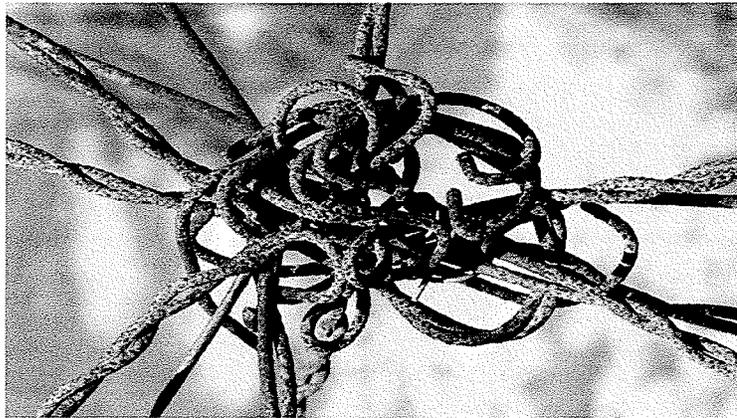


**From Pathways to Tangled Webs:  
An Analysis of Girls in Trouble with the Law**



by

Lisa Heshka

A Thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies of

The University of Manitoba

in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

Department of Sociology

University of Manitoba

Winnipeg, Manitoba

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## Abstract

In recent years, it has become apparent that significant gaps exist in our knowledge about female delinquency. As a result, young girls who come into conflict with the law are often misunderstood and misrepresented as simply being 'like the boys.' In response, feminist criminologists have argued for a more female-centred approach, one that is sensitive to the experiences and situations of young girls. One promising avenue that has developed in the literature is the notion of 'pathways to crime.' However, several problems are evident in this research, a most significant one being that the focus has mainly centred on the negative aspects of girls' lives (such as their experiences of victimization) as these connect to their involvement in delinquency. What has been neglected, in other words, are some of the broader concerns as well as positive influences that girls might encounter in their family, peer groups, and school environments. This study, therefore, contributes to the pathways approach by focusing on both the positive and negative influences in girls' lives as these have a bearing on their coming into conflict with the law.

The research goals were achieved by interviewing twelve girls (aged 13 to 17 years) who were being held in custody at the Manitoba Youth Centre (MYC). Instead of a formal interview process, I used a qualitative timeline or 'life history grid' to allow the respondents to map out the issues and troubles most important to them. Using a timeline was the most suitable methodological tool for studying young girls because it was a visual device that assisted the girls to chronologically list their past events and help explore their pathways to crime. This process also shed light on their current lives and gave them insight into resolving past problems or planning their futures.

Through this research strategy I learned that the girls' lives were in many respects not that much different than other girls their age. One important aspect of their lives, however, was racialized poverty, which set the broader social context for investigating four key components: schooling, family connections, peer groups, and boyfriends. In relation to understanding the girls' criminal involvement, it became clear that rather than the notion of 'pathways,' a more useful metaphor was the notion of a 'tangled web': the girls' are trapped in a web with many interwoven parts to their criminal troubles, such as drugging and drinking, family violence, gangs, the sex trade, and the criminal justice system. In response to these troubles, the girls form both positive and negative coping strategies that enable them to get by.

Despite their difficult circumstances, most of the girls displayed considerable resilience and hope for a better life. Even though many of the girls identified having social supports, when it came down to actually being there and making a difference in their lives these supports were often lacking. Furthermore, the study also revealed the experience of institutionalization as an obstacle in the girls' lives. In developing preventative measures, the focus needs to include each of the components of the tangled web.

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## **Introduction**

In recent years, it has become apparent that significant gaps exist in our knowledge about female delinquency. As a result, young girls who come into conflict with the law are often misunderstood and misrepresented as simply being 'like the boys.' In response, feminist criminologists have argued the need for a more female-centred approach, one that is sensitive to the experiences and situations of young girls. In particular, one promising avenue that has developed in the literature is the notion of 'pathways to crime' (Burman et al., 2001; Gaarder and Belknap, 2002; Chesney-Lind and Shelden, 1998; Daly, 1992/1998). Using a 'life history' approach, researchers have endeavoured to uncover the experiences and social contexts that place girls at risk to offend. However, several problems are evident in this research, a most significant one being that the focus has mainly centred on the negative aspects of girls' lives (such as their experiences of victimization) as these connect to their involvement in delinquency. What has been neglected, in other words, are some of the broader concerns as well as positive influences that girls might encounter in their family, peer group, and school environments.

The goal of this research project is to contribute to the pathways approach to understanding girls' involvement in delinquency by gaining a clearer sense of both the positive and negative influences in girls' lives as these have a bearing on their coming into conflict with the law. Such a goal can best be realized by learning from girls themselves. What do girls who have been in conflict with the law single out as troublesome in their lives? How do they understand their involvement in delinquency? Just as important, what do they consider to be their most positive influences and sources of support? By learning from young girls themselves about the troubles they

experience—and how they resolve them—it may be possible to understand better the pathways by which girls come into conflict with the law. Locating the issue within the broader context of girls' lives will also reveal potential avenues for reducing those conflicts.

The following discussion is broken down into five chapters. Chapter one locates my study in terms of previously conducted research in the area of girls' delinquency. Within this literature, researchers have argued that we need to hear from girls about their lives and their experiences with the justice system. One such avenue for pursuing this goal is pathways research. Nonetheless, it will be revealed that gaps still exist in our understanding of girls' pathways to crime and therefore further research is needed.

The second chapter outlines the specific methodology I used in order to fill these gaps and to help build a female-centred approach to girls' delinquency using feminist methodologies. The research goals were achieved by interviewing 12 girls (aged 13 to 17 years) who were being held in custody at the Manitoba Youth Centre (MYC). Instead of a formal interview process, I used a qualitative timeline or 'life history grid' to allow the respondents to map out the issues and troubles most important to them. Using a timeline was the most suitable methodological tool for studying young girls' lives because it was a visual device that assisted the girls to chronologically list their past events and help explore their pathways to crime. This process also shed light on their current lives and gave them insights into resolving past problems or planning their futures.

Chapter three focuses on mapping out what the girls' lives have been like. One lesson to emerge from the interviews was that their lives were not that much different than other girls their age. However, to fully understand these girls' lives it was necessary to address the notion of racialized poverty. This involved expanding the lens to include

the social conditions surrounding them, which included the characteristics of their neighbourhoods and the reality of life in the inner city, in order to situate a discussion of four key components in the girls' lives: schooling, family connections, peer groups, and boyfriends.

Concentrating on an analysis of the girls' involvement in crime, chapter four calls the notion of 'pathways' into question. Rather, a more appropriate metaphor seemed to be that the girls are trapped in a 'tangled web' which involves many interwoven parts to their criminal troubles, such as drugging and drinking, family violence, gangs, the sex trade, and the criminal justice system.

Chapter five explores how the girls have dealt with all that has happened in their lives—including the positive and negative coping strategies the girls adopted in order to get by. Many of the girls showed aspirations of hope and freedom; they showed resilience and had plans for the future, including wanting to help other girls in trouble. Even though many of the girls identified having supports, when it came down to actually being there and making a difference in their lives these supports were often lacking. Furthermore, given that the experience of institutionalization itself becomes an obstacle the girls must overcome, the focus needs to be fixed on developing preventative measures that encompass each of the components of the tangled web.

## **Chapter One**

### **Uncovering Girls' Pathways to Crime**

In response to the gaps that exist in our understanding of girls who come into conflict with the law, feminist criminologists have argued that we need to hear from girls about their lives and their experiences with the criminal justice system. One such avenue that has been advanced for pursuing this goal is 'pathways' research. In this chapter, I review the research that has been conducted using this pathways approach, as well as consider some of the limitations that prevail in this work.

#### **The Pathways Research**

Pathways research finds its roots in the work of Maureen Cain (1989). Cain's book, *Growing Up Good*, focused on research that examines girls' everyday lives. Cain notes that 'everyday life' was a concern in the early 1960s that is still worth considering today. "The term implies a lack of reverence for those sociologies which focus on institutions as relatively enduring structures and a preference for the fluid and the mobile" (Cain, 1989: 7). Although Cain did not conduct research herself on girls, her book contributes to our understanding of girls' pathways into crime because 'everyday life' implies that the normal, the routine with its minor surprises, is far more important than the big event or criminal act.

Cain notes that self-report studies are often criticized in that what boys and men do is taken for granted as the norm and girls/women are secondary considerations. "This not only makes it impossible to question what boys and men do but also leaves us with no

way of making sense of what girls say they do” (Cain, 1989: 2). Cain then illustrates the ways in which feminists are changing these views.

In contrast, feminist work has demonstrated that the problem and the solutions arise from social relationships, or structures: the problem is powerlessness (isolation, economic and emotional dependence); the solutions are working to maintain networks of girlfriends in the early days of a partnership, help lines, refuges, crèches, and work. (Cain, 1989: 3)

Using a similar framework Kathleen Daly (1992/1998) studied women’s pathways to felony court, asking: Why do these women get caught up in crime? How does their behaviour become criminalized? Using interview studies from a number of different countries of girls and women who have been arrested or incarcerated, Daly constructs a feminist composite or “leading scenario” of women’s lawbreaking:

Whether they were pushed out or ran away from abusive homes, or became part of a deviant milieu, young women began to engage in petty hustles or prostitution. Life on the streets leads to drug use and addiction, which in turn leads to more frequent lawbreaking to support their drug habit. Meanwhile, young women drop out of school because of pregnancy, boredom or disinterest in school, or both. Their paid employment record is negligible because they lack interest to work in low-paid or unskilled jobs. Having a child may facilitate entry into adult women’s networks and allow a woman to support herself in part by state aid. A woman may continue lawbreaking as a result of relationships with men who may also be involved in crime. Women are on a revolving criminal justice door, moving between incarceration and time on the streets. (Daly, 1998: 136)

While this ‘leading scenario’ draws attention to the gendered contexts that bring girls to the streets (e.g. running away from abusive parents) and the gendered conditions of their survival once they get there (e.g. selling their bodies to make money), Daly notes that questions continue to linger. For instance, “what lies in the ‘black box’ between one’s experiences of victimization as a child and of criminal activities as an adult? Is there something more than economic survival which propels or maintains women in a criminalized status?” (Daly, 1998: 136-7).

Drawing on Pre-sentence Investigation Reports on 40 women who were convicted in the New Haven felony court between 1981 and 1986, Daly uses the biographies of the women to map out five different categories. Ten of the women were characterized as “street women,” fifteen of the women were characterized as “harmed and harming women,” five as “battered women,” six as “drug-connected women,” and the remaining four were placed in an “other” category.

On the basis of her analysis, Daly argues for a more multidimensional portrait of why women get caught up in crime. In addition to the ‘leading scenario’ of the street woman, she proposes three other routes that lead women to felony court: 1. abuse or neglect suffered as a child, an “out of control” or violent nature; 2. being (or having been) in a relationship with a violent man; and 3. being around boyfriends, mates, or family members who use or sell drugs or wanting more money for a more economically secure and conventional life (Daly, 1998: 148).

Several years later, Kathy Heimer (1995) used an interactionist theory of delinquency to argue that certain pathways lead youth to break the law. Heimer’s study uses a secondary data analysis to build upon David Greenberg’s (1977) original work, which focused on presenting a theoretical analysis of the age distribution of criminal involvement. Although Greenberg’s research does not use the term ‘pathway,’ Heimer added this concept into her study to propose a socio-psychological explanation of the gender gap in delinquency.

According to Heimer (1989: 148), “Greenberg’s discussion implied that structural and contextual factors combine to create pathways to delinquency that vary somewhat, depending on the nature and the meaning of the offence.” She found that his research

also implied a different motivational pathway that travelled from breaking school rules, to stealing, and to violence. Using this information Heimer constructed three motivational pathways to delinquency: gender ideologies and law violations; identity costs and theft; and self-esteem, risk-taking, and law violation.

The first pathway involves traditional gender ideologies or beliefs that afford males greater political and economic power than females. This pathway contributes to our understanding of girls' pathways to crime because it illustrates the importance of examining gender roles. "Girls will be less likely than boys to negotiate definitions of the situation that lead to delinquency. In other words, claiming gender identity requires females more than males to avoid all forms of law violation" (Heimer, 1995: 149). Therefore, Heimer believes that one pathway leading youth into acts of delinquency is their beliefs about the nature, obligations, and motivations of being male and female in a gendered society.

The second pathway—identity costs and theft—stems from the unique social position youths occupy in contemporary society. This pathway illustrates the heightened importance placed on the peer group. As a result, youth subculture places status on various symbols that ultimately represent a youth's position within society. These can include dating, cruising in cars, drinking, smoking cigarettes, and even appearing physically mature. Heimer points out that because youths are often excluded from the labour market, they rely heavily on their parents financially to help them embark on a claim to adult identity. "If legitimate means of making money are not available, youths may turn to theft as a means of resolving their dilemma. The latter course of action is most likely when youths take the role of their peers and other significant persons and

determine that theft would bring social rewards and little disapproval from others” (Heimer, 1995: 151).

The final pathway—self-esteem, risk-taking and law violation—focuses on how mandatory schooling may lead youth to law violation. Heimer (1995) argues that schools strip youth of autonomy and the many institutional degradation ceremonies (such as grading students’ performance, both academically and athletically) can be detrimental. With the many rules imposed on students, schools essentially restrict students’ opportunities to negotiate identities for themselves as responsible independent actors. “Specifically, when individuals perceive or imagine threats to their self-image, they may engage in risky behaviour, such as common delinquency, in the hopes of maintaining or improving their character in the eyes of others” (Heimer, 1995: 153). This final pathway also adds to our understanding of girls’ pathways to crime because it considers gender differences in risk-taking behaviours. Heimer suggests that males are more likely to engage in risky behaviour because in a patriarchal capitalist society, males are encouraged to take more risks. However, it is possible that females will be just as likely to engage in risky behaviour, but they might do so in other forms. “Because delinquency is considered more ‘deviant’ for females than for males, girls may try to manage impressions with others through legal forms of risky behaviour” (Heimer, 1995: 153). Unfortunately, Heimer does not go on to explain what these forms of legal risky behaviour consist of.

Overall, the three motivational pathways Heimer develops in her research predict that gender differences exist in the motivational pathways to delinquency. This may be so because of the different meanings referenced with being female and male in a society that is filled with gender inequalities. Heimer concludes that race will play a role as well

in motivational pathways because, like gender inequalities, racial inequalities will restrict the position and opportunities of youth within society.

Subsequent to Heimer's research, the focus of pathways analysis shifted to the task of incorporating girls' own experiences and perceptions into an understanding of female delinquency. In 1998, Meda Chesney-Lind and Randall Shelden attempted to redress the often-neglected task of presenting results of interviews with girls who found their way into the juvenile justice system. They argued that listening to girls' stories is a vital task often ignored but essential to understanding female delinquency. "Only a few studies actually allow girls on the margin to speak about their whole lives, and only a very few look at the lives of girls in the juvenile justice system" (Chesney-Lind and Shelden, 1998: 192).

Chesney-Lind and Shelden (1998) present findings from a study based on interviews with ten girls in a short-term residential treatment program for female juvenile offenders in Hawaii. The girls ranged in age from twelve to seventeen years. The ethnicity of the group was highly diverse, representing the cosmopolitan, racially-mixed population of Hawaii. Many of the girls had experimented extensively with both drugs and alcohol, which in some cases contributed to their involvement in delinquency. "Indeed, the girls being interviewed had already committed, by their own admission, a considerable array of offences, although most of them had been formally arrested only for status or minor property offences" (Chesney-Lind and Shelden, 1998: 194).

In general, none of the girls talked at any length about their feelings in regards to crimes that they committed. An important finding was the fact that although there were several questions about their experiences with police and the courts, the girls' responses were short. "It appears that girls did not consider themselves criminals, nor did they see

crime as a major part of their lives. For the most part, their behaviour appeared to be a reaction to problems” (Chesney-Lind and Shelden, 1998: 195). Many of the girls commented that their motivations for their offences stemmed from problems with their families, peer groups, and pressures at school. For instance, one girl who was physically and sexually abused at home reported that she ran away to bring attention to herself: “I ran away so many times. I tried anything man, and they wouldn’t believe me ... [A]s far as they’re concerned they think I’m the problem. You know, the runaway ... bad label” (Chesney-Lind and Shelden, 1998: 195). Many of the girls expressed that since their actions were done “because” and “for a reason,” they did not belong in detention. Rather, the solution to their problems lay elsewhere.

If anything, Chesney-Lind and Shelden suggest that the girls’ gender orientation may be pushing them further into delinquency. A reason for this may lie in the fact that a strong detail of the girls’ lives was the issue of identity. For these girls, popularity was sought through fights, being tough, taking drugs, and the like. The girls also had trouble dealing with family problems such as divorce, parents getting new partners, deaths, and other changes in their families. “Quite often, these events were cited as the cause of their personal problems and ‘bad’ behaviour” (Chesney-Lind and Shelden, 1998: 200). Girls were also found to deal with their loneliness by using three different strategies: fantasizing about the future, fantasizing about boyfriends, and thinking about suicide.

An important aspect of Chesney-Lind and Shelden’s (1998) research in relation to girls’ pathways to crime was that they highlighted key themes in female (as opposed to male) delinquency. Two of these themes were the experience of sexual abuse and the double standard that girls have to live by. With regard to the first theme, the authors note:

Girls in the juvenile justice system have been and are survivors as well as victims. Forced to cope with daunting and shocking conditions, they manage accommodations at tremendous cost to themselves. Their behaviours may puzzle us until we understand their predicaments. Their delinquencies are, in fact, attempts to pull themselves out of their dismal circumstances. (Chesney-Lind and Shelden, 1998: 209)

With respect to the second theme, Chesney-Lind and Shelden make the following statement:

Examination of the offences that typically bring girls into the juvenile justice system highlights the fact that girls' delinquencies are shaped by their unique problems in a society that gives women, particularly girls, very little power and few options, and even fewer legal rights. These burdens become heavier when compounded by poverty, abusive families, and membership in a minority group. (Chesney-Lind and Shelden, 1998: 240)

Furthermore, Chesney-Lind and Shelden point out that before researchers attempt to sketch out a delinquency theory that is sensitive to the context of patriarchy, there needs to be more research conducted on girls' lives. As such, they note that their Hawaiian study is complemented by another qualitative study by Jean Bottcher (1986). Bottcher's California study gathered the "life accounts" of ten young women incarcerated in Ventura School. This study used a combination of personal interviews as well as information gathered from case files in an attempt to understand the context within which the girls' delinquency was exhibited. The girls differed from those in the Hawaiian study because they were mostly African American or Hispanic, and they were also incarcerated for more serious offences.

The lives of these young women revealed three common themes: independence at an early age, extensive free time, and the disregard of their crimes (meaning they did not think they were deviant). Bottcher found that as early as age ten but no later than fifteen much of the girls' time was spent without any adult supervision. This independence was

achieved in one of two ways: due to grim life circumstances they had no choice but to leave or they were 'throwaways' (meaning they were deemed to be worthless or unwanted); or due to the lack of structured parental supervision they took their freedom, usually in the form of manipulation such as threatening to run away.

The girls' free time started by cutting classes, usually in junior high and middle school. "They began to use school merely as a place to gather and plan the days activities, which consisted mostly of just 'having fun' and 'hanging out', which eventually evolved into using drugs and consuming alcohol" (Chesney-Lind and Shelden, 1998: 206). But this free time was never spent alone as they usually gravitated toward a group of similar friends, especially a boyfriend. Bottcher reported that most of their lives seemed boring, and their daily lives were random, casual, and idle.

The study found that even though these girls were charged with serious crimes (such as kidnap, and murder), their crime came as a shock to them. As well, they seemed to drift into criminal behaviour largely because their lives were falling apart and they had limited choices. They had difficult situations at home or they had already left home, and—much like Chesney-Lind and Shelden's findings—they would locate their problems not within themselves but elsewhere, often within their families.

Pathways research by Stephen Kapp (2000) took a different approach. After reviewing the research linking child maltreatment and offending behaviours, Kapp (2000:64) was left with a critical question: "What is significant about those children that do eventually offend that is different from the considerable number that do not?" Kapp suggested that an answer to this question might be found by examining the relationship between delinquency services and adult offences. His research uses a qualitative approach that relies on life history interviews with eight former clients of the child

welfare and juvenile justice systems. It is important to note that this research focused only on imprisoned young men. Of these eight men, seven were African American.

Of the life histories gathered from three child welfare participants, it was found that a major life event (such as when the ultimate goal of living with a family or living on their own was thwarted) functioned as a turning point in their lives; it led them to give up hope and live a delinquent lifestyle. This event was portrayed as a loss of control: “The individual described a traumatic event as the centerpiece of his experience in the system. The event was portrayed as something over which the person had no control” (Kapp, 2000: 69). They also blamed programs as contributing to their imprisonment. All three young men seemed to agree that they were victims of the system.

The delinquent youth, on the other hand, viewed the impact of juvenile services on their current imprisonment very differently. They did not hold the system responsible although they acknowledge bad judgment in their decisions. Instead they accepted responsibility for committing illegal acts and pointed to the attraction of particular life styles of living on the streets. As one of the respondents stated:

People don't know when to quit. Majority of people searching for things to get high off of, or a better life financially, not emotionally. Those things there, cause them to end up in here. I knew it was wrong to sell drugs. My thought process, this shit got to be done. Got to kill. This me or them. (Kapp, 2000: 70-71)

The delinquent youth asserted a personal choice and responsibility for their actions, both for their illegal actions but also in attempts for change. Programs helped them to realize that once they are on the outside it is up to them to make a change, whether to go back to the old crowd or find a new one.

Although Kapp's research focused solely on male participants, it sheds light on an important pathway to criminal behaviours, which is the particular attraction to the

lifestyle on the streets. While Kapp recognized that his findings needed to be verified in other settings and with larger samples, he suggested that these preliminary findings would reveal critical practice considerations. In particular, he suggests that his study confirmed the specific needs of youth in both the child welfare and juvenile justice systems: “This study not only confirms those needs but provides a glimpse at some of the specific psychosocial impacts associated with ‘growing up’ in these settings” (Kapp, 2000: 72).

Kapp’s research contributes to our understanding of girls’ pathways to crime because he was able to point out how the different methods of entry appear to have implications in relation to the levels of accepting responsibility for those in the adult system. Kapp points out that practitioners, researchers, and policy makers need to take into consideration these differences and their effects as they deliver, study, and advocate for the types of services that should be provided to children in these two systems.

Much of the pathways research has been confined to the American context. Michele Burman, Susan Batchelor, and Jane Brown (2001), however, note that this particular economic and social setting may not easily be projected onto other contexts. Their work, therefore, involved a multiple-method study (involving the collection of field notes, self-report questionnaires, small group discussions, and individual, in-depth ‘conversations’) that included girls aged 13 to 16, from a wide selection of socioeconomic backgrounds, and living in a variety of locations across Scotland. In all, some 800 girls participated in one or more aspects of the study. The aim of the research was to investigate young girls’ “pathways into violence, the manner in which they are violent; how they use or ‘manage’ violence; how they deal with potentially violent encounters; and how they desist in using violence” (2001: 444). In this respect, their study follows on the work of Chesney-Lind and Shelden (1998). As Burman et al. note:

We believe that in order to comprehend girls' relationships to violence it is necessary to understand the social, material and gendered circumstances of their lives, how they live their lives and make sense of their actions, by drawing on their personal accounts. (Burman et al., 2001: 444)

According to Burman et al., focusing on girls in the 13 to 16 age group is significant for a number of reasons. For one, it is a crucial time for the development of feminine identity. For another, because it is a time when girls are nearing the transition to the adult world and are thus facing important decisions about their futures, "their social worlds, life chances and experiences are characterized by 'risks' associated with that transition" (Burman et al., 2001: 445). As well, "it is a time when girls learn how to take up their place in hierarchies and regimes of structural power." Finally, girls of this age "have gone through the process of acquiring knowledge about what society will or will not tolerate in terms of unacceptable behaviour and what happens (or does not happen) when certain rules are broken and norms infringed" (p. 445).

Burman et al.'s work is an especially important contribution to pathways research because of their insights with respect to the methodological and ethical issues encountered in doing research involving young people. For one, although they used in-depth interviews, Burman et al. believed it was important to move away from a structured interview format and towards a natural progression in which the girls used their own methods of letting the data emerge.

We took an early decision to move away from the mode of single direct questions and answers which is often the mode of communication that arises in adult-young person interactions. Instead, we chose to conduct open conversations with girls in order to generate data which, we hoped, would move beyond that which we would be able to accumulate through other means. Our intention was to be responsive to the concerns of the girls, letting them talk their own way into, and about, what *they* considered important. (Burman et al., 2001: 445)

For another, the researchers found that it was important not to name or define what violence should look like for girls, as this might lead the girls to give responses that they thought the researchers were looking for: “Hence, while we needed to explain the research and why it was being done, this had to be achieved without pre-defining the problem or leading girls to give the responses they thought we were anticipating” (p. 448).

The researchers were also attentive to the issue of power in the research process, noting that “as researchers, we had the power to define the research situation, to steer the agenda along a certain course, to control the information we ourselves were prepared to disclose, and also to shape the production of the data” (p. 447). The researchers therefore endeavoured to implement a non-hierarchical research process through reciprocity (being as honest as possible with the respondents, including answering questions which the girls had of the researchers) and reflexivity (recognizing that potential impact of the researchers’ own experiences and assumptions on their interpretation of events).

A final ethical concern of Burman et al.’s research related to the ‘politics of disclosure’: “Whilst we do not wish to mute the voices of our research respondents, there is a delicate balance to be struck between ‘giving them a voice’ and opening them up to the possibilities of misappropriation and subjugation” (p. 455). In this respect, Burman et al. caution how much researchers should disclose in re-telling the stories of young girls. In particular, they note the importance of always remembering why a study is being conducted, and who the public audience will be.

The focus on examining situations of girls’ violence carried on in the work of Geoffrey Hunt and Karen Joe-Laidler (2001), who examined the role of violence in the

lives of female gang members. Hunt and Joe-Laidler formulated a series of questions designed to address the extent to which these young women experience violence in their lives from early childhood within their families to their current statuses with gang life. The aim of the research was to challenge recent portrayals of female gang members as 'demonic' by examining the violence-prone situations in which these young women operate.

Hunt and Joe-Laidler's analysis is drawn from both qualitative and quantitative data gathered from an ongoing comparative study of ethnic youth gangs in the San Francisco Bay Area that began in 1991. During the course of their research project, the researchers conducted face-to-face interviews with more than 600 self-identified male and female gang members. Within this sample, 141 young women were members of one of 44 different gangs. They ranged in age from 14 to 27 years and were found to belong to three ethnic groups: African American, Latino, and Asian American. This methodology provided an opportunity to focus on the groups' histories, organization, and activities, and the gang members' demographics, alcohol and drug use, history and involvement with the group, and prior contact with the criminal justice system.

Hunt and Joe-Laidler's main findings revealed that three domains of violence exist in the lives of girl gang members: the street; the family; and relationships with boyfriends. Experiences of violence on the streets involved two different groups of girls, "independent" and "separate-but-together" gangs. Females in the independent group associated their violence with selling drugs and competition with other female gangs. In selling drugs, the girls tried to avoid violence by adhering to certain rules of the gang,

such as avoiding the streets late at night and selling in crack houses instead. When they found themselves in competition with other gangs it was for two reasons: men and turf.

For the females in separate-but-together gangs, their potential situations for violence increased. As such, five situations of violence were examined: initiation into the gang; conflict with members of male gangs; conflict with homegirls from other gangs; internal conflicts between female members of a gang; and internal conflicts between homegirls and homeboys in the same gang. Hunt and Joe-Laidler also examined violence in the family and with boyfriends to help understand the girls' experiences of and use of violence.

Although focused on female gang members, Hunt and Joe-Laidler's research adds an important dimension to pathways research. Specifically, girls' use of violence must be located within the particular context in which it occurs, and is often conditional on more primary concerns. "It is not that they seek out violent encounters, but rather, they must seek out a place at home, on the street, and in a marginalized community, and in doing so they may have to resort to violence to protect themselves" (Hunt and Joe-Laidler, 2001: 382). Related to this finding, violence, although present, does not consume these young women's lives: "Much of their everyday lives entails getting together to talk and shop, to hang out, and to care for their children" (p. 382).

Emily Gaarder and Joanne Belknap (2002) took pathways research one step further by addressing the absence of research on girls who have committed crimes deemed so serious that they are tried as adults are. According to Gaarder and Belknap (2002: 481), an unprecedented number of delinquent girls and boys are housed in adult prisons because "the 'get tough on crime' attitudes promoted by politicians and the media

portray youthful offenders as increasingly dangerous, out of control, and in need of punishment rather than rehabilitation or care.” Their work is guided by a feminist approach that gives voice to twenty-two girls adjudicated and sentenced as adults in a large Midwestern women’s prison. The girls ranged in age from 16 to 19 years, with varying ethnic origins and a combination of middle-class and lower-class backgrounds. “From the way they defined their lives and communities, many of the self-identified ‘middle class’ girls were likely lower class or poor, but within their neighbourhoods, they saw themselves as ‘average’ or ‘in the middle’” (Gaarder and Belknap, 2002: 486).

The goal of the research was to address two issues. “First, what are the histories and profile of girls who end up in prison? We examine their life stories and trajectories into criminal behaviour. Second, we take up the question of identity, agency, and responsibility in the lives of girls whose actions have been proclaimed ‘adult’ by the legal system” (Gaarder and Belknap, 2002: 481). Through the use of in-depth interviews focusing on questions of childhood experiences, histories of law-breaking, encounters with legal (police and the courts) and social service agencies, and experiences in prison (such as the programming, health care, and schooling they received while in custody), the girls describe their lives before prison as well as their perceptions and experiences of being tried and convicted as adults.

In addressing the pathways to crime, Gaarder and Belknap present the biographies of the girls to reveal how violence and victimization, racism and economic marginality, neglect and disorder in their families, negative experiences at school, structural dislocation to the streets, and the use of drugs and alcohol as self-medication were persistent themes in the girls’ lives. They also suggest that the concept of ‘blurred boundaries’ can help to not only describe the pathways of victimization and offending, “it

might also be used to illustrate the indefinite demarcation between child and adulthood” (Gaarder and Belknap, 2002: 506). Gaarder and Belknap maintain that judgements of responsibility and agency must therefore consider how these blurred boundaries impact upon children in ways that are different from adults because children are deeply affected by the decisions adults make around them to an extent that adults are not. Furthermore, in their discussion of agency, they point out that some girls commit acts that have caused great harm to others. “To deny them the chance to sort through their own conflicted emotions of sadness, guilt and anger is to deny them the chance to repair harm and the relationships that have been damaged in the process” (Gaarder and Belknap, 2002: 498).

Lastly, a study by Sumar Kakar, Marie-Louise Friedman, and Linda Peck (2002) set out to examine the risk factors related to delinquency in an effort to explain the growing problem of female delinquency in the United States. In order to understand the individual, family, and neighbourhood contexts of adolescents and how criminality during adolescence may develop, the researchers utilized a combination of official data on girls detained in a South Florida regional detention centre and focus group discussions. Official data were gathered from a random sample of 100 girls, aged 12 to 18, representing three racial groups (Black, White, and Hispanic). Focus groups were conducted at the detention center in three separate sessions (with a maximum of 12 girls in each).

According to Kakar et al., some of the most important findings of their study emerged from the focus group discussions. For instance, even though the official records indicated that only 10 girls had families with a history of violence, during the focus interviews most of the girls reported significant family violence, ranging from verbal fighting to physical violence. “Throughout the group discussions and during various

questions the theme of violence was almost always present” (Kakar et al., 2002: 68). As such, the researchers reaffirm the findings of previous studies by concluding that family violence may indeed play a major role in contributing to girls’ involvement in delinquency: “one of the most recurring themes is the fragmented and chaotic family” (p. 70). Given the disparity in the official records as compared with the girls’ own reports, they also conclude that official records alone provide an incomplete source for understanding girls’ involvement in delinquency.

### **The Main Pathways**

Researchers have reported that certain pathways are causal factors in girls’ delinquency, including: gender roles and experiences of the double standard; peer groups and relationships; evidence of family problems; schools, self-esteem, and issues of identity; substance abuse; experiences of abuse (emotional, physical, and sexual); the attraction to street life; female gangs; and different experiences of violence. The main focus of much of this research has been on girls’ use of violence (Chesney-Lind and Sheldon, 1998; Burman et al., 2001; Gaarder and Belknap, 2002; Hunt and Joe-Laidler, 2001 and Kakar et al., 2002). Yet, the research also suggests that focusing solely on the violence of girls tends to ignore the broader issues affecting young women. Therefore, although research on girls’ pathways has expanded our knowledge and understanding of why girls come into conflict with the law, there are limitations to the studies conducted thus far.

To begin, Daly’s research points to the difficulties encountered in putting women into different ‘categories’ or ‘boxes.’ For instance, not all of the women she studied could be easily fit into one of the categories she had designed, and some of the women at

one point in their lives could be classified as “battered women” while, at other points, as “street women.” This suggests the need to focus on the processes by which females come into conflict with the law—as opposed to designating girls and women into specific labels or categories. As well, attending to the positive (and not just negative) influences that have a bearing on girls’ lives may offer some clues as to why particular pathways are followed as opposed to others.

Heimer’s (1995) research left some elements of the three motivational pathways unexplained. One is the puzzling matter of whether all pathways are ‘motivational.’ She does not explain in detail whether the pathways youth encounter are a constant motivating force, influence, or incentive that directs them toward engaging in criminal activity or if sometimes within the same pathway they do not feel motivated to commit deviant acts. As well, when she discussed the first pathway, gender ideologies and law violations, Heimer did not explain in detail what she meant by ‘gender identity.’ Furthermore, this pathway does not explain or provide examples of how girls are less likely than boys to negotiate definitions of situations that may lead to delinquency. Why is this so? What route do girls take that is different than boys? How are these gender roles different? Finally, in the third motivational pathway—self-esteem, risk taking, and law violations—Heimer argues that males are oftentimes more likely to engage in risky behaviours and are encouraged to do so by society. However, she points out that girls are just as likely to engage in risk-taking behaviours but girls will do so in other (legal) forms. What Heimer does not explain is why society encourages males and not females? What will these legal forms of behaviour look like for girls?

Chesney-Lind and Shelden's (1998) research focused solely on girls in the juvenile justice system in Hawaii. Is it questionable, then, whether these girls' perceptions and experiences will be similar to or different from young girls in the Canadian criminal justice system. Furthermore, Chesney-Lind and Shelden make the statement that many of the girls claimed solutions to their problems lay elsewhere. Yet, they did not explain in detail what this meant. No examples or quotes from girls were provided to get a sense of what these girls may be referring to as alternative solutions to their punishments. In addition, Burman et al.'s (2001) research was based out of Scotland. As they note in their work, factors relating to girls' involvement in delinquency may well be context specific. As such, their findings may not relate to the perceptions and experiences of young Canadian girls. Their article also focused mainly on the ethical issues related to working with girls and lacked a detailed discussion of their main findings.

The major limitation of Kapp's (2001) research is that it focuses solely on males. Within this study, Kapp only examines the possibility of young men's involvement with the child welfare or the juvenile justice system as contributing to their situations as incarcerated adults, and Kapp only examined their perceptions and experiences with those two systems. Other important factors such as the role of family, friends, and society were not addressed in Kapp's discussion. Furthermore, he did not discuss how his findings might apply to girls and women.

Gaarder and Belknap's (2002) research only focused on the small number of girls who are transferred into adult custody. This unique population is not representative of the larger number of girls who remain in the juvenile justice system. In addition, their research focused mainly on the histories of girls' victimization and offending. Although their findings offer many important insights into understanding girls' pathways to crime,

there is still a large void in examining other aspects of girls' lives beyond their involvement with violence.

Kakar et al. (2002) addressed the limitations of their data. They argue that professionals need to focus more intensely on the role of the family and its influence on girls. "Better knowledge about family dynamics through future research, especially as they relate to ethnicity, will be imperative for informed development of rehabilitation programs for this growing segment of delinquents" (Kakar et al., 2002: 70). It is clear that research on girls' pathways must also address the dynamics of their families, and how that will factor into girls' conflicts with the law. What does exist on girls' families has only focused on abuse or violence in the home.

Overall, the research presented thus far on girls' pathways to crime has provided many important contributions to increasing our understandings of girls' delinquency. However, many gaps in this research still exist. As mentioned earlier, these studies represent a broad spectrum from around the world, including Hawaii, Scotland, the Mid-West United States, and South Florida. What is missing is an examination of girls from Canada, and how Canadian girls' thoughts and experiences may be different or similar to other girls across the world.

Perhaps the biggest limitation found in the pathways research is that the focus has mainly centered on girls' violence and on girls' crime. This focus is not enough to comprehend fully girls' pathways into crime. What has been neglected is the positive influences in girls' lives. A great deal of focus has been on the negative and criminal aspects of girls' lives, leaving out the other (non-criminal) troubles and aspects. As Daly (1998: 15) notes, "with respect to *emphasis*, scholars should pay more attention to the

diverse pathways to lawbreaking and criminalization, and not focus solely on crime as work.”

### **Moving Forward**

One of the fundamental premises of pathways research is that girls’ involvement in delinquency must be located in the social, material, and gendered circumstances of their lives. This premise originates from and is based upon a feminist approach to the issue. Feminists have argued that theories of delinquency based on male-centred approaches are inadequate to explaining female misbehaviours and girls’ involvement in deviance. Feminist criminologists, as such, have endeavoured to build a female-centred approach to delinquency.

A feminist approach to delinquency means construction of explanations of female behaviour that are sensitive to its patriarchal context. Feminist analysis of delinquency would also examine ways in which agencies of social control—the police, the courts, and the prisons—act in ways to reinforce woman’s place in male society. (Chesney-Lind, 1989: 19)

In addition, Chesney-Lind (1989) asserts that the construction of a feminist model must be sensitive to the situations of girls. She also suggests that failure to consider the existing empirical evidence on girls’ lives and their behaviours could lead to stereotypical thinking and theoretical dead ends. Another important point she raises is the need to gather information on girls’ lives.

A feminist model of delinquency would focus more extensively on the few pieces of information about girls’ actual lives and the role played by girls’ problems, including those caused by racism and poverty, in their delinquency behaviour. Fortunately, a considerable literature is now developing on girls’ lives and much of it bears directly on girls’ crime. (Chesney-Lind, 1989: 20)

In a similar vein, Joan Sangster (2002) has argued:

To understand girls' conflicts with the law, we must analyze the daily lives, economic, and social circumstances of their lives, the dominant discourses concerning 'normal' as opposed to 'deviant' behaviour, and the mutually reinforcing relationship between these realms of the material and the discursive. (Sangster, 2002: 4)

By using a feminist approach to girls' pathways into crime, my study is designed to build upon the existing theory and research and contribute to increasing our understanding on the topic. One aim of my study is to fill in the gaps left by the existing pathways research. As mentioned earlier, research thus far has focused on girls' violence and experiences of abuse as key motivational pathways into crime. However, my study will differ from the existing research because it will include an analysis of the 'non-criminal' troubles that these girls might face. One such avenue to explore is the legal forms of risk-taking behaviours (such as violating gender roles and breaking informal rules or codes within the schools or amongst peers) engaged in by girls.

The research also needs to consider the issues of class, race, and gender in more depth. As well, it will explore girls' value systems, identities or definitions of self, and the meaning of being a young female in a gendered society. A related issue is the examination of where boys figure in girls' lives, and how they fit into girls' pathways into crime. The main questions to be addressed are: What do Canadian girls single out as troublesome in their lives? How do they understand their involvement in delinquency? What do they consider to be their most positive influences and sources of support? As such, the purpose of this study is to gain a clearer sense of the positive and negative influences in girls' lives as these have a bearing on their coming into conflict with the law. By hearing from young girls themselves about the troubles they experience—and

how they resolve them—it may be possible to understand better the pathways by which girls come into conflict with the law.

### **Concluding Remarks**

As we learned in this chapter the notion of ‘pathways’ research has come along way and has provided many important contributions to increasing our understandings of girls’ delinquency. The concept of ‘pathways’ gave way to research on girls’ everyday lives, exploring gendered contexts, letting the girls speak out, using life histories, and comparing girls across the world. The main pathways found to contribute to girls’ involvement in crime included: gender roles and experiences of the double standard; peer groups and relationships; evidence of family problems; schools, self-esteem, and issues of identity; substance abuse; experiences of abuse (emotional, physical and sexual); the attraction to street life; female gangs; and different experiences of violence. However, many gaps in this research still exist. Perhaps the biggest limitation found in the pathways research is that the focus has mainly centered on girls’ violence and on girls’ crime. This focus is not enough to comprehend fully girls’ pathways into crime. My study attempts to fill in these gaps. The next chapter will consider the methodology to be used in this study.

## **Chapter Two Methodology**

Now that we have an understanding of the existing literature on girls in conflict with the law, the next logical step is to provide a detailed account of the methodological approach I used in my study in order to fill the gaps and to help build a female-centred approach to girls' delinquency. As you will see, my tool box was created using feminist methodologies and my research goals were achieved by interviewing twelve girls (aged 13 to 17 years) who were being held in custody at the Manitoba Youth Centre (MYC). The following discussion will also explain how I gathered, collected, and analyzed the data.

### **Standpoint Feminism**

This study uses a standpoint feminist approach to understand the pathways by which girls come into conflict with the law. The aim of standpoint feminism is to give voice to girls' and women's experiences that have otherwise not been heard or were oppressed under the male-centered epistemologies. As Sandra Harding (1987: 6) has noted:

Critics argue that traditional social science has begun its analyses only in men's experiences. That is, it has asked only the questions about social life that appear problematic from within the social experiences that are characteristic for men (white, Western, bourgeois men, that is).

Standpoint research emerged with the work of Dorothy Smith in the 1970s. Smith argued that knowledge is created through the engagement of sharing experiences and understandings with someone else. "Rather than insisting that theories or concepts must be in place to govern research," the focus of standpointism is "the actualities of people's activities and how they are coordinated and concerted" (Smith, 1999: 70).

Standpoint feminism has been subject to a number of critiques in the literature. In particular, it was accused of positing a single or unitary 'woman's standpoint' that only women could grasp or appreciate. Maureen Cain (1990) is one of the writers that have responded to this critique. Cain rejects the view that standpoint feminism posits an essentialist view of 'Woman.'

The particular intersection of these relationships in us is the site from which we produce knowledge and in that sense each site is unique, historical and changing. Some of these relationships form part of our identity, others are part of the way we think about the world but are not conscious of at all. (Cain, 1990: 132)

In addition, she maintains that being a woman does not mean that you can speak for 'all' women; nor does it automatically mean that you can speak from a feminist standpoint. Cain advocates for theoretical reflexivity, which means locating oneself within a theoretical position in order to identify the various standpoints that might be at work. According to Cain (1990: 132), a standpoint is "a site which its creator and occupier has agreed to occupy in order to produce a special kind of knowledge and practice and which he or she is aware in a special, theoretical way."

In a further clarification of standpoint feminism, Elizabeth Comack (1999) notes the distinction that is to be made between the two uses of standpoint in the literature: the 'women's (or girls') standpoint' and the 'feminist standpoint' that emerges out the work of listening to what women (or girls) have to say about their lives. As Comack (1999: 291) notes, "Women's experiences of their lives are not necessarily the same as a feminist's knowledge of women's lives. Rather a feminist standpoint is a socially produced position, and developing feminist knowledge about women's lives is a political enterprise." A feminist standpoint, therefore, is central to the production of knowledge "for" and "about" women. "Knowledge 'about' refers to the idea that a feminist

standpoint is one which is grounded in and emerges out of a women's standpoint. Knowledge "for" refers to the idea that a feminist standpoint has a political purpose; it is intended to challenge the dominant understandings of women's oppression" (Comack, 1999: 299).

Standpoint feminism provides one way for a researcher to gain an understanding of the world in which girls live. Gone are the days of making inferences. Rather, the experiences that girls encounter and the meanings they attach to those experiences can inform our understanding of the pathways that lead to girls' conflicts with the law. This can be realized by conducting in-depth qualitative interviews.

### **Sampling and Data collection**

Interviews were conducted with twelve girls held in custody at the Manitoba Youth Center (MYC). Through my work as a STEP Student and contract worker with Manitoba Corrections, I had developed connections that facilitated this work. Arrangements were made with the staff at MYC to tell them about my study so they could then ask the girls for volunteers. A notice was also posted at the MYC to advertise my study and solicit interest from possible participants (see Appendix A). Girls were then given the option of either letting one of the staff know about their willingness to participate, or they could call me directly (staff who attended the meeting were given a handout which described the purpose of the study as well as my name and phone number; see Appendix B).

Given the age of participants, consent to participate in the study was also obtained from their parent and/or legal guardian. Once a girl had indicated her willingness to participate, a letter was sent to the parent/guardian explaining the nature of the study

(Appendix C). The signed consent forms (Appendix D) were mostly obtained when parents came for visiting. The others were signed by their legal custodian or faxed over from a Child and Family Services worker. Once the consent of the parent/guardian had been obtained, an interview date and time was set up with the participants.

All interviews were carried out in private rooms at the Manitoba Youth Center. The staff members of the female units were aware that the girls were participating in the study; however, they were not privy to the nature of the conversations. The interviews began by going over the girls' consent form (see: Appendix E), which explained the purpose and nature of the interview. It was emphasized that participation was voluntary, and that the respondent may choose to withdraw from the study at any point. Each girl was also reminded that what she discussed during the interview would be held in strict confidence, but with one exception: any disclosure of abuse involving a child must be reported to the authorities. The girls were also informed that their identity would not be revealed during the reporting of the findings. Two copies of the consent form were signed by both the respondent and myself, with a copy for each of us.

All the interviews were tape-recorded. None of the respondents requested otherwise nor did any of the girls request to have the tape recorder turned off at any time during the interview process. Along with the interviews being tape-recorded, I also took notes during and after the interview.

Since the intention was to gain an understanding of the girls' standpoints, and given the age of the respondents (between 13 and 17 years), a timeline or 'life history grid' was utilized. Instead of a formal interview process (which would presume the issues girls see as important at the outset), respondents were asked to map out a time line from their birth to present. Respondents were provided a large sheet of paper and

coloured pens that they used to indicate what they consider to be the major life events (both good and bad) that have occurred over time. Depending upon what each respondent chose to draw on her grid, she was then asked to elaborate on these different events, for example, with respect to the relationship they represent.

Using a timeline is a most suitable methodological tool for studies involving young people because it is a visual device that assists the girls to chronologically list their past events and—in the case of the present study—to help explore their pathways to crime. In adopting this strategy, it was hoped that this process would shed light on the girls' current lives and insights into resolving past problems or planning future strategies. As it turned out, the timeline served as a good icebreaker to the interview process, but did not always provide in-depth results I had hoped for. In those cases, I then referred to the interview guide, which had a separate list of prepared questions (see Appendix F). The interviews lasted approximately one to two hours in duration. Respondents also had the option of requesting a 'Summary Report' (see Appendix G) of the Masters thesis. After the thesis is defended, a meeting will be held at the MYC to present the general findings of the research to staff, girls, and parents/guardians interested in attending.

Given the age of the participants, I took extra precautions to manage any potential risks encountered in discussing sensitive subjects. "Sensitive subjects are defined by social scientists as ones that seem threatening in some way to those being studied, including the investigation of deviant activities or the disclosure of abuse experiences" (Renzettie and Lee, 1993L 6). As such, a particular concern of this study was the protection of the participants with respect to the confidences disclosed and the emotions that may be aroused and expressed during the interview. In order to deal with situations where girls may get upset during the interview, I had taken training with the Canadian

Red Cross in “RespectED: Violence and Abuse Prevention,” specializing in educating youth on child abuse and dating violence with the skills to handle disclosures. Special arrangements were also made with the staff at MYC to have a caseworker or counsellor available after the interviews in case a girl required further assistance.

### **Data analysis**

Given the nature of this study, it was important that I utilized a data management system that met the needs for confidentiality and anonymity. The data were organized into five files, as suggested by Kirby and McKenna (1989). The identity file contained information that identified the research participants. This file consisted of a list of research participants’ names and their coded or altered identity. For ethical reasons, this file was kept separate and located away from any files where content is stored. The tape file held the audio recordings from the taped interviews. The tapes were coded using the coding scheme stored in the identity file. However, once the tapes had been transcribed and analyzed, the original audio recordings were destroyed. The document file contained all the original research materials. This included the transcripts from the interviews, field notes, and any other source material relevant to the study. Copies of interviews, field notes, and any ongoing data analysis (including tentative ideas about categories and relationships) were stored in the content file. The final file was the process file, which contained all information decisions about the research process, including records of each step of the research process and the reflections I made as a researcher through each phase.

By organizing the research this way, data analysis began as soon as an interview had been transcribed. “One of the commonest problems in qualitative studies is letting

your unanalyzed field notes and transcripts pile up, making the task of final analysis much more difficult and discouraging” (Maxwell, 1996: 77). I analyzed the data by reviewing the transcribed interviews, looking for emergent themes. By reviewing each interview, patterns or concepts began to emerge that represented girls’ pathways into crime. This information was then compared or contrasted to the existing pathways research.

I would also like to point out that self care was very important in the data gathering and analysis portions of the project. I made sure that I took time out to reflect on the girls’ stories and to de-stress in healthy ways, such as going to the gym, enjoying time with family and friends, and talking with my thesis advisor if I was overwhelmed with the information. I also kept a journal of my thoughts and feelings throughout the interview process. What I quickly began to understand was that my own upbringing was like a weird parallel world of ‘all things nice,’ whereas the girls were living lives I could never imagine and would not wish on my greatest enemy. These thoughts and concerns fed my desire to examine the girl’s daily lives carefully. I wanted to know what was happening (or not happening) to make the lives of girls in the same city I grew up in (and still live in) turn out so differently.

### **Concluding Remarks**

As revealed in this chapter, instead of a formal interview process I used a qualitative timeline or ‘life history grid’ to allow the respondents to map out the issues and troubles most important to them. Using a timeline was the most suitable methodological tool for a study involving young girls because it was a visual device that assisted the girls in chronologically listing their past events and exploring their pathways to crime. This

process also shed light on their current lives and gave them insight into resolving past problems or planning their futures. The information was collected, stored, and analyzed using a data management system. I was then able to break down the data into three main analysis chapters: girls' lives, tangled webs, and getting out.

## Chapter Three

### Girls' Lives

Adolescence is a border between adulthood and childhood, and as such it has a richness and diversity unmatched by any other life stage. (Pipher 1992: 52)

Coming from the Latin *adolescere*, meaning, “to grow up” (White 1985: 6), adolescence is a period in the life cycle that has taken on a particular meaning in contemporary societies. Adolescence can be viewed as the journey to independence. It is the transitional period from childhood to adulthood, involving not only physical changes (such as puberty) but also changes relating to identity formation as children move toward adulthood. This journey of developing independence, however, is fraught with many tensions, pressures, and challenges as youth struggle to find their place, to fit in, to belong. They begin to test the rules and face other issues of their daily lives.

While both girls and boys are subject to this transitional stage in the life cycle, adolescence is also very much a gendered experience. It is a time when girls start to go through stages of physical development, and with the many changes to North American diets girls are starting to reach puberty at even earlier ages than ever before. “Generally puberty is defined as a biological process where adolescence is defined as the social and personal experience of that process. But even puberty is influenced by culture” (Pipher, 1992: 53). Jennifer Tipper (1997) also explains that this stage is influenced by cultural factors and socializing agents that have been at work since early childhood, and existing research shows that today’s girls and young women are confronted by a range of obstacles and barriers along their path towards healthy development:

Much of the research on gender identity formation points to the fact that by age four or five, most boys and girls engage in activities and exhibit behaviors that are culturally defined as appropriate for their sex. In other words, these emerging

identities influence the type of activity and relationships in which most young people engage. (Tipper, 1997: 11)

Tipper goes on to point out that we learn about the merits or perils of being a boy or girl from others and from the circumstances around us. By being exposed to gender-based beliefs and practices, boys and girls come to develop a gendered understanding of the appropriate roles expected of them. Developing a gendered identity, however, is not an automatic or uniform process. The very notion of gender as a social construction implies variation among individuals by virtue of unique environmental, cultural, socio-economic, and physiological factors.

Lynn Phillips (1998) explains that 'childhood' is a Western construction. In recent times, childhood for girls has turned into a thriving business that the media have packaged as "girlhood." Through this construction of girlhood, girls are exposed to media messages that espouse what it means to be a girl. Increasingly, the media have capitalized on the knowledge that girls will seek out guidance on how to manage issues around boys, fashion, sex, and peer pressure. As Norma Pecora and Sharon R. Mazarella (1999: 3) have noted, "When examining the messages presented to girls through various forms of popular culture, it becomes evident that issues of identity and body image are foregrounded in such a way that a girl's identity is intricately linked to her physical appearance."

What ends up happening is the mainstream culture 'instructs' girls on learning who they are, what they want to be, and the rules of growing up to become women through advertising in magazines, music, television, and so on. Angharad Vladiva and Rhiannon Bettivia (1999) report that much of girls' exposure to popular culture occurs

during their leisure hours, and it is at this age that media and peers replace family and parents as a major source of influence and time expenditure. Consequently, girls come to see their value as defined by their physical appearance.

The fact of the matter is that girls today encounter social pressures just as girls always have. But another important factor to consider when addressing adolescent girls is that each girl will have her own unique struggles and experiences. As Anita Harris (2004) outlines in the introduction to her book, *All About the Girl*, there is no universal, one-dimensional girl; rather, “the category of ‘girl’ is constantly being constructed and deconstructed, and young women themselves are an incredibly diverse and dynamic population” (Harris, 2004: xxiv). Other researchers, such as Rachel Simmons (2002), point out that it is important to embrace the differences each girl presents and that not all girls choose to be silent about their experiences as more are sharing their stories with others.

Moreover, while adolescence is generally understood as a period of “storm and stress” for both girls and boys (Phillips, 1998: xii), research has suggested that many of the difficulties associated with adolescence are more the result of social factors such as poverty, family stress, and societal ambivalence toward youth than they are the result of some internal process or individual characteristic of adolescents themselves. “Like the category “girl,” “girlhood” is also a highly contested space determined and sometimes over-determined by social forces” (Jiwani, Steenbergen, and Mitchell, 2006: x). As Janelle Holmes and Elaine Leslau Silverman (1992: 31) note, “The immediate world of young women consists of intense but conflicted relationships with school, friends, and families.” In this respect, understanding how particular girls—including the girls who are

the subject of this study—manage the passage to adulthood involves attention to the social contexts, conditions, and relationships in which they are located.

The purpose of this chapter, therefore, is to map out the particular social contexts (specifically, of racialized poverty in the inner city), sites (school, family), and relationships (with parents, peers, and boyfriends) in which the girls in this study found themselves. These contexts, sites, and relationships become especially significant in terms of understanding how and why girls might come into conflict with the law as they navigate their way to adulthood.

### **Racialized Poverty**

To understand the lives of the twelve girls in this study requires that we expand our lens to include the social conditions surrounding them, the characteristics of their neighbourhoods, and the reality of life in the inner city. Eleven of the twelve girls are Aboriginal (seven are First Nation, four are Métis, and only one is Caucasian). Most of the girls identified at one point or another having lived in or frequented specific sites the inner city (the North End, Central Park, Tyndall Park, Selkirk Avenue, Portage Place, Spence Street, and Westin), an area of Winnipeg where conditions of racialized poverty are most intense. Michelle, for instance, reported that the site for her troubles took place in many inner-city destinations:

Ah, just anywhere, like, hang out at malls, Portage Place—in the front, in the back—Central Park, um, I don't know.

The Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives–Manitoba (2005: 3) defines the inner city of Winnipeg as: “the geographic area ... bounded on the north of Carruthers Ave, west of the Red River and Munroe Ave. east of the Red River; on the west by McPhillips St., Ingersoll St. and Raglan Road; on the south by McMillan Ave. and Marion St; and on the east by Raleigh St., the Seine River and Archibald.” While not everyone who lives in these inner-city communities is poor and/or Aboriginal, there are a disproportionate number of poor Aboriginal people who live in these communities. According to Statistics Canada (2003), Winnipeg is the urban centre in Canada with the largest number of Aboriginal people, and children make up a relatively large share of these numbers: “Aboriginal children under 15 accounted for 13% of all children in both Regina and Saskatoon and 12% of those in Winnipeg.... At the same time, 18% of the Aboriginal population was aged 15-24 compared with 13% of the non-Aboriginal population” (Statistics Canada, 2003: 4). Darren Lezubski, Jim Silver, and Errol Black (2004: 26) make the point that “the incidence of poverty has reached what we consider to be catastrophic levels. By 1996, more than half of all inner city households had income below the poverty line, while an astonishing four of every five Aboriginal households were below the poverty line.”

As Jim Silver (2000: 12) notes, “there is strong evidence that growing up in a poor family adversely affects a child’s life chances.” In this regard, Heather Hunter’s (2000) research begins to put into context what life is like for young people growing up in the inner city.

They spend their childhood in substandard housing where heat, light and water may be absent. They often are not adequately clothed. They are often cold. They face scarcity of food. They lack safe recreation opportunities, sports equipment, music lessons, fun clubs like Brownies and Cubs. There is a dearth of community

club facilities, community hockey, soccer and baseball leagues. They have to learn, as best they can, to adjust to the cyclical life events of having money, and not having money, of having food and of having none left, of having a safe place to live and having it turn unsafe. (Hunter, 2000: 111)

Although none of the girls in my study specifically identified themselves as living in poverty or elaborated on what their financial situation was like, Sonia and Kelly did share that they sometimes got stressed about money.

One of the factors that affect the life chances of youth in the inner city is their lack of involvement in the labour force.

Young people aged 15-24 are less likely to be in the labour force, and if in the labour force, more likely to be unemployed, than is the case for the population generally. This is especially so for youth in the inner city. Almost one in five inner city youth were unemployed in 1996. (Lezubski et al, 2004: 34)

Natalie was the only girl out of the twelve I interviewed to report having worked for wages in the formal labour market—she held a job at a slaughter house while in open custody. Karen, Kristin, Heather, and Wendy made their own money, but they did so by working in the sex trade. Wendy described what that was like for her:

When you're a working girl, man, you just you don't eat. I never ate nothing... Yeah, I stayed with my friend Tea. You just stay with people, you just meet people who have places and you stay with them and you get high. You work, you know, you make money and you stay there and you support their crack habit. That's all it is. It's okay in the summer, man, 'cause you don't always have to be inside. But in the winter it's hard.

As with many inner-city youth, these girls are not getting their foot in the door for a first employment opportunity. Lezubski and his colleagues (2004) express concerns that once Aboriginal youth are separated out, this trend is accentuated even more.

In Winnipeg as a whole the labour force participation rate for Aboriginal youth has declined to 50.6 percent in 1996—only one-half of Aboriginal youth are working or looking for work. The unemployment rate is almost one in four—24.5

percent. In the inner city the numbers are worse still. A mere 40.1 percent of Aboriginal youth in the inner city are in the labour force; of these more than one-third, 35.1 percent, are unemployed. These figures are shocking and cause for alarm. (Lezubski et al, 2004: 34)

Just as significant, racialized poverty provides the context not only for understanding issues of housing, education, and employment in the inner city, but also the prevalence of crime and violence in the inner city of Winnipeg. Sherene Razack (2000) argues that violence has come to be viewed as a naturally occurring feature of the placed inhabited by Aboriginal peoples, and this is especially the case for Winnipeg's inner city.

As Elizabeth Comack and Gillian Balfour (2004: 93) note:

The North End ... is not only a "racialized space," but also a space occupied by disenfranchised citizens with limited resources. In recent years the North End has become synonymous with gangs, prostitution, booze cans, drugs, arson—and violence. It has become a primary area where police resources are concentrated and violent crime charges originate.

Many adults (including parents of their own children) and children are afraid of the neighborhood youth. Elizabeth Comack and Jim Silver have also made this connection between the presence of drugs, gangs, and violence and racialized poverty:

Safety and security is a serious issue in Winnipeg's inner city. So too are poverty and racism. The processes of globalization, suburbanization, the migration of Aboriginal peoples from rural and reserve communities, and the growing numbers of new immigrants have resulted in the concentration of racialized poverty in Winnipeg's inner city, where well-paid jobs are scarce, housing is often inadequate, and opportunities for youth are few. In this context, crime and violence, drug dealing, prostitution, and gang activity are among the unsurprising consequences (2006: 1).

This social context of racialized poverty, therefore, provides an important backdrop for situating the lives of the girls in my study.

## **Schooling**

As Lezubski, Silver, and Black (2004) note, high levels of poverty contribute to higher levels of mobility for families within the inner city. This mobility has implications for schooling, as it can mean that a child can move between many different schools, thus having their educational attainment affected.

In short, a vicious cycle is created: low socio-economic status correlates with low educational attainment, and low educational attainment correlates with lower levels of employment and incomes. This problem is particularly severe in Winnipeg's inner city. (Lezubski et al., 2004: 36)

Silver (2004) reaffirms this relationship between poverty and level of educational attainment: "poor children are less likely to do well in school; those who do less well in school are more likely to experience poverty as adults. The likelihood is increased that their children, in turn, will do less well in school, and so poverty is reproduced" (Silver, 2004: 13-14).

Given their young age, it is not surprising that the majority of the girls in my study had an average education level of only Grades 5 to 8; only two girls had completed Grade 9. Nevertheless, many of the girls talked about frequently transferring schools, getting suspended, or dropping out. For many of these girls, the changes were tragic and predictable.

School and families become destabilized when children are apprehended, older students have charges laid or get taken into custody, parents go missing, children go missing, someone does not come home the night before, or children get hurt, even die in house fires, in the kind of accidents and unanticipated life events which seem to occur too often in this community. These are day-to-day realities that impede educational attainment. (Hunter, 2000: 112)

Emily was expelled from three different schools for skipping and for fighting with students and teachers. As a result, at the age of fifteen she had only acquired a Grade 7 education. Karen used to attend school regularly, until she moved to a new neighbourhood in the North End and ended up going to a different school.

When I moved away from around Luxton to around by Machray School then I started hanging around these girls and I started getting suspended. And I started smoking weed. And then I started drinking and I started not coming home. And my mom started worrying about me, and she started getting mad and not letting me out. And, I don't know, I wouldn't come home ...

Sonia was the victim of bullying and harassment at school that led her to lash out:

Well I got into a fight with a tomboy 'cause she was saying stuff about me. 'Cause that shit got me mad and then I was walking by her in the hallway at school and it was, like, after school and we were coming back from the classrooms. She walked by me and started saying stuff and I said to my friend, "Hold my binder," and I went after her and I beat her up. And she went running out crying, and she told her mom and she phoned the principal. And I got suspended.

The sorts of difficulties encountered by the girls in my study make them "at-risk" students. Hunter (2000) addresses this issue with reference to what he calls the "pedagogy of poverty"—the lowered educational expectations of teachers for students living in poverty.

The pedagogy of poverty is characterized by teaching practices that have been reduced to emphasizing basic skills. The lack of emphasis on academic learning is attributable, in part, to the fact that the research makes clear that achievement test scores of poor children are affected primarily by their socio-economic class. (Hunter, 2000:112)

Shawna, for example, said that she started skipping school because she didn't like it and because of the way the teachers talked to her. She added:

Yeah, I never really used to like doing schoolwork. And then I didn't know how to do it. And now I know how to do it, I like doing it I guess.

Kelly said that she didn't understand school, and easily got mad at the teachers. She would respond by walking out. She was also teased a lot by other students and she fought back as a result:

I had lots of problems. I used to always be teased in school until one day when I started beating up this one girl, and it led to the next girl and to the next girl.

Kate also had problems at school. She attended six different schools before she was eventually expelled in Grade 8:

Ah, I just didn't like it. I didn't like sitting there, you know. Elementary, up to Grade 6, I was fine, a straight A student, you know, 'cause it was fun. But grade 6, it got hard and I got, like Attention Deficient Disorder, ADD, and I can't really stay focused on something for a long time. And in Grade 6 my teacher was just a prick so he just made it harder on me. And I just freaked out one day, and I freaked out on him and I threw a desk around. And finally they expelled me and I wasn't allowed at that school anymore.

Because there were so many things going on that affected the girls' educational attainment, it was not surprising to learn that many felt school was "boring." As Emily Gaardner and Joanne Belknap (2002) found in their study of girls adjudicated and sentenced as adults in a large Midwestern women's prison:

Along with the turmoil within their families and negative attention from other institutional forces, school formed yet another atmosphere of oppression and alienation for most of the girls. Many felt bored by the material they were

supposed to be learning and believed that it did not relate to their interests or their lives. Rather than providing a support system, schools seemed unequipped to deal with the multiple problems these girls faced. (Gaardner and Belknap, 2002: 492)

While Heather reported that she “liked school,” she also said that she got easily frustrated and distracted:

I liked school but I had a hard time sitting through it. I, um, can't sit through about half an hour. I get fidgety and that. I can't stay in class or whatever so I'll just walk out of the class or something. But I like school lots.

Heather asked her therapist if it was possible she had a learning disability, but after being tested she was told she did not. Perhaps it was just a matter of school being boring for her.

### **Family Connections**

Another significant feature of inner-city families is that many are single-headed, especially for Aboriginal peoples. As Lezubski and his colleagues (2004: 29) note, “single-parent families are more concentrated in the inner city, but there are more of them beyond than within the inner city.” Sherene Razack (2000: 101) points out that Winnipeg is among one of the Western Canadian cities to have a high in-migration rate from rural Aboriginal communities: “Women form the majority of these migrants (58%), relocating to the city for a variety of reasons including a loss of tribal status, violence, lack of housing and employment.” As such, Aboriginal children are significantly more likely to be members of a lone-parent family than non-Aboriginal children. In 1996, 32 percent of Aboriginal children under 15 years of age lived in a lone-parent family, twice the

proportion (16 percent) in the non-Aboriginal population (Statistics Canada, 2003: 4). Given the difficulties encountered by so many inner-city families, many youth are not able to get the support that is so helpful to youth during this time in their lives. Understandably, parents who are going through their own troubles will have a harder time providing a stable environment for their children.

Of the twelve girls in my study, four lived with both parents, five lived with one parent after a divorce or separation, one grew up in CFS care, and two lived with an extended family member (a grandmother in both cases). Wendy did not remember much of her childhood but was able to recall some of the troubles she had at home in terms of how strict and abusive her mother was:

Um ... my mom was abusive to me, lots. She was, um, she was into God but it was like a different kind of God. Like, we weren't allowed to wear pants if we were girls, we had to have long hair, we couldn't wear jewelry, we couldn't go to the beach because you had to, like, have your body covered. It was little things like that, you know, like ... I don't even know [what kind of religion it was]; she was really into it. I was, like, I listened to her and went to her church and all that, but then when I was 10 I was, like, "No I'm going to wear pants." I started hanging out with kids in school but they were, like, already smoking. So I tried smoking and all that. And then she hit me lots, like, lots. She said she did it because she loved me. So when I turned 12 she lost me to CFS.

Conflict between mothers and daughters was a theme that emerged in several of the interviews. These relationships are often filled with extreme emotional ups and downs and many tensions brew from unrealistic expectations and lack of communication. Ellen Kenemore and Marcia Spira (1996) have suggested that the mother-daughter relationship reflects a tension between the tasks of separation and the need to renegotiate connection.

The tension between these may be at the source of frustration in the mother-daughter relationship during adolescence. ... Adolescent girls and their mothers ideally go through a process that moves them from a relationship that is characterized by the child's dependence to one that is interdependent in which both members continue to grow and develop. (Kenemore and Spira, 1996: 226)

Estherann Grace (2006) also addresses the challenges of communicating between mothers and daughters. She found that both mothers and daughters often lack an understanding of each other's behaviours. Verbal clashes and tensions are also more common between mothers and their teenage daughters (versus their sons). Grace (2006: 413) notes that "the strength of the mother/daughter bond contributes to the intensity of the emotional response both negatively and positively." She then goes on to categorize mother/daughter relationships in terms of dyads that include "over-involved, intrusive mother; distant, unavailable mother; disappointed, hypercritical mother and finally the disdainful daughter" (2006: 414). Many of these dyads are evident in the girls' stories. Wendy's mother could be classified as "over-involved and intrusive," while Kate's comments on the tensions she encountered with her mother reflect what Grace (2006) would term the "hypercritical mother." As a result of Kate's struggles within her family and social networks she ended up in foster care.

Just, my family, my mom always put me down. My mom was the type of person, my mom's the type of perfectionist, and she's really stubborn, and it's her way or no way in my house, well, like, her house. I don't live there no more. Like, I'm in CFS now but, like, it's her way or no way. And even my dad has to deal with it. And she treats me and my dad and my brother like we're stupid. And, I don't know, she always put me down for things that she caught me for. Like, she called me an alcoholic and a druggie and when she gets mad at me she calls me all the names in the book, you know, like she's a little kid. And it really makes me—it really pisses me off that she's supposed to be my role model and doesn't really do a good job, I think.

Many of the girls (nine of the twelve) reported that their parents had problems with drugs or alcohol, which often led to their running away or being placed in foster and group homes. Karen's mom was one of these parents:

My mom started having withdrawals for not having beer and alcohol and she started drinking again. Then I would start running away again, and all that same stuff would happen over and over again, like, I was hanging around with the bad group, like, the bad crowd. And I was smoking weed and that stuff.

Shawna recalled that her parents "always drank," and their drinking increased to the point where "I don't know, it's kind of like they didn't really care no more about the kids and stuff. Like, they didn't take care of us that well. They just let us do whatever we want and stuff." Kristin was taken away from her mother around the age of one because her mother had a drinking problem. She stayed in foster homes for a while until her grandmother gained custody of her. Kristin's uncle also lived at her grandmother's house. His swearing and drinking soon influenced Kristin and, at the age of 11, she took up swearing and started drinking daily with her brother. Sonia had tried to live with her mother, but her mother's drinking was too bad. As Sonia put it, "when she drinks she always starts fights." Sonia was taken by CFS and placed into foster homes. She remembers her time there as "lonely."

Michelle, who was also taken into care, believed that her time in CFS care contributed to her troubles, especially when she was placed into an open-door group home setting:

I think that's when it went downhill, skipping school, smoking weed, drinking. And then CFS got involved with me and took me for a voluntary placement for six months. And then I can say they really screwed up my life and that's when things went downhill, big time!

... That turned me crazier, like, bad. I was doing whatever I wanted and I think that's how come I got into so much trouble, too. I would tell them to "fuck off" and walk out the door, and they couldn't stop me. I was roaming the streets at all hours of the night. I was never even home. I was always AWOL every single day.

For many of the girls, the instability in their home lives often included exposure to family violence. Nine of the twelve girls in my study reported witnessing or being the victim of abuse within their family. The Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP, 1996) was established to address the many issues confronting Aboriginal peoples in Canada. One of the five volumes produced by the Commission was devoted to the family and the issue of family violence. Sharon J. Caudron (RCAP, 1993, section 3.1) of Hay River told the Commissioners that "family violence is seen as the most rampant social problem of our time." She went on to report that even though they may not be direct victims, children are profoundly affected by family violence. "The cost to our children is hidden in their inability to be attentive in school, in feelings of insecurity and low-esteem, and in acting out behaviour which may manifest itself in many ways, such as vandalism, self-abuse, bullying; and often these children suffer in silence" (RCAP, 1993, section 3.1).

Roy Fabian of Hay River tried to give a face to Aboriginal family violence by pointing out that it shares many features with the violence in the mainstream society, but it also has a distinctive face that is important to recognize in order to understand its causes and identify solutions.

First, Aboriginal family violence is distinct in that it has invaded whole communities and cannot be considered a problem of particular couple or an individual household. Second, the failure in family functioning can be traced in many cases to interventions of the state deliberately introduced to disrupt or

displace the Aboriginal family. Third, violence within Aboriginal communities is fostered and sustained by a racist social environment that promulgates demeaning stereotypes of Aboriginal women and men and seeks to diminish their value as human beings and their right to be treated with dignity. (RCAP, 1993, section 3.2)

Sonia, who comes from a large family of seven siblings, spent her early childhood living on a reserve in the northern part of the province. Sonia recalled that a lot of “bad stuff” happened when she was younger—including her mother stabbing her father to death. Sonia was caught in the vicious cycle of abuse, from witnessing domestic violence to being physically and sexually abused in her own home. She talked about being too scared to tell anyone she was being molested. Even when she was put into foster care the abuse continued and the feelings of loneliness engulfed her.

A Statistics Canada (2007) report on family violence highlights that females are slightly more likely than their male counterparts to be physically assaulted by a family member. Of those physical assaulted by female family members, “82% were mothers, 10% by a sister, 7% by an extended family member and 1% by a spouse or ex-spouse” (Statistics Canada, 2007: 21). Furthermore, rates of family-related physical assault generally increased with the age of the victim.

For girls, the rate of physical assaults committed by a family member increased steadily from the age 11 to the highest rate at 17 (113 and 297 incidents per 100,000). As in previous years, in 2005, young teenage girls between 12 and 15 years of age experienced the highest rates of sexual assault by a family member, with the highest rate at age 13 (248 per 100,000). (Statistics Canada, 2007: 21-22)

Emily, whose parents separated when she was young, also recalled witnessing domestic violence in her home. She also commented that her father would be violent with his girlfriends. Emily has a brother and a sister, and while she always got along with

her brother she would fight physically with her sister. Natalie disclosed in her interview that her parents' drinking and drug use led to domestic violence between them, and to physical abuse toward Natalie and her seven siblings. She recalls her childhood as "pretty messed up." Because of the problems at home, Natalie has been in and out of foster homes since she was a baby.

### **Peer Groups**

When faced with challenges in the home and with family, many adolescents turn to their peer group. Peers become highly important during this phase of the life course. Peers help to validate decisions, test reactions, and thereby act as a check for girls to make sure they are okay and fit in. As teens, they have daily access to these friends. It is these same peer groups and pressures of trying to "fit in," however, that can lead to drug and alcohol use.

It is important to note that experimentation with drugs and alcohol is widespread among youth.

Alcohol is the drug of choice of most teens. It's cheap, powerful and sold everywhere. But drugs are more available than most parents suspect. Most kids have been offered drugs by the time they are in grade seven. By eighth grade, most kids know kids on drugs. (Pipher, 1992: 189)

David Patton, Terri-Lynn Mackay, and Brian Broszeit conducted a study for The Addictions Foundation of Manitoba (AFM) in 2004 involving 6,673 students randomly selected from Grade 7 through to Senior 4. The aim of the study was to provide information on the use of various substances and their availability, and to identify a variety of risk and protective factors. The researchers found that three-quarters of all students had consumed alcohol at some point in their lives. Next to alcohol, cannabis was

the most frequently used drug in this population; however, they report that unlike alcohol there is no straightforward measure of consumption. Specifically addressing cannabis use among females they found that “7% smokes about once a week or more, and 3% smoked at least daily” (2005: 32). In addition Patton, Mackay, and Broszeit (2005) found that differences across grades led to finding much higher levels of daily use by the older students, which led to harmful consequences such as missed homework deadlines and school absences.

Another important finding of the AFM study was in relation to cigarette use: “The rates for females in high school are much higher than for males, with almost 38% of the females in Senior 2 through Senior 4 smoking in the past year” (Patton, Mackay, and Broszeit, 2005: 39). A few students also disclosed having tried magic mushrooms (psilocybin), methamphetamine, ecstasy, and crack. The use of “hard drugs” (heroin) in this sample was very rare, although Patton, Mackay, and Broszeit (2005) did find that 1 percent of Grade 7 and 8, 3 to 4 percent of Senior 1 to 3, and over 8 percent of students in Senior 4 had used cocaine in the previous year.

Experimentation with alcohol and drugs was certainly prevalent among the girls in my study: all twelve girls indicated that they have consumed alcohol and used cannabis. Kate’s experimentation started early, at age 10, when she was introduced to it by older peers at school:

At school, 'cause I went to when I was, like, in Grade 6 and stuff, like, elementary school—it was grade 6 to, like, 12—so I met a lot of people, and from just hanging around the neighbourhood. I used to chill out at community clubs all night and tell my mom “Oh I’m going to the community club,” you know, and [so she was] not gonna think anything bad [was] happening. And meanwhile I’m just getting high and stuff.

Kelly's experimentation also started at age 10:

Well, yeah, it was just pot for the beginning. And then I started using cocaine and whatever was in front of me. And then I've only ever tried everything once and I didn't like [cocaine] 'cause I don't want to be a cracker or anything. So I was, like, "Screw that I'll just stick to weed."

While many youth have been found to experiment with drugs and alcohol, it would appear that the girls in my study were more inclined to use heavier drugs—all twelve disclosed having tried drugs such as cocaine, crack, and crystal meth—and for many cannabis became a daily habit. Michelle, for instance, used the weekly allowance she received from her mother to buy weed: "I would buy weed but not all the time, like, I'd buy maybe a gram and a pack of smokes, go to the movies, go roller skating. I don't know, go roller skating high." Marijuana became a problem for Michelle: "For the longest time, I'd say for probably every month or two, like every single day, not a day goes by that I didn't smoke a joint, like, one joint. I don't need to smoke a gram, like, one or two or three or four or five to get me high, one joint between, like, two or three people."

Karen disclosed that when she went to a centre to get treatment for drugs, she left being "more educated" about the drugs available to her:

Every second day, I was smoking lots of weed until I moved to Gilbert Park and that's when it started. From there I went to CFS and I was running away from CFS. And from there I went to Knowles Centre. Then Henderson Highway was a treatment centre and I kept on running away from there. ... I started meeting older people who were more experienced at Knowles. They did, like, harder, more bad drugs. And then we started smoking crack and I started working the streets and I was hanging around older guys and they were buying me stuff and everything. Then I wouldn't go home and, I don't know, the same thing happened for, like, a year. And

then I've been in Knowles since 2002 of October. And off and on from there.

Natalie was another girl that openly shared she was addicted to drugs and made sure she always had money for her smokes and drugs: "I wouldn't really drink that much so, I don't know, I just like really addicted to weed and pills [Valium, T3s and T4s]." She reported that she has to smoke marijuana at least two to three times daily or she has withdrawals and "gets mad." She did this at home or with friends and it was always readily available to her.

That the girls may turn to drugs or alcohol as a coping strategy is not all that surprising. Intoxicants, after all, are recognized as a socially-sanctioned resource in our society. As Pipher notes:

Chemical use as a coping strategy is tremendously appealing to teenage girls, who are often confused, depressed and anxious. Alcohol and marijuana are popular because they offer teenage girls a quick, foolproof way to feel good. Caffeine and amphetamines help girls avoid hunger and eat less. (Losing weight is probably the most common goal of girls this age.) Plus, chemical use often enhances status with friends. (Pipher, 1992: 190)

## **Boyfriends**

Through delivery of the RespectED: Violence & Abuse Prevention presentations on dating violence, I have learned that healthy relationships are generally considered to involve open communication and trust, whereas signs of an unhealthy relationship—no clear boundaries, substance abuse, and accepting jealousy and control as signs of love—can lead to dating violence and risky sexual activities. Because many of the girls in my study did not witness healthy relationships at home they already had clouded perceptions about relationships. Furthermore, they often had difficulty trusting others and forming

same-sex friendships. Nine of the twelve girls have been in heterosexual relationships, and one reported bisexual relations. Three of those relationships were violent and abusive.

It was clear for Kelly that she did not trust guys and had no romantic relationships to that point in her life:

No, I don't like guys. One guy tried getting near me and I grabbed his thing and just holding it there and I started squeezing it. And I just went like that [motions] and he jerked forward and he was screaming like crazy. And everyone ran into the room and I was, like, "This mother fucker tried getting on me, man." And they were, like, "Fucking Kelly, man," and that. I just let it go and I was, like, "Don't you ever mess around with me again." And that was the last time I saw that guy.

Kate also had a bad start with guys and relationships. She lost her virginity against her will and was sexually assaulted again at age 13.

Well yeah, I never touched a guy until I was like 15. It took me two years to actually to think of guys to do it with me. Like, I still don't trust them, though, to this day.

She then found herself with an abusive boyfriend.

Just 'cause, ah, why, not this summer but last summer, I ended up, no—not last summer, yeah, last summer I wasn't living at home. I was away from home for eight months and, ah, I was with this guy and we were doing crack and I was living with him and he told me, "I'll give you a place to sleep and just come stay with me," you know, "I love you." And it was bullshit. And he was drug dealer and I found out he was pimping these girls. And he was just a really bad guy. And when I tried to leave he wouldn't let me leave. He beat me up and tried to make me work the streets. But I was a little too tough for him at that point. I would stay, like, we lived in a hotel and I would stay in his hotel all day and smoke his drugs and watch his TV and entertain his friends if they came by, and sold his drugs if

people came to the door, you know. But I got beaten when he was, when he thought he was missing something he beat me even harder. But when I finally got away from there I came, I got picked up and I came here last winter. ... And I had bruises all over and, I don't know, I was just in a really bad situation. And I went to the doctors and got tested and he gave me stuff. And I just really don't trust them anymore. Boyfriend guys are pricks, most of them.

Ami Flam Kuttler and Annette M. La Greca (2004) conducted a study with 466 girls ranging in age from 15 to 19 years in a South Florida school that has a large Hispanic/Latino population. To assess girls' dating involvement, a dating questionnaire was developed that was used to examine linkages among adolescents' dating relationships, best friendships, and peer networks. What they found was that serious daters and older girls had significantly less companionship with friends than non-daters and casual daters. As such, the serious daters turned to their boyfriends for higher levels of companionship, affection, and disclosure/support than those who turned to their best friends.

Many adults would assume that young girls spend most of their time thinking and talking about being in romantic relationships. Helen Cordes (2006) cautions parents to monitor their daughters' relationships with their boyfriends. She goes on to report that experts believe that even mature girls are not ready to make sound decisions about dating, and at ages 13 to 14 portions of a child's brain governing impulse controls and foreseeing consequences are not yet fully developed. But Sorensen (2007: 1) found in her examination of adolescent romantic relationships that this was not the case: "Young people do not agree: half of all teens report having been in a dating relationship and nearly one-third of all teens said they have been in a serious relationship." She also suggests that the quality of these beginning relationships will have lasting effects on self-

esteem and shape personal values regarding romance, intimate relationships, and sexuality.

Many argue that older boyfriends often cause problems for girls and open the door to an earlier engagement of sexual activity and subsequent risks of teenage pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases. Natalie was in a relationship when we met but thought she was pregnant with another guy's baby. While she and her boyfriend spent their time doing "normal things" together such as chilling around the house, walking around, and going to movies, Natalie also described her boyfriend as aggressive and jealous:

'Cause the way he is, like, he gets really aggressive, man. Like, I don't know, when I look at a guy he's just really jealous, man. And he told that in the beginning—"I'm conceited." I bet you never heard a guy say that about himself before. And I just thought he was really jealous and I would start laughing at him. And he tried to get all mad about that. And then, I don't know, he tried to hit me this one time. But, I don't know, I picked up his VCR and I chucked it at him and I took off after that (laughs).

Michelle has had romantic relationships that have involved both genders. She was in a long-term relationship for eight months with a boyfriend who was older—and physically abusive.

I guess you could say he was my first love. But I can say this 'cause CFS already knows. We were going out for quite a while, like, a long time, and he really beat me up bad, like, say, real bad, like, I'd say real bad. I didn't have no broken bones, just bruises on my face and legs and my arms. I don't know, my mom charged him and he went to jail for about seven months and now he has a No Contact Order with me.... He did it lots of times, like, he would abuse me lots. Oh my gosh, it was so scary the first time ...

In contrast to Michelle's experience, Sonia dated her boyfriend for one year and two months. He was good to her and supported her when a family member passed away. She also lived with him, as she found living with her mother to be too much because of the drinking and fighting. Unfortunately, two weeks before we met for the interview her boyfriend died in a drinking accident (he drowned while drinking in a canoe). She was still grieving her loss, which was too fresh to talk about.

### **Concluding Remarks**

Adolescence is a period of "storm and stress" (Phillips, 1998: xii), a gendered experience fraught with many tensions, pressures, and challenges. To this extent, the girls in my study share experiences similar to most girls at this stage of the life cycle. Nevertheless, drawing attention to the particular social contexts, sites, and relationships in which these girls find themselves sets the stage for understanding their troubles with the law. Growing up in the racialized space of the inner city, where poverty and social exclusion prevail, readily generates troubles at school and tensions and instabilities within the family. The pressures to 'fit in' with peers can easily lead to conflicts and experimentation with drugs and alcohol use. And navigating the difficult terrain of relationships with boys can mean exposure to sexual and physical violence. Clearly, these social contexts, sites, and relationships generate daily challenges in the girls' lives. In the next chapter, I explore the girls' experiences and troubles with the law in order to draw a more comprehensive picture of the complex and tangled web in which they are caught.

## **Chapter Four Tangled Webs**

As we learned in chapter two, pathways researchers have mapped out a number of routes that lead girls into conflict with the law, including: gender roles and experiences of the double standard; peer groups and relationships; evidence of family problems; schools, self-esteem, and issues of identity; substance abuse; experiences of abuse (emotional, physical, and sexual); the attraction to street life; female gangs; and experiences of violence. One of the fundamental premises of pathways research is that girls' involvement in delinquency must be located in the social, material, and gendered circumstances of their lives. The discussion in chapter three has provided us with a sense of what those circumstances involve for the twelve girls in my study. Attending to the racialized poverty of the inner city, problems encountered at school, instability within their families, pressures from peer groups, drug use, and relationships with boyfriends begins to paint a picture of what some of these pathways might involve.

Nevertheless, in listening to the girls' accounts it becomes evident that the pathways or routes into crime are not linear or clear cut; rather, the tensions and troubles the girls have encountered are interwoven, each bleeding into the other. Instead of the metaphor of "pathways," therefore, I maintain that it makes more sense to conceptualize the girls' lives in terms of a "tangled web"—a structure of linked and locked tensions and troubles that join with other component parts of the girls' lives to produce their troubles with the law. As such, the purpose of this chapter is to connect the social, material, and gendered circumstances of the girls' lives to their law violations using the metaphor of the "tangled web" as an organizing device. The discussion begins with an elaboration of

what those law violations involve and how the girls understand their involvement in crime.

### **Doing Crimes**

In speaking with the girls it became clear that some did not know the full extent of the charges that brought them to the Manitoba Youth Centre, and so this information had to be gathered from the staff. Many of the girls had more than one charge and these charges included property-related offences (1 theft under \$5000 and 1 theft over \$5000), public order offences (1 mischief, 1 joyriding, and 1 flight from police in a stolen vehicle) and violence-related charges (1 uttering threats, 1 assault, and 1 assault causing bodily harm). The large majority of the girls' charges were for administration of justice offences, which included 3 unlawfully at large charges, 11 breaches, 1 escape lawful custody, and 5 failures to comply (with sentences, undertakings, and summons charges).

In addition to their current charges, the girls reported an exhaustive list of charges stemming from their previous involvement with the criminal justice system. These charges included: property-related offences (theft under, theft over \$5000, shoplifting, motor vehicle theft, and house break and enters); violent offences (general assaults, use of weapons, robberies, and assault causing bodily harm); public order offences (joy riding and mischief); alcohol-related offences (drinking in public while under age); and administration of justice offences (breaches, failure to comply).

In terms of comparing these charges to girls across the country, Rebecca Kong and Kathy AuCoin (2008: 11) found that girls have consistently made up only 21 percent of youth who are processed by the youth courts, "a proportion that has fluctuated very

little over the previous 10 years.” Compared to their male counterparts, a greater proportion of female accused were in contact with police for property crimes than for other types of offences (p. 3). Nevertheless, in terms of the distribution of girls’ charges, in 2003/2004, “female youth were as frequently before the courts for crimes against the person (33%) as they were for crimes against property (34%).” According to Kong and AuCoin’s (2008: 11) data, “the three most common offences among females appearing in youth court were level 1 assault (18%), theft other than motor vehicle (17%) and offences against the *Youth Criminal Justice Act* (13%), which are largely offences against the administration of justice.”

Kong and AuCoin (2008: 5) also found that when female youth do commit crimes more than once, in most cases the crimes do not escalate; rather, the girls are most likely to be charged with administration of justice offences. According to Kong and AuCoin (2008: 5) “three in ten offences (29%) involving chronic offenders were offences against the administration of justice. These include bail violations, failure to appear in court, unlawfully at large, breach of probation, obstruct public or peace officer and escape custody.” Similar to Kong and AuCoin’s (2008) data, five of the twelve girls in my study had current charges involving administration of justice offences (such as breaches and/or failure to comply with their sentences).

It is noteworthy that only three of the girls in my study had current charges for a violence-related offence (uttering threats, assault, and assault causing bodily harm). As Kong and AuCoin (2008) note, while the charge rate of female youth for serious violent crime increased since the mid-1980s, it is substantially lower than their male counterparts and has shown a downward trend since that time:

Compared to 1986, the rate for 'serious violent crime' among female youth aged 12 to 17 years has more than doubled, growing from 60 per 100,000 that year to a rate of 132 per 100,000 in 2005. This difference is not a result of recent growth, but stems from a steady rise that occurred from the 1980s to the early 1990s. In fact, since 2001 the rate at which female youth were charged with serious violent crimes has slowly been moving downward. With respect to assault level 1 (the least serious form of assault), charge rates soared upward from 88 to 299 per 100,000 population between 1986 and 1993 and continued upward until 2002. A downward trend began after 2002 with the implementation of the *Youth Criminal Justice Act*. (Kong and AuCoin, 2008: 7-8)

While these quantitative data provide us with a sense of the nature of girls' involvement in crime, another avenue for addressing this issue is to explore how the girls in my study describe 'doing crime.'

Kristin described how she and her friends would break into cars:

Ah, I don't know, like, my friends just popped open the door and then we started doing it all night and then in one car there were keys. I tried to drive, like, it was a semi-truck and it was hard to drive and then I crashed. Then one of my friends got caught and then the cops were everywhere and we were dumb enough to do it the next night ... and then we got popped.

Heather's involvement in crime started by going around with her boyfriend "stealing bikes and money from people." Shawna also started off by fighting and stealing bikes. She later graduated from stealing bikes to stealing cars. Kristin's grandmother stopped giving her an allowance because she found out Kristin was using this money to buy drugs and alcohol. When this happened, Kristin said she resorted to crime to compensate: "Like I say, I don't do crime. I do crime but, like, I don't do hard-core crime. Like, I don't go kill anyone or something."

Emily shared very detailed information about how she accomplished thefts from retail stores. It started by hanging around a 24-year-old friend, and they would "boost" stores together.

When we first started doing it we had little bags, like, the Wal-Mart bags, and we folded them exactly and put them under our mattress so they were straight. We would fold them up and put them in our pocket and we would really be risky. Oh man, we would be in the store. The DVD player, right, they have the bar codes inside. So we had to take it apart. We lifted it up and took the bar codes out. And all the CDs—we had to open it and then we'd get the disk and take it. It took a lot of time. I was, like, 12, man. And it was to my advantage 'cause I looked older and I dressed up in tight clothes and my hair was all weird with glasses and I had a purse. I would walk in and I was like "Oh hi. How are you?" and I would grab a cart and I would fucking start loading shit in. I was, like, "Oh this is expensive and this is nice, this is nice." And my girl would walk in behind me and do the same thing and we would split up, and then we would meet up and we would take all the bar codes off.

Emily then explained how they would move to an aisle without a camera and take off the bar codes using an Exacto knife. They'd put the merchandise in a bag and walk out of the store.

But then we started getting lazy and we stopped using bags and we stopped cutting off the bar codes and we would just walk out and it would go "beep, beep, beep." ... The last time we did two carts full in one store. I was fucked because they had caught us already. And all the managers from all the other stores were there. And I was standing there, like, the aisles right, and there's the McDonald's over here, and I was standing over here. And usually my friend would walk out with the bar code on something and "Oh I forgot this," and I would just keep walking. So I was walking and I seen those four managers walk to the back where customer service is. And they were just, like, one, two—and I was just watching one, two, three, four. And they went to the door and I was, like, "Oh fuck." And I went to the side where people wait and I sat there waiting for my friend. And I couldn't see her, man, and I was, like, "Oh man." And that lady who was standing at the door walked away and I was, like, "Fuck this." And I just walked right out and "beep, beep, beep." I kept walking, man. It was fucking crazy.

Emily and her friend finally got caught and charged. Because her friend was an adult she received a sentence of three years; Emily was sentenced to close to a year.

When asked whether they considered themselves a violent person, three of the twelve girls (Andrea, Natalie, and Shawna) said “yes,” while two (Kelly and Kristin) responded with “depends.” Sonia did not think she was a violent person, as she saw her use of violence as more of a reaction to her situation and connected to the issue of control: “No. I wouldn’t say I am a violent person. I’m just, I don’t know, more about control.” Natalie was one to admit that she sees herself as a violent person.

I have an anger problem that I can’t control sometimes. I don’t know, that’s what I’ve been trying to work on, but it’s hard for me. Like, the way I freak out in here, man. I don’t know, that’s one of my conditions on my probation order. I have to take an anger management program and shit.

Two of the girls (Emily and Shawna) also felt that others would see them as a violent person.

The interviews also included a discussion of how the girls thought their friends saw them, which began to open a window into how they understood their involvement in crime. Natalie thinks her friends see her as “straight-up,” as an honest person and a good friend. But in some ways she sees herself as a “bad friend” and explained: “I don’t know. Just the things I do, like, I don’t know. ‘Cause I’m, like, really into crime and all that. I don’t know. [Laughs] I just don’t take shit from anyone I guess.” Kristin believed that her friends would describe her as “funny” and maintains that she is a good friend as long as they “don’t piss her off”: “I just get mad at them and then I’ll start to (physically) fight them.” Andrea’s friends call her an “alcoholic.” Andrea said that her troubles began because she became dependent on drugs and alcohol. Initially, Kate described her friends as saying she is a “smart, caring person with a lot going for her,” but she “screwed up.”

Later in her interview she revealed that she worries about herself and it was evident she feared that she would continue doing crimes.

I don't have great self-confidence right now. I have lots of stuff I've done to other people and my family and I don't really think I'm a good person. I don't really have a lot of faith in myself because I could get out soon and screw up all over again. I'm not going to have another chance because this is my first time I won't be released to CFS. I'm going on independent living. Like, I got to do it, like, all on my own. It's the first time I've been scared, you know. I've never been scared of anything because if I screw up one more time and start drinking and everything I'll be dead by the time of my 18<sup>th</sup> birthday next year. That worries me a lot.

### **Pathways to Crime?**

So how did troubles with the law get started for these girls? No one singular pathway can be identified in response to this question. Rather, from the timelines the girls constructed and from their interviews, what emerged was a progression of pathways. These pathways include unstable family life (including witnessing domestic abuse, death of family members, and being taken into care by CFS), substance abuse (both by the girls themselves and by family members), being the victim of abuse (emotional, physical, and sexual), peer influences, and boyfriends.

Andrea's story offers an illustration of this progression of pathways. Andrea grew up in an isolated First Nation reserve up north as part of a large family that included six sisters. Andrea describes her parents' relationship as "good." Although her community was supposed to be a dry reserve, alcohol and drugs were readily available. Finding life in her community to be isolating and "boring" with not much to do, and because she wanted to "fit in" with her peers, Andrea started using alcohol and drugs. Combining this with being teased and beaten up by other girls, she ended up dropping out of school in Grade

6. Andrea then moved to Thompson, where she went to live with her cousin. In Thompson Andrea made a new set of friends, but they too liked to party. The pressures and temptations of drugs and alcohol soon turned into an addiction for her, as Andrea's drinking progressed to the point where she would have blackouts. She also did a lot of crimes—mostly stealing—but was never caught until she was “ratted out” by a co-accused. When she got arrested she was charged with assault causing bodily harm (ACBH) and uttering threats. The incident in which the charges stem from is not completely clear but Andrea stated, “I was drunk and saying shit. I was stupid and I was just talking back.”

As reflected in Andrea's story, it is evident that some of the girls' pathways into crime involved a progression of events. But other girls' pathways involved a reaction to certain events in their lives or signs of vulnerability. Boyfriends are one example. As Laurie Schaffner (1998: 280) reports, relationships with older boyfriends can often lead to troubles with the law: “Girls are charged with a range of offences often found to be related to older boyfriends, such as violating a valid court order, running away, loitering, violating curfew, sales of illegal substances, solicitation, auto theft, robbery and fighting.” This was the case for some of the girls in my study.

Heather had been with her boyfriend for one year. While the relationship started out nicely, Heather found herself resorting to doing crimes like stealing bikes and money from people in order to be with him.

I didn't like doing it. I just did it because that was the only way I could be with him, like, for the day or something. But when I, when I asked him to come to the movies with me, I would give him, like, I would say “Why don't you come to the movies with me?” Because I always had money and he would say “Yeah” just to make me feel better. But then, I don't know, he wouldn't want to. So I would say

"Or do you want me to buy you beer?" And he'd say "I don't know. It's up to you." But he really wants to get high, so I would just buy him what he wanted.

Wendy shared that she often lied about her real age, telling others she was 19 so she could hang around 23-year-old boys. She later ended up in two abusive relationships and spent time in and out of jail for doing break and enters together.

I didn't get caught for like a year. I did a bunch of houses and I didn't get caught and then, like, I got ratted out on five houses and I came back, I came here, but I got out right away. And they put me in Marymount lock-up. I took off right away, my first leave I took off. So I'm breaching, right, so I would get picked up and come back here. And I'd get out, go rob some more houses and get caught again and keep doing it for awhile. I'm, like, 15 now and we're still together but we were growing apart. Like, that was my first love, I really loved him. And, ah, I got six months pregnant with him and he beat the shit out of me. And I lost my kid. So I left him right after that. I, fuck, just couldn't take it. And I stopped robbing houses 'cause I was too scared.

After Wendy's relationship ended with her first boyfriend she cycled right into another abusive relationship. This second boyfriend continued to abuse her, introduced her to "rock" and the streets, and became her pimp, which led to more violence.

And I met this other guy. I don't know, and he's a Black guy, and I met him in Central Park. And, I don't know, he just came up to us and started talking to us. And me and my friend are like, "Hi." And he was just trying to flirt around with us and he said, like, "What are you girls doing tonight?" And we were, like, "Nothing." And he said, "Do you girls want to come drink?" And we were, like, "Okay." So we went drinking with him. And I started to see this guy for, like, three months we were going out.

Wendy explained the incident that led her to finally charging her boyfriend with assault:

He's got, like, 21 charges. He tried to stab me in the back that night I got caught and he beat the shit out of me with a hammer 'cause I

wouldn't give him \$340 bucks 'cause I didn't want to smoke crack. I wanted to go to my mom's and I wouldn't. I was, like, "No. No, I need this money," I said. "I need to give some money to my mom." And he was just, like, "No, you fucking give it to me." And I wouldn't give it to him. And he cut me up, and he fucking beat the shit out of me. And I got arrested and I charged him and I gave a 17 page statement. And, ah, then I came back here and I got, it's, like, I want to quit but I'm still addicted to it. I want to quit but I can't. I don't know why I can't.

As a result of her boyfriend being charged and going to jail, Wendy took off again. But this time she didn't do crack; instead, she tried crystal meth. She was on the run again because her boyfriend's buddies and brothers were looking to "kill her."

Those boys, I seen them and I could have died on Saturday. They put a shotgun to my head on Saturday. But I'm not scared of them, like, I want to die ...

But at the same time, Wendy was also proud to be a survivor.

I'm proud that I've survived. That's all I'm proud of. I'm proud I survived him, man. And even though I want to die, man, I still felt like I won with him. He never got to kill me, you know. Fuck, some of the things I had to endure a million men couldn't handle, man. Like, seriously, I don't know how a 15-year-old could survive getting stabbed in the head and getting beat up with a hammer, man. But I did. I survived it.

While some of the girls became involved in doing crimes as a result of their relationships with boyfriends, other girls chose to partake in criminal activities for different reasons. For Kate, doing crimes was connected to a search for attention and recognition from others in order to fill the void she had from her family life.

And, you know, that's what brought a lot on—like, I started robbing people and all that, "That's a nice car. Oh well, I'll steal it for [you]," you know, and stuff like that. I'm a nice person. That's the problem. I do a lot of things for people out there in trouble.

Karen said that her involvement in crime was because of hanging around with the wrong crowd, although she was quick to add: “But I don’t blame them. I was making decisions too.” Natalie started to steal cars because of her brother’s influence:

Then I started hanging around with my brother and his friends and, I don’t know, seen my brother cruising in cars one day and then, I don’t know, he asked me if I wanted to go for a cruise and I was, like, “Okay,” and, I don’t know, I thought that was fun, man. So, I don’t know, I started doing it, over and over and then get caught and, for awhile I thought I’d never get caught but then I got picked up and I finally got caught.

For other girls, involvement in crimes started once they began to skip school. When asked how her troubles started for her, Michelle replied “Um. I started to skip school, smoking drugs and drinking. Well, not drugs but smoking weed, drinking alcohol.” She then shared how her troubles with the law began.

Yeah, skipping school. Ah, one time, the first time I ever got in trouble, I got charged with, I think, in 2002. Me and my best friend, we were all high and we—it was in the summer time and we were riding bikes and we seen these two girls. I don’t know, we were just being stupid and we decided to jack them for their rings and backpacks, cell phone and Disk Man. We didn’t assault them or anything, we just jacked them, took off. We ran into those girls’ moms when we were running away from those girls and their moms came chasing after us. And we dropped all the stuff, like, mostly all the stuff except for the rings ‘cause we had them on our fingers. And, I don’t know, we got away and we didn’t get caught until a year later. Well, I didn’t get caught til a year later, um, I don’t even know. But when I got caught they charged me. Well, yeah they charged me with a robbery x2. That was my first charge.

Sometimes the pathways are not direct or immediately evident. For instance, Kelly said that she stole cars mainly for the “joy of it.” To understand why that might be the case requires a closer look at her story. Kelly had been physically abused by her father, and this experience has left her with a lot of anger: “It made me feel mad.”

Stealing cars, on the other hand, made Kelly “feel good. It made me feel free. Like, I didn’t have to think about anybody or anyone. So, like, when I drive a car it’s just a good feeling.” In these terms, doing crime could be seen as a way for Kelly to cope with the negative feelings engendered by her father’s abuse.

Similar to Kelly, Kate too engaged in doing crime because of the “rush” it provided her. But for Kate this rush was connected to her drug addictions.

Basically I did crime because of my addictions. Like, I robbed people’s houses for stuff to sell, I stole cars to sell, or just for the enjoyment, it’s a rush. Like, selling drugs, like, walking down Portage Avenue with your pockets full of drugs and money and you see cops everywhere. It’s a rush.

Kate also talked about how the adrenalin rush she received from doing crimes enabled her to forget how she really felt about herself.

And, you know, if a cop stops you you’re going to jail for a long time and you got to run. And most people do run. And other people are, like, “Whatever, just give it up.” Me. I’m the type of person who runs. It’s a rush, it’s exciting. It puts, like, you know, how, like, a sugar rush or something? Like a natural body high or a natural feeling good about yourself. Well, that’s what you get when you don’t feel good about yourself. Like, I never feel good about myself and that’s why I drink.

When Emily was just six years old her family had to deal with the loss of her aunt. It was also around this time that her parents separated. After her dad left, things went downhill for Emily: “I don’t know I started just after my dad [left]. I just hated everyone, man. I just tripped out on anybody. I didn’t care.” These feelings of loss and abandonment led Emily to rebel. She soon began to skip school and to hang around with friends, drinking and getting high almost daily. Her friends “used to steal cars and stuff” for money to buy drugs and alcohol, which Emily thought was “fucking cool.” Similar to

Kate and Kelly, Emily found doing crimes—especially stealing—to be a “rush.” But for Emily the rush came more from her sense that she was outsmarting people.

It gives me a rush and I feel good 'cause, I don't know, 'cause when I steal from fuckin' stores, like, little things. Doesn't matter to me. But when I steal a lot of stuff it's, like, fuck, I just out smarted you. You're dumb. I just took so much money worth of shit from you and you didn't even realize, you know. I don't know. And when I steal from people I just think “You got something that I don't. You got more shit than I do so I'm going to take from you.” Or if I'm in a store and I don't have money, I just steal it. Like, when I'm thirsty I go to 7-11 with fifty cents, man, and I'll go walk around and buy, like, two candies and I'll have like a fuckin' meal in my pocket, a hoagie, a slurpee, a drink, and some chips and some ice cream, anything. I just like stealing. I know it's bad but I do, it's hard to not fuckin' steal.

The feelings that stealing brought Emily were enough to make her feel as though she was “addicted” to it:

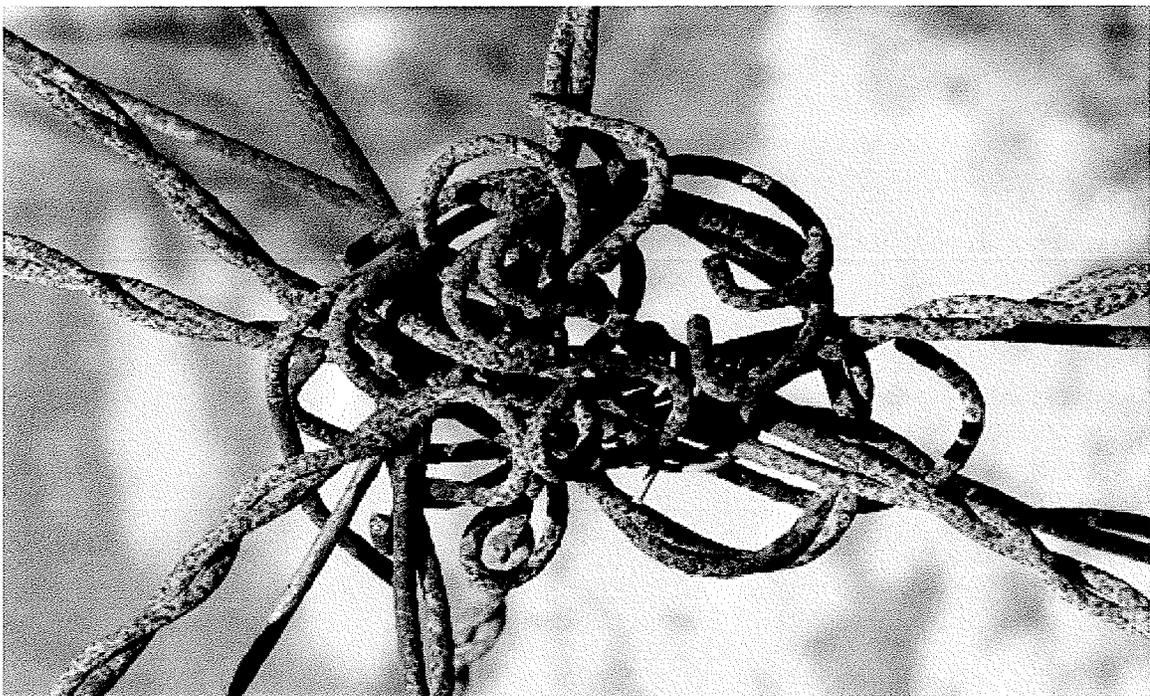
Yeah, when I go to the store with my mom I got to keep my hands in my pockets cause she doesn't like me stealing with her. So I won't go in or I keep my hands in my pocket or I steal and I won't tell her.

### **The Tangled Web and Its Interwoven Parts**

What becomes evident in this exploration of the girls' stories is that their lives cannot be separated into linear pathways to crime. The tensions and troubles they encounter are too interwoven. As such, I maintain that the girls' conflicts with the law can best be understood—not as linear pathways—but as part of a tangled web in which one part bleeds into the next and the interwoven parts are so entangled there is no obvious way to navigate through it. As the famous saying goes, “a picture is worth a thousand words.” The image below (found on Google) depicts what this web might look like. Singular

pathways begin to intertwine with one another and become so enmeshed that they become complex and interwoven until the lines are no longer clear. Boundaries to determine where one strand begins and the other ends are no longer distinguishable.

The presence of rust on the tangled web is symbolic in many ways. First, rust forms due to corrosion and wear and tear over time, much like the many generational cycles (of abuse, poverty, and violence) that the girls' families have endured. The rust is also symbolic of blood because the girls caught in the web are vulnerable, wounded, and hurt. They are bleeding emotionally and (sometimes) physically. They are trying to mend or heal themselves but certain tensions and troubles continue to corrode their efforts. Certain agents, such as substance abuse, speed up the corrosion.



The girls in my study are trapped in this tangled web. To elaborate further on what this web looks like, each of its parts needs to be deconstructed.

## **Drugging and Drinking**

Many of the girls skipped school, dropped out, or were expelled or suspended. Once out of school they were on the streets where opportunities for trouble awaited. They started to use alcohol and other substances, initially out of curiosity or due to peer pressure. But once they got a taste of the parallel world that the high could give them, many abused substances to cope with how they felt about themselves, to numb or mask the physical or emotional pain they were experiencing. Andrea felt peer pressure to belong and tried drugs to fit in. Most of the time they were “good friends” but “when they drink they get into trouble.” She became dependent on drugs and had alcohol-induced black outs. As a result she became criminally involved:

Yeah, I started hanging around with these girls and we were like ... I don't know, they started being friends with me 'cause I didn't want to take their shit anymore so I wanted to fight back. So they were scared of me and they just tried being friends with me. And they were doing drugs and all that so I just wanted to fit in and do the same. So I done drugs and alcohol and stayed out with them sometimes.

Andrea minimized her criminal involvement, saying she only did “soft crimes”: “stealing, that's it. I didn't do, like hardcore. I wasn't that bad.” But later on in the interview she revealed that she was facing charges for violence crimes:

Assault causing bodily harm, and ... aggravated assaults and threats to the cops 'cause I was drunk. And I was saying shit and I was stupid. And I was just talking back ...

Kristin was a victim of family substance abuse. Her mother drank too much and became violent when she did. As a result, Kristin felt no feelings of guilt for influencing her younger sisters to use substances. Because of Kristin's drug use her sisters began to

use and do crimes as well. Instead of stopping her sisters she introduced them to the cycle of drugs and family dysfunction.

Maybe one, the older one yeah, probably her 'cause when she used to live with us she used to do crime with us (laughs). And she used to drink with us and she was only 6 at the time. She used to drink with us and get high and smoke, and she used to steal cigarettes, just a lot of shit.... I used to get her to get stuff for me 'cause, I don't know, they wouldn't suspect her 'cause she's just a little kid, she's just a little girl.

It wasn't until reflecting back on her actions that Kristin felt differently: "I would have slapped her when I seen the joint in her mouth but instead when I did I said 'Give me a hoot' (laughs)."

Shawna initially responded to pressure from her peers to try drugs and ended up "liking it." When we talked further about her drug use she shared that she got her drugs for free without having to do anything in return. "No, it's just the friends I hang around with. They do stuff for them and then they, like, give it to me and I just get it for free." Drugs soon became an addiction for her and she also became violent. As Shauna described it, "I just walk down the street and beat up people." It's possible to assume that if Shawna's free source of drugs ceased she may become one of those that "did stuff"—likely the intent of whomever was supplying the free drugs in the first place.

It was at the young age of 11 that Kate almost died from an over-dose of drugs at a party.

I was just at a party and, ah, I had a bottle of T3's and somebody, the cops came or something, and the cops came. I don't know, I was drunk and the cops came and somebody poured Ecstasy into the T3's and I didn't realize it. I was on two packs and I was drunk and I kept taking them 'cause I thought they were T3's. And I kept taking them and the doctor told me there was 12 caps of Ecstasy in my system.

For a while after this traumatic event Kate managed to straighten herself out and was actively involved in sports, especially hockey. Her parents provided her with everything—from brand new equipment to all the extra curricular activities she wanted. But not too long afterward she starting coming home late, stealing her parents' cigarettes and money, and running away. While her parents would never get physical with her, they would stand in her way. But the support they tried to offer her wasn't enough: "Even though I love them no matter what ... I ran away." It wasn't long before she went back to drugs and got caught up in the cycle again. Kate's relationship with her brother was one of the determining influences in this process:

I don't know, I straightened out for a while 'cause my mom came to the hospital and she was, like, "What are you doing?" And then I went home. And then my brother started getting into trouble, he was like 16 at the time and he left home for about two years and started doing. He became a crack dealer because he had no money so his friends introduced him to selling drugs. So, whatever. I seen him when I was out and about and, like, at school he would, like, come see me and stuff. And me and my brother, we've always been close 'cause we understand each other. 'Cause, like, our parents don't understand how it is out there. So we've always been close. So he would like come see me at school, just talk to me about how things are at home and how I was doing. And he was in a bad place and he kind of went off his own way for awhile. And then, I don't know, I kind of got into selling drugs with him. 'Cause at school I was a really popular kid, eh. And I was somebody's good friend all the time, you know. Like, I was always [selling] and doing the good drugs and stuff like that.

### **Family Violence**

As noted in chapter four, most of the girls in my study—nine out of twelve—were caught up in cycles of violence in their home lives, which involved not only witnessing domestic

violence as well as being emotionally, physically, or sexually assaulted by a family member but also engaging in violence themselves.

Emily was one of the girls that self reported being violent “sometimes.” She shared many experiences with violence, which included witnessing domestic violence and physically fighting with her older sister. Kristin was one of the girls that did not see herself as a violent person; however, she did admit to fighting a lot when younger and attributed her learning about violence to her older brother: “Cause my brother always fought me when I was younger and he used to punch me out.” Sonia too was caught in the cycle of family violence. Her mother had stabbed her father to death. Sonia said that when her mother drinks “she always starts fights.” She recalled one incident:

[My mom] was drinking and a bunch of people came over and then so I started drinking and then, ah, me and my mom got into an argument. So she started saying stuff to me, like, “You’re a mistake” and stuff like that, “I didn’t want to have you.” Um, saying, like, my real dad wasn’t my dad and that. She said that my dad’s roaming around somewhere. I don’t know where he is. And I started crying and saying “That’s my real dad that you killed.” And then we got into a fight and she grabbed me and I stabbed her in the head and I stabbed her in the arm. I was aiming for her heart but she blocked it with her arm. So I got her in the arm. And I stabbed her in the head twice. And then she threw me outside. Then the cops were looking for me for, like, two weeks. And I was hiding out.

Heather also came from a broken family, where her troubles became enmeshed with one another. Her mother left her father when she was only seven because if they drank together they fought. As a result, she spent most of her life in the care of CFS. She only liked it when she was placed with her siblings, but often they got split up and would run away and go drinking together. Heather’s troubles deepened because her brother used to do “bad stuff” like steal cars and get into trouble—all of which, she thought, was “cool.” Extended family members were “bad” too, always drinking, and her mom was

doing drugs and crack. At an early age of 10, Heather started drinking with her sister and friends. When she was 11 years old she was worried she was becoming addicted to crack so she “only did it once in awhile.” Heather then spent about a year and a half at the Knowles Centre, but didn’t like it there: “I just don’t feel at home there and I want to run away because on the street I would feel safe. Well, it isn’t safe but I felt that’s where I belonged.” Nevertheless, Heather went on to talk about how these same streets were scary: “It’s scary outside in the North End at night.”

As Heather’s story tells us, in addition to experiencing violence in their homes, many of the girls also encountered violence on the streets. This was especially the case for girls who were involved in gangs.

### **Involvement in Gangs**

Winnipeg is one of the major cities in Canada that has experienced a rapid growth in street gangs. Inside Prisons (2006) reported that many Aboriginal youth gangs are involved in vandalism, auto thefts, robberies, and muggings. On the other hand, more organized gangs such as the Manitoba Warriors and the Hells Angels prefer gun-smuggling, drug-trafficking, drug-dealing, and prostitution. Inside Prison (2006) also listed 19 gangs in the prairie prison region and 108 prairie street gangs. First Nation Drum (2000) identified four primary gangs in Manitoba: The Indian Posse, Deuce, The Native Syndicate and The Manitoba Warriors. Unfortunately for many of the girls in my study, their worlds are so interwoven that they may not realize their connections or affiliations to these gangs. Two of the girls in my study identified as being involved in a gang, and four could be considered gang associates. Upon closer review of the girls’ interviews, the findings resemble other studies done in Winnipeg.

Melanie Nimmo's (1998 and 2001) research on "the invisible gang member" revealed the social portrait of female gang affiliation in Winnipeg. Female gang members were most likely to be young, unemployed, and undereducated. Nimmo also found that girls joined the gang for all the things they do not have or were lacking in their own lives. Many had been the victims of physical or sexual abuse and were looking for something stable and strong to hold on to. These are social characteristics that the twelve girls in my study share. Nimmo's research also revealed that many girls do not classify themselves as being in a gang, even if they have some involvement with a gang. For example, a young female will be classified as gang involved if she is going out with a gang member. For those six girls in my study identified as having gang involvement, other gang members may see them as vulnerable targets.

Nahanni Fontaine (2006) interviewed study participants ranging in age from 13 to 44 years and from a variety of Aboriginal heritages and locations to examine Aboriginal women's and girls' particular experiences in relation to the gang. Based on her research, Fontaine (2006: 116) maintains that "Aboriginal gangs surfaced, developed, and organized in response to the reality and experience of colonization and its perpetual legacy in our daily lives." In particular, she argues that

Aboriginal gangs do not develop solely because of a desire or need for money and power. Aboriginal gangs develop simply because our people are not afforded the same educational, employment, political and cultural opportunities as the rest of Canadian society. (Fontaine, 2006: 128)

Fontaine goes on to report that Anishinaabe Ikwe are doubly victimized and become "collaterals of war. It is under these circumstances that Anishinaabe Ikwe, some as young as eleven, are recruited by gang members and often targeted for exploitation in the sex and drug trades (Fontaine, 2006: 117-118). She also points out that females in the

gang are not considered members; rather, they are labelled as “old ladies,” “bitches,” or “hos.” Each of these roles carries certain responsibilities, and is defined in terms of how the women and girls were related to a male gang member. As well, Fontaine (2006: 129) notes that gang members often end up being family members, which “complicates whether or not it is ever truly possible to “leave the gang.””

Kate’s story is a prime example how drugs, violence, and gangs were all entangled in her life. She received her first charge for aggravated assault with a deadly weapon at 13 years of age. Kate explained that one of her friends had been badly beaten with a crowbar by another girl, resulting in 60 stitches in her face and a metal plate in her cheek. She then recounted what happened when she ran into the girl who had inflicted the damage on her friend:

We were all in gangs, and it just came with the territory. And we caught her snooping in our territory. She was by herself and I was the one who went crazy ‘cause that was my best friend. Nobody else did anything, like, all my older friends just stood there. And I was, like, “That’s that girl, man.” And I went after her and just didn’t think, you know. I was sober and that’s what really surprised me. I was sober and I had that much anger. And I just stabbed her four times. And I almost killed her. I could have been spending a lot of time in here.

Because it was Kate’s first charge, she was released on bail a week later. Things spiraled out of control for Kate and her troubles only deepened from there.

That was my first charge and I got out a week later on bail, like, that would have been my second charge. I would have stayed there for months and months but just the fact that it was my first charge. I got out a week later and ever since that I have a couple more assault charges and a whole bunch of breaches and fail to comply and auto thefts, like, over \$60,000, robberies. Just, basically, one thing led to another, you know. I was under the influence in public, and drinking under the age, and running away from home and all that stuff, and B&E’s. But it seems one thing leads

to another. Like, right now I am here for only five breaches 'cause I breached my last conditions five times.

For two months before Kate was caught she lived with a friend in a drug house and talked about being on the run.

In a little shitty house, it was hard being on the run like that 'cause you always got to hide and, like, hiding is hard 'cause, you know, I'm the type of person who likes to go out. And for the last 2½ months before I came here I was drinking everyday and doing drugs everyday and that's the only way. But I still talk to my mom. I call her once a week but basically to let her know I'm still alive and I'm not great and I do want to come home but I can't, like, I always keep in touch with my mom no matter how pissed off I am at her like she kicked me out and this time she kicked me out and I didn't run away and that's why I got breached and I had no where to go so but, whatever, I don't blame her.

Karen mentioned that her older cousins were associated with gangs, and how difficult it was when she was around them because of the presence of drugs:

It was hard when I go see them 'cause they are my family and my cousins and when I would go see them they would have that crack and it would be right there. They would ask me if I wanted a hoot and I'm not going to say no and all and then it just got started again and I wouldn't go home.

Similarly, Emily spoke about how members of her family—including her cousins and brother—were involved in the Indian Posse (IP):

All my cousins are all in there—they're full patched IP. He's the youngest IP and I got another full patched IP. And my brother used to hang around with all those guys. And, um, my brother's friend is cool, man. He's full patched IP and he's got Indian Posse right here and he's got IP right here [pointing to body parts]. He's cool.

Emily looked up to her brother, who was involved in doing crimes but also garnered a lot of respect from his gang associates:

.... he used to sell drugs and he used to steal, not really pissy things, but he used to steal for the money for his rent and stuff like that. He

would go steal a car and go do B&E's. Most of his charges are for assaults. And everybody knows my brother and everybody respects my brother.

When one of her cousins moved in with Emily's family, she too became involved in the gang, and began using drugs and doing crimes. She ended up in custody as a result.

.... she just kind of, like, she just introduced me. She was, like, "Yo, man, these are all the IP guys." And I used to think that was so cool and, like, I just started, like, I joined the IP then I got locked up. 'Cause, like, that's who I used crack with when I was out all my friends. I was, like, 12. And then I got locked up. And I got out and my homies, they were, like, "IP are punks, man. Come to the West Side, man." I was, like, "Okay, man." And their colours were grey, black, and white. And I was, like, "Put some red in there, man." So, yeah.

While Kelly denied any gang involvement on her part, she did share that she had "a lot of friends involved" and that her older brother was heavily involved.

My older brother is, oh man, that's what I hate about him. He's too much into that. Like, this one time I was with him and then there was, like, what he calls "slobs"<sup>1</sup> walking through Central [Park] and, like, he hates slobb 'cause one of them almost cut off his bro's arm with a machete. Like, I don't know, that's when they were walking through the North End to see my grandma, like, both of them, and that's when they got chased by some slob 'cause he had some big machete with him and he was messing around with them and they got all serious and then next thing I know they all ran away. Like, I don't know, but they hate slobb. But back to my point, well, whatever, well, I see violence everyday when I'm out on the street and my brother, like, I didn't think that people beat up people really badly, but my brother, when he fights he fights.

As a result of her brother's involvement in the gang, Kelly was exposed to a lot of violence and gang retaliations.

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<sup>1</sup> According to the Security Intelligence Officer (SIO) at Stony Mountain Penitentiary, "slob" is a racial slang word used to describe members of the Indian Posse. Anyone referring to a "slob" is making reference to an IP member. The SIO was not sure how the term "slob" originated.

You should have saw what he done to this one guy, him and his bros. There was this one guy dressed up in heavy red and they just ran up to him and I thought they were only going to talk to him, like, tell him to get out of the way. And the next thing I know my brother's like, "Kelly, get the hell out of here." And I was, "Why? I want to watch this." And he was like, "No. Fuck, you better get the fuck home or else or else I'll kick your ass when I get home." I was, like, "Whatever." And I walked away. And then I was peaking around the corner and I was seeing what he was doing. And the next thing I know this one guy—I can't say his name but he had this big bar with him. He just started pounding this guy that was looking this way. He looked all scared. And he just hit him across the face and his face was all gross looking. And then they wouldn't stop beating up on him, even if he looked helpless. He was on the ground and they just started stomping on him and stomping on him and kicking his face in. And, eww, it was gross. It was really gruesome. And, like, a week later the guy was okay after that, I think, yeah. But his jaw was kind of broken, I don't know, it was messed up. And then some guy beat up one of his homies. He threw him out of a three story house and when he was one the ground they all ran down to the bottom of the steps and they all started beating him up with a bat and he almost died. He's still in the hospital. That happened, like, a month ago. He had, like, tubes going right through. And I couldn't look at him. I just started crying, man.

Kelly went on to explain that she feels mad inside due to all the violence she has been exposed to: "I just want to go out and grab a Glock and anybody I see in red ... boom ... and that's how I feel." But then she went on to say that she wouldn't do it because she doesn't want to spend the rest of her life in jail and she tries to share that message with her younger brother.

Sometimes Kelly's anger is so intense that she blacks out. She fears it will be hard to stay out of trouble with all the negative influences that surround her.

When I get angry, I can't really remember the stuff I do. But I remember, like, some parts where I could have killed someone while I was driving. 'Cause there was this one time when me and this other guy named Matthew were racing down, like, a two-way street ... And I was this close away from the parked cars and he was this

close away from, like, the cement curb [showing how far away with her hands]. And we were just racing and there were little kids running across. And at that time I didn't care what was going on. And we were just having him a race. And then we got to the end of the street on Sherbrook and I just realized that I could have killed someone. There were probably, like, twenty kids on that block. I don't know, that's what got me thinking and trying to change my life around.... But it's really hard when you have everybody and I have all my friends around me always peer pressuring me.

### **The Street Sex Trade**

As the tangled web of gangs, drugs, and violence gets more complex, another strand or layer that can be added to it is the street sex trade in Winnipeg. Given the conditions of racialized poverty in the inner city, many young women are drawn into the sex trade as a means of getting by. Maya Seshia (2005) interviewed youth and adults that work in Winnipeg's street sex trade. Her study revealed many of the reasons why they become vulnerable to this form of sexual exploitation.

Common factors that emerged from the interviews included: poverty and survival, including homelessness; the legacy of residential schools, the continuation of colonialism, and racism; lack of stability and being placed in multiple care homes; childhood abuse; gender discrimination, including discrimination against Two Spirited/transgendered people; pimps and peer pressure; generational sexual exploitation (having a parent or family member who was or is sexually exploited); substance dependency; and effects of low self-esteem. (Seshia, 2005: 1)

Seshia also found that street sex workers get entrapped and caught in the cycle of poverty and negative pressure from their peers.

The dangers of working the streets in Canadian cities have become all the more evident with the revelation by Amnesty International (2004) that "500 Aboriginal girls and women (and maybe more) have gone missing over the past thirty years" Anupriya Sethi's (2007: 57) study found that the pattern of domestic trafficking of Aboriginal girls

in Canada takes many forms, including family members forcing young girls to participate in sex trade and organized (gang related) or sophisticated forms such as escort services, massage parlors, and dancers. Sethi (2007: 60) also shed light on the recruitment methods used, in which coercion and deception are the underlying elements, including “airports, schools, bars, boyfriends, girls are recruiters, dancers, internet and hitchhiking.” Just as Seshia (2005) outlined the common factors of exploitation for the street sex trade, Sethi identifies the root causes affecting Aboriginal girls’ safety and well-being that ultimately put them at risk for sex trafficking: “legacy of colonization and residential schools; lack of awareness, acknowledgement and understanding of sexual exploitation; violence; poverty; isolation and need for a sense of belonging; racism; substance use; role of gangs; and gaps in service provision” (Sethi, 2007: 61-64).

Four of the twelve girls in my study disclosed experiences with working the streets of Winnipeg. Heather was one of these girls. She was only 11 years old when she first became involved in the trade as a result of pressure from her sister and friends:

I was drinking with my sister and my friends and we started, I had people that, um, friends that I hooked with or whatever. And I used to go with them. And I never, well, sometimes I did stuff. But I didn't really like it because it feels not good. But, um, after awhile I got used to it. And I only did that because I thought I didn't have a life anymore. 'Cause I felt nobody cared about me.

Kristin was introduced to working the streets when she started to hang around one of her friend's mothers, who was in her 30s. She described her as “just like a kid” but she didn't do kid things because she “hooked” all the time and pressured Kristin into doing sexual acts so they could get money to buy alcohol, so she “just went along with it.” According to Kristin:

I did oral stuff, 'cause I couldn't do the other stuff cause I was on my time... Yeah, I kind of felt pressure 'cause I didn't really want to 'cause I was scared and, I don't know why, but I just was.

Karen did not provide much detail about her experiences of working the streets but did allude that she did it with her cousins, working all hours of the day and night: "All the time, sometimes I'd sleep and sometimes I wouldn't." Karen's involvement in the sex trade appears to have been connected to her addiction to crack cocaine. As she commented, "I stopped caring about all that stuff when I started smoking crack." She continued to work the streets until she was picked up by the police in a guy's car.

Wendy was the fourth girl in my study that got involved with the sex trade. Like Karen, Wendy's involvement in the trade was connected to a crack addiction, but with a difference. As we learned earlier, Wendy had been in two abusive relationships. Her second boyfriend also turned out to be a crack dealer and a pimp.

One night he just gave me some rock. He was like, "Here just try it try it." So I did, and then, ah, I tried it, fuck. It's addicting, man. I got addicted to it right away. And, ah, he started to pimp me, like, he beat me and, ah, and I was so addicted to the crack that I would do whatever he wanted me to do. And, ah, they gang raped me one night, him and his friends. And they burnt my leg, my leg's burnt to shit man. He's cut my head open, he's stabbed me in the back, he's beat me with hammers, he's tried to kill me. He's fucked me up, man. I started prostituting, and, ah, I turned 16 and still doing it. And then last year, October 21<sup>st</sup>, I finally got caught. I was on the run for one year and I finally got caught. And I came in here and I stayed until December 17<sup>th</sup> and I got out.

Wendy's experiences have had a profound effect on her:

I push everyone away. 'Cause the love that I'm used to is just hate. Like, getting beat up, that's love for me. My mom beat me and she said she did it 'cause she loved me. Ace beat the shit out of me and said he loved me. So that's my love, that's what I want, that's what I'm used to. I'm not used to someone loving me just for me. I'm used to someone loving me because I have money. I'm used to

someone loving me 'cause I can suck their dick, like, you know, I don't know, man.

Before Wendy's interview ended she shared some of her poetry that eloquently describes her troubles:

Ace's Prostitute: I'm sweet 16 with a dark dark past, I'm Ace's little prostitute, I'm his little whore who's just been kicked out the door. He uses and abuses me and maybe he's right I'm not much of anything, I'm Ace's little prostitute, his private little whore. People say he's great, people say he's liked but I see the mask he wears I'm sick and tired of the game he plays, I'm sick and tired of the pain, I hate to be a player in this game, I'm Ace's little prostitute, Ace's little whore who's on the verge of being kicked out the door. Please help me I'm confused.

My silver platter for you: Wendy had problems, people told me I was trash and nothing but a loser, I was forced to live some, I was forced to handle some situations which were very unreal, these kind of problems made me feel lost, depressed and unwanted and let me make it clear to you. I was a wonderful person with a wonderful mind, having no one to talk to or someone who understand I turned into something that wasn't in my plan, it was drugs, my only way out, drugs made me feel better without a doubt, do you understand the actions that I have chosen, my life miserable and wrecked, some of the things I have to endure a million men couldn't handle and that's for sure, so I started a new life of drug use, which shed away all my horrible abuse, although when it seemed I was on a trip my problems were gone but when I would come down I would still felt as if couldn't go on, so what's the purpose of being a user, it's only a part of the time I didn't feel like a loser, I used more and more to stay on the go, I would have to be on something so I could survive, even though medically this wouldn't keep me alive but I needed some kind of release so my mind could, so I could have a mind that was at some kind of peace. I remember where the peace was, let me tell you how. My heart is still cold and heavy but the only thing different now is that I am dead, this may shock you that I've written in this matter I just don't want you to be served at death's dinner at drugs silver platter.

Darkness creeps in: Down at the end of lonely street a couple blocks from skid row avenue I shut the door on yesterday and started worrying about my plan, the suns gone down and my mind's laid

down and the darkness creeps into my room and it's 9:35 and the night comes alive, somewhere the devil starts playing his tune, and the summer is alive and in his voice I hear it, I try not to listen but still the silence gives away to some friends out there, the pipe, the rigs and the pills, I whispered a pray and wishing I wasn't there, I looked at a picture from the past a place full of plants where my mother set her traps, how I wish the good times would last, when I didn't have the drugs I could count on the hugs and man who wants to stand by my side but all I get now is nil cause my mind is in jail. I feel lost without hope and everyone blames the dope but the pain goes much deeper than that, somewhere in my mind an image frozen in time and it comes alive without a warning attacks and I try hard to hide all the hell grief inside but the devil starts playing his tune when it's 9:35 and the darkness creeps into my room.

### **The Criminal Justice System**

An invisible but dominant strand of the tangled web is the criminal justice system (CJS). Under the administration of justice many of the girls are caught in cycles of non-compliance and subsequent failure to comply (FTC) charges. As we saw earlier, most of the charges that brought the girls into the MYC were for breaches or FTC charges. Jane Sprott's (2004) report to the Department of Justice Canada on "Understanding Cases of Failure to Comply with a Disposition" found that the current FTC was driven, largely, by the previous sentence. "The more severe the previous sentence was, the more severe the current sentence for FTC was" (Sprott, 2004: 3). What ends up happening is the girls cannot live up to the expectations of the courts or meet the requirements of their orders, so they end up back in jail with more charges.

Michelle, for instance, talked about her involvements with the CJS. When she was first charged she was put into the MYC for one night, then released on probation for one year, but she breached a couple of times "for not going to report to my Intensive Support Supervision Program person and for not seeing my PO and for not calling in to

report. Um, I have, like, 14 charges. That's sad." Michelle also feels that things began to go downhill for her when she got involved with CFS, and then got worse when she was placed into an open-closed door group home.

And then CFS got involved with me and took me for a voluntary placement for six months and then I can say they really screwed up my life and that's when things went downhill, big time!... That turned me crazier, like, bad. I was doing whatever I wanted and I think that's how come I got into so much trouble too. I would tell them to F-off and walk out the door and they couldn't stop me. I was roaming the streets at all hours of the night. I was never ever home. I was always AWOL every single day.

Kate had been charged with five breaches and had only come close once to finishing her order. She was caught in a no-win cycle.

Yeah, there is only one time I almost finished my probation and I screwed up with only four days left, I got into a big fight with my mom and she called the cops and usually the cops listen to the parent's more than the kids she said I hit her and all this stuff and just that I smashed my room that's how I got my anger out when I was at home instead of hitting people I hit at walls or broke mirrors and stuff like that.

Heather was also in the MYC for breaches and openly shared that she violated her Probation and Undertaking because "it was boring at home" and she "wanted to go do stuff." She finds it hard to be good and keep promises to her dad that she will stay away from her negative peers.

I don't know, I just kind of say "Okay" but when I say "Okay" I can't keep my promise to him that I will do it 'cause it's kind of hard being good and that. Like, I want to be good and everything when I get out but I can't 'cause people just phone me or they come to me or something.

### **Concluding Remarks**

As is evident from this discussion, the girls' lives are interwoven with many tensions and troubles, so much so that the metaphor of 'pathways' does not fully capture the complexity involved. In this chapter I let the girls' individual stories unfold to get a better sense of their standpoints in terms of the crimes they committed, and how they understood and saw themselves. In the process, I was able to locate their law violations in the context of the tangled web and its interwoven parts. In the next chapter, I explore how the girls coped with all that was happening around them and to them, and address the issue of whether or not they can free themselves from the tangled web in which they are caught.

## Chapter Five Getting Out

What we have seen thus far is that the girls' daily lives are filled with many tensions and troubles. As their stories began to unfold we saw how their many pathways led them into a tangled web, resulting in conflicts with the law. In this final analysis chapter I explore how the girls have endured what took place and their prospects for moving out of and beyond their troubles. This includes an examination of the girls' coping mechanisms or, more to the point, the inability of most of the girls to cope in a healthy manner with all that is wrong in their lives. The girls have tried to survive in the only ways they know how. As a result, we must consider whether or not they have the skills and resources necessary to free themselves from the tangled web in their search for hope. The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language (2008) defines hopes as:

A belief in a positive outcome related to events and circumstances in one's life. Hope implies a certain amount of despair, wanting, wishing, suffering or perseverance—i.e., believing that a better or positive outcome is possible even when there is some evidence to the contrary.

Given their young age, many of the girls in my study were not able to reflect fully on themselves or their actions; they are still searching for their identities. Nevertheless, many expressed their hopes for the future, and for a better life. Wendy, for instance, talked about being lost on the wrong path in life and what hope meant to her.

I believe I'm a lost little girl, with so much hope at a better life. But I don't think I'm ready for that. I've tried to change and I've got many chances, but I keep fucking up. I want to be a clean, drug free person. I want to help people like me. I want to have kids and teach them well. I want to raise them better than my mom raised me.

In order for the girls' hopes for a better future to be realized, the supports and resources that would enable their transition out of their troubles need to be scrutinized. This chapter begins by examining the impact of the tangled web on the girls' conceptions of themselves. In this respect, what I found was that the girls have adopted a defense mechanism of "don't talk, don't trust, don't feel."

### **"Don't Talk, Don't Trust, Don't Feel"**

This theme can be found in the teachings of Al-Anon or Children of Alcoholic Parents. Many support and self-help groups for those living with alcoholics have heard this system of belief before. "Don't talk, don't trust, don't feel" is a common defense mechanism for many children of dysfunctional families. What ends up happening in these families is that in order for the children to survive they cope by not talking, feeling, or trusting others. What is ironic is that many of the girls in my study also adopted this notion even if their parents were not alcoholics. In part, this is a function of the social conditions in which they find themselves. As the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives–Manitoba (2005: 2) notes: "Many people in the inner city have been ground down over a long period of time, and they live largely without a sense of hope for a better future."

While they may not have been overtly conscious of this theme, comments made by many of the girls in my study reflected various elements of it. Andrea was stressed about her upcoming court hearing but indicated she doesn't talk to others about her feelings.

I don't tell anybody. I'll just sit and cry 'til I fall asleep or calm down.  
'Cause I don't like talking to anybody about my feelings.

Kelly uses this defense mechanism because one of her best friends betrayed her by telling others something very private. Kelly did not share with me what this secret was but as a result she has a hard time trusting people.

Well there is this one girl, she's like my best friend but I don't trust her. I don't know, she always tries to get me to trust her and I'd be like "No."

Wendy is scared that when she gets out and is sober she won't know how to cope and handle her emotions. Normally she doesn't deal with her feelings and keeps things inside. She fears that when she gets out of the MYC all her emotions are going to come to the surface and she won't know how to deal with them except by getting high: "See, when I get out it's all going to come out and I'll just get high when I get out, that's all." Wendy voluntarily got her journal and shared many entries that gave an in-depth look into her life. This began with sharing some of her school work and that she felt good after her teachers (at the MYC) wrote nice comments about her in her journal.

Wendy is a young woman who has potential but because of a real rough life she keeps choosing to go down the rough road. When Wendy finally decides that she has had enough she will be an excellent; she will be excellent at helping others like her. Wendy is strong, strong willed and caring. She is straightforward and speaks what's on your mind.

However, she still doesn't know if she can trust people and who she really is. As she wrote in her journal:

No one will ever know the real me because I don't trust people and I don't let people get to know me. I make sure that people—that people close to me are kind of confused about me. And I don't know the real me, I don't even know the real me. I'm not sure—I'm not so sure I trust myself.

This comment led into a review of more journal entries on how Wendy viewed herself.

I see myself at times as just a fuck up. But people see me as something good. I'm scared to be a good person because I don't know how to. I don't want to make it sound like the way it's gonna sound. Like, I don't know how to live like you. I don't know how to go to school. I don't know how to have a life like that no more.

Next she wrote about how she thought others see her and how this affected the way she perceived herself. Her journal entries were conflicted at times, saying at one point that she tries hard to push people away and at a later point that she wants to change and be like the person people see her to be.

It makes me want to not give up. Like, you know, people in here say you're going to be something so I don't want to give up. But I'm not going to let myself give up. I haven't given up yet so I'm not going to give up now. But, in a way, it makes me scared and happy and sad all at once. I'm scared to be good. I'm happy to be good. But I don't want to be good either, you know?

Wendy also wrote in her journal that she wants others to know that she cannot change overnight, and that she will fall a lot while trying.

See, like, I'm like a baby. Like, ah, you know how a baby crawls around and sees people walking and the baby wants to try and walk so baby tries and the baby falls and hurts itself but it gets up again? You know, that's what I'm going to do. I'm going to keep falling but I'm going to keep getting up. But I'll get back up and try again.

Ideally, Wendy would like to be this person others see in her. To achieve this goal she needs to get help and go to school. She states "I will do everything in my power to achieve the things that will make my life better. I'm going to try while I am in here." She went on to read her journal entry about the qualities she likes in herself and how to achieve her ideal self and better self-esteem.

How I see myself right now is not the same as my ideal self. Right now I need lots of help and work on myself. Some of me right now I don't want to change and I won't change. I like little bits and parts

about myself. I like getting high but I don't so I'm all confused. It's all confusing how I see myself. I know I'm neither perfect nor wrong, I'm somewhere in between. Whenever someone asks me for something I never hesitate to say "yes." I guess you could call me a people pleaser. I feel lost without hope and everyone blames themselves but the pain goes much deeper than that.

As Wendy went on sharing her journal entries other issues emerged, including that she hated smoking crack because it hurt her so much. As a result, one of the most important things for her was to change her lifestyle and get help for her drug use. She also shared that she expresses herself verbally, in writing, and artistically by drawing. She then listed and expressed from her journal the values most important to her:

Freedom: my own choice. Hope: by studying my schoolwork and working on myself. Love: by caring for other people more than myself. Independence: by taking care of myself and being able to survive. Courage: by charging Ace, by not letting him win and hurt me anymore. Friends: by being true to them and being there for them. Family: not giving up on them. Responsibility: taking responsibility for my own actions. Kindness: respecting others the way I want to be treated. Self-discipline: by controlling myself when I was on the run and by not smoking crack. But I went and smoked crystal meth, which doesn't make it better, but still.

Wendy continued on by sharing from her journal that the feeling she most often expressed was confusion and the feeling most difficult for her to handle is joy.

When I feel love usually I'm getting beat up. I feel joy when I see my little niece and nephew learn how to read. I feel sadness when I think about my life. When I feel confused I feel like I think about what I should be doing and what I want to do. Like, see, I know what I should be doing but I know I want to do drugs. I feel fear when I see Ace's boys or when I think about what they'll do to me when they catch me. But at the same time I want them to catch me. I feel lost. It's mostly because of the dope, I feel lost, without hope, mostly because of the dope.

Wendy wasn't the only girl to grapple with how she saw herself. Shawna also struggled with self-awareness and identify throughout her interview—much like any girl

her age would. She often answered with “I don’t know” and even sometimes saying “I can’t think.” She also doesn’t open up to others: “I don’t really talk about stuff. I don’t talk to people. I just keep to myself.” Kate was another girl in my study who shared that she did not feel good about herself, which meant she lacked faith, hope, and confidence. Kate reported that this was because of her family, that her mom put her down, called her names, and she lacked support, especially emotionally.

Heather was more worried about her boyfriend than herself and wants to demonstrate to her boyfriend’s family that she is a good person and has changed, and that she is not a “hooker.” She wants to be able to help her boyfriend with his problems and live on his reserve where she knows “he doesn’t think about bad stuff.” She plans to talk to him about the consequences of his actions and worries for his safety. When asked if she ever thought this way about herself she replied, “Yeah. I know that I just take the chance of going back,” and agreed she was a risk taker. She struggles with being good and keeping her promises because of the temptations surrounding her.

Um, I have problems. I don’t know, when people tell me, say, “Steal cars” or whatever and I’ll say “No” for that. But then they come around and they’re, like, driving around squealing their tires, it, like, it gives me courage to want to go with them. But I could say “No,” but it’s kind of hard.

Because many of the girls lacked self-esteem, their ability not only to trust themselves but to trust others was tarnished. Kate also felt peer pressure and learned the hard way about friendships:

Yeah, at that point I was just a scared little girl, man. These friends were, like, you know, they stole from me and used me and they left me places when I was drunk and stuff like that. So I learned the hard way who my friends were. I don’t chill with those people to this

day 'cause I know they are not my real friends. But that's what really got me into the drugs.

Cattrall (2006: 9) reports that self-esteem is more than just feeling good about one's self. "It's the glue that holds you together when things get uncomfortable or tough. It's a way for you to learn from your mistakes and to trust your gut when it's time to make a decision. Building self-esteem is a process that is never really finished." In this regard, it would not be unreasonable to assume that because of their low self esteem, the girls in my study were unable to learn from their mistakes and oftentimes made poor decisions as a result. We all make mistakes but the point is to learn as much as we can from our mistakes. But what happens when we don't learn from our mistakes or we don't have anyone to lean on for support? Jennifer Tipper (1997) called these "critical points of learning" and "reflection transitions" as they represent windows of opportunity to check, correct, and influence healthy development.

It is also important to acknowledge the gendered context in which the girls find themselves. Rachel Simmons (2002: 240) states that "girls are socialized to care for others, so they often internalize negative feelings to shield others from the weight of their path—hence the spike in depression, self-mutilation, and anorexia that can accompany the loss of self-esteem around adolescence." The next section will explore some of these negative coping strategies.

### **Negative Coping Strategies**

Unfortunately, some of the girls did talk about experiences of self-mutilation, depression, and suicidal ideation. Emily had taken anger management courses, but they didn't work for her: "It doesn't seem real to me, their reading from a fucking book. What do they

know?" In response to asking how she coped or managed her experiences, including her involvement in crime, Emily stated, "I don't know. I kind of had that around me lots. My brother's been in jail. The only good one in my family is my sister." Emily disclosed an incident of self-harm which involved self-mutilation with scissors, but expressed that her intent was not to kill herself:

Some people don't believe me. But it's more of a pain. Like, if I feel shitty about something or I feel bad about something and it, like, hurts I do this and it doesn't hurt in here no more [pointing to her heart], it hurts out here [pointing to her arm]. Yeah, like, it takes the focus off other things, you know. That's why I do it, that's why people do it.

Wendy shared her feelings of hopelessness due to her life experiences and her drug addiction, and why she made the comment that she wanted to die:

I don't know, it's 'cause why, like, I got no point in living. I'm a crack head. I'm a whore. My mom doesn't give a shit. When they put that gun to my head I told them to pull the trigger, pull the trigger. And they wouldn't do it. They just beat me up. They said my brother wants to pull the trigger... I don't know, man, I should have. He should be enough to quit, you know. Like, I almost died, like, he almost killed me. They put a shot gun to my head and I still want to go back out there. That's 'cause, like, I don't care if they kill me. I want them to kill me 'cause I want to die, but I can't kill myself. I don't know. Something inside won't let me do it. But I was, like, they'll kill me. So I want to go out there. I want them to do it. There's no point in going on. My mom doesn't give a shit about me...

Wendy went on to talk about what love has come to mean for her.

I push everyone away. 'Cause the love that I'm used to is just hate. Like, getting beat up, that's love for me. My mom beat me and she said she did it 'cause she loved me. Ace beat the shit out of me and said he loved me. So that's my love, that's what I want, that's what I'm used to. I'm not used to someone loving me just for me. I'm used to someone loving me because I have money. I'm used to someone loving me 'cause I can suck their dick.

Andrea was another girl who felt comfortable enough at the end of her interview to discuss her attempted suicide in her cell one week earlier. She was taken to the hospital where she struggled to be free from the police holding her down. Andrea recalled that her arms were bruising up and she screamed, yelled, and called the police officers names—so they charged her with uttering threats. She then shared what had happened that night.

Yeah, I don't know, it was crazy. Some of these girls are just talking behind my back and I told the staff to ask that girl to stop talking behind my back or else I'll punch her. I got real pissed off and I wanted to fight her. So me and the staff started arguing. My cousin and I are arguing too. I started it so that really made me feel bad that I argued with my cousin. So I went in my room and started thinking about what I'd done and why I'm in here and all that just came together and stuff from the past and I tried to commit suicide. I hung myself and I started having flash backs while I was hanging and I started struggling and I could see my past go by fast. I just said "I want to see my family again" so I untied the rope and sat on my bed.

Kelly expressed that she distances herself from caring about others as a way to protect herself. She had also contemplated suicide:

I'm really trying to, like, care less about people now and I try not to worry about anybody and, I don't know, I think it's because I don't want to care for them because, like, say if they were to pass away, I don't want to go through all that, like, crying. I don't think I can handle [that] 'cause when my uncle died I was sitting in my basement with a razor just staring at it before it was, like, half an hour. And I was just, like, "Screw it." And I just hugged my dad and my brothers. I don't know, I almost killed myself one day...

As we saw in chapter four, some of the girls resorted to chemical use as a coping strategy. Alcohol and drugs became a way to self-medicate and dull the pain. A key informant in Sethi's study succinctly summed up this strategy: "Drugs are more easily available than counseling or other support services" (Sethi, 2007: 64). Kristin felt her

short-term memory was affected by all her drug abuse. Wendy felt that because of her drug problem people took advantage of her.

Yeah, I'm too good, I let people walk all over me, and I don't give a shit and I still consider them my friends.

Emily was aware that girls often get taken advantage of because of their gender: “So there are things that set you up. Maybe not all but most girls [have] things that set you up and, um—there are a lot of girls that have fucking shitty lives and they get taken advantage of because they are girls.” At the same time, however, she was also critical of girls who end up working in the sex trade:

I really don't have any sympathy for those girls who work the streets 'cause that's their fucking choice. People say “Oh they don't have a choice” and all that shit. They got a choice man. They got a drug addiction. Fuck. I have a drug addiction. I never fucking worked the streets. I just did other things. I used to steal. There are other things you can do.

Nevertheless, Emily did have empathy for some of these girls.

I feel sorry because there are girls who get beat up. Or, like, there is this one girl I know in here. She was a hooker. But I thought really badly of her, like, before I came back here. She used to be here and one of the staff and I clicked and we were talking about that girl. I never knew this but her dad used to rape her and sleep with her, and it started when she was like 7. I was, like, “Oh, can you imagine that man?” Like, that's your fucking dad. And her mom blames her for that. Her mom blames her. That's fucked, like, I don't know, man. That's crazy. And that girl—she just wants somebody to love her man, 'cause I know that 'cause I know that girl.

While watching a documentary *Depression: Out of the Shadows* (2008) on Prairie Public Television my attention was piqued as they made reference to being chained to the tangled web and how something had to be done to cope. One of the interviewees,

surgeon and award winning author Dr. Sherwin “Shep” Nuland, made the comment that humans develop ways to get out of their dark thoughts.

For most of us those ways are somewhat efficient, but for some of us those ways are self contradictory. They just make things worse. The more obsessional one is, the more one gets trapped in these convoluted notions of how to get out of the entrapment; the notions of getting out of entrapment just go deeper and deeper.

Many of the pupils featured in the documentary had suffered trauma and neglect while growing up, producing feelings of helplessness and hopelessness that resulted in depression. It is possible that some of the girls in my study have untreated mental health conditions, as many of them exhibit symptoms of depression. "Although estimates vary, most studies indicate that mental disturbance among court-involved youth is three times as high as in the general adolescent population" (Chung, Little, and Steinberg, 2005: 82). One of the most significant problems that occurs for these youth is substance abuse, a problem that is strongly linked to adjustment difficulties in their transition into successful adulthood.

The girls in my study did not have access to psychotherapy on the streets, so like those in the documentary their therapy becomes the bottle, pills, crime, and violence. One of the fellows interviewed for the documentary reported that the endangering behaviours young people develop can also be considered suicidal ideations: “Gang bang is just a different form of suicide, that’s all.” Others in the documentary talked about kids growing up without their parents because their parents are in their own pain: “They didn’t get the help they need. Generations after generation are wounded and never got the help they needed.” As a result, they adopt the street or gang life as their family and soldier through by testing their faith daily by being on the streets.

## **Positive Coping Strategies**

In contrast to what we have seen thus far, some of the girls in my study did take on one strategy to cope more positively: journaling. Natalie spoke highly about how her journal has really helped her get her thoughts out, especially considering that she doesn't like to talk to people and doesn't trust easily.

It kinds of helps me, like, when I write down some of it gets out. But, I don't know, it's still there, man, but then when sometimes I think about it I go all out. I'm suicidal and, I don't know, it's really hard for me when I think about it. I just want to. I don't know.

Michelle reported that she keeps things to herself, and doesn't talk to others. Instead, Michelle likes to journal and shared some of her work and papers (which we will hear from later). As we saw earlier, Wendy's favorite possession was her journal; it is a way for her to get things out and she feels better afterward.

Another positive form of coping was that of having the opportunity to tell their stories. Many of the girls expressed that they felt good after their interview, as it gave them a chance to be heard by sharing their stories and accounts. Michelle spoke about how she felt after the interview.

I feel, I don't know, like, I don't know, like, you were somebody I could tell this to and you were just here to listen to me. So I feel relieved ... Yeah, like somebody's just here to listen to me and what I have to say and even if it's recorded. You can use it as something and to tell people they don't want to be here. Mistakes, the smallest things, can get you to the deadliest places, like the Manitoba Youth Centre.

For Kelly, the interview was a way for her to think more clearly, compared to the past when she would just cry a lot.

I don't know, it's like all these different things are jam packed into one little thing and it closes with no name. I don't know, it all builds

up together and then I start thinking. That's how I think people think. Like, you know how when you are little and you watch something and when you are older and you see it you understand it more? That's how I think everybody is. They all jam stuff into one thing 'cause they don't understand it. They are, like, "Oh whatever," and they just put it in there. Then later on when they see it again it kind of—that one part just comes out and another part comes out and they see it through. That's why I think when people get older they get wiser and they, I don't know, they start making clearer choices. Like, for those people in jails, they still have problems they haven't dealt with and don't want to. I think about this a lot, like, everyday. I used to cry a lot and feel sorry for everyone. Now I pray to God. I used to hate Christians and God for all he's done to me.

Kate too saw the advantage of being able to share her story with others: "I don't mind sharing my problems with other people, even other girls. If I can help, if my story helps anybody, even if it only helps one person, that's one more person saved you know." Perhaps because Kate was older than the other girls in my study she was able to reflect more on the interview process itself.

I just I think it's kind of cool that you know people are asking us, the criminals, for something. Usually people just sit there and they write stuff about criminals. They assume who you are and they don't really take the time to ask us. Like, for some people you can just look at them and just say "She's a crack head and done this and done this from her charges and stuff." But you don't know until you know why people do what they do. It could be, like, how they feel about themselves or if their diseased and don't feel like living, you know, stuff like that and suicide and why people—like, I think it's pretty cool that somebody's, like, actually asking us, like, sitting down and having the time to do this. Like, that's pretty cool. And I don't know about anybody else, it's cool to me.

### **Resilience and Change**

Many of the girls shared the changes they want to make in their lives in order to overcome their lack of hope and faith. By surviving all that has happened in their lives

they now have a second chance at life. It was warming to hear the accomplishments, goals, and plans the girls have about their futures and their resilience to carry on.

Karen identified her accomplishments as “being proud” of herself and the things she was accomplishing before she got caught in the web of troubles. To stay out of trouble she wants to go back to school, stop hanging around with the wrong crowd, and stay away from drugs. Before Karen was arrested she wasn’t able to stop using drugs, but now that she’s in MYC she has:

Yeah, I stopped. I got put in here because I was on the street. I got caught by the cops in a guy’s car. I had a warrant and they took me and that’s why I stopped smoking. I’m trying to change and there’s nothing that could have stopped me from smoking that stuff. ‘Cause, I don’t know, I didn’t want to go turn myself in ‘cause it’s hard. But I wanted to quit and then I finally got caught and put here and then I’ve never smoked it since. I’m going to start changing and try to like be my old self from before.

Andrea described how her relapse prevention program was helping her.

My program worker, she’s doing something about relapsing and that helped me. She gave me booklets and she gave me all these questions, kind of like the questions are you asking me.

Sonia identified her pathways out of trouble as wanting to change, and to stop drinking and doing drugs. She believes it will be easy to make these changes, especially to stop drinking seeing as this is why her boyfriend died due to a drinking accident. However, she was unable to identify anything positive in her life when we spoke. The loss of her boyfriend was too fresh and she was still grieving. Upon her release she plans to go back to her reserve and stay with either her aunt or her best friend. She wants to upgrade her schooling, continue with the Step Program, and find a job. Sonia identifies her aunt as a positive support, as she is able to talk with her openly and attend church

with her. Sonia has insight into her future and wants to be a nurse. She plans to make this happen by going to school and then to college.

Shawna hopes to finish school and to stop doing drugs. But when asked if she could make this happen she responded, "If I want to, but I don't think I want to yet." Shawna did not feel she had it within her to make the changes necessary to overcome her drug addictions: "No, I don't think so. 'Cause in here I just think about it, like, everyday, and when I'm out there I just smoke it everyday." She has never gone for treatment or talked about getting help at this point. She also could not identify anything positive in her life when we spoke. She did, however, talk about some things she will do once released, such as adopting relapse prevention skills to help her say 'no' and sustain those changes. She was also going to ask the court for secure custody because she doesn't trust herself in open custody as she ran away in the past, "'cause it's boring there and you just have a big chance to get out so you just go."

Michelle hopes to get accepted into the Dream Keepers program.<sup>2</sup> She felt she would fit well into this program because the women have been where Michelle has been. She shared a journal entry on what she would say to her mom when she gets out.

Buy mom some flowers when I get out and tell her I'm sorry for how I treated her in the past. She always said to me it's not because she wants to be a bitch it's because she cares about me. She doesn't want anything to happen to me. I always told her you're just a

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<sup>2</sup> Dream Keepers was a confidential youth sobriety and support group offered to female and transgender youth aged 12 to 20 by the Klinik Community Health Centre. The group provided an emphasis on community and their unique needs through sobriety and strength. Klinik trained volunteers who themselves were sexually exploited to be peer supports and run groups at the MYC. When Dream Keepers dissolved about two years ago it branched off into two new programs, Dream Makers and Dream Catchers. Dream Makers is a partnership between Klinik and Red River College that provides formal training for those in the sex trade so they can be employed. Dream Catchers continues to be a sobriety and support program for individuals and groups and provides a natural flow allowing them to give support to others.

bitch and you're a cunt and this and that and, I don't know, I just treated my mom so shitty. But now that I'm in here and I was reading a book and it said mostly everything that my mom said to me. I don't know, I realized lots of things I did in the past little while, like help out around the house, laundry, dishes, sweep, mop, dust, and clean my room. My mom would ask me to help her clean up and I'd say "What for? I didn't make the mess."

Michelle wants to work on giving out compliments and being more respectful. She read the following entry from her journal.

Have respect for myself and give respect to others. I was a very disrespectful person. But at times I can respect people and I don't think that I was respecting myself. I will try to have a good positive day and night. I have my ups and downs. I will try to not be rude or swear. I used to swear so much, that's crazy. I was very rude. When I feel like I'm going to lose control this is what I'll do. I will take a time out or go for a walk around the block. I will not keep my feelings inside anymore. I will talk to someone about how I am feeling. If I have any problems I will be willing to sit down and try hard to resolve them. If I hurt someone's feelings I will say sorry to them. I will follow the rules."

She also read a journal entry which talks about her plans to stay out of trouble when she gets released.

I will follow the rules that my mother gives me. I will follow the conditions of my release and curfew. I will be at my residing address half an hour before my curfew everyday and night. I will attend school on regular basis at Gordon Bell High School. I will report to Youth Bail Worker and Probation Officer when told to do so and keep regular scheduled appointments with them. I breached with these people so many times. I will stay positive and take time to re-focus myself if I feel like I am getting off track.

To keep on track, Michelle wants to have activities to keep her busy during her free time.

This includes attending the Dream Keepers program, going to sweat lodge ceremonies,

playing bingo, playing cards, reading, doing puzzles, and writing letters. She also plans to find positive peers to associate with and be a positive friend in return.

I will have faith in myself and know that I am important. I will continue to make an effort to change and if I make a mistake I will try and try and never give up. I will remember that the choices I make today will affect my future.

The changes Kelly feels she has to make in order to achieve her future goals are to listen more, be more well behaved, and think of her father and how he will not be around forever (due to his illness). Kelly acknowledged that she knows the difference between right and wrong but makes the wrong decisions and how other girls may be affected by the choices they make.

Yeah, that's what everybody says, that's what a lot of girls say. They'll be, like, "Yes, I agree with you." Those are the ones who can't take their own actions into their hands. I think it's because something bad happened to them or something they did a long time ago that they never wanted to talk about. From there on that one choice they make leads onto the next thing they have to make... It could be the tiniest thing, like, say their cat died when they were a little girl. It could lead onto that if they are really emotional. I'm not really emotional but, like, I don't act it out. I usually am, I'm very sensitive. I just try not to show it. I don't know, my feelings get hurt very easily.

Kate plans on making some changes, which include staying sober, getting a job, and doing normal things with friends like going to a movie or playing pool. She also plans to get her G.E.D. or Adult Ed and try to attend either university or Red River College. She is scared to be released, as she will be on her own for the first time.

Ah, I don't have great self-confidence right now. I have lots of stuff I've done to other people and my family and I don't really think I'm a good person. I don't really have a lot of faith in myself 'cause I could get out soon and screw up all over again. I'm not going to

have another chance 'cause this is my first time I won't be released to CFS. I'm going on independent living. I got to do it, like, all on my own. It's the first time I've been scared, you know. I've never been scared of anything. 'Cause if I screw up one more time and start drinking and everything I'll be dead by the time of my 18th birthday next year and that worries me a lot.

Kate also explained that having too much freedom is not a good thing. This was because she was sent to Lakewood in Portage la Prairie for initially being charged with attempted manslaughter and breaching. This charge was dropped down to assault with a deadly weapon and she spent 32 days in Lakewood.

It's a holiday here [MYC] 'cause there you're in your room for 23 hours a day. You get 10 minutes for a shower and 20 minutes outside for basketball. There is no basketball net, it's just a wall in just this little courtyard outside, and that was hard. You're allowed to go back and if you're not on good behaviour you don't come back, only for court. I never had court 'cause I was already sentenced and that straightened me out right there. That was like jail to me, this is like summer camp. You're told what to do and when to do it and that's what you do. I think on the outside I had too much freedom I could do what I want and it didn't matter and it didn't matter how hard I fell. I just kept going down and I kept digging a hole and no one was stopping me except the cops. And I was pretty good at hiding until I got caught doing stupid stuff.

Kate believes that being in custody this time is a good thing for her. She is building her self-confidence and realizes that while she can't change her past, she can learn to deal with it instead.

Emily is much like the other girls in this study. While she has some insight into her past behaviours and future choices to make upon release, she seems—like many girls growing up—confused and very uncertain of her future. Emily was unsure how to resolve her problems that led her into trouble. For example, due to the relationship breakdown

she had with her dad she suggested she could “talk to him or something ... but I don’t know.” Emily did not have any concrete plans or ideas for her future. She understands the conditions of her release and the consequences of her offending behaviour but then stated,

I don't think about that stuff. I don't know, I just don't think that far. I just think about next month and next year, not ten years from here. I don't know where I will be. I don't know if I will even be alive. Fuck, you never know.

She identified some changes to make, which included “stop stealing” and “getting a job.” She did not feel that support and help from others could influence her to stop stealing; rather, this was something she had to do on her own. When asked about how to help girls keep out of trouble, she answered: “I don’t know, ‘cause a lot of girls have some fucked up lives. I met a lot of girls in here that have had crazy shit done to them and I can’t relate to that ‘cause I’ve never had that done.” She felt that such experiences have led these girls into trouble and where they are today. Emily felt bad for her close friend who turned to crack and working the streets, and feels it is easier for her to stay doing what she does than try to leave.

That makes me feel bad. But what can I do? I can't do anything 'cause she doesn't want to change. Well, she wants to but she doesn't because she likes it. It's hard to explain. Like, she really wants to but it's like she can't. It's hard to stop because it's so easy for her to do that. It's just so much easier.

Later on we went back to this issue and Emily did not think it could be prevented. She felt that as a result of these experiences girls learn how to cope with their situations, and for some this means working the streets. Emily felt some girls were vulnerable targets and spoke of one girl she knew in the MYC.

Like, no one has showed that girl love. She just, I don't know, but she's looking for it in all the wrong places man. And there is a girl in here that used to get beat up by her pimp. She's got burn marks on her ankles [shows examples on her ankle] one here, one here, one here and one here. They're, like, all up her leg, all from her pimp, fucking deadly burns man. He stabbed her in the back and broke five of ribs. He's just nuts man. He rapes her and makes her sleep with all his friends. That's fucking crazy man.

Emily did have some friends that were able to change their ways. "They got locked up and they just didn't want to come back. They stopped drinking and they stopped stealing and they stopped chilling with all the homies. They just stopped." While some of her friends have been able to break away from the cycle of street life, it is not clear what it will take for Emily to break away.

Natalie tried to change her ways once someone she knew died in an accident: "I thought I would change after that and stop stealing cars, but cars are like addicting for me. It's like drugs, I don't know, it's really hard for me to stop, I don't know." She would like to try and prevent her younger cousins from stealing cars. When we spoke Natalie disclosed that she thought she might be pregnant. She was aware that having the baby would be a big responsibility. "Even though I'm a criminal and all that I still want to finish school and all that." She weighed the pros and cons of keeping the baby.

Yeah, like, I know I can take care of it and I know that if I was to have this baby, like, I would like straighten out and all that. I would just leave crime and all that and just forget about it. I just know it would change me and change my life and all but, I don't know. I'm too young, though, man, there's stuff I want to do and stuff that I don't want to do, like, I don't know.

Natalie also doesn't want to make commitments that she can't follow through on.

I don't want to talk the talk man and just say shit but I won't do it. I'm just trying to take this day by day and that. Before, like, I don't

know, I used to say a bunch of shit that I was going to do and I didn't do any of that and I just came back. I don't know.

Wendy was another girl who lacked faith and hope to sustain the changes necessary to keep her out of trouble and repeatedly kept saying she did not know if she could be able to change her ways. Kristin did not think she could change or resolve any of the problems we discussed throughout her interview. She also could not share any good memories—except to say that her grandmother has always been there and supportive to her. Once released she plans to go back to her grandmother's and finish school and get a job. She dreams of being a pediatrician but thinks it would be too hard for her to achieve this because she is not good at math. She also realizes that to make a goal like this happen she has to stay away from crime and places like the MYC. Kristin also realizes that she does crime to feed her drug addiction. All her money goes to drugs—pot, crystal meth, or occasionally rock. She thinks it will be hard to make this change because all her friends get high. She questioned if any friends would understand the changes she needs to make but thinks her best friend will support her because they are together every day. However, there was reluctance in her voice: “Yeah, ‘cause I told him, like, “Oh, I want to quit drinking” and he’s like “Oh, I’ve heard that before.””

### **Helping Other Girls in Trouble**

Besides making changes to help themselves, several of the girls wanted to help other girls in trouble. In this respect, speaking out is a form of helping not only themselves but others who can potentially learn from their experience. Sonia believes that to help other girls who are in trouble with the law they need to be conscious of their choices. Michelle

said that one day she would like to mentor girls like herself. She believes it is important to tell them that the MYC is not a good place to be.

Um, they don't want to come here. It's not a good place. The staff and the girls in here, I don't know, they treat you like shit. It doesn't matter if you're here for a day or more. I don't know, they are hard on you. They're being very hard on me too. I'm trying to tell them the changes and stuff that I'm going to make. I don't know, they are, like, pushing me away or something. Like, they don't care and they don't want to listen. They talk about you behind your back, 'cause I heard with my own ears in gym yesterday.

While Wendy was skeptical about her own prospects, she did think that her own experience could help other girls stay out of trouble:

Nothing could help me. I have to help myself. But I think what would help me is by me helping people 'cause, see, I don't like people doing what I do. Like, this girl in here, she just got in here today, like, I know her though 'cause she told me she started smoking crack and she's laughing. And I was, like, "Fuck, that's not funny. That's not funny. Like, why do you do that?" I said, "Don't even do that anymore." 'Cause it's, like, her first time. I said, "Don't do that," I said, "Do you want to end up like me?" I don't know, it's not funny that way, man. In the beginning it was, but now it's not fun. Now it's something that I need, I need it to live. See, right now I'm in so much pain 'cause I'm sober. See, when I'm high I don't feel nothing. I just feel stoned. I don't care about nothing. But my problems are all there. Like, when I come back down I'm only, only part of the time I don't feel like a loser.

Wendy wants to be a speaker at the MYC to tell her life story to kids like herself: "I want to help people in pain, let them see there is more to life than just drugs, that there is a way to deal with all the bad shit instead of drugs."

Heather would like to talk to other girls in order to steer them away from stealing cars.

I would tell them that it's not worth it and you only get about, like, maybe 10 minutes or half an hour laugh out of it, but then you'll be laughing your way into the Youth Center and that's not good.

Kelly also thinks about how to help other girls:

Well, I think about this a lot and I think it's because some of them want to be cool. Some of them have to prove it to somebody. Some of them don't have a choice. Some of them do but—then they just aren't thinking right. Some of them are just young and immature and just chose to.

She believes that some of the girls are making the wrong decisions, and there are things that can be done to prevent it, including taking the time to talk to people who commit crimes, to “get deep” and try to understand what has happened in their lives.

Well there is, it's just that nobody has found it yet. Some people have, like, you know that saying, that “everyone is different.” I think that someone should just take the time to talk to every criminal person. Talk to them about what they like, like, get deep, like, some of them are very wise. Yeah, that's what everybody says, that's what a lot of girls say they'll be like “Yes, I agree with you.” Those are the ones who can't take their own actions into their hands. I think it's because something bad happened to them or something they did a long time ago that they never wanted to talk about, and just from there on that one choice they make leads onto the next thing they have to make.

One day Kate would like to help troubled kids like herself by becoming a mentor at Ma Mawi.<sup>3</sup>

Because I've been through it, like, or to even be just, like, a drug counselor. 'Cause some of the staff here are, like, they sit here and talk to us and try to be a counselor and they don't even know. Because they haven't been through it, you know. But think about it kids who come here. If they see a staff who's, like, been here and knows how it feels to sit in those rooms for hours a day it would really help them, like, some kids in those different situations...

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<sup>3</sup> The Ma Mawi Wi Chi Itata Centre was established in 1984 by the Aboriginal community to serve the Aboriginal community living in Winnipeg. It provides culturally relevant preventive and supportive programs and services.

Kate had good insight into how girls get onto the wrong pathways:

I think it's all about being strong inside, being able to say "No" to people, to things that you don't really want to do. And drugs and alcohol really influence crime. If you were to go drink and party at least not coming home at night then you lose your family. Then the police get involved and you start doing things to, like, get money. You know, money is not free. You always have to do something against the law to get money. I think it's all about how you want to live. Do you want a party life or do you want to do all your responsibilities till your 18 and then have a little party life. Like, there's always certain limits to things and, like, I think family life and home life has a lot to do with it. It did with me. I think it does. It depends on what you grow up around, even though I can't really say it 'cause I grew up with a good family and money. But money's not everything either, and I lashed out and I lacked support and emotional support and that's what made me turn away from my parents.

### **Social Supports and Resources**

While the girls had insights into the changes they wanted to make in their lives—including wanting to help other girls who are in similar situations—it is necessary to address if these girls have the supports and resources that would enable them to realize these goals.

Several of the girls were able to name role models and sources of support in their lives. Shawna identified her former wrestling coach, Ed, as a role model and her family as a source of support. Karen's role models are her mom, a friend, and her old therapist Inga and new therapist Andrea. Karen doesn't feel she will go back or re-offend because of the bond she has with her mother. In trying to work things out, they have made promises to each other.

They gave my mom a couple chances until her chances ran out. They were permanent but my mom right now is working on getting

us back. She talks to me one-on-one now and we both agreed that we were going to work our ways to get back home and all that. But I didn't do my part 'cause I started smoking crack and all that and she's still, she's pregnant. The crack was controlling me. Now that I am here—'cause before I used to think when I was a little drunk and all that I could get out for a week and I was freaking out all the time and smoking. But now I've been in here for awhile and it makes me think and all that, it's not worth it. I've watched a whole bunch of movies about rape and, like, a movie called *Monster*. And a whole bunch of stuff can happen. And I read all these pamphlets about drugs and what they can do to you and what can happen. And I don't want that.

Kelly identified the people she turns to for help as her father and older brother. She talked about forgiving her mother, but that their relationship is not very strong today (when we met her mother was in custody at the Portage Correctional Center for Women). Reflecting back, she identified her wrestling coach at her local community drop-in center as a good influence. He talked to her about “stuff” and told her of her potential.

I don't know, he was talking to me and telling me what I could be and all the potential I had and stuff. Like, my dad, he never does that because, I don't know, my dad's, like, slow kind of and he doesn't understand things very well. But he's very wise and he never really says that, he's not that type of person.

Kelly no longer has contact with her wrestling coach because she had influenced his son to become involved in criminal behaviour. She also has a medical condition that limits her ability to continue with the sport, which really affected her dream to be an Olympic wrestler one day. When I asked if this bothered her she replied,

I'm really trying to, like, care less about people now and I try not to worry about anybody. I don't know, I think it's because I don't want to care for them because, like, say if they were to pass away, I don't want to go through all that, like, crying. I don't think I can handle [that] 'cause when my uncle died I was sitting in my basement with a razor, just staring at it before it was, like, half an hour and I was just,

like, "Screw it." And I just hugged my dad and my brothers. I don't know, I almost killed myself one day.

It would appear Kelly tries to distance herself emotionally from others to protect herself from getting hurt or let down. Her older brother also tries to keep her out of trouble but she doesn't listen to him either.

I just want someone to talk to me that knows how to, like, get me through something in a way that makes it sound so interesting and the way I want it to be. I want to go to school but it's so hard. But the reason I want to go is so I can go to university. Well, I don't want to go but I want to go to university 'cause I found out I am treaty and I can go to university for free. And when someone told me that I was, like, "Wow, I should try to get my hands on it." And that's the way I want someone to talk to me.

Even though Kate is scared to be released, she was able to identify supports that are willing to help her stay on track. These include her probation officer, social worker, AFM worker, and psychiatrist.

While she is in custody Natalie worries about her siblings and how her granny is doing. She has no relationship with her real dad; her step-dad is more a father figure to her as he has been with her mom for a long time. Natalie identifies her troubles as her family: "I don't have no family man." For Natalie, her granny means a lot to her: "Yeah, my mom and my dad are, I don't know, when I think of them, man, right now it seems like I don't even have a mom, just my granny, and I kind of pushed my mom out, I guess."

When asked who her supports were, Shawna responded: "My dad is kind of 'cause he doesn't drink that much, like, no more. Staff here, I guess. I talk to lots of staff and I guess they would probably be a good influence." Heather identified her supports

and role models as her brother, staff at the MYC, and her therapist, with whom she had developed a good relationship. Andrea identified her mother, family, and a cousin (who was also in the MYC) as her main sources of support. Her mother is a role model, working as a nurse's aid in a personal care home, and Andrea hopes to finish school so she can also work there as well.

Unfortunately, even though many of the girls identified having supports, when it came down to actually being there and making a difference in their lives these supports were often lacking. Heather realized the hard way that "none of her friends are good."

While Heather was able to draw support from her mother, her father was a different story:

Ah, yeah, I talk to my mom. I talk to my dad but he doesn't come see me that much 'cause he always lies. Like, he says "Oh I'll be there," and he won't come. But my mom, I can kind of trust her more.

### **The Obstacle of Institutionalization and the Need for Preventive Approaches**

Now that we have seen what changes the girls in my study want to make and the limited supports and resources available we need to ask: how are those changes going to happen?

Wayne Osgood, Michael Foster, Constance Flanagan, and Gretchen Ruth (1999) discuss how some youth are "vulnerable populations" as their transition into adulthood is compromised because of the different priorities they encounter compared to other youths.

For instance, runaway and homeless youth begin the transition in need of housing, rather than having the security of their family's home. Youth involved with the juvenile or adult justice system often owe restitution in the form of money or labour, and their freedom may depend on following conditions of probation or parole that restrict activities. (Osgood et al., 1999: 8)

As we saw earlier in chapter five, the criminal justice system is part of the tangled web; especially since many of the girls were charged with breaching and failure to comply, sending them to the MYC. In this respect, institutionalization becomes yet another obstacle that the girls must overcome in order to fashion a successful future.

Emily is one example. At the time we met, she had spent the previous 22 out of 36 months in jail. Emily described herself as “institutionalized.” When I asked her to explain what she meant she said: “I’ve been here so goddamn long that this is like my home, that’s all.” Emily recalled how “weird” it was the last time she was living at her ‘real’ home:

It just felt weird. I was sitting at home and I was sitting with my family and I wasn’t in here. I could walk outside and I could go to the bathroom when I wanted and my room didn’t have a lock on it. I don’t have a door to my room. It’s just so different, man. I was just sitting there and I looked at the clock it was, like, 10 or 11 and I was, like, “Holy shit I got a lot of time here.” It just felt weird to me. This is normal to me in here.

Not used to freedom, Emily ends up taking advantage of it: “That’s another reason why it’s hard ‘cause I’m not used to freedom so I kind of take advantage of it when I have it.” Like some of the other girls, she finds it hard to stay out of trouble: “It’s not hard because of peer pressure. It’s hard because I like doing that stuff. But I don’t know, man, it’s fun to me. I get a rush, I guess. It’s fun. I like it.”

The girls’ situation becomes even more difficult once they reach legal age, as their access to social supports becomes even more constricted. Recall Kate’s comment, for example. Kate was scared to be released as she would be on independent living: “this is my first time I won’t be released to CFS. I’m going on independent living. I got to do it, like, all on my own. It’s the first time I’ve been scared, you know. I’ve never been scared

of anything.” Commenting on this worsening situation of vulnerable youth on turning 18, Michael Wald (2005) argues the moral case for not abandoning them becomes even more compelling.

Most were afforded little opportunity to succeed. The great majority grew up in very poor households. Many were abused or neglected by their families. They are the victims of failed schools, failed child welfare systems, and failed neighbourhoods. Their poor outcomes are exactly what is predicted when children grow up under these circumstances. (Wald, 2005: viii)

Nevertheless, the criminal justice system will continue to play a significant role in the ability of the girls to break free from the tangled web, since “access to resources and opportunities are likely dictated (for better or worse) by their experiences with the court” (Chung, Little, and Steinberg, 2005: 74).

One criminal justice strategy discussed by Jeremy Travis and Christy Visser (2005) is a continuum of care model whereby services, resources, and supports are carried through into the community:

Ideally, an integrated service network would connect correctional institutions with community organizations. In recognition of the reality of reentry, particularly the high risks that attend the “moment of release,” these services would preferably be aligned to provide a continuum of care between prison and community. In this model, correction agencies and local institutions—housing agencies, faith institutions, schools, and youth-serving entities—would focus squarely on the complex dynamics of the family reunion that occurs upon a prisoner’s release. Prisoners, who return to live with extended families, and those family members, would have opportunities to plan for the dynamic, both positive and negative, associated with reunification. Public and private institutions within the community could be mobilized around these goals. (Travis and Visser, 2005: 171)

Community reintegration is a great way to get started on a successful transition out of the criminal justice system, but what about before the girls even get to that stage?

Sethi’s (2007) consideration of policy recommendations to combat the domestic sex trafficking of Aboriginal girls in Canada emphasizes the need for a preventative

rather than a reactionary approach. Sethi cites a key informant in her study who spoke about Aboriginal peoples' traditional view of life as a cycle of seven generations.

The wisdom of the past three generations is used to guide the present, which is the fourth generation, and lays the foundation for the future three generations. The understanding of this vision is not reflected in social policies today, which focus on immediate and reactionary measures instead of combining it with long term prevention strategies. (Sethi, 2007: 66)

Sethi argues that what is lacking is preventative and educational programs and long term strategies, and that making all the necessary changes to succeed is a lengthy process. She also discusses the issue of capacity building in Aboriginal communities, suggesting that more resources are needed for Aboriginal communities to support themselves in dealing with the many problems and challenges they face. Elders are also an under-utilized resource as they have the experience and knowledge to share and guide youth. "Aboriginal youth should be provided an environment that facilitates an open dialogue with both their peers and elders. Similarly, there is a need for better role-models for young Aboriginal girls" (Sethi, 2007: 67).

Sethi goes on to recommend that schools and communities also need to be proactive to reduce the number of young children who drop out of school. "Measures such as family support, counseling, homework clubs and culturally appropriate classes need to be in place to support children and keep them in the education system" (Sethi, 2007: 67). Furthermore, she believes that resources should be directed towards things like transportation, recreation facilities, awareness campaigns, and Aboriginal communities offering more apprenticeship programs to their youth.

In a similar fashion, the National Council of Welfare (NCW, 2007) has noted that Aboriginal alternatives to justice have arisen because of the mainstream system's failure to provide healing, rehabilitation, and restoration, among other factors. "Alternative

measures include pre and post charge diversion, alternative sentencing including sentencing circles, and community based conditional sentencing” (NCW, 2007: 102). The NCW also recommended that the justice system increase options available to Aboriginal people such as legal aid, and cultural awareness training for police, prosecutors, judges, and corrections staff. They also believe it is necessary to recruit more Aboriginal people into the criminal justice system, and to offer culturally appropriate life skills programs as well as community re-integration supports.

Offering culturally appropriate re-integrative measures is a great way to start the healing process but I believe that changes need to happen even before troubled girls get to these stages. I am a firm believer that the role of the family is one of the most important factors in how we map out our way through the transition into adulthood and also how we handle these situations. As well, there needs to be more emphasis on education and prevention so the girls have the knowledge and skills to succeed.

It also needs to be acknowledged that not all children who grow up in the inner city of Winnipeg end up in conflict with the law; they go on to lead successful lives in adulthood. So why is it different for the girls in my study? As we have learned, the girls are confronted with many challenges in their lives, becoming entangled in the web and not able to set themselves free. It is not fair to ask them to change overnight when the worlds in which they live also need to change. A holistic approach to the problem would include ways to break down each of the components to the tangled web. This is no small task and will take years upon decades to reverse. But change has to start somewhere.

## **Concluding Remarks**

In this final data analysis chapter we learned that the girls formed a defense mechanism of “don’t talk, don’t trust, don’t feel” to protect themselves for all that was wrong in their lives. Some were able to form positive coping strategies but many developed negative coping behaviours to survive. But in terms of survival many of the girls showed resilience and the plans to change, including wanting to help other girls in trouble. Even though many of the girls identified having supports, when it came down to actually being there and making a difference in their lives these supports were often lacking. Furthermore, the study also revealed the obstacle of being institutionalized and the need for preventative measures. The focus needs to expand to include not only the girls but each of the components of the tangled web. This includes families, especially in trying to break generational cycles and mending broken families who have passed on years of destruction.

## Conclusion

My study began with a review of the 'pathways' literature and how this research came a long way in providing many important contributions to increasing our understanding of girls' delinquency. The concept of 'pathways' gave way to research including girls' everyday lives, exploring gendered contexts, letting the girls speak out, using life histories, and comparing girls across the world. The main pathways found to contribute to girls' involvement in crime included: gender roles and experiences of the double standard; peer groups and relationships; evidence of family problems; schools, self-esteem, and issues of identity; substance abuse; experiences of abuse (emotional, physical, and sexual); the attraction to street life; female gangs; and different experiences of violence.

However, many gaps in this research still exist. Perhaps the biggest limitation found in the pathways research is that the focus has mainly centred on girls' violence and on girls' crime. This focus is not enough to comprehend fully girls' pathways into crime. My study attempts to fill in these gaps by using a feminist methodology and incorporating a qualitative timeline or 'life history grid' which allowed the respondents to map out the issues and troubles most important to them. Using a timeline was the most suitable methodological tool for studying young girls because it was a visual device that assisted the girls to chronologically list their past events and help explore their pathways to crime. This process also shed light on their current lives and gave them insight into resolving past problems or planning their futures. The information was collected, stored and analyzed using a data management system.

## **Review of the Findings**

Three main research questions guided my study: What do Canadian girls single out as troublesome in their lives? How do they understand their involvement in delinquency? What do they consider to be their most positive influences and sources of support? These questions were addressed in the analysis chapters. In chapter three I was able to identify that the girls went through many of the tensions and troubles that all girls do. These troubles related to school, family connections, peer groups, and boyfriends. What became evident though was that these particular girls' lives had to be located within the broader social context of racialized spaces as many lived or spent time in the inner city of Winnipeg.

From this in-depth look into their daily lives I was able to get a better sense of how they understood their involvement in delinquency as they shared their stories of doing crimes. For some it was a reaction to things going on around them or to them, but others described it as a "rush" or doing crime for the "joy of it." More significant, the notion of 'pathways to crime' became questionable as no one particular event or trouble caused their conflicts with the law. What made more sense was to consider that the girls' lives were complex with many interwoven parts where one bleed into the other creating a tangled web. This tangled web included aspects of drugging and drinking, family violence, street gangs, the sex trade, and the criminal justice system.

The final analysis chapter tackled the third research question. It was here that we learned the girls created a defense mechanism of "don't talk, don't trust, don't feel" to protect themselves and carry on from day-to-day. They identified a few positive coping strategies but also indicated negative ways as well. Many showed the resilience to change and the overwhelming need for hope, freedom, and healthy forms of love in their

lives. Some talked about helping others stay out of trouble and the few social supports and resources they had. But when it came down to actually being there and making a difference in their lives these supports were often lacking. Lastly, this chapter revealed the obstacle of being institutionalized and the need for preventative measures. The focus needs to expand to focus not only on the girls but to each of the components of the tangled web. This includes families, especially in trying to break generational cycles and mending broken families who have passed on years of destruction.

### **Recommendations for Change**

One lesson to be learned from this study is that we cannot treat all girls that come into conflict with the law with the same measures. Each girl is different and has experienced different things. Treatment, rehabilitation, and other programs should be geared towards what will best enable them to break free from the tangled web. Most importantly, programs and services need to look at helping those families that are broken and trapped in generations of destruction.

As we saw earlier, some authors suggest the need for communities to be more involved in making sure drop-out rates from schools are reduced, and that community resources and programs are offered in culturally appropriate ways. If education is the key to prevention then we must get involved earlier. Similar to the Canadian Red Cross program RespectED: Violence & Abuse Prevention that I volunteer for, culturally appropriate programs need to be developed for inner city youth. Through education and partnerships these programs promote healthier relationships and safer communities. They also help to break the cycles of abuse, harassment, and interpersonal violence.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

Future research should also consider giving girls diaries and a specific subject to write on each day. I found that some of the best insights came from the girls sharing parts of their journals with me. This was not only beneficial to me as a researcher to gather richer data but was also therapeutic to the girls as well. Another consideration is to have a second follow-up interview after preliminary data analysis of the interviews has occurred. This would allow for clarity and further in-depth questioning about the issues they identified.

### **Concluding Remarks**

In order to help young girls in trouble with the law I set out to understand who they were, how they defined their criminal actions, and how they see themselves now and in the future. My study allowed for the girls' voices to be heard and for them to tell me what mattered in their lives. My hope is that this study will contribute to building our knowledge and understanding of girls' delinquency and efforts to support girls in trouble with the law. If nothing else, for some of the girls this was the first time that someone actually took the time to listen and care about what has happened in their lives in an effort to make things better for them and future generations.

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## Appendix A

# Girls' Pathways to Crime

What you have to say matters.

Let your voice and story be heard.

### Please Read

My name is Lisa and I am a university student doing research on the pathways that lead girls into (and out of) conflicts with the law. The purpose of my study is to gain a better sense of both the good and bad influences in girls' lives so that they can avoid such troubles in the future.

Interviews are **private**. What you have to say will not be shared with anyone else. I am interested in finding out about what you see as troublesome in your life, how you understand your involvement in crime, and what you feel are your good influences and sources of support.

Each participant will be given \$5 as a thank you. If you are interested in taking part in my study, please let one of the staff members know – or call me directly at

**(204) 945-XXXX**

Thank you,  
Lisa Heshka

## **Appendix B: Handout for Meeting at the Manitoba Youth Centre “Girls’ Pathways to Crime” Study**

### **Who am I?**

My name is Lisa Heshka, and I am a student in the Sociology Department at the University of Manitoba. I am doing a study on girls’ pathways to crime. The purpose of this study is to understand girls’ involvement in crime by gaining a better sense of both the good and bad influences in girls’ daily lives.

### **The study:**

- I am interested in conducting 12 private meetings with girls at the Manitoba Youth Centre. I expect this meeting to take about one to two hours of your time.
- During the interview girls will be provided a large sheet of paper and coloured pens that they can use to indicate what they consider to be the major life events (both good and bad) that have occurred over time. Depending upon what each girl chooses to draw on her grid, she will then be asked to talk more about these different events and what they mean to her.
- Because you are under the age of 18, I will require the address of your parent or guardian to get their written permission to meet with you. Once this form has been signed, we can meet on a day and time of your choice.
- Your participation in this study is **voluntary**, and you do not have to answer any questions you don’t want to answer. Also, if you decide to withdraw from the study, you may do so at any time, without any consequences, simply by telling me your decision.
- The interview will be tape-recorded. At any time during the interview, you can ask that the recorder be turned off.
- The information you provide is **confidential or private** (with one exception: I am legally responsible to report any cases of child abuse). I will be the only one with access to the information collected during the interview. It will not be possible to identify any of the research participants in the final report, and the interview notes and tapes will not contain anyone’s name.
- At the end of the project, all tapes and other identifiable materials will be destroyed.
- As a participant, you will receive \$5.00 as a thank you for your time. A Summary Report of the study will be sent to you upon request.

**If you are interested in participating in this study, you can either let one of the staff know or call me directly at 945-0365. Should you leave a voice message you can be assured that I am the only person with access to the message.**

Your participation in this study is important and would be really appreciated. I am looking forward to speaking with you.

Sincerely,

***Lisa Heshka***

## **Appendix C**

### **Information Letter for Parents/Guardians**

January 1, 1234

Mr. and/or Mrs. Smith  
123 Street  
Winnipeg, MB  
R2C 1T2

Dear [name];

My name is Lisa Heshka. I am a Sociology graduate student at the University of Manitoba. I am writing you with regard to a study I am doing on girls' pathways to crime. \_\_\_\_\_ has expressed an interest in participating in my study. Because she is under 18 years of age, your permission is required in order for her to participate.

The main purpose of the study is to understand girls' involvement in delinquency by gaining a clearer sense of both the positive and negative influences in girls' lives. My plan is to interview 12 girls at the Manitoba Youth Centre. The interviews will take place in a private room at the youth centre, and will last approximately one to two hours. Respondents will be provided a large sheet of paper and coloured pens that they can use to indicate what they consider to be the major life events (both good and bad) that have occurred over time. Depending on what each respondent chooses to draw on her grid, she will then be asked to elaborate on these different events.

Given the age of the participants, every effort is being made to ensure that this study meets ethical guidelines. [Name]'s participation in the study is completely voluntary, and she is not obligated to answer any questions that may be asked of her. Also, if she chooses to withdraw from this study, she may do so at any time, without the risk of consequences. The interview will be tape-recorded. At any time during the interview, [Name] has the right to ask that the tape recorder be turned off. All the information that she provides will remain strictly confidential (with one exception: I am legally obligated to report any disclosures of child abuse). I will be the only one with access to the interview tapes. It will not be possible to identify any of the research

participants in the final thesis report, and the interview notes and tapes will not contain respondents' names. At the completion of the project, all audiotapes and other identifiable materials will be destroyed.

I have enclosed two copies of a consent form for you to sign. Please keep one for your own records and return the other in the enclosed self-addressed stamped envelope.

It is my hope that this study will provide insights into the kinds of troubles that girls encounter, as well as ways to reduce their conflicts with the law. If you have any questions regarding this study, please feel free to contact me. You may also contact my Thesis Advisor, Dr. Elizabeth Comack at (204) 474-9673.

Sincerely,

Lisa Heshka  
Sociology Graduate Student.  
Phone: 945-XXXX

***Enclosure: Consent form***  
Self-addressed stamped envelope

**Appendix D**  
**Parent/Guardian Consent Form**

**‘Girls’ Pathways to Crime’ Study**

I understand that \_\_\_\_\_ has voluntarily agreed to participate in Lisa Heshka’s study on ‘girls’ pathways to crime.’ The main purpose of this research is to understand girls’ involvement in delinquency by gaining a clearer sense of both the positive and negative influences in girls’ daily lives.

[Name]’s participation in this study will involve an interview at the Manitoba Youth Centre, which will require 1 to 2 hours of her time. Her participation is completely voluntary, and she is not obligated to answer any questions that may be asked of her. Also, if she chooses to withdraw from this study, she may do so simply by stating her decision, without prejudice or consequences. The interview will be tape-recorded. At any time during the interview, [Name] has the right to ask that the tape recorder be turned off. All the information that she provides will remain strictly confidential, with one exception: Lisa is legally obligated to report any disclosures of child abuse. Lisa Heshka will be the only one with access to interview tapes. It will not be possible to identify any of the research participants in the final thesis report, and the interview notes and tapes will not contain respondents’ names. At the completion of the project, all audiotapes and other identifiable materials will be destroyed.

I also understand that [name] will be paid \$5 as a thank you for her participation.

By signing this Consent Form I give [name] my permission to participate in the “Girls’ Pathways to Crime” study. I understand the purpose of the study and what her participation will involve.

I wish to receive a copy of the ‘Summary Report’                     yes     no

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Signature**

**Date**

Legal Relationship to [Name]: \_\_\_\_\_

This research has been approved by the University of Manitoba Psychology/Sociology Research Ethics Board. If you have any concerns or complaints about this project you may contact any of the above-named persons or the Human Ethics Secretariat at 474-7122. Please keep a copy of this consent form for your records and reference.

**Appendix E**  
**Consent to Participate in Study**

**‘Girls’ Pathways to Crime’ Study**

I understand that Lisa Heshka is conducting a study on girls’ pathways to crime. The main purpose of this research is to understand girls’ involvement in crime by gaining a clearer sense of both the good and bad influences in girls’ daily lives.

I realize that my participation in this study will involve an interview that will require 1 to 2 hours of my time. I know that my participation is completely voluntary and that at any time during my interview I may refuse to answer a question or withdraw from the study without getting into any trouble or suffering any consequences. My responses will be confidential, with one exception: Lisa is legally responsible to report any disclosures of child abuse.

Lisa has explained to me that the interview will be tape recorded, unless I say otherwise. I can also ask to have the recorder turned off at any time during the interview. Only Lisa will have access to the tapes. I accept that my information may be used word for word, but Lisa has assured me that my identity will remain confidential at all times. I also understand that once Lisa has finished her research, the tapes will be destroyed.

I also understand that I will be paid \$5 as a thank you for my time.

By signing this Consent Form, I agree to participate in the “Girls’ Pathways to Crime” research project. I understand the purpose of the research and what my participation will involve. I will allow Lisa Heshka to use my interview for her research. I also realize that because I am under 18 years of age, Lisa has received the consent of my parent/legal guardian for me to participate in this study. If I have any questions or concerns, I can contact Lisa at 945-XXXX or her Thesis Advisor, Dr. Elizabeth Comack, at 474-9673.

I wish to receive a copy of the Summary Report                     yes                     no

\_\_\_\_\_

**Participant’s Signature**

\_\_\_\_\_

**Date**

\_\_\_\_\_

**Researcher’s Signature**

\_\_\_\_\_

**Date**

This research has been approved by the University of Manitoba Psychology/Sociology Research Ethics Board. If you have any concerns or complaints about this project you may contact any of the above-named persons or the Human Ethics Secretariat at 474-7122. A copy of this consent form has been given to you to keep for your records and reference.

## **Appendix F**

### **Timeline Instructions**

Hello, and thank you again for coming here today. I would like to begin by going over the *Informed Consent Form* with you (make sure they understand it fully and have signed both copies. Remind them that the interview will be tape-recorded, with their permission).

I have asked you here today to gain a better understanding of some of the troubles girls face in their everyday lives – like conflicts with the law – and ways of fixing them. I'm interested in learning your views on a number of issues.

Today we are going to create a timeline using a large sheet of paper and coloured pens. On one end of this sheet we can mark off when you were born, and on the other end will be the present day. I would like you to draw or map out what you consider to be the major life events (both good and bad) that have occurred over time. Depending upon what you choose to draw on your grid, I may then ask you to explain these different events, for example, the relationships they represent. You can use whatever colour of pen you want to represent the different events in your life.

Keep in mind that you don't have to answer a question if you don't want to. And if you don't quite understand a question, please let me know and I'll try to clarify it for you.

### **Supplementary Interview Guide**

#### **Demographics:**

- How old are you?
- What is your ethnic or racial background?
- What grade have you finished in school?

#### **Main Research Questions:**

- What do you single out as troublesome in your life?
- How do you understand your involvement in crime?
- What do you consider to be your good influences and sources of support?

#### **Family:**

- Where were you born?
- Where did you grow up?
- Who raised you? (Your parents? Other relatives?)
- Do you have any brothers or sisters? How many?
  - Do you get along well with them?
- What do you remember most about your childhood? What was it like for you?
  - Who could you go to for support? Your parents/guardians? Siblings? Others?

- Were there any conflicts in your home? If so, how did you deal with that?
- What is your family situation like now? (i.e. Who did you live with before going into custody?)
  - What was this experience like for you?

**School and Leisure Time Activities:**

- Where did you go to school?
- Do you like school? Why? Why not?
- Did you get into any trouble at school? Very often? What for?
- What do you like to do outside of school?
  - Do you play any sports?
  - Do you belong to any clubs or organizations?

**Relationships:**

- Do you have many friends? A best friend?
  - Can you tell me about them? (eg What do you like/dislike about them?)
- What kinds of things do you do when you're with friends?
  - Where do you like to hang out?
  - Do you use alcohol and/or drugs? How often? In what kind of settings?
- Have you ever experienced peer pressure (pressure from your friends) to do something?
  - Can you tell me about it? How did that make you feel?
- How do you think your friends see you? How would they describe you?
  - Do you think you are a good friend?
- Have you had many boyfriends?
  - What were they like?
- Are you in a relationship right now? Tell me about your boyfriend.
  - How did you meet?
  - What kinds of things do you do together?
  - What's your relationship like?
  - Are there any problems?
  - How do you resolve conflicts/differences?
- Do you think it is important for girls to have a boyfriend? (Why/why not?)
- Do you have any children? (sex and age)
  - If so, who is taking care of him/her/them?
  - Are you okay with that? (Do you have any worries about your kids?)

**Positives and Negatives:**

- What do you do for money? (Have you ever worked? Do you get an allowance?)
  - What do you find you need money for?

- Do you ever get stressed about money?
- Do you have any problems in your life right now related to money?
- Have you experienced any violence in your life? Can you tell me about it?
  - How did you deal with it at the time?
  - How have you managed to cope with that experience since then?
- Have you ever engaged in violence yourself? Can you tell me about it?
  - Do you see yourself as a violent person?
  - Do you think others see you as a violent person?
- Why are you here at MYC? Can you tell me about it?
- Have you been in trouble with the law before? What for? What was your punishment or consequence at home?
  
- If you had to list the 3 biggest troubles or worries in your life, what would they be?
  - How do you think they could be resolved?
- What would you say are the most positive things in your life?
  - Who is your main source of support right now?
- If you had to list your 3 biggest accomplishments so far, what would they be?

**Plans for the future:**

- What would you like to be when you grow up?
  - What do you think you need to do to make that happen?
- Do you feel there are any changes you need to make in your life?
  - Are there changes you are making now that you think will make a difference?
- What do you think would most help girls to keep out of trouble?

**Closing:**

Are there other things that we haven't discussed that you would like to talk about today?

Are there some things we've talked about that you think need to be clarified more?

How are you feeling about what we've talked about?

How will you spend the rest of your day?

Ask if the participant if there is a need to speak with a counsellor after the meeting. Hand her a copy of the community resource list. Express appreciation and thank the participant. Present her with \$5 as a thank you

## **Appendix G**

### **Summary Report**

In recent years, it has become apparent that significant gaps exist in our knowledge about female delinquency. As a result, young girls who come into conflict with the law are often misunderstood and misrepresented as simply being ‘like the boys.’ In response, feminist criminologists have argued for a more female-centred approach, one that is sensitive to the experiences and situations of young girls. One promising avenue that has developed in the literature is the notion of ‘pathways to crime.’ However, several problems are evident in this research, a most significant one being that the focus has mainly centred on the negative aspects of girls’ lives (such as their experiences of victimization) as these connect to their involvement in delinquency. What has been neglected, in other words, are some of the broader concerns as well as positive influences that girls might encounter in their family, peer groups, and school environments. This study, therefore, contributes to the pathways approach by focusing on both the positive and negative influences in girls’ lives as these have a bearing on their coming into conflict with the law.

The goal of this research project can best be realized by learning from girls themselves. What do girls who have been in conflict with the law single out as troublesome in their lives? How do they understand their involvement in delinquency? Just as important, what do they consider to be their most positive influences and sources of support? By learning from young girls themselves about the troubles they experience—and how they resolve them—it may be possible to understand better the pathways by which girls come into conflict with the law. Locating the issue within the

broader context of girls' lives will also reveal potential avenues for reducing those conflicts.

The research goals were achieved by interviewing twelve girls (aged 13 to 17 years) who were being held in custody at the Manitoba Youth Centre (MYC). Instead of a formal interview process, I used a qualitative timeline or 'life history grid' to allow the respondents to map out the issues and troubles most important to them. Using a timeline was the most suitable methodological tool for studying young girls because it was a visual device that assisted the girls to chronologically list their past events and help explore their pathways to crime. This process also shed light on their current lives and gave them insight into resolving past problems or planning their futures.

The three main research questions guided my study and were addressed in the analysis chapters. Through this research strategy I learned that the girls' lives were in many respects not that much different than other girls their age and they went through many of the tensions and troubles that all girls do. I began by focusing on mapping out what the girls' lives have been like. One lesson to emerge from the interviews was that their lives were not that much different than other girls their age. However, to fully understand these girls' lives it was necessary to address the notion of racialized poverty. This involved expanding the lens to include the social conditions surrounding them, which included the characteristics of their neighbourhoods and the reality of life in the inner city, in order to situate a discussion of four key components in the girls' lives: schooling, family connections, peer groups, and boyfriends.

From this in-depth look into their daily lives I was able to get a better sense of how they understood their involvement in delinquency as they shared their stories of doing crimes. For some it was a reaction to things going on around them or to them, but

others described it as a “rush” or doing crime for the “joy of it.” Concentrating on an analysis of the girls’ involvement in crime meant calling the notion of ‘pathways’ into question. Rather, a more appropriate metaphor seemed to be that the girls are trapped in a ‘tangled web’ which involves many interwoven parts to their criminal troubles, such as drugging and drinking, family violence, gangs, the sex trade, and the criminal justice system.

The final analysis section tackled the third research question. It was here that we learned the girls created a defense mechanism of “don’t talk, don’t trust, don’t feel” to protect themselves and carry on from day-to-day.

Next I explored how the girls have dealt with all that has happened in their lives—including the positive and negative coping strategies the girls adopted in order to get by. Many of the girls showed aspirations of hope and freedom; they showed resilience and had plans for the future, including wanting to help other girls in trouble. Even though many of the girls identified having supports, when it came down to actually being there and making a difference in their lives these supports were often lacking. Furthermore, given that the experience of institutionalization itself becomes an obstacle the girls must overcome, the focus needs to be fixed on developing preventative measures that encompass each of the components of the tangled web. This includes families, especially in trying to break generational cycles and mending broken families who have passed on years of destruction.

One lesson to be learned from this study is that we cannot treat all girls that come into conflict with the law with the same measures. Each girl is different and has experienced different things. Treatment, rehabilitation, and other programs should be geared towards what will best enable them to break free from the tangled web. Most

importantly, programs and services need to look at helping those families that are broken and trapped in generations of destruction.

Some authors suggest the need for communities to be more involved in making sure drop-out rates from schools are reduced, and that community resources and programs are offered in culturally appropriate ways. If education is the key to prevention then we must get involved earlier. Similar to the Canadian Red Cross program RespectED: Violence & Abuse Prevention that I volunteer for, culturally appropriate programs need to be developed for inner city youth. Through education and partnerships these programs promote healthier relationships and safer communities. They also help to break the cycles of abuse, harassment, and interpersonal violence.

Future research should also consider giving girls diaries and a specific subject to write on each day. I found that some of the best insights came from the girls sharing parts of their journals with me. This was not only beneficial to me as a researcher to gather richer data but was also therapeutic to the girls as well. Another consideration is to have a second follow-up interview after preliminary data analysis of the interviews has occurred. This would allow for clarity and further in-depth questioning about the issues they identified.

In order to help young girls in trouble with the law I set out to understand who they were, how they defined their criminal actions, and how they see themselves now and in the future. My study allowed for the girls' voices to be heard and for them to tell me what mattered in their lives. My hope is that this study will contribute to building our knowledge and understanding of girls' delinquency and efforts to support girls in trouble with the law. If nothing else, for some of the girls this was the first time that someone

actually took the time to listen and care about what has happened in their lives in an effort to make things better for them and future generations.