

Expressions of Distress and Resistance

Women¹ wrote about many different actions they took to express or “act out” what was going on for them when they were at school. Often this acting out got them into trouble; occasionally it took the form of trying harder in school (see Joanne’s words).

Anna²:

I was bullied to the point where I would feel afraid to go to school, and I would bite my fingernails down to the cuticles thinking about what I would have to endure on my way home from school or at recess time and then about what type of mood my dad or step mother would be in when I got home

When I felt I couldn’t take the bullying anymore I would get into severe fistfights.

Joanne:

I was angry all the time, which was displayed in my attitude, I started hanging out with the “bad kids” and started smoking.

Things went terribly bad for me at school. I was just a body in the class with a bad attitude and refused to do anything in class.

...a letter was sent to my mother telling her that I was to repeat Grade 8. I was furious and literally tore my room apart. Clothes were thrown everywhere, wallpaper was ripped off the wall. It was bad. I believe to this very day that I lashed out in my room not only because of school but everything else that went on in my life. I felt absolutely crazy in that moment.

The second time of grade 8 was just as difficult. I tried harder because the humiliation was almost unbearable and I already felt insignificant and I wasn’t going to be left behind again....I did well in school, completed my homework most of the time and made friends. I was also considered a “bad girl” by my peers because I smoked, swore and wore tight jeans and make-up, which also made me feel “cool”.

My mother eventually went back to my stepfather with my younger siblings, and my older sister and I stayed with my aunt because we refused to go back to him.... she tricked us...and said it was going to be better...I was livid. But I had no choice I was stuck. I went back to my old school but retained my confidence I

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found within myself. I did better in school, I think it was the underlined angry hostility that gave me the strength to be more outspoken.

Sierra:

My experience with violence has affected me by my realizing that every individual had their own coping strategy. By isolating myself, it did not allow me to heal. I have to let others help me so that I can perform to my fullest ability

I realized I had become an alcoholic to cope with my issues but somehow passed all my classes.

Fumi:

I don't remember much from grades four and five but I do remember doing poorly in school. I had a difficult time making friends my age and began spending time with a group of older kids.

I spent more time hanging out with my older friends at the pool hall. I began smoking and the other kids at school didn't like me. I even remember trying to get some other kids to smoke and then getting in trouble for it and being told I was a bad influence. I started hanging around with kids that were robbing grocery stores and a few run-ins with the police.

I would resort to stealing food and money to buy food. I would usually buy chocolate bars and chips from the convenience store.

I had made a core group of solid friends and I continued to excel in the arts, which were made more available to me in high school. I even started to slowly pull up my grades. By grade eleven I started to take more chances.

Priya:

The biggest effect it [experiencing violence at home] had on me was my anger towards authority figures especially male teachers. Suddenly they would agitate me to the point where I would lash out at them verbally and I would refuse to obey any of their commands.

I ended up in the office quite regularly once I started experiencing constant violence at home. This only got worse as I was in junior high transitioning to high

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school, at times I was forced to leave school because of fights with other students or suspensions.

It made me feel good to put the male teachers in their place no matter the consequences....Deep down it was like a form of payback directed onto the wrong people because of the situation at home I could not control. I felt like I was protecting the other girls in my class from my "dirt bag teacher" or so I depicted him to be, since he was openly sexist. Maybe by constantly challenging him I felt like I could do the same when I got home.

I began to disagree with a lot of the religion they were teaching us...I remember thinking if there is a god then how could he be letting these horrible things happen to me. I started to reject a lot of the material they were feeding us, thinking that what they were preaching was solely to their benefit.

Marlene:

I just wanted to forget for a little while and the way I accomplished that was by fooling around with my friends most of the time. It was an escape for me.

The teachers never made a huge difference in my life. To me all grown ups/adults were the enemy.

The only positive thing [about high school] was that it was a way out of my household every day, other than that it was really pointless to me. To this day I think that high school is a huge waste of time.

Grace:

I fought in class (grade 11) and threw everyone's books around, while yelling that I was going to blow up the school

I didn't do any schoolwork; I passed with 50's. I barely went to school, and when I did go, I was suspended and sent home. I did a lot of drugs and alcohol before I went to class

¹ In 2007 some students in the Assaulted Women and Children's Counsellor/Advocate Program at George Brown College took part in a research study where they reflected on the ways they could now recognize that violence had had an impact on their own learning. This research was carried out as part of the Weaving a Web project to develop www.learningandviolence.net The rest of the themes identified can be found in other sections of The Impact of Violence on Learning.

² All names are fictional.