

TALKING BACK: SIX FIRST NATIONS WOMEN'S  
RECOVERY STORIES FROM CHILDHOOD SEXUAL ABUSE AND  
ADDICTIONS

by

ELAINE I. HERBERT

B.S.W., University of British Columbia, 1992

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE  
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF  
MASTER OF SOCIAL WORK

in

THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES  
(School of Social Work)

We accept this thesis as conforming to the required  
standards

UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

August 1994

© Elaine I. Herbert, 1994

In presenting this thesis in partial fulfillment of the requirements for an advanced degree at the University of British Columbia, I agree that the Library shall make it freely available for reference and study. I further agree that permission for extensive copying of this thesis for scholarly purposes may be granted by the head of my department or by his or her representatives. It is understood that copying or publication of this thesis for financial gain shall not be allowed without my written permission.

(Signature)

Department of Social Work

The University of British Columbia  
Vancouver, Canada

Date Sept 9/94

## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to create a discourse or "women's talk" about recovery that embodied and reflected the life experience of six First Nations women who had experienced childhood sexual abuse and addictions. An exploratory, emancipatory, feminist qualitative research design elicited rich, thick data through interactive audio-taped interview processes. The six stories were translated into four emergent themes with 12 sub-themes in the data analysis, as follows: (1) Alcohol Abuse and Addictions: (a) parental/community alcoholism; (b) understanding own alcoholism/getting treatment; (2) Sexual Abuse: (1) incident(s)/experiences of sexual abuse; (b) family/community response to the sexual abuse; (c) effects of the sexual abuse; (3) Recovery Process: (a) recovery as an individual process; (b) spirituality in recovery; (c) racism; (4) Gender Issues: (a) internal perceptions of self as woman; (b) family/community perceptions of the role of women. The women in this study "talked back" with defiance and courage as they recounted their experiences of abuse and addictions, and how they were able to recovery despite the cultural/societal oppression experienced. This First Nations women-centered discourse, which placed culture and gender as major considerations for women in recovery, provides the basis of discussion for creating meaningful intervention and for future research projects.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT	ii
TABLE OF CONTENTS	iii
LIST OF TABLES	v
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT	vi
INTRODUCTION	1
CHAPTER ONE: HISTORICAL AND CONTEMPORARY REALITIES OF FIRST NATIONS WOMEN: A FEMINIST ANALYSIS	11
Overview of First Nations women's history	11
Contemporary conditions of First Nations women	18
First Nations women's self-determination in self-government discourse	24
The notion of traditional collective practice	24
The concept of a traditional First Nations woman	29
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW	35
First Nations and addictions	35
Feminist perspectives of addictions	41
Physiological factors	44
Psychosocial factors	45
Effects of the AA 12-step model of treatment on women	49
Addictions and childhood sexual abuse	52
First Nations perspectives on addictions and violence against women and children	56
Summary	61
CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY	64
Participants	67
Interview process	72
Methodological procedures	76
Methodological tensions	79
CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS AND DISCUSSION	82

Emerging themes and their subtexts	83
Alcohol abuse and addictions	84
Parental alcoholism and community alcoholism	84
Understanding own alcoholism and getting treatment	85
Sexual Abuse	88
Incident(s) of and experiencing the sexual abuse	88
Families and communities responses to the sexual abuse	91
The effects of the sexual abuse	95
Recovery Process	97
Recovery as an individual process	98
Spirituality in recovery	100
Effects of racism	103
Gender Issues	104
Internal perceptions of self as woman	106
Family and community perceptions of the role of women	110
Summary	121
CHAPTER FIVE: IMPLICATIONS AND REFLECTIONS	124
Bibliography	132
Appendix A: Interview Guide	139
Appendix B: Interview Consent Form	140

## **LIST OF TABLES**

<b>TABLE 1:</b>	<b>The Emerging Themes and Their Subtexts</b>	<b>83</b>
-----------------	---	-----------

## **ACKNOWLEDGMENT**

This study is my acknowledgement of the distinctive historical and contemporary experiences of First Nations women in recovery. It is with honour and respect that I want to acknowledge and thank the six courageous women who told their stories so that they could provide hope for those women on the same journey. I also want to especially acknowledge and thank Dr. Kathryn McCannell for her guidance and support in doing this study. I would also like to thank Dr. Betty Carter and Dr. Celia Haig-Brown for their time and effort that enabled me to complete this study. Special thanks to my mother Rita and my daughter Tracey for their love and support as I worked toward my academic aspirations. I as well acknowledge and thank my friend and partner Frank for his patience and understanding of the sacrifices of being a student.

I want to acknowledge the spirits of the women who have walked before me and provided me with the guidance to be able to write this study. I want to thank my momma Rose and all the old grandmas and aunties that helped me believe as a child that I was special and smart so that I could accomplish what I have today.

The subject of this study qualified me for the financial support of an Alcohol and Drug Program Graduate Fellowship from the Ministry of Health and Ministry Responsible for Seniors which I want to acknowledge and express thanks for.

## **ALL MY RELATIONS**

# INTRODUCTION

## THE WOMEN'S DRUM

So long, the Woman's Drum  
has been quiet  
While women looked to Men  
for the Teachings  
Now, the realization comes  
to seek Women  
for the Sacred Teachings  
of the Creation.

Women, search out  
the Sacred Teachings  
of our Grandmothers.  
Take up the Drum  
sing the Women's Songs  
of the Healing Ones.

So long, the Women's Drum  
has been alone  
kept in the back of the minds  
silent in the Spirit.  
Now, comes the time  
To pick up the Drum  
To sing the healing songs  
of the Woman's Way.

Women, sing out  
the Healing songs  
of the Women's Teachings  
Take up the Drum  
Sing the Honour Songs  
of the Traditional Ones.

Too long, the Women's Drum  
has been silent. (Morin, 1990)



This poem encapsulates the purpose of this thesis which is to create a discourse about recovery and healing that embodies and reflects the life experiences of six First Nations women, who, "sing the healing songs of the Woman's Way". I borrow these lines from my sister's poem because they speak for me and the many other First Nations women who believe that for "too long, the Women's Drum has been silent". My interpretation of this poem and how I use it in this thesis is my recreation of the powerful message contained within these words to First Nations women. I use this poem in honour and respect for the creativity and skill of the author because she captures the essence of my own thoughts as a First Nations woman.

This thesis which is my contribution to disclosing a significant aspect of the reality of First Nations women, is as well about my own journey as a First Nations scholar. To be able to "sing the songs of the Woman's way" for myself, I have had to purge myself of the confines of academia and the unrelenting feelings of loyalty to the First Nations collective.

As a self-proclaimed First Nations feminist, I have experienced limited understanding and awareness from First Nations people, women and men, who espouse complete loyalty to the concept of collectivity in First Nations communities/organizations. I learned and experienced that the

reality of women is not to be exposed to the public as being significantly different than the reality of all First Nations people. This attitude, which I attribute to the internalization of colonial influence by First Nations people, profoundly limits the bid for self-determination of all First Nations people.

What has led First Nations women like myself and others to want to speak of our realities and present a world view reflective of our lives? I believe this movement comes from two places. This is our response to the issues raised by the North American women's feminist movement and it is a cultural knowing and being that has particular significance only to First Nations women. This awareness of the need to speak and to give "voice to the varied dimensions of our [First Nations] lives, is one way women of colour begin the process of education for critical consciousness" (hooks, 1989, p. 13).

Critical consciousness derived from what Paulo Friere (1967) names as "conscientisation" is a process whereby individuals make connections between the social relations they endorse and perpetuate through their attitudes, values and behaviour and the social positions they occupy (Dominelli, 1988). I believe critical consciousness can be the basis for liberation or self-determination. While most liberation theories speak of the need to liberate the oppressed, these ideas are generalized to the

oppressed populations without consideration for the women within these populations. There is a belief (including some feminist theories) that oppression can be generalized to a population without consideration for the differences within that population.

My reading of some white feminist writers is that they believed that their ideas of liberation within the feminist framework were applicable to First Nations women and women of colour. Likewise, liberation from racism was thought to be the end of oppression for all group members. There was no thought given to the lived experiences of First Nations women and women of colour, no need to help them speak, by either the feminist groups, or by the male leaders of their own communities, regarding issues specific to them.

This raised an awareness for First Nations women and women of colour of the need to begin to reconstruct and redefine what liberation and self-determination meant for them. Writing this thesis gives me a medium whereby I can speak to the inequities as I view them and as well gives voice to the experiences of the First Nations women interviewed.

I have borrowed a definition of feminist theory from bell hooks (1989) which I feel can provide:

a structure of analysis and thought that synthesizes that which is most visionary in feminist thinking, talk and discourse...those models

of change that emerge from our understanding of sexism and sexist oppression in everyday life, coupled with strategies of resistance that effectively eradicate domination and engage us fully in a liberatory praxis. (p. 35).

This theory is defined as not separate from action and reflection.

This thesis will provide a description and raise questions about how First Nations women experience intervention from sexual abuse and alcohol/drug abuse. The women's experiences will provide a context in which the role of women within the renaissance of the First Nations cultural movements can be examined as well.

The historical cultural role of First Nations women has changed throughout the colonization process. During these changes, First Nations people have relied on the "strength" of First Nations women to maintain the life of our communities in times of drastic change and tragedy. While this "strength" is often spoken of by all First Nations people as significant to our communities, it has also relegated women to be the primary community caregivers much to the detriment of their own health and well-being.

This paper is about and by First Nations women. It is about looking at and exploring interpersonal violence and addiction experiences of First Nations women and listening to their perceptions of what they believe has occurred and will happen in the future. Time and space has been allocated to listen attentively to only First Nations women to help create a place that

validates their spiritual, emotional, physical and mental health and well-being within the recovery movement of all First Nations.

It is my own growth and understanding within the recovery movement that has led me to choose this thesis topic. While I am not a recovering alcoholic or drug addict, I am like my gender counterparts recovering from being socialized into oppressive traditional gender-role behaviour and as well recovering from the historical colonial racism practices against my ancestors. It is from the development of my own awareness and educational process that I discovered how much of my existence was regulated by the expectations of others and society.

Forays into feminist readings and later on experiences in Women Studies courses opened the door for me to examine my own life and the lives of other First Nations women. The practical application of these ideas culminated for me in my work with First Nations women seeking treatment in an outpatient addiction agency where I was a practicum student. I worked with 30 women over the time I was there doing one to one counselling and group work. All of these women had addiction problems as well as having been sexually abused as children.

My experience in working with these women solidified my beliefs about why women need to have treatment interventions that meet their

specific needs as women. It was also clear to me much work has to be done to create awareness of this need that First Nations women have and that more advocacy and research must be done to insure that these needs are being met. First Nations women suffer from the double jeopardy of racism and sexism. The recovery movement and the movement toward self-determination for all First Nations must acknowledge this situation and work with women to eliminate it.

There is much resistance among First Nations to acknowledge the unique circumstances of women. This resistance comes from men and women who want to only acknowledge the effects of colonial racism and ignore the sexism which they believe will further separate the genders. Women's experiences of oppression emphasized by the mainstream feminist movement are depoliticized in First Nations communities by the notion of collectivism. Mary Ellen Turpel (1991) a First Nations lawyer who has critiqued the "Report of the Royal Commissions on the Status of Women in Canada" debates the applicability of the findings of the commission report on First Nations women. She says that "equality is not a central organizing political issue" in First Nations communities and that the Elders view it as "individualistic and alienating" from others in the community.

The concept of equality put forth by the feminist movement is only one aspect of feminism. There are other aspects which I feel directly apply to all women regardless of race. A "woman centered worldview" is one aspect of feminism that I feel is applicable to all women. First Nations women can speak of the experience of racism as the men do, however, women also have the added experience of sexism. That is what makes the worldview of women unique and different thereby creating experiences that they only can have as women.

I am committed to feminism because I realize that so much of our capacity to struggle against oppression, domination and especially racism is diminished by internal oppression and domination caused by collective support among [First Nations] of sexism and sexist oppression. We can as First Nations women use theories of feminism, combined with what Audre Lorde (1984) describes as the unique possession of every woman:

that for each of us as women, there is a deep place within, where hidden and growing our true spirit...within these deep places, each one hold an incredible reserve of creativity and power...(p. 37).

..woman's power within each of us to rebuild and reconstruct our socio-political and spiritual understanding and voice.

Many women of colour and First Nations women have avoided and dismissed the feminist movement because they do not wish to be perceived

as supporting a racist movement; feminism is often equated with white women's rights efforts (Allen, 1986; hooks, 1984; Shanley, 1982; Turpel, 1991).

The situation is changing, however, with the redefining and recreating of feminist theory to work against sexism as well as racism in our communities. I personally believe as bell hooks (1989) does that:

feminist theory should necessarily be directed to masses of women and men in our society, educating us collectively for critical consciousness so that we can explore and understand better the workings of sexism [and racism] and sexist oppression, the political basis of feminist critique and be better able to work out strategies for resistance [together]. (p. 35).

The dimensions that First Nations women bring to this form of liberating feminist theory is the historical, spiritual, and political understanding of their roles before European contact. In my experience, First Nations women have had a difficult time reclaiming and establishing their roles within their societies because of the assimilation of European ideology within these societies.

The biggest challenge to creating a First Nations women's worldview is the necessity for both women and men to deconstruct the colonial history, understand how much First Nations have assimilated patriarchy into our lives, and to reconstruct First Nations cultural beliefs to include liberation for both genders. In order to create a framework of understanding regarding



where First Nations women are in terms of their people's history and contemporary realities, a brief overview of both situations is presented in Chapter One. Chapter Two is a literature review of the addictions, interpersonal violence, and links between sexual abuse and addictions in the context of First Nations and feminist perspectives. Chapter Three describes the methodology used in the present study, Chapter Four is the analysis of the results, and Five discusses the implications of the study for social work theory and practice.

# CHAPTER ONE

## HISTORICAL AND CONTEMPORARY REALITIES OF FIRST NATIONS WOMEN: A FEMINIST ANALYSIS

### An Overview of First Nations Women's History

There is evidence to suggest that most North American tribal societies were not patriarchal in nature prior to contact. However, due to the absence of concrete evidence, I agree with LaDue (1991) that accurate generalizations are not possible regarding the status of women, given the cultural diversity of the Native groups. In most tribal situations, however, First Nations women were believed to have enjoyed comparative honour, equality and even political power in a way European women could not at the same time in history (Allen, 1986; LaDue, 1991; LaRoque, 1993). This traditional perception of women was diminished and almost eradicated by the racist subjugation of all First Nations people and the sexist practice of patriarchy.

The hegemonic order (patriarchy) that guided the colonial practices during this time in Canadian history was instituted and practised through the

market, the state and the church. The fur trade utilized the First Nations women for cheap labour and sexual partners (Bougeault, 1991). The church introduced the European family structure, and the state created the Indian Act that legally discriminated against women based on their gender and still does today.

The fur trade in North America was the first to impact the political, social and economic structures of tribal societies. The fur trade driven by capitalism changed the relations between First Nations men and women. The women were exploited as sexual commodities as a means of developing trade relationships between fur traders and tribal societies. The traditional skills and values of First Nations women were transformed into cheap labour as they served as guides, translators, provisioners, paddlers and porters. Samuel Hearne's journal notes that [First Nations] "women ..were made for labour;...they pitch our tents, make and mend our clothing, keep us warm at night.." (Bougeault, p. 103). The roles of First Nations men and women within this context became redefined. The First Nations men who were trade leaders and leading hunters accumulated women to prepare and transport their goods as the volume demanded by the European traders increased. The women's labour became a commodity to both First Nations and Non-First Nations men.

This growing patriarchal perception of First Nations women was further condoned by Christian practices. Redefining the nature of tribal women became one of the goals of the Jesuits. Essential to the conversion of First Nations was to introduce the European family structure, with male authority, female fidelity and the elimination of the right to divorce. A recount of this conversion is detailed in the journal of Paul Le Jeune, a superior of the Jesuit mission at Quebec, describing his work with the Montagnai-Naskapi in 1640.

Le Jeune's actions would help to destroy the personal autonomy of the Montagnai-Naskapi men and women that was central to the structure and ethics of their society (Leacock, 1980). Le Jeune subverted this structure by favouring male converts and placing them in positions of power and authority. Violence against disobedient women was sanctioned by the converts and Le Jeune. This model of subjugation and sexist oppression of women was further authorized by the Indian Act.

Legislation entitled "An Act for the gradual enfranchisement of Indians, the better management of Indian Affairs and to extend the provisions of Act 31st Victoria Chapter 42" passed in 1869 which would be later entrenched into the Indian Act of 1876 by the Government of Canada. This legislation conformed to the patriarchal values of the dominant society

by further diminishing women's roles and rights within the First Nations communities. This legislation which would discriminate against First Nations women based on their gender read as follows:

Provided always that any Indian woman marrying any other than an Indian shall cease to be an Indian within the meaning of this Act, nor shall the children issue of such a marriage be considered as Indians within the meaning of this Act. (Jamieson, 1975, p.29)

This blatant act of discrimination based on sex took away the rights of First Nations women to live in their communities, to identify as a First Nations person, and to benefit from the rights available to all other First Nations people. These rights included a home, an education, and medical treatment. The gravity of this situation affected women more deeply emotionally and mentally because white women who married First Nations men received all the rights that First Nations women lost. They could claim the identity of being a First Nations person and so could their children, while First Nations women who married a white man could not.

I can personally relate to this situation as it happened to me. I lost the right to identify to a place where I spent my formative years, to live on the land that belonged to my ancestors for decades, and to identify with who I was, a Shuswap. Although sometimes it was difficult to understand how this could be, that someone else could define who I was, I feel that I was fortunate to have had an identity that was already entrenched within

me from my childhood. That was something no one could take away.

My years of living in the community, being an integral part of the people living there, a feeling of safety and well-being, being totally immersed in the discourse of that community helped to build my identity of who I am today. The Shuswap language when spoken can take me back in time and envelope me into a space so that when I close my eyes I can still see the expressions on the grandmother's and auntie's faces as I danced and sang on the table to entertain them, inhale the smells of deer meat frying, Auntie Christine's smoked deer hide gloves, taste the acidity of bitter root with the sweet juices of saskatoons and the smell of the small trout that my grandmother and I used to catch in the river. There are many more sad and happy memories of how I came to be, based on my connection to the people and the land.

I can understand how soul wrenching it must have been for most First Nations women with similar experiences. I was fortunate to have lived as long as I did with my grandparents, to have spoken and learned the Shuswap language and to have connected to the land of my ancestors. While this short piece of history cannot begin to fathom the depth of the spiritual, emotional, physical and mental losses of First Nations women, it can begin to acknowledge that we did suffer as a result of the racist and

sexist ideology of the Indian Act and continue to do so in many other ways. The act was finally changed on April 15, 1985, allowing many First Nations women and their children to regain status. This change was due to the efforts of many First Nations women after decades of struggle with the government and First Nations male dominated organizations.

Contained in this same Act of 1869 were two other decisions that would affect the status of women within their communities. Voting for an elected leadership in the community was restricted to only men who fit the following criteria: "male member of each Indian Settlement of the full age of twenty-one years at such time and place and in such manner as the Superintendent General may direct" (Jamieson, 1975, p. 29). This situation of women not being allowed to vote in Band elections remained until 1951 when the Indian Act was amended.

Another part of the legislated Act of 1869 affected women's property and communal rights. It was deemed within the Act that "on the death of an Indian his goods and chattels and land rights were to be passed to his children...the wife was excluded, her maintenance being the responsibility of the children" (Jamieson, p.29). The repercussions of the Act continue to deny women property rights within their own communities.

Two cases that were recently heard before the Supreme Court of

Canada regarding women's property rights continue the discrimination against First Nations women which was started in the Act of 1869. The Paul and Derrickson (1986) Supreme Court decisions ruled that "First Nations women have no property rights at all on Indian lands because there is no federal law in the field and the provincial laws do not apply" (Nahanee, 1992 p.11).

These decisions have grave consequences for women today according to Mary Ellen Turpel (First Nations lawyer):

an aboriginal woman who resides in a home on a reserve with her spouse cannot make an application under provincial family legislation for occupation or possession of the home upon marriage breakdown or in the event of physical and emotional abuse from her spouse. There is no federal family legislation to govern these conflicts. In the Paul case, for Pauline Paul, this meant she was denied legal access to the matrimonial home of sixteen years which she herself helped to build. With the sanction of constitutional law, she was, effectively, left out in the cold. (quoted from Nahanee, 1991, p. 12).

There is no question that colonization has seriously eroded the traditional relational practices between First Nations women and men. Neither is there much question that First Nations men have internalized white male devaluations of women. Clearly, sexism has always been a political stance mediating racial domination, enabling white men, black men and [read First Nations] men to share a common sensibility about sex roles and the importance of male domination (hooks, 1990, p.59).



As First Nations we cannot escape the reality of our history and the effects that colonization has on us today. However, we chose to read and interpret this history as men or women, and to imagine new possibilities, strategies for change and transformation, the reality of our present day situations speak louder than we can about what we think is happening and why. This next section constructs a picture of the present reality of First Nations women in Canada and provides an overview of why this thesis and other work about and by First Nations women is essential for the recovery movement to succeed.

#### Contemporary Conditions of First Nations Women

There is no doubt that the historical and contemporary government and societal structures still create and maintain inequities among all First Nations people. For example, Nahanee (1992) quotes Mary Eberts [Eberts was Counsel to the Native Women's Association of Canada in their case against the government regarding monies for consultation around the Constitution that was given to male dominated First Nations National organizations] from her brief titled "Memorandum of Law to Native Women's Association of Canada, December 19, 1991", which summarizes the circumstances of First Nations in Canadian society by describing their status as being a "discrete and insular minority" (p. 35). Eberts maintains that this

is particularly true for aboriginal women and she contends that it is due to:

a situation resulting from over a hundred years of government actions and policy, and deeply ingrained racism in public and private decision-making. Yet power within these communities rests largely with Aboriginal men, who control most of the Band Councils and the larger national organizations of Aboriginal leaders. Aboriginal women may thus be described as one discrete and insular minority within another: they suffer the systemic disadvantages of gender discrimination in and by an Aboriginal society that itself must cope with the results of racism. While women as a whole are disadvantaged within Canadian society, Aboriginal women like all Aboriginal people must contend not only with that sexism but also with the adverse economic, social, and political consequences of living in a profoundly racist society.

Women make up a little over half of the First Nations population in Canada. I will use the data from the 1991 Census Canada from the category where people self identified as First Nations (that would include status First Nations who legally defined through the Indian Act and non-status are those who do not fit this definition). Of that total figure of 625,710, over half, 324,220 are women. According to Department of Indian Affairs Indian Register Population as at December 31, 1990, there were 490,220 status First Nations in Canada. Sixty percent of the status population live on-reserve. More women (43%) are likely to live off-reserve than men (37%).

First Nations women are the poorest of the poor in Canada (McBride & Bobet, 1990; Nahanee, 1992; Cairns 1991). Average yearly income for

First Nations women in 1986 was \$9,000 per annum compared with \$12,900 for Non-First Nations women, \$14,300 for First Nations men and \$23,200 for Non-First Nation men. Sixty two percent of status First Nations women aged 15 or older are not in the labour force compared to 40% of Non-First Nations women. Less than one-quarter of status First Nations women on-reserve are employed compared to one-half of all Non-First Nations women. Employment opportunities increase off-reserve where one-third of all First Nations women over the age of 15 have jobs (McBride & Bobet, 1990).

First Nations people currently live 10 years less than Non-First Nations people. High infant mortality rates constitute part of the reason, however, there are other causes (McBride & Bobet, 1990). For example, First Nations women are 4 times more likely to die from accidents or violence than Non-First Nations women. Among the Canadian population older women are more at risk of dying from accidents, however, among First Nations women, the risk starts at age 15 onwards. One-third of the violent deaths among First Nations women are suicides which is double the national average for all Canadian women. There is strong evidence of alcohol involvement in many of these accidental deaths.

Another aspect that illustrates the violence and the disadvantages

that First Nations women experience is their over-representation in prisons.

In 1989-1990, First Nations women accounted for 33% of provincial admissions compared to 17% for First Nations men (Shaw, 1994). Twenty percent of the federal female offender population were First Nations women.

Of this federal population, 90% of the women had experienced physical abuse and 61% had experienced sexual abuse. These levels of abuse were experienced at comparable levels for provincially sentenced women.

A large portion of the First Nations female status population is under 25 years. Over two-fifths of First Nations women living on-reserve have less than grade nine education (one definition of functional illiteracy) while only one-fifth have a high school diploma. Many of these young women will have/had children and 87% of them will be single parents. These statistics present very different health and socio-economic conditions for First Nations women compared to First Nations men and to Non-First Nations women.

First Nations women experience more difficult personal, family, and community hardships than any other group of women in Canada. First Nations women identified the following as threats to their mental health reported in the discussion paper entitled, The Mental Health Problems and Needs of Canadian Aboriginal Women (1991): family and spousal problems, alcohol and drug abuse, violence (spousal assault, rape and child

sexual abuse), single parenthood, loss of traditional and spiritual values, the stress of changing roles and acculturation, low self-esteem, inadequate housing, poverty, safety, residential school syndrome, grief, depression, suicide, and fetal alcohol syndrome. Given this situation of First Nations women in Canada, what is their role in the recovery process for all First Nations?

One of the solutions to creating healthy First Nations communities put forward by the First Nations leadership is the move toward self-government. While the theory of First Nations people being in control of their own lives instead of being wards of the Federal government makes sense, the practical application is problematic especially for women.

The application of the Charter of Rights on self-governments to guarantee the rights of women became a contentious issue during the discussions and subsequent referendum around the Charlottetown Accord because the Assembly of First Nations refused to include the guarantee in the negotiations for self-governments (Nahanee, 1992). The conflict surrounding the Charter and the Federal Court of Appeal's unanimous ruling that declared it was a violation of freedom of expression to consult mainly men on Aboriginal policies affecting all Aboriginal peoples delineated a perspective on the rights of women within their own nations. When Federal

Court of Appeal on August 20, 1992 ruled in favour of the Native Women's Association of Canada, it stated that:

by funding the participation of the Assembly of First Nations, Metis National Council, Native Council of Canada, Inuit Tapirisat of Canada in the current constitutional review process and excluding the equal participation of NWAC, the Canadian government has accorded the advocates of male dominated Aboriginal self-governments a preferred position in the exercise of an expressive activity...It has thereby taken action which has had the effect of restricting the freedom of expression of Aboriginal women in a manner offensive to ss. 2 (b) and 28 of the Charter.( p. 22).

This court case presented a concrete example of the on-going struggle that women have with the domination of a male-centred ideology that refuses to acknowledge the oppression of women in their own communities.

Suppression of women's rights within First Nations communities is not a new phenomena. It has existed since 1869 with the legislated discrimination against women based on their sex which was expanded on in the previous section on historical perspectives. The most recent examples of the continued suppression of women's rights, this time by First Nations women and men, is taking place within the context of self-government. The discourse on self-government has created a language that purports to reflect the values and beliefs of First Nations and to discard what is not consonant with these values.

First Nations Women's Self-Determination  
in Self-Government Discourse

In this section, I want to focus on two concepts which I feel suppress the rights of First Nations women and force them to abdicate to the male dominated discourse on self-government. The concepts are the two words "traditional" and "collective" which are currently used to define what are considered to be acceptable identities within the parameters of self-government discourse. These concepts are being used as opposing thoughts in a dichotomous framework: traditional versus contemporary; collective versus individual. In the self-government discourse, traditional/collective are First Nations identified and individual/contemporary are white-identified (assimilationist). These categories do not reflect diversity or recognition of the "differences" that First Nations are striving for in Canadian society. I believe these concepts must be critically analyzed.

The Notion of Traditional Collective Practice

This situation unfolded as a result of the efforts of the Native Women's Association of Canada to demand "explicit, legal, sexual equality guarantees for Aboriginal women"(Krosenbrink-Gelissen, 1993 p. 360.) by the application of the Charter of Rights within self-governments as part of the constitutional discussions. The Assembly of First Nations, the national

organization that represents the status First Nations of Canada, holds the opposing position that "sexual equality rights for Aboriginal women is not a constitutional issue....[but] will be dealt with by individual bands once self-government is operationalized" (Krosenbrink-Gelissen, p.359). Sexual equality has been equated with individual rights (Nahanee, 1992; Turpel, 1991) and therefore, deemed to be the opposite of the collective aspirations of the First Nations male leadership. The concept of collectivity within the First Nations self-government movement is supported by legal theoreticians. For example, Mary Ellen Turpel (1991) in her article "Patriarchy and Paternalism: The Legacy of the Canadian State for First Nations Women" writes that:

equality is simply not the central organizing principle in our communities. It is frequently seen by our Elders as a suspiciously self notion, as individualistic, and alienating from others in the community. It is incongruous to apply this notion to our communities. We are committed to what would be termed a "communitarian" notion of responsibilities to our peoples, as learned through traditional teachings and our life experiences. I do not see this communitarian notion as translating into equality as it is conventionally understood. (p. 180).

Two points in this excerpt that I would question within this presented concept of communitarianism are traditional teaching and life experiences. What kind of traditional teachings are being referred to and what do they teach you about being part of and contributing to a communitarian lifestyle?



I will expand upon the concept of traditional and how it has been applied to women's roles in the next part of this discussion. Speaking of life experiences, I wonder how the experiences of being discriminated against for the past 125 years based on their sex has contributed to well-being of women within a communitarian lifestyle.

Black activist Rosemary Brown (Vancouver Sun, March 2, 1993) in her article "The Culture of Cruelty" addresses the question "to what extent people should be allowed to interfere with the cultural practices of each other?". She articulates what I believe to be the contradictions inherent in the concept of collective rights being proposed by the First Nations leadership and Turpel in the following statement:

I no longer believe that cultural practices are sacrosanct and untouchable, especially given my observation that when cruelty and abuse are directed at men, they are defined as human rights violations rather than cultural practices.

I believe that the First Nations male leadership contends, that the right to self-determination through a collective conceptual framework of self-government is a human right of First Nations people (in this situation, mainly men). Further to that, they appear to believe the notion of collectivity being presented as a cultural practice [human right of men] is being violated by the application of the Charter of Rights that would guarantee sexual equality for women.

It is clear that the male leadership of the First Nations organizations do not consider women's rights as a human rights issue. The male dominated discourse on self-government suppresses and denies how much we as First Nations have integrated patriarchy in ourselves, our families, communities and nationalist movements. This situation ignores the reality of gender politics and sustains sexist oppression. Sexist oppression has regulated the lives of First Nations women in two ways, by not recognizing women's rights within collective rights and by violence. Women's rights are defined within a sexist context of being individual rights and therefore seen as not fitting into the traditional collective rights ideology.

Male dominated First Nations national movements have consistently opposed legally ending the sexual inequality experienced by women under the Indian Act. These organizations actively intervened not to have the Indian Act challenged and changed on the issue of sex discrimination (Nahanee, 1992; Krosenbrink-Gelissen, 1993; Jamieson, 1975). While they said that they sympathized with the women, the collective good of the people was more important because they feared the change to this part of the Indian Act would create the dismantling of the Act without consultation by the First Nations.

This same line is being used in the argument against the applicability

of the Charter of Rights on self-governments. While the Assembly of First Nations and the Native Council of Canada, two male dominated national organizations, agree that sex discrimination must end, they also took the position that these issues would be dealt with after self-government was entrenched in the constitution (Nahanee, 1992). "Trust Us" was the only guarantee given that women's rights would be addressed. First Nations women's rights are again being suppressed, as precedent is given to the "human rights" of First Nations male dominated organizations to discriminate according to sex "in the name of culture".

Critical inquiry into how First Nations name/define collective rights is required to bring the concept of collective rights into the context of the 20th century reality of First Nations people. Romanticized notions of collectivity defined as:

group and communal relationship rights derive from basic principles of mutual respect and respectful behaviour within and between kinship and tribal groups. Thus, an individual's right to autonomy is not a right against organized society, as it is in western thought, but a right one has because of one's membership in the family, kinship and associational webs of the society (Clinton, 1990, p.742).

are being embraced. Meanwhile, the reality in our communities of issues like violence against women and children remain invisible during this monologue of collective being. While it is true that we develop through our relations with the people around us, it is also true that structures like family

and community can be repressive and alienating.

Male dominated discourse has taken the subject of collective rights into the domain of human rights infiltrated with the baggage of colonialism. Colonialism is innate to this kind of collective ideology being touted as traditional because it does not acknowledge the dominant society's values which are being currently practised in First Nations communities by certificates of possession held by individual band members [denotes private property ownership], hierarchical male dominated leadership, family breakdown and dysfunction, and violence against women and children.

#### The Concept of a Traditional First Nations Woman

A particular definition of a traditional First Nations woman has been alluded to in the male-dominated discourse on self-government. I interpret this concept as reflecting the backlash against the women who support the idea of guaranteed sexual equality through the application of the Charter of Rights. In one article of the Kathou News (1993), a provincial First Nations paper, one First Nations woman is quoted as saying about women that they should be "looking after the greater good of all people....men, women, children and elders...rather than worrying about putting the women's issues first". Turpel (1991), counsel to the Assembly of First Nations quotes a First Nations woman who believes that First Nations women have many

responsibilities and the most daunting for women is:

her responsibility for the men---how they conduct themselves, how they behave, how they treat her. She has to remind them of their responsibilities and she has to know when and how to correct them when they stray from those.

Turpel then goes on to say that while First Nations want to extricate themselves from the debilitating forces of patriarchy and paternalism, it is wholly distracting and irresponsible for us to place the blame for First Nations women's experiences at the feet of First Nations men. I believe that these definitions echo imposed definitions of the identity of a traditional First Nations woman.

These definitions are framed in the traditional [patriarchal] "biological determinism " concept of women's caring roles. bell hooks (1991) notes in her analysis that assumptions are often made that Black women are inherently destined to selflessly service others. I believe similar assumptions are made in First Nations communities about women. Baines (1991) writes that the notion that caring comes naturally to women, fails to consider the significance of the socially patterned roles. What also must be considered are the processes of socialization where sex is translated into "gender", as women and men learn to incorporate into behaviour and attitudes, assumptions related to masculine and feminine roles.

This traditional (patriarchal) concept of female role was introduced

into First Nations communities by the encroachment of the Church and the State. It has permeated tribal societies to the extent that there is a "notion at large that it is cultural for First Nations women to tolerate violence at all costs in the name of family or tradition" (LaRoque, 1993, p.25). Christian teachings steeped in patriarchy admonish women never to leave the sanctity of marriage even if the women and children are being battered and or sexually abused.

The naming and defining of what traditional means to First Nations women requires a process of conscientization that enables women to reflect on their present reality as subjects so that they may perceive the causes of reality in order to change them. The process of naming/defining their/our own reality in the struggle for self-affirmation and determination within our own societies is based on an internally defined identity of self. Women/I have to define self based on our spiritual, emotional, physical and mental understanding of self and other women. Part of the intent of this thesis was to engage in a research process which would facilitate women's reflections on their lives.

Friere (1985) expands this notion of naming/defining self into a separate language of struggle for women. Women, he said, have to elaborate their own female language, to celebrate the feminine

characteristics of their language, which they were socialized to despise and view as weak and indecisive. This language of women breaks the silence of oppression.

Castellano (1992) is quoted in Women in Native American Society as suggesting that women continue to spend their energies on surviving:

Native women of today are breaking their silence to lobby for improved social conditions, to protest the injustice of white man's law, to practice and even teach native arts, and even to run for public office. They are not breaking with tradition as some have suggested...Contemporary Native women have simply accepted the reality of achieving these goals in modern society which requires that they put aside their reticence and work out their destiny in public as well as in private endeavour. (Rayna Green, 1992, p.99).

Tradition is not static; what behaviour was deemed traditional 50 to 100 years ago has changed with the socio-political context in which we live today. Given the opportunity to reflect and act with a decolonized view of tradition, a more inclusive and non-oppressive definition of traditional could be created by First Nations women.

I have endeavoured thus far to expose and as well create a picture of the reality of First Nations women in Canada today. It is imperative for me as a First Nations woman personally and professionally to engage in the process of formulating a true picture of First Nations women because it

creates recognition of the need to speak to what they/I consider issues specific to them/me. We have to find ways in which to expose how patriarchal phallogentric masculinity is a destructive force in First Nations communities and expose the ways it undermines solidarity between men and women.

As a First Nations woman scholar I can begin to reclaim what I perceive to be my reality, my spiritual and socio-political understanding, my voice as I write this paper. While this paper is about six other First Nations women's journeys of healing and recovery, it is as well my journey into understanding and giving recognition to my own and other First Nations women's voices. I have a deep rooted loyalty to the Shuswap Nation that I belong to and to the ending of colonialism. Commitment to my own self-determination, however, helps me to separate the oppression being perpetuated against me and other First Nations women in the name of culture from this loyalty. This paper which provides a medium whereby First Nations women speak, is my contribution to resisting sexist oppression in my own society and Canadian society.

The next chapter is a literature review of the existing research on addictions and interpersonal violence. The information on addictions will be focused on women and addictions, using primarily feminist literature. The



interpersonal violence literature reviewed will summarize the effects of childhood sexual abuse on adult women; discuss the links between sexual abuse and addictions; show the extent of violence against women and children in First Nations communities; and examine the state of mental health of First Nations women. Literature on First Nations is limited, particularly information specific to First Nations women. The literature review will primarily examine the connections between childhood sexual abuse and addictions in women. This however, cannot be done in isolation particularly for First Nations as one does not examine issues without consideration of the larger picture or world we live in. This means the long term effects of socialization of women and the on-going processes of sexist and racist oppression and domination that First Nations women face everyday must be considered as background for the issues discussed in Chapter Two.

## CHAPTER TWO

### LITERATURE REVIEW: ADDICTIONS, VIOLENCE AND FIRST NATIONS WOMEN

Empirical and theoretical studies on the recovery process of First Nations female survivors of childhood sexual abuse with substance abuse problems do not exist. This review will therefore rely on related literature regarding substance abuse, family violence, and links between substance abuse and sexual abuse. Much of the existing literature is about the Non-First Nations population, supported with some key studies and articles about the First Nations population. The focus of the literature will be on the experiences of women examined from a feminist perspective.

#### First Nations and Alcoholism/Addictions

There are mixed messages about the extent of alcoholism among First Nations people. While many First Nations people do not want the "drunken Indian" stereotype as a measurement of degree of the problem of alcoholism among First Nations, First Nations people will be among the first to admit that alcoholism is a problem in their communities (Anderson, 1993; LaFromboise et al, 1992; Hodgson, 1990; LaDue, 1991). To date

there has been no empirical data available to ascertain the extent of the alcoholism among First Nations people in Canada. The Canadian Profile on Alcohol, Tobacco and Other Drugs (1994) could only conclude that it was difficult to develop a national picture about alcohol and drug use among aboriginal people.

Reasons given were First Nations disapproval of being the target of persistent research projects, limitations of the information regarding First Nations living off reserve and the measurements used by traditional research methods. The Jellinek Formula used to estimate the number of alcoholics in a population (based on the number of deaths due to liver cirrhosis) is not relevant to First Nations communities because First Nations often do not live long enough to die from liver cirrhosis. An alternate method of using violent deaths as the prime indicator of substance abuse among First Nations people was suggested.

Anderson (1993) in her paper entitled "Aboriginal Counselling and Healing Processes" writes that alcoholism among the Aboriginal population is four times the national average. Most of the data for alcohol rates is compiled from police arrests, suicide rates and medical records which would fit into the use of violent death as a prime indicator of substance abuse among First Nations.

Anderson (1993) summarized the following statistics of the extent of alcoholism in First Nations communities. A study completed by Hummele and Wilson (1988) concluded that alcohol abuse is a common problem among 93% of Native communities in B.C. This was supported by a report that was compiled by the Native Courtworkers in 1989-90 which concluded that 65% of First Nations living off reserve and 85% First Nations living on reserve had problems with alcohol. I believe that it is quite safe to ascertain at this point that alcoholism is a problem among the First Nations population in Canada, although this information has not been compiled as thoroughly and comprehensively as it could be.

Alcoholism among First Nations women is not as high as within the male population; however, it remains one of the main issues to be viewed as a serious social and mental health problem identified by First Nations women (LaFromboise et al, 1992; LaDue, 1991; Cairns, 1992). Statistics on the exact number of First Nations women who have a substance abuse problem is not available in Canada. Studies from the United States report an estimation that 60% of First Nations women have an alcohol problem (Van Den Bergh, 1991), and that "one out of every four Native American female deaths have been attributed to cirrhosis of the liver" (p.9). This rate is 37 times greater than that for White women. Forth-Finegan (1991)

another American source supports the high incidence of cirrhosis and other alcohol related deaths among the Native American female population. She also concludes that this population of women experience higher rates of fetal alcohol syndrome.

There are related factors that point to the high degree of risk that First Nations women face regarding alcohol abuse. The social conditions of First Nations women outlined in the previous chapter--"being the poorest of the poor" in Canadian society indicates a very vulnerable population. Bobet and McBride (1990) conclude from their study entitled "Health of Indian Women" that

as a group, [First Nations women] they tend to be younger and their mortality patterns are quite different from those of both Indian men and Canadian women. A large portion of Indian women are in childbearing years and have high fertility rates. High accident and suicide rates at all ages point to strong evidence of alcohol involvement. Programs to address alcohol and drug abuse should continue to be a large component of services delivered in communities. Distinct differences in the health and socio-economic conditions of Indian women as compared to men point to the importance of considering women's needs separately in order to more effectively target public health programs to those most at risk. (p. 19, emphasis mine).

This small study and a few other articles specifically addressing First Nations women's issues alleviate somewhat my frustration at the many research projects on First Nations populations that continue to ignore the

experiences of women. The situation is exacerbated by the generalizations thrust upon women without recognizing them as a separate entity. The political correctness of Non-First Nations researchers and the denial of gender differences by First Nations researchers direct the current information and limit authentic research. What happens then, to the population most at risk? They remain vulnerable and at risk even in the intervention stage of their recovery from alcohol. There is only one First Nations Treatment Centre that specifically works with women's issues that I am familiar with. The Hey'way'noqu' Healing Circle for Addictions Society an outpatient Treatment Centre in Vancouver, B.C., employs female counsellors to work with women who have been sexually abused. As well they do group work on violence against women. Of the nine Centres listed in the "Guide to First Nations Healing Lodges and Treatment Centres in British Columbia", none listed specific services for women. Two Centres listed daycare service. Three of the Centres list family counselling which can be potentially problematic for women if the issues of power differentials and socialization of roles are not addressed. Many of the Centres list First Nations traditional healing methods of recovery. While those are good ways of working with people and I support this alternative method of intervention, I am also concerned that safeguards need to be in place to avoid the abuse

and oppression of women in this relatively new application and re-creation of traditional healing.

Anderson (1993) recommends in her major paper for her M.S.W., that "the role of the traditional elder in healing practices be used extensively and constantly". This is reflective of the cultural belief among most First Nations that Elders hold the status of respect because they can better provide guidance and support based on their life experiences and knowledge. Hodgson (1990) in her paper "Shattering the Silence", writes that;

unfortunately, this respect has been confused with condoning abuse by older people. Consequently, when an older person is the perpetrator of physical, emotional or sexual abuse, our communities are more reluctant to disclose that violence. This is not because violence is cultural but because respecting Elders is. (p.36).

This situation is also mentioned by Nahanee (1992) when she notes that "the role of male elders as perpetrators of violence, and arbitrators needs serious examination in situations where...women have been subjected to sexual, physical, emotional and psychological abuse in the form of teaching (p 39). LaRoque (1993) contributes to this line of thinking when she says that "care must be taken that violence of women and children never be advanced in the name of "culture" (p.25). It is this point that I want to make in regard to the use of "traditional healing". It is not to discredit or

take away from the idea that Elders do have a valuable contribution to make to the recovery from alcoholism. The point is that in our zealousness to provide the best possible ways in the recovery from alcoholism we may forget the vulnerability of the people we are helping and not be vigilant enough in ensuring that they have a safe and healthy environment in which to begin their process of recovery.

Women are particularly susceptible to this type of abuse. The absence of the recognition, and lack of acknowledgment of women's specific experiences and needs within the First Nations recovery movement perpetuates the vulnerability of women. The next part of this literature review will look at how feminist literature has critiqued the conventional definitions and models of treatment of alcoholism, and as well examine how feminists have redefined and re-created these concepts to be more applicable to women's experiences.

### Feminist Perspectives of Addictions

Recent efforts by feminist writers have produced literature on women and alcohol abuse/addictions that has changed the way in which alcoholism among women is understood. Feminist theory has not only critiqued the social norms of western society identified as patriarchy, defined as:

the manifestation and institutionalization of male dominance over women and children in the family and the extension of male



dominance over women in society in general. (Kasl, p. 55).

It has also initiated another worldview through the eyes and hearts of women. Feminists have done this in three ways; first, in redefining addictions, second, in considering physiological and psychosocial factors in the assessment and treatment of women from alcoholism/addictions and third, in critiquing the AA 12 step model.

According to Van Den Bergh (1991) addiction:

emanates from an internalized sense of powerlessness that is manifested by an obsession to engage in a behaviour that is ultimately destructive, but temporarily anaesthetizes uncomfortable feelings and fills a sense of internal void. One's propensity to develop an addiction can be directly related to experiences of invalidation, oppression and abuse that can create feelings of shame, inferiority and unworthiness (p. 8).

Feminist perspectives on addictions go on to examine societal inequalities that can engender the sense of emptiness and despair, which is present at the genesis of any addictive behaviour.

This structural analysis approach examines the social, political and economic forces connected within the ideology of patriarchy that create "conditions conducive to the development of addictive behaviour" (Van Den Bergh 1991; Kasl, 1992; Forth-Finegan, 1991). This is particularly true for women and ethnic minorities who historically have experienced discrimination and powerlessness in a capitalistic system where they have

been occupationally segregated and economically disadvantaged. It is the same kind of thinking that relegated the issue of women's alcoholism to be overlooked and incorporated in the work on men's alcoholism until the late seventies (Forth-Finegan, 1992, p.22).

Alcoholism was considered only from a male perspective. This included male dominated research which was generalized to treatment models (Forth-Finegan, 1991; Van Den Bergh 1991) that included women. I believe that this is still true today, particularly among First Nations populations. The absence of separate women's treatment programs and child care support are evidence of this belief.

While feminist research is a growing field, I agree with Forth-Finegan in her statement that "the androcentric view of science based on the cultural norms which perpetuate male dominance and hierarchy still prevails" (p.21). One of the objects of this thesis project is to raise the issues of First Nations women who have struggled with addictions and interpersonal violence and make a contribution to the literature on the subject areas. It is my expectation that this subject will begin discussions among First Nations women of how their experiences are different in terms of the physiological and psychosocial factors that affect them because of their gender.

### Physiological Factors

Forth Finegan (1991) and Van Den Bergh (1991) both write that women are at greater risk than men for the development of drinking-related health problems because of innate physiological differences in how alcohol is metabolized. Because women have more fat and less water than men, the alcohol enters the female system at a less diluted state resulting in a higher alcohol level.

Women get drunk faster and are quicker to develop alcohol related diseases. This leads to death rates among alcoholic women which are 50 to 100 times higher than those of men. The average age of death for an alcoholic women is 51 years. Alcoholism is the third leading cause of death in women between ages of 35 to 55 years. LaDue (1991) in her article, "Coyote Returns: Survival for Native American Women" notes that Native women suffer from alcohol related illness such as cirrhosis at a rate 37 times higher than those of Non-Native women. These references are both American based information, however, I believe they are reflective of women of North America. Historically there were no Canadian/American borders that delineated the experiences of First Nations in North America. Many First Nations choose not to recognize these borders today.

Both Finegan-Forth (1991) and Van Den Bergh (1991) agree that

while alcohol dependence is not completely predictable through genetic inheritance, a greater risk does exist if both or one of the parents are alcoholic. Children of alcoholics are four times more likely to become alcoholic than the general population. These are not good odds particularly for the First Nations who experience inter-generational alcoholism.

### Psychosocial Factors

Finegan-Forth (1991) Nol (1991) and Van Den Bergh (1991) all agree that the socialization into gender roles has significant consequences for understanding alcoholism in women. The traditional socialization of women instituted by a history of domination and subjugation promotes feelings of helplessness, dependence and powerlessness. Addiction, Forth-Finegan claims:

serves to mediate the dilemmas of the female experience in many ways, blunting the conflicts between dependence and independence, internally, interactionally and at the social level, the dilemma between personal power and powerlessness....it is also clear that gender role socialization both shapes and is challenged by addictive behaviour. Women in general are more likely to be socialized to be overfunctioning caretakers of all family members, and may drink to relieve the strain of this overresponsibility. (p.33)

The code for appropriate female gender functioning consists of passivity, victimization and caretaking behaviours. One of the central institutions of society that does promote this gender appropriate behaviour is the family.

Feminist theories on the subject of family have created awareness of how the male dominant ideologies permeate this system and establish male headed hierarchal structures. The family can be a nurturing, loving environment or it can be an abusive unsafe place to be. LaRoque (1993) writes about the notion of family in First Nations communities. In her entitled "Violence in Native Communities", she says:

Questions remain as to notions of healing, notions of rehabilitation, the value of emphasizing family and community unity at the possible expense of victims, many of them children. Studies on abuse of children show that families can be the most dangerous places to be. We must take care that we do not advance notions such as the unity of families in any formulistic way because we know, unfortunately, that families are not inherently safe. (p.25).

Family is the first place where you learn how you fit into the world, where you first learn about your identity and self-worth. Whatever the experience may be, the family factor has a fundamental role in the development of alcoholism.

Forth-Finegan (1991) writes that difficult and physically abusive childhood experiences are reported to be frequent, and the incidence of sexual abuse among women alcoholics has been reported to be as high as 75% of women in treatment. These women as well are more likely to have more alcoholic relatives and are often the daughter of an alcoholic. Downing (1991) in her article "Sex Role Setups and Alcoholism" sustains

this view in her conclusions that:

if a child is raised by an alcoholic parent, the impact of that parent's disease on the child, coupled with sex role socialization, can have a very negative outcome on personality development (p. 51).

She further notes that the consequences of growing up in a dysfunctional family system promote an environment where members:

deny their problems, bury feelings, develop strong and rigid personal defense mechanisms, exhibit low self-worth, communicate indirectly and encourage the formation of rigid roles for each family member (p. 51).

This socialization has long term effects with a high probability of alcoholism.

While all of the above behaviours render all members of the family to be powerless over the alcoholism, the female child growing up in this environment is powerless over both alcoholism and the demands of her traditional female role. This sense of powerlessness is characterized by the psychosocial issues experienced by alcoholic women.

Many psychosocial issues affect alcoholic women. I will summarize some of them from the feminist literature that I am using. Depression is found to be prevalent among women who are alcoholic (Corrigan, 1991; Downing, 1991; Forth-Finegan, 1991; Van Den Bergh, 1991). The literature utilizes examples of the feminization of poverty and its accompanying sense of powerlessness as one reason for depression. Included as well is society's denigration of women; and how women's

sense of self is organized around being able to make and then maintain affiliations and relationships, while at the same time this situation can promote feelings of helplessness, powerlessness and constant compromise.

Another important psychosocial issue which directly relates to the family factor of alcoholism, is victimization. Addictions and victimization are related according to literature reviewed by Briere, 1992; Corrigan, 1991; Forth-Finegan, 1991; LaDue, 1991; Miller, 1991; Oxner, 1993; Russell and Wilsnack, 1991; and Van Den Bergh, 1991. The literature cites how childhood sexual abuse is prevalent among women in treatment for substance abuse, as well as noting that these women have also suffered from rape and battering as adults. It would seem that female children victimized during childhood are more likely to be victimized as adults. Briere (1992) writes in his book Child Abuse Trauma: Theory and Treatment of the Lasting Effects, that:

Abuse-related learned powerlessness also may present as passivity in the face of danger and self-perceptions of inadequacy and inability to cope with aversive circumstances...this sense of helplessness to stop painful or intrusive events can render the survivor especially vulnerable to revictimization later in life, and lead her or him to accept or endure dysfunctional or abusive interpersonal relationships. (p. 26).

A more indepth analysis will be done under the section of the literature review addressing addictions and interpersonal violence. The next part of

this review will briefly discuss how male oriented treatment methods can be oppressive to treating women with addictions.

### Effects of the AA 12 Step Model of Treatment on Women

A critique of the Alcoholics Anonymous 12 step model of treatment for addictions is an important aspect of the continuing feminist analysis of addictions. The purpose of this critique is not to dismiss the value and the good work that the AA organization has done for many addicted people, both men and women. It is, however, a brief overview of literature that looks at how this male-centred model has been applied to women's addictions and the effects of these experiences.

Aspects of the AA 12 step model of treatment have reinforced negative experiences of power and shame for women due to the model's masculinist bias (Berenson, 1991; Downing, 1991; Forth-Finegan; 1991; Kasl, 1992; Oxner, 1993). The following characteristics reported by Berenson are a summary of how some feminists view this model of treatment:

1. **An emphasis upon the private and personal at the expense of the public and political**--While the experience of powerlessness may be liberating for some women in some respects, it does nothing to address the very real social political, and economic power inequalities that exist. Focusing on their private growth may distract many women, and men, from questioning and changing oppressive power arrangements based upon gender.



2. **A denigration and pathologizing of traits associated with femininity**---The very development of terms like codependence and "women who love too much," the labelling of behaviours and relation-ship patterns as diseases, combined with the focus upon powerlessness as a key component for healing have all served to increase stigmatization and to reinforce women's social conditioning. Women wind up blaming themselves for personal relationship problems instead of getting angry and taking assertive action to change their situation.
3. **A tendency toward self-abnegation and unquestioning acceptance of authority**--While Alcoholics Anonymous and its Twelve Step offshoots give theoretical lip-service to spirituality as non-dogmatic and non-hierarchical, in practice they wind up asking women to be subservient to male authority. The A.A. Twelve Steps refer to "God as we understand Him," and women who are working the steps are called upon to make amends for damage done to them. (p.78)

This model is a clear example of how this male centred concept co-created 60 years ago by a white middle class man named Bill Wilson was generalized to populations that had very little resemblance to his reality. Individual's interpretations of this model have started to create change. For example, Oxner (1993) writes that many AA members recommend that you translate the program in any way that fits for the individual person using the slogan "take what you need and leave the rest behind: in an attempt to be all inclusive of the membership".

Kasl (1992) captures the essence of the process of recovery in her statement that "people may give up addiction out of fear, but they heal out

of love". She cites an example of a woman who described how her experience with the twelve step model was based on fear. Fear that if she did not obey the rules of the program then she would be punished by falling into her addiction. While fear may motivate, it does not heal. Kasl (1992) writes that it is:

love that leads to a state of openness grounded in faith, a knowingness that we exist on this planet as a miracle of life. Love leads us to look within, to listen to the beating of our heart and accept all that we are. (p. 22).

The twelve step model has been re-created by women to instill love into its framework. Kasl (1992) developed Sixteen Steps for Discovery and Empowerment in her book Many Roads, One Journey: Moving Beyond the 12 Steps which she describes as:

steps for discovery and empowerment, designed to create a healthy, aware Self which, over time, will help crowd out compulsive, addictive, or dependent behaviour. We believe that through bonding with others, speaking genuinely from our hearts, forgiving ourselves and others, finding purpose, helping create social change, and accepting the imperfections of life, we will find a sense of fulfilment that we have sought to fill through our addictive and dependent behaviour. (p. 337).

Jean Kirkpatrick's "Thirteen Statements of Acceptance" in her recovery program Sobriety for Women are designed to:

build up women's fragile egos and battered self-esteem through self-discovery, and to release shame and guilt through the sharing of experiences, hopes, and mutual encouragement. She believes that women need separate

groups to affirm their autonomy from men and recognize their emerging roles. (Kasl, 1992, p. 166).

Van Den Bergh (1991) succinctly summarizes a feminist perspective that healthy recovery promotes choice. People must be free to choose a treatment model for themselves. She goes on to say that it is important to impart that there is not a perfect way to proceed "since so many addicts have succumbed to split-thinking..seeing everything in dichotomies of good or bad and right or wrong, processes must be established that enable seeing the middle ground". The next section of this review will consider literature about sexual abuse and addictions, as well as other types of interpersonal violence.

#### Addictions and Childhood Sexual Abuse:

Fifty to seventy-five percent of women treated for substance abuse (addictions) had childhood sexual abuse experiences (Forth-Finegan, 1991; Mason, 1991; Miller, Downs, Gondoli, Keil 1987; Russell and Wilsnack, 1991; Van Den Bergh, 1991; Young, 1990). Miller and colleagues found that 67% of the women in their alcoholic sample were had experienced sexual abuse as compared to 28% of the women in the non-alcoholic group. MacKinnon (1991) in her book Each Small Step: Breaking the Chains of Abuse and Addiction, writes that over 50% of women alcoholics report that they have been sexually abused as children. This information is derived

from the experiences of the Women's Post Treatment Centre in Winnipeg that was established for women seeking help in coping with the terrible memories the sobriety unleashed. This literature raises two important points about the consequences of childhood sexual abuse among women that this part of the literature review will focus on.

The first is the distinct probability that early sexual abuse predisposes women toward alcoholism. And the second point is how sexual abuse as a child predisposes a girl to "revictimization" as an adult. Russell and Wilsnack (1991) write that childhood sexual abuse is clearly not "just a girl's issue...adult women carry the scars of such experience into adulthood and often throughout their entire lives".

When the effects and defenses associated with the trauma of childhood sexual abuse are left untreated, secondary symptoms will develop that mask them according to Young (1990). She goes on to say that addictive behaviours serve such a function by:

keeping the self impaired by covering over the trauma and maintaining the lies and denial that have surrounded the abuse. At the same time, they allow the impaired self to function more or less with restrictions for a certain period of time. (The impaired self, for example, has been cut off from learning how to care for itself). A person in psychological pain, therefore, may take a drink or overeat to soothe the pain. Eventually through the progressive and pathological effects of the addictive behaviour, the impairment of the self will increase. (p. 253).

Both Russell and Young suggest that the clinical profile of an adult incest survivor resembles the post-traumatic stress disorder diagnosed in Viet Nam veterans. The untreated trauma of childhood sexual abuse develops a stress reaction that becomes chronic and integrated into the survivors's personality structure. While there may be similarities between post-traumatic stress and the effects of childhood sexual abuse, Sandra Butler (1994), notes there are vast differences between a soldier knowing he is going to war and a young girl going to bed at night believing she is safe.

Central to creating both of the above situations is negative self-concept and the lowered self-esteem which are the long term consequences of early sexual abuse (Russell and Wilsnack 1991; Van Den Bergh, 1991). Mason (1991) proposes that the damaged sense of self internalizes the shame of the abuse which becomes manifested in low self-worth, self-contempt, self-mutilation, depression, suicidal ideation, dissociative disorders, and in extreme cases, multiple personality disorders. She goes on to say that women who feel no sense of control often turn to addictions to medicate the buried pain and rage that truly belongs outside them.

The inability to resolve the feelings arising from the trauma of the sexual abuse often leads to a cycle of abuse. Miller, Down, Gondoli, and Keil (1987) write in their study entitled "The Role of Childhood Sexual

Abuse in the Development of Alcoholism in Women" that parental alcoholism may set the stage for sexual abuse of their children by contributing the environmental and psychological vulnerabilities. Miller and her colleagues also deduce that women from these alcoholic families who have had sexual abuse experiences appear to be more vulnerable subsequently to the development of alcohol problems. Thus, the stage is set for sexual abuse of their own children, a third generation.

Please note here that alcohol is not always the only contributing factor to sexual abuse. Other factors that contribute to an abusive environment are: the broad social forces that support or allow the victimization of those with lesser social power, resulting in high rates of child maltreatment; and that which cultivates socially transmitted attitudes and beliefs that deny or minimize the implications and impacts of child abuse (Briere, 1992). As well, Russell (1985) in "The Causes of Child Sexual Abuse", quotes Finklehor's conclusion that "being male is one powerful predisposing factor to having sexual feelings toward children". The revictimization of these women and their children is a result of the continued vulnerability of these women in adulthood. Russell and Wilsnack (1991), Downing (1991) and Briere, (1992) report that these same women who were sexually abused as children are more likely to be sexually assaulted

in adulthood. They will as well, be more likely engaged in physically and sexually abusive relationships. The tie between addictions and violence against women and child is more explicit in the literature that I will review on First Nations populations in the next section.

### First Nations Perspectives on Addictions and Violence Against Women and Children

Much of the literature on First Nations perspectives on violence against women and children ties into the previous information regarding the interrelatedness of addictions and childhood sexual abuse. This literature makes more explicit connections between the two issues and the socio-political factor of the effects of racism and colonization.

Most of the information on the extent of sexual abuse in First Nations communities is either informal or anecdotal. The information on where physical violence in adulthood follows childhood sexual abuse is more comprehensive. The scarcity of comprehensive First Nations literature on the subject violence against women and children and addictions is exacerbated further by the lack of literature on these subjects as they pertain to women specifically.

Many First Nations people believe that sexual abuse in First Nations communities is a very serious problem ( Hodgson, 1990; LaDue, 1991; LaRocque, 1993; Nahanee, 1992; Piasecki et al, 1989). Piasecki et al

(1989) in a study entitled "Abuse and Neglect of American Indian Children: Findings From A Survey of Federal Providers" found that 67% of 1,155 Indian children surveyed had experienced both sexual abuse and neglect, their mean age was 12.7 years. Other conclusions consisted of: a greater proportion of Indian girls than Indian boys had a history of neglect and/or abuse; Indian boys more commonly suffered from neglect, while the Indians girls were more prone to being abused; and that the abuse and neglect are strongly interrelated (as both cause and effect) to chaotic family situations and to other mental health problems such as alcoholism and depression.

The second study that examines abuse in First Nations communities is by Roland Chrisjohn (1991), entitled "Faith Misplaced: Lasting Effects of Abuse in a First Nations Community". While working with four Cariboo Tribal Council bands near Williams Lake, B.C., he found that 48% of the 187 respondents had been sexually abused. I would like to note here that 63% of the respondents were female, however, this was not acknowledged as an explicit factor in the analysis. One of the conclusions of the study was that the extent of abuse in the communities studied was not as extensive as previously thought. However, Chrisjohn believes that it is indisputably serious and has had a psychological impact on abuse survivors



in a manner not distinguishable from that seen in Non-First Nations populations. With a reported abuse rate of 48%, and given that one does not have to be a direct victim to experience the impact of sexual abuse, he concludes that the "communities surveyed are dealing with social and psychological consequences of unprecedented magnitude" (p. 174).

Chrisjohn also makes an interesting point in his observation that the term "residential school syndrome" being used by some First Nations people is an imitation of psychiatry and psychology's use of the word "syndrome". These disciplines use this word to refer to signs and symptoms that seem to regularly co-occur in specific kinds of psychological disturbances.

I agree with Chrisjohn in his observation that the use of this terminology has no place in working with First Nations. It portrays a character deficiency whereby the client is the problem (pathology) and the central factor is the experience of residential school. Applying the feminist principle of "the personal is political" to this situation would assist in the understanding for many First Nations that the sociocultural contexts (residential school experience being one) in which we live promote many of the social issues which plague our communities. Chrisjohn argues that medicalization of traumatic experience is merely reification which serves to

"blame some victims, deny the experiences of other victims, look past the enormity of what one society did to other societies, and close off avenues to a clearer understanding of what it all means" (p. 183).

Physical violence in the forms of battering, sexual assault and sexual abuse is a serious threat to the well-being of First Nations women and children. The Ontario Native Women's Association study on family violence found that 8 out of 10 First Nations women are abused. The other literature reviewed concurs with this study that the abuse is extensive and damaging (Cairns, 1991; LaRoque, 1993; Nahanee, 1992).

LaRocque (1993) in her paper to the Royal Commission entitled "Violence in Native Communities" raises issues that I feel are important to include. First of all she agrees that First Nations women, adolescents, and children are experiencing abuse, battering and/or sexual assault to a staggering degree. She believes that the sexism and misogyny which is nurtured in our society is the cause of this violence. Another very important point that is raised is the notion at large that it is "cultural" for Native women to tolerate violence at all cost in the name of "family" or "tradition". This statement supports my critique of cultural values and beliefs which oppress women.

One of the most important points LaRoque makes is about how the

use of language can run the risk of trivializing sexual violence by using descriptions and terms which couch and soften the impact. "Family violence" connotes that all individuals in the family are responsible for the violence happening within it. It minimizes the fact that it is men who have the power in the family and are often the ones doing the hurting. The word "healing" is used so often, LaRoque writes, that it risks promoting the idea that victims of sexual violence can be easily healed and can dismiss the extremely traumatic, destructive and long term effects of the abuse.

Nahanee (1992) concurs with LaRoque in the extent of the violence against women and children, plus she adds a legal dimension to the issue. Two points that Nahanee raises have implications for assessing the basis for the violence and what is done to stop it. She believes that the power First Nations men hold in the communities helps men to protect each other and collectively or collusively contributes to the violence against women and children. The second point she raises is about the cultural and racial considerations by law enforcers to mitigate sentencing of First Nations men convicted of violent sexual crimes against women and children. Nahanee writes that the lack of understanding by the judiciary of the nature of sexual assault and rape, added to the cultural defenses often results in lenient sentencing of First Nations men. This reinforces the view that violence

against First Nations women and children is acceptable in Canadian society.

### Summary

The literature review for the subject of this thesis, which is to document the recovery process of First Nations female survivors of childhood sexual abuse with substance abuse problems, had to cover a range of subject areas. To understand the extent and effects of childhood sexual abuse and substance abuse on First Nations women, an overview of the extent of alcoholism and violence in First Nations communities was provided. An overview of feminist literature on how addictions and childhood sexual abuse are interrelated was included to create an understanding of how these issues directly affect women's lives.

While there could be more concrete evidence to ascertain the extent of alcoholism and sexual abuse in First Nations communities, the available literature concluded that both alcoholism and sexual/physical abuse are extensive and damaging to First Nations women and children. A feminist perspective on the effects of alcoholism on women identified in the physiological and psychosocial factors contributed to an understanding of how addictions affect women differently from men.

The literature on the relatedness between addictions and childhood sexual abuse contributed convincing evidence toward the association of the

two issues. Two findings from this literature I believe have direct consequences for First Nations women and children. These are:

- parental alcoholism may set the stage for sexual abuse by contributing to both environmental and psychological vulnerabilities.
- women with sexual abuse experiences appear to be more vulnerable subsequently to the development of alcohol problems.

Combined with the other factors such as poverty, battering, loss of cultural identity, poor health, low levels of education, and high levels of personal and community losses, this information supports the idea of First Nations women and children being the population most at risk in Canada.

This study is my contribution as a First Nations woman scholar to compile evidence of the realities of our [First Nations] women's lives. The documentation of six First Nations women's stories of how addictions and sexual abuse affected their lives will make a valuable contribution to the literature on addictions, sexual abuse and violence. More importantly, it will give First Nations women an opportunity to articulate their experiences as a specific population with needs and resources that are specific to them.

In order to create an environment and methodology that was reciprocal, exploratory, feminist, and First Nations, I created a qualitative methodology of research that incorporated all of the above. This study is

about First Nations women, by First Nations women and for First Nations women. The research process is outlined in the following chapter.

# CHAPTER THREE

## METHODOLOGY

For persons, as autonomous beings, have a moral right to participate in decisions that claim to generate knowledge about them. Such a right protects them from being managed and manipulated. The moral principle of respect for persons is most fully honoured when power is shared not only in the application, but also in the generation of knowledge. Doing research on persons involves an important commitment: to provide conditions under which subjects can enhance their capacity for self-determination in acquiring knowledge about the human condition. (Heron, quoted from Lather, 1991, p.56).

This quotation describes the way in which I endeavoured to do this study.

As a First Nations feminist scholar, I could not align myself with the positivist stance of "value free" research that has long made First Nations the "object" of countless numbers of studies. Therefore, I embarked on a journey of exploring and re-creating emancipatory and feminist methods of research that I anticipated would embrace the participants as "subjects" into the study.

As the researcher, I had no preconceived ideas what the results of the study would be. What I hoped for was that the data would make some meaning out of the relatedness of addictions and sexual abuse, but I had

no idea what that would look like. This is the reason I chose to utilize feminist and emancipatory research methods. These methods I believed would free the participants and myself as researcher to be able to make this study meaningful for all of us.

Feminist research as described by Lather (1991) in her book Getting Smart: Feminist Research and Pedagogy With/In The Postmodern, puts the social construction of gender at the center of one's inquiry. I did this, making First Nations women the center of my study. I also attempted in my study what Lather further describes as the overt ideological goal of feminist research ...which is to correct both the invisibility and distortion of female experience in ways relevant to ending women's unequal social position. This study, I anticipated would give these women, which was my only expectation, an opportunity to provide an authentic rendering of their experiences.

I also applied aspects of what Lather describes as emancipatory research where the goal is to encourage self-reflection and deeper understanding on the part of the researched, at least as much as it is to generate empirically grounded theoretical knowledge. Lather identifies three interwoven issues that portray empowerment in the methodology: reciprocity between the researcher and researched; the stance of dialectical



theory-building versus theoretical imposition; and validity.

For the purpose of providing clarity regarding the methodology in mainstream research discourse, the methodology that I chose to utilize could be interpreted as evolving or being re-created from the concepts of qualitative research design and grounded theory.

Marshall and Rossman (1989) describe the process of designing mainstream qualitative research that entails:

immersion in the everyday life of the setting chosen for study, that values participant's perspectives on their worlds and seeks to discover those perspectives, that views inquiry as an interactive process between the researcher and the participants, and that is primarily descriptive and relies on peoples's words as the primary data. (p. 11).

In general terms this is the research design that I used, however, the feminist and emancipatory methods provided for more indepth interaction and co-creation of results.

Grounded theory method is defined by Glaser and Strauss (1967) as "theory in process", whereby theory is an ever-developing entity, and not a perfected product. I took this concept another step further and applied what Lather describes as dialectical theory-building. This means that the theory generated becomes an expression and elaboration of progressive popular feelings rather than abstract frameworks imposed by intellectuals on the messy complexity of lived experience. This requires a reciprocal

relationship between data and theory. Utilizing this concept, I applied a blend of feminist, emancipatory and First Nations theories as the a priori theoretical frameworks, never losing sight of the central importance of the data.

### Participants

The participants were contacted and selected from what I understand to be the First Nations recovery movement community. This movement is defined as a community of people who are presently engaged in active recovery from substance abuse, interpersonal abuse and other effects of colonization. This community exists in growing numbers throughout the lower mainland, and at the provincial, national and North American levels.

I interact within this community for personal and professional reasons. I am also in recovery from the effects of colonization. My family and extended family have suffered the effects of substance abuse, violence, the residential school experience, poverty and racism. I also work within this community as a practitioner and volunteer. The subject of my thesis is known in the community because my relationships within this community provide me with the opportunity to discuss the study with interested people.

It was my relationship within the community that assisted me in

selecting the participants. Michael Agar (1980) describes this selection process as an "opportunistic sample", whereby the selection was built on the quality of the relationship the researcher had with the participants; as well as my conclusions that the aptitude of the potential participants was conducive to the subject of the study. I went one step further with this opportunity and chose for this study what Agar further describes as a "judgemental sample". This means that the researcher seeks out people who are specialists in the areas you want to know more about. Based on my own experience as a practitioner who had counselled women with childhood sexual abuse experiences and substance abuse issues, I chose to select women based on the following criteria:

1. women in recovery from both substance abuse and childhood sexual abuse for at least two years. This included having been in treatment for the substance abuse and some form of counselling for the childhood sexual abuse.
2. women who are of First Nations ancestry and eighteen years of age or older.
3. women who felt they could recount their stories of recovery without being re-traumatized.

All of the participants selected concluded that they were at a place in their recovery process where they could talk about their experiences without undue stress to themselves and consented to participate in the study. The six women selected were articulate and positive about their recovery

process and felt that their stories could contribute to helping other First Nations women with similar experiences. With the exception of one woman, I had previously interacted with all the study participants in a community or social settings. The length of time I had known five of the six participants ranged from one year to seven years.

The six First Nations women represented five different tribal groups with distinct cultures and languages. These brave and resourceful women honoured this research project by openly sharing their stories and their tears. There are scarcely any words that can describe the process that we [researcher and the researched] embarked on as we explored the depths of the recovery process and all the thoughts, feelings, beliefs and hopes that came out of it.

The phrase that captures this experience best of all is "the hurt of one is the hurt of all" and that "the honour of one is the honour of all". The painful experiences recounted by these women are some things I felt and will be felt by most First Nations people who read this thesis. As well, the courage and the hope of these women's recovery stories will also bring courage and hope to others.

In order to maintain confidentiality and protect the identity of the participants, we agreed to use alias names. In keeping with the spirit of

this thesis, which in part is to honour First Nations women, I looked to First Nations women's names in mythology and history. I relied on Paula Gunn Allen's references from her book The Sacred Hoop: Recovering the Feminine in American Indian Traditions (1986) to find names of female deities and famous women from her accounts of what she identifies as gynocracies---that is

woman-centered tribal societies in which matrilocality, matrilocality, matrilinearity, maternal control of household goods, and female deities of the magnitude of the Christian God were and are present and active feature of traditional tribal life. (p. 3).

I wanted to use this way of naming the participants because I believe that the spirits of our ancestors [female and male] guide and support us in this world, as well we are the products of all the women who have walked before us. I use these names in honour of all First Nations women and in no way denigrate the honour and respect these names hold for the First Nations people whose spiritual beliefs include these female deities. My consultation with a Shuswap woman elder regarding using the names supported my belief that the significance of what these women gave in telling their stories must be honoured with an acknowledgement of the same stature. The strength and the spiritual attributes the participants demonstrated builds on the qualities represented in the strong spiritual feminine spirits of the mythological and historical entities.

The names of the participants are: Uretsete, Naotsete, Tsepina, Iyatiku, Ts'eh and Magnus. The first four names are female deities from the Laguna tribal mythology; the second name is a fictional spiritual female force drawn from the novel by Leslie Silko entitled, Ceremony (1978); the last name belonged to a hereditary female head of state of the Narragansett tribe from Rhode Island.

The following demographics will provide some background information of these women as a group. The women are all of First Nations ancestry representing five distinct cultures and languages; five of the women grew up on reserves; their ages range from 25 years to 53 years; four are single, one of these women had been married with children, and two are presently married with children; all of the women are employed; education level ranged from not completing high school to two of the women completing university degrees.

Alcoholism in the immediate and extended family situation was experienced by five women. The sixth woman experienced alcoholism in the extended family situation only. The extent of alcoholism, which was reported by all of the women who lived on reserves as serious, is summed up by one woman's observation that "you can travel ...all over the reservation and you will not meet one human being whose life has not been

effected by alcohol". Five of the women remember explicit experiences of sexual abuse as children. The sixth woman believes that she was sexually abused as a child, but has no tangible memories to date, although she believes that she has all the characteristics of being abused. Two reported experiences of overt physical abuse. All women suffered emotional and mental abuse as children because of the effects of alcoholism and residential school on their parents' ability to parent.

All of the women suffered from revictimization as adults: two were raped, three reported being battered, two women talked about always finding themselves in self-destructive relationships with men; two attempted suicide; and two women recounted experiences of abuse and exploitation from First Nations male elders. These women remain on a journey of recovery which is sometimes rocky, but most of the time it is moving forward despite the pressures of everyday living.

### Interview Process

To remain in the realm of feminist and emancipatory research methodology, I sought to engage the participants in an interview process that would allow them to speak from their authentic self. Anderson and Jack (1991) describe this process as when the focus is not on the right questions, but where the:

focus is on the process, on the dynamic unfolding of the subject's viewpoint. It is the interactive nature of the interview that allows us to ask for clarification, to notice what questions the subject formulates about her own life, to go behind conventional, expected answers to the women's personal construction of her own experience. (p.23).

My interview skills as a social work practitioner, plus my gender and cultural identity positively influenced the degrees of rapport I had with the participants. I believe that I the researcher and the researched engaged in what Devault (1990) describes as:

"woman talk" an interaction that women interviewing women bring into the process..they help each other develop ideas, and are typically better prepared than men to use the interview as a "search procedure", cooperating in the project of constructing meanings together. (p. 101).

Another aspect of the interview that supported this interactive process was the questions.

The question(s) were developed as an interview guide rather than being used as a standardized list. The interview guide was discussed with a First Nations woman colleague with a social work degree, who had worked extensively with First Nations female adult survivors of sexual abuse. She concurred with the interview guide with some added suggestions.

The interviews were conducted in the places and at the date/time chosen by the participants. Before we got into the discussion about the



study, I gave the women tobacco or sage as a recognition of the significance of what they were doing by agreeing to tell their stories to me for the purpose of this thesis. In my understanding of this First Nations protocol, if one wants something significant or assistance from someone, for example, medicinal herbs, healing ceremony or advice, then one gives the person they are asking some tobacco in exchange for the help. This use of tobacco is not at all related to the use of tobacco as a recreational drug.

We spent 30 to 40 minutes discussing the reason for the study, issues of confidentiality and the rights of the women outlined in the consent form, time required for the follow-up interviews and the possibility of further participation in the study. We also discussed the need for breaks and what we would do if painful feelings came up. We discussed the importance of the accurate interpretation of the transcript of the data and agreed that they would have an opportunity to change, clarify and delete any part of the transcribed data that they did not agree with. I then asked permission to use an audio-tape; the women all agreed to this process. (see Appendix A for consent form).

The interviews ranged from one and one-half hours to two hours per session. Three interviews took place in my home where I provided a safe

and relaxed environment that included refreshments and comfortable chairs; another woman chose to be interviewed in her home; one in her office and the other at her friend's home. I began the interviews by discussing how the process could unfold. I talked about how I was more interested in having a conversation with the women rather than asking a set of questions that they would answer. I explained how I was interested in their "stories of recovery", and that they could choose how to tell these stories. We then proceeded to have a conversation whereby the woman would talk about her recovery story starting from whatever place she was at during the interview. At times during the interview I would ask questions that specifically related to the subject, for example, if the woman did not tell where she went for treatment, I would ask her.

The women started from different places in their lives: their childhood, from when they began their sobriety, from a gender analysis of First Nations or when they first discovered they were sexually abused as a child. During the interview all of the women experienced painful memories that caused some tears to flow. During these times, I would stop the tape and we would spend time debriefing the feelings, we would then continue when they felt they were ready. At the end of the interview, I took the time to ensure that they were feeling centered before we completed the process

by using methods consistent with concluding a counselling session.

### Methodological Procedures

I want to discuss now how I attempted to utilize an empowering, emancipatory, methodological procedure in the research process. I will speak to the three issues previously mentioned under the description of methodology which are the following: reciprocity between the researcher and researched; the stance of dialectical theory-building versus theoretical imposition and validity.

Reciprocity between the researcher and the researched [which means to give and take, [a mutual negotiation of meaning and power] was implemented in the following ways: the interactive interviews, and the respondent validation of the data. The interviews were set up to accommodate the participant's choice of time and place, and the interview process itself was designed to create more dialogue between the researcher and the researched than it was to "interview" the participant.

The interpretation of the data was checked twice by the women. After the data was transcribed, a copy was sent to the women to obtain feedback and provide an opportunity for them to make changes, clarify or delete. Feedback was obtained in the following ways: two women wrote up their feedback, I spoke to one woman on the telephone for 45 minutes,

I interviewed two of the women face to face and recorded the feedback, and one woman did not have any feedback. Some of the data was changed; for example, one of the woman requested that information that she felt was personally identifying be removed. She also requested deletion of our discussion of topics which she felt were particularly controversial regarding spirituality. However, most of the changes requested by the women were additions and clarifications.

The data analysis was handled much the same way with inclusion of the women, except for one participant who had moved away and another who was unavailable. Four of the women were given the information regarding the emerging themes and they all provided feedback.

The dialectical theory-building opposed to theoretical imposition was partially enacted by allowing the themes to emerge from the data as opposed to asking specific questions based on a priori theories. However, I must acknowledge here that I was looking for specific information from the data that would support my a priori theory of gender socialization.

I chose to utilize the re-conceptualized interpretation of validity described by Lather (1991) as "objectively subjective" in the ways it checks the credibility of the data and minimizes the effects of personal bias. I discuss personal bias in two ways. I first of all acknowledge my "self-

reflexivity" as the researcher. Self-reflexivity creates reflection of my own understanding of the research process and provides room for a different kind of relationship between myself and the participants. I did this by acknowledging the ways in which my own bias could work against my valid interpretation of the data and also by reflecting on ways in which my "positionality" could work to enhance the validity of my interpretations.

There are ways in which the other side of these "biases" support my qualifications to do this study. Being a First Nations feminist with a solid background in counselling First Nations adult female survivors of sexual abuse as well as established in the recovery community in a social and professional capacity, validated my qualifications as researcher for this study. One of the women in the study remarked to me during our discussions of the data analysis that she liked how I had positioned myself inside the study. She also remarked that she would have not agreed to do this study with a Non-First Nations person.

Other forms of validity are outlined in the previous discussion of the concept of reciprocity which also provides validity by member checks. This form of validity is also considered to be face validity where "the data goes back to the subjects with tentative results and refines them in the light of the subjects" (Lather, p. 68). I did this by having the women check the

emerging themes and provide feedback.

### Methodological Tensions

Two issues that are methodological tensions for me in this research process that I want to acknowledge here are: (1) what does it mean to turn these women's lives into "data"; (2) the power and privileges of being the academic researcher.

I want to acknowledge my socio-political role and privilege as the academic scholar and the power inherent in these roles that will affect the research process and outcome. While I am a First Nations woman who is able to relate to some of the experiences of the research participants, I can never fully understand what those experiences felt like and how they shaped the lives of the women. This is what Lather (1994) terms an "inadequate reader" of the experiences of these women. This means that no matter how hard I try as researcher, I will end up interpreting the information through my own lenses of understanding.

My lenses [bias] include six years of academic scholarship, a feminist analysis, grounding in liberating theory and my clinical experiences working with adult survivors of sexual abuse, all of which shape the way in which I view the subject of the thesis. These lenses infiltrate the procedures in how I conducted the interviews, how the data was transcribed

and how the data was analyzed. These views consciously shaped the research process and the data interpretation. Even though I believe that what I do is liberating and emancipatory, I also must acknowledge that what I do in the name of liberation, may be experienced as intrusive, invasive and pressured (Lather, 1994).

I also want to acknowledge the problem I had in reducing the stories of these women into four themes and 12 subtexts, and what I tried to do to problematize this standard operational procedure of conventional research methodology. As I write up this study, I am currently taking a research course entitled "The Politics of Interpretation in Educational Research" by Dr. Patti Lather, a noted visiting scholar. We are learning how feminist, neo-marxist and poststructuralist theories challenge and reformulate empirical inquiry in the human social sciences. She advises us to use conventional methods of research for now, and add another step where we "stir it up and gesture toward problematizing the limits of what we are using", just as I am doing here in this section. Lather adds that we as graduate students often have much to lose if we do not adhere to the conventional methods of research.

In gesturing toward the problems of using the emergent themes as reflective of the women's stories, I want to discuss how I problematized this

procedure. I want to say first of all, that in no way do these themes reflect the totality and reality of all of the aspects of these women's lives. I was able to capture some parts of these recovery stories but there is a lot unsaid.

There is no one real correct "truth" in this study. My work was to bring the many "truths" of the women's stories into a framework to be able to present the commonalities and differences of their experiences. This situation is demonstrated by the way the patterns which formulated themes were not always neat or tidy.

My intention in this study was to work within and against conventional notions of social science research. Lather (1994) succinctly describes what I tried to do in this study when she says: "the goal is not so much to represent the researched better as to explore how the [I] researcher can be accountable to people's struggles for self-representation and self-determination.



## CHAPTER FOUR

### RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Sexual Abuse was the pen that wrote the script of my Life.....Magnus

Alcohol covered and hid..it gave me a Voice.....Uretsete

Wondering where I stood being Gay, wondering where God stood.....Tsepina

Spirituality is at the core of everything, is at the core of my Sobriety...Ts'eh

Fuck it, I don't care what anybody thinks...I'm going to do what I want...Naotsete

I know I am a strong Woman, I found my inner strength and I listen to Myself...Iyatiku

These quotes encapsulate some key points identified by the women in their stories of recovery that I will illuminate in this chapter. Four emergent themes were identified, as the following: alcohol abuse; sexual abuse, recovery process, and gender issues. These themes are further developed by the 12 subtexts that evolved out of the data that reflect common experiences described by all of the women in the study. These themes reflect a journey of recovery that starts from childhood and extends to adulthood. Table one summarizes the four main themes and their subtexts.

## **TABLE 1 - THE EMERGING THEMES AND THEIR SUBTEXTS**

### **ALCOHOL ABUSE AND ADDICTIONS:**

- ☐ parental alcoholism and community alcoholism
- ☐ understanding own alcoholism and getting treatment

### **SEXUAL ABUSE:**

- ☐ incident(s) of and experiencing the sexual abuse
- ☐ responses of families and communities to the sexual abuse
- ☐ the effects of the sexual abuse

### **RECOVERY PROCESS:**

- ☐ recovery as an individual process
- ☐ spirituality in recovery
- ☐ racism

### **GENDER ISSUES:**

- ☐ internal perceptions of self as woman
- ☐ family and community's perceptions of the role of women

### Alcohol Abuse and Addictions

Alcohol abuse was a major subject in the study and there was much discussion by the women about how their lives were effected by their own alcoholism and the alcoholism in their families and communities. The other important category identified by the women was their own understanding of alcoholism; and admitting their problem and getting treatment.

### Parental Alcoholism and Community Alcoholism

Parental alcoholism and community alcoholism had significant consequences for all of the women. Ts'eh writes that she believed that alcoholism was "genetic, something that is passed on by your parents...I remember when I first drank alcohol, I was 12 years old...I blacked out". The ages at which the women started drinking ranged from 12 years to 16 years. When she was ten years old, Iyatiku remembers "hating alcohol and the people her parents drank with, because I thought it was because of my mom's friends that she was drinking".

Alcoholism affected the whole reserve communities in which five of these women lived. Magnus describes this phenomena when she says that "you can go all over that reservation and you will not meet one human being whose life has not been effected by alcohol". Tsepina who grew up in a white adoptive home spoke of her biological alcoholic mother and the

rampant alcoholism in her mother's community. Her adoptive parents were alcoholics as well.

#### Understanding Own Alcoholism and Getting Treatment

The second category of understanding own alcoholism and getting treatment was experienced by the women in different ways. Coming from alcoholic families and communities clouded their own understanding of alcoholism and their ability to admit their problem and get help. One woman had a spiritual epiphany, three of the women had personal crises (bottomed out), one woman had a severe allergic reaction to alcohol, and the last woman quit after she realized how neglected her children were. This sounds like a one time process but it was not. All of the women struggled with quitting at one time or another. In her sobriety, Uretsete realized that she would quit drinking for a while every time someone died in her family.

The women understood their own alcoholic stage in the following ways: Magnus said she would get "shitfaced" because that was the way she dealt with stress. She also talked about finally deciding she was an alcoholic-- "nobody told me I was, I decided for myself that I was"; Tsepina remembers drinking because she "blamed herself for everything before the counselling..I hated myself..so I just drank..it seemed to sort of numb it all";

Uretsete talks about becoming an "instant alcoholic, because it was the only way I could speak out..I became very sexual at a young age...very needy", she goes on to say that it "is really sad when you look back on it today for the way I was". When Ts'eh reflects on her experience, she says "I was born an alcoholic" because of her family, community and cultural experiences. The alcoholism and the interpersonal violence was the way she saw life, so how could her drinking be a problem? There was no one sober, and people did not talk about sobriety.

Iyatiku was diagnosed an alcoholic at 19 years of age. She says "I drank because I didn't feel good about myself". Until she finally quit drinking in 1982, she would spend time in and out of treatment, but would always go back to drinking. Naotsete remembers drinking in high school, then losing herself in the big city going to college and then getting involved in drugs.

The women experienced sobriety and treatment in different ways. All of the women did get treatment for their alcoholism. Four of the women were treated in non-Native out-patient treatment programs and the other two women attended a First Nations residential treatment centre. Three of the women reported that the treatment process was very helpful in learning about dysfunctional family dynamics and understanding that other people

had similar issues. Naotsete remembers thinking "holy shit, you know, I thought I was the only one that lived that way". For one woman, Uretsete, the experience was not as positive, although she does admit that the treatment helped in some ways. She remembers being silenced during a family session and feeling blamed for what her alcoholism did to her family even though her husband was also an alcoholic. Two women did not consider treatment as a major step in their sobriety. Other means of achieving and maintaining sobriety were identified such as AA sponsorship and a training program for First Nations Band Workers.

Three of the women were able to talk about their sexual abuse issues at a very peripheral level in treatment, while the other three were discouraged from mentioning the abuse at all. Except for the First Nations treatment centers, the issue of race was not part of the treatment plan. All of the treatment centers were co-ed, and two women made explicit reference to being uncomfortable and not being able to speak because of the men in the room. In one situation, one woman reported feeling angry and scared when one of men in the group began to talk about how he had abused women.

Of the six women, only Iyatiku thought that the AA groups worked for her. The other women talked about feeling uncomfortable and

pressured. Tsepina articulates her feelings this way-- "it was like a cult..a feeling where they want you to join and you live your whole life this way".

### Sexual Abuse

Under this theme of Sexual Abuse, the women talked about the **incident(s) of and experiencing of the abuse and what the effects were/are**. They all believe that their adult lives were changed drastically because of the abuse and they also talked about how their **families and communities responded to the sexual abuse**. These underlined subtexts make up the different aspects of how these women identified the issues of sexual abuse. The discussions in this theme will interrelate with the other themes as they are all interconnected at some point.

#### Incident(s) Of and Experiencing Of The Sexual Abuse

All of the women except one remember being sexually abused as a child by either a male member of the immediate family and/or the extended family system. Four of the women remember more than one incident and two women remember ongoing abuse. An understanding that what had happened was sexual abuse did not come to them until they were adults, except for Magnus. Another aspect of the abuse which was common to all of the women's experiences was not being able to tell anyone which will be expanded upon in the next subtext of how the family and community

responded to the abuse.

The women's ability to talk about and reflect back on what they remember took place, helped them to contextualize the experience and understand how it could happen and why. The experience of the abuse they remember is their interpretation which was validated through their counselling sessions.

This seemed to be an important part of the recovery from the abuse, the ability to talk about and reflect on the experience. To make sense out of something that did not make sense. To place the experience in the context of their lives today to be able to say, it happened, and this is what I did to survive and this is what I am doing to thrive despite the experience of childhood sexual abuse.

I have included excerpts of the women's experiences to illustrate the circumstances of the abuse, their perceptions of what happened and how they endured and prevailed through and after the experience:

**Uretsete** was able to understand what had happened to her was sexual abuse 13 years after her sobriety when she was in her late forties. She learned about sexual abuse by working with clients who talked about their experiences. She recalls thinking that "hey, you know that was exactly what happened to me, it was sexual abuse". The abuse started at the age of five by an older foster brother who came to live with her family. The abuse continued by threats to abuse her younger sisters and being told-- "I would go to hell and back" if I told anyone. Uretsete remembers not wanting to go home from the residential school which gave her respite from the sexual abuse and physical abuse she suffered in her immediate family



situation. The abuse continued during her intervals at home. At age 12, her brother-in-laws began to abuse her as well. Uretsete recalls finding safety in the homes of the "old ones" where she spent time working for them and just being around them because--"sexual abuse was really bad on this reservation...I came to hate men...I got to be smart in protecting myself".

**Naotsete** began to explore the possibility that she was abused before she went into treatment for her addictions. She recalls talking to a therapist who was doing community work around sexual abuse. Naotsete took the information from these discussions in the treatment centre with her and began the initial work around the abuse. Naotsete was six when she was abused by a male cousin from her extended family. The abuse would not have happened she believes had her family situation been different. The number of people who lived with her and her grandmother, plus the alcoholism and partying that went on contributed to the circumstances of the abuse. She also attributes the notion of family loyalty and family secrets to her inability to tell---"I was too scared to tell anybody or shamed of myself".

**Tsepina** was nine years old when she was abused by her 12 year old foster brother while living in a white adoptive home. The abuse continued until she was 19. She remembers--I fought it..like once I got really mad and I started fighting him..but then that was for four or five years and then he said I wanted it..and then I just believed him". At 16, Tsepina was sexually assaulted by her adoptive uncle from her father's side of the family. Tsepina would have been in her early 20's when she realized what had happened to her was sexual abuse. She remembers a friend talking about her experience of childhood sexual abuse, Tsepina recalls telling her friend that the same thing had happened to her---" but it was not abuse because it was her [Tsepina] fault...the friend said, no it is the same".

**Iyatiku** remembered she had been abused when she was in her mid-thirties. The incident of the abuse happened when she was four years old. Iyatiku began to have body memories about the abuse when she was in therapy for other reasons. She very clearly remembered being abused by her mother's brother,--"the day that it happened, the weather, how my body felt...I remember my mother calling out for me". He told me not to tell. A second incident of sexual abuse at nine years old by her dad's brother was remembered by Iyatiku after the first interview for this study.

**Magnus** was 12 when she was sexually abused for the second time which was when she realized she had been sexually abused at four years old by another uncle. She recalls that he bribed her into the abuse by telling her she would not have to take a nap. The second incident she was able to prevent from happening again by getting into bed with all her sisters. Magnus remembers feeling--"so much shame..I must be worthy as a pile of shit if they can do this to me" was her reaction to the abuse. She never told anyone until she was 19.

**Ts'eh** cannot recall a specific incident of childhood sexual abuse. However, she chooses to believe that it probably happened and has worked on what she feels is a "gap" in her recovery process. Ts'eh attributes her physical ailments and "issues that are blocking my development" to the probability of childhood sexual abuse. She feels that continued therapy will eventually help her resolve this issue which to date has been a factor in her goal to recovery.

These excerpts were included to provide specific information about the incident(s) of the sexual abuse to bring attention to some common patterns of the experience. All of the offenders were from the immediate and/or extended family; four of the women had been age six and under when abused, and one under the age of ten; and none of the women as children told anyone of the abuse. These issues are expanded upon under the following subtexts.

#### How Families and Communities Responded To The Sexual Abuse

Not any of the women were able to tell anyone about the sexual abuse when it happened to them as a child. This is consistent with the experiences of most victims of sexual abuse. They offer various reasons for why they were unable to tell anyone. Given this information regarding

the inability of the women to voice their experience of sexual abuse, I want to offer reflections on this. Taking the characteristics of an alcoholic or dysfunctional family that Downing (1991) described (see Chapter Two) as "denial of problems, bury feelings, develop strong and rigid personal defense mechanisms, exhibit low self-worth, and communicate indirectly", is it any wonder that these women (children) growing up in their families could not tell anyone. Naotsete adds the element of cultural beliefs into this foray when she describes her experience of not telling. She says "its the whole family system, the extended family and the secrets that are kept, and the whole thing of family loyalty and not let the secrets...because I think you know I was too scared to tell anybody, or ashamed of myself"

Three of the women talked about their experiences of their mother's responses to suspecting the sexual abuse, and as well the experience of telling their parents as adults. Two of the women talked about their belief that their mothers/parents knew about the abuse. Iyatiku remembers when she walked into the room after the abuse had happened--"I saw my aunt--my aunt is at my mother's place--when I look back now, they knew..... they knew that this happened before, and yet they never said anything about it". Tsepina remembers singing Prince's songs very loudly in the presence of her parents because a lot of his music is about sex. The only response she

did get, was when her mother asked her when she was 14 years old if she was still a virgin. When two of the women told their mother/parents as adults about the abuse, the response was not what they had wanted.

Magnus was 19 when she first told her mother about the abuse. She describes the incident this way "you know when I told my mom about that, I told her about both of those [two incidents of abuse], she acted like I never said a word...she never looked at me..she acted like she never heard me. When Magnus's sister told their mother about her abuse, her response was "what do you want to do about it now..I can't do anything about it now". Tsepina's parents told her that "if I [you] was [were] not drinking, it wouldn't have happened with uncle [rape at 16] and the abuse by her foster brother, [their comment], brothers and sisters do that".

Further discussions on this issue raised the probability that their mothers were sexually abused as well and therefore were powerless to respond to their children's experiences of abuse. The women talk about how prevalent sexual abuse was/is in their families and communities. Magnus talked about how one of her mother's younger sisters was raped by one of her cousins--"when she told her mother, her mother beat her up..so much violence in my family..so much of it perpetuated by women...who have been victims themselves". Another aspect of the

inability to talk about sexual abuse that I would like to offer up as an issue for the reader to think about is the concept of "family loyalty". All of the women spoke about family loyalty. I want to include a piece of this discussion under the theme of sexual abuse because I believe it has consequences around the safety of children and women. I will expand on this topic further under the theme of gender.

I agree with LaRoque (1993) in her statement that there seems to be a notion at large that it is "cultural" for Native women [children] to tolerate violence at all cost in the name of "family or tradition". This was a topic that most of the women had something to say about. Uretsete talks about her inability to talk about the physical and sexual abuse she was experiencing in her family. She recalls that her process of recovery was very slow because she learned as a child that she couldn't tell the truth:

because I had to keep all the family secrets, because as I was growing up, my mom was really good at keeping us clean and well dressed you know, she never hit us in the face, if we had bruises on our arms we had long sleeves on.

Ts'eh describes her issues of family loyalty which came as a response to learning about women and cultural beliefs. She acknowledges now that she:

romanticized our culture....I never really started looking at what that meant for me, being a woman, and I didn't like it, because I felt, and I still struggle with my loyalty today with my brothers and my father

and the male or the socialization I had being a woman in that kind of family, in that setting.

This notion of loyalty has come up throughout this study. In chapter one, I discussed loyalty in the context of how women's rights have been viewed by some First Nations as being disloyal to the collective. It is also discussed in terms of "traditional" women's roles in chapter one. The women in their interviews specifically refer to being silenced and vulnerable because of what they learned was loyalty to keeping the family secrets.

#### The Effects of The Sexual Abuse

All of the women except Ts'eh believe that the alcoholism they experienced was one of the effects of the childhood sexual abuse. Ts'eh does not have clear memories of an experience of childhood sexual abuse, however, her patterns of self-destructive behaviour, physical problems and alcoholism lead her to believe that "it's there [within her herself]...that's the assumption". While all women had different ways of expressing what the sexual abuse did to them, they all contend that it had major effects on their lives.

Magnus writes that "sexual abuse was the pen that wrote the script of my life...it damaged me to the core". She goes on to say that the reason she drank was because:

of the way I had been raised and the things that happened to me

and I was never given any tools to deal with them...to heal from them....all I was taught in direct and indirect ways was to stuff it and pretend its not there, don't ever talk about it....the family secret thing.

Other important effects that the women articulated that they felt were the effects of being sexually abused as a child were their "self-destructive behaviour" [their words] and revictimization. Words like powerless, broken spirit, shame, fear, describe their experiences of the sexual abuse. These same words also depict their experiences of what they characterize as self-destructive behaviour in relationships or in Tsepina's case, where she resorted to cutting herself.

Revictimization was experienced by the women as teens and as adults when they were raped, battered, sexually exploited by a cultural teacher, experienced racism, and later a genderless treatment process. This condition relates back to the statement I made in the literature review when I quoted Briere (1992) explaining that:

abuse related learned helplessness which is the product of chronic exposure to aversive stimuli (beating, sexual abuse), can render the survivor especially vulnerable to revictimization later in life, and lead him/her to accept or endure dysfunctional or abusive interpersonal relationships.

Iyatiku supports this theory of revictimization as she recounts her experiences--"I would say that being sexually abused contributed to a lot of why I put up with so much abuse and why I drank for so long". There are

additional pieces to what these women had to say about the causes and effects of the sexual abuse which will be discussed further under the themes of gender, recovery and identity.

### Recovery Process

Recovery is finding people who support you, finding people who believe in you until you believe in yourself. Recovery is learning to listen to yourself, being kind to yourself, listening to your spirit, finding a God of your choice, or a God of your own understanding, listening to your body when you're tired and burnt out. You know, making time out to take care of yourself. Being okay with whatever issues you have... knowing that in time if you give yourself a chance and if others believe in you that you can recover. It doesn't happen overnight..for me I'll be recovering for the rest of my life..from being a victim. Learning that I was sexually abused and battered, I understand today how I coped and survived..and I always tell people that yes you are a survivor and some day you can do more than survive. (Iyatiku, 1994).

This definition of recovery by Iyatiku captures the discussions that the women had about their recovery process. Recovery was not just the treatment of the alcoholism. It was part of and parcel of what Iyatiku refers to as the identification of the issues in your life and working on those as well. For all of the women, there was also the issue of childhood sexual abuse which included issues with parents. The process of recovery was different for each woman, the hows, wheres, and whys all came about in different ways. The discussion about the recovery process will be expanded under three subtexts: **recovery as an individual process,**



**spirituality in recovery, and racism.**

### **Recovery As An Individual Process**

I want to portray a small piece of the recovery process of each individual woman in this section to illustrate the fact that because we are all individuals, we see and experience the world in different ways. While these women had the same issues of childhood sexual abuse and addictions, they also identified and worked through these issues in different ways. I do this as well to make the point that in creating and providing interventions around sexual abuse and addictions, care must be taken to include the many aspects that an individual may bring.

#### **Uretsete**

Uretsete's particular story of recovery focused a lot around what she names her "caretaking role", always taking care of other people around her. She also had an issue in communicating with women which she believes comes out of her abusive relationship with her mother. Grief was another issue that Uretsete had to work through given the many deaths in her immediate family. Being silenced because of her abuse was another issue that she identified. Uretsete began to understand her own issues in the counselling training programs she attended. She had 13 years of sobriety before she began to deal with the abuse. Working toward being balanced, Uretsete says, she will always be in recovery.

#### **Naotsete**

Naotsete considered herself "damaged goods", so a big part of her recovery was to learn how to feel good about herself. She states she "had to learn to get out of old relationship patterns and learn how to trust". Support came from family members in recovery as well. Her Recovery process was very connected to her cultural understanding of women and

their roles in traditional beliefs and practices.

### **Tsepina**

Tsepina was in counselling for the sexual abuse two years before her addiction treatment. She says for three years I wrote [journal] and I cried. Her main support through her early recovery process was her Minister. One of Tsepina's primary issues which she believes drove her back to drinking was her questioning of her sexual orientation. Now she says "I realize I am a Lesbian and that shook me in a spiritual way. I am now more willing to act on feelings...I've made some choices..but I am living...I am a survivor, Native, not educated and Gay".

### **Iyatiku**

Iyatiku realized that she had choices which was something she did not know because of her experiences with sexual abuse and addictions. For example, choosing the gender of her counsellor and deciding to be with people or not. Native Spirituality is a big part of my recovery..."I could have rejected it because of my experience of being exploited by a cultural teacher, but it made me a stronger person".

### **Ts'eh**

Te'eh is ten years in recovery. "I feel pretty healthy.. stable..still get shook up sometimes which makes me realize I have a lot of work to do yet and always will". Liberation, growth, empowerment are all part of the recovery process for Ts'eh. She goes on to say that "my Indian identity and subsequent involvement in ceremonies kept me sober...I learned to be positive about being Native through a First Nations culturally appropriate training program.... this program was a turning point in my life".

### **Magnus**

Staying healthy and telling it the way it is... is part of healing and recovery. Recovery is also supporting a stand on women's issues, "of an awareness that there is something wrong with this picture..is really quite new in terms of my recovery, but its really important to my recovery too..critically important that I feel healthy and in balance and in harmony with my position as what happens to us as women. Having boundaries around and

challenging sexism. Education was also vital in recovery to understand the trauma of childhood and why I drank. Recovery is an ongoing process".

### Spirituality In Recovery

All of the women identified spirituality as a major component of their recovery process. Five of the women identify First Nations spirituality as their belief system, while Tsepina credits her Christian Church, more specifically the minister who helped her through her recovery. Learning how to feel good about being a First Nations person was the drive behind this move to spirituality. Cultural identity was established by participation in First Nations cultural ceremonies, rituals and practices by the women. Unfortunately, there were also experiences of abuse during these cultural journeys for two women.

Cultural identity and spirituality sustain each other. Magnus and Iyatiku already had experiences of First Nations culture and spirituality, so identity was not so much the driving force behind their move toward spirituality in their recovery as much as it was a rebirth of the beliefs for them. Iyatiku talks about being "grateful to my mother and father for giving me an Indian name, because I really believe that with my Indian name, that is what has carried me through too".

Uretsete, Naotsete, and Ts'eh learned to feel good about their identity as First Nations and that propelled them into spirituality practices.

Ts'eh remembers being a "born again Indian", revitalized by the new life that it was giving her. Naotsete learned about spirituality and cultural identity in the treatment centre. Uretsete recalls having no culture...over the years she has gained knowledge and practices different rituals/ceremonies. Besides her psychologist, Uretsete believes that it was also "spirituality that got me through".

Tsepina, who lived in a white adoptive home sums up her understanding of her situation when she says: "I feel like I'm more white. I feel uncomfortable with them, you know, I don't belong there [reserve]....so many Natives have been taken away...I thought I had to be one or the other until someone said, you don't have to be one or the other. Her spiritual beliefs that had helped her through the better part of her recovery became another place of doubt and confusion. Accepting and acknowledging her Lesbianism caused her to be "shaken in spiritual ways...wondering how I stood being Gay, wondering where God stood."

Another important theme regarding culture and spirituality concerned the experiences of women being abused by cultural teachers [male] and the oppression inherent in some of the cultural practices. Four of the women talked about their experiences of abuse and exploitation which generates another side to how cultural identity and spirituality can aid or impede

recovery. Magnus articulated a very strong opinion, which captures the opinions of the other women, on the issue of First Nations women's role in culture, which I believe illustrates how the abuse and exploitation could happen. She says:

our culture makes women second class citizens..it gives men permission to do that, it [culture] approves it [oppression of women] of them. That is really true and it was hard for me to break out of that, especially in sacred ways..how women are kept apart from sacred things, and are not allowed to participate. It is used as a mechanism, **this is really a scary thing to say**, that Indian men have used to oppress Indian women, to keep women from getting as powerful as they are. To keep them from the realm of carrying medicine for the people or doing things for the people in that way..

Ts'eh speaks about her vulnerability in the first few years of her recovery, which I believe is the issue here for women seeking help from cultural teachers. She says that:

I really became cautious, and I'm still very cautious today, about what I get into with regard to our traditions and all the born-again Indian men, doctors and medicine people. Because I reflect on my own vulnerability in those first five years...and the things I did with and for men in the name of being Indian..I would say they [teachers] were very unethical....

For Iyatiku the consequences of finding out that her cultural/spiritual teacher was also her abuser helped her realize why she seemed so powerless to his requests. Once she was able to walk away from this man, another world opened up. Among the new teachers she found were two women, and a very gentle man. "They believed in me" was her description of how

they helped her.

The ability of these women to articulate what was good and what was bad about their experiences of cultural and spiritual practices is reflective of their understanding of how oppression obstructs recovery. Despite experiencing exploitation and exclusion, these women still believe that cultural and spiritual practices remain an integral part of their recovery, and are actively seeking ways to integrate their anti-oppressive beliefs into these practices.

#### Effects of Racism

I want to summarize this section of the theme culture and spirituality by raising the issue of racism which is interwoven throughout the analysis without any explicit reference to its existence. The only explicit reference to racism was by two of the women who gave examples of their experiences of racism in their stories: Ts'eh talked about her experiences as a teenager being stereotyped and harassed because she was an Indian; Naotsete believes that her shame of being Indian and fear of white people was learned from her grandmother...whose experiences of racism included not being able to ride the school bus with other children because she was an Indian. Other than that it was not distinct as an issue. My reading of the stories, however, indicates to me that racism born of colonization is

loudly announced throughout the text. Institutional racism can take some responsibility for the loss of identity and culture that all these women experienced; the loss of appropriate parental care which was subverted by the residential school experience; and for placing Tsepina in an abusive White adoptive home.

### Gender Issues

The theme of gender and the application of the concept of gender was brought into the text of the study in a roundabout way. This I believe, is reflective of the uncomfortable feelings that are raised when "gender talk" is brought up among First Nations women. I include myself in this "uncomfortableness", even though I identify myself as a feminist First Nations scholar. My experience of trying to produce "gender talk" with women is that more times than not the discussion is deflected by responses of "we don't have the same issues as those other women, or because racism is more important and we need to stick together".

I did not make overt reference to feminist analysis in the initial interviews because I did not want to alienate women who were not comfortable with feminist theory. However, I was compelled to include questions on gender talk after one of the women I interviewed said it was a critical factor in the abuse and recovery process.

Ts'eh in her written feedback to her first interview said to me and I quote "I would also like to expand on the issue of gender. I believe this is the biggest "gap" that I feel was not complete in our initial interview". I then discussed the topic with her and she felt that it was important to ask explicitly if gender was a factor in the abuse and addiction. I then went on to include the following questions and went back to the first two women I had interviewed and asked them these two questions on gender: (1) Do you think that being a female child placed you in a more vulnerable position to be abused, and (2) During your treatment process and counselling for sexual abuse, did anyone specifically address your gender in the practice they used?.

The results were contradictory in many ways. Five of the women expressed how their experiences of gender were located in their understanding of the abuse and addictions. One woman exhibited no consciousness of how gender was entwined with any of her experiences. While all of the women raised the issue of gender, it was brought up differently because of their diverse experiences. The concept of "gender talk" was tenuously raised in conjunction with feminism by two women, while the other women either did not relate their experiences from a feminist analysis at all, or openly rejected a feminist analysis. Magnus's rejection



of a feminist analysis was explained in this way:

its not a feminist thing...I don't like it when white ladies get feminist and start saying all kinds of stuff like that...in terms of how white ladies are feminist..its not like that for me.. it is a humanist thing.

"Gender talk" was explored and reported in two subtexts: **internal perceptions of self as woman** and **family and community's perceptions of the role of women.**

#### Internal Perceptions of Self

So far the women's perception of self has been constructed from an understanding of identity within a cultural framework. This section of the study will look at how the women constructed a perception of self [identity] based on their conscious and unconscious acknowledgment of how gender may have been a factor in their experiences of abuse/addictions, and as well a catalyst in the recovery process.

Gender is socially and politically constructed through the biological and sociological expectations of our families, communities, and society. Van Den Bergh writes that the conventional woman is "subservient, dependent, passive, and focused on caring for the needs of others" (p. 17). This perception of a gender defined role of woman, combined with the problematic notions of what a "traditional" First Nations woman is, raises questions of how much our experiences as First Nations women are

externally dictated by gender expectations. The women in this study give examples of how their gender predicated their experiences of abuse and recovery.

Their experiences from being a young female child to adult womanhood reflect how their family, community and societal expectations shaped their lives into the female gender. We will look at how the fact of being a First Nations female child in their particular environments placed them in vulnerable situations.

The Piasecki et al (1989) study on the abuse and neglect of native children described in chapter two reported that females are more likely to be sexually abused than males. This supports the findings of other studies. Therefore, these six women were more at risk because of their gender than their male counterparts.

Three of the women in the study, however, believed that male children were being sexually abused at the same rate as females. Although at this point in time the literature does not reflect an equal number of male children being abused as female children, it appears there is more interest in directing future research to document the extent of male child sexual abuse more accurately.

Some of the women talked about situations which I perceived as

describing their vulnerability as female children. Tsepina says as she described herself, that "people who abuse see a quiet, shy person....the men and boys know they can threaten you to keep quiet". Little did she know that she was also describing Uretsete who talks of her childhood as not having a voice--"I couldn't speak to anyone..I was always quiet..never looked anyone in the eye..kept my head down..and kept my mouth covered when I talked". Uretsete was repeatedly sexually and physically abused. Given that part of female children's experiences of abuse may be because of gender socialization, how does that shape the adult woman's roles within further gendered expectations? Silencing and shame are key enforcement arms of patriarchy (Hyde, 1986) as these women's stories reflect so clearly.

Briere (1989) writes that an "impaired self-reference", which is described as one of the consequences of childhood sexual abuse, is where individuals often suffer from difficulties in how they relate to self (p.42). Combined with struggling to formulate an identity within a cultural and gender framework and being handicapped with an impaired self-reference, the journey to adulthood would not have been smooth.

Ts'eh talks about "being proud of being an Aboriginal woman and I value being a woman, but I haven't always". She goes on to say that sex role [gender] troubled her the most as female/woman because:

it was my mother whom had the most impact as a role model pertaining to my expected role within the family, however, my experience as a young girl when I witnessed spousal abuse and their own [the omen] retaliation of drinking more that I would admit had the most serious impact on my self-concept than any other experience.

During her therapy sessions Ts'eh had identified that "being shameful of being a woman was an issue that has been the most serious of issues to overcome".

Naotsete agonized over her abortion, which she was led to believe that was not a "traditional" thing to do. She had to fight her own feelings of labelling herself a "bad girl" and keep from falling into self-destructive behaviour because she felt she was not complying with the rules of expected "good behaviour" for a First Nations woman. Naotsete accepted her decision when she learned that traditionally First Nations women had medicinal plants that terminated pregnancies.

Magnus talked about getting her self-esteem by the way she looked, the socialization that women learn regarding appearance and attractiveness.

She said " I never looked for it [self-esteem] on the inside, because on the inside, I was dead..so there I was seeking that kind of attention". The most frequent remarks that the women made regarding their socialization as women had direct ties to their mothers.

### Family and Community's Perceptions of the Role of Women

This section will look at how the stories of the women elucidated the perceptions of what the role of women was in their families, communities and societies. Many of the women made direct reference to how they perceived their mothers and their subsequent relationships with them. Their fathers were not referred to as often and if they were, it was mostly in a peripheral manner. Siblings and extended family members were included in some of their discussions around family. There was quite a lot of reference to First Nations communities and cultural beliefs about women by those four women in the study who possessed a gender analysis. The other women talked about their experiences within the personal realm without making any connections to the political realm of their situation.

Ts'eh, Naotsete, Iyatiku and Magnus connected their perceptions of the role of women to the behaviours demonstrated by their mothers. Ts'eh talked about her mother being her first role model of expected behaviour in the family. She also spoke of how she thought her mother's anger and frustration was linked to her father's alcoholism and her mother's own alcoholism, and how as a mother of a large family and wife of an alcoholic husband, her needs were not being met. Both Iyatiku and Naotsete

remember their mothers being battered. Iyatiku believed what she learned from her family experiences is that men batter and women are battered; these ideas keep getting passed on. Her mother died of exposure when under the influence of alcohol. Naotsete remembers blaming her mother for getting beat up because of the "gender thing", where she had more allegiance with her father because of his role.

Uretsete, Tsepina and Magnus remember their mother's anger and how that affected their ability to relate to them. Tsepina talked somewhat about her father, while Magnus did not mention her father during the dialogue about families. Uretsete does remember being able to talk with her father and thinking how perfect he was until as an adult she looked back upon her family and realised his role in the dysfunction of their family. As children, these women bore the brunt of their mother's anger. Tsepina remembers being "scared to death of my mom".

Most of the women have come to understand and accept the role their mothers had in their childhood, although they still struggle in their relationships with their mothers. Ts'eh, Magnus and Naotsete were able to frame their experiences with their mothers within a gender analysis which helped them to understand how their mother's role was prescribed by external factors that she had little control over. Magnus talked with her

mother about relations between men and women. The following is her mother's observation; she [mother] said:

for instance..about how they [men] really want you to dress up and look nice, but if anyone looks at you twice, they get mad at you.

And on the subject of power differentials, Magnus observed that her mother "killed them [men] with kindness" which is the opposite of "in your face confrontation" which Magnus says is her style. Her mother's style, she says, is more indirect, more of a "traditional thing".

Iyatiku, and Uretsete were certainly aware of how their mother's role influenced them in their adult lives, although it was not framed in a gender analysis at a conscious level. They both talked about how the alcoholism, and interpersonal violence their mothers/parents experienced became acceptable for them as women in their adult lives. Tsepina's relationship with her adoptive mother/parents was severed the day she disclosed her abuse to them. After hearing them blame her for her own abuse, she symbolically buried them. On that day, Tsepina remembers, "I buried my cat, my family, and I got a tattoo, wanting to be tough and not need no one". She was later able to accept them for who they were. Uretsete had an issue with her mother for years. It was after her mother's death that she was able to let her feelings go during a sweat ceremony, that she finally felt she could begin to accept her mother's behaviour toward her.

While all of the women mentioned how their mother's and parent's behaviours had affected them during their childhood and adulthood, they also talked about seeing their sisters, aunts, cousins and other women in the community suffering from the effects of alcoholism and interpersonal violence which in some situations was being committed by their brothers and uncles. Ts'eh as a young girl, remembers thinking after she witnessed her sister-in-law being beaten, "that's what happens when you are with a man".

I do not want to leave this section without discussing the implications of focusing solely on the mother and have the reader perceive that these women are engaged in "mother blaming". All of the women made specific references to their mothers which I believe were necessary to explicate given that mothers are one of our first teachers of gender role development. Fathers are also part of this parental process, however, there was limited reference to them in the stories. The women talked extensively of how they chose their mothers and female family members and other women in the community as their referent for "acceptable" female gender behaviour. In doing this they also chose the known male behaviour within their families and community as the referent for "acceptable" male gender behaviour. It would be during their recovery process that they would discover alternative



ways of viewing "acceptable" behaviours for both genders.

I want to conclude this section of the analysis by relating what the women observed to be the perceptions of women's role within the community and society. Community and society will be used to refer to First Nations communities and Nations. These perceptions of women's role will be examined under the headings of culture and spirituality.

Four of the six women had a good grasp of a gender analysis of their communities and nations. The other two women had not made an explicit connection between how their communities and nations define the female gender and their own abuse and alcoholism. It is important to explore both aspects because it demonstrates that a diversity of opinions and knowledge exists among First Nations women and is reflective of the differences relegated to "traditional" or "contemporary" First Nations women in the current politics.

The women found themselves in a dichotomous situation of advocating cultural values and practices on one hand and trying to make sense out of the oppressive cultural beliefs and practices that kept women vulnerable and powerless. I want to start by telling the reader that despite the strong words that you will be hearing in this section, the four women

whose words I will be transposing are strong cultural advocates who are all working toward creating social change in their communities for all the people. As well these women are all actively engaged in spiritual rituals and ceremonies.

Magnus articulated her understanding of First Nations perceptions of the female gender in the following statement:

its about power and control of women, because they can be powerful people, and that's why men are afraid of us, and that is my conclusions and its interesting that we start off our talk with this as the topic because I would say that nine out of ten women who drink do so because they were sexually abused as children and what does that tell you about power, ..the power ratio and about women being completely helpless and defenceless and being raped and abused by men, even their own brothers, uncles, their own fathers...what does that tell you about the attitude toward women in our culture, that we are just there to be used and that they drink to stuff that pain, to numb that pain...

Ts'eh remembers how her "silent role" learned in her family which was reestablished at her work place in the Band office where she says, "I listened and agreed (I want to use the word "obey" but I hate it) with the "Men" that were more or less the controllers and decision-makers then and my belief was that was their role". Her second example that led her to the conclusions she makes about her community's perception of the woman's role was from the result of being sexually assaulted by Indian men. This was a clear indication that there "was no respect within our communities

between men and women".

Naotsete believes that her life situation cannot be blamed on her sexual abuse, there are other factors, such as "society as a whole..the oppression...the gender issues and sexual inequality all contribute to the situation". Iyatiku remembers believing that she had no choices in her life as a woman. The messages she was receiving from those around her were things like, "you'll never make it...I'll make you ugly so nobody else will want you...you're dumb". She goes on to say that after listening to those messages for a long time, "I know today that none of them are true". This part of the interview was hard for Iyatiku, whose memories still brought feelings for her of what she had been taught to believe about herself as a woman/person in the world.

So where do the two women who did not explicitly acknowledge their gender roles, fit into this discussion of conventional gender role development imposed by our families, communities and cultural/societal values? Based on their information contained within their stories, my sense is that while both women's experiences have been influenced by conventional gender role development, they have not been able to place their personal experiences into a political framework of how conventional gender role development regulates women's lives.

In my experience of working with First Nations women this is not an uncommon situation. While many of the women I have worked with have some understanding of the effects of the politics of racism perpetrated by colonialism, there is very little or no understanding of the effects of the politics of sexism which was also a major component of the colonization process. Chapter one deals extensively with the politics of sexism in First Nations communities, and this section on gender analysis provides real life experiences that support the extent of sexism being practised in First Nations communities to the detriment of women and children.

Uretsete was battered and sexually abused for the most part because she was female and vulnerable as a child. Her reply when asked if being female had anything to do with her abuse was "no, all the women in our family were strong and tough...there were as many male victims in our family as were female". All of the women agreed that male children were just as likely to be abused as female children. That speaks to the vulnerability of all children, but it does not speak to the continued vulnerability experienced by the women in this study demonstrated by their stories of revictimization. I would also like to raise the point of what "strong and tough" means to women who are survivors of victimization. I refer you [reader] back to page five in the Introduction where I write about the

"strength" of women in our communities. I would ask you, reader, to think about what this means particularly if you are a First Nations woman because I believe that this concept must be a point of reflective discussion for all women because it has a profound influence on the gender role development of First Nations women.

Tsepina was not raised on a reserve community. Her experiences with First Nations people consisted of trying to make connections with her biological family, and her offender being of half First Nations ancestry. Culture shock was how she described her visits to her community. Trying to make sense of the people's stories of reserve life and residential schools, and how the children were being neglected because of the weekend parties.

She was able to talk to her brother [offender] about the abuse. He told her that he was sorry, however, Tsepina says that "he really doesn't acknowledge that he really abused me...he thinks I wanted it". They also talked about how he had been sexually abused and how he was now in counselling [he attended only one session] as well as attending First Nations cultural events. The questions that I believe need to be thought about and discussed from Tsepina's statements are about how does an adolescent male of 16 learn to believe that a 12 year old girl wants to engage in a sexual act even though she physically fought against it?.

Where did he learn that?

The last piece of Tsepina's story that I want to make reference to regarding gender role socialization is her struggle and eventual acceptance of being Lesbian. I want to apologize to all First Nations Lesbians for not consciously choosing a Lesbian as part of the study. I perpetuated the invisibility and oppression that Lesbians live within and out of our First Nations communities. I want to thank my grandmother and grandfather spirits for insuring that their voices were heard by guiding Tsepina to the study.

Lesbians suffer greatly from the conventional gender role development and socialization. Tsepina talks about how her alcoholism was exacerbated by her struggle with her sexual orientation when:

I realized I was Lesbian...I worked it out for one and one-half years...that was the reason I lost my sobriety..it was a hard part to deal with...I was shaken in a spiritual ways of wondering how I stood being Gay, where does God stand?

It would seem to be particularly difficult for Tsepina given her spiritual beliefs. Heterosexuality is one of the mainstays that Christianity contributes to the gender role socialization of women and men, which is aptly exposed when Tsepina wondered where her God stands on her choice.

The residual effects of Christian beliefs learned in residential schools and from the proliferation of Churches in First Nations communities have

created the general homophobic climate in most First Nations communities. Given that these historical and contemporary influences of Christianity still shape our lives as women and men, what does it mean to women and men in their recovery process which includes healing from the gender role expectations of family, community and society? How do we support Tsepina in her recovery process in ways that will encourage and empower her to live the lifestyle she has accepted? Where do we stand?

I want to end this part of the analysis with a message of hope that these brave women present about our potential as First Nations to rise to the challenge of social change which would consist of eliminating gender biased cultural beliefs and instituting anti-oppressive practices of culture and spirituality. Although Magnus spoke very convincingly about her experiences of oppressive cultural practices by First Nations men, she also speaks of cultural spiritual experiences that changed her life. These experiences:

rocked my core...like a huge hand came and just somehow turned me inside so that I was facing another direction and seeing things differently...then I began the long climb up and it was a spiritual thing for me..a spiritual release and understanding and permission to acknowledge your pain of things that really hurt you...its ok to cry, you are so sad and you are keeping the sadness inside and you are making yourself sick...I was told that God loved me...so did my ancestors in the spirit world who were watching over me and wishing me well....

Magnus's positive experience represents another side of First Nations spirituality that is possible for women given the support of teachers and medicine people who equally value the roles of women and men.

Given that cultural identity and spirituality has been a major influence in their recovery process, Ts'eh sums up how the women have decided not to give up on this revitalized component of their lives when she says:

I believe in the "spirit" of our ceremonial practices. They are perceived as male dominated and oppressive toward women. This is a fact because we have a history that reminds us everyday of the results of patriarchal influence within our communities. I acknowledge my inner conflict at these times and do my best not to let these feelings interfere with my purpose of being "present" at these ceremonies. So I am committed but it is not an easy commitment when I feel anger and judgement...So its my personal challenge not to feel victimized, but accepting, that most of these human beings are "where they are at this time", just as I am and maybe with my presence there is an opportunity to speak to one person that also has these same feelings and maybe "new" growth and learning can occur (maybe even with a man). But these ceremonies support me and my sobriety and this is what I value first and foremost.

This concludes the theme of gender and the chapter on describing results and findings from the interviews.

### Summary

Writing the "results" was the hardest part of the study to complete. I felt most inadequate in trying to capture the essence of the women's stories in four themes. There is so much to say about women in recovery



and it will not all be said in this study. This study is one small attempt to raise discussion about the complexity of First Nations women in recovery.

There was a definite ebb and flow to the stories which was interwoven with threads of alcoholism, sexual abuse, recovery process and gender analysis. These threads were intersected with the additional threads of 12 subtexts/themes that extrapolated the women's stories into topics of individual perceptions, family and community perceptions, and culture and spirituality. One of the most rewarding aspects of working on this section and doing the overall study was the importance and validity the women placed on their participation in the research.

Lather (1991) writes that one of the goals of emancipatory research is to encourage self-reflection and deeper understanding on the part of the researched. This was one goal that I wanted to accomplish. I include the following comments from the participants which lead me to believe that I did accomplish parts of this goal with them:

the interview gave me an opportunity to reflect on what was happening for me now in life. (Uretsete)

was validated during the interview in being able to talk to someone who understood the man/women thing. Healthy support and validation to talk about this issue is rare. Also see that the denial about women/men issues are just not from men, but from women as well, makes it harder. (Magnus)

My hands feel all sweaty. It brings up a lot of stuff. But, you know,

there's a time and place, and it just shows me where I come from and I guess that's the most rewarding. When I can maintain and talk healthily about this experience with other women, somehow hopefully that knowledge will help the, or that what they observe will help them. (Ts'eh)

# CHAPTER FIVE

## IMPLICATIONS AND REFLECTIONS

The purpose of this thesis was to create a discourse about recovery and healing that embodied and reflected the life experiences of six First Nations women who had experienced childhood sexual abuse and addictions. The discourse, or in my words-"women's talk", focused on the women's understanding of what had happened and how they make meaning of these experiences. In describing and interpreting their stories, the women and I [researched and the researcher] endeavoured to frame the "talk" into an image of a conceptual grid that reflected their experiences with their own exclusions and erasures, their own rules and decisions, limits, inner logic, parameters and blind alleys (Lather, 1991).

This conceptual grid created by the women's stories demonstrates how language, experience, values and beliefs provide the basis for how we interpret the world and make meaning of it. The discourse, or the term I prefer to use--"women's talk" was manifested out of this conceptual grid which provided a space for women to "talk back".

bell hooks (1989) describes women who "talk back" as coming from a "legacy of defiance, of will, of courage, affirming my [read our] link to

female ancestors who were bold and daring in their speech". The women in this study "talked back" with voices of defiance and courage about the abuse and violence that they experienced in their childhood, and how the violence was continued through the cultural/societal beliefs that oppressed them. The women as well displayed will and courage in their struggle to overcome the experiences of violence and addictions and engage in a journey of recovery which has not been easy.

The value of this study lies in the richness and depth of the information drawn from a small sample of six women which was the basis of the discourse, rather than producing findings that would be generalized to other women's lives. This study is about beginnings not endings, which has implications for further research and anti-oppressive social work practice.

There are some issues that have been raised in this study that need further exploration. Whether this action takes place in terms of new research or in terms of including a gender analysis in current and future research, it is clear that women's experiences need to be included.

The "women's talk" identified specific components from the experiences of the abuse and recovery that were believed to be causal factors, and/or factors that either helped or impeded the recovery process.

These factors could be utilized as points of exploration in a combined quantitative and qualitative research project with a larger sample of women.

The following are issues that could be further explored:

- (1) how gender role socialization and the unequal distribution of power between men and women contribute to a greater risk for [female] children for sexual abuse.
- (2) how alcoholism in the family and community increase the vulnerability of children and put them at risk to be sexually abused.
- (3) why adult women who are survivors of sexual abuse are at a greater risk to be revictimized.
- (4) the impact of First Nations women experiencing the double jeopardy of racism and sexism.
- (5) problems with generic [genderless] treatment interventions of addictions which do not address the needs of women.
- (6) ways in which First Nations cultural beliefs and practices are oppressive to women and can cause further trauma to vulnerable women seeking help. Also exploration of how these beliefs and practices could be more anti-oppressive and more liberating for women is needed.
- (7) the ways in which diversity impacts treatment, for while First Nations women share many commonalities, they also are diverse in terms of class, education, marital status, parental status, age, status/nonstatus, (dis)ability and sexual orientation which are all factors in providing resources.

This is one example of how further research projects could continue to explore the issues identified in this study. Another example is to evaluate the effectiveness of current treatment programs using a gender analysis

based on the issues raised in this study.

The "women's talk" has also raised issues that have implications for social work practice in terms of policy development, program development and education. This women centered discourse placed gender and culture as major considerations in the discussions of First Nations women in recovery. The stories illustrate the importance of social workers understanding several key factors: gender socialization, the impact of community alcoholism, that recovery for First Nations women is more than treatment of addictions alone, the potential value of cultural beliefs/practices, and the tremendous losses to First Nations people due to colonization, childhood sexual abuse and addictions.

The recognition and acknowledgement of gender socialization in mainstream social work practice has influenced the way in which resources have been developed and provided for women. Although not fully embraced by the social work profession, feminist and structural theories have moved beyond "blaming the victim" into understanding how institutions like family, community, culture and society have contributed to the problems that women experience.

While First Nations social work practice has acknowledged how the effects of racism through the processes of colonization has contributed to

many of the problems experienced by First Nations people, there is virtually no acknowledgement of the effects of sexism which is also an integral part of the ideology of colonization. The "women talk" on the subject of oppression by gender, troubles this notion of only considering race as a causative factor of social problems.

The topic of gender raises serious considerations in the development of First Nations social programs particularly for child welfare in the movement toward self-government. The experiences of the women regarding family loyalty which contributed to their silencing about the sexual abuse and violence challenge the cultural notion of rebuilding families as an important part of the recovery of First Nations communities. It would appear that First Nations and Non-First Nations social workers would have to first deconstruct the issues that can contribute to the violence and silencing in families to be able to foster the rebuilding of safe family structures.

The identification of community alcoholism in the women's discourse establishes another dimension to the practice of treatment intervention of addictions/alcoholism. Rather than focusing on individual treatment, it is apparent that family and community recovery are part of the individual's recovery process. While some First Nations treatment programs address

family issues in recovery and provide resources to work with the whole family, aftercare is limited and often unable to continue to support families who have to return to a community after treatment. This is particularly problematic when these communities still condone substance abuse.

Recovery was identified by the women's talk as more than the treatment of alcoholism/addictions. Other issues identified as factors in the recovery process were; sexual abuse, gender socialization, being battered, cultural identity, and sexual orientation. This points out that treatment intervention cannot focus only on the addiction/alcoholism. Counsellors and social workers have to be more informed about the interrelatedness between these factors and how they block and complicate the recovery process.

Cultural beliefs and practices were a significant part of the recovery process for these women. Rebuilding a positive First Nations identity through the understanding and acknowledgement of the effects of colonization helped the women to put their own problems into perspective, as well as increasing understanding of their family and community. Spirituality practised through rituals and ceremonies became a healthy way to reconnect the spirit to the body and begin the process of "getting better". These beliefs and practices when utilized in an anti-oppressive manner are a powerful catalyst for creating change.



First Nations and Non-First Nations social workers must have a solid grounding in their educational training of the racist and sexist ideologies inherent in the colonization process. The facts about colonization must be comprehensive and critically deconstructed to understand the social and political significance it had on First Nations and Non-First Nations cultures. This knowledge and understanding must be included at the policy and program development level for social programs provided by First Nations organizations, or provincial or federal governments.

Loss was a large part of the experience of these women. The loss of culture through colonization, and the loss of childhood from the sexual abuse and alcoholism/addictions within the immediate and extended family systems are major considerations for intervention procedures. Cultural loss is pervasive among First Nations people and accounts for the struggle toward a positive identity in the recovery process demonstrated in the women's stories.

Survivors of childhood sexual abuse and alcoholic parents grieve the loss of a "normal" childhood. While loved and well-treated children are "becoming acquainted with self--celebrating a developing sense of discovery, autonomy and fledgling impressions of self-efficacy---abused and neglected children are absorbed in the daily task of psychological and

physical survival" (Briere, p. 46). Children living in alcoholic homes are "deprived of being parented--living with people who can not be counted upon for safety, security, or nurturance" (Briere, p. 14).

All of the above issues are parts and pieces of a complex web of life experiences that this study can only begin to unravel in terms of trying to understand and make meaning of childhood sexual abuse and addictions in and among First Nations women. How this study is presented is one of many ways to represent the information from these women's stories. This study is about six women's lives told through the lenses of another First Nations woman from a tentative and partial position.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Agar, M. H. (1980). The Ethnographic Research Proposal. in The Professional Stranger. Toronto: Academic Press.
- Allen, P.G. (1986). The Sacred Hoop. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Anderson, B.M. (1993). Aboriginal Counselling & Healing Processes. Unpublished major paper, University of British Columbia, School of Social Work, Vancouver, B.C.
- Anderson, K. & Jack, D.J. ((1991). Learning to Listen: Interview Techniques and Analyses. In S.B. Gluck & D. Patai (Eds.), Women's Words: The Feminist Practice of Oral History. New York: Routledge.
- Baines, C. & Evan, P. & Neysmith, S. (1991). Women's Caring: Feminist Perspectives on Social Welfare. Toronto: McClelland & Stewart Publishers.
- Berenson, E. (1991). Powerlessness--Liberating or Enslaving? Responding to the Feminist Critique of the Twelve Steps. In D. Bepko (Ed.), Feminism and Addictions. New York: Haworth Press, Inc.
- Bougault, R. (1991). Race, Class and Gender: Colonial Dominations of Indian Women. In Race, Class, Gender: Bonds and Barriers. J. Vorst et al (Eds.), (2nd ed). Toronto: Garamond Press.
- Briere, J.N. (1992). Child Abuse Trauma: Theory and Treatment of the Lasting Effects. Newbury Park Ca.: Sage Publications.
- Brown, R. (1993, March). "Culture of Cruelty". The Vancouver Sun.
- Butler, S. (1994). Conference presentation, Vancouver, B.C.

- Cairns, R. (1991). The Mental Health Problems and Needs of Canadian Aboriginal Women. Department of Health, Department of Social Services, Government of the Northwest Territories.
- Clinton, R. N. (1990). The Rights of Indigenous Peoples As Collective Group Rights. In Arizona Law Review. No. 4, p. 739-747.
- Corrigan, E.M. (1991). Psychosocial Factors in Alcoholism in Women. In N. Van Den Bergh (Ed.), Feminist Perspectives on Addictions. New York: Springer Publishing Company.
- Chrisjohn, R. (1991). Faith Misplaced. In Canadian Journal of Native Education. (18), 1, p. 161-196.
- DeVault, M.L. (1990). Talking and Listening from Women's Standpoint: Feminist Strategies for Interviewing and Analysis. Social Problems. Vol. 37, No. 1.
- Dominelli, L. (1988). Anti-Racist Social Work. London: The MacMillan Press Ltd.
- Downing, C. (1991). Sex Role Setups and Alcoholism. In N. Van Den Bergh (Ed.), Feminist Perspectives on Addictions. New York: Springer Publishing Company.
- Forth-Finegan, J. (1991). Gender and Spice and Everything Nice: Gender Socialization and Women's Addiction- A Literature Review. In C. Bepko (Ed.), Feminism and Addiction. New York: The Haworth Press Inc.
- Friere, P. (1967). Pedogogy of the Oppressed. New York: The Continuum Publishing Corporation.
- Friere, P. (1985). The Politics of Education. New York: Bergin & Garvey Publishers, Inc.
- Glaser B. & Strauss, A. (1967). The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research. New York: Aldine Publishing Co.

- Green, R. (1992). Women in American Indian Society. New York: Chelsea House Publishers.
- Guide to First Nation Healing Lodges and Treatment Centres in B.C. Alcohol and Drug Programs, Ministry of Health and Ministry for Seniors. Province of B.C.
- History of Native Indian Alcohol and Substance Abuse. (1990). Substance Abuse Curriculum Resources Prepared by Cariboo College for the Minister of Advanced Education Training and Technology. Province of B.C.
- Hodgson, M. (1990). Shattering the Silence: Working with Violence in Native Communities. In T. Laidlaw, C. Marmo, and Associates, (Eds.), Healing Voices: Feminist Approaches to Therapy with Women. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers.
- hooks, b. (1984). Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center. Boston: South End Press.
- hooks, b. (1989). Talking Back: Thinking Feminist: Thinking Black. Boston: South End Press.
- hooks, bell. (1990). Yearning: Race, Gender, and Cultural Politics. Boston: South End Press.
- Hyde, N. (1986). Covert Incest in Women's Lives: Dynamics and Directions for Healing. In Canadian Journal of Community Mental Health. Vol 5, No. 2, (pp. 73-84).
- Is Anyone Listening: Report of the B.C. Task Force on Family Violence. (1992). Minister of Women's Equality, Province of British Columbia, Victoria, B.C.
- Jamieson, K. (1978). Indian Women in Canada: Citizens Minus. Minister of Supply and Services Canada.
- Kasl, C.D. (1992). Many Roads, One Journey: Moving Beyond the 12 Steps. New York: Harper Perennial.

- Kirkpatrick, J. (1986). Turnabout: New Help for the Woman Alcoholic. Seattle: Madrona Publishers, Inc.
- Krosenbrink-Gelissen, L.E. & Frideres, J. S. (1983). The Native Women's Association of Canada. In Native Peoples of Canada: Contemporary Conflicts. (4th ed.). Scarborough: Prentice Hall Canada Inc.
- LaDue, R.A. (1991). Coyote Returns: Survival for Native American Women. In P. Roth (Ed.), Alcohol and Drugs are Women's Issues. Vol 1,. Metuchen, N.J.: Women's Actions Alliance and The Scarecrow Press Inc.
- LaFromboise, T.E., Berman, J.S. & Sohi, B.K. (1992). American Indian Women. In L. Comas-Diaz & B. Greene (Eds.), Psychotherapy with Women of Color. New York: Guilford.
- LaRocque, E. (1993). Violence in Native Communities. Report for the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples presented in Vancouver, B.C. March 10-12.
- Lather, P. (1991). Getting Smart: Feminist Research and Pedagogy With/In The Postmodern. New York: Routledge.
- Lather, P. (1994). Validity After Poststructuralism: On (Not) Writing About the Lives of Women with HIV/AIDS. Presented at AETA, New Orleans.
- Lather, P. (Summer, 1994). Class lecture-The Politics of Interpretation in Educational Research. Education 508-B, Education Department, University of British Columbia.
- Leacock, E. (1980). Montagnai Women and the Jesuit Program for Colonization. In E. M. Leacock & E. Leacock (Eds.), Women and Colonization. Brooklyn: J.F. Bergin Publishers.
- Lorde, A. (1984). Sister Outsider. Freedom Ca.: The Crossing Press.
- McBride, C. & Bobet, E. (1990). Health of Indian Women. Paper presented to The Canadian Public Health Association 81st Annual Conference, Toronto, Ont. Quantitative Analysis

and Socio-demographic research. Finance and Professional Services, Indian and Northern Affairs Canada.

MackKinnon, M. (1991). Each Small Step: Breaking the Chains of Abuse and Addiction. Charlottetown: Gynergy Books.

Marshall, C. & Rossman, G.B. (1989). Designing Qualitative Research. Newbury Park: Sage Publications.

Mason, M. (1991). Women and Shame: Kin and Culture. In C. Bepko (Ed.), Feminism and Addiction. New York: The Haworth Press Inc.

Miller, D. (1991). Are We Keeping Up with Oprah? A Treatment and Training Model for Addictions and Interpersonal Violence. In C. Bepko (Ed.), Feminism and Addiction. New York: The Haworth Press Inc.

Miller, B.A., Down, W.R., Gondoli, D.M. & Keil, A. (1987). The Role of Childhood Sexual Abuse in the Development of Alcoholism in Women. Violence and Victims. Vol. 2, No.3.

Morin, S.M. (1990). The Women's Drum. In Writing The Circle: Native Women of Western Canada. J. Perrault & S. Vance. (Eds.). Edmonton: NeWest Publishers.

Nahanee, T. (1992). Dancing with a Gorilla: Aboriginal Women, Justice and the Charter. Presented at the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples in Ottawa, November 25-27.

Ontario Native Women's Association. (1989). Breaking Free: A Proposal for Change to Aboriginal Family Violence. Thunder Bay, Ontario.

Oxner, K. (1993). Exploring The Phenomenon of Recovery For Chemically Dependent Women Survivors of Childhood Sexual Abuse. Unpublished MSW thesis, School of Social Work University of B.C., Vancouver, B.C.

- Piasecki, J.M., Manson, S.M., Biernoff, M.P., Hiat, A.B., Taylor, S.S., & Bechtold, D.W. (1989). Abuse and Neglect of American Indian Children: Findings From a Survey Of Federal Providers. Presented at the American Indian and Alaska Native Mental Health Research, Fall 1989, The National Center.
- Rowe & Associates, Consultants Ltd. (1989). The Vancouver Urban Indian Needs Assessment Study. Alcohol and Drug Program Ministry of Labour and Consumer Services. Province of B.C.
- Russell, D.E.H. (1985). Sexual Exploitation. Beverly Hill, CA: Sage publications.
- Russell, S.A. Wilsnack, S. (1991). Adult Survivors of Childhood Sexual Abuse: Substance Abuse and Other Consequences. In P. Roth (Ed.), Alcohol and Drugs are Women's Issues. Metuchen, N.J. Women's Action Alliance and the Scarecrow Press Inc.
- Shanley, K. (1984). Thoughts on Indian Feminism. In B. Brant (Ed.), A Gathering of Spirit. Monpelier: Sinister Wisdom Books.
- Shaw, M. (1994). Women in Prison: A Literature Review. In Forum on Correction Research. Vol. 6, No. 1. Ottawa: Publishing and Editorial Services, Correctional Service of Canada.
- Single, E. (1994). The Canadian Profile on Alcohol, Tobacco, and Other Drugs. Ottawa: Center on Substance Abuse-Addictions Research Foundation.
- Turpel, M.E. (1991). Patriarchy and Paternalism: The Legacy of the Canadian State for First Nations Women. Review Essays Recensions d'essais. Vo. 6.
- Van Den Bergh, N. (1991). Having Bitten the Apple: A Feminist Perspective on Addictions. In N. Van Den Bergh (Ed.), Feminist Perspectives on Addictions. New York: Springer Publishing Company.



Young, E.B. (1990). The Role of Incest Issues in Relapse. Journal of Psychoactive Drugs. Vo. 22(2), Apr-June.

# APPENDIX A

## INTERVIEW GUIDE

The purpose of the study was to document and create a discourse from the recovery stories of childhood sexual abuse and addiction of six First Nations women. The interview guide was utilized to evoke the particular meaning that these women gave to their experiences of recovery. I endeavoured to engage the participants in "woman talk" an interaction that moved into a dialogue instead of "interviewing" from a set of questions. The question was basically that; a question with a set of probes that were used if the participant did not mention a particular part of the recovery process that I believed was significant. After spending time discussing the purpose of the study and how I perceived the interview process to unfold, we began with the one question of:

How would you describe your experience of recovery?

probes consisted of the following:

- ☐ when did you realize you were an alcoholic?
- ☐ where did you get treatment-did it address your race or gender?
- ☐ did your history of sexual abuse effect your recovery from addictions?
- ☐ did being a First Nations female child have significance to your experiences of abuse and addictions?

# **APPENDIX B**

## **INTERVIEW CONSENT FORM**

(on letterhead)

### **CONSENT FORM FOR THE FOLLOWING RESEARCH PROJECT**

**TITLE:** First Nations Women In Recovery: A Gender and Cultural Experience.

**INVESTIGATOR:** Elaine I. Herbert BSW, MSW Candidate-University of B.C. School of Social Work-Telephone 228-8084.

**SUPERVISOR:** Dr. Kathryn McCannell. Associate Professor-School of Social Work, University of B.C. Telephone 822-6622

**Purpose:** The purpose of this research project is to document the experience of First Nations women who have a history of childhood sexual abuse and have received treatment for a substance abuse addiction. Two face to face interviews, two hours in duration each will be conducted with the participant where the participant will talk about her experience in recovering from sexual abuse and substance abuse. The participant will have an opportunity before the interview to view the questions, clarify and give feedback, and prior to second interview, the participant will receive a transcribed copy of first interview to be discussed with participant to ensure that the interpretation is representative of her experience.

**Confidentiality:** Identity of participant will be only known to researcher. Information that could identify the participant will be excluded form all aspects of research project. Recorded interviews and notes will be destroyed when project is completed.

**Rights:** You have the right to refuse to participate and can withdraw at any time from this study. The right to refusal does not jeopardize further treatment or medical care.

I, \_\_\_\_\_, hereby consent to participate in this research study.

I, \_\_\_\_\_, acknowledge that I have received a copy of the consent form.