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"Nothing's Come Easy for Me. Everything is Hard": a Secondary Analysis of Interviews

with Female Youth on Struggle and Resiliency

by

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"Nothing's Come Easy for Me. Everything is Hard": a Secondary Analysis of Interviews

with Female Youth on Struggle and Resiliency

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"Nothing's Come Easy for Me, Everything is Hard": A Secondary Analysis of Interviews with Female Youth on Struggle and Resiliency

Abstract

Marginalized youth in Canada face a number of struggles, and some deal with multiple risks associated with criminalization. Despite this, most do not come into conflict with the law. This thesis examines how female youth who avoid criminalization understand their experiences through a secondary analysis of depth interviews conducted in 2005 and 2006 on youth violence and other risks associated with criminalization. Drawing upon feminist pathways theory, thematic analysis and theorizing on the narrated self, the thesis explores internal and external resources salient to the young women's journey towards resiliency and responsible adulthood.

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Introduction

A large body of international research addresses the broad issue of gender, crime and victimization, with a specific focus on females who come into contact with the law. While Canadian researchers contribute to this now extensive body of knowledge, to date there is relatively little research on how Canadian female youth (hereafter young women) deemed 'at risk' perceive and experience the widely documented link between victimization and offending. Pathways theory explores this, and this thesis examines possible extensions on this theory. How is it that some young women who encounter the same kinds of trauma and victimization become more resilient? If we are to understand how trauma and victimization contribute to crime, then we must also understand how some similarly disadvantaged individuals are able to avoid involvement in, or desist from, crime and violence.

This thesis investigates how young females perceive their pathways through struggle, towards resiliency. It addresses this gap through a secondary analysis of 30 interviews conducted with female youth recruited in youth correctional facilities and high schools serving high risk students in a southern Ontario municipality, and subsequent depth analysis of four of these interviews. The 30 interviews were conducted between 2005 and 2006 and are a subset of the 83 open-ended audio-recorded qualitative ("active") interviews with female (n = 30) and male (n = 53) youth that University of Windsor professors Dr. Ruth Mann and Dr. Charlene Senn conducted. The interviews were part of their larger *Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council* (SSHRC) funded research on community partnering in youth violence prevention and intervention under the then new Youth Criminal Justice Act (YCJA) (Mann, 2014). Using strategies

of deductive thematic analysis as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006) and drawing on the narrated self as an analytic construct (Peacock & Holland, 1993), I analyzed the 30 interviews with female youth utilizing a theoretical framework consistent with feminist pathways theory, reviewed in the Theory and Method section of the thesis.

I come to this project as a feminist criminologist. Feminist criminology places the experiences and narratives of females at the forefront of inquiry (Acker, 2001; Balfour, 2006; Belknap & Holsinger, 2006; Comack, 1999; Daly & Stubbs, 2006; Pollack, 2007). Thematic analysis is well suited to the exploration of the narratives of female youth who face adversity. This topic is especially important to me as a person, because I grew up in similar conditions to many criminalized and marginalized young women in my data set. Though I now inhabit a very different position, sociology has allowed me to examine the intersections of poverty, deprivation, abuse, violence, neglect, crime and victimization as an outsider, in that I no longer live in these conditions, but also as a former insider for whom these factors will always be a part of my biography. In taking a feminist qualitative approach, I aim to enhance understandings on how female youths' experiences and perceptions fit with feminist scholarship on hypothesized crime and victimization links, and to extend this to examine resilience.

Research Questions

The thesis will address the following broad research questions:

1. How do female youth whose life stories are marked by risks associated with criminal offending understand or make sense of their pathways through struggle and towards resiliency?

2. What resources do they identify as salient to their resilience?

Literature Review

Introduction

There is a great deal of Canadian and international research inspired by feminist criminology, including insights gained from research that examines pathways to offending (Becker & Mc Corkel, 2011; Belknap & Holsinger, 2006; Belknap, 2010; Bender, 2010; Carr & Hanks, 2013; Hawke, Jainchill, & De Leon, 2003; Kassis, Artz, Scambor, Scambor, & Moldenhauer, 2013; Pasko & Mayeda, 2011; Sharp, Peck, & Hartsfield, 2012; Stevens, Morash, & Park, 2011; Tasca, Zatz, & Rodriguez, 2012). As emphasized repeatedly in this body of literature, female offenders constitute a minority of all offenders. Focusing on youth, in Canada females between the ages of 12 and 17 account for a mere 19 per cent of all youth crime convictions, and a mere 23 per cent of youth crimes against the person (Kong & AuCoin, 2008, p. 22, Table 6). While much of the literature on female offending deals with older offenders, the pathways perspective is useful to help identify early events, conditions and experiences that contribute to the criminalization of the relatively small number of female adolescents who come into contact with the law, as they may grow up to be adult offenders. Understanding these conditions is also useful in terms of understanding young females who do not come into contact with the law, as well as those who *do* come into contact with the law and go on to more pro-social behaviours. The pathways perspective can be used to examine how youths navigate periods marked by stress and instability, and the factors that support personal growth in the face of significant trauma and trouble.

Risk Factors

Nikolas Rose (1996) makes the argument that the construct of risk" is tied to a "culture of blame" (p. 4). Individuals such as care providers, parents, social workers and teachers are expected to be able to predict abuse or assault against a minor, and staff in youth correctional facilities may face serious repercussions if they adjust the risk-related score of a youth and the youth then commits another serious offence (Hannah-Moffatt and Maurutto, 2003). A primary concern in risk discourse is self-regulation (Pollack 2007). Those deemed to be incapable of regulating themselves are seen to be a greater 'risk' or are seen to have a greater number of 'risky attributes'. Rosenberg (1988) observes that those who are marginalized are often seen to be a greater risk to themselves or those around them. As Gerald Cradock (2004) and others point out, actuarial risk assessments seem on the surface to be objective and value-neutral, but are necessarily the result of subjective decisions made by individuals applying the assessments. Moreover, the criminological literature recurrently identifies a number of risky or traumatic experiences and contexts as factors associated with criminalization.

Family Abuse.

Critiques of the literature on risks aside, both the Canadian and international literature identify a link between abuse related risks and trauma and later involvement in the justice system (Bender, 2010; Belknap & Holsinger, 2006; Gaarder & Hesselton, 2012; Sharp, Peck & Hartsfield, 2012; Hawkins-Anderson, 2012; Kerig & Becker, 2012; Maschi, et al., 2009; McAra & McVie, 2012; Tasca, et al.; Sharp, et al., 2012; Stevens, et al., 2011; Carr & Hanks, 2013). That victimization in the childhood years can be a

contributing factor in later delinquent, criminal, hostile or aggressive behaviour has been recognized as early as 1917 (Belknap, 2010). Abuse in childhood is also a contributing factor in later vulnerability to sexual and physical violence in addition to psychological abuse (Boney-McCoy & Finkelhor, 1995, Rich, Gidycz, Warkentin, Loh, & Weiland, 2005). In Canada, those who have been abused have greater difficulties in school, which impacts later employability, and is sometimes also related to self-medicating and addiction issues (AuCoin, 2005).

Some research suggests that abuse is particularly salient to female offending. Research consistently finds that young women are more likely to be victimized within the family than boys are, and this holds true for physical as well as sexual abuse (AuCoin, 2005; Becker & McCorkel, 2011; Belknap & Holsinger, 2006; Leschied, et al., 2001; McAra & McVie, 2012). While it is important to bear in mind that fewer than one out of four Canadian youth who come into conflict with the law for crimes against the person are female (see Kong & AuCoin, 2008, p. 22), young women who have been previously traumatized may react with violence to situations that would not lead to a violent reaction in a non-traumatized young women (Brewer-Smyth, 2004). It is common that young women who are involved in the justice system are prior victims (Corrado, et al., 2000). Though this is clearly also true for boys (Belknap & Holsinger, 2006), criminalized young women arguably experience a greater level of stress as the result of abuse-related traumas than do their male counterparts, in particular because female children and youth are overwhelmingly the target of sexual assaults that are perpetrated both inside and outside of the family (80 per cent of child and youth victims of sexual assault in Canada are female, see AuCoin, 2005, p. 7). Some researchers contend that females, after sexual

abuse or assault, are more likely than their male counterparts to develop not only post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), but also antisocial behaviours, anxiety disorders, depression, agoraphobia, suicide attempts, and drug use and addiction (Carr & Hanks, 2013; Gaarder & Hesselton, 2012; Gershon, Minor & Hayward, 2008; Hawke, et al., 2003; Javdani, et al., 2011; Tasca, et al., 2012), In the case of young women, moreover, a link between abuse, PTSD and involvement in the justice system has been suggested (Bender, 2010; Kerig & Becker, 2012).

Research also finds that children and youth who are abused in one form are more likely to experience other forms of abuse in childhood (Rich, et al., 2005). Some research finds that young women report more experiences of multiple abuse than do boys (Hawke, et al., 2003). One example is that young women who associate with deviant peers are more likely to report being the victim of intimate partner violence than are their male counterparts (Vezina, et al., 2011).

Witnessing abuse between parents is recurrently identified as a correlate of later involvement in crime and violence, as either a perpetrator or victim (Belknap & Holsinger, 2006; Boney-McCoy & Finkelhor, 1995; Dahlberg & Potter, 2001; Gaarder & Hesselton, 2012; Kilpatrick & Resnick, 1993). Likewise, there is evidence for intergenerational patterns of vulnerability to abuse perpetration and victimization. As children see others in their families victimized, it may erode their potential to see the world is a safe place, and abuse or violence may become an expected part of daily life. They may also use violence as a way to deflect perceived harms and manage negative emotions of fear, anger and powerlessness (Bender 2010; Boney-McCoy & Finkelhor, 1995; Paetsch & Bertrand, 1999; Shelley & Craig, 2010). Maschi, Schwalbe, Morgen,

Gibson and Violette (2009) suggest an intergenerational pattern of struggle. Youth who experience abuse or neglect at the hands of their parents, commonly due to their own mental health, substance abuse or criminal involvement, appear more vulnerable to substance abuse, mental illness and criminalization.

Fleeing family abuse.

Patterns of violence may pull youth away from their home and towards attachments with others who face similar stressors (Kerig & Becker, 2012). As a consequence, youths seeking to escape violence and conflict often find themselves in situations where conflict and violence are common, such as street life and criminal lifestyles where use of drugs is common (Kerig & Becker, 2012; Mann, Senn, Girard and Ackbar, 2007). Some research identifies abuse as a common precursor to running away from home, which is criminalized in the United States, and which leads to child protection intervention in Canada in the event the youth is not yet age 16 (Boney-McCoy & Finkelhor, 1995; Desai et al., 2001; Javdani , Sadeh and Verona, 2011; Mann et al., 2007; Stevens, et al., 2011; Tasca, et al., 2012). In Canada, many criminalized youth come from a background marked by family violence and instability and by efforts of child protection authorities to intervene. Mann and colleagues (2007) examined how "victimization, child protection involvement, and vulnerability to criminal activity are linked" (p. 39) through a case study of a runaway young woman, who they name "Connie". Their article documents how in fleeing family violence and instability, female youths encounter enhanced vulnerability to sexual assault and violence.

Mental Health and Substance Abuse.

Research is clear that experiences of abuse or victimization - whether direct or indirect - can impact an adolescent's mental health, which may in turn contribute to a host of negative outcomes, including substance abuse and mental health challengs (Bender, 2010; Leschied, 2008; Maschi, et al., 2009; Sharp, et al., 2012). The pathways model of understanding the ways risks foster criminalization (discussed in detail in the theory section below) is underscored by the need to consider trauma. Pollack (2007) observes that mental health is individual. Therefore, there is a tendency to not contextualize mental health issues in relation to social circumstances. Comack and Brickey (2007) contend that this leads to incomplete understandings of the contours of mental health, crime, victimization and substance abuse. Salient to this, youth who enter substance abuse treatment often come from deprived backgrounds where "high crime rates, discrimination, economic marginalization, poor housing, and family and relationship problems" are common (Hawke, et al., 2003, p. 70).

Focusing on mental health outcomes, female youth with histories of victimization or abuse are more likely to be diagnosed with "eating disorders, depression, and anxiety" (Maschi, et al., 2009, p. 258; see also Sharp, et al., 2012). Further, female youth with histories of abuse appear more likely to develop suicidal ideation and other mental health issues, including physical self-injury, compared to their male counterparts (Belknap & Holsinger, 2006; Leschied et al., 2001; Leschied, 2008; Maschi, et al., 2009). Thus, mental health reactions to victimization, sexual victimization in particular, appear to be gendered (Gaarder & Hesselton, 2011). PTSD is likewise linked with substance abuse (Hawke, et al., 2003), as well as criminal incarceration (Bender, 2010).

Leschied (2008) notes that relationships among mental health challenges, substance abuse issues, and acting out aggressively are complex and difficult to disentangle. Research he cites supports the pathways model, suggesting that contributing factors in mental health and substance abuse issues also operate to foster vulnerability to crime and delinquency. Since young women appear to be at greater risk of family perpetrated abuse and maltreatment, particularly in the case of sexual abuse, understandings of these processes must take gender into consideration.

Risk as an Accumulation of Factors.

As Sharp et al. (2012, p. 202) emphasize, "it is not the presence of any specific strain but rather the *cumulative impact* of multiple types of strain experienced during childhood that leads to risky behaviors" (emphasis in original), such as running away from home, or experimenting with drugs. Otherwise stated, while individual risk factors do not predict youth offending and other negative outcomes in isolation, in combination poverty, abuse and other risks "may be powerful determinants " (Fergusson & Lynskey, 1996, p. 290). This raises questions relevant not only to factors associated with vulnerability, but with protective factors (Stevens et al., 2011). The following discussion considers how research into risks and protectors fits with feminist criminological pathways research.

Protective Factors

Protective factors are defined as those assets which help a person to overcome trauma (Stevens et al., 2001). Some examples of protective features could be a caring

adult in the school or community, the support of peers or a romantic partner, or counselling and anger management programs.

Research suggests that some personal-level characteristics may act as protective factors, such as scholastic achievement and "a sense of purpose, a sense of control, and hope for the future" (Stevens, et al., 2011, p. 1438). Other literature identified protections include "higher emotional self-control, talking with parents or friends about violence, seeking help to avoid violence, and not endorsing aggression supportive beliefs" (Kassis, et al., 2013, p. 182). Kassis et al. (2013) suggest that support is a protector which is important at the family as well as individual level – especially when one addresses the problem of intergenerational aggressive tendencies and the cycle of violence (see also Hartman, et. al., 2009).

Important avenues of support include family members as well as individuals who are not family members, but people who an adolescent can turn to for guidance and support as they navigate particularly troubling or stressful periods or experiences, including friends and romantic partners (Hartman, et al., 2009; Fergusson & Lynskey, 1996; Mann et al., 2007). Bender (2010) suggests that school can also be an important avenue of support (see also Mann et al., 2007). Drawing on Bender (2010, p. 471), school connectedness is key, given the potential of school professionals to collaborate in reducing risks by ensuring mentoring, tutoring and extracurricular activities are available.

Resilience

Resilience has various definitions. Broadly, resilience refers to a general ability to recover from painful life experiences and/or events. Some definitions would categorize

youth who have engaged in criminal or delinquent behaviours as non-resilient. However, if resilience is defined as a process of growth and recovery, young women who have engaged with the justice system but are attempting to desist can be categorized as resilient.

Further to this, Masten, Best and Garmezy (1990) identified three processes that indicate resiliency in young people: positive outcomes despite experiencing high-risk environments, competent functioning in the face of acute or chronic major life stressors and recovery from trauma or maltreatment. Some examples of external resources include support of caring adults and use of programming and counselling. Some examples of internal resources include hope for the future and tenacity. Some key factors in the development of resilience are identical to the protectors addressed above. These include strong ties to family, especially family members that may be younger or more vulnerable (Gaarder & Hesselton, 2012), as well as support from adults and role models including school professionals (Bender, 2010). Additional factors associated with resilience include high levels of autonomy or independence and social competence as measured by problem-solving skills, empathy, task orientation and a sense of purpose and future (see Brackenreed, 2010, p. 115).

Indicators of resiliency must be understood on an individual as well as a context-specific basis. While orientations or traits associated with resilience are commonly listed as individual factors, it bears noting that all are manifested relationally. In understanding resiliency, attention must also be paid to how youth construct their biography and lived experiences in relation to individuals who are important to them, what they have been

through, and how they see their future. How an individual understands their own strengths is central to understanding the processes of resiliency and recovery.

Moreover, people are "more or less resilient in different situations or at different points in their lives, depending on the interplay and aggregation of individual and environmental factors" (Brackenreed, 2010, p. 114). For some young females, graduating high school could be seen as a marker of resiliency, but for others with a more stable background and greater access to resources, other markers may be more salient. Thus resiliency needs to be explored in terms of patterns or processes, as opposed to absolute or relative levels.

Discussion

The literature reviewed in this thesis indicates support for a pathways model of understanding female involvement in crime, and also suggests the pathways model is useful in understanding how young women move towards positive and responsible outcomes. It is important to note the various ways that the literature indicates female youth may be more vulnerable than male youth, and to the ways female youths' trajectories play out. As the literature reviewed above emphasizes, many marginalized females have several life experiences in common, notably abuse, violence, instability, assault and neglect. The pathways perspective, outlined in the following section, helps explain how these experiences intersect to foster vulnerability to life-long enmeshment in crime and criminalization. The pathways model is also useful in examining resources youth may mobilize in order to follow paths to more resilient outcomes.

Theory and Method

Introduction

From the perspective of feminist criminology, this thesis examines the lived experiences of female youth with a focus on struggle and resiliency. The thesis explores how female youth articulate parts of their biography, and the resources they identify as salient in the journey through struggle towards a positive, responsible and resilient future. Pathways theory is extended to look at how victimization may *not* lead to criminalization, and resources that youth mobilize in resisting this behaviour.

As the literature review above documents, it has been established that involvement in crime and delinquency is gendered in both its extent and its nature. Belknap and Holsinger (2006) exemplify the feminist contention that female crime must also be understood in the context of patriarchy, or male dominance, as this historical reality continues to impact the lives of women and young women. I contend that this extends to understandings of struggle and resiliency. The voices of marginalized females need to be heard when planning strategies or conducting analysis, in particular their voices on the role of trauma in their own life trajectories. If we are to understand how young females get themselves into trouble, we must also understand how they avoid, or get themselves out of, trouble. As Gaarder and Hesselton (2012) state, it is essential to incorporate awareness of "the patriarchal context of [female] childhood trauma and ongoing vulnerability to abuse by males" (2012, p. 240) into efforts to make sense of their experiences of marginalization.

The Pathways Perspective

Feminist pathways research is not so much a unified directive as it is a flexible method, well suited to exploring the wide variety of life experiences that females encounter and endure. This understanding recognizes two key ideas. These are the salience of trauma and abuse as precipitating factors in criminal justice system involvement and the importance of understanding these pathways in the context of gender (Becker & Mc Corkel, 2011; Belknap & Holsinger, 2006; Belknap, 2010; Bender, 2010; Carr & Hanks, 2013; Gaarder & Hesselton, 2012; Hawke, et al., 2003; Javdani, et al., 2011; Kassis, et al., 2013; Leschied, et al., 2001; Leschied, 2008; McAra & McVie, 2012; Pasko & Mayeda, 2011; Sharp, et al., 2012; Stevens, et al., 2011; Tasca, et al., 2012). Some common contributors to delinquent and criminalized pathways cited in this literature include poverty, sexual and other forms of abuse, interaction with antisocial others, particularly males, running away, intimate partner violence, neglect, mental health troubles, feelings of alienation from school settings, substance abuse and becoming a victim of bullying and/or relational aggression. The feminist pathways perspective seeks to document and explore the experiences of females not in relation to males, but as a point of study on their own merit.

In this literature, it is not only the presence of trauma that contributes to pathways to delinquency and criminalization, but these paths are impacted by frequency, intensity and duration (Sharp, et al., 2012; Tasca, et al., 2012). Balfour (2006) argues that pathways between victimization and criminalization should not be characterized as a continuum, but should be seen as more dynamic. This view also applies to understandings of pathways associated with struggle and resiliency. Importantly,

resiliency is not an end goal; it is rather an ongoing journey. Several scholars advocate for treatment that situates criminal and delinquent behaviours in relation to prior abuse and trauma (Gaarder & Hesselton 2012; Pate, 1999; Comack, 1993) as opposed to constructing trauma and abuse as an individual-based risk factor (Pollack, 2007).

Pathways and intersectionality.

A large body of research advocates for investigation into different subject positions that may influence the ways people experience and interact with the world (Hindman, 2010; Shields, 2008; Warner, 2008). Dubbed intersectionality, this approach examines how structural and cultural processes come together to foster disadvantage, or advantage. Three main aspects considered are race, socioeconomic class and gender (Warner, 2008), though culturally constructed phenomenon such as personal clothing style, membership in a social clique, or membership in some kind of sport or arts group or club may also be salient (Shields, 2008). As part of situating or accounting for disadvantage or advantage, intersectionality examines how social locations and identities influence beliefs and experiences of gender (Schilling, 2008, see p. 301).

This data set speaks to the intersections of class, gender and age, but intersectionality will not be utilized as a key analytic focus. This could be a consideration for further analyses from this or other sets of data.

Methodology

As outlined in the introduction, this thesis investigates how young females perceive their pathways through struggle towards positive and responsible outcomes through a secondary analysis of 30 interviews with female youth – a subset of the 83

interviews with female (n = 30) and male (n = 53) youth that Dr. Ruth Mann and Dr.

Charlene Senn conducted in 2005-2006 as part of a larger SSHRC funded research on

community partnering in youth violence prevention and intervention. As described by

Mann (2014, pp. 62-64), the youth who voluntarily and anonymously participated in the

interviews were recruited orally and through information letters distributed by staff at

youth correctional facilities and high schools in an unnamed southern Ontario urban

municipality. The interviews took the form of open-ended "active" dialogue (Holstein

and Gubrium, 1995, as cited in Mann, 2014, p. 63) on youth violence and interventions

across partnering educational, social agency and youth correctional domains, and lasted,

on average, an hour and a half. Over the course of the interviews the youths described

violent interactions and intervention efforts that they had participated in or knew about, in

response to three broad open ended questions (plus follow-up probes):

1) What do you think about the issue of youth violence?

2) What do you think about efforts to address youth violence by the schools and
    social agencies?

3) What do you think about efforts to address youth violence by the justice
    system?

In addition, youth interviewed in correctional facilities were asked to describe their

various run-ins with the law and their experiences with incarceration and correctional

programming. The interviews concluded with a small set of demographic questions that

included a probe on Children's Aid Society involvement, followed by an invitation to

share hopes or plans for the future.

My secondary analysis of the 30 interviews with the female youth and depth analysis of four cases draws upon the deductive thematic analysis strategy outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006). I chose the four interviews because their stories were sufficiently similar as to illustrate something important about the process of resiliency. Specifically, all four of the young women faced serious trauma, were resourceful, discussed early independence and demonstrated a strong sense of hope for the future and determination to realize this hope – highlighting the salience of tenacity to resilience. Guided by insights into risks and protectors in the research literature reviewed above, and attending to theoretical understandings of the narrated self, outlined below, I reflexively analyzed and interpreted the data with the aim of contributing to knowledge on how risk vulnerable female youth navigate through struggle towards outcomes typified by resilience and competence.

Secondary analysis.

Secondary analysis is commonly used in quantitative analysis but is not as common in qualitative research (Fielding & Fielding, 2000; Gilles & Edwards, 2005). Data sharing among researchers is becoming more common, as many grants for research now mandate that the data be made available for future research (Bishop, 2009; Fielding & Fielding, 2000; Parry & Mauthner, 2005). Some of the benefits include "making 'unmined' data available, avoiding duplication, reduced burden on research participants, greater transparency of research procedures, alignment with open access principles, and recognizing that outputs of publicly funded research are public assets" (Bishop, 2009, p. 256). Secondary analysis is particularly beneficial when dealing with populations that may be sensitive or hard to reach (Fielding & Fielding, 2000). Some main reasons offered

for re-use of qualitative data are additional in-depth analysis, additional sub-set analysis, and new perspectives or conceptual foci (Heaton, 2008). In the case of this thesis, all three conditions apply.

Some researchers note that a lack of context is a potential pitfall in secondary analysis (Fielding & Fielding, 2000; Gilles & Edwards, 2005; Van den Berg, 2005). While this appears relevant in some cases, at least two benefits identified above outweigh this potential pitfall. In some projects, the secondary analyst will have knowledge about the group under consideration due to their own experience, bringing an insider perspective to the data. Additionally, a secondary analyst will likely construct meanings that are at least somewhat different from the original collector, bringing forth valuable new insights. Van den Berg (2005) problematizes the concept of original context, noting that the idea of 'original context' is ambiguous, and that this 'original context' is subjective – two individuals conducting the same interview may see the context very differently. Further to this, context is, at best, always partial (Parry & Mauthner, 2005; Van den Berg, 2005). Thus I explored how the 30 interviews with female youth and particularly the four interviews I chose for depth analysis situate at-risk young women's experiences. The necessary context thus comes from their testimony.

The Narrated Self

Qualitative interviewing allows participants to have a hand in constructing and construing their realities and lived experiences (Tanggaard, 2009). Exploring the narrated self also allows examination of how interviewees situate their own experiences (Peacock & Holland, 1993). In the case of this thesis, I explored how the young women' self-understandings are constructed by attending to turning points, defined as points in time

that mark some kind of monumental change (Rogan & de Kock, 2005). These turning points could mark pathways to hardship as well as pathways through hardships or risks to outcomes rooted in choices that reflect and build resilience.

Alasuutari (2010) articulates two general schools of thought concerning the nature of qualitative inquiry. One contends that a researcher is able to capture some kind of truth regarding social reality and one rejects this notion. For the purposes of this project, I am took the latter stance. I assumed that the narrated life experiences of the four young women spoke to subjective truths. Typically, autobiographical works have a beginning, middle and end (Richardson, 1990). Because I have their stories as they choose to tell them, and not those of others involved in the incidents they narrate, these truths are at best partial. This does not negate the importance of subjective truths, however. Rather, it acknowledges the limitations of knowledge constructed through the qualitative research strategy of depth interviewing.

Importantly, the stories the interviewed young women offer are embedded in their past, thus the young women interpreted their experiences with all of the knowledge that came with the passage of time. The stories were related to the interviewer from a self that is at least a little bit older than when these events occurred. Similarly, if these same young women were interviewed today, their accounts are likely to have changed. This means that these stories are best understood as the product of a particular place in time, a specific point in these young women's lives. Thus, this research project marks a point of departure in exploring the experiences of female youth, as understood through narratives of their lived experiences. Similar to Comack (1999) I aimed to draw the pieces of their story together, "in a theoretically informed and reflexive way" (p. 303).

Richardson (1990) discusses the power of construction of narrative, explaining that "people who belong to a particular category can develop a 'consciousness of kind' and can galvanize other category members through the telling of the collective story... by emotionally binding people together who have had the same experiences, whether in touch with each other or not, the collective story overcomes some of the isolation and alienation of contemporary life" (p. 192). Richardson (1990) further iterates the importance of narrative understandings:

> Narrative is the best way to understand the human experience because it is the way humans understand their own lives... If we wish to understand the deepest and most universal of human experiences, if we wish our work to be faithful to the lived experiences of people, if we wish for a union between poetics and science, or if we wish to use our privileges and skills to empower the people we study, then we *should* value the narrative (p. 134, emphasis in original).

Thematic Analysis

Secondary analysis is a tactic well suited to thematic analysis (Fielding & Fielding, 2000). A precursory look at the 30 interview data set confirmed that these interviews are a rich source of information of personal experiences and perspectives salient to resilience. While it is historical data in that it was collected up to ten years ago, there is much to learn from the life histories that these young women shared with the researchers. This data set proved useful in seeking narrative truths (Tangaard, 2009), as opposed to some kind of quantifiable truth, on how these young females navigate their way through tenuous circumstances to negotiate a sense of resiliency.

Braun and Clarke (2006) note that thematic analysis "can be a constructionist method, which examines the ways in which events, realities, meanings, experiences, and so on are the effects of a range of discourses operating within society" (p. 9). Braun and Clarke (2006) go on to explain that, especially when employed deductively, that is from a clearly articulated theoretical perspective, "thematic analysis... seeks to theorize the socio-cultural contexts, and structural conditions, that enable the individual accounts that are provided" (p. 14). In a deductive thematic analysis, as the data collection is guided by a theoretical paradigm, it is common to search for instances where your analytic interest is discussed (Braun & Clarke, 2006). They define theme in a fairly commonsensical and flexible manner: "a theme captures something important about the data in relation to the research question, and represents some level of *patterned* response or meaning within the data set" (2006, p. 10, emphasis in original). In essence, what lessons do these young women have for us? Braun and Clarke iterate two useful methods of thematic analysis: one in which a rich description of a larger chunk of the data set is given, and one where one specific aspect of the data set is explored in greater depth (2006, p. 11).

Braun and Clarke identify two levels in thematic analysis: one at which themes are related explicitly and semantically to what is being said, and one at which the researcher explores the underlying meanings of these passages (2006). I took the semantic approach as I completed the initial reading and coding, attending to exactly what was being said. In the second round of coding, I attended more to what I perceived as the underlying messages, and it is this level of analysis that contributes most to the argument advanced by this thesis.

Braun and Clarke (2006) outline a relatively flexible six step process, briefly outlined below.

1. The first step is to become familiar with the data set, and this is particularly important for those who conduct a thematic analysis who did not collect the original data. Braun and Clarke iterate that at this stage, the data will need to be read multiple times. For this stage of the analysis, I read ten of the thirty interviews to see what kinds of experiences I might notice. This was done as I neared the completion of the proposal for this thesis. This allowed me to change focus as need be, and this project has been a fluid movement as I narrowed my topic, based on the details I picked out from this data set.

2. The second step is to generate initial codes. These codes will likely be explicit statements made in the material. These are specific instances of what will later be organized into themes. For this phase of the project, I read the entire set of interviews, and used NVIVO software to code on an open basis. I looked for anything that could be pertinent to this project or any future project. Rather than coding only for what I thought would be relevant to this project, I wanted to see where the narratives would lead me, and the result was that the initial research question I had planned was altered significantly. I found some of what I expected to find, then a found a whole other layer.

3. The third step is to begin to assemble these codes into themes. This is one way of organizing findings, such that a coherent story begins to take shape. As this is a deductive project, I assembled the codes as they naturally seemed to fit together as I was doing the initial coding. I still kept a relatively open mind

about what could be important within the general plan that I had for this project. For example, as I found explicit references to instability, I coded for instability and the forms that came up – instability in school placements and instability in living arrangements.

4. The fourth phase entails reviewing themes. At this phase, I evaluated the codes and their fit within the themes that have begun to take shape. As I planned to move back and forth through this process, this allowed me to reflect on what I'd done and improve on the organization of this narrative. In this phase, I reflected on the codes that specifically fit with the broad themes that I had picked out. As I went through this process, I began to think about the nature of resiliency, and this will be discussed in the narratives and analysis sections in this thesis. I began to write up the narratives and assemble the coded quotes into the two main themes: struggle and resiliency. I opened a second NVIVO project and coded as a new project. As I did so, I constructed narratives under each main theme, for example struggles and paths to violence or resiliency and family as a resource. During this process, I took the time to reflect on the experiences I had encountered, and thought about the lessons within this data through all stages of the data analysis.

5. The fifth step entails exploring these themes and defining and refining them. At this stage, I began to tease out what was important about each theme and how they related to my broad research questions. I re-read the four interviews I had decided on for the final analysis. The two salient questions that helped

me to organize this analysis were "what are the lessons in this data set?" and "what do these lessons and themes tell me about my research question?".

6. The sixth step in this process was the analysis of these codes and themes, and the production of this thesis. This phase was more or less synonymous with phase five, in that I moved back and forth between writing the analysis and reflecting on the fit between the coded data and the themes and argument of this thesis.

Findings

Introduction

I feel it prudent to begin with an explanation of the terminology used to describe these interviewees. As the term 'girl' can be taken to be diminutive, or generally refers to children, I have chosen to use the terms young women and young woman. There is a sense of dependence attendant to the term girl, and while the 30 interviewees are not yet fully adult, I wish to convey a sense of agency in their narratives. Since all were between the ages of 16 and 19, the interviewees were at or nearing the stage of emancipation from parental or child protection services authority at the time of the interview (Mares, 2010). Thus, the constructs 'young women' and 'young woman' seem more fitting. Salient to emancipation, in Canada youth are guaranteed child protection services until the age of 16, 18 or 19, depending on the province or territory, and may choose to live independently at age 16 across jurisdictions (Tweddle, 2005).

This thesis examines how young women at-risk of criminal justice involvement achieve positive outcomes as they build resilience. As an initial step in thematic analysis,

I reviewed all 30 interviews to identify themes salient to processes of risk and resilience. I coded passages from the interviews in terms of how they might fit with the link between victimization and criminalization, as well as other ideas that seemed salient. As I completed the first round of coding, it became clear that many of the young women were not formally involved with the justice system. Of the 30, only 11 had been formally charged. Prior to the second round of coding, I settled on the four interviews that I used for the narrative portion of this thesis.

As I engaged with the stories of those young women who appeared most resilient, I began to consider which narratives would work together best to address my research question. As I reflected on the sub-set of interviewees with young women who appeared most resilient, four stood out. Although each of these four young women had a different set of circumstances, they had many common experiences, such as early maturation, early independence and instability in school and living arrangements. More importantly, these four interviews provide a clear picture of the processes of achieving positive outcomes despite trauma, and the role of agency and tenacity in this achievement. All four described their struggles with various literature identified criminogenic risks (see Literature Review section of the thesis), namely family abuse, running away from home or being 'kicked out' by a parent or parents, mental health issues, substance abuse issues, intimate partner violence and sexual assault. Two of the four interviewees described their struggles with three of these seven risks, one with five of the seven and one with six of the seven. In addition, one of the four disclosed having faced a single criminal charge that resulted in a brief stay in pre-trial detention.

After I had settled on the four interviews I would use for depth analysis, I went back through these interviews to take a second look at the themes I had constructed. This time I took a more focused approach. As Braun and Clarke (2006) outline is the practice in thematic analysis, I kept some of the themes, discarded others, and came up with new ones. It was during this stage that I began to realize that an important lesson from this four interview sub-set is that that resiliency is a process.

Coding the Data

My initial analysis of the 30 interviews generated 163 different codes, which I organized under 29 broad themes. Some examples included opinions on school programming, opinions on the youth criminal justice system, experiences with poverty, victimization, resiliency and experiences with youth violence. For the depth analysis of the four interviews, I reduced these to 19 different themes that coalesced around the broad themes of struggle and resilience.

My final six sub-themes under struggle are 1) a rock and a hard place, 2) abuse in the family, 3) instability and early independence, 4) sexual assault, 3) the self as older, and 5) intimate partner violence. The seven sub-themes under resilience are 1) support of caring adults, 2) positive partner influences, 3) programming, 4) competent functioning, agency and tenacity, 5) hopes and dreams, 6) turning points, and 7) lessons from youth.

The four young women and the data excerpts.

Using pseudonyms, the four young women chosen for depth analysis are 1) Evelyn, age 18, 2) Mary, age 19, 3) Rachael, age 16, and 4) Veronica, age 17. I present the findings by drawing heavily on these four young women's own words. In the excerpts

selected to advance my argument on what the data convey about struggle and resilience, I use ellipses to indicate where some text is omitted (necessary for brevity), but the young women's words are not changed. Since the interviews were conducted using an active interview strategy (see Mann, 2014, p. 63), the interactions between the interviewer and the interviewee are an important consideration in analysis. For brevity and clarity, however, I have omitted the interviewer's contributions unless I regarded including them as necessary for clarification or context.

Reflexivity

In conducting a qualitative analysis of narratives I do not purport to seek objective truths. Instead this thesis is an exploration life stories situated within an epistemological framework that views narratives of lived experience as a window into interviewees self-understandings (Alasuutari, 2010; Bishop, 2009; Gilles & Edwards, 2005; Gubrium & Koro-Ljungberg, 2005; Keso, Lehtimaki & Pietilanen, 2009; Lincoln, Lynham & Guba, 2011; Mauthner & Doucet, 2003; Tanggaard, 2009). Lincoln et al. (2011) insist that researchers bear in mind that "we construct knowledge through our lived experiences and through our interactions with other members of society" (p. 103; see also Braun and Clarke, 2006). Given that, the analysis presented in this thesis is the product of at least three individuals: the interviewer, the interviewee and me, the analyst. Drawing on Lincoln et al. (2011) my role in this endeavour is that of a "facilitator of multivoice construction" (p. 101).

Important to this facilitator role, I came to this project with prior knowledge, goals and assumptions, which I address in more detail in the discussion section of the thesis. Some scholars stress that it is impossible to truly separate ourselves from what we know

(Gilles & Edwards, 2005; Lincoln et al., 2011). I agree with this contention, and argue it is important to acknowledge my prior experience, as opposed to attempting to bracket it. Bourdieu makes the compelling argument that the material being examined in the social sciences is different than the natural sciences, thus a different approach is justified (as cited in Fries, 2009). Bourdieu also stresses the importance of checking one's beliefs and assumptions (Bourdieu, 1996), arguing that this adds a level of vigor to qualitative research (Fries, 2009). Guided by these assumptions, in the Discussion section of the thesis I reflect and comment upon my own assumptions, potential biases and subject positioning.

Braun and Clarke (2006) emphasize that a key part of the job of analysis is the job of actively constructing meaning. Salient to this, it is important to note that how I understood and interpreted what an interviewee meant by a passage will predictably differ from how this passage would be understood and interpreted by another researcher. This is a fundamental reason why self-reflection is an important part of this thesis project. The element of reflexivity requires that I explore how I reached the analytic conclusions I did, and why I picked certain foci over others (Keso et al., 2009; Richards, 2011). This is to say, I agree with those who contend that an element of reflexivity contributes to the responsible production of knowledge. In this thesis, it means that I recognize that I must interrogate what I choose to bring out of the data to create my narrative on what the data convey. As part of this, a central question that I have endeavoured to keep in mind is the question of how the knowledge I construct may benefit the population represented by the interviewees.

The Four Young Women's Stories

Struggle.

In order to understand processes of struggle and resilience, it is first important to consider what the four young women struggled with, or against. This section outlines some of the struggles the four young women narrated.

A Rock and a Hard Place.

The work of growing up is made especially hard when a youth runs up against fairly unworkable roadblocks. Rachael and Veronica both articulated such roadblocks.

Rachael.

Rachael, a 16 year old with a background marked by family instability, sexual assault and alcohol dependency in the family, discussed the situation she was working through at the time of her interview, which was to move beyond unstable living arrangements so that she could concentrate on school. This was a struggle that truly put her at risk of criminal justice system involvement:

> Rachael: I've stayed at friend's houses. I've sold drugs. I've done everything I could to basically survive without having to compromise my morals. My morals, in that which are prostitution, and um, selling people out. Like, you know, like I don't want to do either of those things because both are dangerous.

At the time of this interview, Rachael was living with her boyfriend's family and searching for an apartment of her own. She outlined how inability to trust any of the adults in her life prior to living with her boyfriend's mother impacted her ability to secure

the social transfer payments that would pay for her rent, as she would need someone to act as a trustee each month:

> Rachael: I didn't have one adult I trusted ... [the response of staff at the social transfer payment agency was] 'Too bad. You don't have anyone who can help you out, then we can't help you'.

Rachael discussed the fact that several struggles intersected in her life to make it harder for her to attend school. School is harder for youth who are on their own at an early age, regardless of how badly they may want to attend. Given that these issues happened around roughly the same time, it gave her little time to be able to recover from sexual assault (explored in more detail below), and plan her next move. Rachael had a clear picture that school was something she needed to do for herself, and articulated some of the life experiences that were in the way of her achieving her goals:

> Rachael: I want to be able to get through it well … I had missed so much school for a semester and had failed all my classes ... I am a good student in the sense, like I am capable of really decent marks. And um, like before I even got into high school and all that social stuff got in the way, like I graduated with an 89 average. And I was a valedictorian and everything else. But all this stuff's happened to me, that it's hard to concentrate in school … I owe my roommate money, you know what I mean... I'm worried about whether or not I had a trustee. Yeah I was worried about whether or not I had a place to live.
>
> *Veronica.*

Seventeen year old Veronica, whose father was in jail for sexual assault, similarly found herself between a 'rock and a hard place'. For Veronica, this was related to the pressures of picking up the slack within her family:

> Veronica: My mother? You should have seen her ... My mother's father and my mom had owned a business. Two companies, they had both construction and roofing companies. And my mom had to hold up the business herself for a year after he [Veronica's father] had went [to jail] and it was really rough. I raised my brothers actually for a year on my own. I was 14 years old, umm, by the end I was probably like 15… that's when everything started to fall apart and you know. Like, school ... just everything. … Then I noticed my brothers behaviours were getting better and my behaviour was getting better. But then I felt a lot of resentment towards [maintaining the household] ... you know I was like raising my brothers. So I had her, and he [father] was in jail, and just [pause], I don't know it was pretty harsh.

These familial pressures began to take a toll on Veronica in terms of school performance as well as contributing to anxiety problems.

Abuse in the family.

Mary, Veronica and Rachael all described abuse that they experienced in their family.

Mary.

As with many youth, Mary struggled with emotional and physical abuse from her

mother and father:

> Mary: I ran away from my house, and I went to [my boyfriend's] house. Then my parents like came there cus they found out from a friend ... And all of a sudden I heard my dad's voice. And I was like, 'What the hell is that? ... [A]ll of a sudden he walks in the door and got all violent … I had like bruises on my eye, everywhere, and my shirt got torn up."

After the incident in her boyfriend's apartment, police were involved but Mary didn't feel they took her side seriously:

> Mary: We went to the police station. And they're like, 'oh, well, what's your name, and what happened?' ... They didn't do nothing. I'm like, 'I'm not going home.' And they're like, 'There's nothing you can do.' And I'm like, 'what do you mean there's nothing I can do? I just got beat the hell up. Like, you're going to tell me I can't, I have to go back with them?' ... I was fifteen. And they didn't do nothing.

Upon being sent back home, the abuse escalated:

> Mary: So then, the next day I had to go with my parents and they were like choking me and everything and like my dad was like holding me. And my brother came, like as basically I couldn't breathe and my brother came and knocked him off. And I was like 'oh my god'. And I basically, that's why I love my brother because I think he just like saved my life that day. Because they were going crazy, and they were like, 'We wouldn't kill you.' And I was like 'You basically did.'

Like I couldn't frickin breathe. A few more minutes or whatever, or seconds, I

don't know what would have happened.

This event led to Mary's removal from the house, and she described foster care:

Mary: So she [the Children's Aid Society worker] made me go with her. And I

was like, 'Thank God.' I was so relieved. Like I know foster care sucks and

everything, but out of a house that you can't even, I can't even sit at the dinner

table with peace. There always has to be some yelling. It's like why can't we all

just get along?

Veronica.

Veronica's life history was marked by abuse in her family. She narrated severe

violence from her father to her mother:

Veronica: I used to see my mom get beat all the time ... by my real father, my

biological father. He used to, he broke her jaw, shattered it, broke her cheekbone.

Rachael.

Rachel gave an example of some of the kinds of abuse she endured from her

stepfather:

Rachael: I've been restrained. I've been, like not even restrained as an excuse ...

My step father was attacking me. And he used it as an excuse to my mother that

he was restraining me. When I'm alone in a room, cleaning myself, like I'm just by

myself ... And he comes and attacks me and starts trying to physically hurt me,

when he's a full grown man. And if he needed to restrain me, he'd just [kicking noise] you know what I mean, like hold me down.

Rachael explained that for her, the abuse was from both her mother and her father. Rachael's biological father had an alcohol abuse problem and was also physically abusive, but for Rachael dealing with that was preferable to handling the mental abuse she endured from her mother:

Rachael: I was living with my dad for five months and then, he's an alcoholic. And then I got kicked out during one of his alcoholic rages, when he was gonna like attack me ... So um, I had to go back to my mom's … You know, I couldn't handle it any more. ... I won't move back to my mom's. But I would move back to my dad's. Just because, I could have deal, I can deal with the alcohol abuse, more than I can deal with this psychological maniupulatory, manipulative game abuse at my mom's.

Instability and early independence.

All four of the young women indicated that instability and early independence impacted their lives.

Evelyn.

This research community is in Ontario. The agency that oversees youth is called the Children's Aid Society (CAS). Evelyn was involved with the CAS from an early age. She indicates that she personally had been in trouble, when the circumstances that brought her into care were out of her control. It could be that she had internalized the life

troubles she had experienced, despite the fact that the situational factors were out of her locus of control. It is also possible that she simply meant she recognized that she was in a bad situation. Evelyn was 18 at the time of these interviews and had to mediate instability in her home life since the age of seven. She had been on her own since the age of 15:

> Evelyn: I was in trouble since I was 8 years old … I have been in a number of foster homes and have been on my own since I was 15. These was stuff I had to deal with. My dad and my mom had a stroke when I was seven. That's why I went to Children's Aid, so it's been a mess.

In some instances, the catalyst for instability comes closer to the teen years, but Evelyn's case is one of a long string of unsuccessful placements. Having been placed in care at an early age, Evelyn described feelings of stigma surrounding her life circumstances. She noted that parents of friends were quick to judge:

> Evelyn: I did not have that many friends because they thought that I was bad. Their parents knew that I was in foster care, but they did not know why I was in foster care.

Evelyn's experience in foster homes varied, some she found to be pleasant (as will be discussed in a later section of this thesis), but one she described as particularly abhorrent:

> Evelyn: I have been to a couple that I could not even understand how they can be foster parents. And one of them, I told my social worker about them and they got shut down because one of them was hitting like their own kids, and they were beating us and calling us names and stuff like that.

Veronica.

Veronica moved out on her own at the age of 16, and as a consequence school became harder for her to fully concentrate on:

Veronica: Actually, I get a check, but it (inaudible) right now. I could go to work for my mom, like you know what I mean, she's told me from the beginning, like you know. You have to go to work, you have to go to school, you have to do something, you know, you can't be a bum the rest of your life. I was like alright, you know (laughing). And right now I'm focusing on school.

Rachael.

When Rachael was abused by her stepfather, she called the police but they returned Rachael to her mother and stepfather's house. At this point, the situation escalated, and for Rachael this was one of the turning points when she realized she had to leave her parents' house:

Rachael: [The police] basically just threatened me with Children's Aid foster care, which I've heard nothing but horror stories about ... they're [the police] like 'either go home, you're 15, go home or go to foster care'. Basically. And I'm like, 'thanks for the help guys'. You know what I mean. Um. All the, every phone was taken off the wall and hidden in their room with a padlock doorknob at the time. So that I couldn't call anybody. I was locked in my room, which didn't have a door at the time, because they took my doorknob off and then my door and then disconnected the electricity to my room – all my step dad's ideas. Yeah, it was, it

was crazy ... Like was going through such emotional stress being there that I, I had to leave.

Rachael did not consider life in a foster home to be a viable option for her for two reasons: proximity to another youth who had sexually assaulted her and a perceived ban on contact with external supports such as friends and peers:

Rachael: where the rape happened was pretty much on [named street] which is, which is right near there, like right up the street basically, and that's where he lives still, because it happened at his house.

The struggles that Rachael had to work though, including sexual assault and abuse in the home, left her feeling she needed to be able to contact her supports; it was explained to her that cellular phones were not allowed in this one particular foster home. She outlined this part of her experience:

Rachael: I went for the orientation. No. No foster homes. At the group home for the [young women's shelter], I went to the orientation [for the group home] and everything. I said it's not for me. They were going to take away my cell phone even. Like I said, that was a very emotional weekend for me as well. Like I, I just realized what happened to me. I needed my phone in case I needed to talk to somebody.

Mary.

Mary was 19 at the time of her interview, and her history is one of violence in the home and instability. She described the catalyst for leaving home as a particularly violent encounter with her parents:

Mary: [My parents] both beat the crap out of me...I had problems with them like abusing me when I was little, well, throughout my whole life or whatever. And I don't know, I couldn't take it … they'd beat me up, so I just couldn't take it no more. ... So then I decided to leave, and she'd always say stupid remarks and stuff, like 'Oh, go kill yourself, you're such a bad', blah blah blah. If you think of me like that, then fine you don't need me. And my brother was like crying, and like I didn't want him to see that ... I'd rather go leave so he doesn't see the situation, because they're always good to him for some reason ... I was never good enough, you know what I mean?

Mary's narrative is rich with details of CAS placements. She reported that part of the reason for her instability was that she did not feel safe in one particular placement:

Mary: One day I'm sitting [at my foster home] eating something and [the foster home operator] is like, 'I'll give you a reason to hate me.' And I'm like, 'excuse me?' Like, you know what I mean, and called the foster like worker, and they didn't do anything about it ... And they tried to get me to go back in there and I kept running away ... I was running away from that one house because it sucked. I never ran away in my life, but until I got into that house I ran away. Cus this lady was telling me she was going to give me a reason to hate her. I didn't want to know the reason was, so, I kept on running away. And I thought they obviously

got the clue that you know, obviously I didn't want to be there. So I kept on running. And I ran, and I ran.

Mary did not see life in the foster care system as ideal, but she did see it as a better alternative than the abuse she encountered in her parent's home. She had a relatively good experience in her first foster home, though the way she had been treated at her parent's home made a stable environment less comfortable for her:

> Mary: My first foster home it was the best. I thought of them as my parents. I was so happy I got a good foster home. But then I guess, I don't know, I wanted to move out after that. Because my parents didn't really show me all that much love, I kinda felt like so uncomfortable in a way ... [I]t was too much, like I'm like 'Oh my god, they actually love me.' And I don't know, I was like, I need to get out of this house ... I guess maybe because I've been so used to always being, I got too scared, of being hurt so much. I couldn't actually believe that someone actually cared.

Mary described the next placement as very different from her first foster home:

> Mary: Then I moved out and then I was actually like, wow I should have just stayed at the house I was at. Because I went to this other house, and one of the ladies was like, 'Oh if you ever get pregnant you have to leave this house because I can't deal with that because I can't have children.' And I'm like, 'You know, I understand.' But I'm [thinking] like, you know, you didn't have to put it like that.

Mary's next experience was not much more pleasant for her:

Mary: I ended up going to a different foster home in the city. And the lady was okay, except she tried to not feed me. I'd eat cereal and toast. You know, you could only have one. And I was like [thinking], they pay you to feed us, like a lot. And she'd have groceries in her room and I didn't understand … We, like we'd only have a little thing of pizza once in a while, so. And I don't know it was just stupid. So yeah, this one time my boyfriend took a hundred bucks and went grocery shopping and bought me a whole bunch of food. And [he] was like, 'No I'm not having you eat peanut butter all the time.' That's all I ate, peanut butter.

There was a supported independent living program in the community, but Mary explained that she found this placement too dirty to be comfortable:

Mary: I moved into my own place they paid [for]. And then there's like mice and I told [the caretaker] about it, and he didn't do anything ... I didn't want to stay there, I'm used to living in clean places … I was so scared to stay there, so I told my worker and she didn't do nothing about it. And I was getting like really pissed off.

Sexual assault.

Veronica, Rachael and Evelyn all experienced sexual assault or attempted sexual abuse as a child or as a youth.

Veronica.

Sexual assault was prevalent in Veronica's life in three ways: her father was incarcerated for sexual assault, she herself had been sexually assaulted and she saw it as a

part of a wider pattern of sexual assault becoming more common. She believed it to be one of the most pressing problems among her cohort:

> Veronica: You know, sexual assault is definitely rising … I think that's one of the biggest issues right now… you know, you go out, you drink, you know, have a party, or whatever. And you know, boom, date rape drug.

Veronica did not go into a great amount of detail on her own assault, though she did indicate that she planned to seek counselling in order to deal with it:

> Veronica: I've been sexually assaulted in the past. I guess, I don't know. I just want to forget about that and you know. Thinking about it is just bringing back flashbacks and memories and it's really scary ... Me actually, I'm going to be going for counselling in a couple of weeks.

As the result of charges for sexual assault, Veronica's father was incarcerated at the time of the interview. She shared how this impacted her family:

> Veronica: I'm always around. I just, umm, my dad's not around he's incarcerated like I said. So, umm, I spend a lot of quality time with them to make up for their dad not being there ...

> Researcher: So what happened that your dad's in jail?

> Veronica: Rape.

> Researcher: Really?

> Veronica: Yeah.

Rachael.

Rachael had to contend with a sexual assault by a peer. This male also later physically assaulted her. These events compounded the turmoil Rachael was enduring with her parents, her struggle for independence, and her difficulties with school.

Rachael discussed the attack and its continued impact on her life. While it is true that most youth deal with problems with their friends, the kinds of problems Rachael described are of a greater caliber. She discussed lashing out at this friend who she felt betrayed her when she was sexually assaulted:

> Rachael: When I heard that, I just go so enraged that I, like waited for her after work, and then I chased her down ... I went nuts on her. Like she, she's terribly afraid of me now ...
>
> Researcher: How do you feel about that?
>
> Rachael: [pause]. Not bad at all, because she was supposed to be my best friend.

The harassment continued for Rachael, and she recollected

> Rachael: [My best friend] gave him my phone number and address when he was out of, when he was getting out of jail and he was telling her he wanted to kill me. She also um let him in the house when I was there. When I was on my, I was on my way to my first meeting for the [sexual assault center], and I didn't make it because, my rapist attacked me again ... I was on my way for my first meeting there. And um, when I was on my way, she allowed him in the house. And he attacked me, like he was choking me, throwing me around. He was trying to kiss

me as he was attacking me. Like just to taunt me, like, like, like oh man, like it was bad ... [H]e actually moved right next door to my father, so if I chose to move home, I couldn't.

In dealing with the fallout, Rachael hadn't called the police, and to a certain extent blamed herself for not calling the police. She had poor experiences with police in the past, thus she didn't feel they would help. She discussed the period after the sexual assault:

Researcher: He's threatened to kill you?

Rachael: Oh, oh several times. I remember um right after it happened, I didn't accept it … that's another reason why I couldn't have called the cops even, was because I waited too long. I, I uh, I didn't ... I made tons of mistakes ... Because [the police] would be, they wouldn't believe me. They're like, 'You're lying', you know what I mean, 'because why would you wait this long?' ... I remember not believing it happened. I remember pushing it totally out of mind, to the point where I forgot it happened.

Rachael eventually did confront her attacker:

Rachael: I remember when I wasn't sure what happened. Like I needed to hear him, I needed to hear if he felt like he had any remorse of any kind. ... I called him from the payphone right outside the cafeteria. ... [I] just said, 'Do you remember what happened last time we saw each other?' And as soon as I said that, he got immediately defensive and started yelling at me. He's like [change voice] 'What are you trying to say? You're trying to say I raped you?' And at that

point is when I really, yeah, okay, he knows.

Rachael outlined the second attack in a little more detail:

> Rachael: My neck was like beet red, and mainly because I was struggling … he had actually, after that, he had blown up my phone, my cell phone … that was a few months ago.

The traumatic experience left Rachael with a general distrust of men, which she stated clearly: "I don't trust men". She was able to view the situation as one that didn't reflect on her sense of self or her character:

> Rachael: When it did finally happen [accepting the fact that she'd been sexually assaulted], like I knew a lot about it already, so I was okay. Like and I know. I know it's not my fault. And I, I don't feel any less of a person because it happened ... And I don't feel dirty or anything … I take, took care of myself because I knew that no one else was going to take care of me, you know what I mean.

Regardless of this general distrust of males, Rachael found her boyfriend to be a source of protection from the continued harassment of this attacker:

> Rachael: The guy who had raped me, was like, 'oh I don't want to scrap with [Rachael's boyfriend], dog' blah blah blah. He was all scared ... so he's been afraid of him ever since.

> *Evelyn.*

Following her mother's stroke, Evelyn's uncle tried to sexually abuse her, thus she was unable to live with this set of her extended family:

Evelyn: My mom had a stroke and when she was moved to the ICU … I moved in with my aunt and uncle and my uncle tried to molest me.

The self as older.

Of the four young women, Evelyn, Veronica and Rachael described having to grow up early or as being older than their chronological age, and in a sense having emancipation from parental authority foisted upon them.

Evelyn.

Evelyn explained how she was forced to grow up and how this made her feel like a pariah from her group of friends.The fact of having grown up early is a double-edged sword. At some points, Evelyn framed it as a struggle or liability, but in other ways, she saw it as a strength, which will be outlined later in this thesis. She eloquently described growing up early as something forced upon her: "I had to grow up a little bit earlier because I was forced to". Evelyn later goes on to elucidate "by the time I was 15 I was more mature than my other 15 year-old friends so, I felt like an outcast from everybody".

Veronica.

Veronica outlined how her father's incarceration made it such that she had to step up to help take care of her brothers. For her, being thrust into a role older than her chronological age was a source of resentment, which she described as "harsh", as noted previously.

Rachael.

As a result of her lived experiences, Rachael felt as though she was older than her chronological age. This sense of early maturation does represent a resource in pathways that draw upon and build resiliency, as will be discussed later. This sense of feeling like one is older is also related to her struggles. Rachael explained that she felt older because of what she had endured:

> Rachael: My birth certificate would say I am 16 years old. But I don't say I'm 16 years old. Like I wouldn't, I don't think I am, I don't. I deal with a lot more than a 16 year old would.

Intimate partner violence.

Intimate partner violence featured in the narratives of three of the young women: Mary, Veronica and Evelyn.

Mary.

Mary experienced violent intimidation at the hands of a family member of her ex-boyfriend. This ex-boyfriend's cousin used intimidation and perceived threats with a weapon against her then-current partner:

> Mary: [My] ex-boyfriend's cousin or something, they're like, 'Oh, I'm going to shoot your boyfriend if you don't uh dump him.'… he's like, 'well, if [your ex-boyfriend] can't have you, no one can.'… This guy's coming up to me like, 'Well, uh, why are you with [your current boyfriend]'? ... And I talk and he's sitting there trying to talk to me. And I'm trying to walk away, and he's like, 'Don't you try and walk away from me.' I swear to God, he's like, 'I'll get something out of the

trunk.' I'm like, 'What do you need to get out of the trunk? A gun' … [I]t's not even him, I haven't dated him, I dated his cousin.

Veronica.

Veronica indicated that when her brother witnessed her partner abusing her, her brother tried to emulate this behaviour:

Veronica: My brother one time, one of my ex-boyfriends he came up to me and he like choked me right. And my little brother saw and he went up and then he tried to do it to me.

Veronica's story demonstrates how witnessing violence can contribute to violent behaviour, though fortunately this served as wake up call for Veronica. Veronica also discussed how the abuse from this partner escalated. Knowing that seeing this behaviour could affect her younger brother was a catalyst for change in her life:

Veronica: You know, I kicked my boyfriend out, and you know, back after. That was before I, I received the black eye from him ... He choked me after, then he gave me the black eye, then that was it. That was it, never ever. I haven't been with him since. When my brother came up and choked me, actually saw it, I don't know, that did it. That's when I knew, you know what I mean, this isn't how, you know.

Evelyn.

Intimate partner violence was also a feature in Evelyn's life, and she previously had a partner that inflicted severe violence on her – enough that she ended up in the

hospital. She declined to report the abuse out of fear of her abuser. Though she did not excuse the behaviour of her ex-boyfriend, she did blame herself for not reporting it to the police. Evelyn framed the experience as a lesson, however, and indicated that she would not remain in an abusive relationship in the future. An abusive relationship that she had at age 15 was part of this:

> Evelyn: I started dating this guy who abused me and so I ended up in the hospital because of him. And, like, we were dating for about a year and he put me in the hospital. And then from then on, I, I never wished that on any young women ever … The first time he was violent, we got into this argument, it was the middle of winter and I was living with my dad and he was on the back porch and we were sitting at the top of the stairs and he got mad at me … And he hit me and I went falling down the stairs. And I cracked my head open ... when my boyfriend abused me, I got pregnant by him and he told me that if I did not get an abortion that he would kill me. So I had to have an abortion ... [T]here were other times, there were a lot of times. There was this one time when he called me because he was supposed to go on his friend's camping trip for the weekend and called me from there and he was drunk, and he told me, 'I'll come to pick you up tomorrow so you can spend few days up here, because it is really nice'. So, I said 'fine'. And he said that he would be here at a certain time and he was four hours late. So when he got there I did not want to go. I told him that I have made other plans because I thought that he was not coming. And my dad couldn't help because my dad wasn't home, and my dad is short so he pulled a knife on me and told me that if I did not get in the car, I would be sorry. So, it wasn't just that time, it was a lot

of times. Not even that he hit me whatever, it was a lot of times that he was threatening my life, I think he did like four times.

Evelyn declined to go to the police out of fear. She described an incident where she ended up in the hospital, and when asked by the researcher if she reported it, she says "No, I never called the police ... I was afraid". She went on to explain that from this experience, she learned. She framed it as a mistake on her part to not to have left after the first abusive incident, though she did not excuse the behaviour of her former romantic partner:

> Evelyn: I just had to learn from my mistake and I realized that I really have to not jump into relationships like that. You know, first time ... then, when he's going to put his hands on me the second time, I am not going to stick around.

Resiliency.

Some of the key elements that I picked out from these narratives were also identified as important markers of resiliency by Masten, Best and Garmezy (1990). These were recovery from trauma or maltreatment and competent functioning in the face of acute or chronic life stressors. Another important element was the support of a caring adult. Some other salient markers of resiliency were a sense of agency or tenacity, and turning points in these young women's lives. These markers of resiliency are part and parcel to the resources these young women identified as crucial in building their pathway towards more positive outcomes. Taken together, this demonstrates that resiliency is a process as opposed to an end state.

Support of caring adults.

For two of the young women, Mary and Rachael, the support of a number of caring adults played a large role in their movements towards positive outcomes and enhanced resiliency. The support of these adults helped them to move forward with their lives.

Mary.

The support of a caring adult was important in Mary's journey towards resiliency:

Mary: This other lady, she's like my grandma, but she's like close. I call her my grandma, because she's like one of my friends. She felt so bad for me so she took me in. And her grandma was like, yeah, she called the thing and said, 'I want to have her at my house so she can get her school done here. I'm right by [school named].' You know, she's like 'This girl does not deserve to be threatened by anybody, she's had enough of that in her life, do you guys not understand?' ... She's like, 'I don't care if you don't want her to live here, because she's going to be living here. Because I don't want to see a nice child getting like, you know, hurt by people.' And all that, whatever she said, so that's where I ended up living. And it was good, you know what I mean.

Though Mary had mixed experiences with other workers, one stood out as particularly important in helping her to move forward:

Mary: Well, my other workers were fine. Like my um worker before her, she had to leave because she was pregnant. She was fine with me. Because in the summer that year, and I actually ended up getting pregnant and I went to her and told her. And she was so good with me, like she didn't even like complain, or anything.

Like, but I asked her, like, I wanted something done. I was like can you help me with this, sure, she'd do it right away ... [Her previous worker], like it's like she wouldn't do anything. I'd just ask her, all I did was ask her for something, a little help and like, you know what I mean?

Rachael.

For Rachael, one of the important avenues of support was the caring adults in her life outside of family members. One such adult was the child and youth worker at her school. She described his role in her life:

Rachael: He's respected by a lot of students, if not all of them … [H]e's really good at what he does for sure. And you can tell he does it, he doesn't do it for the pay cheque ... He cares about the kid. He's not there to try to scare them or try to threaten them about getting kicked out of school or anything like that. He's not, he's more compassionate. He's more ready to make um an effort to find the solution to best fits the child instead of the textbook … [H]e's very personal with his, with the child, like he knows how, he's one of the type of people that knows how to connect with them. And really, truly help them. And then he's also not afraid to pick up the phone if he needs to, for other like excessive help, like um, he helped me get into the [young women's shelter program] the first time when I had nowhere else to go. And then um, I don't know, he's been there pretty much in the background. Like I know he's there, I can come to him. Like through everything that's been going on, and he's like, gives good advice and everything.

For Rachael, getting the help she needed after the sexual assault was not always easy, and she felt her age played a role in the way she was treated by social service agencies. She remembered:

> Rachael: I needed somebody who had a voice. I don't have a voice, I'm 16 years old. I don't have a voice until I'm 18.

Positive partner influences.

For three of the four young women, a boyfriend was an important positive influence and source of support: Evelyn, Mary and Rachael. Many of the resources utilized by these young women are nested in social relations. Contrary to the popular view that at-risk youth simply 'run around' with other at-risk youth, pro-social youth are a potent component of their life worlds.

Evelyn.

Evelyn described how her boyfriend was an important factor in helping her past her then-current situation. She explained:

> Evelyn: He stayed with me throughout my pregnancy, and no other guy would stay with a girl once she's pregnant with another guy. But he stayed with me. And he was at the hospital and he took care of me the whole nine months. And he was at the hospital and when the adoption workers came in. He was there.

Mary.

One crucial resource for Mary in overcoming this rocky period in her life was the support of her boyfriend. She discussed his involvement, as outlined previously, noting

his reaction to her situation:

> Mary: He's like, 'What are you eating?' I'm like, 'Peanut butter.' He's like 'No.'
> And he invited me over and he was like, 'Come here, you need to eat something,
> seriously you're like getting too skinny'.

Rachael.

A major source of support for Rachael was her boyfriend and his mother, who acted as a trustee for her funds and allowed her to live in their family home. Her boyfriend was also a source of strength for her, and a resource in terms of encouragement and support. Rachael explained their roles in her life:

> Rachael: I have an amazing boyfriend. Like, I didn't want a boyfriend. The last
> think I wanted right now was a boyfriend just to screw me over even more right
> now ... but he's amazing. Like we've been friends for three years before we even,
> actually even thought about each other like that ... [A]nd I've lived with him
> already for about two months now. Like, and his mom loves me and wants me to
> live with him ... I've been living with my boyfriend mainly, and um I've been
> getting rides to school every day, so I'm here on time and stuff. And I don't have
> to worry about that ... Now that I'm with my boyfriend, and living with him and,
> like I eat there all the time. Like it's not a problem ... [H]is mom gives us lunch
> money each. Like his dad answers phone calls and refers to me as his daughter ...
> Yeah. Like it's just like … I'm protected from everything ... It's a home.

Programming.

A vital external resource in working towards positive outcomes and enhanced resilience is programming. Rachael, Mary, Veronica and Evelyn had all participated in one or more counselling or mental health intervention.

Rachael.

One source of support for Rachael was the counsellor she worked with after her sexual assault. This counsellor helped her to learn to manage the myriad stressors in her life and deal with them based on level of immediacy. Rachael recalled that

> Rachael: it wasn't until I went to my meeting at the Sexual Assault Centre where [the counsellor was] like 'you know what, you can't even deal with this right now. Rape is not even something that you need to worry about right now'… Like you need to get your basic needs for life to be met first. You need food, water, shelter and then obviously, I need to get help for what happened to me and everything else.

> Researcher: So there are some systems that have helped you. So that had, that wasn't.

> Rachael: But you know what?

> Researcher: Yeah.

> Rachael: That wasn't the system. It was the person ... It's the person who does her job for not only a pay cheque, but because she's decided to go into that line of work for a reason.

An important part of Rachael's recovery process was her involvement with mental

health services. She viewed mental health services as necessary, and believed they would help her to move forward and recover from the complex traumatic life experiences she had encountered. Rachael articulated:

> Rachael: I've wanted to do counselling anyway. I wanted to seek it anyway. I knew I needed it, because some days I could talk about it and be fine, like now ... They, they, they really do evaluate your situation and try to understand where you are.

> *Mary.*

A crucial element in helping Mary to overcome her traumatic background was her experience with counselling. She indicated that she saw how it could benefit others as well:

> Mary: It's just counselling whatever, maybe it'll help me, you know what I mean. Because I just went through like leaving my parents' house, and all this crap going to a new foster house. So my worker, or my counsellor actually, ended up being my worker after – the one who was all helpful because she got transferred because she was doing the thing to become a worker. It was good there, so that's why I had a good worker... she knew all my problems and everything. So, it was good. But, no, um, it was good because I got to speak out and she got to talk to me so it was better. Like she talked about everything, violence, anything, like anything I wanted to talk to, and it helped me, you know what I mean? So that's why I think, I think lots of people should go to that you know, because people usually think that oh, counselling's just for people who have problems, but it helps you because you get to know like the real you, you know what I mean?

Mary articulated that she found counselling programs to be an important element in her recovery:

Mary: It was good, I know they talk to you about a lot of stuff, like everything that's happened in my life, and I don't know it helped me. Like you know before I'd cry about everything that happened and now I'm cool with it. And even if it's like embarrassing to me or whatever, I'm kinda like whatever, I wouldn't change anything that happened even though I had to go through some pain or whatever, with all my stuff. But it just made me stronger and at least I can go out to other people and tell them about it and help them, you know what I mean, because they're not alone. I've been through it.

Veronica.

Veronica made a very important point when she indicated that wait times for programming reduce their effectiveness. She outlined how families need help, and that long wait times make it such that the problems families endure continue to fester. Thus, an important part of a program is how quickly it is able to deal with the problem it is designed to address. Mary discussed the merits of programming and appreciated the public speakers that came into her school. She explained that it helped that people could speak and be heard. An additional form of programming that benefitted Mary was counselling, which also carries the notion of being heard. The idea that youth need to be given a 'voice' was a theme also articulated by Rachael when she discussed her issues in getting through to the proper channels in the Children's Aid Society.

Evelyn.

Anger management and counselling can be beneficial in overcoming traumatic and challenging life circumstances. Evelyn demonstrated that it was indeed an important piece of the puzzle in helping her to move forward:

Evelyn: I have been in anger management because I had just too much stuff happening in my life. And I am with the Children's Aid, and my social worker suggested it - because we really don't need to have you blowing up. Because I kept everything inside ... I was at anger management and it helped me.

Evelyn also indicated that buy-in is essential, and used her boyfriend as an example:

Evelyn: My boyfriend, he had very bad anger problems and he's done like a lot of beating up people but he's never hit me and his family. And he's like that when he gets mad, he just blows up on them. And nothing works for him. He's been to the [youth counselling center], he's been to a counsellor and nothing works, and I think it is because he's doesn't want to know that he has a problem.

Evelyn further illustrated this point with an example from her own life:

Evelyn: At first, the [youth counselling center] did not really help, because I just did not want to help, I wanted to fail. And you know, screw up everybody. And when I went with one on one counsellor, she made me feel better because she made me feel that she was listening to just me.

Competent functioning, agency and tenacity.

For these interviewees, agency and tenacity played a large role in all four of these young women's ability to cope with their situation. Their ability to function was thus tied

to their sense of agency and tenacity. The four interviewees demonstrate agency and tenacity in discussing how they took charge of their situations. Though different forms of external resources contributed to their ability to take charge of their situation, agency is a large factor in this. Three young women articulated this directly: Veronica, Evelyn and Rachael.

Veronica.

Veronica chose to take charge of her situation by seeking out counselling after her sexual assault. She explained that counselling was transformative in her life, and it encouraged her to help others in a similar situation, which relates to notions of tenacity and survival. Oftentimes, survivors of trauma choose to reach out and help similarly affected others. This demonstrates the interplay between agency and pathways, and the role resilience plays in achieving positive outcomes. Veronica recognized that in order to better help her community in the future, she needed to first do work to help herself:

> Veronica: I could help the community, but right now I need to focus on helping myself before I can help somebody else.

Veronica indicated that her maturity played into her learning style, articulating that she resented being treated "like a kid" by teachers, and that she preferred a less supervised learning environment.

Veronica demonstrated her ability to take charge of the situation when she stepped in to take care of her brothers when her father was in jail. Though this sense of early maturation is a struggle, as discussed earlier, it is also an internal resource important to the process of building resilience.

Veronica equated achieving an education with not playing the role of victim. For her, achieving an education was part and parcel to her survival and recovery. She explained that "I don't want to play the victim for the rest of my life. I'm not going to, I refuse to … I need an education". Thus, for Veronica personal growth and tenacity were integral to resiliency.

Evelyn.

Early independence is tough for any youth, but for Evelyn, the alternative was unbearable. For many youth, leaving home is better than enduring the abuse they experience in the home. Therefore, while her choices were limited, Evelyn took charge of her situation and left her family's home.

Evelyn similarly made the conscious decision to put school first, and for her this indicated a step in the right direction. She wanted to make a different kind of life for herself and recognized her role in terms of the decisions she made:

> Evelyn: I am finishing school now and I am really happy for myself … that's why I don't want any of that stuff around me, the fighting, and the alcohol, and the drugs because I am just starting to feel how it feels a normal life and like, to be independent. And I don't want that to be my life again … I would never do [drugs and alcohol] again because now it just scares me.

For Evelyn, taking charge of her life was an important element in her pathway towards a positive, responsible and resilient future.

Rachael.

Part of Rachael's pathway towards resilience was her tenacity in finding ways to survive on little to no resources, and not giving up. She recognized the value of her education and did anything she could to stay on track:

> Rachael: Ever since I've been with my boyfriend, I've been trying my absolute hardest to focus 100% in school … get my marks up, because I was failing every class. …. My teacher just told me this morning, that I've just reached 51%. I had 39 two weeks ago.

In as much as growing up too fast was a struggle for Rachael, she also identified it to be a source of strength:

> Rachael: I don't really need somebody to take care of me anymore ... my birth certificate would say I'm 16 years old. But I don't say I'm 16 years old … I deal with a lot more than a 16 year old would. I look in my classes and, they're like, 'Ah man, I didn't do my homework last night'. And that's their biggest problem, you know what I mean.

Rachael further narrated that she felt capable of handling her own affairs:

> Rachael: I don't need someone to, to, to find my bills for me ... I'm perfectly capable of doing that on my own ... And maybe not if I didn't, if I didn't have this last two years, my life being like this, maybe I wouldn't be at that point yet ... but I am now ... and I, I, I don't, I hate feeling like I'm being babied, and being basically disregarded because of my age constantly.

Rachael recognized the role of agency as well as limited options in her own life choices:

Rachael: I've had things that have happened to me in my life, but of the decisions I've made, even though they weren't always the right ones, have been made for a reason. And I think about them wisely because I know that if I don't, it could get me in trouble.

Rachael demonstrates a remarkable amount of maturity and insight. This level of maturity and insight may not occur in an individual that has not had to grow up as forcefully and fast. Rachael also indicated that her ability to evaluate a situation was a marker of her maturity, as noted previously.

Another choice that Rachael explained she had to make was staying at her mother's house in order to try to save enough money to move out on her own. She explicitly stated she did not want to be there, but chose to try to make it work in order to plan for a different future. For Rachael, independence from her mother was also a marker of her ability to take charge of the situation, and she discussed the fact that her school knew she was essentially emancipated from her mother. She saw herself as wholly self-reliant, as noted previously:

Rachael: I made sure I take, took care of myself because I knew that no one else was going to take care of me.

Rachael's narrative thus demonstrates the interplay between early maturation and tenacity – both are important internal resources in her struggle towards a more positive future.

Hopes and Dreams.

For each of the young women, their hopes and dreams represented an internal marker and source of resiliency. They each had aspirations that transcended the circumstances into which they were born. Rachael recognized that school was key in emerging from her struggles, Evelyn placed emphasis on nursing school, Mary wanted to be a police officer and Veronica equated continuing on in school with not playing the role of "victim". One important facet noted by these young women was their desire to get into a profession where they could help others. They all expressed a desire to help others who had been similarly disadvantaged, and this was also a theme across the rest of the interviews that were not used for this thesis.

Mary.

When asked about her future plans, Mary discussed wanting to be a police officer. Mary held out hope that if people put in the work, things could be better in her community. For her, being able to help people was also an element in her own transformation:

> Mary: I want to be a police officer ... I just need a few more credits, so I'm trying
>
> to do that. Actually, I want to go on the armed forces first ... and then go on to
>
> like police foundations stuff like that.

Veronica.

Veronica recognized the need for role models for youth who struggle, and articulated that she would like to help other youth to grow in her future career:

Veronica: I want to do something positive, you know, influence kids to you know, do better. Life, does, don't go down the wrong path, you know, you don't have to be cool, you don't know me, do drugs to fit in ... [I'm] like reconnecting with my life.

Evelyn.

For Evelyn, finishing high school was an integral part of her plan to move forward with her life, and when asked when she will graduate, she responded

Evelyn: Hopefully [I'll graduate] by the end of the next year, the semester. So I am doing really good.

Rachael.

As with the other three young women, Rachael had plans for the future. Despite the extreme disadvantage she had grappled with, holding out hope for the future was something she articulated clearly, in trying her "hardest" to stay in school.

Turning points.

The path towards a better outcome is often marked by some significant event in a person's life. This turning point could be some kind of grand epiphany, or it could be a series of events with some kind of culmination. Three of the young women' narratives explicitly support the importance of turning points: Evelyn, Rachael and Veronica.

Evelyn.

Evelyn framed her experience with intimate partner violence as a lesson as well, and indicated she wouldn't stick around again, should a future partner show signs of being abusive, as discussed previously.

The nature of growing up involves coming to some kind of fork in the road from time to time. Evelyn described some of the life experiences where she had to make some kind of decision about what she wanted or needed to do. She became pregnant at a young age and decided to give the boy up for adoption. As Evelyn reflected on this choice, she came to the decision that she had made the most responsible choice for two reasons. One was the good of her child. The other was her ability to go through school, which was crucial in her pathway from her struggles towards a better, more secure future:

> Evelyn: I want to be in school. So I don't have a child but he'll have the things he needs and he would have a father and his father would be around and stuff like that. Because it is hard ... I put him up for adoption but it's an open adoption ... At first I didn't [want to choose adoption]. Everybody was like, I mean like, my god-mother gave her son up for adoption 25 years ago. And she made me realize that I did it for my own good because she, she'll always be asking me, 'What do you think you'll be doing right now if you had [child named] with you?'

Another fork in the road for Evelyn was finishing high school:

> Evelyn: I am turning 19 and I am starting my life now, I am getting a house. I am finishing school and now I am really happy for myself … that's why I don't want any of that stuff around me, the fighting, and the alcohol, and the drugs because I

am just starting to feel how it feels a normal life and like, to be independent. And

I don't want that to be my life again.

Evelyn reflected back on the moment she hit her rock bottom:

Evelyn: I just happen to see my mom the day that I found out that I had a problem

and she said that we'll go to [Priest named] and [Priest named] said that

[residential rehabilitation] was one of my options ... I would never do [drugs and

alcohol] again because now it just scares me ... I don't know how I kept alive.

An important marker of change in Evelyn's life was her struggle with drugs and

alcohol, and she knew after treatment that she did not want to live that kind of a lifestyle

any more. Part of this realization was the recognition that alcohol addiction contributed to

her father's death.

Rachael.

An important turning point for Rachael was the stability offered by her

boyfriend's mother. This stability allowed her to concentrate on her schooling, which she

viewed as crucial to her being able to move forward towards a positive and resilient

future. Simply stated, when immediate needs such as food and shelter are being met, a

youth is able to concentrate on clearing other roadblocks to their success.

Veronica.

As with many youth who have faced struggles in their lives, Veronica had gotten

into some minor trouble with the law in the past. She articulated that this experience was

a turning point for her, and that it made her realize that she didn't want to live that kind of

a lifestyle:

> Veronica: I got into some trouble. I, you know, I said a whole bunch of things,
> and, I don't know I went to jail for a week, the [secure custody], and I got released
> on bail. And then I got back into school, and with the offence I don't know how
> I'll go back. But it was a horrible experience. I learned my lesson … I want to go
> to school and get my life on track.

Veronica saw herself as an important resource in helping to teach her brothers a different way of living and this acted as a turning point for her. Her sense of responsibility for them helped her to shape the kind of person she wanted to be:

> Veronica: I've been through a lot of stuff, like wow, so much stuff, you know,
> I've been through the drugs, I've been through everything. And I just, you know,
> I don't need it. It tears people apart, it wrecks lives, it you know. And I definitely
> don't want my brothers having a sister who's no good for them … I have to
> straighten myself out make myself better, so I have something to show to those
> kids. They look up to me.

A crucial turning point for Veronica was seeing the link between violence enacted against her by her then-boyfriend and the behaviour of her brother. When this link became clear to her, she left this abusive partner. Veronica's sense of responsibility to her brothers also helped her to realize the sort of person she wanted to be. Veronica had another major turning point when she got herself into legal trouble, and articulated vehemently that she had learned her lesson from time spent in secure custody.

Lessons from youthful voices.

All four young women had important insights on changes they thought would help themselves as well as other marginalized youth.

Rachael.

Rachael shared some definite ideas on what people who work with youth could learn from her experiences. She felt that due to her age, her opinion was automatically disregarded. She also felt that given the experiences she had already contended with, she felt older than many of her peers. She identified some of the ways that service providers could better approach youth:

> Rachael: There has, there's, there's um, probably many things they can do I guess
> ... like maybe, listen, for once. I mean, I'm 16 years old. As soon as I basically let
> that out of my mouth, like basically there's no point in talking to them anymore,
> cause they're not listening ... [T]hey need to recognize that some 16 year olds
> need to be independent.

Rachael felt that the principal of her school took an unnecessarily heavy handed approach in dealing with teens, and this lead to adversarial relationships between the students and the principal:

> Rachael: He [the principal] withheld me from class before without, for like a
> textbook problem. Where I had handed in my textbook, but it was another
> classmate's who I sat next to ... [H]e wasn't allowing me in class and that's illegal.
> That's against the law, not to allow somebody into class [and school employees

could] learn from people that actually know how to deal with kids, talk to kids. And make kids feel like they actually care.

Veronica.

Veronica had some important contributions to make about different ways that students learn. She identified that not all students learn in the same way, and believed that more would benefit from being given a little bit of freedom in terms of a less structured school day:

> Veronica: Yeah, the teachers are pretty cool. I just like, you know, the independence, and just, you know, the teachers treated you how, you know, an adult as opposed to being a little kid, you know what I mean, them chasing you around. You know, 'do you work, do this, do that', you know.

For Veronica, the key to a successful high school education was a little bit of leeway. She discussed how being treated as more mature benefitted her:

> Veronica: You know, certain classes you know the teachers they treat you with respect … We're not like kids, well not kids anymore, young adults, and I believe, that you know what I mean, we should be treated like that.

Veronica attended a smaller school where there was a smaller student to teacher ratio, and students were able to work more or less at their own pace. She found this to be enormously successful in helping her to achieve her goals:

> Veronica: There's too many people in the mainstream line schools that I think get, that think classes are getting too big, and umm, each students don't have their own

life, you know what I mean, like teachers don't spend enough time with them. They aren't getting the time that they need … I think that's also the reason why a lot of people lag behind, you know. What I mean, feel like, you know, they can't complete it, it's too stressful. And you know, that's why a lot of people drop out.

Veronica saw community based resources as essential to the health of the community and youth within it. She also realized that parents who are raising children on their own face a unique set of struggles, and she recommended that services need to be more accessible in order to head off problematic behaviour at the pass. Veronica identified that long wait lists can be very detrimental to youth:

Veronica: One of my mom's friends actually, for example, she tried getting her son into [the Big Brothers and Big Sisters Program] … And a single mother trying to raise these two kids, and the kids are horrible because you know, they don't have their mom cause their dad left, you know ... and there's a waiting list for these programs that are so long ... It takes like a year, 2 years. Sometimes longer and I think they need more programs like that for kids to get help ... the waiting list is too much. That's why all the kids are, they're like, you know, their parents don't want to put up with this program so they're like, just go outside, you know, whatever, you know take one of your toys (inaudible), you know, cause it's a mild problem. And it's more stressful to care. You know, there's a lot of single parents out there and they can't deal with all that stuff and work, and just everything, you know what I mean, all the, it's a big package and they just need help.

Evelyn.

Evelyn's narrative brought into focus some of the ways that her testimony can benefit others. She indicated some of the ways that she believed programs could be improved upon, including adding anger management to the regular curriculum. She indicated that many youth felt uncomfortable asking for help, feeling it would single them out and that a more blanket approach might help to get the message out to more at-risk youth:

> Evelyn: There is this guy who comes in every other Friday and he's our school counsellor but nobody is going to get up and say 'Miss, can I go to the counsellor?' Because they fear that people are going to talk about them ... I think that they should have somebody come in once a week, like a counsellor to talk to the whole class. Because then, if somebody said something, then somebody had a problem or something … at least they're getting an answer or something to their problems. Because I don't think that people will volunteer themselves to go.

Mary.

Mary shared many ideas on how to curb violence in schools, and one of the main points she made was that youth need something positive to do with their time. She explained the link between boredom and delinquent behaviour in response to the interviewer's question on the importance of supports in schools:

> Mary: Um, not even just at school, but even after school, you know what I mean? ... places to go … It's like, we don't have anything better to do so people are just wasting their time.

Mary also indicated that having public speakers come into her relatively small

school helped to get youth thinking about alternate ways of handling disputes. She outlined that the time for the youth to be heard was beneficial:

> Mary: I think a good thing too is that we have a speaker … and he comes in usually every Friday, every other Friday ... [E]verybody gets to like speak out, and get heard ... and I think it helps a lot because everybody gets to kinda speak about it and kinda come together.

Mary indicated that violence wasn't just an issue in her school, but she saw it part of a broader pattern of youth violence in Canada as well as other nations:

> Mary: They have people come in or the teachers talk about it all the time, and like, 'So what do you guys think about this? And like they ask you, sometimes in class we'll just talk about it and I think that's good. Because you know like, everyone should be able to talk about stuff like that. Because it's something that's happening in our, you know, country and all over the world.

An important theme that Rachael and Mary both touched upon is the idea of voice. Rachael felt she wasn't listened to. Rachael stated directly that one thing service providers could do is "like maybe listen, for once". Mary similarly felt that her worker didn't listen to her needs, leaving her in an independent living placement that was dirty, where she felt uncomfortable.

In terms of approaches service providers could take with youth, Rachael suggested that the workers should show they care about the individual youth. She explained that school providers could "learn from people that actually know how to deal with kids, talk to kids". Veronica articulated that the wait times for programming are too

long, such that small problems begin to fester and become much larger problems. To counter this, more funding would be needed to begin to provision programming more proactively. Evelyn indicated the need for adding more anger management programming in the schools. She suggested that approaching the whole class could be more beneficial, as a one-on-one approach could make youth feel singled out. Mary made the suggestion that more activities should be available for youth to partake in, and suggested a link between boredom and delinquency. As she had previously been in trouble with the law, her suggestions stemmed from personal experience.

Discussion

As discussed previously, these accounts represent subjective accounts rather than some kind of objective truth; their truths are partial and historically bound. In a similar fashion, the way I have constructed this thesis is wrapped up with my own biography, assumptions, ideals and goals. I grew up on social transfer payments. For me, instability was a way of life. As a child, my family and I moved quite often, and as a teen I frequently moved from one relative's house to another, spending some time in group homes. Life at home was not always unhappy, but there were a lot of challenges that I could not handle. Many times I either fled or was asked to leave. All of this instability was before I reached the age of 16. At the age of 16 I left home and lived with roommates, working full time. The catalyst for this was the sometimes physical, but often mental abuse in my family's home.

The experiences of these young women differ from my own in some important ways. Yet as I was reading through and analyzing the transcripts, I was frequently struck by how similar my feelings as a teen were to the feelings expressed by the interviewees,

especially those four used in my depth analysis. When the young women talk about emotional abuse, instability and early independence, I saw a lot of my own history in their testimony. I am very aware of what it feels like to feel older than one's chronological age. At the age of 16 I had dealt with much more than most, if not all my peers. I felt fully ready for emancipation. Looking back, I know that leaving home was the right choice, though I certainly would not recommend it for most youth.

In reviewing the data, I began to think about what it was that supported these young women in moving forward with their lives. What were the resources that they utilized, and what was the nature of these resources? How were these resources interrelated? How did they recover from severe trauma, and what was it that gave them hope? What was the nature of their journey towards a more positive future?

In enacting a sense of agency, these young women made choices and owned up to them, and this appeared crucial. However, the young women did not make these choices inside of some kind of vacuum. The young women made choices from a set of unattractive options. This is exemplified in their stories of running away from home or CAS placements. Given that early independence is extremely challenging for a young person, it is not likely that any youth would have taken these decisions lightly. For Evelyn, Mary, Rachael and Veronica, it was a matter of survival. Rachael fled emotional and physical abuse at home, leading her to sell marijuana to survive while navigating unstable living arrangements at age 16. Evelyn dealt with a long history of abuse and instability, leading her to strike out on her own at 15. Mary had to contend with instability in foster care placements. Veronica left home at the age of 16, which impacted her ability to focus on school, as Rachel also made clear, though at the time of the

interviews both young women discussed how they were trying to focus on their education so as to be able to work towards their hopes and dreams. There is a strong sense from these young women that their efforts to achieve stability are wrapped up with resilience. That is, in order to move forward, they needed solid ground to start from. Stability was a way to gain control of their lives, and they used their internal strength and tenacity, key components of their overall resilience, to work towards their vision of a rewarding and responsible future.

In terms of how the interviewees exercised resilience as they moved towards positive outcomes, the young women used both personal or informal and formal resources. Key was assistance from caring adults, notably in the case of Rachael, her boyfriend's mother. Veronica similarly expressed gratitude for the support of her boyfriend, who helped to feed her when times got particularly bad, as did Evelyn, who also declared appreciation for her partner as she was dealing with her pregnancy.

In terms of formal supports, Rachael explained that it "wasn't the system, it was the person" who makes a difference. For Rachael, it was the child and youth worker at her school who helped her to get into a shelter program, while offering "good advice". Veronica, Evelyn and Mary similarly utilized resources such as caring adults, supportive partners and programming such as counselling and anger management. As important as formal supports clearly were to these young women, some of the most important supports that they identified were relational. Three of the four young women emphasized that support from a partner and from caring adults was crucial to their being able to move forward with their lives.

The internal and external resources they mobilized, as discussed throughout this thesis, were complex and interrelated. The support of a partner or caring adult can help to build a stronger sense of tenacity. Similarly, hope for the future may influence a young woman to seek out the support of a child and youth worker in her school. There are myriad ways these resources combine to help marginalized youth to move forward with their life.

Just as the resources associated with achieving positive outcomes are complex and difficult to disentangle, so is the process of resilience. The situations faced by these young women helped to prepare them for future struggles. Based on my own assumptions and lived experiences, I would argue that the adversities that these four young women encountered help prepare them for future adversity. I would further this by noting that this may differ based on the nature of the adversity. For example, dealing with financial difficulties while young may prepare one to face financial difficulties in the future. Yet a struggle related to workplace discrimination is a very different experience. Thus, the struggles they faced, while making them stronger overall, may not equip them equally for struggles of a different nature. At the same time, each appeared to have effectively learned first and foremost that they were resilient – that they had, and that therefore they could, overcome the adversities and traumas that life holds in store for all of us.

Conclusion

Female youth face adversity for many reasons. However, the literature is clear that a key commonality in trajectories that lead youth to come into conflict with the law is a history marked by abuse, neglect, violence, poverty and instability. Feminist criminology and pathways research seeks to explore this link. This thesis explored the other side – that of

young women between the ages of 16 and 19 who are working towards outcomes that were made possible by their growing resilience, including the outcome of viable emancipation from economic dependence on parents, and thus emancipation from parental authority and parental abuse. It is a difficult cultural and political decision to set a youth free to make her or his own choices and handle her or his own affairs at 16 or 18 or older, as child protection authorities recognize. While the narratives analyzed for this thesis cannot provide an answer as to when this should optimally occur for youth who seek emancipation or find themselves under the authority of child protection services, the narratives suggest that some youth feel more capable of handling full autonomy at a young age than others. Further, when viable supports are in place the narratives demonstrate that autonomy can be beneficially self-managed by youth as young as 16.

The thesis addresses the question of how female youth whose life stories are marked by risks associated with criminal offending understand or make sense of their pathways through struggle and towards positive and responsible choices and outcomes, and what resources they identify as salient to this achievement. The key finding is that resilience and emancipation are processes that are navigated by way of mobilizing resources. Internal resources that the four young women identified as crucial contributors to their process of their resilience were a sense of agency and tenacity, hope for the future, early maturation (despite the attendant troubles that accompany this), and competent functioning despite major life stressors. Crucial external resources were caring adults who were willing to reach out and believe in them, supportive pro-social intimate partners, and access to counselling and social services. It is important to recognize that there are many ways these different

internal and external resources can combine to help at-risk youth to overcome adversity.

The narratives are clear that resources essential to recovery from adverse and traumatic experiences (resilience) and the achievement of emancipation are interrelated. Otherwise stated, emancipation is more smoothly realized when a youth has resources with which to work towards a positive future. Thus, while the thesis does not explore the link between victimization and criminalization, it does have implications for pathways theory. For the most part, this trajectory was avoided in the case of the four young women. The resources these young females identified as salient to their struggles towards a positive, responsible and resilient future would arguably be assets for other youth who encounter similar life stressors, whether female or male.

Future Research

As discussed in the literature review and the theory and method sections of the thesis, gender shapes our experience of our social worlds. Many categories of risks are gendered in the sense that responses may be based on gendered dynamics. For example, research consistently finds that female youth experience assault in the family at a higher rate than male youth, and that female youths react differently to abuse than their male counterparts, perhaps especially to sexual abuse (AuCoin, 2005). As important, despite high levels of victimization females (youth and adults) offend at a dramatically lower rate than males (AuCoin, 2005). Given these gender differences, it is likely that pathways associated with resilience differ by gender. Research is needed on whether and how the resources identified as salient to resilience by the young women in this study contribute

to resilience among young males. In particular, research is needed to ascertain if the resources are different, and if they are viewed differently by male youth.

Another avenue of inquiry that would likely be fruitful would be a longitudinal study using a larger sample and multiple methods to examine how young women avoid criminalization, despite the gendered constellation of risks. This future research might addresses whether the resources indicated to be salient by young women such as Veronica, Mary, Evelyn and Rachael maintain their salience as young women transition into later stages of adulthood.

Limitations and Strengths

This study has strengths and limitations. With respect to limitations, the data speak only to the experiences of a small set of young women at a particular time and in a particular jurisdiction. While the problems that the four young women whose narratives are at the centre of this thesis face are enduring problems in Canada and elsewhere, the study cannot provide insights into how youth can negotiate or access resources to assist them to deal with these problems in other jurisdictions inside or outside Canada. In addition, there are special limitations when doing a secondary analysis. Among these, the data for this thesis were collected with the promise of anonymity. Consequently, I am unable to reach the original participants for purposes of clarification or confirmation. Thus, it is not possible to contact the interviewees to see how the process of emancipation played out for them over the past decade, to assess which internal and external supports gained or maintained salience in their lives as they moved further into adulthood, or to confirm whether the sense of maturity that they gained through the work of growing up earlier than is the norm in contemporary Canada helped to build resilience that helped

them to deal with future adversities. With respect to this third point, it is my assumption that the sense of maturity that the work of growing up early instils aids in this process, but this assumption comes from my own life history of having left home at the age of 16.

With respect to the study`s strengths, the thesis provides a much-needed glimpse into how female youth in Canada who flourish despite having been dealt a poor hand of cards manage to achieve this. A key strength of the study is that it builds knowledge on how these young women understand their struggles as part of their life histories. Crucial to this, this study provides insight on how they were able to harness formal and informal resources and supports to build a better future, and a growing sense of themselves as capable and responsible resilient agents who have - and will - overcome adversities. The nuanced self-understandings that this knowledge draws upon can best be examined through qualitative research that incorporates depth engagement with stories of struggle and resilience, and reflexive analysis and interpretation by a researcher who has encountered and overcome similar adversities.

The major contribution of the study is that it provides valuable insights into young female youths' lived experiences of resilience in the face of marginalization and adversity. I am grateful for the chance to construct new insights into the lives of a cohort of young women who are not commonly given the chance to contribute to discourse on processes that have very real consequences for all youth.

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