight individuals were interviewed. Three potential participants declined to partake in the research after the initial telephone call as they felt uncomfortable telling their sexual abuse experiences to a complete stranger. One other potential participant agreed to be interviewed, however on the day of the interview, he cancelled our meeting saying that he had been experiencing nightmares of the sexual abuse since having arranged the meeting. He and I both thought it best that we not proceed with the interview.

2.2 THE PARTICIPANT PROFILE

The sample for this study consisted of 5 male and 3 female survivors of sexual abuse where the perpetrator had been a woman. The participants ranged in age from 23 to 43 years of age, with the majority in their early thirties. Seven of the participants were Caucasian and one participant was Aboriginal. The majority of the participants reported that they had been sexually abused by their mothers (4), one (1) individual stated that he had been sexually abused by his step-mother. One (1) participant stated that she had been sexually abused by several older

females while living in a foster home and at the age of three, this same individual was "sold" by her father as a prostitute on a weekly basis to both a male and female clientele. The remaining participants (2) reported being sexually abused by a female babysitter.

3. GETTING THE DATA: USING IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWS

In order to gain solid and rich data as to the experiences of survivors of sexual abuse by women and the impact that gender typifications have had on their experiences, a very astute and penetrating method of inquiry is needed. Under the circumstances, a questionnaire or survey would not be appropriate. Both these methods would fail to provide a rich source of material. The pre-determined, standardized categories and the closed nature of these methods would likely hinder spontaneous and insightful personal information that the participants feel is important to their case. An open and flexible method is needed to capture the individual realities and perspectives of each participant. The in-depth interview was therefore chosen as the method most applicable.

3.1 WHY USE INTERVIEWS?

The in-depth interview is regarded by many as one of the most powerful methods in the qualitative armoury (McCracken, 1989; Seidman, 1991). At the very heart of what it means to be human is the ability of people to express their experience through language. In fact, recounting narratives of experience has been the major way throughout recorded history that

humans have made sense of their experience (Seidman, 1991:6). The fundamental purpose of interviewing is neither to get answers to questions, nor to test hypotheses. At the root of the in-depth interview is an interest in understanding the experience of other people and the meaning that they make of that experience. At the heart of interviewing is an interest in other individuals' stories because they are of worth in themselves. In this sense, interviewing is the willingness to "treat individuals as the heroes of their own drama" (Brenner, Brown and Canter, 1985:3).

The in-depth interview is also important not only because it can take us into the mental world of the survivor to consider the categories and logic by which he or she sees the world, but also because it can take us into the daily life of the survivor, to see the content and pattern of daily experience (McCracken, 1989:9). The interview gives us the opportunity to step into the mind of the survivor, to see and experience the world as they do themselves. As Patton (1980:196) indicates, "the purpose of interviewing is to find out what is in and on someone else's mind...to access the perspective of the person being interviewed...and to allow us to enter into the other person's perspective". According to Seidman, (1991:6) interviewing is a "meaning-making" process. Every word that people use in telling their stories is a microcosm of their consciousness.

Interviews also provides depth and detail. Not only can a researcher gain an understanding of the personal attitudes, beliefs, and thoughts of those under study, but can also capture detailed descriptions of situations, events, interactions, as well as observed behaviours (Patton, 1980:23). Because I examine the life stories and experiences of survivors of sexual

abuse by women, how their experiences conform or deviate from conventional gender typifications, and some consequences of this, the depth and detail that interviewing provides is extremely pertinent to the study.

Brenner, Brown and Carter (1985:3) note that another central value of the interview lies in the flexibility of interviewing, and the exploration of meaning that is encouraged on the part of both the interviewer and the participant. As a research tool, interviewing is extremely flexible. It can deal with an endless array of subject matters at different levels of complexity and detail. It also allows both the interviewer and the participant to explore the meaning of the questions and answers involved. During an interview there is a unique sense of sharing and a negotiation of understanding which is absent from other forms of gathering data.

3.2 THE DISADVANTAGES OF INTERVIEWING SURVIVORS OF FEMALE PERPETRATORS

Despite the many strong points of interviewing, there are a number of drawbacks. Firstly, the interview session takes place between two strangers, the researcher and the participant. The participant is being asked to recount very personal, private, sometimes painful memories and experiences associated with the sexual abuse that are likely to be difficult to recount to a complete stranger. If the interview is to take place during one occasion only, there is little opportunity for the interviewer to gain the trust of the participant. As a result of this plausible lack of trust, the participant may not feel secure revealing certain aspects of their experience, thus limiting the information given to the researcher.

Secondly, in the case of an interview session on one occasion only, if participants are not feeling at their best on the particular day when the interview has been arranged, it is likely that the important information that they hold for the research may be lost.

Thirdly, the notion of gender in interviewing is important (Denzin, 1989; Oakley, 1981; Seidman, 1991). Although many interviewers insist that their respondents are "faceless and invisible", and gender does not play a major role in interviewing (Oakley, 1981), there is evidence that gender influences the interview relationship as well as the responses of many research participants (Seidman, 1991). As Fontana and Frey (1994) note:

gender filters knowledge, that is, the sex of the interviewer and of the respondent does make a difference, as the interview takes place within cultural boundaries of a paternalistic social system in which masculine identities are differentiated from feminine ones (p.369).

The question of gender is further complicated in a study of this kind as it involves survivors of sexual abuse. Many survivors are distrustful of those who are of the same gender as was the gender of the perpetrator (Myers, 1989:209). Women who have been sexually abused by men, may feel more comfortable and safe being interviewed by women, while those who have been sexually abused by women, may feel more at ease being interviewed by men (Sgroi and Sargent, 1994:31). As Sgroi and Sargent (1994:31) note:

For [survivors of sexual abuse by women], the experience [of disclosure to a woman] may feel like an amplification of their childhood experience of feeling vulnerable with a woman and being victimized by her.

As one female survivor of sexual abuse by a woman explained in a female-only group therapy session: "There are a lot of breasts in the room! I'm not sure I'm going to be safe" (Sgroi and Sargent, 1994:31).

Being a female researcher, I was initially concerned that the participants would not feel comfortable expressing or revealing their true feelings in relation to the sexual abuse. Although this did not appear to be a major problem, during one interview, a participant did not look at me as he spoke. Instead, he stared in the opposite direction for the entire interview. At the end of the interview he let me know that I should not take it personally, but that it was easier not to look my way and that it was definitely more difficult to talk about his experiences to a woman.

The fourth issue that has the potential to cause problems when relying on the interview as the method of inquiry, centres around the location of the interview. As Babbie (1986) notes, the location of the interview can have a strong impact on the quality of the interview. If the location of the interview is not conducive to interviewing (if it is noisy, distracting, uncomfortable etc) it can seriously effect the participant's responses.

Because of the sensitive nature of the topic, participants were encouraged to choose where they would feel most comfortable being interviewed, either at their home or at mine. There are several advantages and disadvantages to each locale. When the interview was carried out in my home, I had greater control over the environment and could more easily ensure that there were no interruptions. On the other hand, the participant may not have felt as comfortable in a new

and unknown environment. The advantages of interviewing in the home of the participant is that the participant is likely to feel more at ease. However, a downfall is that the researcher has little control over the surroundings. This became an issue during one interview. In this case, the participant indicated that he would feel more comfortable being interviewed at his home. Upon my arrival, several children were enthusiastically playing in the house and the television was blaring. Although the children were sent upstairs, the participant's wife remained in the adjoining room. I sensed that she was curious to hear what would be said during the interview and that her presence may have influenced the participant's responses. On several occasions, the participant would look up in mid-sentence and apparently aware that his wife might overhear, would proceed to change the nature of his response. The general distractions present in the house made it difficult for both myself and the participant to concentrate and maintain a train of thought. Although it is vital to respect the wishes of the participant, it is also important to ensure that the surroundings are free from distractions and outside influences.

The final disadvantage of the interviewing technique is that, like most qualitative methods, the conclusions drawn from the interviews are often regarded as suggestive rather than definitive (Babbie, 1986:260). This is said to be due to certain problems of reliability and credibility which were addressed earlier. According to Babbie, a researcher cannot rely upon the data nor generalize the data as safely as those methods based on rigorous sampling and statistical analysis.

Despite several drawbacks to the interviewing technique, it is clearly the most efficient and effective way to study the complex issues that surround the topic of perceptions of gender

and how they influence beliefs about sexual abuse perpetrators, victims and the experiences of these victims.

3.3 USING THE UNSTRUCTURED INTERVIEW

Given the wide range of interview forms and styles (Fontana and Frey, 1994:361), the choice and selection of appropriate interviewing techniques varies according to the nature of the research. Because the goal of my research was to explore the reported experiences of those who have been sexually abused by women and how gender typifications have affected these experiences, it was crucial to choose a technique that would allow me to gain knowledge in these areas, yet also encourage participants to express what was important to them in relation to their past experiences. In this regard, the unstructured interview seemed the most fitting.

The success of the unstructured interview for this research lies in its open-ended format which allows participants to explore the subject freely and unconstrained. Participants are encouraged to share what is important for *them*, as there is no imposed or pre-determined categories that may limit the field of inquiry (Fontana and Frey, 1994:366). Because participants have unique experiences and distinct ways of understanding their experiences of sexual abuse, the unstructured interview allowed them to express themselves openly and have a greater voice in the research process (Douglas, 1985).

However, by relying solely on the unstructured component of interviewing, one risks not being provided with crucial information necessary for the research. In this sense, some guidance is required on the part of the interviewer to help the participant to report adequately, within the frame of reference within which the in-depth interview is conducted (Brenner, 1985:151). This is usually done through an interview guide and a series of open-ended questions that relate specifically to the object of study. The interview guide ensures that the frame of reference is clear, while encouraging introspection, and unconstrained rumination on the part of the participant.

In keeping with this technique, each interview began with the explanation of the interview guide - a standard preamble that introduced the goals and aspirations of the interview. The opening statement for each interview began with the following: "I would like you to tell me about the sexual abuse that you experienced." The guide was used to encourage the participant to establish him or herself in the appropriate frame of mind while allowing for flexibility and spontaneous exploration. Several open-ended questions were used throughout the interview to ensure that participants remained within the object of study. They consisted of the following:

- What role do stereotypes of men and women play in our perception of sexual abuse?
- Do you think that society recognizes that women sexually abuse children? Is it taboo? Why or why not?
- Did you ever report the sexual abuse? If so, to whom, and what was their reaction? How did their response affect you?
- In your eyes, was the sexual abuse taken seriously by professionals or other individuals who learned of the abuse? Why or why not?

- In what ways has the sexual abuse affected your life?

In essence, I relied on a biographical approach to the unstructured interview (Maruna, 1995). In the context of the interview, I encouraged the participants to share with me their personal biographies and "self-stories". According to Denzin (1989:14), biographies are conventionalized, narrative expressions of life experiences that rely on "the subjective verbal or written expression of meaning given by the individuals being studied, these expressions being windows into the inner life of the person". Self-stories involve pivotal and critical life experiences that are told by an individual. A self story is said to position the "self" of the teller centrally in the narrative that is given. As Denzin (1989:43) notes, a self-story is "literally a story of and about the self in relation to an experience." The self-story is pertinent for my research as the participants are being asked to recount their "stories" and experiences surrounding the sexual abuse perpetrated by a woman.

3.4 THE INTERVIEW SESSIONS

Of the eight interviews, six were conducted in Ottawa and two were conducted in Montreal. All of the interviews were conducted in English. The interview sessions began by me introducing myself, giving a brief summary of my educational background and the goals for my research. I tried, as much as possible, to make the participants feel at ease and to create an informal and unthreatening atmosphere. When I sensed that a participant was nervous, I tried to immediately address it by assuring them that was perfectly normal and even expected under

the circumstances. Once it was directly addressed, I found that the participants generally relaxed and were visibly less tense.

There is a moderate level of psychological risk involved in interviewing survivors of sexual abuse. Recalling painful memories of abuse can be difficult. However, my experience as a clinical social worker counselling survivors of sexual abuse has armed me with many skills that helped to reduce the level of risk to the participants. Also, because of the unstructured nature of the interview, survivors could choose what they did and did not want to discuss in the interview, thereby avoiding psychological distress.

After the informal introduction, I reiterated to each participant their rights as research participants: that they could refuse to answer any question at any time; at any sign of discomfort, I was prepared to terminate the interview; their anonymity would be protected; the contents of the interview would be kept confidential, anonymous and for research purposes only, were repeated. The participants were then given a consent form to read and sign, which outlined all of what I had gone over. Before the interview began, I asked each participant if they had any questions. It was only after this point that the interview began.

The interviews lasted between one hour and a half and three hours. The majority of the interviews were two hours in length. At the end of each interview, the participants were thanked for their time and their important contribution. I emphasized that if at any time they wished to discuss my research in general or their interview in particular, they should not hesitate to contact

me. Those who were interested in receiving a copy of the study upon completion wrote their addresses on my copy of the consent form.

4. THE METHOD OF ANALYSIS

After completing the eight interviews, each interview was transcribed verbatim. After reviewing the eight interviews, I felt that I had a solid amount of data with which to proceed with the analysis. Qualitative research relies mainly on inductive forms of analysis. This means that the categories or dimensions of analysis are said to emerge from the data itself. A researcher, with time, comes to realize and understand the patterns that exist in the population under study (Charmaz, 1983; Glaser and Strauss, 1967). As Filstead (1970:6) notes:

Qualitative methodology allows the researcher to "get close to the data", thereby developing the analytical, conceptual, and categorical components of explanation from the data itself - rather than from the preconceived rigidly structured, and highly quantified techniques that pigeonhole the empirical social world into the operational definitions that the researcher has constructed.

As such, I read and reread each of the interviews dozens of times, searching for common themes, ideas, categories and patterns of interaction. I then sorted and classified the interview data using a variety of subject headings. This process is what grounded theorists refer to as "coding". Codes serve to summarize, synthesize and sort the many observations made of the data. Researchers use coding to pull together and categorize a series of otherwise discrete events, statements, and observations which they identify in the data (Charmaz, 1987:112). By

providing the critical link between the data collection and its conceptual rendering, coding becomes the fundamental means of developing the analysis.

Eventually, I managed to generate categories that adequately described many pages of raw data. Ultimately, the categories that I observed in the data began to form a picture. This picture expressed the important influence that gender typifications and common perceptions of sexual abuse perpetrators and victims had on the experiences of the eight survivors. From this picture, the crux of my analysis was established.

Data, however, do not entirely speak for themselves. As Charmaz notes, the researcher's views and perspectives in relation to the participants and their stories do play a role in the analysis, as the researcher acts as the story's interpreter:

The grounded theorist's analysis tells a story about people, social processes, and situations. The researcher composes the story; it does not simply unfold before the eyes of an objective viewer. This story reflects the viewer as well as the viewed (Charmaz, 1993:4).

In this sense, as a researcher, I had to not only be cautious that my own perspectives did not interfere with the process of data analysis, but also that I was not just selectively including those elements in the data which supported my workings hypotheses and disregarding those which did not. Babbie (1986:254) insists that these dangers can be avoided through sensitivity, awareness and introspection. According to Babbie, to fully understand what we observe, it is crucial that we examine our own thoughts and feelings as well as place ourselves in the position

of those we are studying and take the role of "the other". As Babbie notes, these methods can protect against the many pitfalls of inquiry: "merely by being aware of the problem, you may be able to avoid it."

CHAPTER III:
EXPOSING THE "ATYPICAL":
THE EXPERIENCE OF SURVIVORS OF SEXUAL ABUSE BY WOMEN

The goal of this analysis is twofold. In the first section of my analysis (chapter III), I intend to demonstrate that the prevalent gender typifications which assume that males are the perpetrators of sexual abuse and females are their victims, reflect only one portion of the complex reality of sexual abuse. Another "atypical" or "deviant" reality, where females are the perpetrators of sexual abuse and both females and males are their victims, not only exists, but also defies conventional gender typifications. I intend to uncover this "atypical" reality by exposing the experiences of individuals who self-identify as survivors of sexual abuse where the perpetrator was reported to have been a woman.

In the second section of my analysis (chapter IV), I illustrate the consequences that gender typifications have on survivors of sexual abuse by women. I show that the survivors I interviewed who came forward to professionals with their experiences of abuse, all claimed that typical perceptions of gender affected how their cases were handled. Moreover, these individuals maintained that they faced negative consequences as a result of how professionals understood and dealt with them.

I. THE COMPLEX REALITY OF THE EXPERIENCE OF SEXUAL ABUSE

The experiential reality of sexual abuse is a complex one. It involves cases of sexual abuse that are both "typical", that is they conform to the prevailing gender typifications, as well as the "atypical" or "deviant" cases which defy gender typifications. Contemporary North American society has tended to focus mainly on those cases that are typical. Females are likely

to be perceived as the victims of sexual abuse, not the aggressors; males are likely to be viewed as perpetrators of sexual abuse, and not as victims; males are assumed to enjoy and profit from all sexual contact with females; and sexual aggression by females is not harmful. However, by focusing solely on the typical and ignoring the atypical or deviant cases, we may not only get a skewed picture of the reality of sexual abuse, but also, we fail to discern the whole, which is crucial to understanding the complexities of sexual abuse. This predicament is exemplified in Figure 1.

**The Complex Reality
of Sexual Abuse**

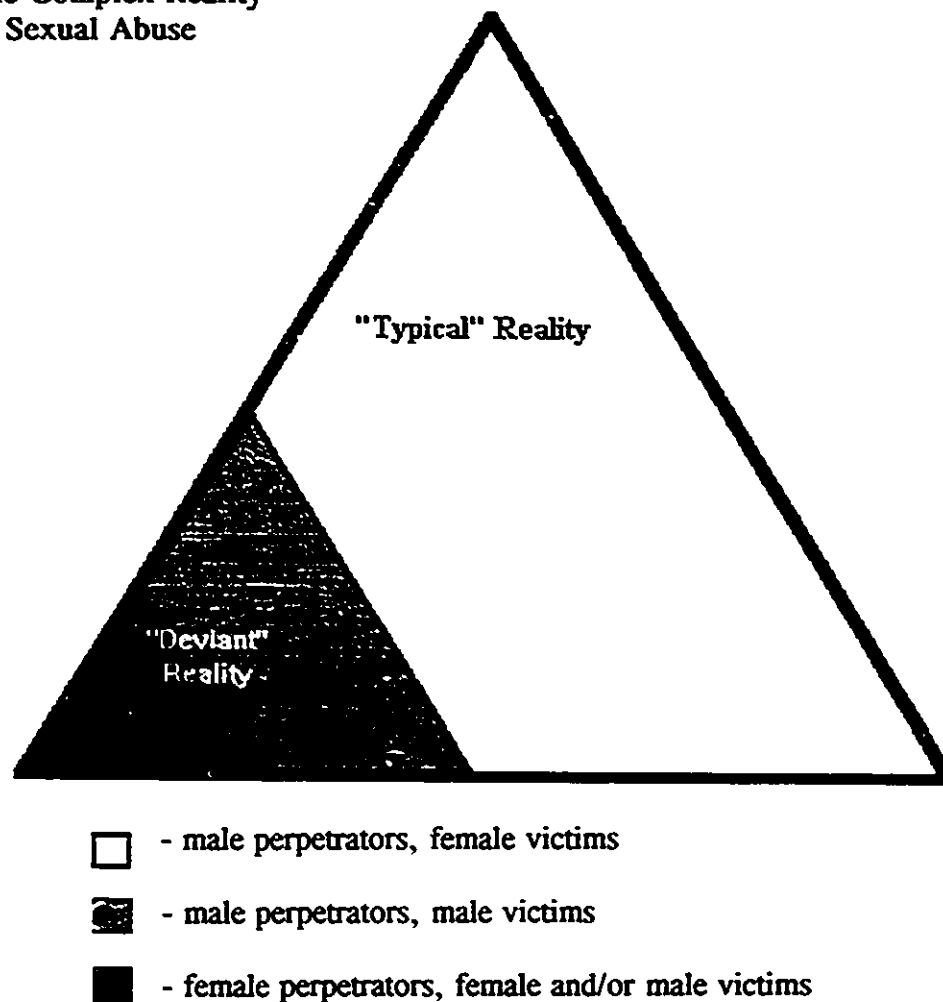


Figure 1.

To demonstrate that gender typifications do not represent the whole of the reality of sexual abuse, I intend to expose the obscured reality of survivors, both female and male, who reported being sexually abused by a female. The analysis of their reported experiences will show that these victims and their experiences defy the four prevalent gender typifications that surround sexual abuse and their experiences express an "atypical" reality.

1.1 THE WAYS IN WHICH FEMALES ARE EXPERIENCED AS SEXUALLY AGGRESSIVE

The pervasive image of the unconditionally kind, warm, nurturing, victimized and unaggressive woman is challenged by the experiences of the eight survivors of sexual abuse. Instead of being in victimized roles, the eight participants claim that the women who allegedly perpetrated the sexual abuse acted as aggressors, taking advantage of their positions of power, through their age, authority or greater physical strength, to manipulate or coerce their victims into compliance. The female perpetrators described here clearly depart from the gender typification of the caring and nurturing woman. In fact, their actions reveal traits that are often associated with men, such as physical, verbal or emotional coercion, manipulation, aggression, and a heightened interest in sexuality.

By outlining the sexual acts that were reported to have been perpetrated against the eight participants, I hope to reveal the extent to which the experiences of these survivors defy the typifications that "women are victims and not aggressors" and that "women are not sexual aggressors." At the same time, I hope to reveal an atypical reality that has received little

exposure in the area of child sexual abuse.

The sexually abusive acts reported to have been committed by females against the eight participants are varied and diverse. They include inappropriate bathing, oral sex, forced intercourse, sexualized talk and overt sexual nuances, the perpetrator exposing her genitals to the victim, penetration with objects, and being forced to sleep with the perpetrator. Survivors may have experienced one or more of these acts.

1.1.1 Inappropriate Bathing

Four of the respondents reported that they had experienced inappropriate bathing. In all four cases, it was either the mother or step-mother who was responsible for inappropriately bathing their child. I use the term "inappropriate" because in each of the four cases, the victims claim that the bathing was done in an odd, manipulative, or ritualistic manner, where the "washing" went far beyond a mother's desire to keep her child clean. All four of the survivors stated that the bathing sessions continued beyond what they deemed as "normal" motherly behaviour. Survivors who were bathed by their mother insisted that the "washing" continued despite the fact that they were of an age where they were capable of washing or bathing themselves.

Two male survivors, ¹⁰Ed, now 38 years old and Andrew, now 29, stated that they were

¹⁰ All of the participant's names have been changed to ensure anonymity

given a daily bath by their mother's from infancy until the age of twelve. They both noted that the bathing sessions continued despite protests that they were capable of washing themselves.

As Andrew recalls:

I can remember there were some fights about "No mom, I can do it myself!" That [happened] twice, the end. That was a fight issue and I wanted to keep peace, so I didn't push it.

Ed said that his mother insisted that the daily bath, where particular attention was focused on washing his penis, was "necessary" because she feared that he would develop "an infection between the foreskin and the head of the penis".

Rachel, who is now 26 years old, also reported experiencing inappropriate and blatantly sexual bathing by her mother. Each night, before bedtime, Rachel's mother "washed" Rachel's genitals. Oddly however, Rachel's mother did not "bathe" her in the bathroom, but in a dimly lit bedroom:

My mother had a ritual of washing my genitalia and bum every night before I went to bed. That was from the crib onwards... However, she was still doing it when I was 7, 8 years old. I don't know when it stopped. At some point it stopped, I don't know whether I initiated it, I just don't remember... It's hard for me to say this but, what she would do is...[my mother would] not bathe me in the bathroom. She would take me into a bedroom in the dark or with just a hallway light on so that there was just dim light in the room, allegedly because I was shy. I would take my pants off lie on my stomach and lift my bum in the air and she would wash me from behind...[s]he would do it more than was required for bathing and also she would do it when I was capable of doing it myself.

As Rachel points out, her mother's actions went far beyond the conventional notion of "bathing."

Sexuality and sensuality were strongly attached to the ritual:

[The bathing] became a sensual thing - the fact that it was in the bedroom, it was prolonged... It was not only cleaning, it was some other kind of ritual. It's such a strong image for me, that image [of her washing me]. It wasn't even my bed or her bed. The image I have is being on my brother's bed...a neutral place.

Al, a 33 year old male survivor of sexual abuse by his step-mother explained how, from the age of five, he was manipulated and later coerced into fondling, washing and bringing his step-mother to orgasm. Once again, the sexual abuse took place under the guise of "washing" as all of the sexual acts and coercion took place while his step-mother was in the bath. Throughout the sexual abusive episodes, which continued until he was fourteen, Al said he was threatened by his step-mother to remain silent and not to disclose the sexual abuse:

At the age of 5, she was in the bathtub, and she called me into the bathroom...and she was drunk...she was drinking, that was her pastime. She wanted me to wash her body. She had me wash her breasts, and her clitoris and vagina. The odd thing was that she had me wash [her] and she was [having an orgasm] and I thought she was going through a lot of pain. I didn't know what it was. But then, when she was relaxed, she told me to keep it between the two of us, and it was no one else's business what went on. I never did understand any of that, I just thought I was washing a woman and not doing any harm...This went on for so many years, constantly washing her...It seemed like every single night I was constantly washing my step-mother in the bath, it was sick...I can't remember any other places that she touched me...like in another room. It was just in the bathroom, always in the bathroom. She had this sort of act that she [put on] that she had a pain in her chest... and I don't know if [that] was [meant to explain] her climax. I mean afterwards she [said she] would feel okay and it would end there, for the time being.

These cases demonstrate that children's experience of sexual abuse by women may be hidden under the guise of "bathing". However, because of the sometimes elusive nature of the abuse, some survivors did not, at the time, define the episodes as "sexual abuse" per se. As Rachel explained:

I didn't have the experience at the time it was happening of thinking "this is sexual abuse". I didn't have that. I had this generalized feeling that my mom is weird and I would openly tell people that: my friends, people at school. It's only now as an adult and as a teenager that I reflected back and saw that certain things were unacceptable, and by my standards, categorized as sexual abuse.

One could argue that by "hiding" the sexual abuse through the guise of bathing, which is "typical" gender behaviour for women, the female perpetrators could easily preempt the imputation of abuse, by those in the outside world and even by those who might be considered to be their victims.

1.1.2 Oral Sex

Two of the participants reported that they were forced to perform oral sex on their female sexual abusers. David, a 26 year old survivor, stated the he was sexually abused from age three to age six by his female babysitter who insisted that he tie her up and perform oral sex on her. He recalls:

A lot of times, she forced me to perform oral sex on her and I really had to force myself to do it...I have this memory of me trying to stop and her insisting that I keep on doing it. Sometimes she would want me to suck on her breasts and I wanted to stop...I don't like this!! She just insisted that I keep doing it. [As an adult] I've always had a problem with oral sex.

Jennifer, who is now 31 years old, reported being sexually abused by two different sets of women. The first set occurred when Jennifer was three years old. She says that her father sold her as a prostitute to a variety of men, and several couples. In her words, she was simply being

"used" as a "receptacle". Jennifer stated that several women were involved in the sexual abuse.

One particular woman who made her perform oral sex remains vivid in her mind:

She was wild...I remember her putting my head in her crotch...she kept pulling my hair, I couldn't breathe and all I could smell was her... and somebody had me from behind. It was awful...

Because her own father was sexually abusing her, Jennifer reported that she was taken from her home and sent to live in a foster home. It was here after only a week where the second set of female sexual abuse took place. Jennifer stated that two female teenagers who lived in the foster home coaxed her into performing oral sex on them. Jennifer explained that the main difference between her sexual activities with the couples and with the teenagers in the foster home was the lack of violence in the latter case:

The difference between these girls and what was happening before was that there wasn't a lot of violence. I mean [the teenagers] coaxed me into [the oral sex] as opposed to me just doing it. Yeah, they're getting off on it, I'm going down, I'm doing what I gotta do...I [was doing] what I was taught.

1.1.3 Forced Intercourse

Anne, a 23 year old survivor, reported that she was forced by her female babysitter to have intercourse with her younger brother. At the time of the incident, Anne was ten and her brother was seven. Interestingly enough, although Anne self-identifies as a victim of sibling incest, Anne stated that she was raped by the female perpetrator. The complexity of the situation is accurately expressed by Anne:

[The perpetrator] forced me and [my brother] to perform sexual acts with each other. The incest stigmata and trauma was there in the extreme - the guilt, the shame, the confusion. Yet I can derive no psychological benefit from turning to the perpetrator because [my brother] was a victim as well...we were raped by [my female babysitter]... [she] physically [held] me down on top of [my brother] when I expressed my reluctance. My reluctance to be perfectly honest was based on a fear of hurting him. I was physically bigger and taller than [my brother], I really thought I would crush him underneath me. [My brother] was a robust little kid, but he was a tiny little bugger. So there was that fear, and when I expressed that fear, I was held down physically. But mainly her role was as a deceiver to suggest that we do this and it would be a great idea....Everything that I suggested against it - like "Well, mommy and daddy say that only adults do that etc, etc" was countered with an argument. I don't think it was a spur of the moment experiment. She had to have given it some thought. She always had an easy answer. I was a fairly bright kid but I had zero experience. So I was easily fooled...[by] her experience and her knowledge and her being smarter and bigger and in control - [she was] the babysitter.

1.1.4 Sexualized Talk and Overt Sexual Nuances

Ron, a 42 year old survivor, reported the seemingly constant sexual overtones of his mother's words and actions. His mother's odd behaviour and strong sexual nuances led Ron to believe that his mother was constantly trying to seduce him. Ron described as follows his experiences of the blatant attempts his mother made at seducing him:

[At the age of fifteen]...I got a set of barbells and I started lifting weights in my bedroom. I was in my underwear doing this one day and my mother came in. She saw me and she walked up to me with a big grin on her face and started "ooing and aahing" about how muscular I was becoming. She cupped her hands and put them over my nipples and squeezed them and said "oh, you're getting so hard!" and she laughed and walked away.

In another instance, Ron remembered:

I remember one time [mother] came into my bedroom at the cottage in her bathing suit

and she sat down beside me and she started talk about all these men that were attracted to her. I didn't understand what the point of this was, but she kept looking at me in a sort of seductive way and just talking about how men find her really attractive. Anyway, nothing happened, she got up and left, I guess because I wasn't reacting to anything she was saying. This wasn't the first time she'd acted in a seductive way to me...When my parents had moved down to the States and I had gone down [to see them] for 2 months, I was really depressed and homesick. I had tried to talk to her about how I felt. She was in her bedroom lying on her bed fully clothed and I was trying to talk to her about how I felt empty inside and how I was lonely. She lay on the bed with this look in her eyes, she was grinning at me, like if I had just jumped on top of her she would have just loved it. That was the look she had. Her body language was the same. It looked like she wanted to have sex.

In another incident, Ron explained how as a teenager he would secretly masturbate in his room at a summer cottage. One particular time, he realized that his mother was watching him:

I was in my bedroom at the cottage and I took off my bathing suit and I don't know why I decided I needed to masturbate then, but it was a bad habit with me and I did. The set up of this cottage was that there was a small bedroom with a single bed in it, that's where I was staying. In only one spot could you look through an outside window, and see the bed. There was only one spot that you could do that. Right after I climaxed, my head rolled over and I could see my mother standing in her bathing suit at this spot in the window... she was masturbating herself... I felt so ashamed then, and nothing was ever said about it. I don't know if she knew that I had seen her there, but I thought "This is so sick...I'm sick and she's sick and we're all sick." It's still bugs me today that it happened. And we've never talked about it. I could just never figure out what the hell it is what my mother wanted from me...

1.1.5 Exposing Oneself to the Victim

Ron reported that on several occasions his mother exposed her breasts and genitals to him. The first incident happened when Ron was fourteen years old:

When I was 14 my mother once knew I was coming up the stairs and she was getting dressed. The bedroom door was open and she stood there naked from the waist up, let me see her, and only then turned away. She had never done that before and I apologized, which is what I thought I was supposed to do...

However, Ron asserted that the behaviour continued throughout his life:

i remember the odd time I would see [my parents] over the years... I'd come over for dinner and we'd exchange hellos and sit in the living room. [Mother] would always sit directly across from me and she would start playing with the edge of her dress or would start running her hands up and down her legs. Sometimes she would pull her skirt up her thighs or she would just sit there with her legs wide open, directly across from me so that I could see her. This was in front of my father and was blatantly obvious to me, and to him. I remember my father finally said one time, "Close your legs!". Whether this was attention seeking behaviour, or what she was trying to do to me, I don't know. All she did was totally repulse me.

1.1.6 Penetration with Objects

Jennifer, who reported being sexually abused in a foster home by two older females, remembered being violated only one week after having arrived at the home. Jennifer stated that her sexual abusers inserted various objects into her vagina:

[W]hen I moved into the [foster] home... I was easy pickings... [It] started I guess the second week I was there. They would put like brush handles inside me, lipstick...these were the other girls in the foster home.

1.1.7 Being Forced to Sleep with the Perpetrator

Rachel stated that she was forced to sleep in the same bed as her mother until the age of 13, at which point she rebelled and refused to sleep with her any longer:

I felt really weirded out by sleeping with my mother. My mother had me sleep in her bed until I was about 12 or 13 at which I rebelled...that was a big turning point for me. Ever since my father left her and I was outside of sleeping in a crib, I slept with her in her double bed. I basically kept her warm, that was my job - to be her hot water bottle. I just hated it. To this day, I have trouble sleeping and falling asleep... [Mother] was a torturess and sharing her bed with her was the ultimate torture because anything that I did that disturbed her, she would construe as [me] deliberately trying to irritate her. So I could get a smack in the middle of the night out of nowhere just from having moved...It was really difficult because she would press her whole body against me while we were sleeping... I didn't like that. I wanted to have blankets between her and me. So I was always falling off the edge of the bed. It was really yucky.

1.1.8 Physical Abuse

In the cases of two survivors, Al and Rachel, both individuals reported that their sexual abusers also engaged in severe physical abuse. In fact, Al asserted that the physical abuse began before the sexual abuse.

What happened at the beginning was that it started with beatings. Just the littlest things, I guess I ticked this woman off, I don't know what her problem was... she just wanted to take everything from me, she wanted to take my life, my soul, my strength, everything...the constant beatings kept on going when my father went out. She constantly beat me for whatever, if I wanted a lollipop or if I wanted a bit of candy, I was beat for that. Even if I watched TV or something I was beat [sic] for watching TV. I was beat [sic] for sleeping. I couldn't understand what type of world I was in...

Al said that the physical abuse only escalated when he attempted to disclose to his father the physical and sexual abuse that was allegedly being perpetrated by his step-mother:

I even tried to explain to my father a few times before he died that she was hurting me and that she was doing funny things to me. He had had conversations with her and when the conversations ended I was beaten really badly and abused with frying pans, clothes hangers, belts... anything she could get her hands on that can cut you or hurt you... whatever was at her fingertips.

Al stated that he attempted to reveal what was going on with his step-mother to the police. According to Al, the police simply laughed at him and sent him home. Upon learning where Al had gone, Al recalls that his step-mother punished him physically:

[The police] brought me back home and I received a licking like you wouldn't believe. Blood would splatter everywhere. Punches in the nose, she would kick me, she would belt me, she would throw things at me... belts... hangers... she used to tie me to the clothes line too. That was a humiliating situation. I couldn't play with my friends. [My friends] had to sit there, and she let them laugh at me for hours on end till she thought the humiliation was enough.

Al recalled the last time that his step-mother beat him:

At the age of 14 she hit me for the last time. I was out drinking with some friends and I wanted to go to her place and get my stuff. [When I came in] she called me "a good for nothing, cock-sucking son of a bitch"...and I was garbage and I was filth and every name you could possibly think of...she took a pot and broom and she was going to take them to me and she was going to finish me off, that was the thought that was in my mind, she was going to finish me off... Something just gave me the strength... I just took the things out of her hand... And I said "you would love to beat me wouldn't you? but I'm not giving you the satisfaction. You've damaged me enough and this is it, this is where the buck stops. You are not hurting me any more because if you do try to hurt me again, I will kill you and that I'm serious about." I would have killed her I think, it wouldn't have taken 2 seconds.

Like Al, Rachel also reported having experienced severe physical abuse at the hands of her mother:

[M]om used to slap us, pull our hair, drag us on the floor by our hair, slap us on any part of our bodies, pinch us. She used to whip us with tools like our skipping ropes, kitchen implements - wooden spoons. She used to throw things at us, like shoes. She used to take off her shoes and throw them at us across the room. She used to put black pepper in our mouth and hold our mouth shut so that our tongues would get burned. The verbal abuse was just unbelievable....the verbal abuse would be like be "quiet, shut up, you're driving me nuts"... then when we started becoming teenagers, she started getting

into swearing. I'm sure we brought home half the stuff because English was not her first language...She started saying "You're a bitch, you're a slut"...there are so many stories. It's just sick, really sick.

As a result of their experiences, the survivors of sexual abuse by women that I interviewed reported that they felt very strongly that women are just as capable of being aggressors as men. They indicated a strong need to share this message with others. Jennifer, who has two children of her own, stated that she has tried to make sure that her children are aware that both men and women are capable of sexual abuse:

I teach [my children] about sexual abuse and protecting themselves. [I started] when they were just old enough to talk. I got the videos, the "Smart Kid, Safe Kid", the "Comfortable, Uncomfortable"...I did all of it. I did all of it because I wanted to ensure and this may sound kooky but, I believe that everybody has the capability of being molesters, male or female, I don't care. I think it's really important to arm the kids with this knowledge... whether it's male or female. I taught my children that women can do this too. That women aren't safe...We've been socialized to believe that males are the monsters and that women are the weak little victim/follower sort of people. That's a misconception...Women and men have been drawn into different categories as what they're capable of doing and that's crap because they're capable of doing the exact same things...when we segregate people because they're male or because they're female when they cause the same kind of pain and trauma, that's wrong...I think it's really wrong for people to think that the only perpetrators of sexual abuse are males.

Anne stated that, in general, people are afraid to come to terms with the fact that women are capable of being sexual aggressors:

There isn't enough people with enough courage to say that [sexual abuse by women] is an issue. I agree that more men abuse and that when men abuse there is a greater possibility of violence and death. I agree it's a serious issue, but I think that we're robbing our children just as much if we say that if we leave them in a woman's care everything will be fine. That's an issue that I don't find challenged. I hear dip-shit things...I see cases where children [are sent to live with] mommy because "it's best to live with mommy" but mommy is a raving bitch. Dad is crying his eyes out and wants

to give them the love they need...Can a woman rape? Yes, if you give her a psychological advantage through authority and size...I think women face a special danger and a special stressful situation in that they are often the primary caregivers for themselves, for other women, for the elderly, for children. Women are constantly cast in the caregiving role. Often they have conflicting needs, work and so on. That frustration can build and it doesn't have to be sexual. It can be emotional or physical. They're in the position where the temptation to abuse is even more paramount. And many do.

As one of my respondents indicated, people are often comfortable with the notion that women are capable of being sexual aggressors. Anne reported that many of her female friends have tried to look at Anne's abuser as a victim herself, which is reminiscent of the Crown witness' stance in the case of Karla Homolka. According to Anne, her friends have insisted that the perpetrator must have been a victim of abuse herself to have abused Anne in the way that she did. These reactions can be interpreted as attempts to maintain a woman in the gender typification of "victim", something that would rarely be done in the case of male abusers:

With this one friend it came again and again to "Well, how was *she* abused?" "She's part of the patriarchal this, this, this and that and she's being manipulated by men and you have to take into account how *she* was abused." "She's you're sister in strugglehood" or something. A woman who is supposed to be my friend was telling me to empathize with my abuser because she was a woman. That's where I lost all connection with her...[the perpetrator] consciously decided to carry out [the sexual abuse] and I am not going to call her my sister in anything!...[disclosing sexual abuse by a female is] viewed as a betrayal of my sex. "You have to side up with us because you have two XX's [chromosomes]". I don't agree with that...I don't think that's right...I cannot just blindly give an allegiance to my sex because I know now that that's not possible. I find that it's a psychological comfort to cast "them against us", you know, "us versus men", I don't have the luxury of that any more...

The preceding case examples contradict the idea that women are always in the role of "victim" and that they are never in the role of "perpetrator." Despite the subtleties in their

actions and the elusive nature of some of the sexual abuse, it is clear from the reports of my respondents that they experienced women acting as aggressors. Whether it be through physical, emotional or verbal coercion, seduction or manipulation, these female perpetrators were perceived by the respondents as victimizing the children placed in their care.

1.2 HOW MEN EXPERIENCE BEING A VICTIM OF A FEMALE PERPETRATOR

When one envisions a typical male, one does not tend to envision a victimized male. In our society, men are to be strong, self-reliant and presumed to be able to protect themselves from any potential danger. However, the cases of the five male survivors of sexual abuse reveal that such a typification is not absolute. As shown through the case examples in the previous section, all of the male survivors claimed to have experienced and identified themselves as victims in some form or another. The male survivors state that their experience of victimization was sexual, emotional and sometimes physical in nature. Al reported that at the age of five, he was forced to wash his step-mother's genitals in the bathtub and was also physically abused by her; David reported that at the age of three he was forced to tie up and perform oral sex on his female babysitter; Ed and Ron reported being "bathed" by their mothers until they were twelve years old; Ron stated that his mother exposed her genitals to him on several occasions and bombarded him with sexual messages, seduction and flirtation.

Anne, who reported having a close male friend who was sexually assaulted at knifepoint while walking home from university one night, grows incensed over the common notion that men are rarely victimized:

I would say that this man has suffered as much as I did at the hands of my abuser. It is affecting his life and he is in pain. Along with the idea that women don't rape there's the idea the men don't get raped... He was pretty fucking victimized. I don't think you have to discuss gender or gender roles when you got person with a knife and person who wants to live. There's just no issue.

As Al revealed, his experience of victimization was extensive and long-lived:

There's nothing that a psychiatrist can tell anybody or some phenomenal name that they can make up that I haven't been through with this woman [the perpetrator]...I don't know what her problem was or what she had, she just wanted to everything from me. She wanted to take my life, my soul, my strength, everything. It's a terrifying experience. I'm trying to put my life together and I can't. My past is just constantly there...It's just constantly haunting me. Like I'm supposed to be nothing for the rest of my life, and I'm trying to fight it the best way I know how...I could never understand why a person could be so cruel and take an innocent person and turn their life around.

Andrew stated that he felt that being victimized by a family member added to the complexity of the sexual abuse:

Being [sexually abused] within the family is much more difficult because of the trust and betrayal issues, and the caretaking issues. The family is supposed to be a safe place for children to grow up as best as they can. Therefore something like this happens to shatter that, and the child has no safe place.

For all of these male survivors, simply being of the male gender did not protect them from experiencing and identifying themselves as victims of sexual aggression by a female.

Although all of the male survivors maintained that they were victimized by women, they felt that, because of the strong pressure for men to exert the masculine traits of power and control, it was not easy to acknowledge that they were victims. For men to identify themselves

as victims throws into question the very essence of their masculinity. David conveyed his thoughts on this issue:

Men don't like to be victims or to be seen as victims. Society kind of says that it's bad enough to be a victim but if you are a man [and have been victimized], you're a lesser man...

Moreover, for these men to accept that they had been victimized by women, typically the "nicer and weaker" gender, was even more trying. As David commented:

If you are a man who has been a victim and on top of it all, victimized by a woman, a "weaker" gender, what kind of man are you? It's bad enough that you're a male victim, but being victimized by the "weaker" sex makes you a much "lesser" man...that was the distorted reasoning in my mind. I realized I felt this way about a month ago.

Andrew concurred with David in regards to his perception of male victimization:

The stereotypes - man is supposed to be in control, woman is supposed to be gentle...the fairer sex and they are supposed to be weaker...[he] seduces [her]. To have had something done to you by a woman...it goes against that image... so when the role is reversed it becomes I am less than a man because I wouldn't take control of the situation and stop it.

The idea that they were unable to protect themselves from the sexual abuse was very disconcerting for the male survivors. Whereas none of the women were angry at themselves for not protecting themselves from victimization, this was a prominent issue for the men:

Sometimes [I] would blame myself for not having said "No", "Fuck you" or stopping it and just rebelling...you know I said "No" sometimes but I never really insisted...(David)

I guess I could have prevented it somehow or another. Maybe I could have ran [sic] away, for good and stayed away (Al).

I think a lot of the guilt is on myself. There was a lock on the door. [So you're saying that you could have prevented your mother from coming in?] Yeah, definitely (Andrew).

Interestingly enough, Jennifer, in her own way, also reported to have relied on the gender typification that men as a gender are not likely to be sexually abused. Jennifer stated that she has been diagnosed with Dissociative Identity Disorder by her psychiatrist. This disorder is said to be a coping mechanism for individuals who have undergone severe childhood trauma. In order to cope with the trauma, the individual creates different "personalities" or "alters" to help alleviate the pain and to manage the stress. Jennifer stated that in her youth, because of all of the trauma brought on by the sexual abuse, she strategically created a male alter. For her, the male alter not only acted as a protector, but also was her embodiment of the idea that because men do not get sexually victimized, she believed that she herself would be safe from any further victimization:

I have male alters, one in particular, and I've always thought this one male alter was created because boys don't get sexually abused... I really don't know enough about this area to even speculate on a hypothetical psychological level, but I often wonder...because [the male alter] was created around that time when I was going through the abuse by the girls in the [foster] house.

In this sense, both male and female survivors, not unlike any other members of society who have been initiated into the world of typifications, often internalize the gender typification that men are aggressors and not victims. Because their experiences countered such gender

typifications, male survivors often saw themselves as somehow aberrant or deviant and would prefer not to disclose their experiences of sexual abuse by a woman:

I'm still ashamed of my experience...I would definitely be embarrassed to say that I was abused by a woman (David).

The men in this study reveal a different reality than is portrayed by common gender typifications. Being male did not shield these individuals from victimization. However, dealing with the notion that their experiences defied the standard gender typification was not easy for some male survivors. In some cases, there was a feeling that they should have protected themselves and taken control of the situation as is dictated by the very essence of their gender. The issue of being male and being victimized was only further complicated by the reality that they were sexually abused by a female, the typically weaker and more gentle sex.

1.3 THE DISAVOWAL THAT COERCED SEXUAL CONTACT WITH A FEMALE IS ENJOYABLE

The common typification that men enjoy all sexual contact with a woman regardless of the circumstances is challenged by the experiences of the male survivors in this study. In all of the cases of the male survivors, the overall reaction to the sexual contact was one of disgust, revulsion, anger, shame and guilt. Although some victims may have experienced some physical pleasure from the sexual contact, it did in no way alter the overall feeling of anger and betrayal:

It's disgusting when I think about [the sexual abuse], enough to make you sick. The filth factor...it seemed like every single night I was constantly washing my mother in the bath, it was sick...(Al).

...my mother's behaviour toward me would always make me angry...my mother would often try to be affectionate with me by putting her arm around me and I would just cringe whenever she would do that...All she did was totally repulse me (Ron).

What I crave more than anything is to be touched, **but not from her!** (mother). My stomach just tightens thinking about her right now (Andrew).

...if I were to see a woman do that to a boy, I think I would just want to kill her...I remember last November wanting to kill [the perpetrator]...If she were in [city] I would have gone to see her...I don't know what I would have said. I would have wanted to kill her, not kill her but say "You fucking bitch!" (David).

What I want to do and this satisfies me to this day and it scares me half to death, is slice [the perpetrator's] throat and cut her tongue out, cut her eyes out and stab her till there is no life left in her. That is the frightening part (Al).

At times, I feel like a sick monster because of the anger and bitterness that I feel (Ron).

Although the typifications and messages that are portrayed by the media often depict young boys as happy, proud and "ever-ready" for sexual contact with an older female, the men in my study do not support this picture. None of the male survivors reported feeling the least bit proud or happy as a result of their experience. Instead, feeling ashamed of their experience was far more common:

I'm still ashamed of my experience...(David).

I was ashamed [of the sexual abuse]...I thought "This is so sick. I'm sick, [my mother's] sick, and we're all sick." It still bugs me today that it happened. And we've never talked about it. I could never figure out what the hell it is my mother wanted from me (Ron).

Unlike the image of the happy young boy enjoying the sexual attention of an older woman, Al reported that being "happy" meant to be free from his step-mother and the sexual abuse that he experienced as inflicted on him:

I want to be happy, I want to be set free from all this evil that has been put upon me. The filth, it's constantly at my brain and I feel sometimes that my brain is deteriorating slowly because of all the thoughts and disgust that I've been through...

In this same vein, none of the male survivors perceived the sexual contact between themselves and their female perpetrator as "seduction" or "initiation" to sexuality. However, all of the male survivors were extremely conscious of the prevalence of this gender typification.

As Ron asserts:

There's sort of a general fantasy, I guess you could say, that some young guys might think that sexual attention from an older woman is a really neat thing. Some cultures initiate boys this way, deliberately, as part of their rite of passage. I've heard stories of fathers taking their sons to a prostitute.

The pervasive idea that sexual relations between an older woman and a boy is "seduction" and is rarely viewed as abusive, was also commented on by survivors. Instead of being depicted as a victim, David believes that the boy will be seen as having been seduced:

I think what happens is that when people think of boys being molested, they think of this big, violent, sexual rape. So they feel more for the victim. But if it was a woman, the abuser was a woman, women are gentle. So what happened was gentle and soft and he wasn't really victimized, it was more...he was just shown a good time or he was seduced...She's a woman, he's a boy, he's just finding out what women are all about... it wasn't violent, so it was okay (David).

Most of the male survivors did not dare to disclose their sexual abuse experiences, especially to other men, fearing that their experiences would be construed as "seduction", or that "they must have enjoyed" the sexual contact with the older women. David explains how some men might interpret his own situation:

I think that the big thing with a woman abusing a [boy] is that a lot of other men will dismiss it and say "Well, you just started [having sex] young." Men in our society are always supposed to be wanting sex and if you got it when you were three, well, lucky you!. [I]f you tell some guys [that you've been abused by a woman] they'll say "Oh, well, I guess you enjoyed yourself" (David).

Although male survivors are aware of how widespread these gender typifications are, this awareness does not shield them being hurt or disappointed when their own experiences are likely to be interpreted as "seduction" or "initiation" to sexuality and not sexual abuse:

See, sometimes [when men assume you enjoyed the sexual contact] it doesn't hurt...you just come to expect it and it doesn't get to you...Sometimes I'm disappointed and feel like saying "Well, that's not what it was, you know" (David).

Seeing that I am a man and I know that I would have to be stronger... emotionally and just take it, and enjoy it, or laugh it off...seeing that I'm a man. That's the tough part about it. I never enjoyed it (Al).

In some cases, however, the gender typifications are so strong and the social pressure to conform to these typifications are so powerful, that some survivors ended up internalizing them and sometimes, renegotiating them altogether. To avoid social ridicule and to elude feelings of being aberrant or deviant, David reported that he consciously tried to redefine his own experience to conform to the gender typification that his experience was not abusive, but an initiation to

sexuality:

Well, I know that I've told myself sometimes, "Well, you know, [the perpetrator] was a woman, and just look at it as having started [sexual activity] early...that you had an early experience" (David).

David asserts that this renegotiation practice is quite common among men or boys who have been sexually abused by women:

I guess when you're trying to rationalize, minimize or deny, or just trying to make yourself feel better, these excuses are good and I think it's easier to do that if you're aggressor was a woman.... The idea that if it was a woman, "You must have enjoyed it", you're a boy and "boys always want sex"... victims use those excuses and say "Oh, it was no big deal."

David also noted that there were other moments in his life where he renegotiated his sexual experiences with women in much the same way, and ultimately felt revictimized by the experience. David explained how his memories of being sexually abused came back to him during his first sexual experience as an adult. He reported that he did not want to have sex with the woman he was with, but convinced himself that "he should want to" simply because he was male, and that any male in his situation would be proud to have sex with an interested female. David said that he reluctantly had sex with the woman and that the experience unleashed a flood of memories of the sexual abuse and made him feel that he was being revictimized:

I guess everything came back when I had my first sexual experience and everything kind of really hit me. I was shocked, I was dazed...I couldn't understand what was going on and I couldn't stop crying...I felt dirty and ashamed and I didn't really know what hit me... it was the first time I had slept with a woman. I didn't want to. She didn't force me but she insisted and I didn't want to. I said "No" like three or four times and after that...I thought "I'm a guy, I should want this. Not should I want to, but I should want this... [Why should you want this?]....well you know..like I know it's wrong, I know

now, I should have told her if I didn't want to do it. But I told myself well, you know, any guy would want this...there's this woman who wants to sleep with you and I guess every teenager's dream is to do this, and here I am ...so I kind of told myself "just do it" and I forced myself to do it and it wasn't a very good experience at all...Another effect of the abuse is not being able to say no to sex. By not saying no in intimate relations there is the risk of being revictimized. I am learning how to say no.

The widespread typification that males enjoy all sexual contact with females, even casual touching or flirting, is contradicted by the views and perspectives of the male survivors in this study. Instead of enjoying the sexual contact or feeling that it was an initiation to sexuality or seduction, all of the male survivors expressed disgust, anger, shame in regards to their experience. What is clear, however, is that survivors themselves are not immune from the pressure to conform to gender typifications. In some instances, survivors reported that they consciously reconstructed the sexual abuse so that it would comply to the standard gender typification, thus avoiding social ridicule and self-loathing.

1.4 THE EXPERIENCE OF PSYCHOLOGICAL HARM FOLLOWING COERCED SEXUAL CONTACT WITH A FEMALE

Attached to the prevalent gender typification that women are incapable of being sexual aggressors, is the idea that if a child has sexual contact with a woman, the effects are not harmful, nor enduring. However, all of the survivors interviewed reported that the experience of sexual abuse by a female perpetrator was harmful, painful and debilitating. The list of reported negative effects of the abuse are numerous and diverse. They include suicidal thoughts or attempts, self-injury, substance abuse, sexual dysfunctions, altered relationships with siblings, low self-esteem and body image, self-blame, and a variety of fears. The survivors stated that

all of these effects were directly related to the sexual abuse they experienced during childhood.

As Al reveals:

I'm constantly haunted by [the sexual abuse]. It's not something that just goes away, and I don't know how to put it behind me. That's what I'm trying to do. It's constantly remembering all the beatings, the washing, the sucking...There is not a minute or a day that goes by where I haven't experienced depression, anxiety, fears. These are part of my daily existence...I only want to know what it's like to actually feel free from all of the corruption that took place in my life.

What this section will demonstrate is that according to these survivors, females are capable of causing harm through coercive sexual acts.

1.4.1 Suicidal Thoughts or Attempts

Five survivors, David, Ed, Al, Ron and Jennifer reported that they have struggled with suicidal thoughts and tendencies throughout their adult years. Each of them associate their suicidal tendencies to the sexual abuse they endured as children. Although David, Jennifer and Ron assert that they have seriously contemplated suicide, they have not acted on these thoughts. However, Al reported making three attempts on his life and Ed, to prevent himself from attempting suicide, reported engaging in self-injury.

David stated that he has cyclical thoughts of suicide. He noted that the suicidal thoughts have come at periods in his life where he was been forced to acknowledge the sexual abuse by his female babysitter. According to David, pervasive thoughts of suicide initially surfaced after his first sexual experience. This experience unleashed a flood of memories of the sexual abuse

and provoked the suicidal thoughts.

Everything came back [to me] when I had my first sexual experience and everything kind of really hit me...I felt dirty and ashamed and I didn't really know what hit me...it was the first time I had slept with a woman...[after that] I was really down, I felt really bad about myself and I would spend my weekends in bed. You know I'd get up to eat and then go back to bed... I was thinking about suicide a lot...The whole month of November I would wake up with anxiety attacks, I would be shaking in bed, I would be angry, feeling awful, I would have nightmares and flashbacks [of the sexual abuse]. I was suicidal, I really thought of killing myself...It was hard, really rough.

Ron, who said that he has been diagnosed as clinically depressed, reported that he has contemplated suicide on several occasions. Since he has obtained regular counselling and therapy, he claims that these thoughts have partially subsided:

I got so hopelessly depressed that I was thinking about suicide all the time. When I started thinking about it everyday I realized that I had to get some help or I was going to do it.

Jennifer reports having suicidal thoughts for three years as a result of her past:

For 3 years in that bleakness and that blackness of when I was going insane... Everyday I would cry that I woke up. I was suicidal to the max. I was 27. For 3 years I was really suicidal. I didn't want to live, I didn't want to have to deal with any of [the sexual abuse] and if I focused on any one thing, I went absolutely loony tunes. If I focused on any one memory [of the sexual abuse] too long, I would live it. I would go into PTSD [post traumatic stress disorder] mode and actually live it. I'd actually experience it, actually feeling physical pain.

Jennifer revealed to me that she had her suicide carefully planned:

I had had enough, I couldn't go on any more and I was planning on "leaving" and I let my mom know, and my best friend know, and my doctor knew and everybody knew that

I was planning on "leaving" and I was never coming back, if you get my drift - it was the permanent thing. I had it all planned out and it was going to work... I knew a little lake and I was going to take a whole bunch of my medication, get really sleepy and go for a little swim. And it would've worked. I wouldn't have felt the burning of the lungs as the water went into them. I would have been asleep basically. And even if I wanted to fight I would have been too tired to do anything about it. I knew exactly what I was doing. I didn't want to hurt anybody....Then, I felt like I was doing [my children] more of a favour than anything else. I felt like I couldn't do anything, that I was so powerless...The knowledge that [the sexual abuse] didn't just happen once or twice, it was like I had a sign on my head that said *"Please Molest This Child"*.

Unlike David, Ron and Jennifer, who reported that they did not make any physical attempts on their lives, Al stated that he attempted suicide three times in his life. At age 14, he took an overdose of medication and alcohol, at age 16 he attempted to slit his wrists and at 24, he jumped off the roof of a highrise. Miraculously, he survived all three attempts.

I've debated suicide 3 times...at the age of 14 and 16 and 24. I really wanted to kill myself, I thought my life was garbage...I saw all of my step-mother's pills and some alcohol, and I didn't know what [the pills] were, they were for her heart or something, or panic. I just took them all and just fell asleep. [Later] I was sick, sicker than a dog, that's all I was. I thought it would do the job and I was nothing but sick... It didn't work and I was still alive, and something just told me not to try it again, this little tiny voice inside your mind, you know, "Leave it alone, don't go near it". I just always thought it was my dad. "Play safe, don't be stupid,"...at the age of 16, I lost a lot of people in my life, people that I thought were important to me. I just said to myself, I'm not going to have anyone else in my life, that's it, it's over. So I picked up a knife, something sharp and just put it through [my wrist]...At the age of 24 I [felt] I was no good, I would amount to nothing, I would end up in prison, I'll be garbage...you're just a piece of scum, you're a no-good for nothing rotten Native, you don't belong in this world, you should be dead...

Self-injurious behaviour, whether it be in the form of slashing, cutting, burning or more passive means such as self-induced starvation, has been documented as a coping mechanism for

survivors of sexual abuse (Elliott, 1994; Heney, 1990). Ed was the only survivor to report engaging in self-injurious behaviour. Ed stated that he has long engaged in self-injury by burning himself with candles and abrading his skin with sandpaper. Not uncommon for survivors of sexual abuse, Ed reported that he would also injure his genitals:

I've only actually cut myself a couple of times. Sandpaper is much more effective. [It's] messier, [there is a] higher risk of infection, but it doesn't leave scars. [I'd self-injure] mostly the arms, but I'd be doing ridiculous stuff to the genitals...[like] genital constriction...

Ed explains that for him, self-injury is a way of punishing himself for being "unclean" and a way of refraining from acting on his suicidal thoughts. It is also a way of gaining and asserting control:

I try to avoid suicide...A lot of it is like you're toying with suffering and pain and death, because it's all under control. It's all under control and you get to draw the line...mostly it's a way to stop the emotions, to stop self-pity because self-pity leads to suicide. To punish the self, the body for being unclean. [Self-injury] punishes myself for being monstrous...

Ed stated that although he has not engaged in self-injury in several months, he is continually acting in ways that are self-injurious:

I haven't been doing any self-injury for four months. But, like, I say [to myself], "Stop doing that" and then I don't feed myself. I injure the body somehow.

1.4.2 Substance Abuse

Five out of the eight participants reported that they have, or have had, a serious problem with drugs or alcohol. For all of the five individuals, the abuse of substances was reported to have begun before the age of thirteen. The survivors reported that the alcohol and the drugs were efficient ways to silence their rage and numb the pain that came from being sexually abused:

I had a buffer and that was the drugs and the alcohol in my earlier life. That was how I kept all the rage in...Alcohol and drugs became my solution for a lot the abuse. I started drinking on a daily basis by the time I was 10...[At] 10, I used to keep tupperware containers full of Five Star whisky. I used to take it off my parents when they would pass out. The warmth didn't make it hurt so much and I actually relaxed and enjoyed it....I [became a] heroine addict by the time I was seventeen (Jennifer).

I went into drugs by the age of 12, drinking by the age of 12 because I was so afraid to face people. With all the drugs and the alcohol, I was so numb that nothing bothered me...I buried [the sexual abuse] with booze and drugs...(Al).

I discovered drugs right away and basically became an addict. I tried alcohol several times and it always made me sick no matter how much I drank and I didn't really like it. But as soon as I smoked hashish, I fell in love with it. It was made for me - it made me happy...I did acid, I tried mescaline, I tried mushrooms, I tried opium, anything that would stimulate my imagination and calm me down....I lived like a gypsy. I moved from drug house to drug house...I just escaped in the drugs for years (Ron).

Rachel noted that her decision to try alcohol was carefully planned and very strategic. At the age of twelve she imagined that alcohol was something that could help her through difficult times:

I used alcohol quite heavily...I started when I was 12 or 13...It was a cerebral decision for me... I went [into the liquor cabinet] and decided that maybe this could help me. I had a little shot of scotch and hated it, but just taught myself to drink it and went through this training process...[I tried] smoking dope, cocaine, acid, and didn't like it, but I loved drinking alcohol. That was very scary a couple of years ago. For me partying was something that you do a lot and that makes you feel happy... I led a very dangerous lifestyle for a few years (Rachel).

1.4.3 Sexual Dysfunctions

Like the majority of survivors of sexual abuse, all of the participants reported that they are currently experiencing or have experienced some form of sexual dysfunction as a result of the sexual abuse. The main problems noted include fear of physical intimacy, feeling dirty or ashamed during sex, and experiencing flashbacks of the sexual abuse during sex. For the male survivors, compulsive masturbation, addiction to pornography, and impotency were frequent problems mentioned. I will elaborate on each of these problems.

Fear of Physical Intimacy

Four out of five of the male survivors, and two out of three of the female survivors reported a fear of physical intimacy. Being touched in a sensual or sexual way was often perceived as threatening, highly anxiety-provoking and would often remind the individual of the vulnerability they experienced during the sexual abuse. David stated that his intimate relationships with women are positive and enjoyable, as long as the relationship does not become sexual. Once the relationship becomes sexual, he reports feeling threatened and the relationship

deteriorates:

[I like] intimacy as long as it's not physical...I went out with [girlfriend] and it was great. Then it got sexual and it started to go downhill. I started to have anxiety attacks and I started to resent her sexuality and then I started to resent women [in general] for being sexual...I [am] paranoid about women "getting at me"...

Ed revealed that the fear of physical intimacy became so great that he consciously eliminated sexual contact from his life altogether:

I'm 38 years old and I am a virgin...For a long time tactile contact would panic me. Intellectually, I would know that this is not an attack. Emotionally, I perceived it as an attack. I didn't get women touching me until I was 22.

Ron also reported fearing physical intimacy with women:

At 28, I was still a virgin. I did date some women, but whenever it got too intimate, I got uncomfortable and I just let the relationship go.

Feeling Dirty or Ashamed During Sex

The majority of survivors reported that sex was not something they considered pleasurable or enjoyable. Instead, they claimed that sexual activity often brought on feelings of shame and feelings of being unclean. Survivors indicated that these feelings were a direct result of being sexually abused. Because of these pervasive thoughts, sexual contact is often difficult and produces much anxiety:

As far as making love and stuff, it's really hard. I can't make love all the time, because I feel dirty...But there was a point to where [my wife] wanted a lot of making love and sex, and I couldn't do it...I felt dirty and really disgusted. [After sex] I'd go and take

a bath and would scrub down my skin...(Al)

I'm ashamed of my sexuality. I'm ashamed of being sexual, still. Even though my head knows everything, I've worked it through. I love sex and I'm a completely sensual person. Still, when it comes right down to the brass, I feel ashamed when I'm in the moment of being pleased, and it pisses me off. I know that that's not from *me*. That was *inflicted on me* (Rachel).

[Sex] never really felt good. And I always felt, you know, what's the big deal about sex? I always felt terrible afterwards, you know tight, withdrawn (David).

However, Jennifer reported that sexuality has always involved a complex and sometimes contradictory set of emotions. She stated that sometimes she would enjoy sex and would engage in it compulsively. At other moments, she would avoid it like the plague:

I've gone to sex addiction where it's like "all the time, all the time, all the time", because it's the only way I can get out of myself. And then I've gone the other way where it's like "Touch me and die!" That goes with this territory.

Flashbacks

Another difficulty surrounding the issue of sexuality is what many survivors refer to as "flashbacks" or distressing memories of being sexually abused while being intimate with their partners. Four individuals reported experiencing flashbacks during sexual contact. Andrew explains:

[When I have sex], my head is not there...half way through, [I] have flashbacks...of some pain out of childhood that comes back and it doesn't have to be some of the sexual stuff, it can be some of the other issues as well (Andrew).

However, for other survivors, the flashbacks were specifically related to the perpetrators of the sexual abuse. Both Al and Anne reported that their flashbacks involve distressing memories of their perpetrators:

Sex is sometimes very difficult, sometimes very painful. We have to stop and I can't go through with it. [My boyfriend] is sort of shaped like [the perpetrator] and that's kind of scary. I have flashbacks [of the sexual abuse] a lot, and I have to sort of stay in touch (Anne).

When I do [have sex with my wife], all I see is bad memories, constantly,...my step mother, [she's] constantly right there in my mind and it's not my wife that I'm making love to it's [this person] that [has] hurt me and the suffering that I've done. It's a constant ongoing battle...(Al)

Compulsive Masturbation and Pornography Addiction

The male survivors reported sexual problems that were not common for the female survivors. Jennifer was the only female to report an addiction to sex. However, four out of five of the male survivors reported engaging in compulsive masturbation, which they perceived as problematic and as a form of sex addiction. In two cases, the compulsive masturbation was said to be accompanied by the compulsive consumption of pornography.

Ron stated that compulsive masturbation and the consumption of pornography was used like a drug to compensate for solitude, loneliness and his fear of intimacy with women. There was much shame and guilt attached to this behaviour:

I would always masturbate compulsively and use it like a drug. I'd always feel ashamed afterwards...I'm also addicted to pornography...for me it's an escape to a fantasy and it's

safe. There's no intimacy involved there, it's totally one sided and yes, I am in control of the situation...I've been lonely and single too long and indulging in masturbation and pornography for too long. And to me that's just sick...

Ed also considers himself to be addicted to pornography:

I'm like a hell of a lot of survivors. I am a sex addict, only in my case it ends up being pornography...So even though in a sense I'm a sexual anorexic [as a result of being a virgin], in another sense I'm as much a sex addict as most survivors are.

David said that in his case, compulsive masturbation was not used for sexual purposes, but was a way to gain control and command over women, who had sexually abused him:

My addiction...I'm not embarrassed to say it any more, is masturbation. Compulsive masturbation. I didn't see anything wrong with masturbation, but I wasn't masturbating for sexual reasons...I didn't associate [masturbation] with sex. The [sexual] fantasies [during masturbation] were an angry way of gaining control. Some of them were taking revenge on women.

Impotency

Impotency was reported as problematic by two male survivors. Both Andrew and Ron relate their problems with impotency to the sexual abuse that they experienced at the hands of their mothers. Andrew associated his impotency to comments that his mother made while she "bathed" him:

I do remember her making a comment about me getting an erection when I was about 8 in the tub. I had an erection and "No, I'm not supposed to do that."...It made me feel like I can't do anything right. According to her, things are happening that are not supposed to happen...I still struggle with that. I'm still struggling with getting erections when it's not appropriate and still struggling with *not* getting them when it is.

In the same vein, Ron reports that his inability to achieve and maintain an erection could be related to the way in which his mother constantly flirted with him and yet never actually physically touched him:

If I got intimate with [women], I would never get an erection...I flirt, but the minute it starts to get intimate, I run. That could be exactly what my mother's behaviour is. She was just always flirting with me.

1.4.4 Altered Relationships with Siblings

One of the interesting experiences reported by my interviewees and one that is not frequently mentioned in literature on victims of sexual abuse, is how, and in what way, sibling relationships have been affected by the presence of sexual abuse in the family. What was interesting to note is that five out of the eight survivors reported that there was a significant and noticeable change in the quality of the relationship between siblings as a result of the sexual abuse. Out of the five cases, four survivors reported that their relationships with their siblings deteriorated. One survivor reported that her sibling relationships improved as a result of the abuse. The reasons for the change in the sibling relationships varied according to each case. However, all the changes were said to be related to the trauma and upset that was brought on by the abuse. Once again, the gender typification that sexual aggression by a female is not harmful is thrown into question.

Sibling Incest

According to Al and Jennifer, their sibling relationships deteriorated and declined as a

result of sibling incest. In both cases, the survivors reported that the children in the family were being sexually abused by an adult. In Al's case his step-mother was the alleged perpetrator, and in Jennifer's case several people, both men and women were reported to be the perpetrators. Both Al and Jennifer stated that the older sibling proceeded to sexually abuse their younger sibling. The impact of the sibling incest was highly traumatic and inevitably affected the sibling relationship.

Al reported that he no longer has any contact with his step-brother. The two have not spoken in years. However, the relationship was not always surrounded by silence. At an early age, Al considered his step-brother a sort of ally, as both boys were being sexually abused by the same female perpetrator. Al believes that the two of them were the family scapegoats:

There was only one other person that was abused like I was and that was [the perpetrator's biological] son... We were the two worst off in the whole family. Just constantly bickering, constantly. We were no good, garbage, we were trashed.

However, Al believes that his relationship with his step-brother altered because his step-brother began to sexually abuse Al. Al was five and his step-brother was nine when the sexual abuse began:

He started it when I was 5. He was 4 years older...He was a victim just like I was, of his Mom - He hated women...you could see it in his eyes. I don't know if that made him go to someone a little more sensitive, a little less intimidating, a little less strong.

Al said that the sexual abuse by his step-brother continued for many years and not

surprisingly, the relationship between the two brothers altered dramatically. Al no longer considered his step-brother an ally. Instead, Al reported that his step-brother became a second source of fear, trauma, and disgust and contributed to his feeling of helplessness:

Time [went] on and [my step-brother] started doing all these crazy things [to me] and he started telling me that they were right and that's the way to go - "Women are no good, don't touch women, only touch me, [don't touch anyone] else unless I say." How am I supposed to know any different? I've got 2 people that are threatening me, and I can't go to either one of them and tell either one of them what they're doing. One is threatening me if I tell anyone if I touch his penis, the other one is threatening me if I tell that I've been washing her and making her come. It's disgusting when I think about it, enough to make you sick.

Like Al and his step-brother, Jennifer stated that she and her brother have not spoken to one another in years. In Jennifer's eyes, the quality of the relationship between her and her brother was transformed because Jennifer herself sexually abused her brother. Jennifer reported that at the time, both she and her brother were being sexually abused by a variety of adults, both men and women. Jennifer said that she initiated the sexual contact with her brother when she was three and it continued sporadically until she was nine. Jennifer says that she deeply regrets the trauma that she caused her brother:

The thing I regret with my brother is that I may have contributed to his damage too. Not realizing of course - I was very young myself. The last time that there was any sexual contact, I was nine.

Jennifer is acutely aware that as a result of her actions, she and her brother are no longer on speaking terms:

My brother and I don't speak... We have no relationship at all and I have to live with the fact that I am part of that reason. I am part of his pain, whether I meant to do anything

or not.

Silence and the Loss of Communication

The loss of communication was a theme that was reported to have pervaded the relationship between David and his brother. According to David, as a result of the sexual abuse, the sibling relationship was characterized by a profound silence and lack of communication.

Today, David says that he and his brother have a fairly good relationship. However, he notes that there is one area of their past that remains a silent and taboo subject. That area of their past is the sexual abuse. David said that the female babysitter who was sexually abusing him, was also sexually abusing his older brother. Although they were mostly abused alone, David reported that at times the brothers were sexually abused together. The change in the relationship has manifested itself in that the two brothers have surrounded themselves in silence. To this day, David reported that the brothers have never discussed the sexual abuse and it remains a taboo subject:

It happened with my brother and I...Sometimes together, sometimes alone. That's something my brother and I never talked about. Even today. I've been wanting to talk to him about it for the last year.

David said that he has wanted to discuss the sexual abuse with his brother for a long time. However, his brother is extremely withdrawn. David's stated that his ultimate fear is that his brother will remain silent and have no reaction at all to David's disclosure:

My older brother is very very very withdrawn and closed off. Well, I think [the sexual abuse] is affecting him...I guess it's one of my goals to eventually talk to him about it. But my brother is very closed off and very scared. I'm just afraid of how he's going to respond and that he's not going to say anything. That's what scares me.

Violence and Aggression

Although Anne believes that her relationship with her brother is now much calmer than it used to be, Anne remembers a time when it was characterized by violence and aggression. Not surprisingly, Anne reported that her relationship with her younger brother altered drastically after they were forced by their female babysitter to engage in sexual intercourse. Before being sexually abused, Anne reports being very close to her brother:

We were tight, him and me. When he was in trouble, I'd defend him. If he got a spanking, I'd cry. He'd have his weird little chatter at the dinner table and I'd translate for him. I knew what he meant. We were like that all the time. I used to read to him, I used to tickle him, we used to play together...

Anne stated that the relationship between her and her brother did not alter immediately. However, when they reached early adolescence, their mutual anger, confusion, and guilt from the sexual abuse was released through violence and aggression against one another:

[the sexual abuse] didn't [affect the relationship] immediately. The abuse became a factor when he was about 12 and I was 14. What it was like was... knives and strangulation and the worst shit you can imagine. We were at each other 24 hours a day. Every time Mom and Dad left, we tried to kill each other, *literally*. Mom and Dad would come home and knew we had been fighting, but they didn't know the extent of it. [My brother] kicked me in the crotch, I kicked him in the balls, he drew blood more than once. Yet when we knew that they were about to come home, we'd cover this all up. That's actually the only time we'd work in unison - is straightening bedrooms, cleaning

up, and handaging each other... He choked to me blackout once. I bounced on his chest...we threatened to kill each other while we slept. We put things in each others drinks. It was awful... And then there was the day of the knives. We chased each other around the house with knives. I had him cornered with a butcher knife and I was going to kill him and Mom and Dad came home. That's *not* normal and I think the violence of that reaction to each other was fuelled by our mutual confusion and guilt and misdirected anger. I really doubt that it would have been that intense without the hidden strata [of the sexual abuse].

Anne reports being extremely frustrating that, because of the sexual abuse, she will never again have that close relationship that she once shared with her brother:

I will never get back what I had with my brother before [the sexual abuse] and I remember it clearly.

Protecting One Another and Becoming a "Community"

Rachel was the only survivor to note a positive change in her relationship with her two siblings as a result of the abuse. Rachel asserts that as a result of the abuse and because of a desire to protect one another, she and her siblings banded together and formed what she referred to as a "community". Rachel stated that banding together was the only way to survive the abusive household:

Survival. To me, it's exactly like you're in a concentration camp and you don't care any more where you each come from, you have to protect each other. You become a community.

Rachel reported that the degree of closeness between the siblings became so intense that today, she is able to fully empathize with the pain felt by her siblings. In fact, she stated that she

actually feels her brother or sister's pain when she recalls the abuse they endured:

I think that one of the things that happened in protecting ourselves from the abuse is that our personalities got overlapped. We really got connected so that when I think about what happened to [my sister] when she was little, I feel it myself. She has the same experience.

Rachel conveys that her intimate partners are not as close to her as are her siblings:

The three of us bonded so closely that even our lovers are not as close to us...and everyone notices...it's a bit strange sometimes...sometimes I'd really like us to have our partners as the first and foremost. Our partners notice too, and it causes tension. I'm not about to change it.

The trauma of sexual abuse affects individuals and families in different and unique ways. Sibling relationships are evidently affected by the sexual abuse as well. In four out of five of the reported cases, the sibling relationships suffered.

1.4.5 Low Self-Esteem and Body Image

According to many of the survivors, their self image was damaged by the sexual abuse. The low self-esteem that many survivors reported, manifested itself in different ways for different survivors. Sometimes it was a generalized feeling of inadequacy and ineptitude:

Today, I'm a monster, I feel like a monster. I don't feel handsome, I don't feel strong, I feel very weak, very tormented, constantly eaten up by the fact of being abused by my step-mother physically, mentally and sexually (AI).

I don't love myself, I hate myself, I can't stand my body, and I try to love others. But

when you have so much contempt for yourself, it's hard to reach out to others and show them that you really do care... and I really do care for other people, I always did (Al).

Most of my life I've felt like a victim...I felt like I was a bad person, I didn't deserved to be loved...When I've been feeling good about myself lately, I do something to feel bad about myself, or to feel depressed. When I start to feel good, I feel as though I'm betraying my past. The logic of the emotion is "If I feel good now, I'm betraying the child that was abused. The only way that I deserve to feel good about myself is if I do something to stop child abuse, even if it is in some small way" (David).

For some survivors, the self-loathing was reported to be localized to the body:

[The sexual abuse] made me...I guess this is the most difficult part... very sensitive, shy, very intimidated and very vulnerable when it came to my own body. There is nothing about my body that I can tell you that actually works well or is physically good. I'm very embarrassed about my privates, I'm very embarrassed about the thought of being put on display. I guess that when you're on display, you have to have strengths. If you weaken, you show the whole the world that you're not strong (Al).

Survivors also reported that by gaining weight and making their bodies bigger, this made them feel safer from potential harm:

...the weight gain made me feel protected...(Rachel)

I gained almost 100 pounds. The bigger I got, the safer I felt (Al).

I've had lots of issues revolving around my appearance. I go through periods where I'm fine, I maintain a healthy weight and I'm fit and I won't let it go. [Then] I just want to lose it all in fat, I don't even want to have a distinguishably female form (Anne).

For others, the body was viewed as "unclean":

For most of my life, I was literally monstrous...unclean...(Ed)

I'm dirty... (David)

A strong self-neglect of the body was also an issue with survivors:

I do not cook at home, nor do I eat healthy. I believe the four basic food groups are McDonald's, Harvey's, Burger King and Pizza Hut. I can also go a day or two where my only source of food energy is Pepsi (Andrew).

I don't feed myself. I injure the body somehow (Ed).

I have been depressed. I don't eat right, I don't sleep right, I don't exercise properly and I smoke too much (Ron).

1.4.6 Self-Blame

A common theme among the survivors was that they reportedly blamed themselves and felt tremendously guilty for the sexual abuse that they experienced. Four survivors in particular, Al, David, Andrew, and Jennifer reported that they continue to believe that they are in some way and to some degree, responsible for the sexual abuse.

When David was asked if he had ever reported the sexual abuse by his female babysitter to a family member, this was his reply:

I guess, in my case what is hard is that I felt as though I was an accomplice, I felt as though I participated, so I'm guilty so if I talk about this, I'll be bad and I'll be punished. So no. I never did, I felt like I was an accomplice and just as guilty if not guiltier...Whenever it would happen, I always thought I was wrong. I felt like I was a bad person, I didn't deserved to be loved. I'm dirty...Sometimes [I] would blame myself

for not having said "No", "Fuck you" or stopping it and just rebelling...you know I said "No" sometimes but I never really insisted...

What was even more distressing to David was that because he enjoyed certain aspects of the sexual contact with his babysitter, this caused him to blame himself to an even greater degree:

If I would not have [physically] enjoyed it and said "No" and enforced it, it would have been easier to look at myself. I enjoyed it so in that respect, it kind of makes me feel like an accomplice... So...yeah in that respect it's a little hard. You feel just as guilty as her, I'm an accomplice...so like what am I complaining about if I enjoyed it?

Like David, Andrew states that he carries much guilt for not preventing his mother from coming into the bathroom to bathe him:

I think a lot of the guilt is on myself. There was a lock on the door. [So you're saying that you could have prevented your mother from coming in?] Yeah, definitely. I can remember there were some fights about "No mom, I can do it myself!" That was twice, the end. And that was a fight issue and I wanted to keep peace so I didn't push it. [Do you blame yourself for not locking the door?] Yeah. Looking back at it with an adult mind though, it is a lot easier to say "Oh, I could have done this, I could have done that." Whereas when you're 8, 10, 12... you know?

Al says that if he had only acted differently, had been more of a "good" child in his step-mother's eyes, he would have been able to prevent the abuse. He says that because he believes that he was not that "good" child, he holds himself responsible for the sexual abuse:

I blame myself...I think it's my fault. Because you say to yourself, things could have been different if I could have just been a little bit politer, or if I could have just been that extra helpful. If I wouldn't have started up that trouble and went to the police. Maybe if I could have just been that better person, I could have stopped it myself. I could have prevented it. I guess I could have prevented it somehow or another. Maybe I could have

run away for good and stayed away. I don't know. I know I end up blaming myself for things. It's pounded in your head and forced upon you and so you start believing that you're not a victim. You're at fault. You're not even a person, you have no rights as a person.

Jennifer also reports that she is in part responsible for the initial sexual abuse that she experienced, as well as the many subsequent revictimizations. She states that her inappropriate reliance on sexuality to gain attention and respect caused her to encourage the sexual abuse:

Oh God yes! [I did blame myself] and to some degree I think I still do. I know that it wasn't necessarily my fault, but I became overly sexual at a very young age. When I went to a group home I was 13. One of their favourite lines was "inappropriate sexuality". I heard it all the time "inappropriate sexuality". It's how I learned how to do things... Of course, that's what people do when they've learned that that's the value of their body. That that's all I have to offer. It's a lot easier than talking your way through things...I never talked about it when I was younger because I thought that it was my fault anyway. I really did. That I had encouraged it...What kills you is the guilt...you feel ashamed and you're always carrying it. I felt like I was always doing something wrong...There is still that element of "you asked for it."

1.4.7 Fears

Debilitating fears is another lingering effect of childhood sexual abuse that survivors reported. According to survivors, these fears had a profound effect on their daily lives. The predominant fears that were mentioned were a fear of women in general and a fear of female sexuality in particular. Also, some revealed that there was a strong fear that as survivors, they would continue the cycle of abuse against other children, particularly those placed in their care.

Fear and Contempt of Women

David says that women as a gender are intimidating and at times threatening. Because

David was sexually abused by a woman, he fears sexuality in all women, and fears being revictimized by them. In his words: "I [am] paranoid about women getting at me." In order to maintain close friendships with women, David explains that he strategically separates a woman's sexuality from the rest of her being because he perceives any manifestation or potential manifestation of sexuality in a woman as a threat:

I have some close female friends and that's because I separate their sexual aspects [from the rest of them]. You know, like, I'm talking to you and you're a woman, but if I'm going to be open or have female friends, what will be easier for me to do is [to think to myself] "She's a person." She's a woman, yes, but I kind of take away [her] sexuality...if I integrate the two it makes it more threatening...

Although David says that he fears women and their sexuality, his experiences of being sexually abused by a woman have initiated strong feelings of contempt and anger toward women. As a result, David says that he has at times felt a desire to retaliate against women, and gain control and power by asserting his own sexuality. This manifests itself by thoughts of wanting to "fuck" all woman, especially women who are strangers, who give off an air of being sexy, or aroused.

I'm going to say some things and don't take it personally...I know in my head they're wrong, but sometimes I feel them. Sometimes I really get angry. When I get at this angry stage, I just hate women (pause)... for being sexual...Because I was abused by a woman, it made me angry with women. I get these feelings where I want to fuck all the women that I can and get the sense that, well, I'm in control now. It's not making love or enjoying the sensual aspect of it. It's more the power-thing and letting the anger out that way...I get in these moods where I say, you know, I'm going to fuck every woman I can. I'll be in charge and I'll be in control this time. That's one thing. I especially get that feeling if a woman looks at me and she has that look of something resembling being turned on or being attracted. I get this feeling, this gut feeling like "oh yeah, well I'm going to FUCK YOU!", you know? That really gets to me. I'm not like that with women I know...it's different with strangers...sometimes the way certain girls look at me it reminds me of the abuse.

Like David, Al reported both fear and contempt for women as a result of being sexually abused by a woman. In general, Al says that not all women can be trusted:

I guess with my...step mother abusing me, I just had this contempt for women, deep down, but I didn't know it was that...I just thought that not all women can be trusted...

As a result of his extreme distrust of women, for a period in his life, Al reported that he made a conscious effort to avoid women and led what he referred to as a "gay life" for several years:

With all the drugs and the alcohol, I was so numb that nothing bothered me, except for women, so I went to gay bars, and started seeing men...I led a gay life between 16 and 24...I don't know if I was looking for a father figure or if I was looking for some security or someone to just say that they loved me...

Al is now married to a woman, and reports that his wife does provide him with the security that he desires. However, to a certain degree, Al's fear of women remains. He stated that he fears that his wife, as indeed any other woman, would abandon him and leave him helpless and vulnerable:

It's sort of a contradiction because I'm married with a woman, and I don't fully trust her...I don't trust my wife, and the most important thing that you have to have is trust...I know that I yearn for a special thing in my life and she gives me that special thing - she gives me my security...but I'm afraid that she is going to leave me too. She's going to leave me stuck somewhere.

Anne was the only female survivor to note having some fear or apprehension of women as a result of being a survivor of a female perpetrator. However, this apprehension came out in ways that were very different from the men. Instead of fearing *other* women, she reported fearing growing up to become a woman herself. As a child, she explained that she longed to be

male. In her eyes, growing up and becoming a woman meant that she would become like her own sexual abuser, and she herself would sexually abuse children:

Probably the first thing that really becomes clear to me when I'm able to look back on the experience, is I did not want to grow to be a woman. I wanted desperately to be a boy. I was sure...that if I tried hard enough, I could change into a boy. I had a strong belief in magic and the power of will and societal roles and I felt that if I dressed like a boy, if I acted like a boy if I played the very rough violent sports with the boys and basically did not concede to womanhood, I wouldn't become a woman. At the time I didn't know what motivated this. I felt that it was just like "oh, I don't want to be a girl because girls are sissies". You know, I don't want to grow up to match this role where you've got these long legs and tits and nobody takes you seriously. I think that now my motivation was that I didn't want, and I see this again and again in literature,...that I did not want to grow up to assume the form of my abuser. Many people believe that you become your abuser.

To ensure that she would not become a woman, at a young age Anne reported that she engaged in very rough, violent sports that were played with other boys. She says that she was convinced that these activities would prevent any feminine attributes from manifesting themselves:

So I played a lot of sports. One of them was tackle soccer...This game involved a lot of dog piling...I repeatedly got slammed to the ground and 15 boys piled on top of me. Everyone fighting for the ball. I was convinced the this was the short road to success and that there would be no way that breasts would thrive in this environment. They'd be beaten back into my body and that was fine.

Later on in her life, to deny and oppose her gender because of the fear attached to being female, Anne says that she would dress and carry herself in a way that would emulate, if not a male form, at least one that was neutral and not feminine. According to Anne, she would be safest to others and to herself, if she was not female:

I've had lots of issues revolving around my appearance. I go through periods where I'm fine, I maintain a healthy weight and I'm fit and I won't let it go. [Then] I just want to lose it all in fat, I don't even want to have a distinguishably female form. I wear bulky clothing, I wear lumber jackets, I dress in men's clothes, I'll do anything to be, if not male, at least neutral. You know, like, don't look at me, I'm not a chick. Someone in [my therapy] group called me "femme" - very affectionately, not meaning anything wrong by it. I got quite incensed. I was very angry, and I demanded that they take it back because that image wasn't acceptable. I would be safest and be safe for other people if I'm not female...Being a woman is a large part of my identity and it's my biggest struggle.

Fear of Abusing Children

Among survivors, there is a strong fear of carrying on the cycle of abuse and sexually abusing other children. Anne explained that her fear of sexually abusing children was so great that at the age of 23 she decided to have a tubal ligation which would prevent her from ever having children. Anne stated that the decision was a difficult one and one that she may grow to regret:

I think the abuse by [the perpetrator] is much more instrumental in my decision to sterilize myself. I had a tubal ligation in September of last year. It's irreversible. I'm 23 and I have no children. Right now, I'm not saying I regret it... But in the future, I may come to regret this decision...The heart of my concerns at the time were I don't ever want to get pregnant and do to my children what [the perpetrator] did to me. Life is an awesome responsibility that males can distance themselves from if they choose to, but a woman can't. That baby grows inside your body. There is an intimate relationship that cannot be denied. I think the original abuse of trust by a woman who was in a caretaking role really has caused me to doubt myself a lot...Overall, I'm happy with it [tubal ligation]. I'm just wondering ten years from now...how will I be evaluating [the perpetrator's] role in that decision?

Anne, who reported that she was also sexually abused by a male, insists that the doubt that she casts upon herself that she will be a good provider for a child, is a result of being abused

by a female. To her, it is the destruction of the "motherly" and nurturing role and a that is far more crippling:

I often think, and I resent it bitterly, that this doubt will always be with me and may possibly deprive me for my lifetime of being able to have children. And it's a doubt and a fear that I do not think would have been felt so strong after the male had abused me. It's the destruction of a safe mothering role which is supposed to be sacrosanct in our society. It is the breakdown of that, that is so much more debilitating.

The fear of sexually abusing children did not rest with Anne alone. Both Jennifer and Al, who have children of their own, also stated that they fear that they will abuse their children:

Sometimes I'm afraid of what I'm capable of doing, I'm afraid of losing control...I know very well that I am capable of creating havoc and hurting other people, the same way I was hurt. I know that I have that capability. I've seen it, I've been violent, I've done things that I'm not particularly proud of...That's my biggest fear now. But as long as I keep aware of everything and I don't let things slide and I don't lie to myself, I don't do things that are morally incorrect and I don't justify them. I don't mean morally according to some religious law, I mean morally according to people. You don't steal, you don't hurt people. You try and be a good person....I've kind of made a pact with myself...that nobody is going to make me do those cruel things to other people. Nobody - I'd rather die first (Jennifer).

I think I still have so much rage...Its frightening to know that I have kids and a wife and I have this much hate inside me, lurking. I'm so afraid that it's going to come out one day and the wrong way...I know that I would kill myself, I would take my own life before I touched a hair on my kids. I would take my own life and that's a definite. I think I'd just walk right out and kill myself, that's it, I wouldn't have to think about that (Al).

The fears of abusing children are not just based on sketchy outlooks or predictions. Both Anne and Jennifer reported that in the past they have sexually abused children:

I did abuse 2 children in my care when I was 11. I somehow had an adult realization that what I was doing was wrong and I thought "This is not going to happen again. This is wrong, this is abuse. Every other child in my care will be safe." This was a decision that I made... Part of my vow to myself was worded along the lines of "I'm not going to this to somebody else what was done to me" (Anne).

I remember the first time I went into my brother's bed. It was before I even went to the foster home. I was that young, I was about 3. I actually remember my bed was on this side and my brothers was on this side...I went over and I think I tried to put his penis inside of me. He started to wake up or I heard my mom at the door or something and I pretended that I was sleeping in bed with him, curled up beside him and then I got up and went back to my own bed. That's what I remember, the first time (Jennifer).

Jennifer also stated that although she has made a pact with herself that she will never abuse a child in her care, she candidly acknowledged that at times, she does have to fight off abusive urges:

If you think that I haven't had to fight off urges you're nuts - because I do. But I also know that I don't want to injure anybody the way I was injured. It's really hard to control and you can't always control the mind. You can't always control what you're thinking or what you're fantasizing about. It's like you have to give you're head a shake and go "No, this isn't right, this is really not healthy." Then I ask myself the important question - why am I thinking these things?, what am I missing?, what am I lacking, what am I feeling like I want? This is not a feasible alternative - what do I want? That's how I sort it out myself, but there are lots of people out there who haven't. I thank God that I have never sexually abused my children. I have never put them in that position, but I've also not spent a lot of time with them either...I took parenting courses because I knew how badly I had been abused and I knew if I didn't do something, I was going to do the same thing, maybe not the same thing, but a harmful thing and I didn't want to do that.

David says that the idea that women do not cause harm is an extremely pervasive gender typification in our society today:

I think a lot of people, a lot of women think that women can't do harm... you know most of the violent crime is done by men and you always hear... "men raping, men doing this and doing that" and it's men who declare war most of the time and [one] rarely hears of crimes committed by women. So it makes it harder to believe that a woman could do this.

However, the experiences of child sexual abuse survivors show that women can and do inflict pain, suffering and induce numerous harmful effects on their victims. The eight survivors I interviewed reported that the trauma of the sexual abuse manifested itself in suicidal thoughts or attempts, substance abuse, sexual dysfunctions, altered relationships with siblings, low self-esteem and body image, self-blame and fears.

Jennifer states that although she is a bright and capable person, because of the effects of the sexual abuse she is unable to accomplish what is required of her in today's society. According to Jennifer, people are unwilling to recognize the impact of child sexual abuse on survivors:

I have a 140 IQ, for fuck sakes. I'm unemployed, I'm on disability [as a result of having Dissociative Identity Disorder from the sexual abuse]. I have 2 children that I don't get to see all the time and I have a lot of good things going for me...Except that my brain is mush as a result of all of the trauma. I still cannot contend with certain situations that are necessary to cope in this society. And then I hear people going, "Well you *look* fine, why don't you go work?" Well, that's really easy for you to say. What happens on a day that I can't come in because I'm too afraid to go out the fucking door? What am I going to say? People don't care, they don't want to hear it.

David notes that the effects of sexual abuse are profound and are not something that can be overcome instantaneously without hard work, and determination:

In regards to the [sexual] abuse, I've come to realize how much it's affected me in ways which are not sexual and ways that I thought would not affect me, just now I'm starting to realize that...Another thing I've come to realize...I would tell myself, "Well, I was sexually abused and I'll deal with this for two months and everything will be fine afterwards." And I would realize how much it's affecting me and how much it'll be hard to change and how much work will have to be done and it's not going to be over in two months. You know, it's not like after two hours everything is perfect, like in the TV shows.

After outlining the numerous negative effects reported by the sexual abuse survivors, it seems clear that the typification that "sexual aggression by women is not harmful" is not absolute. From the case examples in numerous and diverse areas of the lives of survivors, it can be surmised that sexual aggression by a female can be harmful.

By exposing and analyzing the experiences of survivors of sexual abuse by female perpetrators, it can be inferred that the four prevalent gender typifications discussed do not accurately reflect the whole of the reality of sexual abuse. The experiences of these survivors counter gender typifications and reveal an "atypical" or "deviant" reality. By revealing and investigating this reality, we are better able to understand the complex whole of the reality of sexual abuse.

CHAPTER IV:

"YOU WERE SEXUALLY ABUSED BY A *WOMAN*?": THE CONSEQUENCES OF GENDER TYPIFICATIONS

1. THE CONSEQUENCES OF GENDER TYPIFICATIONS ON SURVIVORS

I have highlighted that the four common gender typifications I have discussed do not accurately reflect the entire reality of sexual abuse and have established that, as the survivors have indicated, females are sometimes aggressors, males are sometimes victims, males do not enjoy all sexual contact with females, and sexual aggression by women can be harmful. One final question remains to be addressed. What are the consequences for these individuals whose experiences oppose gender typifications? This question will be answered by analyzing the experiences of survivors of sexual abuse by women who came forward and revealed the sexual abuse to a professional. This investigation will not only provide information on the consequences for survivors, but also the degree to which gender typifications are relied on in our society today. The first part of this analysis will examine the survivors' perceptions of the professional responses in relation to their disclosure of the sexual abuse. The second part will explore the consequences of these responses on the survivors.

1.1 SURVIVORS' PERCEPTIONS OF PROFESSIONAL RESPONSES

By examining sexual abuse survivors' experiences with professionals, such as police officers, child protection agents, psychologists, psychiatrists and social workers, we can examine the extent to which these professionals were perceived to be relying on gender typifications and what impact this had. I would also suggest that by exploring the responses of professionals, we are obtaining a sample of society's view of sexual abuse perpetrated by women. The professional responses may be indicative of the wider societal ideologies in regards to gender

roles and norms, what is considered acceptable gender behaviour, and how individuals react to a reality that is atypical or deviant.

What is important to note is that out of the eight participants, only four individuals - Al, David, Anne and Rachel - stated that they came forward to an official agency to report the sexual abuse or to obtain counselling. As a result, only these cases will be examined in this section. The other four survivors - Andrew, Ron, Ed and Jennifer - said that they remained silent out of fear that others would not believe or accept their stories. As Ron comments:

I never felt close enough to someone or trusted someone enough to tell them, because I was afraid they wouldn't understand or they wouldn't believe me, or they wouldn't accept it...The consequences of coming out with this and talking about a woman who's [sexually abusing], may be that it'll hurt talking about it more than not talking about it, because maybe you won't be believed.

What is unfortunate about Ron's statement is that it may in fact be accurate. As will be demonstrated in this section, two survivors, Al and Rachel, said that they came forward at the time the abuse was still being perpetrated - one to the police and other to a child protection agency, and in both cases, the survivors indicated that they were not believed. Both survivors said that the fact that their perpetrator was a woman, had a strong impact on the professional response to their case.

The other two individuals, Anne and David, said that they disclosed the abuse as adults to psychiatrists and psychologists. They received a variety of reactions, yet all were perceived by them as inappropriate. Anne stated that two doctors responded with discomfort, and shock

to the fact that the perpetrator was female. According to Anne, one doctor ultimately rejected her as a patient because of the gender of her sexual offender. David reported that his psychologist denied his victimization and implied that he should have enjoyed the sexual contact with his female babysitter.

All of the professionals in question were perceived by survivors to have relied heavily on typical perceptions of gender. Their perceived dependence on these typifications reportedly had a significant impact on the way survivors dealt with the sexual abuse.

1.1.1. Perceptions of Responses by Police

Al was the only survivor who said that he had attempted to report the sexual abuse to the police directly. Al said that at the age of five, he wandered the streets of the large city he was living in, to try to find the police department with the belief that the police would be able to help him. He says that he was desperate for the sexual abuse to stop. As Al explains:

I was lost in my own mind...When I was a child and I'd walk for miles and not even know where I was until I would look up somewhere and I'd just ask somebody where the police were, or where a certain street was, and I'd find my way home. I would just go to the police and say "Look, I need some help" and not in those words of course, I was a frightened little guy. I was really tiny, no bigger than 2 and a half, three feet at that age, even less at the age of 5, I was a very tiny person...

Al reported that despite his efforts, the police rejected his cry for help. He says that he was perceived as a young boy trying to get attention and was immediately brought back home.

Al says that although he continued to pay visits to the police in the hopes that one day they would believe him, their response remained unchanged. What Al perceives as inappropriate reactions of the police to his story is something that hurt him immensely. Al says that a feeling of betrayal has remained with him for years:

They laughed...No respect. I was just some kid trying to get attention or looking for some fun. That wasn't the first time I went to the police. I went to them about 3 or 4 times at different ages. I [tried to explain what was going on] on several occasions.

According to Al, when he would return home with the police, his step-mother would change her demeanour completely. In front of the police, she was a caring and nurturing mother - a drastic change from the violent and manipulative woman that he was used to:

Her personality was like she would switch over from night to day. She could be this sophisticated, well-dressed, well-mannered woman. But behind her closed doors, she was a wicked witch. She had her ways of manipulating people... Outside her home it was a little different. She had no control. It was hard for her, but she still managed to keep the police away, the teachers, the guidance counsellors. She managed to trick them all.

Al stated that when the police left, his step-mother would revert back to being abusive. She would punish him with a beating for having attempted to disclose the sexual abuse.

Each time I went to the police, they brought me back home and I received a licking like you wouldn't believe. Blood would splatter everywhere, punches in the nose, she would kick me, she would belt me, she would throw things at me, she would pick up belts and she would pick up hangers, anything she could get her hands on. She used to tie me to the clothes line too. That was a humiliating situation, I couldn't play with my friends, they had to sit there, and she let them laugh at me for hours on end till she thought the humiliation was enough. I'm surprised I'm alive today...

Al says that he believes that the police inaction was likely due to the fact that he was

accusing a woman of sexual abuse. He says that time and time again, all of the compassion and empathy was directed towards her and not him, the victim:

All the help that I tried to get for myself, you could see the sympathy for the "her" and not for me. Most of the people did feel sorry for *her*... *I* was nothing but a monster. She could have made up a story or something like that, saying that "He's a wild and rambunctious kid and that his father just died, and he's just lashing out to hurt me." [The police would say] "Well, that's fine if he comes to us again we'll just send him right back home."

Although it is impossible to ascertain the exact motives of the police for disregarding Al and his persistent cries for help, if one accepts what Al recalls of the police reactions, the police involved were likely relying on traditional stereotypes or what I have been referring to as gender typifications. According to Al, the police were never suspicious that his seemingly kind and well-put-together step-mother was abusing him. Al says that he believes that the fact that she was a woman played a large role in their dismissal of his case:

They see women as gentle, caring - not harmful, abusive and not a strong character. She had a strong character. She could double talk anybody... Because she was a prominent citizen, people thought "Well, it's impossible for her to do something like that... Oh, well she can't really be abusing you... she's too nice of a person."

By depending on the typifications that I have referred to as "women are victims, not aggressors", and that "women don't cause harm", Al asserts that the police officers may have assumed that it was inconceivable that this little boy could be telling the truth. That the police officers did not take his complaint seriously was clearly evidenced to Al by their laughter. Similarly, at the time Al was five years old, the sexual abuse of boys was recognized as a social

problem even less than it is today. The police officers may have also been relying on the typification that "men are aggressors, not victims" and may have found it hard to believe that a boy could be a victim of abuse, especially by his step-mother.

1.1.2 Perceptions of Responses by Child Protection Agencies

At a young age, Rachel reports that she was desperate to leave home and distance herself from her abusive mother and live with her father. Rachel stated that at the age of thirteen she made a call to a child protection agency with the hope that they too would realize that her mother was an unfit parent who was both physically and sexually abusing her. However, according to Rachel, the child care worker who came from the agency failed to properly question her as to why she had made the call and why she wanted to leave home. Instead, Rachel says that the worker proceeded to ask her mother, the alleged perpetrator, all the questions about her behaviour in front of Rachel:

I phoned Children's Aid Society to try and get myself out of that house...[What happened?]. Oh, it was just a farce. Some woman came from Children's Aid Society. This woman came, and I clearly remember sitting in the backyard with this woman, my mother and me, while this woman asked my mother a series of questions about her behaviour. *I don't remember being asked any questions...*

Much like in the case of Al's step-mother, Rachel reported that her mother put on "her best behaviour" to thwart any possible accusations of sexual or physical abuse. Rachel recalls that her mother insisted that the reason Rachel was upset and made the phone call to child protection was because her father was "gay and alcoholic" and calling the Children's Aid was

Rachel's way of "acting out". Rachel stated that her mother was trying to make it look as if her father was the unfit parent. To Rachel, this is the ultimate irony as she surmises that despite being gay or alcoholic, her father would have been the better parent:

My mother has a record player story and I'm sure she played it. My father is an alcoholic and she probably said "My husband is an alcoholic and he's gay and he's a very sick man and the kids are very upset"... I mean the story is such a farce... On the one hand yes, the father is an alcoholic, homosexual... On the other hand, the mother is totally fucking psychotic. He would have been the better parent. It's clear, and it's clear today still, that he would have been the better parent.

According to Rachel, the "performance" that her mother put on was a success. The child care worker readily dismissed Rachel's allegations and closed the case before having even questioned Rachel herself as to her version of the story. Rachel's clear distress on learning that she would not be able to leave her mother's home was completely overlooked by the child care worker and was not investigated further. When asked whether she thought that the child care worker's attitude towards the case had anything to do with the fact that the alleged perpetrator in the case was a woman, Rachel replied:

I'm sure... The interview ended with my mother having put on her best behaviour and having got all dressed up as the "normal mother" and the wonderful garden, and all this crap. The woman decided that I couldn't leave. I was literally trailing behind her saying "Get me out of this fucking place". I was terrified of where I would go. I had no idea where the hell I would go but I knew that I had to get out of there.

Although the motives of the child care worker cannot be verified, Rachel reported that it is likely that the child care worker did not suspect that a seemingly kind, considerate, and well-mannered woman was sexually or physically abusing her children. Once again, the gender

typification that women are prototypical victims and not aggressors may have played a role in the worker's assessment of the case.

1.1.3 Perceptions of Responses by Mental Health Professionals

Unlike Al and Rachel who attempted to seek outside professional help when they were children, Anne and David said that they came forward to reveal their stories as adults, and this time to mental health professionals. Anne reported that in her early twenties she went to two different psychiatrists with the hope that they would be able to help her deal with the traumatic after-effects of being sexually abused by her female babysitter. In the cases of both psychiatrists, Anne stated that she was extremely disappointed by the responses that she received upon divulging that her abuser had been female. According to Anne, both psychiatrists seemed uncomfortable and unwilling to deal with the issues surrounding her case. Anne recalls her experience with the first doctor:

I found a doctor who seemed promising. I went to see him. He had two appointments with me and put me on [anti-depressants]. The classic response to a woman in pain. Put her on drugs, "Oh, she's going to cry." I don't know what they think tears will do, like corrode your face? I don't know what the fear is behind tears...I didn't get very far with him, I found him very reluctant to address the issues and I wondered if part of that was because the abuser was female. I think so.

Disillusioned by that doctor and his difficulty in dealing with the idea that a woman had perpetrated the sexual abuse, Anne said that she began to search for another psychiatrist. She decided that perhaps she should try seeing a woman this time. Anne was recommended by her

family doctor to see a young female psychiatrist who specialized in cases of sexual abuse. Anne said she was eager to begin therapy. However, she noted that she was not prepared for the reaction that she got when her psychiatrist learned that her abuser was female:

I went to Dr. P - she's a woman in her thirties. A woman obviously not the generation of my grandmother. A woman who is a psychiatrist and is supposed to be trained in all the various workings of humanity as a whole...When I told her that the abuse was perpetrated by a "Michelle", she expressed surprise. "A *woman*?" she said. "Yes" I said, "a woman." Now this obviously leaves a lot of linguistic confusion of course, so she says, "Oh, do you mean a *female*?" "YES!", "I was sexually abused by a female!", I say, "I hope you do not greet this with surprise". But she did. Then she told me that that was a *special need* that was not covered by her psychiatric practice. So I basically told her where she could put her special need, and how hard, and in what position by degrees, and left her office.

The experience with the second psychiatrist left Anne feeling even more disillusioned than before. She stated that she was infuriated that the psychiatrist expressed shock at her story and refused to accept her as a patient on the basis of the gender of her perpetrator. Anne also found it completely unacceptable that the psychiatrist could not refer her to outside resources where she might be able to get some help:

I was startled, confused and hurt and very angry to have a person who is supposed to be a healing professional, who cannot afford to be naive, express shock that a woman is capable of sexual abuse. Not only was she not able to help me, which is her decision - it's her practice, she had no resources at all that she could recommend. That infuriated me. I really saw that as neglect. The type of cases that a person decides to have in their practice is entirely up to them, but to not even have sufficient knowledge to direct someone to perhaps more useful sources, is criminally negligent in my mind. I was extremely disappointed. I found that attitude repeated again and again.

Assuming the validity of Anne's statement, it is likely that both of her doctors depended

on the gender typification that "women are victims, and not aggressors." When they were confronted with a reality that defied this typification, they expressed discomfort and shock. In the case of the second doctor, her discomfort with the issue was so great that she rejected Anne as a patient.

David's case is similar to Anne's in that as a result of the persistent after-effects of the sexual abuse, David realized that he might benefit from some outside help. Although David reported experiencing frequent flashbacks of the sexual abuse, anxiety attacks and depression throughout his young adult life, during his final years of university, these problems became more pronounced. It was at this point that David decided to seek help:

I was a bad case. I couldn't concentrate, I had anxiety attacks, I couldn't study, I was tired all the time, I [was] feeling awful...I [was] going through a living nightmare. I knew that I was abused as a kid, [so I thought] maybe the two are connected, so let's try to work this out.

David says that although he was somewhat apprehensive, he made an appointment with a psychologist. However, after seeing him twice, David said that he never returned. David explains that he was very disconcerted and confused by the psychologist's reaction to his story:

I went to see this man three times. He was a psychologist, but I think that he just made people's problems worse...this guy was so full of shit... The minute I saw him I didn't like him. His shirt was sticking out of his pants. His pants were dirty, and he smelled of booze. I thought, "Well, he should know what he's doing". [After telling him my story] he basically told me, "I don't understand what your problem is" "You don't have a problem." "You were sexually abused between the age of three and six, but you were really too young to be affected."...He asked me how I felt, and I said "You know, some of the abuse I enjoyed and that's part of the guilt I was carrying...if I enjoyed it, I am an accomplice and I was really ashamed and felt dirty for it." And when I told him that, he started laughing like "You dirty dog"...I was really scared of being there, and he was

laughing at something I was saying!.

David said that although he felt uncomfortable because of the psychologist's inappropriate laughter and his assertion that there was no problem, he decided to give him a chance and returned for a second time. According to David, however, the second appointment proved to even more damaging than the first. David says that not only did the psychologist continue to deny his victimization, but he also insinuated that he should have enjoyed the sexual contact with the woman, and not to feel guilty about it. He then encouraged him to go and have sex as some sort of "cure":

I went to see him the second time. He said, "I don't see what your problem is, I looked through the literature but I don't know what's affecting you" - so that didn't help. Then he started asking me questions, and from the what he was asking me, he was basically trying to hint that I was feeling overly guilty for being Catholic...he was basically trying to tell me to go out and have sex and enjoy it, which was weird. He was telling me don't worry about contraception, just use the withdrawal method. I thought, what the fuck's his problem?...he's telling me I don't have a problem and he laughed at me...So I just said "fuck you" and I just left.

Based on David's report, the psychologist appeared to depend very much on the typifications that "sexual aggression by women is not harmful" and that "men should enjoy all sexual contact with women." Firstly, by insisting that David "didn't have a problem" and that "he didn't see what was affecting him", it is obvious that the psychologist assumed that sexual contact with an older women would not be harmful to young boy, nor would it have any damaging effects. Secondly, by assigning little seriousness to David's concerns, which was evidenced by his laughter, and by encouraging to David to "go out and have sex" as a cure for

his confused feelings, and without any regard for contraception, the psychologist is depending very much on the gender typification that men should enjoy all sexual contact and get as much of it as they possibly can.

All four survivors who came forward to disclose their ordeal to a professional stated that they received what they perceived as an inappropriate response to their victimization, one that was largely based on one or more of the four gender typifications focused on in this study.

The reactions of the professionals described in the survivors' reports can be seen as a window to the wider society and what is considered "acceptable" or "typical" male and female behaviour. The professionals described are all members of society and therefore have been inducted into the world of gender typifications. Their responses may be seen as "typical" responses to situations which defy traditional gender typifications.

2. THE CONSEQUENCES OF PROFESSIONAL RESPONSES ON SURVIVORS

The final question remains, how did these responses which relied heavily on gender typifications affect survivors? When the four survivors were questioned as to how the official responses affected them, all declared that what they perceived as inappropriate responses to their case, had a negative impact on their lives and their outlook. Many researchers and clinicians have referred to this secondary source of trauma, which is usually instigated by professional intervention, as "iatrogenic trauma." In the following section, this notion will be applied to the

survivors of sexual abuse who came forward to professionals with their stories.

2.1 **PROFESSIONAL INTERVENTION AND IATROGENIC TRAUMA**

There is a small but growing body of literature describing the damaging effects that professional interventions can have in cases of child sexual abuse, particularly on the victims of child sexual abuse. These damaging effects are referred to as "iatrogenic effects" or "iatrogenic trauma" (Cooper, 1990; Schultz, 1982). Early studies proposed that the reaction of adults in general, and professionals in particular, who deal with children who have been sexually abused, have an effect on the amount of trauma the child experiences from the sexual abuse. Some authors have gone as far as to insist that if professional intervention in cases of child sexual abuse is not done properly, professional intervention could be as damaging, or even more damaging than the sexual abuse itself (Gibbens and Prince, 1963). As Hunter (1990:49) notes in his discussion of male child victims of sexual abuse:

The most significant factor in determining how powerfully a child will be affected by abuse is how he is treated by those around him following the abuse experience. Those children who are fortunate enough to have supportive people available to them will have less difficulty than will those who are left to their own resources.

2.2 **IATROGENIC TRAUMA AND SURVIVORS OF SEXUAL ABUSE BY WOMEN**

In the cases of the four survivors who disclosed their stories to professionals, I doubt that the professional responses were more damaging than the sexual abuse itself. However, I would

argue that the professionals' reliance on the various gender typifications led them to respond to the victims with shock, disbelief, and a denial of victimization and injury. In turn, these inappropriate reactions had a negative impact on survivors. In essence, the four survivors in question did experience a degree of iatrogenic trauma. The responses of the professionals amplified and intensified the survivors' trauma. The professional interventions fuelled and renewed the survivors feelings of self-blame, denial, resignation, anger, and helplessness.

2.2.1 Self-Blame

Al says that as a result of the police inaction and their refusal to believe his allegations that his step-mother was sexually and physically abusing him, he convinced himself to an even greater degree than he had before, that the abuse was his fault and that *he* was the bad person:

I was nothing but the biggest liar, lowdown dirty, that's the thoughts that went into my mind...because no one trusted me, no one believed that this was happening to me...It was like *I* was the bad person, *I* did the worst thing in the whole world.

2.2.2 Denial

David says that when his psychologist denied his victimization by asserting that "he did not have a problem", and encouraged him to "go out and have sex and enjoy it", David assumed that because of his credentials, the psychologist's assessment must be correct. David reported that from that moment on, he tried to convince himself that he didn't have a problem:

For the following four to five years I just tried to convince myself that I didn't have a problem...I really felt like, you know, he's a psychologist, he should know what he's talking about and he's telling me I don't have a problem.

For four to five years, David says that he continued to deny his pain despite frequent and highly intense anxiety attacks, flashbacks, nightmares and suicidal thoughts.

The other problem was that because of his negative experience with the psychologist, David says that he concluded that counsellors could not be trusted and decided that he would never see one again:

After [seeing the psychologist], I decided that I didn't want to go back and see a counsellor.

As a result of inappropriate professional intervention, David was far worse off than he had been before seeking help. According to David, not only were his symptoms and after-effects of the sexual abuse escalating, but he refused to recognize them as problematic. When he finally did realize that he needed outside help, he refused to get it, out of fear that once again, his story would be misinterpreted by a counsellor as "seduction" or that "he should not have been affected by it".

2.2.3 Resignation

Like David, Al stated that he denied his own pain and victimization because the police rejected him, and his attempts at disclosure. Al reported that because no one would believe him, he resigned to the fact that he was to be a victim:

The more I guess [the police] rejected me, the more I buried the pain and what she was doing to me on a daily basis. She was winning. She was actually winning with all this. So no matter what she did to me, I had to learn to accept that that was my life on a daily basis.

2.2.4 Anger

According to Rachel, the lack of intervention by the child care worker and the outright dismissal of her allegations against her mother made her extremely angry. Rachel says that not only did the child care worker's inaction intensify her sense of anger, it also made her exceedingly mistrustful of adults and individuals in positions of authority:

I was *so* mad... I'd love to find out who this person was and pursue the Children's Aid Society's policies on this kind of crap...I was really pissed off, I'm still pissed off at authority people because of that... I have a lot of resentment still toward adults.

2.2.5 Helplessness

Anne stated that the disappointing episodes with the two psychiatrists fuelled her feelings of helplessness. Anne says she felt scared, alone and was convinced that there was no safe place to turn to. In her eyes, there was no individual or organization that she felt she could go to that would accept her and her story of being sexually abused by a female:

For a while I felt that I had no place to go. I felt that I couldn't go to the sexual assault centres and say, "I've been raped by a woman." I didn't know if I would receive respect or attention or counselling or if I would be told that just wasn't so.

Anne reported that by relying on the notions that women cannot be perpetrators of sexual abuse, the psychiatrists intensified her trauma by forcing her to remain silent, alone and helpless:

The unspoken assumption that women heal and never hurt, silences me that much more. So that's how it affects me...It makes the validation of my feelings and my fears that much more difficult...Abuse by women is not taboo...because if it was it, it wouldn't be done. *Speaking about it is taboo.*

According to the four survivors in question, all of the professionals who dealt with their cases intensified and amplified their trauma. The four survivors explained that they attempted to disclose what was happening to them or what had happened to them in the past, with the assumption that they would be helped, supported, and with professional intervention, the abuse or its after-effects would be stopped. What I have tried to show, based on the survivors' reports, is that because of the professionals' dependence on the gender typifications that women are not perpetrators of sexual abuse, that men are not victims of sexual abuse, that men enjoy and profit from all sexual contact with women, and sexual aggression by women is not harmful, the survivors underwent iatrogenic trauma. The professionals inappropriate responses fuelled survivors' feelings of self-blame, denial, resignation, anger and helplessness. Ultimately, these cases demonstrate the inherent dangers of gender typifications. They not only obscure deviant realities, but also have negative consequences for those whose experiences defy the established gender typifications.

CONCLUSION

Throughout this study, I have highlighted four main points. My first point emphasized that perceptions as to what is appropriate gender behaviour strongly influence how situations will be negotiated in everyday life. The created gender dichotomy where females are typified as nurturing, frequently victimized, passive, emotional, caring, and natural mothers, and where males are typified as assertive, aggressive, frequent perpetrators of abuse, logical and virile, have diffused in to many realms of our social reality, including the realm of sexual abuse. Females have been typified as victims of sexual abuse, whereas men have been typified as perpetrators of sexual abuse. Moreover, gender typifications have also assumed that males enjoy all heterosexual contact and females are incapable of causing harm through coercive sexual contact.

However, as I emphasized in my second point, the gender typifications surrounding sexual abuse perpetrators and victims reflect only the "typical" portion of the reality of sexual abuse. By focusing our attention solely on the typical, the atypical or deviant is overlooked, which prevents society from seeing the complex whole of the reality of sexual abuse. Studying the atypical reality where females are perpetrators of sexual abuse and both males and females are their victims, is an important tool to begin to understand the complex whole.

In my third point I established that the experiences of survivors of sexual abuse by women clearly defy gender typifications. Their reported experiences demonstrate that females can be aggressors, males can be victims, males do not enjoy all heterosexual contact and females can cause harm through coercive sexual contact.

Finally, I demonstrated that survivors face negative consequences as a result of opposing these typifications. Professionals in the criminal justice system, child protection agencies and those in the area of mental health, often renegotiate the behaviours of women so that they are more consistent with their gender roles. In the case of the four survivors who disclosed their stories to professionals, in each case, the professional was perceived by survivors to express shock, disbelief, and denial of harm and denial of victimization. This ultimately heightened and intensified survivors' feelings of self-blame, denial, resignation, anger and helplessness. As a result of their experiences of inappropriate professional intervention, the four survivors can be said to have undergone iatrogenic trauma.

DISCUSSION

Gender typifications play a crucial role in how we perceive reality. However, they do not remain static or idle, but vary according to the historical period and the societal values of the time. One might ask whether the gender typifications of females as passive and perpetual victims and males as aggressive and frequent perpetrators are beginning to change. Recent incidents suggest that this may be the case. By analyzing the public reaction to two well-publicized cases of female criminals who clearly defied gender typifications, as well as the images of women depicted in recent Hollywood films, and by examining what is considered to be the image of the "new" male, it would seem as though our gender typifications may be undergoing a noticeable change. Moreover, we may be witnessing what Meyrowitz (1985) refers to as the "merging of masculinity and femininity."

Take the case of Karla Homolka. During the trial of Paul Bernardo as well as during the pre-trial period, the media and the public at large became obsessed with her, and her role as Bernardo's "side-kick". However, what has been remarkably different about the public reaction, is the refusal by many people to accept her as a passive victim.

There has been a surge of attention to Homolka's case and, more specifically, her role in the torture and murder of two teenage girls. To a certain degree, her role remains, and probably will always remain, an enigma. As Campbell (1995:A6) indicates:

Ms. Homolka's role is more puzzling. Why did this middle-class adolescent with a taste for dime-store sentiment - Karly Kurls, as she referred to herself - fall in love with a man who liked rough trade? Was it fear or love? Was she a victim or was she, despite her conviction on the lesser charge of manslaughter, an equally culpable conspirator in the perversion that took place in that house in St. Catharines?

Despite the mystery that surrounds Homolka, of late, there has been a strong movement which has refused to deny her agency and has resisted the popular urge to accept the image of "Homolka the victim", an image that was propagated by Crown prosecutors and Homolka herself. As Kirk Makin, a journalist for The Globe and Mail who covered the Bernardo trial from start to finish indicates, many have refused and are still refusing to believe that Karla Homolka was a victim:

In her looking glass world, Ms. Homolka would have us believe a battered terrified woman was involuntarily sending those pathetic mash notes asking her assailant to abuse her more. Sorry, can't buy it...I strongly suspect the police, prosecutors or victims didn't buy the victim scenario, either. Their mistake, albeit an understandable one, was feeling they had to justify her deal by helping her don the mantle of victim (Makin, 1995:A6).

John Rosen, the lawyer for the defense, believes that the Crown's efforts to portray Homolka as a victim was a mistake:

"She doesn't...smell, or look like a victim. I think they were trying to justify the [plea bargain] deal. They should have put her in the box and said "tell us what happened." She would have done the victim thing anyway, but the Crown at least wouldn't be party to it...If I were the [victims'] families, I think I'd feel I was sold a bill of goods with that Karla-the-victim story" (Makin, 1995:A6).

As Pearson (1995:58) notes, the general public was frustrated and disheartened by the constant move to perceive Homolka as a victim:

So intense was public frustration with [Homolka's] testimony that defence counsel John Rosen looked like a folk hero when he jumped up on July 5 (1995) for his cross-examination and said "now wait just one darn minute", on behalf of all of us.

There has also been much public outrage directed at the prosecution team who chose to plea bargain with Homolka and use her version of the crimes against her former husband and co-conspirer, Bernardo. The public is enraged at what they refer to as the controversial "Homolka deal" where Homolka received immunity in the drugging and sexual assault of one teenager, and a twelve year manslaughter sentence for her involvement in the kidnapping, sexual assault and murder of two other teenagers - all in return for testifying against Bernardo. Again, the public outrage stems from the belief that Homolka "got away with murder". According to many Canadian citizens who followed the trial, Homolka's lenient prison sentence and the fact that she is eligible for parole in 1997, does not accurately reflect the pain and suffering that she inflicted upon the victims and their families, or the fear that she has instilled in Canadian society in general.

Since the publication ban on the trial was lifted and information on the Bernardo/Homolka affair has become public knowledge, citizens have begun to clamour for an investigation into the Homolka deal, in the hopes that her sentence be lengthened. In early October, 1995, a petition signed by 300,000 Ontarians was sent to the Ontario Legislature. The petition demanded an independent investigation as to the deal that Homolka made with the Crown. Petitioners want the deal reversed. Whether or not Homolka's plea bargain will be investigated or not, or whatever the outcome of the investigation, the public has taken a strong stance in regard to a woman charged with serious crimes. Instead of denying her agency and re-negotiating her crimes as harmless and non-deviant, as was done in the many cases that were outlined in this study, the public is demanding that harsh measures be taken against Homolka and that ultimately, she take responsibility for her crimes, something the public feels she has never done:

Karla didn't take responsibility. She still hasn't. Insulated by therapists and encircled by friends and family who probably cannot be blamed for grasping at any tolerable explanation for what she has done, Ms. Homolka still doesn't get it. In this respect, she and Paul Bernardo are still psychically joined, both of them unrepentant murderers (Makin, 1995:A6).

Makin (1995) speaks prophetically when he comments on the stance that most Canadians will take toward Homolka when she is released from prison:

Knowing Karla as we do, it is easy to extrapolate that her future mental health will depend greatly on whether her excuses have been accepted. *Most people won't accept them.* Outside her tiny coterie, her life will probably be spent among disbelievers. If she remains in Canada - and what other country would have her - she may be obliged to skip from one community to another as her identity becomes known. Her innate insecurity and paranoia will bloat and perhaps overwhelm her. That, I suspect, will be Karla Homolka's real sentence (my italics).

Although the harsh public stance taken against Homolka may be a relatively new phenomenon, it does not appear to be an isolated incident. The public reaction to Susan Smith, the mother in Union, South Carolina who drowned her two children by locking them in a car and pushing the car into a lake, is reminiscent of the public response to Homolka. Susan Smith was the mother America had come to know over breakfast. In late October of 1994, Smith appeared on the "Today" TV show in an attempt to inform the public that a black male in his twenties had taken her children. She claimed that when she stopped her car at a red light, an armed black male jumped in the passenger's seat and demanded that she "shut up and drive". Sixteen kilometres out of town, he allegedly ordered Smith out of the car, yet promised that he would not harm the children who were in the back seat. On the "Today" show, Smith pleaded with the kidnapper that he feed and care for her children. Public support for Smith was enormous. People placed yellow ribbons outside their homes to offer their support. Volunteers set off on foot and on horseback, in trucks and in helicopters to comb the county. No traces of the children were found. A week later, the car was discovered at the bottom of a lake and it was Smith herself who was charged with the murder of her children.

As in the case of Homolka, the public outrage to Smith was intense and furious. People removed the yellow ribbons outside their homes and replaced them with black ones. "She's slime, just slime" said one woman upon hearing the news. Others advocated "stringing [Smith] up right in the middle of the courthouse." Worried about Smith's safety, SWAT team members staked out the courthouse roof, scanning the crowd below as helicopters circled overhead (Gibbs, 1994:59). People shouted "baby murderer!" as Susan Smith left the courthouse after an

arraignment. During the trial, Americans everywhere seemed to be clamouring for the death penalty.

The cases of Homolka and Smith have been the most recent cases where women have been involved in violent crime and received international attention. If the public opinion and reactions are any indication, we may be witnessing a change in how we perceive females who engage in serious crimes.

There have been other indications that perhaps our typifications are moving in a new direction. Take films, for example. There seems to be a trend in Hollywood where the typification of women as passive victims and men as dangerous aggressors is being thrown into question. Lately, for example, there have been films such as Black Widow (1986), Fatal Attraction (1987), The Grifters (1990), Thelma and Louise (1991), Basic Instinct (1992), and Disclosure (1994), which have depicted men as more helpless victims and women as more feared aggressors. As Birch (1993:1) indicates: "in recent years, the rampaging female has become a new cliché of Hollywood cinema, stabbing and shooting her way to notoriety in a range of popular films."

Just as the perceptions and typifications of females may be altering, those typifications designated for males may be as well. The typification of the aggressive, unemotional, and strong male is, in many circles, being thrown into question. The Berkeley Men's Center, which seeks to change the typical roles of men both socially and personally, is a strong example of this:

We, as men, want to take back our full humanity. We no longer want to strain and compete to live up to an oppressive masculine image - strong, silent, cool, handsome, unemotional, successful, master of women, leader of men, wealthy, brilliant, athletic and "heavy". We no longer want to feel the need to perform sexually, socially, or in any way live up to an imposed male role, from a traditional American society...we want to affirm our strengths as men and at the same time encourage the creation of new space for men in areas such as childcare, cooking, sewing, and other "feminine" aspects of life (Men's Liberation Manifesto - cited in Lindsey, 1990:176-177).

The move to rid the contemporary male of his reliance on "machismo" and adopt a more sensitive, more "feminized" approach to life has been encouraged by both the feminist movement and the men's liberation movement (Lindsey, 1990). These groups have encouraged a change in male roles as they believe that the typical standards of masculinity are inherently dangerous to a male's well being:

The psychological evolution of the male is...a movement away from the defensive, rigid, insatiable conditioning that perhaps was once functional for men but now serves to press them into narrow, rigid patterns of behaviour that produce their psychological inner death...(Bernards and O'Neill, 1989:119).

We are oppressed by conditioning which makes us only half-human. This conditioning serves to create a mutual dependence of male (abstract, aggressive, strong, unemotional) and female (nurturing, passive, weak, emotional) roles. We are oppressed by this dependence on women for support, nurturing, love, and warm feelings (Men's Liberation Manifesto, cited in Lindsey, 1990:177).

Included in this desire for change in the male role is the strong move to encourage men to be involved in the lives of their children and to take an interest in family life, a concept foreign to conventional gender typifications of men:

Fathers are just beginning to understand what mothers have know for years - the wonderful gratification and utter adoration a baby can give and how it's possible to fall head-over-heels in love with your child (Vogue, May 1988).

In this sense, the notion of what it means to be male in contemporary North America may be in transition. As Garfinkel (1985) comments:

These are perilous times to be a man in America. There are forces afoot that have changed men's sense of themselves, blurring what once seemed clear-cut modes and models of manhood. John Wayne is dead, and we have not yet picked his stand in (Garfinkel, 1985).

Meyrowitz (1985) notes that the recent changes in gender attitudes, laws, and behaviours have been so sudden and so widespread that they have become quite bewildering to many. As a result, in everyday life, a complex negotiation of male-female roles and relations is often required. Meyrowitz writes:

Many forty and fifty year olds are looking around them at the ashes of their marriages and dreams - indeed, at the demise of a whole belief system of "the way life is." Many young people are not certain of what roles to assume. Relationships have become more problematic because, while it is easier to spot a member of the opposite sex, it is much more difficult to spot a member of a complementary gender orientation. Many once taken for granted aspects of male-female relationships now require frequent and explicit "negotiation" (p.194).

Meyrowitz (1985:187) not only believes that male and female roles in North America are changing, but he also insists that the notions of masculinity and femininity are beginning to merge. He notes that members of both sexes are becoming more alike; men are becoming more feminine and women are becoming more masculine. Because of this tendency, Meyrowitz believes that a whole new field of study is emerging which transcends research on sex roles and instead focuses on the area of cognitive or psychological androgyny, which is concerned with the blend of cognitive styles traditionally associated with men and women. In the future, Meyrowitz

argues, men and women may become capable of being both rational and emotional, strong and nurturant, assertive and compassionate, depending on the demands of the situation (Meyrowitz, 1985:194).

Perhaps the uncompromising gender dichotomy where women learn one type of behaviour and men learn another, will slowly cease to exist and the trend toward the merging of masculinities and femininities will continue. Only time will tell. However, whatever direction perceptions of gender take in the future, it is clear that they will affect many facets of our social lives, including our perceptions of sexual abuse perpetrators and victims.

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APPENDIX

INTERVIEW GUIDE

Each interview began with the following statement:

"I would like you to tell me about the sexual abuse that you experienced."

The following open ended questions were used only when necessary to ensure participants remained within the object of study:

- What role do stereotypes of men and women play in our perception of sexual abuse?
- Do you think that society recognizes that women sexually abuse children? Is it taboo? Why or why not?
- Did you ever report the sexual abuse? If so, to whom, and what was their reaction? How did their response affect you?
- In your eyes, was the sexual abuse taken seriously by professionals or other individuals who learned of the abuse? Why or why not?
- Do you think that survivors of sexual abuse by females have difficulty coming forward to talk about the abuse?
- In what ways has the sexual abuse affected your life? Have you experienced any physical or emotional difficulties as a result of the sexual abuse?