BATTERED WOMEN AND VIOLENT CRIME: AN EXPLORATION OF
IMPRISONED WOMEN BEFORE AND AFTER THE CLEMENCY MOVEMENT

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BATTERED WOMEN AND VIOLENT CRIME: AN EXPLORATION OF
IMPRISONED WOMEN BEFORE AND AFTER THE CLEMENCY MOVEMENT

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Dissertation

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ABSTRACT

When battered women kill their abusive partners they generally do so in self-defense. However, self-defense law never took women’s experiences with domestic violence into account. It was not until 1990 that certain states began to allow expert testimony on Battered Woman Syndrome in self-defense trials. Because of this change in law, several states granted clemency to small numbers of incarcerated battered women (Gagné 1998).

While the research on battered women who received clemency is minimal (Gagné 1998; Beattie and Shaunessy 2000), there has been no research on the women who applied for clemency and were denied. Using existing interview data with battered women who applied for clemency in 1990 as a starting point, this dissertation involved first time and follow up interviews with women who were part of the clemency applicant pool in 1990.

Findings indicated that the women’s lives prior to prison were filled with multiple types of abuse. The turning point to kill came when they felt their only choice was to kill or be killed and/or they feared for their children’s lives. During their time in prison they became active in domestic violence support groups which enabled them to apply for clemency.
The twelve women denied clemency still remain in prison serving life sentences and have become extremely active within the prison by starting different groups (i.e. yoga, choir, and fund-raising for charities). These women shifted their sense of self from victims to survivors and saw prison as a place of safety and freedom. However, this newfound sense of self conflicted with the structure of the prison and the women often felt they were repeatedly victimized.

The six women granted clemency struggled with having a felony conviction and found it affected employment and housing options, as well as their own sense of self-worth. Those without family support were more susceptible to criminal activity after prison and were more likely to report problems with substance abuse. They struggled to reconnect with their children and saw improvement in their relationships over time. Lastly, they viewed themselves as survivors and talked about teaching others how to live violence free.
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Leaving an abusive relationship is difficult for many women. Not only do women suffer extreme psychological effects from abuse (i.e. battered woman syndrome) (Walker 1979), but there are also many structural barriers that limit women’s options (Leonard 2002; Browne 1987; Busch 1999). Battered women make five to seven attempts, on average, before they are able to successfully leave an abusive relationship (Ferraro 1998).

There are some women, however, who even after numerous attempts have been unable to escape their violent partner. Leonard (2002), in interviews with incarcerated battered women who had killed their partners, found that they had tried every avenue to seek help. This included turning to friends, family, mental health personnel, law enforcement agencies, medical professionals, members of religious organizations, and battered women’s shelters and hotlines. Many of these same women also tried to file for legal separation or divorce. Their attempts to leave or seek help often resulted in the abusive partner becoming more violent. Walker (1989) reported that abusive male partners often have the mind-set that they would rather kill than be left by their partners. Furthermore, many of the agencies (i.e. police, courts, hospitals, and churches) that these women turned to gave less than adequate help due to a lack of understanding about the sociology of domestic violence.
When these agencies (police, courts, and hospitals) fail to help, many women feel that they are left deciding between their own lives and the lives of their violent partners (Walker 1989). Death of one of the partners in battering relationships is not uncommon. This dissertation explores the topic of battered women and their use of violence in the context of a violent relationship. Specifically, I am studying the lived experiences of incarcerated and previously incarcerated battered women in a mid-western state who killed or attempted to kill their abusive partners or (step)fathers.

While this study focuses on battered women who killed or attempted to kill, statistically women are more likely than men to be victims of lethal violence by their intimate partners (Walker 1984; Browne 1987). For example, the U.S. Department of Justice (2000) reported that in 1998, 72% of homicide victims in intimate relationships were women. When looking at this rate between 1976 and 1997, the female intimate homicide rate remained stable. However, between 1997 and 1998, it rose by 8%. On the other hand, the male intimate homicide rate decreased by 60% between 1976 and 1998. Some professionals attributed this decrease to the increased availability of battered women shelters and crisis centers (Browne 1987). These statistics revealed that women are much more likely to be victims of domestic homicide and their chance of being a victim of lethal violence has not declined over the last few years.

Studies have found that men are more likely to kill when their partners try to leave the relationship (Walker 1989; Block and Christakos 1995), while battered women are more likely to kill in self-defense (Walker 1989; Leonard 2002; Block and Christakos 1995; Gagne 1998). Walker (1989) reported that very few of the battered women who committed homicide that she interviewed killed out of jealousy or revenge. Most
reported that they killed out of fear for their lives. According to their accounts, they endured emotional, verbal, physical, and sexual abuse before they killed their partners. They explained that if they did not kill their partners, their partners would kill them. This is supported by other researchers who have found that battered women who kill often claim that it was a life or death situation and they feared for the safety of their own, as well as their children’s lives (Gagnè 1998; Beattie and Shaunessy 2000; Leonard 2002).

When battered women kill their abusive intimate partners they generally claim self-defense and will try to use this defense when they go to court. Unfortunately, self-defense law was never constructed to take into account women’s experiences with battering (Gillespie 1989). In order to claim self-defense one must prove that he/she was in imminent danger at the time of the attack and this fear of imminent danger was reasonable (Gillespie 1989). The problem arises, though, when we look at what constitutes a reasonable fear. Traditionally, this assessment of reasonableness was based on an objective standard which compared the person’s actions to a white, middle-class man (a reasonable person). Yet, we know everyone does not perceive the world in the same way. A person’s skin color, sex/gender, socioeconomic status, age, and sexual orientation all allow for a different set of experiences and perceptions. A woman in a battering situation may perceive her options to leave quite differently than a man. Because women lack power when compared to men the options available to them are different. When the courts use an objective reasonable person standard and do not take into account the differences in experiences based on varying social statuses they continue to contribute to biases within our judicial system (Schepple 2000).
As feminists began recognizing the inequities apparent in self-defense law, they began lobbying for changes (i.e. the introduction of expert witness testimony at the trials). Because it took so long for self-defense law to become less gender biased, many battered women who killed were sent to prison without ever being able to talk about the abuse in their relationships during their trials. This problem was the catalyst for the battered women’s clemency movement, where feminists began advocating for clemency (where the governor reduces or alleviates the penalty for a crime) for incarcerated battered women. As the governors of some states started granting clemencies to a few incarcerated battered women, researchers raised the question of how these women would adjust to life post-clemency.

To date, there have been two studies on life after clemency for battered women. Gagnè (1998) was the first to examine what life was like for the women who were granted clemency in the state of Ohio. Soon after, Beattie and Shaunessy (2000) followed up with women granted clemency in the state of Kentucky. Both studies found that before their crime, these women survived in relationships that were controlling, intimidating, and were extremely abusive. As these women tried to get help, they were ignored and/or blamed for the abuse. Furthermore, they all reported getting to a point where they felt it was “kill or be killed”. Lastly, they reported that their lives once out of prison were filled with multiple stressors associated with finding adequate employment and housing because of their felony convictions. They also struggled with re-connecting with children, family, and loved ones and suffered from depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder.
While the research on battered women who received clemency is minimal, there has been no research on the women who applied for clemency and were denied. How has this clemency decision affected their lives? This dissertation focuses on battered women who applied for clemency in 1990 in a mid-western state, including both those who were granted and those who were denied.

This is a longitudinal study using data collected at three different points in time. The first wave of data (Time I) was collected in early 1990 and consists of interviews with 20 women who were incarcerated at a women’s prison in a mid-western state. In these interviews the women tell their stories of how domestic violence affected their lives and eventually led to their incarceration. The Time I interviews include women who were incarcerated for a variety of offenses (not just killing/attempting to kill their partner). I include only four of the interviews from wave one in my research because these were the only women later interviewed in the second and third wave of the study. The second wave of data (Time II; collected between 1990 and 1994) includes interviews with eleven women who were granted clemency and released from prison in a mid-western state. This second set of interviews provides in-depth information about these women’s lives while they were in prison and their experiences with the clemency process, as well as how they have come to think of themselves as battered women and how this has affected their sense of self. For this dissertation only six of the eleven interviews from wave two were used. These six interviews were included because they had either been interviewed in the first wave of data collection or later in the third wave. The third wave of data was collected between 2005 and 2006 and focused on battered women who applied for clemency. This third wave of data includes those who were
denied clemency (n=12) as well as of those who were granted clemency and released from prison (n=4). The Time III interviews looked at the lived experiences of battered women who applied for clemency and how this shaped how they thought of themselves. The interviews at Time III focused on the women's relationships with their family, friends, and children; their physical and mental health; social support systems; sense of self; and their spirituality. The three time points (early 1990s, late 1990-1994, and 2005-2006) provided a socio-historical framework for exploring the experiences of battered women who used violence against their abusive partners.

I used a feminist framework in my exploration of the lived experiences of battered imprisoned women. Traditionally, feminist ideology has promoted research that would give voice to marginalized groups and provide a broader and deeper understanding about the inequalities apparent in society (Acker, Barry, and Esseved 1991). Because the women in this study were involved in battering relationships and they defended their lives by acting out aggressively, they were in many ways considered to be deviant. For example, many people in society do not understand the dynamics involved in abusive relationships and blame women for remaining in these violent situations. Furthermore, if these women use violence themselves, they have crossed the line and stepped out of their prescribed feminine roles. Complicating their stigmatized identities is the fact that their violence (even if in self-defense) resulted in a prison sentence. Now, society views these women as non-human because they are criminals, felons, murderers, and inmates (Goffman 1963).

In order to give voice to these previously or currently incarcerated battered women, I conducted semi-structured interviews. My main goal was to get a better understanding of
the circumstances and experiences of battered women who killed, were sent to prison, and applied for clemency. I had three general research questions that I addressed in this study:

1. What have their lives been like in the years since the clemency decision was made (i.e., family, friends, children, employment, physical/mental health)?

2. How has their sense of self been affected by their experiences with battering, criminal offending, prison, and clemency?

3. How have they coped with life stressors since the clemency decision (i.e., what have their formal and informal sources of support been)?

Chapter II addresses the previous research in this area. Specifically, the literature on dynamics of abusive relationships, the battered women’s movement, lived experiences of battered women, battered women who have killed, and the battered women’s clemency movement is discussed in this chapter. Moreover, I provide greater detail on the two studies to date that have looked at battered women who received clemency. Finally, the two theoretical perspectives (feminist and life course) that I use to guide this study are presented. Chapter III provides an overview of the research design and research methods used for this study. In Chapter IV I talk about what has happened to those battered women who applied for clemency and were denied. It is important to note that in this chapter all but one woman interviewed were incarcerated at the time of their interviews and were serving life sentences. Chapter V addresses the findings related to the women who were granted clemency. In this chapter the longitudinal data is used to compare the women’s lives from the time they were incarcerated (Time I), to right after release from prison (Time II), and then finally fifteen years after release from prison (Time III).
Finally, Chapter VI talks about the policy implications from this research, the limitations of the research, and possible future research in this area.
CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

When a battered woman kills her abusive partner she generally claims self-defense. Yet, there are problems with self-defense law because of a bias in our judicial system. In this chapter I address this gender bias, along with a discussion of Battered Woman Syndrome and how this has been used in the courts to help alleviate this bias. I continue by talking about the Battered Women’s Movement, followed by the Battered Women’s Clemency Movement. I then move to a discussion on the lived experiences of battered women, battered women who were able to get out of their relationships, incarcerated battered women, and previously incarcerated women. Finally, I talk about how I used feminist theory and life course theory to guide my research.

Gender Bias in the Legal System

Women are seen as “unfeminine” when they use violence. Women are taught to suppress anger and not act aggressively. When a woman goes against this standard, she is feared because she has become too masculine (Busch 1999). For example, in 1989 in Ohio there was an intense debate about releasing battered women who had killed their abusive partners. Many of the prosecuting attorneys cried out that this would give women “a license to kill” and result in an “open-season on men” (Gagne 1998; The Plain
Dealer 1990). Ann Jones (1980) also reported that women who kill are stereotyped as angry, vengeful women who kill because of their hatefulness towards men.

It is not surprising that the legal system reflects this view when dealing with violent female offenders. Usually women who kill their intimate partners have no prior criminal record (Browne 1987; Walker 1989), yet, these women often receive long and severe sentences (Browne 1987). The claim that battered women are getting away with killing is unfounded (Osthoff 2001). Even with the legal recognition of battered woman syndrome in the courts, a large majority (70 to 80%) of abused women charged with killing their partners accepted plea bargains or were convicted and given long sentences in prison rather than having their cases go to trial or being acquitted (U.S. Bureau of Justice Statistics 1995).

The Battered Woman Syndrome (BWS), introduced into the criminal justice system in the 1980’s, has been used in some states to help explain (through expert testimony) the battered woman’s state of mind at the time of a violent incident. BWS is used as a way to explain the reasonableness that a battered woman feared for her life. While BWS is not a defense in itself, it is used to support a legal claim of self-defense (Dutton 1996). In order to do this, an expert on domestic violence is called to testify in court about the effects of battering. This expert challenges the many myths the general public holds about battered women. Therefore, an unintended function of allowing expert testimony on BWS into the courts has been to educate judges and juries about the effects of battering in intimate relationships (Osthoff 2001).

As of 1994, every state in the United States allowed some expert testimony on BWS into the courts (Parish 1994). Numerous court cases have also been appealed on the basis
that expert testimony was not allowed in the original trial (Faigman 1986). For example, in the case State vs. Anaya (1981) the court ruled that the abuse suffered by the defendant, along with the fact that many battered women have difficulties getting out of the relationship was relevant to her case of self-defense (see Faigman 1986). However, evidence suggests that expert testimony on BWS works best when it is a traditional self-defense case (i.e. the woman defends herself in an attack) and the woman fits the stereotype of a traditional battered woman (i.e. passive, good mother, good wife, no drug habits). This tends to limit the successfulness of allowing battered woman syndrome into the courts because many judges, juries, and lawyers still believe the many stereotypes of battered women (Terrance and Matheson 2003).

The myths are pervasive and include the following: 1) if the abuse were really that bad for the woman then she would have left the relationship; 2) battered women are just as violent as their partners, and 3) the public tends to believe that “to be a ‘real battered woman’ the woman must be a timid, literally beaten-down (white) woman who cowers in the corner; ideally she has tried to get outside help and done nothing wrong (i.e. never fought back, is very passive, never uses drugs, never drinks, never yells, is a fabulous mother to her kids, is nice)” (Osthoff 2001, p. 235). These misconceptions and stereotypes about battered women make the role of the expert witness central to helping the judges and juries to understand the dynamics of domestic violence.

Unfortunately, even when an expert witness is allowed in court to testify on the BWS, if jurors are reluctant to believe the expert, the battered woman is rarely acquitted (Osthoff 2001). Furthermore, many of those involved in the courts (judges, jurors, prosecutors, and defense attorneys) do not fully understand how to use the BWS. They
often judge whether the woman is really battered, instead of whether the woman acted in self-defense. If the woman is not believable as a "real battered woman" she is often found guilty (Osthoff 2001, p.236).

Not only are battered women who kill punished more severely than men who kill their intimate partners, but they are also treated differently in the courtroom. Jenkins and Davidson (1990) analyzed court transcripts of self-defense cases and found that prosecutors treated battered women self-defense cases differently than any other type of self-defense cases. In cases where the self-defense involved a battered woman, prosecutors portrayed the abused woman as "evil" (p. 164). The prosecutor's case rested on the character of the woman rather than the actual events that took place. Moreover, the reactions of the woman to cross-examination by the prosecutor, regardless if the woman was calm or emotional, were used by the prosecutors to argue that she was not believable as a battered woman (p.168).

Juries are also influenced by the way a prosecutor presents the case. With a sample of college students at a large southern university, researchers manipulated the stories presented to prospective jurors in self-defense cases involving battered women. When students were provided with negative personal information about the abused woman there was a 40 percent increase in students who provided a guilty verdict (Follingstad, Brodino, and Kleinfelter 1996).

Walker (1989) discussed the admissibility of testimony and evidence in a courtroom and how it is biased against women. She noted that women do much better at explaining what happened to them through storytelling. Yet, the context of the story is inadmissible in the courtroom. Only the facts that are pertinent to the case are allowed as evidence.
Walker states that it becomes incredibly difficult for women to represent themselves effectively when asked questions in a "yes" or "no" format.

Another apparent gender bias within the legal system is embedded in self-defense law. Historically, women have been viewed as men's property and therefore have no independent legal standing (Pleck 1987). Women are socialized to seek help and protection from men. In this context, women should have no reason to learn how to defend themselves. The primary purpose of self-defense law was the right of individuals to protect themselves or their property from an intruder. Self-defense law was not designed with women's experiences or violence in intimate relationships in mind (Gillespie 1989).

There are two main assumptions in self-defense law. The first is that the person who acted in self-defense did so as a reasonable person. In other words, anyone else in that situation would have acted in the same way. This standard of reasonableness used in some states is based on male status and does not take into account women's experiences. This is considered an objective reasonable person standard (Ogle and Jacobs 2002). If the defendant's behavior is inconsistent with a reasonable person (white, middle-class, heterosexual male) then she did not act in self-defense.

Schepple (1991) disagrees with the use of one standard and instead argues that there needs to be multiple standards of reasonableness. For instance, a white, lower-income woman with two children in a battering relationship is going to see her options or choices differently from those of a white, middle-class man. The choice to leave or stay in a violent relationship is influenced by her lack of income, her lack of social status as a woman (i.e. wage gap, lack of affordable childcare), her gender socialization (i.e.
caretaker, passive, responsible for success of relationships), and her smaller physical stature as a woman. If she is a woman of color this brings in other issues such as racial prejudice and discrimination. Therefore, some states (Ohio, North Dakota, and Washington) use a subjective reasonable person standard (Ogle and Jacobs 2002). The subjective standard assesses whether the person truly felt they were in imminent danger. The jury must consider if the defendant is really telling the truth when she says she feared for her life (Ogle and Jacobs 2002). Just like with the objective reasonable person standard, there has also been dissent about the subjective reasonable person standard. There is a concern that with the subjective standard anybody could argue self-defense and state they were in imminent danger. Therefore, there has been a move towards trying to combine the two standards. When states combine the two standards, the definition of imminent danger will be based on a reasonable person and that reasonable person would be someone similar to the defendant with comparable resources and knowledge. Thus, a battered woman would be compared with other battered women (Ogle and Jacobs 2002). No states have actually synthesized the two standards, however cases in Ohio, Oklahoma, and South Dakota have used this idea of combining the objective and subjective standards (Ogle and Jacobs 2002).

The second assumption of self-defense law is that the person acted as he or she did because of a belief of being in imminent danger. Imminent danger means that at that moment in time the person feared for his/her life. This assumes that the defense should occur during an attack, not before or after one and that once the attack is over, the victim
is no longer in imminent danger. Imminent danger in abusive relationships is experienced as a constant for many battered women who are in fear for their lives (Gillespie 1989).

One other area of self-defense law that is biased against women is the assumption that the two people fighting are of equal size, height, weight, and physical build. Furthermore, self-defense law states that excessive force should not be used to defend oneself. Only if the attacker is armed can an individual use a weapon to defend him/herself (Gillespie 1989). When applying this to a violent intimate relationship, it does not take into account that a person’s body can be used as a weapon. Walker (1989) found that weapons had not injured most of the abused women she interviewed, but instead the injuries had resulted from their partners own fists. Many of these women reported being thrown across the room, hit, punched, kicked, stomped on, and choked. For these women, using a gun or a knife was the only way they could successfully defend themselves (Ogle and Jacobs 2002).

However, as a rule, women in our society are not taught to use firearms (Gillespie 1989). Many battered women who use a weapon to defend themselves do not fully comprehend the lethality of it. There have also been instances in which battered women shot or stabbed their partners, not once, but numerous times, claiming they truly believed that their partner was invincible and that he could never be killed (Walker 1989). According to self-defense law, these women used “excessive force” which is defined as using more force than necessary to defend oneself (Gillespie 1989).

If juries are told to assess whether or not a battered woman killed in self-defense based only on the legal criteria, the abused woman could easily be convicted of homicide
rather than justifiable homicide (Gillespie 1989). A defendant must prove she acted in perfect self-defense to get a not guilty verdict. Perfect self-defense requires that the defendant truly believes she was acting in part to save her life and that her belief of imminent danger was realistic based on an objective standard (Ogle and Jacobs 2002). As stated earlier, this objective standard may vary from state to state. If, however, she shows that she truly believed she was in danger but her state of mind was not reasonable she could be found guilty of imperfect self-defense and could be charged with varying degrees of homicide (Ogle and Jacobs 2002). One response to this bias in self-defense law has been the use of the Battered Woman’s Syndrome (BWS) to aid in the defense of battered women who use violence against their partners.

**The Battered Woman Syndrome**

The Battered Woman Syndrome is a subclassification of Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and is found in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, 4th Edition ( DSM IV) (1994). When a battered woman has PTSD symptoms she is suffering from BWS (Walker 1979). The DSM IV states that there are six distinct symptoms that must be present for PTSD to occur. The first is that the person must have experienced a traumatic stressor that would render her fearful and helpless. The second condition is that the person must unconsciously refer back to the incident through flashbacks, nightmares, or intrusive thoughts. The third and fourth conditions are a numbing of emotions and sleep problems or hypervigilance. The fifth criterion for PTSD is that all of the above conditions must occur for at least one month. Lastly, these conditions must somehow interfere with daily living.
In addition to the criteria stated above, Lenore Walker (1984) has found that all battering relationships share similar aspects that further serve to exacerbate PTSD symptoms. While interviewing battered women, Walker found that a cycle of violence is often apparent in battering relationships. Within this relationship, the battering usually progresses through several different stages. This cycle can occur many times throughout a relationship.

The cycle of violence consists of three stages. The first stage is the tension-building phase, characterized as a build-up of violence. There may be small incidents of violence. Many battered women say they feel like they are walking on eggshells. The next phase is the explosion, where the tension escalates and acute battering happens. During this phase the abuse often results in injuries to the woman. The last stage is called the honeymoon phase, when the abuser becomes remorseful and tells the woman that he loves her and that he is sorry. He may also buy her gifts and act in a loving manner towards her (Walker 1984).

This cycle of abuse provides intermittent reinforcement that the abusive partner might stop the abuse. The honeymoon period provides hope that the violent partner has changed. Social learning theory and behavioral psychology theories stress that when behaviors are intermittently reinforced they become the most difficult behaviors to change (Walker 1989). Women are taught that men are not perfect and that if they love them enough, they can change them. Women are also taught to make excuses for men’s imperfect behavior (i.e. boys will be boys) (Walker 1989). The honeymoon period provides the opportunity for women to give men a second chance.
However, there has been disagreement over whether this cycle of violence is really present in all battering relationships. Studies have found that often the honeymoon stage disappears after years of abuse leaving only the tension and explosion stages. Also, in some violent intimate relationships, the honeymoon stage was never a part of the cycle (Ogle and Jacobs 2002). Ogle and Jacobs (2002) predict that it is these abusive relationships that are at the highest risk for homicide. If the honeymoon stage disappears, then the abusive partner is only using violence as a form of control. Violence becomes the primary part of the relationship. There are no longer any lulls; every encounter is potentially violent. This change in the behavior of the batterer signals to the abused woman that the abuse has gotten worse and she is in danger all the time (Ogle and Jacobs 2002).

Another characteristic of battering relationships is the centrality of power. Battering relationships are about power and control. Johnson (1995) distinguished between types of domestic violence, stating that some violent relationships can be characterized as “patriarchal terrorism” (p. 284) where violence is used as one mechanism of control, among many. Isolation of the woman, as well as emotional, verbal, sexual, and economic abuse is an additional method of control and domination.

A final characteristic of battering relationships that has been quite controversial is learned helplessness (Busch 1999; Dutton 1996; Ogle and Jacobs 2002). Walker (1984) originally stated that when battered women suffer from BWS they are often left feeling like their situation is helpless. They become fearful for their life at all times and live their lives trying to survive minute-by-minute. Many times this prevents the woman from leaving the situation because she cannot predict what will happen next. She tries to “play
it safe” by remaining in the relationship because she has learned how to survive day-by-day in this relationship, while life “out there” is unknown.

Walker (1984) stated that battered women survive by numbing themselves to the abuse. Denial of abuse and dissociation (similar to self-hypnosis) are common coping mechanisms (Walker 1984). However, if the battered woman has tried to escape or defend herself and these strategies have not worked, then she may feel her situation is hopeless and that she cannot do anything to change it.

This focus on the helplessness of battered women has come under attack (Busch 1999; Dutton 1996). One of the first critiques of learned helplessness is that it is focused on the battered woman and her psychological deficiencies. Rather than taking into account the structural barriers that battered women encounter, victims are blamed for staying in an abusive relationship (Dutton 1996). Furthermore, the resourcefulness of battered women is overlooked (Gondolf 1988). In order for battered women to survive in abusive relationships it takes an incredible amount of strength (Sipe and Hall 1996). For example, life stories of battered women reveal that many women try to become less dependent on their abusive partners by becoming employed, going to school, saving money, going to counseling, and separating from the abusive partners. However, these attempts at independence are often sabotaged by their partners (Sipe and Hall 1996; Goetting 1999; Raphael 2000).

These critiques of learned helplessness were reported in a study conducted by the United States Department of Justice to evaluate the usefulness of expert testimony on battered woman syndrome and learned helplessness in legal proceedings (Dutton 1996). This report concluded that the use of learned helplessness in describing battered women
was detrimental to battered women and does not reflect the reality of battered women’s lives. In fact, reliance on learned helplessness results in stereotyping battered women and portraying them as passive. Since this report, researchers have focused more on Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder and how battered women’s experiences are similar to those of other trauma survivors rather than learned helplessness (Busch 1999).

Battered Woman Syndrome and the Courts

The Battered Woman Syndrome was used for the first time in the courts in 1979 as part of an insanity defense (Schuller and Vidmar 1992). Under this usage of BWS, courts assumed the battered woman was mentally ill and she could not be held accountable for her actions. In 1980, the battered woman’s syndrome was legally recognized in the DSM IV as a sub-classification of PTSD (DSM IV 1994). The process of medicalization gave credibility to BWS and offered an explanation as to why a battered woman might kill her partner. During the 1980s the press presented information that was supportive of the battered woman syndrome and portrayed battered women as victims (Noh 2003). Even though it was seen by some as a step in the right direction, feminists argued that battered women should not be considered mentally ill, because such reactions to being battered by an intimate partner could be considered normal in a violent situation (Browne 1987; Gagnè 1996; Schneider 1986; De Soto 1997).

During the early 1990s BWS became a political issue. The press focused on incarcerated battered women and raised the question of whether they were wrongfully convicted and what would constitute a proper defense of battered women who kill. The issue of the reasonable woman as compared to the reasonable man standard was central to this line of questioning (Noh 2003). The battered women’s movement continued to fight
to change the conception of BWS, attempting to move away from the language of mental illness. Battered women activists tried to explain to the courts that it was the violent situation that battered women were in that made them appear mentally unstable and that their reactions might be considered normal in situations involving terror inducing stimuli (Gagnè 1996). Based on what legal scholars concluded (Schneider 2000), BWS was no longer supposed to be used as an “excuse” defense (insanity), but as a “justification” defense (self-defense) in the courts (Mahoney 1991). It was during this time that state laws were being changed to allow expert testimony on BWS in the courts and also to allow incarcerated battered women to apply for clemency (Noh 2003).

The goal of using the Battered Woman Syndrome in court is to make self-defense law less gender biased by educating those involved in the judicial proceedings about BWS and its effects (Walker 1989). Accordingly, it is important for a battered woman to have an expert witness testify on her behalf to insure that she gets a fair and equitable trial.

Even though there has been considerable controversy over whether expert testimony on BWS should be allowed in the courtroom (i.e. labeling battered women as mentally ill), many feminists are still in favor of its use within the legal system (Gagnè 1998; Walker 1989). By allowing BWS into the courts it still enables experts to educate society about battering in intimate relationships (Gagnè 1998).

However, even with the credibility of the medical model, during the late 1990s and early 2000s the press changed their portrayal of battered women who kill. The battered woman was no longer portrayed as a victim, but as a cold-blooded killer who acted out of jealousy and revenge (Noh 2003). As a result of Lenore Walker’s testimony on behalf of
O.J. Simpson in the late 1990s at his trial for the murder of his wife Nicole Brown
many feminists feel it is important to allow expert testimony on the effects of battering
relationships. However, they want to steer clear of using the BWS and instead focus on
the structural inequities battered women deal with living in a patriarchal society that
condones violence against women (Schneider 2000).

**Battered Woman’s Movement**

The battered woman’s movement began in the late 1960s and one of its major goals
has been to define domestic violence as a social problem (Tierney 1982). Battered
women advocates were able to define domestic violence as a social problem by focusing
on the inequities for women in society that the women’s movement had touched on
earlier. Instead of saying domestic violence was a result of individual causes (i.e.,
alcoholism) they were able to focus on the structural qualities of society that condoned
violence against women (Dobash and Dobash 1992). They claimed victim-status for
battered women and stressed the importance of safety for battered women and their
children (Schneider 2000).

Because of this focus on safety for battered women, many shelters and crisis centers
were established. The first battered women’s shelter was opened in 1973 in St. Paul,
Minnesota (Dobash and Dobash 1992). After this first shelter, numerous shelters began
to open, and by 1982, 300 battered women’s shelters were present in the United States
(Pleck 1987, p. 190). Because there was a constant struggle for resources many shelters
were opened in the homes of activists. The first shelter in Ohio was opened in the home of former Governor Richard Celeste and his wife Dagmar (Gagne 1998).

The battered women’s movement did not end when battered women’s shelters were established and public funding was obtained. Instead, the movement changed focus. The battered women’s movement of the 1960/70s was very vocal and very united. As shelters became established, many activists left this work and went on to other professions. However, their desire to advocate for battered women was not left at the shelter. As these women became active professionals in the community in a variety of professions (doctors, lawyers, judges, nurses, teachers, counselors, legislative members), they were able to devote greater resources to social change (Gagnè 1996). As it became apparent that battering often led to severe psychological distress, the battered women’s movement advocated for this to be recognized by the medical community and helped BWS become a credible medical diagnosis (Gagnè 1996). By the 1990s, the battered women’s movement had women throughout the community who provided the necessary backing for BWS to be recognized as a legitimate medical condition found in the DSM IV (Gagnè 1996). Rather than blaming the victims for the abuse and for not leaving their situation BWS provided a framework to see battered women as victims.

This transfer of blame away from the individual was a result of the medicalization of the effects of domestic violence. Historically, a battered woman was seen as a deviant if she stayed in a battering situation and also if she left since there were few resources/options for single women, especially with children (Rothenberg 2003). Medicalization involved the medical community claiming that staying in a battering relationship was not deviant, but a result of an illness, taking the blame away from the
individual. Therapy has become the prescribed treatment rather than punishment. When a deviant act is redefined as a sickness, the stigma associated with it usually declines. Furthermore, in our society, the medical community has a lot of prestige and when it recognizes a deviant act as an illness it provides credibility to the diagnosis. It also provides the medical community with a way to control individuals by mandating that treatment for the medical problem be sought through the medical community (Conrad and Schneider 1992).

**Battered Women’s Clemency Movement**

One of the early questions the battered women’s movement dealt with was how to help battered women who had killed/attempted to kill their partners. Activists lobbied for the inclusion of BWS in court hearings in cases in which battered women had killed their abusive partners. In Ohio in 1981, the court case State vs. Thomas ruled that expert testimony on BWS should not be allowed in the courtroom. After extensive lobbying against this ruling, it was overturned in 1990. Because it took so long for the battered women’s movement to prove that the legal system was unfair and unjust towards battered women, activists had to change their focus on how to help battered women who were incarcerated. These activists argued that abused women who had killed their partners were imprisoned unlawfully and it was important for the state to reconsider these cases and grant these women clemency. Clemency has been defined as a “generic legal term that includes any executive act that reduces or alleviates a penalty for a crime” (Gagnè 1998, p.29). Many battered women’s advocates view clemency as a way to provide justice for abused women who had been unable to defend themselves using the BWS in court.
Ohio was the first state to allow a mass clemency review of imprisoned women for crimes related to their history as victims of battering. Gagnè (1996; 1998) studied this unprecedented mass clemency of battered women in Ohio. She conducted interviews with eleven battered women who were granted clemency as well as numerous politicians, attorneys, and advocates involved in the movement between 1990 and 1994. Dagmar Celeste (Governor Richard Celeste’s wife) was a very influential person in the battered women’s clemency movement in Ohio. Governor Celeste provided her with an office in the State House to advocate for women and families. She developed an interest in battered women from her own theological training with women on death row. She worked with the Ohio Reformatory for Women and helped them build a chapel designated for “recovery programs” inside the prison. One of the recovery programs that was developed earlier, but later came under Dagmar Celeste’s continued efforts to provide recovery opportunities for inmates, was a support group for battered women. As these battered women came together as part of this group and told their stories, they began to recognize that they were not alone. These women became more empowered and began sharing their stories with the public. At the same time, Dagmar Celeste and other feminists in the community campaigned for these women in prison. It was the combination of advocacy from inside and outside of the prison that helped the clemency movement move forward (Gagnè 1996).

In 1990, 120 women in Ohio’s correctional facilities filed for clemency. Governor Richard Celeste granted clemency to 26, using five criteria to determine who should receive clemency. The first criteria was the question of whether the abuse experienced by the battered woman was so extreme that it might have influenced the jury to rule
differently. Second, the abused woman had to have been active in domestic violence support groups while in prison. A third factor focused on the woman’s behavior while in prison, and a fourth looked at the woman’s prior criminal record. The last criteria stipulated that the woman had to have been in prison for a minimum of two years (Gagnè 1998).

Gagnè (1998) conducted a qualitative study with women who had been incarcerated in the Ohio prison system for killing their abusive partners and received clemency. In 1990, 26 women in Ohio’s prison were granted clemency and released from prison. Gagnè interviewed 11 of these women soon after they were released from prison. The interviews revealed that women who received clemency felt that killing their abusive partner was their only option. They said they had felt trapped in their relationship and that they had no other viable options to stop the abuse. They also felt that if they had not killed their abusive partners, they would have been killed instead. Furthermore, these women discussed at length how they felt they had been victimized repeatedly by unsympathetic social service agencies as well as the judicial system.

The only other study to date on battered women’s lives after clemency was conducted by Beattie and Shaughnessy (2000). They conducted oral history interviews in 1995 with nine battered women who became eligible for parole at the Kentucky Correctional Institution and were granted clemency. All of the women talked about lives filled with childhood abuse (most often sexual) and how this abuse continued into adulthood when they entered into intimate relationships. These women described relationships filled with horrific abuse and communities where no one seemed to care. They spoke of contacting authorities and were victimized repeatedly by people who
refused to do anything. For example, one woman told the story of her community being so afraid of her partner that when she would call the police, the police would stand at the bottom of her driveway and yell at her husband. The police in this instance were so terrified of this man that they would not come face to face with him. As a result they let him abuse his wife for years and did nothing to stop him.

The interviews in both studies revealed that these battered women felt they had killed in self-defense to end the abuse. They tried to seek help before they acted and were unsuccessful. They feared for their lives and felt they had no options. These women also spoke of great inequities within the criminal justice/legal system during their questioning, arrest, sentencing, and trial. Many were unfamiliar with the court system and were terrified of losing their children (which was often used as a threat). They spoke of inadequate representation and attorneys who were not sensitive to battered women. Some of the women talked about being scared to talk about the battering because their attorney was a male. Others talked about their attorney dismissing the battering and not wanting to bring it up because he/she was not familiar with laws pertaining to battered women (Beattie and Shaughnessy 2000; Gagnè 1998).

Once these women were given clemency, they spoke of their lives after prison. Since the women in both Ohio and Kentucky were not pardoned (removal of felony conviction and exoneration), but instead their sentences were commuted (replacement of less severe punishment), they still had a felony conviction on their record (Sheegy, Reinbug, and Kirchway 1991). This had a huge impact on their life after clemency as it was difficult for them to find employment, housing, and assistance. These women struggled with re-establishing their relationships with their children and many suffered
from depression and anxiety. The majority of these women commented that without the help of their family they could not have made it on their own (Beattie and Shaughnessy 2000; Gagnè 1998). With the exception of these two studies (Beattie and Shaughnessy 2000; Gagnè 1998) there is no research on life for women after clemency. This dissertation focuses on what happens to battered women who killed (or attempted to) in their lives after the clemency decision, whether they receive it or not.

**Lived Experiences of Battered Women**

The literature on the lived experiences of battered women consistently reveals that battered women have many similar experiences throughout their life (i.e. histories of abuse in childhood, fast courtship into abusive relationships, feelings of fear, guilt, and shame due to the abuse) (Sleutel 1998; Taylor, Magnussen and Amundson 2001; Goetting 1999). However, many battered women also report diverse experiences and feelings based on their minority status, differing levels of education and income, and their age (i.e. successful vs. unsuccessful attempts at help, individual vs. structural explanations for the abuse, and knowledge of available options for help) (Nichols & Feltey 2003; Goetting 1999; Sleutel 1998). In order to get a clear understanding of what it means to be a battered woman, I will summarize the findings on the similarities and the differences in the lived experiences of battered women.

One similarity of battered women’s life stories was found in the way they tell their story (Taylor, Magnussen, and Amundson 2001). Through qualitative interviews with twelve previously abused women in Hawaii, researchers found three major themes that became apparent when the women told their stories. First, all of the women started their
discussion by “painting the whole picture” of their lives (p.571). They wanted the researchers to understand fully the context of their childhoods and their life with their abusive partner. They provided information on violence during their childhood and how it made them feel. They also talked about why they felt they had been victims of abuse. Many of these women reported loss of self-esteem due to childhood victimization, as well as cultural ideologies that support and condone violence against women. Lastly, they discussed the unpredictability of the abuse and they also provided detailed descriptions of what their violent partner was like.

The second theme was in the way the women described the violence. They usually talked about the first incident of violence and how this influenced what happened in their relationship throughout the years. The women had remarkable memories when it came to the violent incidents in their life and described in detail the specifics of many of the abusive encounters. When describing the violence many of the women also talked about worrying all the time about their children’s welfare. Finally, the women spoke of not asking for help right away when the violence began due to feelings of fear, shame, and guilt for causing the abuse which is consistent with other research (Sleutel 1998; Goetting 1999).

The final theme dealt with how these women lived with the abuse. Only those women who were able to successfully get out of the relationship and take control of their lives talked about these issues. The issues these women spoke about concerned the point at which they realized they had to get out of the relationship. They talked about their encounters with social institutions (health care, police, and courts) and how most of these were negative. These women discussed feelings of loneliness, hopelessness, suicidal
ideations, and a need for people to understand what they were going through. Lastly, even though all of these women in this stage had the goal of living without violence, only a few had been successful.

Other researchers who have conducted qualitative studies on abused women’s lives have findings that support the study just discussed above. In a review of all qualitative research studies concerning the lived experiences of battered women within a fifteen year period, Sleutal (1998) reported that abused women talked at length about histories of abuse in childhood, especially sexual abuse, and how this negatively impacted their subsequent intimate relationships in adulthood. The effects of this abuse, as well as the abuse by their intimate partners led to feelings of inferiority and a loss of self-esteem for many battered women. In fact, many abused women stated that the emotional abuse was far worse than the physical abuse due to the devastating effects it had on their self-esteem (Langford 1996).

The women in this review of studies described their relationships with their abusive partners as very unpredictable; their partners were loving and kind one minute and violent and abusive the next (Thompson 1989). They also spoke of their life with their partner as equivalent to a life in prison (Moss, Pitula, Campbell, and Halstead 1997). Avni (1999) in her qualitative research on battered women also compared being in a battering relationship to living in a “total institution” similar to a prison (p. 137-49). These women were subjected to isolation from family, friends, and any other support systems, which is also consistent with other studies (Walker 1989; Leonard 2001). Many of these studies also found that the psychological abuse the women endured was similar to brainwashing techniques used to torture individuals (Smith, Tessoro, and Earp 1995).
NiCarthy (1986) demonstrates this point comparing the description of torture used by Amnesty International. According to NiCarthy, Amnesty International has stated that torture produces extreme fear, helplessness, and dependency and these are also found in victims of psychological abuse (p. 117-118).

These women often dealt with the abuse by minimizing and denying it (Sleutel 1998). Other researchers have found that battered women deny or minimize the abuse as a way to cope (Leonard 2001; Walker 1989; Browne 1987). Usually the women stopped denying the abuse and started contemplating leaving when there was a change in the abuser's behavior (i.e. violence got worse, he began abusing the children, the effects of the violence became more visible) (Ferraro and Johnson 1983).

However, leaving the abusive relationship often took many steps and it was not an easy process. Once again, many of the women in these studies reported a lack of help from social service agencies (Sleutel 1998). In fact, within the health care system battered women reported a "code of silence" where women do not tell of the abuse because they did not trust their doctors and felt they would be blamed (Bauer and Rodríguez 1995, p. 461). Furthermore, the women in these studies also talked about how religious beliefs kept them in the battering relationship and often the church reinforced the blame the women put on themselves for the abuse (Wessel & Campbell 1997).

These barriers to leaving an abusive relationship described were mentioned frequently in a study conducted by Goetting in 1999. Her research included biographies of battered women from across the United States who were able to get out of their abusive relationships. These women came from a variety of backgrounds, yet they all had in common the fact that they had been victims of domestic violence. These
biographies share many similarities to the lives of other battered women. For instance, one abused woman when interviewed by Goetting showed her photo albums filled with pictures of her life with her abusive partner. This could be equated to what Taylor et al. (2001) described as “painting the whole picture” (p.571). Another similarity to other studies included the fact that many of the abused women interviewed described a childhood full of abuse (witnessing violence between parents, physical abuse, sexual abuse, and emotional abuse inflicted on them). Furthermore, many of these women’s relationships with their abusive partner started at a young age and the courtship with their abusive partner was rather fast.

Goetting (1999) also found that the violence in their adult relationships usually escalated over time. For example, some of the biographical accounts the women provided stated that the abuse often started with emotional put-downs and extreme jealousy. This jealousy was often interpreted as loving behavior at the beginning of the relationship. However, as the relationship progressed (and often as there was some type of commitment such as a pregnancy, marriage, moving in together) the abuse became physical.

Even though Goetting (1999) found many similarities in these women’s lives, she also found quite a bit of diversity. Some of these women reported having honeymoon periods after a fight, other women did not. Although many women came from abusive backgrounds, this was not the case for all of the battered women interviewed in this study. Some of these abused women talked about how their unfamiliarity with abusive relationships led them into something they did not know how to handle, whereas, other
battered women described their abusive childhoods as setting them up to continue that cycle because that had become familiar to them.

Another factor that influences the way domestic violence is experienced is race. Researchers have found that black women may suffer more severe violence than white women (Hampton and Gelles 1994). However, African American battered women are less likely to call the police or ask for help (Moss et al. 1997; Hampton, Oliver, and Magarian 2003). The reluctance of African American women to call the police may stem from institutionalized racial discrimination. If black women call the police they may be turning their partner over to a racist system that is not perceived as a place of justice in the lives of African-American men (Richie 1995). Therefore, these women are caught between helping themselves and protecting their race (Moss et al. 1997). This is what Collins (2000) refers to as the intersection of race, class, and gender. The intersection of all of these statuses affects these women’s experiences with domestic violence.

According to Bograd (1999) understanding the intersectionality of race, class, gender, and sexuality is often a missed component in domestic violence research. Because we live in a society where there is sexism, racism, classism, and homophobia the social statuses that we hold alter how we think, act, and react to our social world. People in different social locations experience domestic violence in varying ways. For example, an Asian American woman may not name controlling behaviors as problematic because of the huge emphasis placed on patriarchal control within the Asian American community (Warrier 2000). Furthermore, a battered homosexual man may not identify himself as a victim because of his status as a male and he also may be reluctant to report any type of abuse for fear of how individuals would react to his status as a gay man.
These examples provide insight into how our gender, race, class, and sexual orientation all interact together and affect how individuals deal with domestic violence.

Nichols and Feltey (2003) also found that the intersection of multiple levels of oppression became apparent when African American battered women in their study focused on structural changes that should be made in order to best help battered women. Because these battered women on a daily basis dealt with being women, being black, and often being lower class they seemed to be more of aware of how the structure affects the individual.

Another way in which the intersection of race, class, and gender operates is when black women are reluctant to call the police because of their own often independent demeanor. Due to racist discrimination many African American men are dealing with unemployment, drug use, and homelessness (Hampton et al. 2003). Because of this, many black women have been the primary caretakers and primary breadwinners of their families. Therefore, African American women often have a strong and independent presentation of self. This often stems from differential socialization during childhood. Ferguson (1988) found that African Americans (or other racial minorities) socialized their children differently than White parents. Specifically, black mothers taught their children about survival, especially how to survive in a hostile environment. They taught their children that life is not always fair and that sometimes the systems that are set up to help people are often discriminatory towards racial minorities. Black women have been taught to take care of themselves and not rely on men for protection. White women, on the other hand, receive more traditional gender socialization with an emphasis on
submissiveness, dependence, and passivity. Therefore, when black battered women call the police, the police often do not see them as deserving victims (Sleutel 1998; Hampton et al. 2003).

Rather than call the police, African American abused women will often call on informal support networks for help (i.e. family members, friends). However, because many African Americans are also dealing with poverty there may be limited support available (Williams 1999). Because of this, African American women usually remain in abusive relationships longer than white women (Hampton et al. 2003). African American women are also more likely to kill their abusive partners than white women (Dawson and Langan 1994). Wells and DeLeon-Granados also documented this finding in an unpublished grant funded by the National Institute of Justice Research Services (2002). They found, though, that as more African American women sought formal help, the intimate homicide rate for them decreased.

Many abused women’s experiences also differ based on social class. Goetting (1999) found that, regardless of social class, the women she interviewed all experienced isolation, fear, self-blame, and humiliation. She also found that just because some of the women had money, their lives were not any easier in terms of dealing with the abuse. The women of higher social standing were often reluctant to call the police or seek help due to the embarrassment they might feel in their community. However, Nichols and Feltey (2003) found that lower class abused women felt that the option to leave an abusive relationship was only available to those individuals who had enough material resources to make it on their own. They did not have the options that women of higher social standing might have and therefore leaving a violent relationship posed additional
problems for them. Many of these women were focused on survival and they had to determine if living with violence everyday was worse than living in poverty. Unfortunately, lower income women not only perceive their options to leave an abusive relationship as more limiting, but are more at risk for being battered. Out of those women who are battered, at least 20 to 30 percent are currently receiving welfare (Plichta 1996).

Lastly, stories of abused women may differ somewhat based on the age of the woman. The control and abuse issues are similar regardless of age (Goetting, 1999). However, stories of teen dating violence show that many times abused teens are reluctant to seek help because they think this is normal dating behavior (Jackson, Cram, and Seymour 2000). A study of elderly abused women (Grunfeld, Larsson, MacKay, and Hotch 1996) found that due to the stigma associated with divorce within this cohort that these women were reluctant to seek help as well. These examples provide evidence that battered women are unique individuals and should be treated in that way. Researchers and social policy makers should not be quick to judge if a battered woman is a “real” battered woman if her actions do not fit preconceived notions of victimization. Because a battered woman decides to stay married to her abusive partner for 25 years does not mean that the abuse was not serious. Moreover, if a teenage abuse victim fails to recognize her dating partner’s behavior as abusive, it does not mean that she was not a victim of violence.

There are remarkable similarities across the stories of abused women. Research supports that battered women suffer severe abuse at the hands of their partners. These women are often socially isolated from support networks and are emotionally, verbally,
physically, and sexually abused on a regular basis. If they have children, they are often conflicted between leaving the relationship and having a father figure for their children (Sipe and Hall 1996; Walker 1989). Many of these women described their abusive partners in very similar ways – controlling, loving, abusive, and unpredictable. However, at the same time research also supports that battered women are a very diverse group. Based on their social location in society these women differ in their experiences with domestic violence. In this dissertation, I have tried to remain aware of these differences and avoided over-generalizing.

**Lived Experiences of Battered Women Who Got Out**

When people hear about a woman in a battering relationship, the most often asked question is, “why doesn’t she leave”? However, as I have stated before, most battered women do eventually leave their abusive relationships (Ferraro 1988). Unfortunately, society often does not recognize these attempts at leaving as legitimate because of the multiple times many battered women leave and then eventually return to the relationship. Researchers found that leaving an abusive relationship is a process rather than a single act (West and Merrit-Gray 1999; Anderson and Saunders 2003).

In their in-depth interviews with women who had been out of an abusive relationship for at least one year, West and Merrit-Gray (1999) found that leaving is a process that involves four stages and eventually ends in the woman reclaiming herself. These stages can be considered survival strategies for the battered woman. The first stage is “counteracting the abuse” and this involves giving up part of oneself and minimizing and denying the abuse. Society often looks down at this type of behavior and blames the woman for not recognizing the abuse. However, in order for the battered
woman to survive in such a violent relationship she must give up important parts of herself so she can put all of her energy into surviving each minute. During this stage the battered woman may also begin to distance herself from the abuser. She slowly begins removing herself from the relationship on a subconscious level. She now is able to move into the “breaking free stage” which is a trial and error stage of leaving and going back. During this stage if she is allowed to be away from home she may stay away longer than usual. She may continue to distance herself from her partner emotionally and physically. She may try leaving for a few days at a time.

The final stages of “not going back” and “moving on” are extremely hard work for the battered woman. She must worry about the abusive partner stalking and harassing her and therefore her safety as well as her family and friend’s safety is still an issue. She also must prove to society and herself that she made the right decision. This may be difficult if she and/or her family had strong views against divorce. She may constantly have to prove that she was a battered woman. She must learn how to negotiate the system and find out what resources are available and how to access these resources. This is also a time when she must start setting boundaries, making goals for the future, and finding a permanent place to live.

These stages of leaving are consistent with other research conducted on women who have left abusive relationships. When Anderson and Saunders (2003) did a review of articles on leaving abusive relationships they also concluded that getting out of a violent relationship was a process and that each time a battered woman left she learned new ways of coping which continued to strengthen her survival skills. Furthermore, these researchers found that the two key variables that predicted whether a woman would leave
her abusive partner were whether she had adequate financial resources and her attachment to her partner (positive feelings). Other researchers have found that battered women often assessed the risks associated with leaving and planned accordingly (Davies, Lyon, and Monti-Cantania 1998). If a battered woman was able to employ adequate safety planning (i.e. filing for divorce, finding employment, finding safe housing, and obtaining protection/restraining orders) she was more likely to leave. This risk assessment and safety planning often fluctuated as the woman’s hopes and fears increased or decreased. Lastly, help and validation from informal and formal sources of support were very important predictors of how successful a battered woman was in ending her relationship (Senter and Caldwell 2002).

Unfortunately, for those women who were unable to get out of their battering relationships one of two things sometimes occurs. Either the battered woman is eventually killed by her partner or the battered woman defends herself against her partner and kills/tries to kill him (Walker 1984; Browne 1987). One of the first studies to look at battered women who killed was conducted by Browne (1987). She did a comparison of 42 battered women who killed/attempted to kill their partners with 205 battered women who had not killed. She found that the main difference between these two groups was with the abusive men, not the women. The abusive men who were killed had more drug and alcohol problems, were more likely to come from homes where they had either witnessed abuse or been victims of child abuse, were more violent towards others, inflicted more severe and frequent abuse on their victims (especially sexual abuse), and threatened their victims more often than those abusive partners who were not killed. All of the studies (Browne 1987; Walker 1989; Beattie and Shaugnessy 2000;
Gagnè 1998; Leonard 2000) where battered women who have killed were interviewed confirm the existence of severe abuse, bizarre and horrific sexual abuse, and an escalation of violence in the relationship.

The more frequent and severe abuse coupled with the constant threats to their lives led many battered women in Browne’s (1987) homicide group to conclude that their lives were in grave danger. They talked about receiving excruciating beatings when they were caught trying to leave. She compared the abuse the homicide women endured to the techniques used on prisoners of war. These women suffered extreme isolation and humiliation with intermittent periods of caring by the abuser. Moreover, the threat of brutal beatings was always present if the women did not do what the abuser wanted them to do all the time. Gagnè (1998) also used this comparison in her study of battered women who killed. She found that it is not unusual for the battered woman to become so connected to the abuser due to a necessity for survival that she starts viewing things from the perspective of the abusive partner. She becomes very aware of his behavior and state of mind and therefore can be very in tune to abrupt behavior changes that might signal danger to her.

The seriousness of the situation was apparent to many women towards the end of the relationship and they felt they would be the one to die (Browne 1987; Beattie & Shaughnessy 2000; Walker 1989; Gagnè 1998). The killings usually happened in the midst of an attack or during the tension phase when the women knew that a huge blow-up was in the near future (Browne 1987; Walker 1989; Gagnè 1998). The women in Browne’s study (1987) continually stated in their interviews, “I didn’t mean to kill him! I only meant to warn him or stop him from hurting me” (p. 160).
Overwhelmingly, the studies on battered women who kill reveal that these women sought help from informal as well as formal sources of help and were unsuccessful (Browne 1987; Walker 1989; Gagnè 1998; Beattie and Shaughnessy 2000). Walker (1984) stated that many of the women she interviewed felt they were completely on their own and had only themselves to rely on for survival. She also found that the more isolated the victim was from family and friends, the more likely a lethal confrontation would occur.

**Lived Experiences of Incarcerated Battered Women**

Previous research on life in prison has focused solely on the experiences of men. It has not been until recently that researchers began to investigate what life was like for women in prison (Owen 1998). Even though the percentage of women who kill their intimate partners has remained roughly the same over the years (United States Department of Justice 2000), the actual number of women incarcerated for a variety of offenses (specifically related to drugs) has increased. This increase has stemmed from a crackdown on drug related offenses which often target lower income, racial minority women (Owen 1998). Much of the current research examines life in prison for all women (not just those who kill their partners).

There were several key studies in the 1960s about women’s experiences in prison and these studies all found that life was very different for incarcerated women when compared to incarcerated men (Ward and Kassebaum 1965; Giallombardo 1966). In Barbara Owen’s (1998) book on survival in a woman’s prison, she conducted ethnographic research at the Central California Women’s Facility, which is the largest women’s prison in the United States. She found that women’s experiences in prison were
greatly affected by their lives outside of prison, in particular extremely high rates of victimization prior to prison. At least 80 percent of the women in her sample reported some type of abuse in their past (most often physical and sexual abuse).

Because of the huge rate of victimization prior to incarceration, it is not uncommon for many women in prison to comment that it is safer within the prison walls than outside (Owen 1998; Bradley and Davino 2002). Bradley and Davino (2002) found that the majority of the women they interviewed in their sample of 65 incarcerated women stated that prison was the safest place they had ever been. The higher the victimization rate, the more likely the women were to report feeling safer in prison. However, most of these women still commented that they did not want to remain in prison, even if they did feel safer there than on the outside.

Current problems with overcrowding in the prison have dramatically affected the situation for female inmates. At the time of Owen’s (1998) study, the California Correctional Facility was at 200 percent of its initial capacity. Other researchers have found similar situations (Chasnoff 2004) where women prisoners described being piled on top of each other with five to six women in a cell and no privacy.

The overcrowding and lack of privacy greatly affects how women spend their time in prison. Many women focus on their relationships outside of prison (especially their relationships with their children) to help get them through the day. Owen (1998) found that 80 percent of women in her sample reported having children and their relationships with their children provided a great source of motivation to do their time and get out. Many women spoke of the importance of maintaining their relationships with their children through phone calls, letters, and visits. However, visits and phone calls were
often difficult because of tensions with other family members and children not
derstanding why their mothers are in prison. Within the prison system conversations
about children were revered and all the women seemed to have an understanding that
when other women talked about their children it was their job to listen and not judge
(Owen 1998; Hunter 2005).

Women's gender socialization plays out in the relationships they develop within the
prison walls. Interviews with incarcerated women revealed that women bond together
and form families. For instance, they might have a play family of a mother caretaking for
a child, a brother watching after his kid sister, or a dad taking care of monetary
responsibilities. The women will take on these roles and act them out. Also friendships
are formed in prison (Gagné 1998), as well as same-sex romantic relationships.
Sometimes these relationships are mutually respectful, however, others can be
exploitative (Owen 1998).

Even though there is severe overcrowding in the prisons and many women talked
about the humiliation of strip searches (Gagné 1998) and having to go to the bathroom as
others watched (Chasnof 2004), incarcerated women do not report conflicts over race
while in prison. When asked about racial tension in the prison, women in Owen's (1998)
ethnographic study with over one hundred women incarcerated at the Central California
Women's facility stated it really was not an issue. According to these women they
focused more on doing their time and getting out so they can see their children. This is
very different in the male prison culture where race does seem to be a major factor in
fights. However, according to Owen, within the women's prison system there is very
little racial segregation and race is only used as a last resort to really make someone mad

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(p. 154). At the same time women reported arguments over resources and that staff would choose people based on race to do certain jobs that would accord them more privileges.

Focusing on incarcerated battered women who had killed/attempted to kill their partners, Gagnè (1998) reported that these women struggled with the reality of being in a "total institution" (Goffman 1961). Most battered women who kill do not have previous criminal records and have never been to prison (Browne 1987; Walker 1989). Therefore, they are in shock, terrified, and have no idea what to expect. After coming from horrendous abusive relationships, they are once again victimized and humiliated in prison. One woman in Gagnè's (1998) sample stated that any ounce of dignity she had prior to incarceration was removed during her time in prison. Gagnè (1998) also reported that battered women in her sample dealt with their incarceration differently depending on their age. Older women reported feeling mortified and started friendships with women who were like themselves in order to survive. Middle-aged battered women relied on friendships, as well as formal support groups. Younger women had a sole focus on individual survival and felt that prison was just another place where they would have to endure continued abuse. Because these younger women were already "hardened", prison became a place where they continued to put up more walls in order to survive.

Women with histories of abuse report that support groups for battered women are excellent places for victimized women to learn how to empower themselves. This may be one of the first times they have been able to reflect on who they are and begin to take care of themselves. However, empowerment through battered women's support groups in prison is a difficult task because these women are living in an institution where they
have no control. Women in Gagnè’s (1998) sample reported abuses from correctional officers and some had to learn how to stand up for themselves even if it meant others became angry with them. As many of these women were able to assert themselves they began to see themselves as survivors rather than continuing the victim role (Gagnè 1998).

**Lived Experiences of Previously Incarcerated Battered Women**

There have only been two studies to date that have explored life after clemency for previously incarcerated battered women (Gagnè 1998; Beattie and Shaughnessy 2000). These two studies explored the lived experiences of clemency recipients who had been incarcerated in Ohio and Kentucky. Gagnè (1998) conducted her interviews between 1990 and 1994 with eleven women who were granted clemency in Ohio. She interviewed these women at varying stages after release from prison. Beattie and Shaughnessy (2000) interviewed nine of the clemency recipients from Kentucky in 1995 shortly after their release from prison. Both studies revealed that adjustment after prison for these women was not easy.

One of the most difficult things the clemency women had to deal with was having a prison record. Due to the fact that in both states the sentences of the women were commuted, not pardoned, their felony convictions stayed with them. This influenced everything in their lives outside of prison from gaining employment to obtaining adequate housing to how individuals (family, friends, and community workers) related to them. In Gagnè’s (1998) sample none of the women were able to go back to the places where they were employed prior to their incarceration due to their felony convictions. In
both studies the women talked about how finding employment was one of the most difficult challenges and that they relied heavily on family for financial support after release from prison.

Finding adequate housing is directly related to finding employment. One of the conditions of leaving prison is often to report the address where you will live outside of prison. For many women, this is the only pre-release planning they are given (O’Brien 2001). Most of the women in both studies reported living with family after release. However, there were a couple of women who had no family and had to rely on halfway homes. The women that stayed at halfway homes had been in prison most of their lives for killing their abusive step-fathers and had a very difficult time adjusting to life outside of prison since that was the life they knew best (Gagnè 1998).

Another major hurdle the clemency recipients had to deal with was reuniting with their children. In some cases, due to parole conditions, the women were not allowed to see their children. In other situations the children were still very angry and blamed their mothers for their own victimization by their father, step-father, or mother’s boyfriend. Some women dealt with older children who had become caught up in their own abusive relationships and these women had to figure out how to help in a way that was not too aggressive. The women tried very hard to reconnect with their children, but it was not something that came easily. This is supported in other research on the mothering practices of previously incarcerated women (Hunter 2005).

Some women also had to contend with the family of the abusive partners they had used violence against. One woman in Beattie and Shanessa’y’s (2000) study reported that due to parole conditions she could not contact her abuser’s family, however, they
continued to contact her through harassing phone calls. Another clemency recipient from Ohio talked about the fear of seeing her abusive partner who had survived the attack. Because of victim’s rights, he was contacted when she was let out of prison, yet, she had no protection from him (Gagnè 1998).

These women also had to deal with the decision of whether to get involved in another intimate relationship. The majority of the clemency women talked at great length about their fear of commitment and mistrust of everyone. One woman spoke of still wearing her wedding ring because she still felt controlled by her husband even though he was dead (Beattie and Shaunessy 2000). Some women from both studies ended up in abusive relationships again. Some of these women were able to get out of these relationships, while others were still trying to figure out how to disentangle themselves from the vicious cycle of abuse. Gagnè (1998) reported that the women who had abusive childhoods (especially sexual abuse) had an extremely hard time moving into a life with no abuse. Many of the women chose not to have any intimate relationships because of a lack of trust.

Granting clemency to incarcerated battered women is only a small step in providing justice for battered women who defend themselves. Because of their felony convictions it is not easy for these women to enter back into society. They are continually victimized over and over again as they are denied employment, housing, and custody of their children, repeatedly reinforcing the fact that they are on their own. Prior to incarceration, many of these women dealt with poverty, racism, and sexism. Post-prison they face the same barriers, and now they have a felony conviction to contend with as well (Richie 2001). Gagnè (1998) found that support groups during prison time aided in the
reintegration of women back into society post-prison. However, Richie (2001) reported the counseling, support groups, mental and physical health care, and educational/employment services that prisons offer are minimal. Many of the women (incarcerated for a variety of offenses, not just killing/attempting to kill an abusive partner) in her study stated that they were not prepared at all for life after prison. They suffered from post-traumatic stress disorder, multiple mental and physical health issues, and had difficulty maintaining sobriety.

This dissertation focuses on incarcerated and previously incarcerated battered women who applied for clemency in a mid-western state in 1990. The battered women who received clemency are an important group to study because there has been little information to date on what happens to women after clemency. The two studies cited above (Gagné 1998; Beattie and Shaunessy 2000) only talked about life after clemency shortly after the women were released from prison. There has been no follow-up with these women since that time. Follow-up with these women would allow comparisons between their lives directly after release from prison and 15 years later. For instance, many of the women struggled with mental health problems right after they were released from prison (Gagné 1998; Beattie and Shaunessy 2000). By following up with these women it would allow us to see if the women are still struggling with the same issues or if new problems have arisen during this time.

The women who applied for clemency and did not receive it are also an important group to study because these women dealt with battering in their relationships as well, but were not “vindicated” with early release from prison. What makes these women different from those who were granted clemency? How have they dealt with being
denied clemency and having to remain in prison? How has this decision affected their prison time? All of these questions are critical to understanding the lived experiences of battered women and clemency.

**Theoretical Perspectives**

There have been a variety of theoretical perspectives used to make sense of spousal abuse. Initially, psychological perspectives were popular and were used to explain why a batterer might abuse his/her partner, as well as why a victim would stay in an abusive relationship (Snell, Rosenwald, and Robey 1964). If the focus is on the abuser these theories stated that the violence can be explained by the abusive partner’s severe mental problems. There has been some support for this as research has found that abusive partners are more likely to suffer from anti-social personality disorder than the general population (Gondolf 1999). However, this theory also focused on the victim and assumes that she stays in the relationship because she has severe emotional problems as well, including masochism (Snell et al. 1964). The major problem with this theory is its emphasis on blaming the victim.

Other perspectives that have been used to explain domestic violence have been stress theories. These theories state that abusive behavior in the home stems from everyday life stressors. Because domestic violence affects lower-income families at a higher rate (Raphael 2000), some researchers believe that arguing about money, childcare, and employment leads to more stress which could lead to an increase in alcohol and drug abuse (often associated with domestic violence) and an increase in violence.

While these theories recognize some of the reasons why domestic violence might occur, they unfortunately do not get the whole picture. Psychological theories can be
victim-blaming and stress theories do not highlight the gendered nature of domestic abuse. I used two different perspectives to guide this study, feminist theory and life course theory. Feminist theory allows me to focus on how the structure affects the individual. Life course theory permits me to understand the connection between the structure and the individual and how what happens at one point in time greatly influences life chances and outcomes later in life.

**Feminist Theory & Battered Women Who Kill.** Feminist researchers have been at odds with family violence researchers in terms of how each defines domestic violence. Family violence researchers stress that domestic violence is a family problem (Straus, Gelles, and Steinmetz 1980; Straus 1989). According to them, violence in the home encompasses violence against children, marital partners, the elderly, and siblings. It is a family issue and there is gender symmetry involved in the violence. Mutual violence in adult relationships is the focus and was supported by survey research findings that both males and females use violence in their intimate relationships (Straus and Gelles 1986). Feminists have challenged this claim by pointing out that the context is extremely important. The violence that men inflicted on women was more severe, more frequent, and led to more injuries. Furthermore, the abuse by men was used for power and control purposes, whereas the violence used by women was generally to defend themselves (Currie 1998).

Feminist researchers define family violence as a gender problem (Kurz 1989, 1997; Smith 1990; Erez and King 2000). They disagree with the statement that men and women are equally violent and stress that women are overwhelmingly the victims of
domestic violence. They stress that domestic violence is about the patriarchal structure of society where men have more power than women, and major institutions legitimatize this inequality (Smith 1990). Because of the lack of power women have in society, feminists group domestic violence with rape and other crimes against women as “violence against women” (Kurz 1989).

Feminists feel that the lack of power women experience is implicated in such problems as lack of affordable childcare and the wage gap. All women in our society have to deal with these inequities. However, the situation is exacerbated by those experiencing domestic violence in three ways. First, studies have shown that one way the batterer controls his partner is by isolating her. Therefore, battered women have to deal with the inequalities in society without adequate support systems. Second, because previous researchers have promoted the idea of battered women having psychological problems (Walker 1979), often these women are not taken seriously when they do ask for help. Third, dealing with intimate violence on a day-to-day basis makes life even more stressful for battered women (Daley Pagelow 1981).

Feminist researchers state that violence is used as a way to control women (Dobash and Dobash 1979; Walker 1984). Feminists view battered women who have killed as victims of multiple types of abuse. These women were abused by their partners and abused by an unsympathetic society. Because our social institutions are patriarchal in nature, they help reinforce the notion that violence against women is acceptable (Kurz 1989). Even though many police departments have implemented specialized training, Ferraro (1989) states that they are still reluctant to see domestic violence as a serious problem. Moreover, the legal system still succumbs to stereotypes of battered women
and violent relationships. Erez and King (2000) conducted a study of attorneys in Northeast Ohio interviewing them about the legal defenses used when representing men who had battered their partners. They found that defense attorneys used the following defenses: blame the woman, saying she started the violent incident; the abuse was an accident; the woman was mentally unstable; and the woman was trying to gain something, such as the house and or children. They also found that attorneys were more apt to use these defenses (especially that the violence was an accident) when the woman was poor or not considered credible (e.g. the woman was drunk, on drugs, hysterical). Many of the attorneys thought the women were making up the abuse and questioned the legitimacy of the alleged acts of violence.

The institution of marriage is also not exempt from playing a part in condoning violence against women. Throughout history, marriage was seen as an exchange of property, and women were thought of as men’s property (Schneider 1980). This notion of women as property has changed; however, the underlying idea that men should be the powerful one in the marital relationship has remained. Studies still find that men’s primary role in the family is one of provider and major decision maker (Kurz 1995).

Because women have been socialized into a more passive role than men, some researchers (Walker 1979) have mistakenly reported that battered women are passive victims. Feminists disagree with the claim that battered women are passive. Rather, feminists focus on the survival skills many battered women use in order to live in a violent relationship. For example, Gondolf (1988) proposes a survivor theory where battered women are seen as using coping strategies that unfortunately were not successful due to structural barriers they encountered when they tried to get help. Therefore, instead
of focusing on the psychological problems of the battered woman, he focused on social inequalities at the structural level.

One last problem feminists have encountered has been a stereotyped view used to define the battered woman. Early domestic violence researchers focused on white, middle-class, heterosexual women. They did this so the battered woman would be seen as a legitimate social problem in society (Rothenberg 2002). However, the lack of research and attention to other victims of domestic violence has been detrimental to battered women who did not fit this description (Loseke 1992). Feminists feel it is very important to look at the intersections of race, class, gender, and sexual orientation (Hill Collins 1998; Rothenberg 2003; Bograd 1999). This dissertation takes into account how race, class, gender, and sexual orientation have affected the lives of the battered women who kill.

**Life Course Theory and Battered Women Who Kill.** Life course theorists are interested in how events early in life affect life choices and outcomes later in life. Specifically, they are interested in four themes (Elder 1994). The first theme is how one’s birth cohort affects life chances. For instance, a woman born in the 1940s will have different opportunities than a woman born in the 1970s. Her options for education and employment as well as societal attitudes about marriage and children will greatly affect what road she goes down. Another area that is of interest to life course theorists is how the timing of certain events in people’s lives (i.e. marriage, birth of children, schooling) affect their life chances later in life. Many women who end up in battering relationships were married and had children at very early ages (Raphael 2000). This in turn had an effect on their educational opportunities and often made them dependent financially on
their abuser. An additional theme focuses on intergenerational connections. For example, how my parents were raised affected me and what happens in my life will affect my children. Lastly, life course theorists emphasize that people have agency; that is, life does not just happen to them, but instead they make choices within the constraints encountered in their lives (Elder 1994).

Using a life course perspective, Macmillan (2001) found that because victimization generally happens early in life it affects key areas of development and greatly alters one’s life chances. He found that most victimization happened within the home and this had devastating consequences for the victims because it altered their sense of trust. Williams (2003) agreed with the idea that abuse in childhood has drastic affects throughout the lifecourse for individuals. She stated that family violence is a process and its effects are chronic (p.443). Furthermore, victims of childhood abuse are likely to still suffer from psychological problems stemming from the abuse they experienced even as they enter into adulthood (Macmillan 2001).

This early victimization also affected victim’s life trajectories with criminal and deviant behavior (Macmillan 2001). This supports the research on incarcerated women and victimization. According to numerous studies the majority of women in prison have been victims of multiple abuses throughout their lives (Owen 1998; Bradley and Davino 2002). Moreover, research has found that individuals who had been victimized in the early years of their lives were more likely to enter into abusive relationships in adulthood (Macmillan 2000; Williams 2003). The majority of the battered women who received clemency in Kentucky and Ohio had histories of abuse in their childhoods (Beattie and Shaunessy 2001; Gagnè 1998).
Childhood victimization also affects educational attainment which subsequently affects socioeconomic status. When children are traumatized it alters their sense of safety and security and makes it difficult for them to concentrate and learn. Also, many child abuse victims miss days of school because of injuries. Educational deficiencies make it hard for them to succeed financially later in life (Macmillian 2001).

Lastly, victimization early on alters one's sense of self-efficacy and makes it difficult for them to establish trust (Macmillan 2001; Williams 2003). Gagné (1998) found this with some of the clemency recipients from Ohio. Those with childhoods filled with abuse had a harder time adjusting to life without abuse. A majority of these women also spoke of a fear of commitment and lack of trust in intimate relationships. According to Macmillan (2001), victimization early on in life alters the sense of agency that Elders (1994) described. A victimized person no longer feels that he/she has a lot of control over what happens to them in life and they often do not feel that they are safe anywhere (Williams 2003).

However, some studies have found that trauma does not always lead to negative consequences in one's life course. Experiencing any type of trauma in one's life (i.e. criminal victimization, death of a loved one, or a natural disaster) is initially accompanied by some form of psychological distress. Tedeschi and Calhoun (2004) found that for some individuals the distress experienced initially may give way to positive changes in the person’s life. They call this posttraumatic growth and define it as “positive psychological change experienced as a result of the struggle with highly challenging life circumstances” (p.1). Furthermore, posttraumatic growth does not always happen in a linear fashion. They state it is both a “process and an outcome” (Tedeschi, Park, and
Calhoun 1998, p. 1). Finally, posttraumatic growth requires growth beyond what the person had prior to the trauma. It is not that the person simply goes back to the way he/she was before the trauma, but instead the changes he/she sees in his/herself are so significant that he/she has surpassed where he/she was before. Tedeschi and Calhoun (2004) describe the after affects of an earthquake to posttraumatic growth. The entire structure is shaken and as the buildings are repaired, the structure of the city often ends up being stronger than what it was prior to the earthquake. The same could be said for some individuals who experience trauma.

Posttraumatic growth encompasses the person’s feelings of gratitude toward life. He/she may now spend time appreciating many of the things he/she had not done prior to the trauma. Along with this appreciation for life is the need to spend more quality time with loved ones, an awareness of who one’s true friends are in hard times, and a more compassionate self towards others who have been through the same trauma.

Posttraumatic growth also allows the person to view his/herself as a strong survivor. Interestingly, this view of self as strong is often conflicted against the view that he/she is quite vulnerable. For instance, he/she made it through this trauma, but the potential is there that another trauma could strike. This awareness of strength and vulnerability many times leads a trauma victim to use what he/she had gone through to help others. Because he/she has gained this clandestine knowledge about such things as being a rape victim, a battered woman, or an ex-felon it opens the door to new paths in one’s life. Finally, posttraumatic growth allows for growth in one’s spirituality. A person may have already had a deep sense of spiritual awareness prior to the trauma and the trauma served to strengthen this spiritual connection. On the other hand, this spiritual growth may come in
the form of a spiritual awakening where he/she now feels connected to something greater than his/herself (Tedeschi and Calhoun 2004; Tedeschi et al. 1998).

Surprisingly, this growth does not necessarily mean the hurt and distress from the trauma is gone. The person often experiences pain at the same time that they experience growth. It is a paradox of grieving, loss, and bereavement accompanied by a new idea of self as strong, an eagerness to help others, a spiritual awakening, and an admiration for life that was not there before. Through this dialectical struggle comes a wisdom that was not there before (Tedeschi et al. 1998) and all of these things combined entail posttraumatic growth (Tedeschi and Calhoun 2004).

In summary, life course perspective and feminist perspective are used in the current study on battered women who spent time in prison. Feminist theory provides an understanding of the relationship between patriarchy and female victimization. Qualitative research on battered women indicated that the courts, police, and hospital staff often do not recognize the severity of intimate violence and often blame the victim (Sipe and Hall 1996; Beattie and Shaunessy 2001; Gagné 1998). Life course theory provides a framework for examining women’s lives over time, and an understanding of the timing of life events such as victimization. Further, feminist theory and life course theory together redirect attention to the agency of battered women, at the same time that previous life experiences often constrain their options. These two theoretical perspectives will guide my analysis of battered women who offend and their experiences with clemency. Chapter III addresses the research design and methods used for this dissertation.
CHAPTER III
RESEARCH DESIGN

The research problem central to this dissertation is how formerly imprisoned, as well as currently incarcerated, battered women who applied for clemency in the early 1990s have negotiated their lives in the 15 years since the clemency decision. For example, how has the clemency decision affected their interactions with others, their sense of self, and their emotional and physical well-being? How have their experiences of being battered, killing or attempting to kill their partners, serving prison time, and applying for clemency shaped these women’s lives? I am interested in issues related to mental and physical health, relationships with family and friends, sources of social support, and sense of self.

This study was longitudinal, and included two secondary data sets (1990 and 1992-94) and a third data set I collected in 2004-2005. The first wave of data included transcriptions of in-depth interviews conducted by Vicki Sussman with 20 women incarcerated in a mid-western state in 1990 (Feltey 1990). Between 1992 and 1994, Dr. Patricia Gagnè, a professor at the University of Louisville, collected data with 11 women previously incarcerated in the same mid-western state (four had been interviewed at Time I) (Gagnè 1998). The women in Gagnè’s study were granted clemency in 1990. Because
I was interested in the longitudinal nature of the data, I only included data from Time I and Time II with follow-up interviews. These two data sets provided the foundation for the data I collected at Time III. Table 3.1 shows how the interviews with the women who were granted clemency are linked together through the three data sets.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 3.1: Women Granted Clemency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Time I</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sarah</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carrie</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jackie</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teresa</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The focus of this third wave of data was on the lived experiences of formerly imprisoned battered women who were granted clemency and of currently incarcerated battered women who applied for, but were denied clemency. I conducted in-depth interviews with these two groups of women, asking the following questions:

1. What have their lives been like in the years since the clemency decision was made (i.e., family, friends, children, employment, physical/mental health)?

2. How has their sense of self been affected by their experiences with battering, criminal offending, prison, and clemency?

3. How have they coped with life stressors since the clemency decision (i.e., what have their formal and informal sources of support been)?

The research design for the first two studies, including data analysis, was grounded in feminist theory, which I also used in this dissertation. To focus my analysis, I used specific themes from the first two data sets. From the Time I data, I used the women’s stories of their childhoods and their lives with their abusive partners. From the Time II
data I used the turning point to kill to their abusive partners, their entrance into prison and life in prison, and their lives post-prison. A description of the data follows in Table 3.2.

Table 3.2: Summary of the Data

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time I</th>
<th>Time II</th>
<th>Time III</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Date</strong></td>
<td>1990 Pre-clemency</td>
<td>1992-94 Post-clemency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Number (n)</strong></td>
<td>4 Childhood</td>
<td>6 Turning point to kill</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Themes Used</strong></td>
<td>4 Life with abusive partner</td>
<td>6 Time in Prison</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In this chapter, I discuss how I used feminist methodology to guide my data collection and analysis. Next, I provide a description of the first two data sets, followed by a discussion of the sampling and data collection strategies used to collect the third wave of data. Lastly, I end with a discussion of the data analysis.

**Feminist Methodology**

The goal for this dissertation was to understand how battered women who applied for clemency have negotiated and re-negotiated their life after they were granted or denied clemency. I did this by using feminist methodology. While there is not one type of feminist methodology (Ramazanoglu with Holland 2002), there are distinct principles that guide the use of feminist methodology (Fonow and Cook 1991; Acker, Barry, and Esseveed 1991).

A feminist framework helped me maintain awareness that there is an inevitable power hierarchy in research. Even though I would like to believe that I could conduct research without having a power differential between the interviewer and interviewee, I
do not think it is possible based on my social status (white, middle-class, educated) and the interviewee’s stigmatized social status as an incarcerated battered woman. However, I addressed these dynamics directly in my research and analysis. The reason I chose to interview these women was to hear their stories. I listened to what they had to say without judgment.

Feminist methodology was designed to challenge previous methodologies that have not taken women’s experiences into account (Acker, Barry, and Esseved 1991). Feminists have critiqued mainstream methods for not including women and for allowing traditional methods to be used in ways oppressive to women. Therefore, it is crucial that feminist researchers use methods that give women a voice and empower women.

Feminist methods require a critical analysis of the research process. Fonow and Cook (1991) introduced some of the basic principles of feminist methodology. It is essential that feminists be reflexive and re-examine the way their research affects them and their subjects. Furthermore, feminist methodology opens up the opportunity for action. It is not enough just to do research; feminist methods must also seek to change and/or make people more aware of inequalities in the existing social structures. Finally, feminist methods must incorporate the affective into their research. Feminist researchers must not ignore their emotional responses to their research, as well as their subject’s emotional responses to the research.

All of these components of feminist research have traditionally been devalued within the scientific community. The social sciences adopted the scientific method and began to devalue any research that was not seen as value-free. Many feminists feel that the devaluation of emotion and interpretation of feelings within the scientific community
has led to research that is androcentric (Hesse-Biber, Leavy, and Yaiser 2004). Research that conforms to the standards of white, middle to upper-class, heterosexual men has become the standard and anything that differs is considered non-scientific (Halphin 1989).

**Feminist Methodology: The Current Study**

I incorporated the components of feminist methodology into my study by using in-depth interviews to collect the data. Even though non-feminists use in-depth interviews, this research utilizes feminist methodology because I include the other things feminist researchers highlight (i.e. awareness of power dynamics, taking women’s experiences into account, allowing a critical analysis of the research process, and using research for social change). Feminist researchers remind us that the interview process should be like a conversation. It is not one-sided (Holstein and Gubrium 1985). Both the interviewer and interviewee go back and forth discussing and talking.

In-depth interviews were the preferred method for this dissertation because there has been little research in this area. There have been several studies on battered women who killed their partners (Browne 1987; Walker 1989; Busch 1999; Beattie and Shaugnessy 2000), but most of these studies have focused primarily on the abuse in the relationship and the events that led up to the killing. Since 1990, numerous states (Ohio, Maryland, Illinois, California, Massachusetts, Florida, Kentucky) have granted clemency to abused women in prison for killing their intimate partners (Gagnè 1998). However, we know very little about life for these women after the clemency decision with the exception of two studies: Gagnè’s (1998) clemency study and Beattie and Shaunessy’s (2000) study.
I used an interview format referred to as semi-structured or semi-standardized (Berg 2001). Using this type of interview I had some set questions I asked each woman. However, the interview was open to changes and continual probes. As I conducted the interviews, I analyzed and reassessed the research continuously. For example, in my initial interviews some of the women kept repeatedly bringing up issues of rehabilitation (or lack of) in prison, as well as their discontent with the parole board and prison staff. I then began to add questions in my later interviews on these topics even though they were not a part of my original questions.

Lastly, in order to incorporate feminist methods into my data collection, I allowed the women’s true voices to be heard (Riessman 1987). This means that I did not change the interview responses so they sounded more objective or “readable” (Riessman 1987, p.189). It was important that I did not take the voice away from the women I interviewed by changing their words so they sounded more grammatically correct or followed a particular prescribed logic. Many of the women talked in slang or would jump from talking about their lives in prison to their childhoods to the abuse they experienced prior to prison. It often times would have been easier to interject and ask them to talk about their lives in a linear fashion. However, since the goal of this research project was to provide these women the opportunity to share their stories, it was extremely important that I allowed the women to do this without too much control from me. I did provide a framework for the interview, but I also let the women talk freely within that structure.

**Sample Diversity: Time I and Time II**

**Time I.** The first wave of data included interviews with 20 women who were incarcerated in a mid-western state in February of 1990. I only used 4 of the 20
interviews because these women were later interviewed at Time II and/or Time III. The sample at Time I consisted of women who were involved or had previously been involved in domestic violence programming at the prison. Also included in the sample were any women who were on waiting lists for these programs, but had not yet attended any groups. Out of this sample, case managers were asked to identify inmates who would be willing to participate in the study.

The twenty participants were chosen based on their crime and their race (10 were black, 9 were white, and 1 was biracial) to make sure the sample was diverse. Three of the women included in this dissertation were black and one was white. At the time of the interview the four women’s ages ranged from 23 to 55. All four of the women were single. The number of children the four women had ranged from 0 to 6.

These women were asked to discuss their experiences with abuse throughout their lives, the crime they committed, and their feelings about being in prison. The interviews lasted between one to two hours and took place in the prison in a private room.

**Time II.** The second wave of data was collected between 1992 through 1994. Time II data consisted of in-depth interview with 11 battered women who were previously incarcerated and then received clemency. For this dissertation, I used 6 of the 11 women, because these six had either previously been interviewed at Time I or were interviewed later at Time III. These women were interviewed shortly after their release from prison between 1992 and 1994. Seven of the women were black and four were white. The average age was 46, with the youngest being 29 and oldest being 64. The six women in my sample from the Time II data included one white woman and five black women. Their ages at the time interview ranged from 28 to 58, with the average of 41 years. The
Time II women were interviewed at a place of their choosing (home, restaurant, coffee shop). The interviews lasted approximately 1-3 hours.

The data gathered on the women at Time II included information on these women’s experiences with domestic violence and the crimes they committed, the court proceedings, their life while in prison, the clemency process, their own personal awareness of family violence issues, and how being a battered woman who received clemency affected their identities. There was also some information about their life after release from prison (several months up to four years).

The Sample: Time III

For the Time III data, I used purposive sampling since I was interested in in-depth descriptive information about a specific group. My original plan was to include only those women who had applied for and received clemency in 1990. I felt these women were a unique population to study because their crime was redefined as a result of the clemency movement. In releasing them from prison, the Governor stated that these battered women acted in self-defense and were wrongfully incarcerated for their acts of violence against their abusive partners. Furthermore, this mid-western state was the first state to have a mass clemency movement for battered women. Lastly, there has been little follow-up on life after prison for women granted clemency.

I received Institutional Review Board (IRB) Approval from the Office of Research Services and Sponsored programs in May 2004 (see Appendix A) and I started the search for the women who had been granted clemency in 1990. I obtained the names of the women who applied for clemency in a mid-western state in 1990 through newspaper articles written during that time period. Many of the women interviewed at Time II
stated they had become advocates for victims of domestic violence due to their own experiences with abuse. Based on this information, I decided it might be fruitful to send letters to all domestic violence shelters in this state asking if any of the clemency recipients were currently working or volunteering at any of the shelters.

In November 2005, I was able to find one of the clemency women via these letters. This interview led to another, beginning a snowball sample as she (clemency recipient number one: Allison) led me to another clemency recipient (Jackie) and provided professional contacts to help locate additional clemency women. Both women provided me with the name of a woman who is involved with a battered women’s shelter and who frequently volunteers in the prison system. They both had met this woman during the clemency process and have stayed in close contact with her since their release from prison. This expert witness became invaluable, as she became my “go-to” person for finding additional clemency recipients. One month later this professional contact led me to another clemency recipient (Emma), who I was able to interview in December 2005.

However, even with help from this expert witness, it became increasingly difficult to locate any other women who received clemency. Women released from prison often have a difficult time finding stable employment and adequate housing, therefore they are apt to move around a lot. Moreover, some of the women may have remarried and changed their names. Lastly, some of the women may not want to be found. Due to the fact that I had only been able to successfully locate and interview three clemency recipients, I decided to broaden my sample to include women who had applied for clemency in this mid-western state in 1990, but were denied. My sampling frame now consisted of the 94 women who applied for clemency and were denied. The women
denied clemency were also a unique population to study because there is no research to date on women denied clemency.

I was able to locate the names of the women who were denied clemency through newspaper articles. I then visited the state’s Department of Rehabilitation and Correction’s website to find out if these women were still incarcerated. I found 14 of the women who were denied clemency were still incarcerated. Because there was a change in my original research plan, I had to submit a change of protocol to the University IRB board. They approved my amended research plan in January 2005 (see Appendix B). However, I still needed approval from the state’s Department of Rehabilitation and Corrections research board. I finally gained entrée to the prison system in June 2005 (see Appendix C). Out of the 14 women currently incarcerated, 11 agreed to talk with me. I completed these interviews in August 2005.

Sample Diversity: Time III

The final sample for this third wave data consisted of 16 women who applied for clemency in a mid-western state in 1990. Four of the women were granted clemency; the remaining 12 were denied clemency. The women granted clemency ranged in age from 38 to 75, the women denied clemency ranged in age from 36 to 54. All of the women who received clemency as African American; only four of the women denied clemency identifying are African American. The remaining eight women who were denied clemency are white. Four women from each group stated they had no children. The others had between 1 to 6 children. One woman denied clemency was released from prison five years ago and is currently on parole. The rest of the denied clemency group are serving life sentences. One of the clemency recipients was back in prison for two
years on a felonious assault charge. The other three who received clemency have had no criminal problems since release from prison. A detailed description of the demographic characteristics of the sample from all three data sets can be found in Tables 3.3 and 3.4.
Table 3.3: Description of Women Denied Clemency

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Women Denied Clemency</th>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Age at Interview</th>
<th>Educational Level</th>
<th># of Children</th>
<th>Conviction</th>
<th>Sentence</th>
<th># of Years Served at Interview</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pattie</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>GED</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Murder</td>
<td>15 to Life</td>
<td>16 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alecia</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>High School Diploma</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Aggravated Murder</td>
<td>20 to Life</td>
<td>18 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cindy</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>GED</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Aggravated Murder &amp; Abuse of Corpse</td>
<td>15 to Life</td>
<td>18 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karen</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>Some college</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Aggravated Murder</td>
<td>20 to Life</td>
<td>16 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lauren</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>10\textsuperscript{th} grade</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Aggravated Murder</td>
<td>Life</td>
<td>20 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Angie</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>Some college</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Murder</td>
<td>15 to Life</td>
<td>15 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Martha</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>8\textsuperscript{th} grade</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Aggravated Murder</td>
<td>Life</td>
<td>23 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Raquel</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>Associate’s degree</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Aggravated Murder</td>
<td>20 to Life</td>
<td>15 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Veronica</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>Some college</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Murder &amp; 2 counts Felonious Assault</td>
<td>23 to Life</td>
<td>20 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Katrina</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>Some college</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Murder</td>
<td>15 to Life</td>
<td>17 years*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Natalie</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>Some college</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Petty Theft, Aggravated Murder &amp; Aggravated Robbery</td>
<td>Life</td>
<td>25 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Linda</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>Some college</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Aggravated Murder</td>
<td>15 to Life</td>
<td>10 Years**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Katrina was released 2 days after her interview. ** Linda had been out of prison for 5 years at the time of her interview.

Table 3.4: Description of Women Granted Clemency

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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<th></th>
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<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Carrie</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td></td>
<td>White</td>
<td>28 (1994)</td>
<td>Some college</td>
<td>2 (after prison)</td>
<td>Murder (plea bargain)</td>
<td>15 to Life</td>
<td>7 ½ years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sarah</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td></td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>52 (1994)</td>
<td>Some college</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Voluntary manslaughter (plea bargain)</td>
<td>5 to 15 years</td>
<td>5 years, 9 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allison</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td></td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>56 (2004)</td>
<td>Associate’s degree</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Aggravated murder for hire</td>
<td>23 to life</td>
<td>4 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emma</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td></td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>52 (2004)</td>
<td>Some college</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Manslaughter</td>
<td>15 to life</td>
<td>1 year, 4 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jackie</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td></td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>70 (2004)</td>
<td>Some college</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Murder</td>
<td>15 to life</td>
<td>10 years, 10 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teresa*</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td></td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>42 (2005)</td>
<td>8\textsuperscript{th}/9\textsuperscript{th} grade</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Murder</td>
<td>15 to life</td>
<td>8 ½ years</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* When Teresa was interviewed in 2005 she was back in prison on a charge of felonious assault and was sentenced to 2 years.

69
Interestingly, when looking at the racial differences between the women granted clemency compared to the women denied clemency it becomes apparent that there tends to be an overrepresentation of white women who were denied clemency. Furthermore, Ammons (2003) reported that the women who were granted clemency in this state in 1990 were more likely to be a racial minority. Yet, when looking at crime statistics for women offenders, African Americans tend to be over represented among women currently incarcerated for a variety of offenses (Pollock 1998) due to the fact that certain laws tend to target lower-income minorities (i.e. drug possession of crack) more so than other laws (Bloom, Chesney-Lind, and Owen 1994). Thus, it seems that with a racially biased criminal justice system more minorities should have been denied clemency and more white women should have received clemency.

A possible explanation is to consider racial and gender bias within our society and our criminal justice system in a different way. Unfortunately, our society may view the killing of a black man as less severe than the killing of a white man. Furthermore, research has found that African Americans are more often associated with some type of violent behavior (Hampton et al. 2003). The aggression from an African American female might be considered a more “normal” part of her culture than a white woman who is violent. In other words, in a racist, patriarchal society, to be a white female who kills a white male is seen as more deviant than a black woman who kills a black man.

An alternative explanation could stem from the idea that the clemencies were to right former wrongs. Because racism is an inherent part of our legal system, there is the chance that more innocent African Americans were sent to prison. However, if white women are serving time, they must deserve it. Thus, if a white woman is incarcerated
she must be really bad, but if an African American woman is incarcerated there is the chance that she could be innocent.

Interview Process

This study was exploratory since there is very little research on this topic. Intensive interviewing best fit this type of research. Before I started data collection for the third wave, I previewed the first two waves of data for background information.

Data collection for the third wave also included memo-writing or field notes (Charmaz 2004). This allowed me to write down my initial thoughts about each interview and compare it to earlier interviews. It also gave me a chance to reflect on my feelings about the interviews. Because I did this immediately after I completed an interview I did not forget important details that I might not have remembered if I waited until I transcribed the interviews.

Before beginning data collection, I conducted a pilot interview with a woman who had successfully left an abusive relationship in November of 2004. I was given this woman’s name and contact information from a colleague of mine who had interviewed her for another study. The pilot interview allowed me to practice my interviewing skills and assess how well the interview guide fit with the research questions. I realized from my pilot interview that the way I dress is very important to the success of the interview. I conducted this interview immediately after work, therefore I was dressed professionally and was wearing jewelry. At the end of the interview, this woman who had struggled her whole life with substance abuse issues, abusive relationships, and homelessness, commented on how beautiful my wedding ring and other jewelry I was wearing was to her. At that moment I realized that unintentionally I had just reinforced the status
differences between us. After I left that interview I became very conscious of these status symbols and became careful in what I chose to wear when I conducted my interviews. When I conducted my interviews I chose not to wear any jewelry, other than my gold wedding band. I also chose to dress casually (i.e. khakis or linen pants and a nice shirt). I tried to wear something that was professional, yet not intimidating to the women. While I did not use the pilot interview in my final analysis, it provided me with a wealth of information about the dynamics involved in the interviewing process, as well as whether my interview questions were easily understood.

The sixteen interviews conducted at Time III lasted on average between two-three hours, with two interviews lasting three and half hours. The interviews took place at a location designated by the respondent for those who had been released from prison (their home, restaurant, place of employment) or at one of four correctional facilities for women in this mid-western state for the incarcerated women. The interviews were semi-structured. I used an interview guide (see Appendix D), however, these interview questions remained flexible and were dictated by what the women felt were the most important areas in their lives that related to their prior experiences. The interviews were audio-taped (with permission of the respondent), and from these audiotapes, I transcribed the interviews. All of the women signed consent forms agreeing to be audio-taped. In addition to the audiotapes, I also took field notes after each interview.

My initial plan was to pay each woman $50 for her participation in this research. I was able to pay three of the clemency recipients; however, the Department of Rehabilitation and Corrections would not allow me to compensate the women in prison. They felt that any type of compensation could be seen as coercion because the women
were living in a total institution where they have no freedom. In fact, it took some persuasion with the prison staff to allow the women to have water and tissues during the interview. Two institutions refused to provide these for the women.

At the beginning of each interview, I provided the women with an informed consent form (see Appendix E). I read this aloud to the women and explained that their participation in the study was completely voluntary and that they could stop the interview at any point in time. I also made it clear to the women in prison that this interview would have no bearing on parole decisions and would not affect their sentence. The women were told that their names and all identifying information would be changed. I asked the women if they would like to pick their own pseudonym and all of them declined. However, several incarcerated women stated that they did not care if I used their real name. Due to confidentiality purposes and IRB stipulations, I used pseudonyms for all of the women interviewed.

I began the interview by telling each woman how I became interested in this topic. I tried to make it clear that I was interested in their stories and wanted to give voice to their experiences. I used the Time I and Time II data to guide my interviews with the women who had been interviewed at a previous point in time. I told the women who had been previously interviewed that I had background information on them from newspaper articles and other media sources. For the women where this was their first interview, I began the interview by having them briefly talk about their life prior to prison (childhood, life with abusive partner, incident that led to incarceration). Most of the women seemed to feel comfortable telling me their life story, which took on a common rhythm across interviews. After they provided me with a history of their life prior to incarceration, we
then moved to their life in prison, applying for clemency, and how the clemency decision affected them. For the women who were granted clemency a large portion of the interview focused on life after prison and readjusting to the free world. The central questions I addressed in my interviews asked the women about their relationships with others (friends, family, children); how their mental/physical health has been; how they have coped with life stressors (spirituality/religion, alcohol/drugs, exercise); and how everything they have been through has affected their sense of self. As my interviews progressed I also began adding questions about the programs available in prison, spirituality and religion, and their interactions with the prison staff.

At the end of the interviews, I gave the women a chance to ask me questions. Many of them asked me personal questions about my own relationships with my husband and family and I tried to be as honest as possible. I thanked the women for taking the time to talk to me and all of them stated it was incredibly empowering to be able to tell their story to someone who wanted to hear it. I later received letters from some of the women, once again thanking me for listening to their stories. For example, Pattie who shot her husband in a physical confrontation and has been in prison for 16 years wrote:

Your attentiveness to my life and survivor sisters brought them a glow and a sense of empowerment. Such a better gift no one could have gave them their entire lives! Doing a life sentence, feeling no one listened or cared is emotionally crippling...Your kindness will never be forgotten, Rachel. You made a difference in here. You believed in and listened to my lifer sisters. There's a sparkle in their eyes, their heads are held up and a new lightness in their hearts. Someone cared enough to come into this prison and hear them with their heart!

This sense of being heard and empowered is consistent with other research. Studies have found that when battered women have been able to talk about their abuse in a non-threatening environment it can be empowering for them (Gagnè 1998). The interview
allows them to recognize their strength and resilience as survivors (Nichols and Feltey 2003). I have worked at a battered woman’s shelter and have seen first-hand how women gain confidence and self-esteem once they realize they are not to blame for the abuse in their lives.

At the end of the interview I also provided the women with counseling referrals since many of the questions I asked led the women back through a difficult time in their lives. The majority of the women were very emotional throughout the interviews and I thought it was best if they had referrals for additional counseling if needed. For the women in prison I told them to seek out their mental health professional in the prison if the interview caused them any emotional strain. I was told by the Department of Rehabilitation and Corrections that there were trained mental health counselors available to the women in prison and the women would be able to see them if needed.

Upon completion of the interview I immediately spent time writing detailed field notes. I would generally be emotionally and physically exhausted, but in order to remember everything I knew I could not put it off. As I would drive home from the interviews I would process through what the women had talked about by talking out loud. I did tape-record my thoughts on one interview, but found by the time I got home I was too tired to listen to it. I found by just talking to myself I was able to remember my thoughts about the interviews so by the time I was able to write my field notes it was relatively easy to recall the fine points of the interview.

Methodological Issues and Concerns

Gender and Age of the Interviewer. I conducted all of the interviews in the Time III data. I found that the women seemed much more at ease with me because I was a female.
Since all of these women had been previously victimized by males throughout their lives, it might have been difficult for a male interviewer to gain their trust. In fact, one woman talked about having a male attorney and being scared of him because he was a man. She said that because of her fear she would not talk to him. Many of the women voiced these concerns about the male prison staff and said that because of their previous victimization it was extremely hard for them to trust men.

I also believe that my age helped me build rapport with the women in the interviews. Some commented that they expected me to be a lot older considering I was working on my doctorate. I think this provided the women with a bit of power within the interview process. Another surprise to me was that for most of the women with children I was close to their children’s age. All of the currently incarcerated women I interviewed had been in prison on average 15 to 20 years and when they came to prison their children were relatively young. I think with me being so close to their children’s ages, it was somewhat cathartic for them to be able to talk about the guilt and shame they felt with leaving or as some women stated “abandoning” their children.

Interviewing in a Prison. Gaining access to interview in a prison can be a tedious process. Fortunately, I did not encounter too many problems and it only took five months to secure access to the state prison system. I had access to all four of the women’s correctional institutions in this mid-western state and was told to talk to the warden’s assistant at each place to line up the interviews with the women. Some were very accommodating, while others took multiple phone calls, faxes, and e-mails to set up the interviews. Upon entering the prison I also had mixed experiences with the prison staff. The majority of the time I did not have too many problems securing a private,
confidential room in order to conduct the interviews. However, in one particular instance the warden’s assistant refused to leave the room. An excerpt from my field notes explains what happened and how frustrated I was in this situation:

As I went to start the interview, the warden’s assistant sat down in the room. I had to stop and tell her that I required a private, confidential room and that she could not be in the room during the interview. She became quite irate and told me that for all interviews she needed to be present for the safety of me and the prisoner. I told her it was a part of the consent that the prison gave me and gave her contact people to call about it. She left and returned telling me that she would just walk in and check on us and that the prison board contact told her that was okay. However, that is not what she did. She came in and sat down! As she was sitting there during the first 5-10 minutes of the interview I wasn’t even listening to what Angie (woman being interviewed) was saying because I was so mad she was sitting in there and I was trying to figure out how to tell her to leave without making her angry since she could possibly pull the plug on my research. Thankfully we had an interruption by another correctional officer who told us we were going to have to move to another room. At that point I made it very clear to the warden’s assistant that I had no problem with her checking on us, but that did not mean that she was to walk in and sit down! I could tell she was angry, but she put us in a different room and she didn’t come in anymore.

I believe this provides an excellent illustration of the difficulty of negotiating with prison staff that may not want you there or may not understand the research process (or the fact that the privacy rights of prisoners would be protected). Even after we were moved to another room we still had multiple interruptions which affected the interview.

Not only did I have to deal with the correctional staff, but I also had to process through my own emotions of going into a prison for the first time. My field notes illustrate my thoughts and feelings about this experience.

I had my first visit to the Reformatory for Women today. It was not at all what I expected. I had envisioned something out of a movie where it would be this huge building with lots of fences, no trees or “pretty” things, and out in the middle of nowhere. I turned off the highway and began driving down the road towards the prison. There were residential houses to my left and I kept thinking it must be farther down because you couldn’t have a prison right next to all of these houses. But, I see a sign on my right pointing to the Reformatory for Women. I drive in the dirt driveway and keep expecting to come to a large gate where people would check my ID, but there
was nothing but a big parking lot next to several buildings all surrounded by the typical prison fence. I parked my car and looked around unsure of what to do next. I saw a small building where inmates were caring for the flowers out front. I wouldn’t have even known they were inmates, but for the t-shirt that shouted in bold print ‘Reformatory for Women Inmate’. I gathered my stuff from my car and headed towards the small entrance building. The women inmates out front turned and smiled and said hello. It was almost surreal due to the images I had built in my head of what prisoners should look like and act like based on movie depictions. In the movies prisoners are not nice and are not normal.

The media is a major socializing agent and I realized I was not exempt from its influence on my ideas about the world. Therefore, I struggled with the idea of research as value-free because I obviously went into the prison with preconceived notions of what prison and prisoners should be like. Yet, when I sat down to talk to these women it was as if I was talking to my mother, my grandmother, my friend. These women were people, not “inmates”, and as I saw this it became extremely distressing to me to see how the women were treated in prison. For example, as stated earlier, two of the correctional institutions refused to provide water for the women. One of the rooms that I conducted the interviews in had a water cooler. I asked the warden’s assistant if I could have several cups for the women. She responded, “No, the inmates are not allowed to have that”. She then asked if I wanted a cup for myself. Because the inmates seemed so “normal”, I tried hard not to over-identify with them. I did this by getting other people’s perspectives (i.e. fellow colleagues, advisor, and friends) about the interviews.

Feminist methodology seeks to use research for social change. As I interviewed these women I became highly motivated to help these women and use my research to change our current prison system into something that values the women and treats them with respect. I started reading additional literature about our prison system and I took a tour of the prison. I have also become very outspoken about what I saw in the prison and
have future research projects in mind to look more in-depth at the process of rehabilitation and recovery in prison. Lastly, I plan to send my research findings to various agencies (i.e. Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation, National Clearinghouse for the Defense of Battered Women) with recommendations that the structure of the prison be changed to provide a more equalitarian, respectful, and caring environment.

**Emotional Nature of the Interviews.** Due to the nature of the questions in the interviews, the women and I were quite emotional at times. The majority of the women I interviewed (12 out of the 16) cried throughout the interviews. I repeatedly told the women if it was too difficult they could stop the interview or we could skip ahead to the next question, yet none of the women wanted to do this. I had several women tell me at the end of the interview that they had never told anybody else everything they told me and that it felt good to get it all out. Other women talked about feeling closed up and that it felt good to have a chance to cry and talk about their feelings.

The women’s stories affected me as well. I knew intellectually that their stories were going to be horrific, but when I actually heard them it was much more emotionally and physically exhausting than I had anticipated. My very first interview in the prison was with Pattie. Before we started she handed me a letter her 23 year old son had written for the parole board in support of her release. In the letter her son described the awful abuse he endured at the hands of his father. And then towards the end of the letter, her son wrote,

We want nothing more in my mother’s life as well as ours to have her home….We are planning camping trips and cookouts, Christmas as a family again after all these years, Thanksgiving dinners, and quiet movie nights at home. We hope that she won’t have
to miss another birth or family death, any other occasions or holidays alone in that place. She has missed her mother’s passing, the birth of her other grandchildren, many holidays the rest of us spent with our families....Please let her come home to her family.

My head was down reading the letter and as I got to the end I felt tears trickling down my face. I was not sure what to do because I was struggling with the idea that as a researcher I was not supposed to be crying! Yet, I knew that the feminist methodology literature recognizes emotions as a valid part of the research process and a source of knowledge (Fonow and Cook 1991). Not only can emotions be a part of the research, but the fact that I was showing emotion helped to build rapport between myself and the interviewee.

In order to deal with the emotional nature of the interviews, I found myself doing a tremendous amount of processing afterwards. I traveled a minimum of an hour one way to all of the interviews that I conducted. The driving time for seven of the interviews was approximately three hours one way. Therefore I had significant time in my car alone to talk to myself and process through the interviews. I also spent a great deal of time talking to my mother on the phone. My mother, at one point in her life, had been involved in prison ministry and helped me sort through my feelings of not only hearing the women’s stories, but also seeing how the women were treated within the prison system.

**Physical Setting.** Where I conducted the interviews often affected the quality of the interview. The women who were out of prison chose the interview location. One interview was conducted at the woman’s place of employment (battered women’s shelter) in a private room, another in her home, and then two at different restaurants. One clemency recipient, Jackie, whom I interviewed in her home, provided a challenge
because upon entering her home the shades were drawn and there was little to no light in the house. It was so dark I even had a hard time trying to find a pen in my purse because I could not see very well. While the interview with Jackie seemed somewhat relaxed, her daughter and grandchildren were home which provided a certain level of anxiety for Jackie when discussing personal issues she did not want them to hear.

The two interviews conducted at local restaurants proved to be challenging as well because with both of these interviews there was a tremendous amount of background noise. This made it extremely difficult to hear the interview when transcribing the tape. In one interview we had asked to have a table away from everyone. Twenty minutes into the interview the restaurant staff seated a party of 10 next to us. Furthermore, interviewing at restaurants ended up being costly for me because I picked up the tab on whatever the women ordered.

For the prison interviews, I did not have a choice where I interviewed the women. For the most part, the rooms that were used for the interviews were fine. However, for several interviews there were quite a few interruptions which disrupted the flow of the interview. For example, in my interview with Angie (where the warden’s assistant would not leave the room) we had a total of eight interruptions throughout our interview. Several of the institutions refused to provide a pitcher of water and glasses for the women. I felt that since the interviews lasted between 2-3 hours, it was cruel to not allow the women to have anything to drink while talking for that long. Not to mention it could shorten the interview if they could not get water. Lastly, the warden’s assistant at the fourth institution I visited, set the interviews up on what the women call “yard day”. This is like their 4th of July and they have all kinds of activities going on throughout the day. I
ended up having one woman renege on doing the interview with me because she did not want to miss out on the activities. Another woman asked if she could take a break in the middle of our interview so she could be a part of the drill team procession. Twenty minutes later, she came back and finished the interview. Furthermore, because it was summertime some of the rooms I conducted the interviews in had window air conditioning units which affected how well I could hear when transcribing the tape. Also, one of the interviews was conducted in a room adjacent to a gymnasium where the correctional officers were having a self-defense class. While transcribing the interview, I often heard the correctional officers over the interviewee. I often wondered what affect this had on the women’s concentration as well. Having little to no choice as to the how, what, when, and where the interviews in the prison took place was extremely challenging in conducting this research.

Problems with Tape Recorders. On the first day that I conducted interviews in the prison I had three interviews set up for that day. I was already a bit nervous going into the prison for the first time. The tape-recorder was problematic in two of the interviews. The first interview I accidentally hit play instead of record and only realized this about 15 minutes into the interview. The second problem arose in the third interview for that day when the batteries went dead on my tape-recorder and I did not realize this. I ended up missing a large portion of the interview. Luckily, this was my final interview for the day and I was able to write up field notes immediately following the interview. Before I left the prison parking lot, I sat in my car and wrote down everything from the interview that I could remember. After this, I began replacing the batteries for my tape-recorder after every interview.
Data Analysis

I used a modified grounded theory approach in the analysis of the data (Glaser and Straus 1967; Strauss and Corbin 1990). The grounded theory approach is a reciprocal relationship between data collection, analysis, and theory construction (Charmaz 2004). As I collected my data I was continually studying and looking for reoccurring themes. As I saw these themes, I restructured my interviews to include additional questions or narrowed subject areas to get more in-depth information on certain topics. It was also important that I have rich data in order to use a grounded theory approach (Charmaz 2004). Even though I had a small number of interviews I obtained a wealth of information that I could not obtain using another method of data collection.

I transcribed the interviews verbatim, looking for themes and coding accordingly. These themes came from the interviews with the women as well as my field notes. I used theoretical coding which is part of grounded theory (Straus and Corbin 1994). There are several steps in theoretical coding (Straus and Corbin 1994; Charmaz 2002). First there is the stage of initial or open coding. At this stage I did line by line coding and became familiar with my data. The second stage, according to Straus and Corbin (1990), is axial coding. Charmaz (2002) leaves this stage out because she does not think it adds anything to the analysis. Axial coding involves narrowing down data from the initial codes. The last stage of coding is called forced or selective coding (Straus and Corbin 1994; Charmaz 2002). This involves developing overarching themes that deal with large amounts of data. For example, in initial coding of my data I found that the battered women talked about using alcohol or drugs, disassociating, and minimizing/denying the
abuse. In my final analysis using forced coding, I found all of these things represent one overarching theme which is “surviving in a battering relationship”.

I transcribed all of my own interviews. Even though this is a time-consuming, laborious task, it offered me the opportunity to know my data thoroughly. I transcribed as I went along so I could begin to keep track of reoccurring themes that emerged from the data. I then incorporated this information into subsequent interviews.

I linked the interviews I conducted with the battered women at Time III with the interviews from Time I and Time II. Therefore, I was able to do within time analysis as well as cross-time analysis. I interviewed four women who received clemency. Two of the women were interviewed at all three points in time and the other two women were interviewed at Time II. If I interviewed a battered woman that had not been interviewed previously (at either Time I or Time II), I gathered background data on her so I could fill in the blanks for the Time I and Time II data keeping in mind that it is retrospective (see Table 3.1 for description of the Time I, II, III data).

I used the computer-based program N-VIVO to aid in my qualitative data analysis. This program helped me pick out themes that occurred throughout my interviews and assisted in analysis of the data. This program helped me do line-by-line coding where I did free coding (Charmaz 2000; Strauss and Corbin 1994). At this stage, some of my free nodes were mental health problems, turning point to kill, life with abuser, and relationships with children. After I coded everything in this way I was able to narrow my coding further with selective coding (Charmaz 2000; Strauss and Corbin 1994). With selective coding, I found several emergent themes. The themes I found were “Survivor Identity”, “Safety in Prison”, “Interactions with Prison Staff”, and “Life after Prison”.

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The “Sense of Self: Survivor” theme examines the women’s shift in their sense of self from a victim to a survivor. The second theme, “Safety in Prison”, captures the women’s idea of prison as a safer and freer place than their lives with their abusers. The next theme, “Interactions with Prison Staff” examines how the women’s change in their sense of self from victim to survivor clashes with how the prison staff sees and treats them. Finally, the last theme, “Life after Prison” focuses on the women who have been released from prison and their readjustment to life outside prison.

After I finished coding, I was able compare the themes in each of the interviews. In this respect I was able to finally analyze the results looking for similarities across the interviews. Thus, I began to link my findings together. Charmaz (2002) refers to this stage as memo-writing. It is a lot like journaling in that organization, spelling, and grammar are not important. Instead, the main point is to get your ideas down on paper. This became my first draft of my analysis. Once this was complete, I then had enough down on paper that I could begin to put it all together in my final analyses and began to draw conclusions about the data.

In the next chapter I present the findings for women who were denied clemency. I talk about the women’s lives prior to prison, what led to their incarceration, and their time in prison. I talk about their experiences applying for clemency and how they coped with the fact that they did not receive clemency. Furthermore, I will describe what their lives have been like in prison and discuss how they could feel safety and freedom in a place designed to restrict their freedom where they are often treated with disrespect. Following the chapter on women denied clemency there is a separate chapter presenting the findings for the women who were granted clemency. In this chapter, I present the
findings of the longitudinal data analyses. I discuss the women’s lives prior to prison, during prison, the process of applying for clemency, and their lives after prison. In terms of the latter, I address how living with a felony conviction has affected their re-integration back into society.
CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

WOMEN DENIED CLEMENCY

The women I talk about in this chapter have been told to be quiet about any type of
dysfunction/abuse in their families of origin by those they thought cared for them (i.e.
parents, grandparents, and other relatives). They were not allowed to talk about alcohol
or drug addiction in their families, incestuous relationships, and physical abuse against
their mothers or other family members because they were told it was not appropriate to
discuss family issues with outsiders. If the women did speak out they were often blamed
for the dysfunction or became victims of physical, sexual, and verbal violence.
Unfortunately, this silence about their own victimization and/or the abuse of their loved
ones has followed them into their adult intimate relationships. Now as they spend their
time in prison, the women report verbal, physical, and sexual abuse in the prison. Yet,
because of their lack of power in prison, if they talk about the abuse there are often
serious repercussions for them (i.e. they may be sent to solitary confinement, their
privileges might be taken away, and they may be given longer sentences when they go
before the parole board). This chapter provides a glimpse into what these women’s lives
were like prior to their incarceration, as well as how they have spent their time in prison.
This is the first study to include incarcerated battered women who were denied clemency and how this decision has affected their life trajectory. In this chapter I first provide a brief overview of the 12 women and why they are in prison. (For a detailed description of the women’s demographics refer to Table 3.3 in Chapter III). Second, I describe the women’s lives prior to prison (childhood, life with abusive partner). I then discuss the women’s turning point to kill their partner and how this changed their status from victim to offender. I then cover their legal representation and finally end with their life in prison. The discussion about their life in prison focuses on several issues: applying and being denied clemency; identity; spirituality; and interactions with others (friends, family, and prison staff). Lastly, I discuss life after incarceration for one woman who was released from prison five years ago.

Introducing the Women

In this section I discuss the women denied clemency and how they ended up in prison. Two women out of the 12 who were denied clemency were abused as children and after years of abuse they ultimately killed a family member. Alecia at 36 years old has been in prison for 18 years for helping to set up the murder of her abusive father. Alecia was physically abused by her father throughout her childhood as well as witnessed her father brutally beat her mother on multiple occasions. Alecia and her mother are both in prison for arranging her father’s murder. She is serving a 20 year to life sentence, her mother is serving a twelve to twenty-five year sentence. Natalie was also physically and sexually abused by her father and at the age of 13 ran away from home. She eventually met a boyfriend at 16 and they moved in together. When Natalie was 17, she and her boyfriend decided to break into her parents’ house and steal a gun and a car. Her mother

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woke up during the robbery and the boyfriend killed Natalie’s mother and two brothers. Natalie’s father is still living, and she is in prison serving a life sentence; her boyfriend is serving a twenty to life sentence. Natalie has been in prison for 25 years.

The other 10 women were all involved in killing an abusive intimate partner. Two shot their husbands when they were sleeping. Angie, an adult survivor of incest, shot her sleeping husband after she found out that he had been sexually abusing their oldest daughter. Cindy also shot her husband while he was asleep because she felt like she could no longer protect their children. She stated that at least this way their children would still be alive. Both Angie and Cindy are in their 40’s and are serving 15 years to life sentences. At the time of the interview they had served 15 and 18 years of the sentences, respectively.

Three women killed their abusive partners during a physical confrontation. Linda, who served 10 years in prison and has been out for five years, stabbed her boyfriend during a fight outside of a restaurant. Her boyfriend had grabbed her son and was threatening to hurt him. Linda went into a store and bought a knife to scare her boyfriend into letting go of her son. As they were fighting over the knife, Linda stabbed him and he died later that evening in the hospital. Linda was sentenced to 15 years to life. Pattie, who was also sentenced to 15 years to life, shot her husband during a physical altercation. He threatened to go after their children and she grabbed the gun and shot him. Pattie has been incarcerated for 16 years and is 50 years old. Finally, Martha who is serving a life sentence, shot her husband during a physical fight after living in an abusive marriage with him for three years. Martha has two children; she has not seen or talked to them since she went to prison 23 years ago.
Both Katrina and Veronica killed their abusive boyfriends in a store parking lot. Katrina, who was sentenced to 15 years to life, shot her boyfriend in a store parking lot after he had been stalking and threatening to kill her for several months. Two days after I interviewed Katrina she was released from prison after having served 17 years. Veronica’s ex-boyfriend jumped on her in a store parking lot and she ran to her car, grabbed a gun from her glove compartment, and ran after him shooting the gun. She shot him along with two bystanders. Her ex-boyfriend was killed along with one of the bystanders. Veronica is 40 years old and has been in prison for 20 years. She is serving a 23 year to life sentence.

The last three women all have unique stories that do not fit neatly into a specific category. Karen’s lover shot her abusive husband when he came in to protect her after hearing Karen and her husband fighting. The lover also had just found out that Karen’s husband had been sexually abusing Karen’s daughter. Karen’s lover testified in court that Karen had conspired with him to kill her husband the next time he was abusing her. Karen stated this was not true and that he only testified against her because he was threatened with the death penalty. Karen and her lover were both convicted and sentenced to prison. Karen is serving a 20 year to life sentence; her lover is serving a 15 to life sentence. She was 49 at the time she was interviewed and had been in prison for 16 years. Lauren, who was 47 at the time of our interview, is serving a life sentence for lighting her boyfriend on fire. She has been in prison for twenty years at the time of the interview. She explains her violence against him by saying that she was just sick of him cheating on her. Lauren said,
I just got fed up. I’m sick of him. In order to get into my apartment you had to have a key because it was a security door and him and the woman he had would sit across the street so when someone would call me and I would raise the window up and they would yell, “ha ha, ha ha”. And so I just said I’m going to ha ha ha ha his butt…..So I had already bought a gallon of gasoline. The kids were gone. And it was just revenge.

Lastly, Raquel’s abusive husband died of a drug overdose; he had ingested a bottle of her anti-depressants. Raquel was in the midst of divorcing her husband and they were separated. He was visiting their children at her house when he overdosed on the medication. Raquel stated that her husband died due to suicide. However, the police felt she was involved in her husband’s death and they arrested her. Raquel proclaimed her innocence throughout her trial, but she was still convicted of aggravated murder. Raquel recalled her trial:

I testified on my own behalf. I had a bench trial. The trial judge at the end said I don’t know how you did it, I don’t know why you did it, there was no apparent motive…I didn’t profit, but I think you must have done it…here go do twenty years.

Raquel was sentenced to 20 years to life and has been in prison for 15 years. She was convicted of aggravated murder because the prosecution claimed that she forced her husband to take the pills.

**Life Prior to Prison**

**Childhood.** Most (11 out of 12) of the women who were denied clemency described childhoods that were filled with some type of family dysfunction. The women talked about their childhoods as a painful time for them, filled with abuse (most often sexual), drug and alcohol abuse by their parents, witnessing abuse between their parents, and episodes of neglect. Table 4.1 provides a summary of the women’s lives in relation to childhood dysfunction, turning point to kill, the actual killing, their legal representation, and their feelings of safety and freedom in prison.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Women Denied Clemency</th>
<th>Childhood Dysfunction</th>
<th>Turning Point to Kill</th>
<th>Actual Killing</th>
<th>Legal Representation</th>
<th>BWS Admissible in Trial</th>
<th>Feelings of Safety &amp; Freedom in Prison</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alecia</td>
<td>Physical abuse</td>
<td>Protect younger sister</td>
<td>Mother &amp; her set up murder of her father</td>
<td>Public defender</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pattie</td>
<td>Physical abuse</td>
<td>Protect children &amp; herself</td>
<td>Shot husband during fight</td>
<td>Paid attorney</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cindy</td>
<td>Sexual abuse</td>
<td>Protect children &amp; herself</td>
<td>Shot sleeping husband</td>
<td>Public defender</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karen</td>
<td>Sexual abuse</td>
<td>Lover killed abuser</td>
<td>Lover shot husband during fight</td>
<td>Public defender</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lauren</td>
<td>Sexual abuse</td>
<td>Tired of boyfriend cheating</td>
<td>Lit boyfriend on fire</td>
<td>Public defender</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Angie</td>
<td>Sexual abuse</td>
<td>Protect children</td>
<td>Shot sleeping husband</td>
<td>Paid attorney</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Martha</td>
<td>Abuse between parents</td>
<td>Can’t take it anymore</td>
<td>Shot husband during fight</td>
<td>Public defender</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Raquel</td>
<td>Abuse between parents/substance abuse</td>
<td>Claims husband committed suicide</td>
<td>Husband committed suicide by overdosing</td>
<td>Paid attorney</td>
<td>NO – Prison same as life with abusive partner</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Linda</td>
<td>Abuse between parents</td>
<td>Protect children &amp; herself</td>
<td>Stabbed boyfriend during fight</td>
<td>Public defender</td>
<td>YES – Prison same as life with abusive partner</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Veronica</td>
<td>Neglect/lack of father figure</td>
<td>Tired of boyfriend cheating</td>
<td>Shot boyfriend &amp; 2 others in parking lot</td>
<td>Public defender</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Katrina</td>
<td>None reported</td>
<td>Protect herself</td>
<td>Shot boyfriend after stalking</td>
<td>Paid attorney</td>
<td>NO – Prison same as life with abusive partner</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Natalie</td>
<td>Physical &amp; Sexual abuse</td>
<td>Boyfriend killed family members in robbery</td>
<td>Boyfriend shot mom &amp; 2 brothers in robbery</td>
<td>Public defender</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Many of the women connected the abuse in their childhood with their adult involvement with abusive partners. For example, Cindy started her interview with me by stating “well, it all started when I was raped by my brother at 15 and then I ran away to be with a man who was 20 years older than me”. This was not uncommon, as Karen also stated, “my life would have been fairly normal but I was molested by an older brother that’s now a missionary in another country”. Lauren also provides a chilling tale of being raped by a family friend and then later how her brother molested her on a regular basis.

In her words:

So one day I was in the basement playing….And my molester he said, come here Lauren. He said come here and he kissed me and he pulled my panties down and he told me to bend over and I bent over and he just put it in. And I said ouch, I’m bleeding. And he said you’ll be all right and he took a rag and cleaned me off. And I didn’t really realize what had happened until I became a teenager. And as a teenager my brother would always sneak in my room and have sex with me.

Lauren went on to describe how she then became very promiscuous, defining herself as a sex addict. And when I asked about this addiction, she stated, “I think it was from being molested. I think it also caused me to be a people pleaser”. Angie, also described how being a childhood victim of incest affected her ideas about intimate relationships.

I think because of my childhood sexual abuse that type of thing was normal to me. Instead of turning away from sex, I was very promiscuous at one point in my life because I thought sex was love and I think that had to do with the abuse that I endured. So it was violent sexually and it was normal to me. It was normal to me. So I didn’t think it was abuse. It was normal because of everything that had happened.

Not all of the women were victims of childhood abuse. Some of the women talked about having childhoods that were marked by alcohol and/or drug addiction in the family. For example, Raquel stated,

I’m the oldest of four children. Parents married young, stayed married...kind of a hostile relationship between the two of them...My dad worked all the time, but was an
alcoholic. My mother enjoyed prescription medication and had some reason to be taking some of that.

Raquel talked about her involvement in two abusive relationships with substance abusing men.

Most of the women claimed that their families of origin had multiple problems, however, they did not realize this until later on in life (once they started counseling and support groups for their abuse in adulthood while in prison). The women felt that the victimization in their childhoods made it difficult to respond effectively to abusive and disrespectful behavior. During childhood the women learned how to cope by minimizing and denying the abuse, dissociating, using drugs and alcohol, and becoming promiscuous. Because this was the only way they knew how to survive the situation, they continued with these coping mechanisms into adulthood.

**Life with Abusive Partner.** Many of the women talked about meeting their abusive partners when they were at a vulnerable point in their life. For example, some women talked about trying to escape their dysfunctional families. Others talked about marrying at a young age (16, 17, and 18). While others talked about wanting desperately for a man to love and care for them since they had not received this from their fathers. Veronica struggled with rejection from her biological father and step-father. After attending various support groups in the prison she talked about how not having a father-figure affected her:

I became very angry because I longed for that, for that male father-figure that I didn’t get with my step-father. So that, that took me where I felt like I had to, any relationship that I was in, I would have to look for that father figure in that relationship because I didn’t have that and I so long desired that and I didn’t have it. So that led me up to gettin’ to relationships were abusive.
Consistent with previous research on battering relationships (Raphael 2000; Walker 1984), the women also described the onset of abuse during pregnancy or after the birth of a child. Linda and Katrina spoke of this. Linda stated, “I became pregnant at 15 and shortly after that he was physically abusive to me”. Katrina stated, “the abuse didn’t start until we had our first child together.” All of the women also stated that the abuse escalated throughout the relationship, and the cycle of abuse (tension, explosion, and honeymoon) as described by Lenore Walker (1984), was apparent throughout their relationships.

Research has established that the main difference between battered women who kill and those who do not kill is that battered women who kill suffer more severe and frequent abuse, as well as sadistic sexual abuse (Browne 1987). Most of the women in the current study had a lot of difficulty sharing this part of their life with me and were quite emotional when they tried to provide examples of the abuse they endured. Even though in some instances I wanted more relationship experiences, I refrained from pressing the women too much for additional information because of the obvious struggle they had in disclosing their painful past. For example, I had a difficult time transcribing the interview with Cindy because she was crying so hard; she shared one instance of abuse where her abusive husband shoved a hot curling iron into her vagina. Cindy’s example, unfortunately, was not unusual among these women. They described having broken bones and bruises, throwing up due to the pain, being raped and forced to have sex with others, being degraded and constantly put-down, and being isolated from their support networks.
**Survival Strategies.** The women used a variety of strategies to survive in these relationships. Angie used alcohol to cope with the abuse and she talked about this in her interview.

I drank a lot back then. I think it kept me numb. I drank a lot when I was with him and it didn’t hurt so bad if he beat me if I was drunk. It was a coping mechanism I think for me the alcohol at that time.

Cindy, Pattie, and Natalie talked about this as well. If they were drunk or high they did not have to be emotionally or physically present in the situation. Other women talked about isolating away from others. This was apparent with Alecia when she talked about how she dealt with the abuse she suffered at the hands of her father. “I was a little hermit who stayed in my room the majority of the time. I would go down in the basement. I would listen to my music and block the world out”.

And yet another survival strategy was seeking out others to get love and support. For instance, Karen had a sexual affair with her gardener and when she told me about this, she still felt a tremendous amount of guilt over the fact that she had this affair. In the interview when she was telling me about her feelings of shame over this, I suggested to her that it could be viewed as a survival strategy. In that moment, Karen’s entire outlook on her situation shifted and she began to view herself as a survivor instead of a bad, immoral wife. After the interview, she sent me a letter that stated,

Ever since this all occurred I’ve carried an unbelievable heavy burden because I did have an affair. You telling me it isn’t uncommon in battered women and it is a means of survival has lightened that load considerably. So, again I must say thank you.

The women also described their many attempts to leave the relationship. Some of the women spoke of distancing themselves from their partners in small, but important ways. Some started sleeping in another bed, others would try to stay out of the house for
long periods of time during the day. Raquel, who was in the process of divorcing her husband when the overdose occurred, talked about when she finally made the decision to leave. She said she started to see what witnessing the abuse was doing to their children and she also had begun to fear for her life. She said she decided to leave, “...when it finally escalated to the point where next time I’m probably going to die and then what?”

Katrina tried to leave multiple times and talked about what happened when she tried to leave the first time.

And I moved away. And of course came the roses and the millions of calls and I’m sorry and it will never happen again. And of course I believed it and went back. And I said well you need to seek help for your problems. I’ll go do whatever it is with you. And he agreed. You know he never went. He claimed he was through with that. But no, he was not through with that.

Later, Katrina tried to leave her boyfriend again and it was when she had successfully left the relationship and he was still stalking her that she ended up shooting him. Natalie also tried to leave her home situation by running away. Unfortunately, she was 13 years old, living on the streets by herself, and was continually victimized by strangers. Pattie talked about trying to leave and her husband would threaten and stalk her family. Other researchers have reported similar stories of stalking after women tried to leave their abusive relationships (Raphael 2000; Browne 1987). In fact, Browne (1987) found that battered women are more likely to be killed when they attempt to leave than at any other time in the relationship.

If the women were not to the point where they were ready to end the relationship, they still tried to stop the violence in their homes. Bowker (1993) found that battered women tried to physically stay away from their partners, they fought back, they tried to talk their partners out of hitting them, they threatened to call the police, and they would
hide from their partners. Sadly, many of the women denied clemency were ignored or blamed for the abuse when they tried to seek help. Karen went to her church to ask for help and she talked about the elders of her church having a prayer session with her and her husband.

I went to the church and there was a big prayer meeting and they stuck him and I in a circle... they came around us and they all started praying for us...all the elders of the church and all the men. And they prayed that God will help him control his temper, but then they prayed that God would help me set a better tone in the house...that God would help me to be a better wife. By the time they were done I was confident that he was right and I was in the wrong. I felt like it was almost like an exorcism...like I had some evil spirits in me. And it was my fault....So I wasn’t praying enough, I wasn’t fasting enough.

This type of experience was not unusual for the women. They spoke of having the police called and/or going to the hospital and the doctors, nurses, and police officers interviewing them with their abusive husband, boyfriend, or father standing right next to them. In these circumstances, the women were afraid to tell the truth and according to the women the officials did not push it because they did want to deal with it any further. Sinden and Stephens (1996) found that many problems in the criminal justice system were not about the laws. Instead the problems stem from the laws being ignored. Even with the implementation of new arrest policies the police often ignored them and were still reluctant to take action in cases of domestic abuse.

The women’s families were generally supportive, however, many of the women talked about keeping the abuse hidden from their family and friends. They did this for a number of reasons. First, the women spoke of being embarrassed and ashamed that they were involved in a violent relationship. Second, many of the women also talked about fearing for the lives of their family members or the actions they might take. Linda said
that she did not tell her family because she was scared her father and brothers would go after her boyfriend and kill him. This lack of support and help the women talked about is consistent with other research of battered women who kill (Browne 1987; Leonard 2002).

**Turning Point to Kill.** Battered women who kill often get to a point where they feel helpless and hopeless. They described feeling they were dead inside from the emotional, physical, and sexual torture in their lives. They see the effects of the abuse on their children. They have attempted to leave and have been unsuccessful. They believe they are going to die eventually in this relationship. This became the turning point in their lives when they felt they could not go on living like this anymore and for them the only option was to kill their abusive partner. For the women in this study, this turning point came when they realized that it was kill or be killed, as well as recognized that their children were being hurt. Karen talked about having a will made out because she knew she was going to die. Martha stated, “he just started laying his hands on me and stuff and I just...I just got tired. You can only take things so much, you know, until you break”.

Cindy said something snapped the night she killed her husband. She said she felt that she could not protect their children anymore and that if she killed her husband and went to prison, at least their children would still be alive. Angie shot her husband after she found he had been molesting their daughter. Pattie also talked about the need to protect their children. She described the incident that led up to her killing her husband.

I made a comment that we just can’t keep doing this, he went to hit me in my face and I covered my face, he had the gun up to my head at some point. He set the gun back down on the bed. I think I repeated this again that I just can’t take this. He started scooting off the bed and said, “bitch you ain’t going anywhere, I’ll kill you and your fucking kids this time”. And I knew he was going for that door...something inside (crying) me screamed, “stop”. I picked up the gun and I fired the gun.
The need to protect their children seemed to be the greatest impetus for the women to kill their abusive husbands or boyfriends. This could be because the women may have realized that killing their abusive spouses/boyfriends could make them look like “bad spouses/girlfriends”, but if they killed to protect their children, they might be perceived as “good mothers”.

The Killing and Police Questioning

Half of the women did the actual killing themselves and used a gun. The other half either had someone else kill their husbands/boyfriends/fathers or used another method. Those who used other methods included Linda who used a knife and stabbed her boyfriend and Lauren who killed her boyfriend by setting him on fire. Those who did not do the actual killing included Alecia who set up the death of her father, Natalie whose boyfriend killed her mother and brothers in a robbery gone bad, Raquel whose husband overdosed on anti-depressant drugs, and Karen whose lover shot her husband.

Some of the women called the police right away, such as Pattie, who picked up the phone the minute after she shot her husband and said to the 911 operator, “I accidentally shot my husband”. Other women tried to hide their crime, for example Cindy who initially tried to hide her husband’s body in her basement. The interesting thing is regardless of the method or the actual person doing the killing, three were convicted of murder (one had additional convictions) eight were convicted of aggravated murder (two had additional convictions), and they all received some form of a life sentence.

Entering the Legal System

The police were the first point of contact in the legal system for these women. The women described being terrified, not understanding or knowing that much about the
criminal justice system as offenders, and that often they were very forthcoming with the police and ended up saying things that were later held against them. Linda talked about how after her boyfriend was rushed to the hospital because she had stabbed him, she did not realize the seriousness of his injury. The police were questioning her about what happened and she said,

I had no clue it was as bad as it was. And so they never told me he died. He actually….that occurred about seven in the evening, he actually died about eleven….he ended up dying that night, no one told me that, so when they questioned me I didn’t feel like I had anything to hide to lie about. In my mind I’m protecting him, thinking if anything watering everything down what happened ‘cause I’m thinking I don’t want to get him in trouble. He’s hurt now, he’s gonna really be mad at me now if I tell them that he was attacking me and my son. I don’t want to get him in trouble, so I watered down the story. I had no clue that I’m the one that was in trouble. I had no clue that he died or was dying. It was just really crazy.

Even though Linda was upset with what happened during questioning, she later said that they lowered her bond and let her go home because they were so worried about her mental state. A lot of the women provided similar statements about their initial interaction with the criminal justice system. There were times when bonds were lowered, the women were able to go home and be with their children, and allowances were made for their children to visit.

Legal Representation and Trial

The majority of people in prison state that they felt they had not received adequate legal representation (Blumberg 1995). Overwhelming, the women in this study felt the same way. This, in and of itself is not a unique finding. However, coupled with the fact that most of the women denied clemency were forced to rely on public defenders (even those that had money because all of the assets were in the husband’s name) and these public defenders were often not experts in self-defense and domestic violence, the
women’s legal representation was hindered. Furthermore, the women who did rely on paid attorneys often used lawyers that had helped them and/or their abusive partners previously on a variety of things. For instance, Katrina used an attorney who had previously helped her when she filed charges against her boyfriend on domestic violence. However, this attorney had also represented her boyfriend when he was arrested on drug charges. Katrina talked about her attorney and his lack of experience with homicide cases,

And I didn’t find out till later, he had never tried a murder trial. He only tried one murder trial and that was found not guilty by reason of insanity, so it never went to trial. He never did a murder trial. It was also a conflict of interest because he was Tommy’s (abusive boyfriend) lawyer. But I didn’t know that at the time. He heard my case anyway. That was the only lawyer I knew ‘cause he had dealt with him. But he handle my domestic violence so I figured that’s who I would get.

Pattie also talked about the attorney she hired. She stated, “I got a paid idiot”. She picked her lawyer because he had previously helped her with some tax and accounting information.

Moreover, some of the women also commented on how the gender of their attorney affected their legal representation. Lauren said she was so used to taking orders from men that she never questioned anything her male attorney told her to sign. Other women stated that at times it was difficult to be completely truthful with their male attorneys about the abuse they experienced because they had a hard time trusting men.

All of the women denied clemency went to trial. Some of them were offered plea-bargains, but in most cases, their attorneys advised them not to take them. Nine of the women went to trial prior to the 1990 ruling that allowed expert testimony on Battered Woman Syndrome into the courts. These women talked about how sometimes the abuse
was brought up in the trial and was used against them. Karen stated, “…it [the abuse] was used against me. It gave me motive. They brought in over a 100 witnesses to testify to the abuse”. However, the main thing to keep in mind with these women is that most of them were not allowed to talk about the abuse in the relationship. According to self-defense law, the only admissible evidence is what happened at the time of the crime (Gillespie 1989).

Nevertheless, two of the women in this study were among the first to use Battered Woman’s Syndrome in their trials. Angie and Linda went to trial after the 1990 ruling therefore, they were allowed to have an expert on domestic violence testify at their trials. Yet, even in these cases, the women stated no one really understood how it was to be used and applied in court and therefore it did not help them. For example, Angie stated,

I had hospital records, doctor reports, police reports. He had two warrants out for his arrest. I had pictures of my face beat up. I had children services testify to what he had done to Kaitlin. Kaitlin testified at six years old in my trial about what Rudy had done to her and then some of the abuse that she had seen him do to me. The state’s expert agreed I was a battered woman. However, he felt that I killed out of anger and rage instead of fear. Whereas my expert said I killed out of fear. The expert that we have now is Dr. B and she’s basically saying that it was numerous emotions and she’s correct. You know you can’t just pinpoint it’s anger, it’s fear… it’s not…it’s everything…it’s all of that put together…anxiety…everything.

Linda also stated that no one at her trial understood how battered woman syndrome worked with self-defense law,

Dr. R testified in my trial as the expert witness, but they hacked her up. It was like it was a brand new defense….We used it in my trial, but it was to no avail. No one understood it. And as a matter of fact, it made things worse because no one understood it. The judge didn’t understand it. The way Dr. R explained it, but with the prosecutor doing their thing and hacking it up, no one understood how it fit in or how you could tie it to self-defense.
The majority of the women denied clemency were unable to discuss their abuse histories at trial. However, even for those that were allowed to bring it up in court, it was to no avail. Two other aspects of their trials are worth mentioning: many had witnesses called to invalidate their claims of abuse and many felt that their characters, rather then their crime, were on trial. Alecia, along with her mother, set up the death of her father and Alecia’s mother testified against her in her trial in exchange for a lesser sentence. Angie’s in-laws testified against her and stated she was making up the abuse. Karen’s co-defendant testified against her and stated she had set up the shooting of her husband. Natalie’s co-defendant also testified against her and stated that she had actually shot her mother and two brothers.

The focus on the defendant’s character is supported by other research (Follingstad et al. 1996) where battered women were treated differently than other types of self-defense cases. Many of the women denied clemency fought back against their boyfriends or husbands, used alcohol and drugs to cope with the abuse, and had sexual affairs. Some of the women were reported to children’s services for failure to protect their children. Angie’s abusive husband forced her to have sexual contact with another woman and he took pictures of the two of them together. The prosecutor in Angie’s trial presented these pictures to the jury to attack her character. Angie stated,

Yeah my trial was a character assignation trial. It was pretty brutal. Maybe if I put her character in I can get a conviction. And that’s exactly what happened. My attorney…any attorney I’ve had since then has basically said you came to prison because of your lifestyle, not for killing your husband. And that’s hard to swallow.

The women in this study recognized that they had done wrong. However, most claimed that their trials were far from fair and just. This unfortunately has led to mistrust
of the judicial system and has become one more thing in their lives that they feel
victimized by. They are wary of the legal system and no longer look at it as a source of
help (if in fact they ever did). Angie talked about how she felt about the legal system
since being incarcerated,

I felt betrayed by the judicial system a lot since I’ve been locked up. I had a lot of
respect for the judicial system. I wanted to be an attorney since I was a kid. When I
met other people who have walked in my shoes and have received the kind of time that
I did for protecting themselves and their children it blows me away at the system here.
So I have a lot of... I have no respect for the judicial system. There’s a lot of things
that need to change. I feel let down from something I believed in. I feel let down by
my country too, to a certain degree. I was a soldier in the army and my job was
soldier. That was my occupation. I was told how to defend myself from my enemy
and when I done that they gave me life in prison. I feel let down.

Most of the women described feeling “let down” by those they thought were there to help
and protect them.

Life in Prison

Initial Reaction to Prison. After the women were convicted and sentenced to life in
prison all were sent to the state reformatory for women to serve their sentences. Initially
the women talked about being scared, anxious, and uncertain about their new lives in
prison. Alecia stated, “So I get here and it’s like a big culture shock. I was fine until I
rode up that gate and I just started crying and I was like wow this is a reality”. Others
also talked about not knowing “how to play the game”. For example, many of the
women were unaware of certain prison rules and got into trouble frequently. Many spoke
of numerous instances where they were sent to “the hole” (solitary confinement) for such
things as fighting or buying things for other women at the commissary. Natalie, as well
as others, talked about learning how to assert herself and trying to find a balance between
extreme aggression and standing up for oneself. Natalie told a story about fighting with
another woman because the woman walked across her wet floor that she had just
scrubbed and she stated,

If I had just let her walk down my floor and then she hit me in the face with a head
scarf... If I had just let her keep walking, I don’t know what would happen. But I
jumped on her. I had to... she still ended up beating me up really bad. But no one else
did nothing else to me because I would have fought. I couldn’t fight, but I would.

Natalie had to prove herself so she would not be victimized by the other women in
prison. Many of the women talked about prison being one of the first places where they
learned how to stand up for themselves and show others that they were not weak. Some
of the women commented that even though solitary confinement was not a desirable
place to be, it afforded them some peace and quiet, as well as alone time that they did not
necessarily get in everyday prison life.

However, most of the women stated that they eventually learned if you “played the
game” life could be a bit better in prison. This allowed them to get along better with the
other women and correctional officers, which in turn kept them out of solitary
confinement and enabled them to earn privileges within the prison. In other words, the
women became socialized into prison culture. This socialization took place through a
variety of venues, but the most significant socializing agents were the other women in
prison, especially those with life sentences. The women referred to those with life
sentences as “lifers” and talked about the “lifers” in familial terms. The women talked
about having the older lifers take the “baby lifers” under their wings and let them know
that they cannot keep getting into trouble because they would have to go before the
parole board and the parole board would not look favorably on too many trips to the hole.
The lifers talked about each other as a family using terms such as “sister lifers”, “baby
"lifers", "grandma lifers". Even though they were separated from their own families, they were still able to survive within the prison walls by creating families of their own. This finding, unique to women's prisons, is consistent with other research that has documented life on the inside of women's prisons (Owen 1998).

Prison a Place of Safety and Freedom. As the women learned how to assert themselves and started helping other women, they began to see themselves as capable people. The way they described this transformation from seeing themselves as passive individuals to seeing themselves as assertive, strong women describes what feminists call empowerment (Gagné 1998). Ironically, many of the women began to view prison as a place of safety and freedom, as other research has found (Bradley and Davino 2002). In fact, Bradley and Davino (2002) found that the more a woman had been victimized prior to prison, the more likely she was to state that she felt safer and freer in prison than outside the prison walls. Overwhelming, the majority of women I interviewed found a sense of security inside the prison. However, three of the women stated they felt prison was the equivalent to living with their boyfriends or husbands. For example, Linda stated that she still felt she was being abused when she got to prison. She felt the prison just replaced her boyfriend as the abuser. When asked if she felt freer and safer in prison, Karen responded,

Absolutely. I buy my own things at commissary. I set my own budget. I tell myself when to go to bed. I decide how to wear my hair, what I want to wear, or when I want to walk, or what I want to think. And I feel safer. When I got here one of things I thought was I don't know when the last time I felt safe. And I feel safe. And that's in prison.

Martha also talked about having similar feelings of comfort. She said she finally found herself when she came to prison because:
I knew I was safe in my environment. And wasn’t nobody to push me around and do things to me. Nobody had to love me or like me cause today I love myself and that’s all that matters to me…I felt safer and not to worry about anything happening to me. Safer bonding maybe…I guess you could say…And I could talk to people if I wanted to and then I didn’t have to be saying I couldn’t have this person I couldn’t talk to or this person. I could talk to whoever I wanted to, you know.

Lauren said initially when she thought of getting out of prison she wanted to buy a house right next door. She recalled a telephone conversation she had with her mother.

When I first got here I called my mother and told her I want to buy a house right outside of prison. She said girl you crazy. I said mom I ain’t being beat on no more. I said I ain’t being hit, I ain’t being kicked, I ain’t being stomped, I ain’t being spit on…I’m a lot more at peace. I’m not on eggshells wondering if he gonna hit me or if he gonna pick an argument.

Applying for Clemency. Many of these feelings of security strengthened as the women became involved in domestic violence support groups. As the clemency process began in the late 1980s and early 1990s, domestic violence advocates tried to start family abuse support groups for the women in prison. In early 1990, activists held a domestic violence seminar for the women and introduced the information on applying for clemency. The warden at the time, who was aware of the women’s histories, encouraged some of the women I interviewed to apply for clemency. Some of these women stated that they did not feel they were battered women (Natalie and Alecia, for example, were abused by their fathers) however, because the warden mentioned it to them, they went ahead and applied. Others, as they became more knowledgeable about intimate partner violence through the support groups started to identify as battered women. Two of the women came to prison already identifying themselves as battered women.

All of the women were told to complete lengthy application packets and provide any corroborating documentation about the abuse they endured (hospital records, police
reports). Because it is common for battered women to minimize and deny the abuse, as well as blame themselves, many of the women were reluctant to call the police or tell others about the violence in their homes. Therefore, the women did not necessarily have documentation of the abuse they endured. Some women admitted that they never had called the police, but there were others who had, but for some reason the police records were “lost”.

Many of the women talked about the insensitivity they experienced from the police. In Pattie’s words, she said the police and society were a man’s world and out to protect the man. She talked about how the police would walk into her house and say “Patti, what did you do now?” Raquel also found the police unwilling to help when her husband almost strangled her. When the police arrived at her house they just told them to separate for the night. As Raquel retold the story to me she commented, “He should have probably been charged with attempted murder”.

The women also discussed other formal (hospitals, churches) and informal sources (friends, family) of help that were not readily available. In addition, many of the women were too embarrassed to admit to others that they were living in abusive situations. For example, Linda talked about feeling she was a failure and that the abuse was her fault. She stated that her mom often said, “you made your bed, now lie it” and she took this to mean her involvement with her abusive boyfriend as well. The lack of support for their histories of abuse, in the form of documentation or witnesses, hindered these women greatly when it came to applying for clemency.

**Denial of Clemency.** When the women decided to apply for clemency, it gave them hope that they may someday be set free to go back to be with their children, their
families, and finally be able to have some control over their own lives. Unfortunately, this did not happen. As one can imagine, the women talked about feeling extremely let-down, depressed, and angry. Many women were angered to find out that women they saw as just like themselves were exonerated of their crimes, yet they had to remain in prison. Many of the women stated it felt like their abusers had won again because their attempts at freedom had failed. Natalie expressed a sense of hurt and frustration:

My feelings were hurt mostly because...the fact that they believed me and they did know about the abuse. They...there was no questioning that. That much they believed, for sure. It was obvious. I mean I went from an A student to a D student. My feelings were hurt because I don’t think I’m a bad person.

Karen also acknowledged the feelings of depression that came with the denial of clemency:

It was really hard. I went into a really deep depression. And I started just not caring about myself because it felt like he had told me the truth. And that no one really cared......I try to say its God’s will. I don’t understand it. I don’t understand that 25 and some of their cases didn’t have as much abuse as mine and some of the others received and others didn’t. But I know they had a lot of political pull. Some of them had very high priced attorneys. [There was an attorney] that costed $25,000. I don’t understand a society where a woman who has political pull or the finances...well she shouldn’t have to take the abuse. But these others should. It’s hard to understand...but our society does. Our society judges our values by our finances.

Surprisingly, I was unable to find a major difference in the economic situation of the women who were denied clemency versus those who were granted clemency. The majority of the women were unable to pay for high profile attorneys. However, some of the women granted clemency mentioned a lot of media attention surrounding their cases. For instance, some of the cases of the women granted clemency were showcased on ‘Oprah’ and ‘48 Hours’. None of the women denied clemency talked about being a part of any type of media coverage (other than Angie who mentioned negative newspaper
articles about her case) during the time of the clemencies. Table 4.2 provides possible reasons why the women did not receive clemency, as well a summary of their prison experiences.

Table 4.2: Denial of Clemency and Prison Experiences (Religion, Health, and Family Contact)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Women Denied Clemency</th>
<th>Possible reason for denial of clemency</th>
<th>Religious attendance</th>
<th>Currently on anti-depressants</th>
<th>Physical health problems due to the abuse</th>
<th>Contact with Children</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alecia</td>
<td>Co-defendant testified against her; lack of documentation</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>Multiple Sclerosis due to neck and back injuries</td>
<td>No children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pattie</td>
<td>Lack of documentation</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>Ostoarthritis</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cindy</td>
<td>Nature of the crime</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>Breast surgery due to abuse</td>
<td>NO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karen</td>
<td>Co-defendant testified against her</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>Severed small intestine; Damaged nerves in back; Brain tumor</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lauren</td>
<td>Nature of the crime; revenge</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>None reported</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Angie</td>
<td>Husband sleeping; in-laws testified against her; able to use BWS</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>Osteopenia; Eyes don’t dilate due to chronic blows to head</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Martha</td>
<td>In-laws testified against her</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>None reported</td>
<td>NO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Raquel</td>
<td>Claimed she was innocent – did not claim self-defense</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>None reported</td>
<td>NO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Linda</td>
<td>Able to use BWS</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>Neck problems</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Veronica</td>
<td>Revenge; innocent bystanders involved</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>None reported</td>
<td>No children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Katrina</td>
<td>Shot boyfriend in parking lot &amp; didn’t turn herself into the police right away</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>Problems with jaw</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Natalie</td>
<td>Mother &amp; brothers killed accidentally; abusive father still living; co-defendant testified against her</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>Hysterectomy due to clusters of tumors</td>
<td>No children</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Veronica was the only person who felt that she did not deserve the clemency and could understand why she did not receive it.

Yes, I was very upset. It took me awhile to get over it. But like I said before, when I got over it I realized that maybe I wasn’t really battered. When I heard all these other people’s stories and stuff and I thought maybe that’s why I didn’t get it. Mine wasn’t like that because I wasn’t really abused that badly. Some people, you know, it was awful to hear the stories. And I’m like mine was nothin’ like that. I mean the one incident that happened, but you know that happened a year before my case.

Veronica brings up an interesting point. How much abuse does a woman have to endure for it to justify violence in self-defense? What type of abuse does she have to endure? How long does she have to be involved in the relationship? When comparing the length of relationships of those women who were denied clemency to those who were granted clemency, many of the women denied clemency had been involved in their relationships for shorter periods of time. This may have factored into why these women were denied clemency. Table 4.3 summarizes how long the women denied clemency were involved with their abusive boyfriends and husbands. The average length of relationship was five years, compared to the women who received clemency where average length of relationship was 17 years.

Table 4.3: Length of Relationship and Marital Status

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Women Denied Clemency</th>
<th>Length of Relationship</th>
<th>Marital Status</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Angie</td>
<td>5 years</td>
<td>married</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cindy</td>
<td>6 years</td>
<td>married</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karen</td>
<td>15 years</td>
<td>married</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lauren</td>
<td>3 months</td>
<td>married</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Linda</td>
<td>2 years</td>
<td>engaged</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Martha</td>
<td>3 years</td>
<td>married</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pattie</td>
<td>6 years</td>
<td>married</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Veronica</td>
<td>3 years (off and on)</td>
<td>dating</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Katrina</td>
<td>9 years (off and on)</td>
<td>dating</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
I struggled with the question of length of relationship and type and severity of abuse as I listened to the stories of Veronica and Lauren. In these two cases, the women were undoubtedly abused. However, the abuse was not as significant as the others in terms of severity and frequency of physical abuse. For example, Lauren talked about her boyfriend grabbing her butt or her breasts as examples of the physical abuse in the relationship and Veronica said she only had one physical altercation with her boyfriend. Also, the length of time they were involved in their relationships was quite short (Lauren’s relationship was only three months). Furthermore, while most of the other women were fearful of losing their own lives or for their children’s lives, Lauren and Veronica were focused on their boyfriends’ infidelity. Veronica who accidentally killed an innocent bystander said,

The last straw with me and this guy was we were together or so I thought… but I had intuition that oh something ain’t right because you came by the house and you said you was going to be home all day and I called later on in the evening and you not there, about an hour later I called and you not there….So I go and drive by the house and I see his car down the street in somebody else’s driveway. So I go to his house and I let myself into the house….I went in there and sure enough I find him in bed with somebody….So I went out and slashed his tires. I felt I was justified for doing what I did cause I was hurt. I was really, really hurt. I was really, really angry. So I lashed out that way….when we had this physical altercation I was [at a store]…So when my ex seen me he comes up and jumps on me, okay. So I automatically go into the glove compartment and get the gun and I chase after him and that’s how all of this came about and how I’m in prison. Cause in the process of me shootin’ him, I shot an innocent person and I killed another person. Okay. I was so bent on revenge. I was already angry because he had jumped on me. Just everything came out. Everything came out that night, the lying, the many times you lied to me, that I didn’t know they were lies at the time. The many times you lied to me, catching you…..

Lauren, who lit her boyfriend on fire, also mentioned her boyfriend’s infidelity as her motive, stating emphatically that she was tired of her boyfriend cheating on her so she was going to “burn his penis off”.
In sum, the factors that may have influenced the outcome of the clemency process include: the nature of their crimes; little to no documentation of the abuse; length of their relationships; lack of media attention or political pull; lack of money; multiple victims involved in the killings; and the admissibility of battered woman syndrome in some of the women’s trials.

Cindy’s friends decapitated her husband’s head after she shot him. Even though Cindy did not have anything to do with the severing of her husband’s head, she was charged with aggravated murder and abuse of a corpse. When asked why she felt she did not receive clemency, Cindy stated that the parole board told her, “due to the nature of her crime”. Lauren also remarked on this idea of the “nature of the crime” keeping her from getting clemency, “I think it was because like the crime was…most people….like his brother said I had to be a cold hearted person….he said most people just shot or most people just stabbed…but I had to be a cold hearted person to burn him”.

Other women noted that they did not have documentation supporting the abuse in their relationships. Pattie talked about having filed seventy-two police reports, yet when it came time to get this documentation, the police department was only able to locate twelve. Alecia also noted the lack of documentation when asked why she felt she did not receive clemency:

The only thing that I can think of is there wasn’t enough proof there for them to fall back on. ….If you talk to about every battered woman or child it’s all basically the same and some have the police reports and some don’t. Some have the hospital reports and some don’t.

Several of the women denied clemency had multiple victims involved in the killings. Veronica shot her boyfriend as well as two innocent by-standers. One by-stander was
killed and the other seriously wounded. Natalie was involved in killing her mother and her two brothers in a robbery gone bad, yet her abusive father was not killed. Natalie said other women in the prison told her, "...if I had killed my father I wouldn't have done a day". She felt she was denied clemency because the wrong people (not her abusive father) were killed.

Natalie, along with Alecia and Karen, also talked about the fact that her co-defendant testified against her at her trial. For all three of these women there was legal documentation presented by their co-defendants that showed some sort of premeditation in the killings (even if this documentation did not adequately depict what happened). Angie also mentioned that she had people who testified against her in her trial (her in-laws) and they presented a biased view of the victim. Her in-laws testified under oath that she was making up the abuse and this information then followed her to her clemency hearings.

The major premise behind the clemency movement was the fact that the laws had changed and now BWS was admissible in the courts where before it could not be part of a trial. It was assumed that the women who were currently incarcerated were unable to talk about the abuse in their trials and this was the reason for the clemency opportunity. Linda and Angie, though, came to prison right after the laws changed and they had been allowed to use the BWS in their trials. They mentioned that even though BWS was used in their trials, no one understood it and it did not help them. However, the point remains that both women were able to talk about the battering in their relationships and therefore the reason for the clemencies did not necessarily apply to them. Angie even said this in
her interview, “I think that [my attorney] told me the reason I did not get the clemency was because I got to use the battered woman’s syndrome in the trial.”

Finally, Raquel’s situation was a bit different than all the others because she claimed she did not kill her husband. She testified that her husband committed suicide. Therefore, when she applied for clemency she did not say she killed in self-defense due to the battering in her relationship. Instead, she continued her claim of innocence, which again did not fit with the criteria for clemency. All twelve women were denied clemency and all continue to serve life sentences, with the exception of Linda who was granted parole and released from prison five years ago.

Coping with the Clemency Decision. As the women came to grips with the fact that they had been denied clemency, they readjusted their thinking. Some women reacted by eating, sleeping, crying, and getting in trouble. Linda said, “Sleeping was a drug for me. I liked to sleep. I’d make myself go to sleep so it could hurry up and be the next day. I thought I could do my time like Ripe Van Winkle…wake me when it’s over”.

Yet, they began to realize that no amount of tears, food, fighting or sleep got them any closer to the free world. Karen and Raquel talked about trying to eat themselves to death and then realized they were overweight, unhappy, and could not do much of anything anymore and they were still in prison. Raquel acknowledged,

I did get really fat at one time. I thought that I guess if I could eat enough…maybe I could fill the emptiness and ballooned clear up to 273 which is about 100 pounds more than I weigh today. Then one morning I got up and said okay, now you’re fat…you can’t sit, walk, stand, or lay down…you’re miserable. And the kids still aren’t coming. What are you going to do? So I just keep fighting.

As the women began to realize that they were stuck in prison they began to change their outlook and many of them went on a mission to “remake” (as Pattie stated)
themselves. They commented that if they were going to be in prison, they should do whatever they could to make themselves into better people. Pattie expressed this when she said,

I wouldn’t be who I am today if they let me out. I would have been right back in an abusive relationship. Definitely...I came in here in November ’89 and towards the beginning of ’90 they did this... So I had next to no programming. You would have actually been putting me back out on the street being the same person I was when I came in. That wouldn’t have been good at all, at all. Because I would have been right back into an abusive relationship....That kicked me off....in ’90 it kicked me off to go on a mission to completely change who I was. I was about to re-make and that’s what I did. I did a lot of programming....endless programming, endless programming.

The programming that Pattie is referring to is any type of self-help or educational group the prison offers (i.e. educational classes on parenting styles, substance abuse, coping, and GED preparation courses). Cindy had a similar response to the clemency decision; she started focusing on what she could do to better herself and started finding any and every group to be a part of in the prison. During the interviews, numerous women showed me documentation (i.e. copies from their files that indicated the courses they had completed) of the multiple groups they had become involved in after the clemency decision.

“Programming Queens”. As the women became more involved in the programming offered in the prison, they became empowered. The programming provided the women a place where they could gain knowledge about themselves, healthy relationships, and coping with life stressors and with this knowledge came empowerment. The women did not use the term empowerment, but as they described their experiences it resembled what Busch and Valentine (2000) would define as empowerment. For instance, the women changed from blaming themselves to saying they were not at fault for the abuse. Along
with that they began to talk about themselves as survivors rather than victims. Finally, they started taking responsibility to help others and make other women’s situations better. As these women began to see themselves as capable individuals, they also began starting their own groups that had not been available before in the prison. For example, prior to prison Natalie practiced yoga and Veronica did aerobics. In prison, they started yoga and aerobics classes. Veronica also started teaching sign language classes. Linda started a choir group. Karen started a fund-raising group, as well as a quilting group to help local charities in the community where the prison is located.

Not only did these women become involved in programming, they were the “movers and shakers” of the groups. They obtained approval for the programs, got them started, and led the groups. They felt they made a difference for the lives of women inside, as well as outside the prison. When I asked if they were involved in any programming, many responded with, “They call me the programming queen”. Initially, the women started the groups to better themselves, but as they healed their wounds and came to terms with their past victimization, they began to see a need to help others. As Alecia stated,

.....like when we do community projects, fund raisers and things like that to actually give back to people around you as well as people out there and making better choices and just to say I walked this institution around and around to raise money to bring in a counselor in here and to help raise money for lights that are in here...things like that in general. So even though you’re here, you’re still doing something to try to help others out there.

Transforming the Self: Victim to Survivor. One of the key tenets of feminism is empowering individuals through knowledge, which then leads to activism (Fonow and Cook 1991). This is exactly what happened with these women in prison. As they began
to learn about their own victimization, they started to become empowered, and began to change how they felt about themselves. The groups provided a turning point for the women where they started to see themselves as survivors rather than victims. As they took on this new survivor self, it became important to give back to others and help other women inside and outside the prison (Tedeschi and Calhoun 2004).

Angie who was a childhood victim of incest, spoke about how the incest survivors group helped change her thinking:

After I took the incest survivors group. It helped me see myself in a different light. And that’s what helped me see myself as a survivor. And then when Dr. F. was going over a lot of things with me that helped me see myself as a survivor more. And then I started thinking outside the box, because I was in a box. I was a victim and I was in a box and I could not think outside that victim role. Today I am not, not a victim. And I do not sabotage anything in my life because I deserve good things in my life just like any person on this earth does.

Katrina also talked about viewing herself as a survivor, “Oh wow. I would say I am a domestic violence survivor, first and foremost. I’m artistic, confident, motivated, just like I said, a leader. I walk my walk”. Linda also saw this change in her view of herself:

I look at myself as a survivor. I cannot afford to look at myself or still consider myself as a victim because I think that embracing that mentality you don’t grow. You stay in that victimization and I absolutely consider myself a survivor....But yeah, I consider myself, big time a survivor.

Not only did the women view themselves as survivors, but they also saw themselves as capable individuals who were lovable, friendly, outgoing, caring, funny, and amazing. Raquel described herself in these words, “I am mature, humorous, amazing person who has survived the un-survivable [and] in spite of all that still manages to find some joy.” Alecia felt she was a “worthwhile person”. Angie also had a remarkable self-view:

I’m a woman with great compassion for people, humanity. I, uhh, I’m full of love... I’m a very strong woman. I have a lot of strength. I’m very courageous. I’m very
assertive. And I think uhh...I can see my beauty today where I didn't at one time in my life...beauty within and on the outside. At one time in my life I thought I was a very ugly person that's because of how I felt on the inside cause I took on the shame and guilt that the man should have took that violated me. And it made me feel ugly. So it took me...oh it was only like three years ago where I could look in the mirror and see that I was pretty. But I think my beauty lies within. And mostly for humanity. I have a great deal of love for people and for their safety and soul.

Karen also viewed herself in a very positive light:

I think I'm honestly a good person. I think I have good morals. I think I have good values. I would like me as a friend. And I'm intelligent... I don't see myself as an inmate. I don't see myself as a convict cause I'm not like...I know your not suppose to say that to the parole board, but I don't feel I'm like three-fourths of the women here. I'm not like 'em. And I think I've maintained...when I walked in here I said I will either leave here dead (what I really planned on) or I will come out a better person...and I think I've done that because I haven't lost my values and I've actually learned what ones are mine and not someone else's.

Goffman (1963:4-5) would consider the label of felon as a "blemish of character". Those with this type of stigma are judged based on their "differentness" from others. The stigmatized individual is seen as less than human. When "normal" people find out these women have felony convictions they react to them differently and perceive them to be non-trustworthy and defective. Interestingly, most of the women denied clemency did not view themselves as felons or criminals. They tended to equate criminal/felon/inmate with bad evil people and they did not see themselves in this way. They did this by surrounding themselves with people who shared their stigmatized identity (other incarcerated battered women) and they found support from others inside the prison (volunteers and domestic violence advocates) and their family and friends who could see beyond the label. Linda found when she re-entered society that her idea of self was challenged when people constantly labeled her as a felon even though she did not view herself as one. Linda (just like all the women granted clemency) struggled enormously
with the stigma attached to the felony label in everything from finding employment to meeting new people. Linda has chosen employment in a battered women's shelter where the shelter staff does not label her. Also, she is slow to make friends because of the uncertainty of how people will react to her once they know about her "blemish of character" (Goffman 1963:4). In other words, Linda has surrounded herself with "sympathetic others" to reduce the negative effects of being labeled a felon (Goffman 1963:20).

Looking Up: Spirituality. Not only did the women change how they viewed themselves, but there was also a significant change in how they viewed their relationships with God. As the women talked, it became glaringly apparent that spirituality was salient in all of their lives. It did not matter what topic they talked about, their relationship with God was mentioned over and over again. Interestingly, most of the women believed in God prior to prison, however, their connection with God had been somewhat strained. As the women became empowered in prison and began to feel safe and secure, their relationship with God also changed. They described a shift in spirituality from a fearful God to a loving God. They denounced the patriarchal notion of God and shifted to a more equalitarian view of God.

Karen was raised in a home where her father was the preacher of a Pentecostal church. Throughout her marriage she sought out her church and her family for support against the abuse and both continued to blame her for the violence in her home. Karen talked about how her view of God changed once she came to prison, "...spirituality is my relationship with God. I used to serve him because I was scared of hell and now I serve him because I love him. He's my friend".
Pattie also talked about her spiritual transformation:

My spirituality has been since I’ve been here. I used to pray for God to take me off the earth everyday I would say the same prayer. Take me off this earth. I can’t take this anymore. And this became the whole solution…this is not what I asked for. At that point I felt like I was about beat to death and I kind of felt when I stepped in here that I was beaten one more time…. I was raised Episcopal and I was raised in a very ritualistic type of religion and God is a punishing God. I mean God is all powerful, but their perspective in a man’s organized religion….you were raised with a fear of God and you saw God as a wrathful God, not as a loving God that he is……[since prison] I stay with the God I know now today that’s really a loving God, not a punishing God.

The women also expressed that there were clear cut difference between religion and spirituality. Many felt they were spiritual people, but not necessarily religious people.

They felt religion was connected to going to church, learning about different denominations, and understanding church organization. Spirituality, on the other hand, was their connection with God. Angie talked about the difference between spirituality and religion:

I consider myself a very spiritual person. How do you define the difference? Religion to me is learning about Hinduism, Islamic, Christianity and stuff like that. That to me is religion. Spirituality is, I feel, bein’ in tune with your ownself…your own spirit because we all have a spirit.

Natalie also spoke of a difference between religion and spirituality, “I don’t think you have to claim a certain religion to be spiritual because for a long time I didn’t have any type of religion, but I was very spiritual. I was always looking, always reading, always mediating, or praying, or something”.

Not only, did the women see a difference between spirituality and religion, they also did not want to take part in those things that were considered religious. For instance, some of the women did not attend church services at the prison (which most thought of as religious not spiritual). Pattie described church as a “man’s world” and stated, “I get
more from that [my own spirituality] than I do going over to sit through a church service that almost kind of reminds me of man’s organized religion....I will never be a part of that”.

Alecia talked about her decision not to attend religious services in the prison as well:

The main reason I really haven’t [gone to church] in the longest time...because a lot of people...you only call them Sunday only Christians...and as soon as you walk out that door, okay I’m not perfect I’m not going to say I am...I can’t sit there and say I’m Christian. I say I’m spiritual. I’m spiritually connected to the things around me. Cause I look at everything...every living thing has a spirit. And I look at the sky and I look at all the beauty that’s around me...and to me is more church filled than what I can get over there. I look at (points to her heart) and this is my church right here.

However, not all of the women I interviewed felt this way about the church services. Some of the women attended because they found comfort in the ritual. They described church as a place where they could go and worship and sing and be a part of a community of people who thought like they did. While they did attend church, they also were conflicted about the same issues described above.

More so than church, the group called Kairos was the most significant source of spiritual comfort and healing for the women. All of the women were aware of this group and many had taken part in it. They described Kairos as a spiritual weekend where volunteers would come into the prison and provide unconditional love, healing, and forgiveness to the women. The women learned to love God, rather than fear him. Karen described one the activities she did in Kairos and how she learned how to forgive herself:

Well, finally in ’95 I went through Kairos and Kairos was a very healing experience. They had us take a piece of paper and it was a dissolvable piece of paper and you wrote down all the people you were mad at and I put down God because I was very mad at God because I prayed and fasted. I was a Sunday school teacher. Where were you?.... So I had to forgive God because I was so angry at God and I would tell him regularly....I put my parent’s names down, the church, my husband. And when the paper dissolved...I even put myself because I was mad at myself for not leaving even
if I would have had to go undercover or whatever… I owed it to my kids… if I didn’t have enough strength in myself… I owed it to my children to not let them see that.

Alecia also talked about learning how to forgive her mother who testified against her in exchange for a lesser sentence for setting up the death of Alecia’s abusive father:

It was the whole three day walk that we had. And the forgiveness. They kept talking about the forgiveness. And the love these people had for us and they didn’t even know us. And we got this big bag of mail from little kids that we didn’t even know and this whole big thing of everybody that was praying for us that didn’t even know us. And to think that no matter what has been done wrong can always be re-done right by forgiving and letting go and being able to grow. And knowing that holding in that anger and that hatred stops you from growing. That whole thing. That journey was a big turning point.

Pattie also described Kairos as a turning point for herself, “It is literally a spiritual journey. It’s a weekend….. It was just wonderful. It was absolutely amazing. And it gave me a different perspective. It really gave me a different perspective on God”.

The forgiveness and healing these women talked about had more to do with forgiving themselves than anyone else. Casey (1998) found that feelings of shame are prevalent amongst abuse victims. All of the women denied clemency blamed themselves (at some point) for the abuse and felt some sense of responsibility for the abuse they experienced. Smedes (1993) found that people who experienced shame were afraid of rejection and felt something was wrong with them. As the women participated in Kairos they were surrounded by people who were not rejecting. Furthermore, they participated in activities that helped them recognize they were not to blame for the abuse and instead began to focus their anger on the injustice of their situation (rather than inward on themselves). Forgiveness came when they were able to see their own humanness, as well as others (Casey 1998).
Kairos started in 1976 as an interdenominational Christian ministry. There are three different programs within the Kairos ministry: ministry to incarcerated men and women; ministry to families of the incarcerated; and ministry to juvenile offenders. The Kairos prison ministry includes a three day course that teaches inmates the principles of Christianity and helps to encourage pockets of Christian communities within the correctional institution. During the three day visit the volunteers pray, share the teachings of Jesus Christ, share meals, and talk one-on-one with the inmates. After the three day visit the Kairos volunteers continue monthly half-day visits with the inmates during a one year period. Currently, the Kairos ministry is active in 270 prisons in 33 states, including Canada, England, South Africa, Australia, and Costa Rica (http://www.kairosprisonministry.org).

Paradox of Prison

Prison provided the opportunity for these women to feel free and safe from violence, become empowered survivors, and develop a relationship with a higher power. Because of these changes in themselves, some have also become activists for battered women and incarcerated women. They want to use their experiences to help others. In fact, all of the women I interviewed stated that they agreed to talk with me because they felt they could help someone else by sharing their stories. Angie eloquently expressed how she felt about using her experience to help others. “If I can save one child from being molested, one abuser from being killed, and one wife from being abused than I’ve done something good in my life and my life has not been in vain”.

As the women defined themselves as survivors, they began to see that through their experiences they could help other people. In prison they found their voice and realized
that they were never going to allow anyone else to silence them again. Alecia described this silencing from abuse and then regaining her voice through her participation in the domestic violence groups:

And then I did...domestic violence, living without violence, and we started up a panel of survivors. And we talked to the girls in admissions that was coming in. And when I first started you couldn’t hear me. I talked so softly you really had to strain your ears to hear me. I’m soft spoken as it is, but back then you really couldn’t hear me. And then it was a few years later [one of the counselors] was having a group and she asked me to talk to the girls and I did. And she stopped me in mid...she says, “wait a minute is this the same person?” And then she would tell them “you would not believe what I went through with her....I couldn’t hear her....you wouldn’t have been able to hear her a few years ago”. I said “hey, now I’ve just got more voice”. I basically had to find who I was.

Yet, as the women regained their voice and started viewing themselves as survivors, this survivor self clashed with the structure of the prison. They felt free and safe in prison, however, they did not want to be in prison. They were frustrated with the lack of respect they received as “inmates” and felt that their basic human needs (i.e. the women are not allowed any form of human affection in the prison) are not being met. They felt that prison was not a place where they could bloom and grow, so they were constantly being stifled. For instance the women talked about learning to respect themselves, which also meant requiring others to respect them. Yet, the prison staff was constantly disrespectful to them. The women found they could only stand up to the prison staff to a point before they would get in trouble. Furthermore, the women talked about being intellectually stifled because there was little available to keep their minds stimulated.

As I conducted the interviews, I was unnerved at the lack of respect exhibited by prison staff toward prisoners. In one prison I was given a tour of the facility and there were so many instances where, in the tone of voice they used, their demeanor, and their
attitudes, the prison staff was disrespectful to the inmates. I constantly kept wondering, how do we teach individuals to treat others with respect if we do not do treat them respectfully? Unfortunately, the rest of society most likely sees these women in terms of their inmate status, rather than as fellow human beings and citizens deserving of rights and respect.

Their stigmatized identity marks them so that they are seen as undesirable and deserving of different (discriminatory) treatment (Goffman 1963). The idea that inmates are not people was illustrated well at a criminal justice conference where a researcher was giving a presentation about going into the prisons to conduct research. He was trying to make the point that usually the inmates in prisons are pretty cooperative when it comes to being interviewed. However, in stating this he said, “These inmates were people before they came to prison and they like to talk”. The phrasing of this struck me because what he stated was exactly how the correctional officers behaved towards the women. The women were no longer people, but “inmates”. Therefore, it became acceptable for the correctional officers to humiliate, harass, and degrade them because they now were marked as criminals.

Natalie mentioned that in her 25 years in prison she has encountered a few caring, sensitive individuals who worked in the prison, however, they did not stay too long. She said that the few “good ones” burnt out fast when they realized they could not change the structure of the prison. She also said the ridicule from other prison staff made it difficult for the “good ones”. For example, a woman who worked at the commissary would make sure she always had her books up to date so the women had their money and the other prison staff referred to her as an “inmate lover”.

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A literature review of 43 articles on job stress and burnout among correctional officers found that work in prison settings is highly stressful (Schaufeli and Peeters 2000). Correctional officers reported such things as withdrawal behaviors, psychosomatic diseases, negative attitudes, and burnout. One of the major problems reported by the young, inexperienced correctional officers was a disconnection between their initial expectations and the actual reality of working inside a prison, which led to a high turnover rate among them. The correctional officers reported confusion over their job roles where they were expected to maintain order and at the same time provide rehabilitation services. They often became discouraged with the high recidivism rate which led to a high level of cynicism among those who continued working in the prison. Furthermore, the correctional officers reported a lack of autonomy in their work as well as conflict with supervisory staff. Lastly, correctional officers pay was usually quite low and there was low social prestige associated with working in prison. Unfortunately, due to the high amount of stress and burnout associated with the job, it was often a rare occurrence for correctional officers to show respect and concern for the inmates.

The women in this study were not immune to the insensitiveness they dealt with on a day to day basis with the prison staff. They recognized that the staff and others see them as “non-human”. And many struggled with the fact that the prison staff exploited work the women did inside the prison. For example, Karen talked about her frustration with the quilting group. She said they started out making and sending quilts to charities, but then some of the staff requested quilts.

And I really hated doing it for the staff. I mean like the Governor’s wife, she had me make like eight quilts for her. And another staff person from the department of corrections had me making...I make like quilt wall hangings and I design them....had
us make eight for him. I was staying up working eighteen hours a day for
them.....well like the CO’s (correctional officers) have a CO day. We had to do them
for a CO day so they could give them to their kids and I’m like I don’t even like most
of them. And they had jobs. So at that point I resigned my position.

Other women struggled with some of the policies and regulations inside the prison.

One of the prison rules is that there is not supposed to be any type of touch between the
women. The women are not allowed to hold hands, pat each other on the back, give each
other hugs, or walk arm in arm. Angie talked about how the lack of touch affected her in
prison:

And it’s sad because I went five years in the prison with no relationship.....And I had a
select friend or two, but that was without touch. And I’m tellin’ you I felt like I was
dying on the inside...just to be hugged. That’s something about Kairos too, you get a
lot of hugs and stuff. I think that draws the women in there because we’re human, we
have to have touch. I mean a child will die if he doesn’t, if you do not touch
it....there’s nothing else on the inside. And that’s how I felt, I was dying on the inside.

Angie later talked about having a same sex relationship with a woman inside the prison
because she felt she craved some type of touch so bad:

I’m human. We’re all human here and we need touch. When my dad stopped coming
with my kids twice year....when he came twice a year I was fine. I knew that in six
months I was going to get all the touch I needed. But then when that stopped, it done
something to me on the inside. And I craved love and touch and that’s one of the
reasons I just went ahead and sought for it.

She said her and her girlfriend tried to sneak holding hands and such, but if they are
catched they were sent to the “hole”. As I finished my interviews with the women I had
several ask me if they could hug me or hold my hand. At the end of the interview with
Martha she sat and held my hand for ten minutes. During this time she cried and told me
it was her son’s twenty-fifth birthday that day and she had no idea where he is or even
what he looks like. She also talked about her hopes and dreams of being free so she
could find her children.
Male Correctional Staff. It used to be that only women were allowed to work in women’s correctional institutions (Rathbone 2005). However, that changed when a woman tried to work in a male prison facility and, due to affirmative action laws, she was hired. This opened the door for men to work in women’s prisons as well (Rathbone 2005). Today, the majority of correctional officers in women’s prisons are male (Moss 1999). I also saw this in the prison where I conducted my research.

Since the majority of women in prison have been previously victimized by males (Bradley and Davino 2002), I asked the women if having all these men around in positions of authority was an issue for them. Some of the women said yes. Some of the women said it used to be when they first came in, but today it is not. And yet others said no, it was not issue for them.

The women who struggled with it, stated that it was difficult because they were afraid of men. They also suggested that the men did not understand this fear, and mistook it as hatred. Angie told of a situation where she had sought out mental health treatment and the male psychiatrist gave her the MMPI (Minnesota Multi-Phasic Personality Inventory). He looked over the results and told her that according to this, “you hate men”. She then stated, “No, I have a son, a father…I don’t hate men, I’m scared of men”. And yet, this psychiatrist refused to listen to her and continued to state, “No, according to this, you hate men”.

On the other hand, those women who were not troubled by the presence of male correctional officers reported experiences where the staff really empowered and helped them, which renewed their sense of trust in men. Pattie, along with others, said that the male staff person in charge of some of the specialized training programs was patient and
kind and showed the women they were capable and intelligent. The women talked about how men in the prison had been caring and had not taken advantage of them and in those rare instances where a man was nice to them, it helped build up their faith in men.

**Mental and Physical Health in Prison.** Another challenge for the women in the prison is their mental and physical health. Alecia was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis in 1991 and is still trying to deal with the aftermath of learning that it came from the physical abuse she suffered at the hands of her father.

I found out I had M.S. (multiple sclerosis). And that was in '91. So I couldn’t really walk and they were trying to say it was all in my mind. Well, tell me why my foot is dropping like horse’s hoof? So if hadn’t been for the nurse’s there...they got me off to see Dr. S and the first thing he asked me was had I been in a severe car accident. And I said no. And the next question out of his mouth was have you been abused. I lost it. To think you’re dead and you’re still haunting me from the grave. That was a hard pill to swallow. To think that this could be caused from chronic blows to my brain and to my spine. Now they’re like saying that it is genes...like a gene hereditary or whatever like cancer cells like what you do can trigger it. So my trigger was the abuse (crying).

Almost all of the women I talked to described certain physical ailments that were directly related to the abuse. Angie talked about a condition called ostiopenia, where her bones started to rapidly deteriorate. She said her doctor says she has the bones of a 61 year old and she is only 41. Her doctor believes this is a direct result of the abuse. Angie also talked about the pupils in her eyes not dilating because of all the blows to her head. Cindy had to have surgery on her breasts due to her husband squeezing her breasts as one form of abuse. Karen described having a severed small intestine and damaged nerves to her back from where her husband had stabbed her. She also said she has a brain tumor from the scar tissue from where he beat her in her head. Katrina has problems with her jaw from where her boyfriend hit her. Linda has trouble with her neck from where her boyfriend hit her in the throat. Finally, Natalie mentioned having a hysterectomy two
years ago because of clusters of tumors. The doctors thought that it might be from the sexual abuse from her father. Natalie also talked about how not being able to let things go could make you sick and she connected that with her need to have a hysterectomy as well. These women struggled with the fact that their abusers caused all of this physical discomfort long after they were dead. Furthermore, they often blamed themselves for their ailments, as they felt that these could have been avoided had they left the relationship.

Most of the women talked about their mental health as being “up and down”. Some days were better than others for the majority of the women. Understandably, the physical health problems related to the abuse often had a negative effect on the women’s mental wellbeing. The women spoke of suffering from depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). In fact, when I interviewed Linda (who had been released from prison), we met at a local restaurant. About 40 minutes into the interview, her face turned ghostly white, and she told me to turn off the tape-recorder. In a second or so of silence, she began to breathe again and told me she thought her first boyfriend who was also abusive, Max (not the one she killed) had walked into the restaurant. Even though Max lives in another state, she thought a man with his back to her was him. Even though Linda had been out of prison for five years and gone through some counseling initially, she is still haunted by those who have victimized her.

Cindy also struggled with PTSD and talked about fitful nights of sleep because she still has nightmares and thus, she is on an anti-depressant. Raquel is also on an anti-depressant and Angie said when she gets stressed she goes on anti-anxiety and depression medication. At the time of the interview, five of the women were on anti-depressants.
However, the rest of the women (except Natalie and Veronica) discussed that even if they were not currently taking any type of medication, that they had taken anti-depressants at an earlier time.

The women talked about how going before the parole board and being denied, the clemency hearings, and not being able to see their family and children often sent them into deep depression. Sadly, the mental health treatment available to the women in prison was not ideal. Some of the women commented on the excellent help they received, however, this varied according to which counselor was available to them. Just like outside the prison walls, some counselors are better than others. Unfortunately, for the women in prison it was the luck of the draw and they had to deal with whoever was there for a given period of time. They could not “shop around” for a better fit. The reaction to the services provided was mixed. About half said it was great, the other half said that it was lacking. Raquel commented that if a person is homicidal or suicidal they will get excellent help. However, for those that are just down and out and need someone to talk to, you will get little help. Raquel stated,

…it’s really a band-aid approach. And if you’re not homicidal or suicidal… I actually see a counselor now as part of my mental health treatment thing, but his office happens to be in the living unit that I live….and he’ll walk up to me about once every couple weeks and he’ll see me in the dayroom when I’m zipping and zooming and I’ ice or heading out to work or whatever for the day. And he’ll say well I see you’re up and you’re dressed today…are you doing alright? He says okay…I’ll mark you down as okay. That’s really their kind of approach…..it’s a lot of people who are homicidal and/or suicidal and I understand that they have to deal with crisis type things instead.

The mental health services available in this mid-western prison system has changed over the last ten years due to a lawsuit against the state (Dunn vs. Voinovich) for improper mental health services within the state’s corrections system. Prior to 1995,
psychiatric services were provided by the Department of Mental Health (DMH) and the mental health programs were provided by the Department of Rehabilitation and Corrections (DRC). As of 1995, DRC enacted a community health model which includes teams that service one to five correctional institutions. These teams include psychiatrists, psychologists, nurses, social workers, activity therapists, correctional officers, unit managers, and case managers. All of the mental health staff receives training at the Corrections Training Academy for three weeks prior to working in any of the correctional institutions. DRC is now responsible for providing prison mental health services and DMH makes sure DRC meets established standards of care for mental health treatment in the state (Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction 1996). The women did not comment on whether this change in the mental health services was beneficial.

**Friends in Prison.** One way some of the women coped in prison was to develop intimate networks of social support. The women referred to friends in the prison in contrasting ways. Some of the women talked about friends and used the term "associates". As Martha, stated, "Well, we don’t really call ‘em friends we call associates". A little while later Martha explained why she has associates and not friends, "When you get close to somebody and it’s time for them to leave, it kind of like hurts you. So I try not to get real close to somebody, cause I’ve had somebody up and left me, you know". Raquel and Lauren also talked about the fear of getting too close to anyone. Raquel stated, “It’s just not smart” and therefore she said she just keeps to herself and Lauren said she also “keeps her distance”.

However, other women equated friends made in prison to an actual family. Katrina who was getting ready to leave prison a few days after I interviewed her stated,
Oh yeah. I've had a lot of friends. Good friends...oh it's going to be hard to leave Monday because what happens here is friends become family. See those people I used to sit at home with and get up in the morning and drink coffee with now are here. You share, I'm here everyday all day with you and they became family. Friends become family. So it's gonna be hard.

Pattie also talked about her lifer friends and how these friends are very much like family. She said, "We are ahh...we're a family. We love like a family, we fight like a family...just everything".

Friendships in prison could be a source of comfort, strength, and support, however, the majority of the women were cautious with who they allowed into their inner circles. Most of the women stated they only had one or two close friends and even some said they did not have any significant friendships in prison because it was too hard if the person left. Furthermore, once out of prison, felons are not supposed to have contact with other felons. Linda talked about this and how she was not allowed to see women who were part of her support network in prison on the outside. Therefore, the structure of the prison and the prison rules are not conducive to the development of enduring social networks. Most of the women rely on their families outside of prison for contact and support. If the women do not have families that are supportive, they are isolated and alone.

Maintaining Relationships with Family. Even though these women were in prison, for the most part they tried to stay connected with their families. Overall, their families (and friends from before) were supportive. All of the women had at least one person that came to visit them on a regular basis.

The majority of the women who were mothers had their children live with other family members (sisters, parents, grandparents). However, in the few cases where the
first choice was a family member and it did not work out, the second and last choice seemed to be the state. These children were sent to group home or foster homes. The only children who lived with the victim’s family were Martha’s two boys.

The children who stayed with the women’s families, for the most part, seemed to adjust as well as could be expected. These women (Karen, Pattie, Angie, Katrina, Lauren, and Linda) were able to see their children, call them, and write to them. These mothers struggled with some of the parenting practices used by their family members, but realized that there really was no other option that would be better for their children. However, these women still had a difficult time when they heard of their children’s struggles. For instance, Karen and Katrina talked about their daughters getting involved in abusive relationships. Some of the women blamed themselves for what they put their children through, especially now when they can see that it has had an effect on them. Pattie talked about her youngest son getting into fights all the time and having a big problem with authority. Angie talked about her son getting into trouble with drugs. Linda, even though she’s out of prison, recognized what her incarceration did to her son. She said,

...there are scars on my soul for life, scars on my family’s soul, scars on my son’s soul because in a sense part of him was incarcerated too and some of those relationships there’s irreversible damage...I can never go back no matter how many times the parole board did say they felt that I should not have been incarcerated for this amount of time...it doesn’t change the fact that I was and my son grew up without the benefit of having his mother raise him and I wanted to. I loved being his mom and I can never get that back. I can never get that back. So that is a huge...that is a huge thing that I will never get over. And even today it makes me cry, from time to time.

While these mothers maintained contact with their children, they struggled to continue to parent and provide comfort and support for their children from the confines of
prison. The prison rule that the women are not allowed in-coming calls and therefore they have to do the calling and these calls have to be collect made it difficult for the women to keep in close contact with their children. Because most of their children are grown and living on their own now, the women worry about the cost of the collect calls. Also there is a limit to the number of calls and the minutes the women can talk on the phone.

As difficult as phone calls can be, visitation is even more challenging. Karen and Angie’s children live out of state, so for them to visit it also entails the cost of a plane ticket. Even for those living in state, the drive to the prison could potentially be four hours one way. Because most people associate mothering with being closely connected to their children, as well as providing them with material things, some of the women recognized that their ideas of mothering had to change. This is consistent with Hunter’s (2005) research on previously incarcerated mothers where the women had to redefine their mothering role to include other things then having physical custody of their children. Angie talked about her relationship with her children and noted that it was more like a friendship than a typical mother-child relationship. Karen also noted that even though she cannot see her daughter as much as she would like, she can still “mother her” by giving her advice (even when her daughter does not ask for it).

Not all of the women had contact with their children. Unfortunately for Cindy and Raquel, their children went to group or foster homes and they have had little to no contact with their children. In Raquel’s case, the foster parents decided that Raquel was an evil person and that it would be best for her children not to see her in prison. Once her children turned 21, her sons Alan and Carl have come to visit her, but her daughter Susie
has yet to see her. Carl lives in another state so she rarely sees him and Alan moved in with Susie so now she does not hear from him anymore. Cindy said she only has contact with her oldest child who is in the military, she has not seen her other two children since she came to prison. Martha had three children prior to her incarceration that died from sickness and accidents. She has two living children who went to live with their paternal grandparent and she has not seen them in her 24 years of incarceration:

    His family had ‘em. My mother had ‘em and they came and took ‘em from my mother. So, my family wasn’t allowed to see ‘em. They told my family that if they came on his property they’d have ‘em thrown in jail. And they were my mother’s grandchildren. But she wasn’t allowed to see ‘em. Nobody in my family’s been allowed to see ‘em. Therefore, I couldn’t get pictures. I couldn’t get nothing.

I then responded with, “So you’ve already lost three kids and now basically you’ve lost two more”? And Martha continued, “Well I don’t know now if they’re married, if they’re in the service...I don’t know what’s going on with them cause I have no contact. I don’t even know where they’re at. I could have grandchildren. I don’t know”.

    The mothers who have not seen their children during their incarceration have tried to cope with this in a multitude of ways. Raquel, who tried to eat herself to death, when asked how she coped, stated, “I don’t know. I probably don’t, very well. But what choice do I have? I mean could hurt myself, but that doesn’t solve the problem”. Martha said she just stays to herself and does not interact much with anyone. I wrote in my field notes after my interview with Martha,

    I had to probe her a lot with the questions and she seemed reluctant to talk. I came to realize as we talked that I think she is afraid to talk and open up. She has put up an incredible wall around her in order to protect herself because everyone she has gotten close to has either hurt her or left her. She talked about having three of her children die, her first husband murdered, her second husband she shot, her parents and sister
passed away while she was in prison, and her two living children she has not seen since she came to prison.

I noted something similar in my field notes on Cindy:

Cindy walked into the room and she had hardness about her. She looked like she had had a rough life. She didn’t smile too much and seemed somewhat distant unlike the others who were quite friendly and easy to talk to. She had dark hair with a few gray hairs spattered throughout. She sat down and began to tell her story and within minutes she started to cry. She cried throughout the entire interview and in some places was crying so hard she had a difficult time talking. She seemed to be in a lot of pain discussing her past.

Raquel, on the other hand, used humor to deal with the hurt. She admitted to this and even stated that she would be more willing to crack a joke than to cry. Regardless of how these women coped, they all were in a lot of pain. The fact that they have not seen their children in years is something that they will struggle with for the rest of their lives (in and out of prison).

**Interactions with the Parole Board.** The one thing that gives the women hope is the fact that they have to go up for parole every so often. Those with set sentences, for instance 15 years, serve their 15 years and are released from prison. Conversely, for the women who have life sentences, the parole board can commute their sentences. The women have set times according to parole board guidelines as to when they are eligible for parole. Moreover, the women also have the option of applying for clemency every two years and there is no limit to how often they can apply. This gives them the chance to tell their story, show how they have made themselves into better people, and hopefully the parole board will look favorably on all that they have done since their incarceration and grant their release. However, this is a rare occurrence for the women with life sentences. The women described going before the parole board as torture. They are
caught between a rock and hard place. In their time in prison, the women have become survivors, yet when they meet with the parole board, the parole board continually takes them back to being a victim. Angie talked about her last board hearing:

I think had I went in there with that victim mentality it probably would have been better with the last parole board people, I think. Because I think that I was too confident...I think that my self-confidence and my self-esteem hurt me in that parole board hearing cause I’m not the same person I was then. So they see this person and they’re probably like...I don’t see it. But this is who I am today. I have rehabilitated myself. And that intimidated them or something..... I’ve healed a lot and maybe that hurts me when I go before the parole board because I’m not as emotional anymore when it comes to that because I’ve healed from so much of that. I’ve finally forgave myself for that.

Karen also struggled with her new found survivor self and what the parole wanted to hear, “If you go in there and mentioned that you were abused...you’re not taking responsibility. You’re not taking...er ah....accepting your own guilt. Whatever way you go...so do you say you deserve it?” Pattie expressed frustration over this conflict as well:

You always wake up every day knowing what you did. They try to teach you here you’re justified, you’re justified, you’re justified. But then you go to the parole board and they blow that all out of the water. You get strong...you feel like hey okay I’m doing alright and it is kind of hard reaching as a survivor to express a lot of remorse. Which is something that they look for too. You can’t just walk into your hearing and say, “are you seeing what he did up until this point...now are you seeing this?” Cause I’m not getting the impression you are. And you want me to express remorse. I am remorseful. I took a human life. If I take the face off that life I feel my guilt and feel my remorse.... I’m not going to be that (victim). I’m not going to be that person again. I’m not going to play or portray that. And that’s what they honestly expect you to do. They can’t look at you as a strong person...you’re standing up for yourself so I can’t understand how you could have been this person sixteen, seventeen years ago.

The women described their experiences with the parole board as abusive. They said the prison had taken over the role of abuser. The women often prepared for their boards by isolating away from others. In fact, initially Natalie was not going to talk to me because she was going before the board the day after our interview. She stated she was
so stressed, but decided that talking might make her feel better. The women claimed that the members of the parole board are ignorant about domestic violence issues. The governor appoints the nine members to the parole board. These nine members have all been part of the criminal justice system in some way prior to their appointment and many hold advanced degrees. All of the members have at least a bachelor’s degree: three of the members hold Juris Doctorate degrees; one has a Ph.D. in Education and Counseling Psychology; three hold Master’s Degrees in social work, public administration, and the third is unspecified; and two hold bachelor’s degrees in social work and psychology. The members have previously worked as public defenders, executive directors of drug and alcohol treatment facilities and mental health facilities, victim advocates, and wardens of several state correctional institutions (http://www.drc.state.oh.us/web/parboard.htm). I was unable to find any documentation on instruction the parole board receives on domestic violence issues.

The women in my study reported that they had asked the parole board what type of training they received on domestic violence and they were told it was a two hour seminar. Regardless of the amount of training the parole board receives on family violence, there obviously is a need for more of it. Many of the women stated that they learned that they would just have to “play the game” and “tell them what they want to hear”, which went deeply against how they thought about themselves.

**Prison Not Rehabilitative.** Lasty, the women viewed prison as a place to warehouse people, not to rehabilitate them. When asked if they felt prison was rehabilitative, all of the women stated, “absolutely not”. Natalie expressed her frustration about what happens inside the prison:
Prison is a warehouse. I think it can be (rehabilitative) if you want it to be, but right now the way things are….you’re not doing enough time to get any programming, the waiting lists are too long…..I mean two weeks before they go home, they stick them in a GED class. You can’t get your GED in two weeks when you come in at the 7th grade level. And it’s just taking up space for someone who really does want to be in GED class that has more time. Either you have too much time and they want you in for…or you don’t have enough time….So either way…there’s just a lot of paperwork to make things look good, so they can say we’re doing this. I bet the warden has a big rap sheet as for what this place is doing for people. It’s not doing anything unless the women individually want it to do something. And that’s a choice.

Pattie described some of the cutbacks in programming and how this has affected the women’s lives:

In the beginning it was (easy to get into programming). As the years go and our populations increase it got harder and harder. Plus, they cut many programs. They have lost an outrageous amount of programming here. Which I think is the worst thing you could do because you are turning in to a great big warehouse. That’s not what it should be. Education has been cut….you no longer have any degree programs here. You can still get your GED and certifications, but no degrees.

Interestingly, the correctional officer who took me on the tour of the prison listed all kinds programming they have available to the women. When I asked him about cutbacks, he suggested that there have been no programs cut. However, all of the women I talked to had been in prison a minimum of 15 years and had a longer history with the prison then he had. Furthermore, the passage of the Violent Crime Control Act of 1994 meant that state and federal inmates were no longer eligible for Pell grants. A study conducted three years after the implementation of the Violent Crime Control Act found that fewer programs were available for prisoners and many of the options for any type of higher education opportunities were cut (Tewksbury, Erickson, and Taylor 2006). For instance, with the elimination of Pell grants, correctional institutions also decreased the opportunities available to earn certificates, associates degrees, and bachelors degrees. Tewksbury et al. (2006) found that the number of correctional institutions offering
associates degrees decreased from 71 percent in 1994-95 to 37.3 percent in 1997-98. The same was found with bachelor’s degree where in 1994-95 48 percent of prisons offered this educational opportunity, only 19.6 percent offered this in 1997-98. Moreover, the variety of programs available also decreased.

**Life After Prison**

Linda was the only woman among those denied clemency who was out of prison. Linda, like the women granted clemency, spoke of the steady problems she encountered with the label of felon attached to her now. She experienced what Goffman (1963) termed a stigmatized self and had to learn how to negotiate life after prison in light of this. She relied heavily on family support and those who would give her the benefit of the doubt. She talked about the continued struggle to not fall prey to the idea that she is a bad person because she has been in prison for taking her boyfriend’s life:

The first couple years were devastating because I could not....I was embarrassed. ...Because I’m going through my trial every time I have a conversation, every time I apply for a job, every time I apply for an apartment, I’m judge all over again. So it’s like going through trial all over again every time you meet somebody new that didn’t know you before. Self-esteem shot to pieces. After about two and half, three years into being home I just started doing whatever I could to just really put the past behind....not forgetting it because you can’t forget it, there are scars on my soul for life....

One reason Linda may have struggled so much with the label of felon is because this was a newly acquired identity. Prior to prison, she had stereotyped ideas of what it meant to go to prison and she felt that people in prison were immoral, bad people. Therefore, when she got out of prison she did not see herself as a bad person, yet, others viewed her in this way. Goffman (1963) would suggest that this new stigmatized identity could
cause the person to feel shame because she knows that others view her in terms of the stigma, which is now her master status.

Linda later recounted a conversation she had with her sister and how this helped her view herself differently once she was out of prison:

I remember my sister saying to me...she said Linda I don’t mean to offend you she said, but it’s almost like you never left. I mean we missed you and it was a long time, but since you’ve been home it’s like, it’s like you never left. That to me blessed me because I’m thinking they feel like I’m normal. They still love me. And so I’m not some weirdo to them.

She found her family support crucial to her re-adjustment to society. Yet, her family was also a source of contention. Linda said her relationship with her mother had always been on again, off again, but throughout her time in prison their relationship had blossomed. However, when she came home she found she had to seek counseling:

My relationship with my mom, while it was wonderful when I was incarcerated, we communicated a lot, we wrote, and for the first time probably in my life with her we were able to express our feelings and talk in a way that we hadn’t been before. And when I came home...I don’t know...I got a lot of attention from people that really seemed genuinely happy to see me. And it was a constant flow. And my mom had become very ill...Diabetes, she was a brittle diabetic and didn’t take her medication like she should...I had a difficult time handling our relationship. And she seemed to have a difficult time, not accepting that I’m home, but I think the attention thing...I hate to use the word...I don’t know it made her seem like it was...I don’t know if it was jealous or if she felt that...I don’t know. It just changed and it wasn’t a good change at all. It bothered me.

Linda’s son on the other hand, is doing well and is finishing up his bachelor’s degree at a prestigious university. Linda felt that she has a solid relationship with her son, yet she struggled to forgive herself for all that she put her son through, as well as not being there for him during her incarceration. However, one of the ways that she has coped with these feelings of guilt is to help others. She talked about her work at a battered woman’s shelter, where she goes into the schools and teaches about healthy and unhealthy
relationships. She said she felt, through this, she was making a difference so other children would not have to go through the same things her son went through in his youth.

Linda, like most of the other women in this study, is hesitant to become involved in another committed, intimate relationship. Linda stated she was not afraid of men; however, she was leery to bring someone new into her life. Other women who were denied clemency talked about this, along with a general lack of trust. Two of the women denied clemency denounced any type of heterosexual relationships, and stated that if they were to get involved in another intimate relationship it would be with a woman apparently falling prey to the myth that relationships between women are less complicated (Bell and Weinberg 1978).

All of the women, when asked about their plans after prison, had detailed answers. The women spoke of reuniting with children, family, and friends. They talked about living their lives without anyone dictating what they should do, wear, eat, sit, and say. They looked forward to a life where they only had to answer to themselves. The women also made it clear that they wanted to help other women. They had become strong survivors that wanted to make the world a better place. All of the women talked about wanting to use their experience to help others and all of the women stated at the end of the interview, that they hoped their stories could help others. Based on the actions of the women granted clemency and released from prison, it is likely that the women denied clemency would continue their activist work in the community if released from prison.

For example, in her work, Linda teaches children about healthy relationships, “When we’re talking about abuse, you tell, you hold people accountable. You don’t have to
confront them, but you find a way of letting your voice be heard because you don’t deserve that and it’s not okay.”

Linda used her experience of being a silent victim as a way for the children in the schools to learn how to be empowered, knowledgeable, and strong individuals. She now uses her voice and encourages the children to never be silent. Linda later said that her work is also continually healing her wounds as well. As she sees the cycle of violence stop, her hurt lessens and her heart heals a bit more.

In this chapter I presented the findings on the women denied clemency. I described their lives prior to prison, as well as their lives during incarceration. I described their shift from victims to survivors. Yet, I also illustrated how this new found self clashes with the structure and rules of the prison. Amazingly, though, those women have not given up and continue to be strong survivors in the midst of it all. In the next chapter I present the findings on the women who received clemency. I will describe their lives prior to prison and during prison, and discuss their adjustment after release from prison.
CHAPTER V

RESULTS

WOMEN GRANTED CLEMENCY

The six women in this chapter, just like the women denied clemency, were arrested because they killed their abusive partners or fathers and when they went to trial they were not allowed to talk about the abuse they endured. The trials of all of the women granted clemency were held before 1990. Prior to 1990, expert testimony on Battered Woman Syndrome (BWS) was not allowed in the courts in this mid-western state. However, in the case State vs. Koss (1990), the state Supreme Court ruled that expert testimony on BWS should be admissible. This swung into motion a move for clemency for all battered women incarcerated prior to the ruling for killing/attempting to kill their abusive partners or fathers.

This state was the first to allow a mass clemency review of imprisoned women for crimes related to their history as victims of battering. The governor’s wife was instrumental in this first attempt at a mass clemency for battered women (Gagnè 1998). In 1990, the governor of this state granted clemency to 26 battered women. By the end of his term he had granted clemency to a total of 28 incarcerated battered women (27 were commuted; 1 on parole was pardoned) (Ammons 2003). There were two other states that followed suit with mass clemencies for battered women convicted of crimes. Governor
William Donald Schaefer granted clemency to eight battered women in Maryland in 1991 and Kentucky Governor Brereton Jones granted clemency to nine battered women in 1996 (National Clearinghouse for the Defense of Battered Women 2003). Overall there have been a total of 125 battered women granted clemency from 23 states (42 of these from Ohio, Maryland, and Kentucky).

The six women in this chapter are among the 26 battered women granted clemency in 1990. This is a unique population because these women were involved in the first mass clemency for battered women. The six women in this chapter were interviewed at several points in time throughout their years in the criminal justice system (refer to table 3.1 in Chapter III). Using data collected at these three points in time, I analyzed how being victims of abuse, killing, going to prison, applying for and being granted clemency affected their life course. Each of these experiences signifies a turning point which altered where they are today (Elder 1994). In addition to analyzing these common turning points, I also compared their stories and identified themes shared by the women granted clemency.

In this chapter I introduce the women and provide some background as to who they are and why they went to prison. I describe their lives prior to incarceration (childhood, life with abusive partner/father, and turning point to kill). I then discuss their transition from victim to offender, their view of prison life, and how they began to define themselves as battered women and how this led to their application for clemency. Next, I discuss what it means for the women to come home to a life where they are labeled felons, a status affecting their ability to find housing and employment. Finally, I talk
about how the women started to view themselves as survivors and how this affected their relationships with family members and significant others.

Introducing the Women

In this chapter my goal is to give voice to the women who received clemency by focusing on their lived experiences. Sarah and Carrie were interviewed during their incarceration (1990) and after their release from prison in 1994. Both of these women killed their abusive fathers. Sarah is African American and was 43 when she shot her father who had been sexually abusing her since she was six. Sarah lived with her parents most of her life and dealt with her father’s sexual abuse and her mother’s physical abuse as best she could by dissociating, asking for help, and suicide attempts. She attempted to gain independence from her parents on several occasions. Yet, because of her own mental health issues and the emotional and verbal abuse from her parents, Sarah always returned home. Sarah shot her father with his own gun two and half months after her mother died of cancer. She took a plea bargain and pled guilty to voluntary manslaughter and use of a firearm. Her sentence was 5 to 15 years; she served 5 years, 9 months and was granted clemency and released from prison.

Carrie is a white woman, who at the age of 16 locked her step-father in his bedroom and set fire to their house. Carrie’s mother left when she was three and she remained in the house with her step-father and grandmother. Carrie was sexually and physically abused by her step-father starting at the age of six. Carrie lived with her mother for a short time until her mother’s new husband started sexually abusing her. Carrie told her mother about the abuse, but her mother refused to believe her. Carrie was forced to return home to her step-father who had custody of her. Carrie also attempted to leave
multiple times by running away, but always returned, afraid that her step-father might start abusing her younger sister. She was charged with murder, felonious assault (her grandmother was hurt in the fire), and arson. She took a plea bargain for murder and was sentenced to 15 to life; she served 7 years, 6 months and then was granted clemency.

The other four women were involved in killing abusive husbands or boyfriends. Jackie is an African American, 70 year old woman who was interviewed during her incarceration in 1990, directly after release from prison in 1992, and then 13 years later in 2005. Jackie was married 25 years to a man who physically, sexually, and verbally abused her. In her 1990 interview, Jackie described how her husband would take her to the park and have her stand next to a tree with her back to him. He would then shoot his gun at the tree for target practice. Jackie shot her sleeping husband with his own gun after a fight during which he threatened to kill her and her mother. Jackie was convicted of murder and was sentenced to 15 years to life. She served 10 years, 10 months and was granted clemency.

Teresa is an African American woman who was also interviewed during her incarceration (1990), after release from prison in 1993, and 12 years later in 2005. She murdered her boyfriend by stabbing him during a physical confrontation outside of a bar. Teresa was 18 at the time of the stabbing. She had been with her boyfriend for six years after meeting him when she was 12 and he was 21. Teresa experienced multiple types of abuse by her boyfriend, as well as her family of origin. She was convicted of murder and sentenced to 15 years to life. Teresa served eight and half years before she was granted clemency.
The other two women, Allison and Emma, were involved in killing their abusive husbands. Allison, a 56 year old African American woman, was married for 21 years. Allison was interviewed directly after release from prison in 1992 and then thirteen years later in 2005. She was violently assaulted by her husband and in one instance jumped out of a third floor window to get away from him during an attack. She ended up with a broken foot and fractured knee, and was punished even more by her husband for trying to escape. The breaking point for Allison was finding out that her husband was molesting their 14 year old daughter. She hired two people to kill him. Unfortunately, the two people who actually killed her husband (the ones Allison hired) testified that she along with two other people (not the hired killers) killed her husband. Allison was convicted of aggravated murder for hire and was sentenced to 23 years to life. Allison served four years before she received clemency.

Emma is a 52 year old African American woman who started sleeping on the couch to avoid the sexual abuse inflicted by her husband. Emma was also interviewed twice after her release from prison (1992 and 2005). Emma’s 17 year old son shot his father (with his father’s own gun) when he walked in on his father choking his mother one morning. Emma and her son panicked and did not call the police right away. When they finally called the police later that evening, Emma took the blame to protect her son. Her son eventually confessed to the killing and they were both convicted of manslaughter. They each were sentenced to 15 years to life. Emma served one year and four months when she was granted clemency. Her son, however, served 13 years in prison and then was released on parole.
All of the women were victimized prior to their incarceration. In this next section I talk about Carrie, Sarah, and Teresa’s childhood abuse. I continue my discussion with the women who were involved intimately with an abusive husband/boyfriend.

Life Prior to Incarceration

Childhood Abuse. All of the women in this chapter lived lives full of victimization prior to their incarceration. Refer to Table 5.1 for a summary of the women’s childhoods, their lives with their abusive partners, the turning point to kill, and their life during prison.

Table 5.1: Life Before Prison and After Prison for Clemency Recipients

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Women Granted Clemency</th>
<th>Childhood Abuse</th>
<th>Length of Intimate Relationship</th>
<th>Turning Point to Kill</th>
<th>Actual Killing</th>
<th>Legal Representation</th>
<th>Feelings of Safety &amp; Freedom in Prison</th>
<th>Contact with Children During Prison</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sara</td>
<td>Sexual &amp; physical</td>
<td>Hopeless – abuse never going to stop</td>
<td>Shot father after a fight</td>
<td>Public defender – plea bargain</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>No children</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carrie</td>
<td>Sexual &amp; physical</td>
<td>Abuse never going to stop — worried about potential abuse towards sister</td>
<td>Set house on fire after a fight with father – killed father; grandmother hurt in fire</td>
<td>Public defender – plea bargain</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>No children</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emma</td>
<td>None reported</td>
<td>18 years</td>
<td>Son killed father</td>
<td>Son shot father trying to protect his mother during a fight between his mother &amp; father</td>
<td>Paid attorney – trial</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES – with family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allison</td>
<td>Witnessed abuse between parents</td>
<td>21 years</td>
<td>Found out about sexual abuse of daughter</td>
<td>Hired two men to kill her husband</td>
<td>Paid attorney – trial</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES – with family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jackie</td>
<td>None reported</td>
<td>25 years</td>
<td>Threats against her and her mother</td>
<td>Shot sleeping husband</td>
<td>Paid attorney – trial</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES – with family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teresa</td>
<td>Sexual &amp; physical</td>
<td>6 years</td>
<td>Feared for her life</td>
<td>Stabbed boyfriend during a physical fight</td>
<td>Paid attorney – trial</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>No children</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
For Sarah, Carrie, and Teresa, their victimization started in childhood. All three were sexually and physically abused by family members and/or friends. They learned early on that if they told others about the abuse, they were often ignored, blamed, or the abuse worsened. Carrie talked about how seeking help often made things worse for her. Carrie realized the mental toll the abuse had taken on her and decided to tell a school counselor about it:

And then I got to the point, mentally it was building up to the point, and I was getting crazy. I was having...it’s what I call blackout where I just totally blackout and I don’t know what I’m doing. And I knew I needed help, and I went to people. I went to the school counselor, and after I finished talking to the school counselor, they called home. I didn’t know this. And I walk in the door...I’m knocked back out the front porch and in the yard. I had to go to the hospital for that.

Because these women learned that no one helped, they began to cope with the abuse as best they could. One of the most common coping mechanisms the women used was dissociating from the abuse. They would pretend the abuse was not happening and they would repress any memories of it. Sarah said this started to happen when she felt she was helpless in the situation. She told her mother that her step-father was sexually abusing her when she was 15. Her mother refused to leave her step-father and became more physically abusive towards Sarah:

When mama didn’t leave him when I was 15, I think to myself, that’s when I started going crazy, so to speak. I started being somebody else, like, I mean, I always did do that. When I was a little girl, I used to dream all the time. I think that’s when I started forgetting because I didn’t want to remember it, I didn’t. And I forgot a lot of things because I didn’t want it to be like it was.

Teresa also described dissociating in order to cope with the abuse. Most of her responses during the interview in 1990 while she was in prison consisted of Teresa saying
she could not remember. She literally had blocked everything out (the abuse, the killing, her arrest, her trial) because it was too painful for her. Teresa was interviewed later after she was released from prison in 1993 and then again in 2005. She said that after she got to prison it was five years before she started getting her memory back. In 2005, she stated that she still struggled with remembering things and that when she gets scared, everything blacks out:

Actually like I said I was doing things and didn’t know it. I have had blackouts and it’s not just from alcohol. I’ve had blackouts when I didn’t even drink when I was a younger kid. I had these blackouts, they just come and go when they want to.

The women used other ways to deal with the violence in their families as well. Sarah would sleep with a butcher’s knife under her pillow after she had a mental breakdown, was hospitalized, and then forced to return to her parent’s house. Carrie got a dog to try to protect herself from her father and stated, “By this time, I had got a dog that I raised to the point where he would protect me, and if anybody, he slept with me and if anybody come in the room, it was like either don’t touch her or else. And that dog would wake me up.”

Carrie and Sarah also tried to leave on numerous occasions, but to no avail. Carrie returned home, afraid that her step-father would start abusing her younger sister, if she was no longer there. Sarah became completely discouraged out on her own as her parents had isolated her away from any type of friends or other sources of support she might have had. Furthermore, Sarah reported extreme mental abuse that had her believing that she would never make it on her own. Both of these women got to a point where they felt helpless, hopeless, and thought there was no other alternative but to kill their abusers. Sarah said that she realized when her mother died of cancer, that she no longer could
avoid her father. Not long after her mother’s funeral her father started sexually abusing her again. Sarah shot her father two and half months after her mother passed away.

Carrie’s breaking point was when she was 16 and had exhausted every avenue for help. She knew that even if she left, her sister would be the next victim:

I go upstairs with my sister and me and my sister’s talking, and she’s crying. She just...she don’t know what I’m getting ready to do, she’s like...I’m scared you’re going to leave me here and all this. And it go to the point that I...it’s something told me what I had to do. There’s nothing else going to stop it. I mean, the police questioned my dad about the incidents, and all he said was I would never do that to her. She’s my favorite daughter, my first-born. I would never do that. Everything was replaying itself. And the more scenes I was seeing in my mind, the more it built up. And I was tired, and I felt like the only way to stop it was to get rid of him because I was going to leave sooner or later for good, and then my sister was next, and I didn’t want that. And it’s like I just totally, I lost it. Mentally, I had just gone.

When Carrie and Sarah described their feelings after realizing they killed their fathers/step-fathers, they said they were relieved. They felt bad that they killed someone, however, they were free from the fear that their fathers/step-fathers would continue to hurt them. Sarah described her feelings about realizing her father was dead:

...one of them [police officer] said, “Well you know he died?” so they are going to charge you with murder. I didn’t say anything.....when he said that it was just like...to me it was just like 300 pounds lifted up off me. It’s not that I was so glad that he was dead but, he wasn’t going to hurt me anymore and it didn’t matter. If I had to go to prison or...or...or none of that mattered! It didn’t...he wasn’t going to hurt me and he wasn’t going anybody else...he was DEAD!! That’s how I felt about it.

Even though Carrie and Sarah’s abusers were their fathers/step-fathers, their story is not unique when compared to the other women. The rest of the women in this chapter told similar stories about coping with abuse, developing survival skills, attempting to leave, and finally getting to a point where they decided they could no longer take it.

**Intimate Partner Abuse.** The four women who experienced intimate partner abuse (Allison, Emma, Jackie, and Teresa) talked about their lives being filled with multiple
types of violence. Their husbands and boyfriends physically attacked them, belittled them, sexually abused them, isolated them away from others, and controlled every aspect of their lives. All of the women were in long term relationships. Allison was married 21 years, Emma 18 years, and Jackie 25 years. Teresa was not married, but had been with her boyfriend for six years at the time of the killing.

**Young Courtship.** The women all met their husbands or boyfriends at a time when they were vulnerable. Research on battering relationships has found this is a fairly common experience for battered women (Sipe 1996; Walker 1989). All of the women met their husbands/boyfriends when they were relatively young and they stated that they were inexperienced with relationships and did not see the jealousy of their partners as a warning sign of potential abuse. Jackie said she married young and was looking for a father figure. She thought her husband’s jealousy was “cute”. Allison started dating her husband when she was 14, and by the time they married when she was 18, she already had two children. Teresa met her boyfriend when she was 12 and he was 21. She stated that her boyfriend gave her material things that her family could not afford. She also said, “I was too young to know about jealousy back then...you always make up an excuse to cover for that person cause you love that person”. Emma also talked about the jealousy/control at the beginning of the relationship and how it slowly escalated throughout her marriage:

And well I guess he was just jealous, probably our whole courtship, but I thought, you know, nice to have someone so jealous. And then after the children were born he, he just seemed to just want me all to his self. He didn't want my family around. He didn't want me to have friends. I worked, but he, I don't know if he didn't want me to work or, or when I worked, he wanted me to bring all the money home to him. Like he wanted me to work and still be dependent on him.
Escalation of Abuse. Not only did the control become more severe in these women’s relationships, but the abuse escalated as well. Allison described this escalation:

And the abuse started as, you know any normal abuse would, with it not being so physical, just a few slaps, push, and then it didn’t happen so often. And as we got older, it escalated to very violent where it was almost on a monthly basis that I was physically bruised where I couldn’t function too well. And I had lots of hospital visits.....And you just feel that there is no relief.

Jackie also talked about not being able to simply go to the store because her husband’s control had become so extreme. She said,

So then he started locking the doors, taking my car keys, hiring detectives to watch the... investigators to watch the house. I had to keep a log. If I went to the store, I had to write down what time I went to the store, what time I come back, what did I buy.

One of the reasons it becomes difficult for the women to leave battering relationships is the escalation of abuse (Walker 1984). By the time the violence reaches an extreme level, most women have been with their partners for quite awhile. Furthermore, the physical abuse often does not start until there is some type of commitment (i.e. moving in together, marriage, pregnancy, birth of a child) (Walker 1984; 1989). Because the violence often happens at the time of a commitment, the women feel that they have already put a lot into the relationship and it is their duty to stick it out. Jackie talked about the abuse in her marriage escalating and that it got worse after she had children. Yet, she found it difficult to leave because of all the time, money, and love invested into the relationship up to that point. She stated, “cause after we accumulated so much, material things was there, and the kids was there, and I just couldn’t see just walking off, throwing away a whole lifetime of work”.

Surviving in the Relationship. Prior research has found that women are quite resourceful in trying to survive in an abusive relationship (Sipe and Hall 1996; Goetting
Gondolf (1998) claimed that battered women are not helpless, but instead are very creative in doing what it takes to survive in these relationships. Because these women remained in their relationships for quite a long time, they learned how to survive minute by minute as they lived in fear for their lives. Even with the extreme control and escalating violence in these women’s lives, they were not passive. They survived in a variety of ways.

Just like Carrie and Sarah, these women minimized and denied the abuse as a survival strategy. In order to live in a violent home, many of the women denied what was really happening. Allison talked about how she could not handle the idea that her husband was sexually abusing her daughter. She stated, “But you, being a mother and you don’t want to think, know that this is happening, or think it is, and so you just shut it out, and that’s exactly what I did. I made excuses for the little things that I saw”. As Allison began to acknowledge the abuse and learned other ways to cope, she used such strategies as confronting her husband and fighting back to deal with the violence.

The other women also used a variety of methods to cope; they attempted to distance themselves, as well as hiding money from their partners. Emma’s statement about doing whatever it takes to survive illustrates this well:

„...so I just would keep things to myself. And when I would go to work, I would pretend, you know, that everything was fine at home. I wouldn’t let a birthday or Christmas, I would buy things, and I would buy myself something. And I would tell my co-workers that he bought it for me. And I started staying at my mother’s house a lot. And my sister’s. Just anywhere, you know, to keep from going home where he was.

Emma later in the interview talked about dealing with her husband’s constant sexual abuse and that she tried to avoid him at all times. She said,
And uh it got so bad I just stopped even going even in the bedroom. I took most of my clothes upstairs to my daughter’s room, and I started sleeping on the sofa in the family room, and he would come in there and he would mess with me, pull me down on the floor and uh, so then I just started staying at my mother’s house.

Jackie also survived by keeping money hidden and wrapped up like meat in the freezer in order to survive financially when her husband would not give her any money.

Not only did these women do things to distance themselves from their abusers, but they attempted to leave these relationships multiple times. One problem that arose quite often for the women was that their abusive partners would put their children in the middle. Emma, Allison, and Jackie have children and they all discussed the difficulty of taking the children away from their fathers. Moreover, they talked about how their abusers would use the children as a way to keep them from leaving. Emma explained,

And so then I decided I would get a divorce from him. And I filed for a divorce and my mother she, you know, she talked to me, you know, how I was gonna make it with 2 kids. He loved the kids. But then, she didn’t know what was goin’, really going on. I never told her. And then the kids, they were young and they still wanted both of us, so I dropped the divorce action… And then he started up again. It went on like that I guess for about 12 years. I tried to leave again and he, he had jumped on me and I was running out the house and he grabbed my daughter, she was about 10 years old. And he held her over the banister, head first, feet up, and he, you know, was threatening if I didn’t come back, that he was gonna drop her. And so she was screaming, so me and my son went back in the house.

The women cited numerous reasons for staying with their abusive partners: they loved them, were financially dependent on them, did not believe in divorce, worried about their children, and were fearful (for their own, children’s, and family’s lives).

These reasons have been cited in earlier research addressing the question of why women stay in abusive relationships (Barnett 2000). Furthermore, attempts at leaving for these women were unsuccessful. Jackie recalled how she called the police on many occasions during the 1970s and 1980s and this was the response she received:
It was domestic. And they [police] said they could not interfere. They said, “but we talked to him. So it would be alright”. And said, “if something happens, he start up again, call us”. I went and got like a...it’s similar to a restraining order...and he tore it up and threw it on the prosecutor’s desk. He said this will not stop me. He said that she’s my wife and she’s going to do what I tell her. He said this is not going to keep me from hitting her.

Research on battered women who have killed has found that these women have made frequent attempts to leave and to reach out to others for help (Leonard 2002; Gagnè 1998; Beattie and Shaunessy 2000). Unfortunately, their pleas for help often fell on deaf ears. It was not uncommon for their husbands or boyfriends to threaten them or other family members. Further, with their lowered self-esteem they often believed they could not make it on their own.

**Turning Point to Kill.** The women in this study got to a point where they began to feel hopeless in their situations. They used different strategies to survive in their relationships until they finally got to the point where they realized that no one was going to help them. The turning point for Jackie was her husband threatening her mother’s life, as well as her own. Her husband was short on money for his business and he started arguing with Jackie about the money. Jackie’s mother was present and stepped in and confronted Jackie’s husband about the abuse. Jackie’s husband then threatened to kill her and her mother if she did not provide the money he needed. Jackie shot her husband with his gun on the Friday after his threat. When Jackie was interviewed, right after her release from prison, she recalled the shooting and her breaking point:

It’s a thing you go through, just all these years, you sit down and it’s the mental strain, it’s the physical abuse, a lot of is sexual abuse too. It’s like something in your mind just goes blank and you just tired. You just tired. I guess that’s the best way I can say it because I didn’t even know how many times I had shot him until my trial. All I know is I got the gun and I just kept shooting and shooting and shooting. I do remember he asked: “Why are you doing this? Its hurts call an ambulance.” And I
remember telling him no, I was tired….I guess really you can’t explain, it’s hard to explain because it’s not something that you would just go and pick up and do. It’s just like you’re mind goes blank and you just don’t care anymore, you just don’t care. The only thing that you care about is this person not being able to hurt you anymore. That’s all you care about.

Allison also had a similar breaking point when she could no longer deny that her husband was sexually abusing her daughter. She stated,

And I thought, “How could my husband, my children’s father do something like this? You know, he has done everything in the book, and I have always tried to do is make sure he was okay, because we were okay.”….And I think I kind of held a lot of that in me until the day he died, 4 or 5 months….you just feel that there is no relief. You know, you’re tired….He’d always say that he wasn’t gonna be out of our life, that if he had to come back and break in the house and kill everybody, that’s what he’d do, you know and I wouldn’t be able, cause the best thing I gotta do is stay with him, you know, and I could live, because he’d always say, “I’ve planned your death a couple times when you was asleep.”

Allison later arranged for her husband to be killed. She gave two men a down payment to do the shooting. She knows nothing about the actual events of the murder.

Teresa and Emma’s situations were a little different. Emma had also suffered severe abuse and had gotten to a point where she felt she could not take it anymore. However, it was her son who actually shot her husband while trying to protect his mother. Emma described the incident:

….that morning he just came in and he pushed the covers off me and pulled me off the couch and he just started yelling about his lunch, you know?...And he started hitting me and kicking me. I mean, I couldn’t even get up off the floor at the time….he pushed me down a flight of steps...And he just started chokin’ me, to the point that I couldn’t hardly even, my ears started to close up...And then my son came down, and he tried to pull him off of me. And he just kept calling, “Daddy, Daddy, leave her alone. Leave her alone.” And he just brushed my son off like he was a baby... And then, that’s when I heard the gun. And my son shot him..... And then he turned around and he told my son, and he was gonna kill him. And then my son shot him again. [crying] And that’s when...when he fell dead.
Teresa killed her boyfriend during a confrontation. Teresa stated that after her boyfriend began threatening her, she started carrying a knife for protection. Teresa felt she could not rely on her family for help because they were also abusive towards her. Because she was so young, she did not know of anyone else she could turn to for help. When the actual incident happened, Teresa and her boyfriend were at a bar together and got into a fight. Teresa pulled her knife out to protect herself and she stated that he came after her and "fell into the knife".

It is not uncommon for women who kill their abusive partners to not remember the actual incident, or how many times their abusers were shot/stabbed, and to deny that their abusers are actually dead (Walker 1989). The women in this chapter all reported this lapse in memory and denial of outcome. Jackie, Emma, Allison, and Carrie did not call the police right away because they did not believe that their husband's/father's were dead. Moreover all of the women who did the killing (including Carrie and Sarah) could not remember specific details. They mentally blocked it out of their minds. Teresa remembered very little about the stabbing of her boyfriend and Jackie did not know how many times she shot her husband until the police told her. For many women, the denial and dissociation that often happens in these instances is just a continued coping mechanism that they learned during their childhoods or lives with their abusers that helped them deal with the abuse. Unfortunately, the criminal justice and legal systems do not always recognize this and therefore think it is supporting evidence that shows their culpability in the killings.
Legal Representation and Trial

As the women entered the criminal justice system as offenders, many were unsure of how the legal system worked. Sarah took a plea bargain to protect her mother’s name even though it might not have been in her best interest. She stated, “And at the time I didn’t know anything about the law. My main reason for not having a trial, the main reason was because of shame. I did not feel that I could go through all of that and drag my mother’s name through all the mud”. Carrie also felt forced into a plea bargain, but for different reasons. Carrie said her attorneys and the judge kept telling her if she went to trial, she would be sentenced to death. But later when Carrie was interviewed after her release from prison she came to a different realization and stated, “…the biggest problem when I was goin’ to trial, it was election time. And the judge that was tryin’ my case was goin’ up for reelection. They even told me, “It’s about politics”.

The other women in this chapter had jury trials. In Allison’s case she told her attorneys that she was asleep at the time of her husband’s killing and so she pled not guilty to the involvement in her husband’s death. Thus, for Allison the abuse was not an issue for her when she went to court. In Emma’s particular case, she went to trial right after the laws were passed to accept expert testimony on BWS. However, because it was her son who actually shot her husband, she was not allowed to bring up the abuse in her trial. Teresa and Jackie went to trial before the law passed allowing expert testimony on BWS and, therefore, were unable to discuss any of the abuse in their relationships during their trials. Interestingly, Jackie’s attorney did try to bring up the battering during her trial, but not only did Jackie not know what BWS was, she did not identify as a battered
woman. When Jackie’s attorney brought up the BWS, the prosecutor objected and stated she did not fit the criteria:

...they testified that I didn’t fit the criteria to go on that. So when they come down they showed me a picture of a woman who had been beaten up, her eyes was like hanging out, her nose was broke, this was all distorted all over. He [prosecutor] said, “Have you ever looked like this?” I said, “No.” He said, “That’s the battered woman. If you look like this, then you use battered women’s syndrome”. I told my attorney, “That poor woman looks like she’s half dead”.

Unfortunately, the general public believes many myths about battered women and if battered women do not fit into the stereotyped criteria, they are not thought of as “real battered women” (Osthoff 2001, p. 235). Furthermore, the women in this chapter did not begin to identify as battered women until they went to prison and became involved in domestic violence support groups. It would have been impossible for them to stand up against prosecutors and protest that they were truly abused women if they did not view themselves in this way at the time of their trials.

Prison Life

When the women started serving their sentences in the state prison system, they were afraid, ashamed and often suffered post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) from the trauma of abuse and killing. Many of the women were not familiar with PTSD and blamed themselves for their out-of-balance feelings, nightmares and night sweats, and their constant hypervigilance. Sarah was afraid to sleep at night for fear that she would have one of her nightmares and would wake the other women up:

And when I first went to prison, I was so afraid, cause I’d never been in an environment like that or anything. And I remember so many nights we were, like at admissions, it was like this dormitory, and the cots are like only this far [two feet] apart and I used to lay there at night and I would lay awake just about all night, I would keep myself awake as long as possible, and if I drifted off to sleep or something, I’d wake right back up. You know why? Because I didn’t want the other women to get mad at
me, because I was scared I was still gonna have the nightmares, and if I woke everybody up, then they would be mad with me and maybe somebody would beat me up. And so I would lay awake at night.

**Counseling/Support Groups in Prison.** Fortunately, these women had access to counselors or support groups where they were able to begin to understand about their own victimization. This knowledge then facilitated a healing process for them. This was especially the case for Sarah, who felt that for the first time, she could begin to come to terms with the incest from her childhood. She talked about how her first counselor taught her to value herself. She recalled a conversation she had with this counselor:

She said first of all, what happened to you was not your fault… [my counselor] works a lot with diagrams. She would put certain words, she showed me really exactly how I was...how I had been trained to be...how I had been so dominated all my life....That’s how I started talking to her and was uh, she’s the one who first started helping me ‘cause she’s the first person who had ever in my life told me that I was a worthy human being. Nobody had ever told me that before….nobody had told me before that I didn’t deserve to be treated like that, that they didn’t have a RIGHT to treat me like that.

Sarah was deeply empowered by working with a counselor. However, a little while later, her counselor quit and she was assigned to a new counselor. Sarah was lucky, in that her new counselor was just as good as her old counselor.

The other women in this chapter said they learned about their victimization from the support groups and other programming available to them. Unfortunately, at the time these women were in prison, those with life sentences had limited access to programming. Because of the limited programming opportunities for those with life sentences, a “Life Group” was started. After her release from prison, Allison recalled how the Life Group got started and what its purpose was:

[Warden at the time] started a group called the Life Group. It was made up of all women that were doing life and it was sort of like a big support system within itself,
because we had, when you’re doing life, you had nothing there. All the programs are made up for people with short time. You know, it’s always about getting you educated or whatever cause you’re moving on to society. And we were not going back. It was plain that we were not going back. We were gonna be there. And she felt that people who were doing life were very mature. They could adjust better. They had better work habits. They had responsible jobs when they were on the streets......And so she started this group. And the group existed about two years before I came, so when I got in the group, it was probably third year.

Teresa struggled to find the right group and finally found acceptance, support, and comfort in the life group. She stated, “They [life group] were supportive to me, and what I mean by supportive to me was they was keeping’ my sanity....they really were....they were uplifters to me”.

The Life Group was also instrumental in getting domestic violence support groups started. These women, along with the warden at the time, were able to get volunteers to come into the prison and facilitate support groups for victims of domestic abuse. These support groups were the catalyst for change in the women’s perceptions of what it meant to be battered women. Prior to these support groups, many of the women did not think of themselves as abused. Just as Jackie felt that she was not a “true battered woman” because she had never been beat to the point where she looked “half-dead”, the other women felt the same way. Emma talked about the abuse in her marriage, “I just thought it was part of being married. You know, I really, really did. I just thought that he was the man and you was his wife and he hit you or whatever and it was part of being married”.

When Emma was interviewed in 2005 she reflected back on what she had learned during her time in prison while attending the domestic violence support groups:

Like I didn’t know I was being battered....I didn’t realize it because I always thought of battered women as being passive or very, very, very poor and not having these material things and actually that’s the way I thought of them. I didn’t know it could be
career women, women that worked like I did all the time. I was still a battered woman and I didn’t realize it. Yet, it [the support group] has put a large awareness.

**Empowerment in Prison.** As the women learned about the dynamics of abusive relationships and began to understand that they were not to blame for the abuse, they began thinking of themselves differently. Other studies have found when abused women are able to discuss their victimization in a safe, comforting environment, it can be empowering (Gagnè 1998) and could lead to posttraumatic growth (Tedeschi and Calhoun 2004). Not only did Emma view herself as a battered woman, but she also began to see herself and the other women as strong survivors:

You know, you think yours is bad, then you listen to someone else and, I, peoples don’t think it, but instead of bein’ weak, I think we are really strong because we put up with so much.

Sarah also felt uplifted by the support of the women in the domestic violence support groups. After she was released from prison she looked back on her experience with the support groups and stated,

It’s the only time, that the only place that I ever got any help at. The only time I ever got any help. Now I’m not sitting here saying that I LOVE the penitentiary or that I want to go back. It’s not that at all, it’s just that that’s the only place I ever got any help, the only place where I came in contact with other women like me.

One of the reasons the women were able to get so much from the support groups and counseling was that they were finally in an environment where they felt safe to talk about their feelings. Surprisingly, some of the women commented that they felt freer and safer in prison than they did in their own homes with their abusers. This is a consistent finding in research on the relationship between women’s prior victimization and their feelings of safety and freedom in prison (Bradley and Davino 2002). During her time in prison, as well as after release, Jackie consistently stated that she felt safer and freer in prison.
During her time in prison Jackie stated, “It's bad to say, but being in here, I feel more freer than I was married. Especially in my last years. And in a way, I have more freedom in here than I had with him. But I don't like it in here. I don't like it you know. But comparing this to him……”. After Jackie was released from prison, she stated, “….I have not regretted one day or all the time I was in [prison], it was a peace of mind. It truly was and that's been 12 or 13 years ago. I still feel free”. Sarah commented that one of her counselors in prison told her that the reason she was having flashbacks was because she was finally in a place where she felt safe enough to explore these hidden memories.

**Paradox of Prison.** As it is currently structured the prison system can never truly be rehabilitative or a place of healing where healing and recovery occur. Even when counseling and support groups are implemented, the most common experience of inmates is one of disrespect and abuse. As a result the women had mixed feelings about prison. They experienced prison as a place of safety and freedom, yet they did not want to be there. As Jackie said, “I don't like it in here…but comparing it to him…” Thus Jackie represents a lot of the women’s views. They were very torn between feeling that prison was a place where they could heal, and on the other hand, acknowledging the fact that they were confined to prison and had no freedom. Other research on incarcerated women also suggests that women experience prison in contradictory terms (Bradley and Davino 2002).

One of the issues the women struggled with was the presence of males working in the prison. While Carrie was incarcerated she talked about what a hard time she had with the male correctional officers, as well as male psychologists because they were men. She
said to her male psychologist, “It’s not just you. It’s every man. I’m going to feel uncomfortable”. With the influx of male staff in women’s prisons over the last 10 years (Rathbone 2005), the discomfort Carrie described will probably continue to be an issue.

The women also struggled with making friends in prison. Sarah reflected back on her incarceration and said that at first she made some really good friends. Yet, these friends eventually were released and she had to grieve those lost relationships. She said it just got to be too much and she decided that she would not make any other friends in prison after that.

However, in order to survive in prison the women described needing emotional, physical, and spiritual support. In order to get those needs met, some of the women said they turned to other inmates for that support, and those relationships sometimes became sexual. Jackie and Teresa talked about the shock and discomfort of seeing two women together in an intimate way (i.e. holding hands, kissing, hugging). In fact, Jackie said she never officially joined the Life Group because there were too many lesbians involved. Yet, the women also acknowledged the need for physical contact and emotional intimacy. The women were often torn between their feelings that homosexuality is wrong and wanting some form of human touch (which is prohibited in the prison). Teresa told a story of when she was in prison and how she had almost kissed another woman. She said she could not believe that she let herself even get to that point. When asked if the woman was nice to her, Teresa responded, “Yea. She was nice. Oh she shared things with me. I shared things with her. But I just couldn’t believe that I had gotten that close”.

The other issue that three out of the six women in this chapter struggled with was the fact that they were in prison and not able to care for their children still at home.

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Fortunately, all of the women’s children were able to stay with family while the women were in prison. Emma’s sister moved into her house and took care of her daughter. Allison’s oldest daughter took care of her one son who was still a minor. Jackie’s youngest who was 14, first stayed with her older sister and then lived with her half-brother until she was 18 and joined the Navy. Even though all of the women felt their children were in good hands, they all felt a tremendous amount of guilt (Hunter 2005). Allison had a difficult time with this and stated, “You know, I really miss him [husband], and you know I wanted him to be around and I could look at my children and cry inside, I would hurt so bad inside because they don’t have their father there”. Jackie also felt a lot of guilt when her children would come to visit and she said,

Like my youngest, when she comes, she’ll sit there and cry, if she stay all day, she’ll cry ALL day. And they can’t….they have no understanding of why I’m here or why I have to stay. They understand what I did to be there, but they can’t understand why I have to keep staying here.

Emma really had a hard time with this because her son was also incarcerated. Not only did she feel guilt and shame about not leaving the relationship, but she also blamed herself for her son’s incarceration. Moreover, Allison and Jackie had a hard time being in prison and knowing their daughters were involved in battering relationships. They said they felt helpless being in prison and not being able to do anything to help their daughters.

Applying for Clemency. As the women struggled with being in prison they did not give up. They did whatever it took to heal, grow, and empower themselves through support groups and counseling. As the women became empowered from the support groups, they also were introduced to information about clemency. Allison talked about
one domestic violence volunteer who told the women about the laws pertaining to the battered woman syndrome. He introduced them to the legalities of the battered woman syndrome and informed them about the bill that was introduced to allow expert testimony on BWS in the courts. Allison said the women in the group got a copy of the bill and dissected every bit of it. She said they would try to understand it and apply whatever they could to their lives. As the women began to understand the laws pertaining to domestic violence they began sharing information with the other women in the penitentiary. Allison stated, “We started reading, well we were gathering information from everywhere about domestic violence. We were sending out articles and just, you know, sitting and reading the stuff and we would share it….We would put packets of stuff together.”

Not only did these women share the information with the other women, they also had others supporting their research. For instance, the warden who initiated the Life Group and then helped set up the domestic violence groups also helped the women with the clemency process. In fact, she encouraged many women to apply for clemency even when they did not want to do it. Sarah said she felt “forced” to submit an application because she initially did not want to apply, “because it was just so difficult. I had a hard time…accepting the fact that I was a victim of domestic abuse”. Therefore, there were several sources within the prison system that helped empower the women: the domestic violence support groups, the women themselves, and the warden at the time of the clemency movement.
All of the women in this chapter received clemency, had their sentences reduced, and were released from prison. Because they received commutations rather than pardons, they still had felony convictions on their records.

**Life After Prison**

Clemency, defined as a “generic legal term that includes any executive act that reduces or alleviates a penalty for a crime” (Gagné 1998, p. 29) can be granted by state governors or the president. However, governors and presidents are politicians and are influenced by public opinion (Ammons 2003). The use of clemency can mean taking a big political risk (especially if it is a high profile case or a perceived dangerous criminal). Sometimes in order to show the public that they are not soft on crime, political leaders opt to commute rather than pardon the criminal offender. A commutation replaces the punishment/sentence for a less severe one, where a pardon would completely alleviate and exonerate the person of the crimes he/she has committed (Sheehy, Reinberg, and Kirchwey 1991).

**Community Service Hours.** All of the women in this chapter received commutations. Therefore an issue in their lives after the clemency decision was how others reacted to them as ex-convicts with felony records. Goffman (1963) proposed that when an individual has a negative attribute that causes them to be different from others it can be considered a stigma and this stigma affords others the right to treat this person as non-human. Goffman felt that the existence of stigmas was a social phenomenon. Link and Phelan (2001) updated some of Goffman’s ideas about stigma, stating that “a stigma is a label that others put on a person; these labels are linked to negative stereotypes; these negative stereotypes attached to the stigmatized person allow for a separation of ‘us’
from ‘them’” (p.370). The stigmatized person is defective and therefore it is okay to discriminate against them.

Society tends to label those with a criminal background as untrustworthy, violent, and immoral (Dodge and Pogrebin 2001). Furthermore, the women in this study committed violent acts of aggression which stigmatized them further because they violated gendered expectations for women (Busch 1999; Schur 1984). The negative labels attached to ex-convicts result in continued discrimination, individual and institutional (i.e. policies limiting employment and housing opportunities for anyone with a felony record). Previously incarcerated people often do not have economic resources (because of their lost income due to their incarceration), political power (felons are often not allowed to vote), or social power (they are not allowed into certain social circles because of their felon status). Power is a central ingredient to stigmatizing others and because these previously incarcerated women lack power, they are discriminated against because of their criminal background which affects their life chances (Link and Phelan 2001).

One of the first places where the women dealt with their felony convictions was the mandatory 200 hours of community service they all were required to do at their local battered women’s shelter. Refer to Table 5.2 for a description of how the women felt about the community service hours, employment after prison, as well as how they felt about themselves once released from prison.
Table 5.2: Life After Prison for Clemency Recipients

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<tr>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sarah</td>
<td>Missing</td>
<td>NO – lived in halfway house</td>
<td>Disability</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carrie</td>
<td>Missing</td>
<td>NO – lived in halfway house</td>
<td>Fast food restaurant/ government assistance</td>
<td>YES – drug addiction/selling drugs</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emma</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES – lived with family</td>
<td>Temporary work for 5 years/government assistance</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allison</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>YES – lived with family</td>
<td>Battered Women’s Shelter/government assistance</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>NO – involved with married man</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jackie</td>
<td>Missing</td>
<td>YES – lived with family</td>
<td>Receptionist at Senior Citizens Home/ government assistance</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teresa</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>NO - lived with family, but family abusive</td>
<td>Disability</td>
<td>YES – drug addiction/feligious assaults</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The community service hours were a stipulation of the commutation to encourage the women to get counseling and give back to other women who were dealing with abusive relationships. Allison was very grateful for the community service because the shelter where she worked offered her employment and in 2005, at the time of her second interview, she was still working for this shelter. However, for some of the women, the community service hours were very difficult. Teresa did her community service hours at several different shelters because she encountered problems at almost all of them because of her felon status:
And I was looked upon as an inmate that had just been released under the Governor and so what. You got 200 hours to do, you wanna do em here or somewhere else. That was their attitude. And that’s exactly how it happened. I ended up in 3 different places because of that.

Instead of being able to interact with the women residents and sit in on groups she was put in the basement to sort and organize donations. Teresa also had a hard time with the structure and rules in the shelters. Because Teresa was so young when she went to prison, and her life prior to prison had very few rules, she had a hard time accepting the battered woman’s shelter guidelines for behavior (i.e. eating times, no spanking children, curfew at night).

Emma also had a difficult time with her community hours at a battered woman’s shelter. Emma was uneasy hearing the women’s stories when her own experiences were still quite fresh. Furthermore, Emma found the realities of shelter life hard to grasp. For instance, she spoke about the devastation of having to turn women away from the shelter because there was no room for them or the shelter staff did not feel the women were really abused. Emma also realized that the living conditions in a shelter were far from comfortable:

It was…that was hard because I heard things and saw things you know that I didn’t know went on because I never went to a shelter so I didn’t know what it was like. And then seeing why some women go back to their situation…shelters are crowded, you have no privacy, you really have nothing of your own. It will make a person say I would rather go home to my home and suffer this than stay here. You know…I saw that.

Because the battered women shelters in this state get most of their funding through grants and donations, lack of money is a constant problem for these shelters (Schick e-mail conversation 2006). This has become even more evident with the Bush administration’s cuts in funding (Laney and Siskin 2003). For example, the 2004
authorized funding request for grants for battered women shelters by the Violence Against Women Act was $124.42 million, which was $2.81 million less than the authorized appropriations in 2003. Furthermore, the actual appropriations listed in the Violence Against Women Act were way below the amounts approved in the bill between the years 2000-2005. The Violence Against Women Act approved 175 million dollars a year for grants for battered women shelters. Yet, in 2002 the authorized amount for battered women shelters was $124.46 million and in 2003 $127.23 million (Laney and Siskin 2003).

**Surviving in a New Environment.** Adjustment to the free world was challenging for all of the women. Some of the women were so used to being told what to do, they were unsure how to act in public. Furthermore, since many were isolated prior to prison, there were a multitude of things that were unfamiliar to them. Sarah talked about walking into a McDonalds and not knowing how to act:

Only a few stores had those scanners [prior to prison]. I had forgotten about those scanner things. When I got out. They’re everywhere, I didn’t know anything about them. I didn’t know how to go in McDonald’s and order food. I had to stand back and watch other people. To see what they did, to see where they put their trays. Did they leave em on the table or did they empty them or something like that, because I didn’t want to seem stupid and I was always dreading the question, “Well, where have you been?”

Carrie said since she had been incarcerated most of her youth, she did not know how to handle her finances:

I didn’t know how to manage money. And I was still livin’ like I was 16. That was the only problem about me growin’ up in jail. And I was runnin’ to the malls, just like a teenager! You know, ‘cause I didn’t know what it was like to grow up and be an adult.

After release from prison, other women in this chapter had a difficult time having people around them, as well as adjusting to the fast pace of society. Allison talked about
how everyone in prison makes their plans as to what they are going to do once they are released. Allison realized, though, that most people’s plans are fantasy and not reality. She said, “And life is so fast moving, and your plans get threwed away because you’re back into society and society doesn’t function normal, and they’re fast movers, so now you gotta figure out how do you fit in.”

Emma, Jackie, and Allison all spoke about needing alone time as well. When released from prison Jackie stayed with family and she said she got to the point where she could not handle hearing babies crying and constant noise around her all the time. Jackie had to stay with a friend because she thought she was having a nervous breakdown. She also described feelings of paranoia and said, “I was a little paranoid. I thought people were looking at me and knew where I had been and I knew they didn’t…. So it all boiled down to I just needed to be by myself for two to three months for me to think”.

Emma described similar feelings of needing her own space and feeling torn between on the one hand spending time with family that she had not seen, and on the other hand having much needed time to herself. Interestingly, after being out of prison for 15 years Allison still feels this way. She goes out of her way to spend time by herself, she only has a few close friends, and she lives in a place where she prefers not to know her neighbors.

Family Support. In order for mothers to successfully make it when they are released from prison, family support is crucial (Hunter 2005). This was evident for the women in this study. Half of the women had family support and they seemed to fare better than those who did not. Jackie, Allison, and Emma relied heavily on their families once out of prison. Emma’s family had been supportive throughout her time in prison, when her
sister moved into Emma’s home to care for her daughter and pay the mortgage on her house, “I have a large family and if it hadn’t been for my family, I don’t know. When I went away, my daughter was still here, they kept my house up. So when I got home I had a home to come back to....”

Allison and Jackie also went home to family. Allison was able to say with her sister and then later her brother and Jackie stayed with her daughter and niece. Because both women were able to stay with family, they were able to save up money relatively quickly to get back on their feet. Within a year, they both were able to buy homes of their own. While their families made life a bit easier for them, they still were frustrated with the help that was supposed to be available to them from groups in the community. Jackie remembered one frustrating occurrence of trying to get some clothing from a local charity. She said she went to one local church where they gave her a voucher for clothing, yet they had no clothing there. So she had to go across town to another church where she could use her voucher to get a couple of skirts and shirts. She commented that she could understand how people would end up back in prison if they did not have any family support.

Those without family support were Carrie, Sarah, and Teresa. Because Carrie and Sarah were victimized by their own immediate family members, they were unable to turn to any family members for support once out of prison. The extended families of these two women blamed them for the death of their loved ones and refused to help them. Initially, both of these women lived in half-way homes, where they had very different experiences. Carrie felt the half-way house was helpful and provided her with skills to find employment, counseling, and even extended her stay an extra 30 days. Sarah
reported a drastically different experience and was very frustrated with the lack of help she received from the halfway house where she stayed:

It is not structured to deal with women who have been locked up a number of years. It’s not designed for that because they don’t have any kind of program to help....When a woman gets out of prison and she has been locked up for years. Things change and she needs to be told, she needs to be shown and told, especially if you go to another town and you don’t know anybody. And you don’t have anybody to tell you any of these things.

Unfortunately for Teresa she was caught in a catch-22. She did have family available, but once out of prison her family became very abusive towards her. She had a stable place to live, yet it was not healthy for her to be there. Getting out of the situation was quite difficult for Teresa because felons are ineligible for the public housing program. When Teresa was interviewed 15 years later after her initial release from prison she said she fought the public housing authority eight years before she was finally able to get a subsidized apartment.

Sarah’s abusive parents were her adoptive parents and throughout her time in prison she had been in contact and became close with her biological family. Once out of prison and after her time in the half-way house, she planned on moving to another state to live with her biological sister. Things did not go as smoothly for Carrie and Teresa. Both of these women dealt with drug/alcohol addiction, additional criminal offending, and abusive relationships.

I believe there were several reasons why these women struggled more than the other women granted clemency. First, Carrie and Teresa were very young when they went to prison (17 or 18 years old) and were in prison between seven to eight years. This drastically altered their life trajectory because they were in prison during a time in their
lives when many important adult turning points usually occur: schooling, employment experience, dating, and marriage. Therefore, when they were finally released from prison, they struggled with the expectation that they should be like other people in their late 20’s. Unfortunately, the educational or work experience they had acquired came from their time in prison and was quite limited. Furthermore, Carrie and Teresa had little know-how about living on their own, making daily decisions in an environment that was not restrictive, and understanding the social norms of interaction outside of prison. Not only did they not have the basics, they were starting out with a felony conviction. The second reason why these women struggled so immensely was the lack of family support. They had to rely on the “system” for help and unfortunately the women reported that help from the government was often not that beneficial.

Employment. Regardless of family support, all of the women had great difficulty finding adequate employment. One of the major problems they encountered was employment discrimination against felons. Allison had previously been a nursery school teacher and when she returned from prison her former employer told her that she would love to hire her back, but she could not because she was a felon. Emma encountered similar frustrations with employment. In her interview in 2005 she stated,

I’ve been at this job for five years. I started off as a temp and then they hired me in. But before then it was hard because with me having a prison record. And people they don’t bother to know why you have a prison record. They can’t understand what happened or what led up to that. This is a one time thing for you. They just think you are a habitual criminal. And so that was the reason it was so hard. By the time I got out in ‘91 up until 2000 I just worked temporary jobs because no one wanted to hire me.

Physical and mental disabilities also affected the women’s employment opportunities. Some of the women had physical health problems due to the abuse (i.e.
back problems) or were suffering from PTSD or other psychological problems that made it difficult for them to work. All of the women discussed experiencing episodes of depression and anxiety after prison. Teresa talked about how she would go into work and start crying and not be able to stop. Throughout her life, Sarah had multiple mental health diagnoses that followed her once she was released from prison. Sarah and Teresa ended up on disability (because of their mental health problems).

Some women turned to alternative sources of income to make ends meet. Carrie, having no previous work experience prior to prison, worked at a fast food restaurant. When she was unable to pay the bills on her minimum wage job she opted to sell drugs. Unfortunately, it was a downhill spiral for her as she began using more of the drugs than she was selling and in the end had to deal with serious addiction. Carrie became pregnant and was able to get help through the YWCA. In 1994 she still relied on them heavily, as well as other substance abuse support groups for social support to keep her clean.

Substance Abuse and Criminal Offending. Carrie was not the only one that struggled with substance abuse when she was released from prison. Emma also mentioned that in her first years of being home she relied on alcohol way too often to cope with life stressors. She eventually realized that it was not healthy and was able to stop. Unfortunately, Teresa was still struggling with these issues 15 years after her initial release from prison. Teresa said when she got out of prison she did not know how to cope, so she turned to alcohol. When asked if she participated in any type of counseling, she said the counseling she went to was pretty much a “formality” because of parole stipulations. She stated she did not like the medications her doctors tried to put her on so she would “drink to forget”. Due to her excessive drinking, Teresa had numerous run-ins
with the law and in 2005 she was incarcerated for a felonious assault charge against a man she claimed had tried to rape her.

In trying to explain Carrie and Teresa’s criminal offending there are some commonalities in their lives. For instance, both women were sexually victimized as children and had abusive childhoods. Furthermore, they entered prison when they were quite young (17 and 18 years old) and therefore when they were released they did not have a lot of life experience. Finally, neither Teresa nor Carrie had family support post-prison.

However, their re-offending after prison differed to a certain degree. Carrie’s re-offending centered on her inability to secure stable employment due to her lack of work experience, lack of education, and her felony conviction. When she was released from prison she was completely on her own without any type of family support. The only work she was able to find was at a fast food restaurant. As she realized that her minimum wage income was not sufficient to obtain housing on her own, she became friends with a man who let her move in with him. He introduced her to selling illegal drugs and she realized the substantial amount of money she could earn from this activity. With this new found income she was able to buy her own home. However, her immersion into the drug world became even more pronounced when she began to use the drugs that she was selling. She eventually lost her home and bounced from friend to friend in order to have a place to sleep. When she realized she was pregnant she knew she needed help and she contacted the YWCA. Carrie began substance abuse treatment in 1991 and as of 1994
was clean and no longer involved in any type of criminal activity. Carrie had her
daughter and also had a son two years later. Since her time at the YWCA she has
remained clean.

Teresa’s story differs somewhat from Carrie’s in a number of ways. Teresa also had
substance abuse issues (her drug of choice was alcohol). However, she never became
involved in any illegal drug activity or property related offenses. Teresa’s criminal
offending involved violence that stemmed from PTSD as well as possible other mental
health problems. She stated in her 2005 interview that when she gets scared she becomes
violent:

But anyway, I just got a fear of people. If they make me scared then I become
dangerous. I realize that. If you make me scared then I become dangerous...Like I
said if somebody scared me or hurt me I lash out. And I don’t know why. I guess
because I’m scared and it’s the only thing I have for protection. I’ve got about three
felonious assault charges. Two of those for the same person...I’m so scared. I’m
hurting people. And that’s not how I was before. If you make me scared, I’m
dangerous. And it doesn’t take much to scare me.

In all three of Teresa’s interviews she mentioned “blacking out” a lot throughout the
day. Teresa also mentioned that she had been diagnosed with bi-polar disorder,
depression, anxiety disorder, PTSD, and a memory disorder. Furthermore, she stated
there were more diagnoses, but these were the ones she could remember. The only time
she has consistently taken her mental health medication was when she was in prison.
When she was out of prison she would use alcohol to self-medicate and spent most of her
time in local bars. Because of her dependence on alcohol and the long hours she spent in
the bars, she was at risk for additional victimization. Teresa stated that since her release
from prison she had been raped five different times. When she has called for help, it
seemed people perceived her as a drunk or a crazy person and thus, just wrote her off as

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someone not worthy of help. Teresa realized that every time she was victimized in her life and attempted to get help, no one listened. Thus, she learned the only way to protect herself from further victimization was to fight back violently. It seemed that Teresa’s childhood victimization set the stage for the multiple mental health and drug addiction problems she now has and her continued victimization. In my field notes I noted:

Teresa seemed to fixate on things and throughout the interview it was frustrating because she just kept going back to the same thing over and over again. I would ask a question and her first sentence might attempt to answer the question and then she would be off on a tangent about how everyone else is victimizing her. I don’t doubt that she was abused or had a horrific childhood, however, it seems her abusive childhood coupled with mental problems keeps her stuck and makes it so she is unable to grow and go forward in life. I also think that because of all her mental health problems she has been written off by society, so it seems like a vicious cycle. People look at her and call her crazy and the more they do that the crazier she becomes. She seems to have a lot of self-defeating behavior. The biggest difference I saw between her and the other women I interviewed was the lack of ownership to her actions and her life. Most of the other women seemed to have a pretty good grip on the idea of responsibility without blaming themselves. Teresa was unable to see this and refused to accept responsibility for anything in her life. It was always everybody else’s fault.

When comparing Teresa and Carrie to the rest of the women, any of the women in this study could have ended up in a situation like Carrie. Fortunately, for the rest of the women they either had family support or adequate social and financial support from other sources. However, Teresa’s story seemed to be the outlier when compared to the other women in this study. Teresa’s mental health problems go far beyond any of the other women granted clemency. Unfortunately, without adequate mental health treatment and intensive counseling for Teresa, there seems to be a strong probability that her life will consist of continued victimization and offending.

*Transforming the Self: Victim to Survivor.* When the women first went to prison many of them did not view themselves as battered women. Jackie and Emma thought
that battered women were poor or were beaten really badly. Nonetheless, as these women became involved in domestic violence support groups in the prison they learned about intimate partner abuse and began identifying themselves as battered women. At the end of their time in prison, some of the women not only self-identified as battered women, but also were beginning to view themselves as survivors. According to Kiecolt (1994), a change in one’s self often begins when a stressor is introduced into one’s life. The introduction of this life stressor might reduce one’s sense of self-efficacy, lower a person’s self-esteem, and cause psychological distress. This often leads to a turning point where the person feels the need to change one’s self. The imprisonment of the women in this study was a major life stressor which led to a lack of self-esteem and feelings that they no longer controlled what happened to them. The turning point for the women came in the form of the domestic violence support groups which caused them to re-evaluate how they thought about themselves. Emma’s transformation from victim to survivor started at the end of a domestic violence support group in prison when she stated, “instead of bein’ weak, I think we were really strong because we put up with so much”.

This sense of self as survivor was reinforced when these women were granted clemency and the governor validated what they had been through. The women had told their stories to numerous people in the prison (battered women activists, prison officials, and other inmates), attorneys, the parole board, the Governor, and the Governor’s wife. The granting of clemency to these women signified that they were justified in what they had done and that someone heard their stories and believed them. One of the governor’s
stipulations for the granting of the clemencies was that the abuse in these women’s lives had to be so horrific that had they been able to talk about it in their trials, they would not have gone to prison.

Furthermore, not only had the governor stated these women were justified, but the media contacted some of the women and wanted to hear their stories. These women became recognized as survivors. They became women who had survived the worst abuse imaginable. Jackie, along with other women granted clemency, went on the Oprah show and the Phil Donahue show after they were released from prison to tell their stories. People wanted to see how they had “survived”. Because these women were defined by others as survivors, they in turn began to view themselves in this way and acted accordingly. The women defined acting like a survivor as being able to stand up to others, the ability to state their opinions without worrying what others would think, taking responsibility for their lives, and using their experiences to help other people. Carrie and Sarah found that after they got out of prison they started demanding respect from more people in their lives. They realized that they deserved to live a life without abuse.

The transformation from victim to survivor was more complete 15 years after prison than right after release. Allison, Emma, and Jackie were all interviewed in 2005 and all of them stated with much certainty that they were survivors. Emma stated,

I would say a survivor because he could have easily killed me. And I believe that is what it would have come to. And I don’t consider myself a convict. I just did what had to be done at that split second. And battered....yeah, I was battered, but that would never happen again in my lifetime.
When Allison was asked how she viewed herself in 2005 she said, "A survivor. I never want to say I'm a victim because I have been victimized, but I don't use that as a crutch".

The only woman who was still caught between viewing herself as a victim and a survivor was Teresa. Teresa seemed unable to take responsibility for her actions and often blamed others for her problems. In order for the women to view themselves as survivors they had to see themselves as active participants in their lives, as people who make things happen (Kiecolt 1994). Instead, Teresa viewed herself as a passive participant and life just happened to her. The women's sense of whether they were victims or survivors affected most of their interactions with others.

**Intimate Relationships.** Teresa as a young child was raped by a childhood friend. Although Teresa did not state the age of this friend, she did note that he was friends with her abusive boyfriend who was nine years older than her. After the rape, this friend became her boyfriend until her abusive boyfriend, who she eventually killed, decided that he wanted to date her. Carrie was sexually abused by her father and had mixed feelings towards him. She knew what he did to her was wrong, yet she also loved her father. It is not uncommon for sex abuse victims (especially those victimized at young ages) to confuse sex (even non-consensual sex) for love (Russell 1998). Neither of these women had male role models that were respectful to them and they claimed they did not even know what a non-abusive male would look like. Both of these women ended up in abusive relationships after their release from prison. Teresa said she was lonely because she had no family and she knew some of her "friends" did not treat her right, but she did not want to be alone. Carrie also talked about her fear of being alone:
I’m not used to bein’ alone. I’ve always had somebody in my life, always. And I’m scared sometimes. Like when we’ve [boyfriend and her] separated, and been totally apart, you know, that loneliness, I don’t like that. And I’m, I just, I just, I’m real codependent and I know that. I’ve got to have somebody there.

Carrie has learned to stand up for herself (she got a restraining order and pressed domestic violence charges against her boyfriend), yet she also justified her relationship with her boyfriend. When asked why she was with her boyfriend she stated he was a good provider to her children (she had two children after her release from prison, but her current boyfriend is not the father of either one of them) and he treats her children well. Carrie often reflected back on her own childhood and remarked that she wanted to give her children everything that she did not have growing up as a child. One of those things was a loving father who provided material comforts. Carrie seemed very torn between the loving father version of her boyfriend and the abusive side of him and it was a constant struggle for her to figure out what to do about it.

The rest of the women granted clemency stated that they were too afraid to get involved in any intimate relationships. When Emma was interviewed in 1992 she stated, “right now I’m still very, very untrusting of men. I, of relationships. I haven’t thought about a relationship and I’m mostly just a loner”. Emma was interviewed 13 years later in 2005 and she talked about her life today without a man:

I’m kind of satisfied where my life is….where I was used to having all the time to do what I was told….and now I can do what I want, when I want. If I want to go outside for awhile I can do that. I look at the peace I have. I look at my sisters and I talk to other people and I say wow I have a nice peaceful house and if I want to have company I can have company. And then I can be by myself. I’m kind of like at peace.

When the women first got out of prison they were terrified of getting involved in another relationship. As the years went by, they dabbled in dating and realized that they
liked being by themselves better than being committed to someone who might have the
potential to become abusive. The women’s sense of themselves as strong and
independent clashed with some of the expectations they ran up against when dating.
Jackie said that after prison she dated two different men and explained why these
relationships did not last:

But like when they start getting to close or come and says you know I think you need
to get out there and cook me something...you’re gone. Because had it been years ago I
probably would have laughed and said okay. Now I take it from what I’ve been
through...oh no he’s never giving me orders...oh no I’m not gonna jump and do this.

Allison also had similar thoughts about dating. She recalled a conversation she had with
her fellow co-workers at a battered woman’s shelter:

[I] always tell my co-workers think about this we’ll never meet anybody cause all we
have in our lives is women and children. There’s no men in our circle. And then if
there are...well here go the red-flags big time and we’re very...men look at us and
think we’re different. We ask too many questions. We don’t know how to be quiet.
So most of us...at least I do attract men that are very strong and are traditional. And
traditional men...well the man wears the pants in the family and women should only
talk when spoken too and yada yada yada. And I have a problem with that. If there is
a problem I need to talk about it and work it out and the men that I know can’t
understand that.

Nonetheless, these women did crave human affection. Allison admitted later on in the
2005 interview that she was involved with a married man. She felt this arrangement
worked well because there was no commitment:

It fit me because there’s no commitment...And he is committed to his family in the
sense of marriage is forever and you support your family and all this. And I’m
committed to mine. So we did things like...it’s more like movies, dinner, he would
come to watch television and that’s the extent of it really. I may call up and say hey
take me to the movies and he’ll say not today, but maybe in a couple of days. Those
relationships...there’s no wear and tear on it, there’s no commitment, there’s nothing
like you gotta be somewhere, you know there’s none of that. If we schedule a time to
meet and I have to go to work...sometimes with my work if someone can’t come in,
they’ll call me....and if I had scheduled something with him, I’ll just call and say I
can’t do it.

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Interestingly, Laurel Richardson (1985) found similar results in her study of career women who chose to have relationships with married men because there was no obligation or commitment. They could have someone to share their time with and yet they also could keep him at a distance. They could have romance and companionship, without sacrificing their career goals and personal control.

Re-establishing Relationships with Children. In her study of previously incarcerated mothers, Hunter (2005) found that re-establishing relationships with children was extremely challenging and this was the case for the women in my study as well. The women who had children prior to prison had a difficult time re-connecting with their children after prison. The women got home from prison and found their children withdrawn and/or abusive, involved in abusive relationships, and angry. Allison talked about the effect of all this on her children:

I talked about my two children that were on drugs and about how my daughter had to give up the house because she couldn’t function and about how one of my sons was young when I left and you know it worries me that, you know, he’s growing and I feel he’s being cheated and that how I’ve worked all my life and never hated anybody and but I was trying to take care of my family and be okay.

Emma also noticed how her daughter was extremely withdrawn when she returned home from prison. He daughter had to deal with the death of her father, and also the incarceration of her mother and brother. When Emma returned home, her son was still incarcerated and she realized her daughter was struggling:

She’s really closed in, she doesn’t talk about what happened. She doesn’t really talk about anything. She uh, she’ll come home, she goes up to her room. But she’s just really withdrawn.....It’s like she’s just trying to forget everything that ever happened. You know I uh, she’s thrown away all the pictures of her father and she doesn’t even like his name mentioned. If you mention his name, she walks out the door.
Some of the children did not understand how their mothers could have taken their fathers away from them. Jackie talked about her children not understanding the brutality of her marriage because she tried to keep it hidden. This lack of understanding about the abuse in their parents’ relationship, also led to a lack of understanding of why their mothers killed their fathers. One of Allison’s daughters refused to believe that her father could have sexually molested her sister. She blamed her mother for her father’s death and had a really hard time dealing with it. Many of the women talked about having long talks with their children in order to bring some peace to the situation. Some of the children were able to get counseling, where others were not. When the women were interviewed at the most recent time, most of their children seemed to have healed some and their relationships with their mothers seemed to be improving. Allison stated that her relationship with her children in 2005 is, “It’s good. I’m still their mother and they call me when something’s wrong or they want to know something.” Emma noted that her son has made it a point to teach non-violence to his own son:

My son has a 15 year old and they’ve had conversations about things and he’ll talk to him and he’s said that if he ever finds himself just angry he’ll leave. And he’s vowed that he will never put his hands on his child or a woman.

Emma also talked about her daughter’s healing process:

She talks....as a matter of fact we all talk about it. She talks about the good times and we even talk about some of the bad stuff that happened. I think at first....she um....I don’t know if she really ever....she says she never blamed us, but I think maybe in the beginning she may have a little resentment there. But I think as she got older and knew it was nothing else it could have happened that she came to terms with it. We even talk about it.

Finally, Jackie in 2005 talked about one of her daughters coming to grips with the fact that her mother killed her father:
So she understood that and she came out about four years and she said you know I don’t know what would have happened if it had been you and not him. She said I’m glad it wasn’t you. So I think they worked themselves through that, it was okay. They never showed hatred but it was like they resented it because they did not understand it.

The women also found that the way they interacted with their children changed as a result of everything they had been through. For instance, the women began to stand up to their children and reinforced the message that they will no longer tolerate abuse in their households. The women also decided they would speak their minds about who their children were dating. Sometimes this new assertiveness conflicted with how their children thought their mothers should act. Allison described her new way of dealing with people and how sometimes her family did not look favorably on this:

And I am very... if I want to know something I’ll ask. You know with my work [at a battered woman’s shelter] you don’t beat around the bush. And I have a family who does that. They talk around stuff. And I’m like wait a minute. I ask the questions. So I am very different. And they all look at me, like oh god, here she comes if anybody is hiding something she’s gonna find out cause she’s gonna ask. You know I am very confrontive. And I look for solutions. And I don’t blame people.

Even though these women changed how they interacted with their children, they still were very aware of all that their children had endured. Some thought they had “abandoned” their children and they seemed to have a lot of guilt surrounding this. In their latest interview in 2005, these women seem to go out of their way to help their children. Jackie sold her house and moved in with her daughter after her daughter had kicked out her abusive husband. Jackie’s daughter called her and said she needed help and Jackie was there without hesitation. Allison talked about the house she bought as a “family house”. She has her own apartment that she stays at, but also has this “family house” for her children where her adult children can live:
So I always tell my son, “this is your house, but you could never marry and live in this house. You get married you have to move”. This is a family house. I’m just very protective over my children and they’re all adults, but their life as they came up was so hard and I never want anyone to be without a place to sleep. So this is why I bought it. And I pay all the bills.

Furthermore, the women’s new sense of who they were spurred many conversations with their children and grandchildren about living a violence free life. These women became feminist activists when they gained the knowledge about abusive relationships and now they were using this knowledge to educate others (mainly their children). The women’s behavior would be consistent with feminist activism, yet, Jackie was turned off by some of the progressive ideas associated with feminism and when asked if she considered herself a feminist she said,

Maybe 50/50. Some issues I do, but not all of em. Cause I think it has hurt a lot of women in a lot of ways. So not altogether. I think some parts of it is a little extreme. And I am still sort of old fashioned about a lot of things.

However, when the women were asked if they took an interest in women’s issues and if they wanted to help other women (especially battered women) all of them stated very admittedly that this was important to them. As of 2005, Allison had 27 grandchildren and she talked about her constant conversations with her children about disciplining their children. She said it was important for them to understand there are other options to disciplining their children besides spanking them. Allison also said she spent a lot of time with her grandchildren and constantly talked to them (especially the girls) about getting a good education so they can support themselves. Jackie said she dealt with her grandchildren fighting at school on a couple of occasions and she would sit them down and talk about the importance of not hitting others. Moreover, Emma stated that she constantly talked to her daughter about healthy versus unhealthy relationships:
Yeah I talk to my daughter a lot. She’s had a couple of guys that did try to get abusive and she was wise enough to get out of it. And I talked to her and say you never have to settle, never settle for less. Never think that you’re not worthy to have one. Because you are and never let anyone make you think that you don’t have that self-worth.

**Promoting Violence Free Lives.** All of the women were doing things in their lives that promoted living without abuse. This even applied to Teresa who was trying to sever relationships with her abusive family. The women also continued to view themselves as survivors and part of healing for the women was being able to use their own painful pasts to help someone else. Allison has worked at a battered woman’s shelter ever since she was released from prison and commented that she gets much joy out of knowing she is helping other women. Jackie has volunteered on and off in battered women’s shelters since her release from prison. Carrie and Emma talked about how they talked to others, as well as their children and were constantly promoting non-violence. At Carrie’s interview in 1994 she was working with a friend to get a hotline for battered women started up. She said sometimes it would be nice to have someone on the other end of the phone that has been there and she felt she could be that person. Carrie has also started standing up for herself and others. She started a petition around her community to get a parking lot turned into a park where the neighborhood children would be able to safely play. All of the women that I interviewed told me that they consented to the interviews because they felt they could potentially help someone else by telling me their stories. Sarah who was interviewed in 1990 and 1994 remarked in her 1994 interview that the reason she did the interviews was to help others:

The main reason I’m doing that is because ...I have to often think...and I used to think all the time, if anything I could ever do that would help some other young woman or prevent her from doing what I did, then I’ll do whatever I have to do to help her. Now that I believe in and that’s why I granted this interview.
Summary

All of the women in this chapter were victims of abuse prior to going to prison. During their time in these abusive relationships, they survived the best they could. Ironically though, when the women entered the criminal justice system as offenders they did not view themselves as battered women or even as strong women.

As they spent their time in prison they had a chance to learn about the dynamics of abusive relationships and came to identify themselves as battered women. This change in how they viewed themselves was one of the catalysts that started the women on a mission to learn about the new laws in place for BWS and the clemencies. The women in the prison, numerous volunteers, as well as the warden, all helped to get the word out about the clemencies and encouraged the women in the prison to apply.

Once the women were granted clemency and released from prison one of the first things they had to do was fulfill the 200 hours of community service at various battered women’s shelters. Unfortunately, these community service hours were quite painful for some of the women. The realities of shelter life were quite a shock to some of the women and they were quite discouraged with what the shelters actually offered.

Other tasks the women had to accomplish once out of prison were to find adequate housing and employment. Those women that had family support seemed to fare far better than those that did not have this, which is consistent with other research on women’s post-adjustment from prison (Hunter 2005). Those who did not have family support were more likely to struggle with drug/alcohol abuse, abusive relationships, and criminal behavior.
Most of the women started to see themselves as survivors and this grew stronger the longer they were out of prison. Not only did they view themselves as survivors, but they also began to actively do things in their lives that supported this notion of who they were. This affected their interactions with others in terms of intimate relationships, their parenting styles with their children, and in general as they constantly stood up for themselves and demanded respect from others.

Those women who were mothers struggled to reconnect with their children. Many of their children were very angry when the women initially came home from prison. But as the women were able to talk to their children and get them into counseling the children were able to start healing. Nevertheless, the women saw how the abuse and going to prison had detrimental affects on their children and the women expressed a lot of guilt surrounding that. They acted on this guilt by doing whatever they could to take care of their children now that they were out of prison.

Lastly, all of the women have made it a point in their lives to promote living in non-violent ways. Some of the women have tried to distance themselves from those that have been abusive in their lives. Other women have taken a more active stance in teaching others about domestic violence (i.e. volunteering or working at battered women’s shelters). All of the women who were mothers talked about the necessity of teaching their children and grandchildren about healthy and non-healthy relationships and did this on a regular basis.

In the next chapter, I will talk about the policy implications from this research, the limitations of this dissertation, and future directions for research in this area.
CHAPTER VI
DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

This dissertation focused on three general research questions about the lived experiences of the women who applied for clemency in the 1990s. The first question was what has life been like for these women since the clemency decision (i.e. relationships with friends, family, and children; employment (if out of prison); physical and mental health)? Secondly, how did their sense of self change as a result of their experiences with battering, criminal offending, prison, and clemency? Finally, how have they coped with life stressors since the clemency decision (i.e. what have their formal and informal sources of support been)? Feminist and life course theories guided this research.

In this chapter I review the main findings for each research question, in the context of feminist and life course perspectives. Finally, I address the limitations of the study, possibilities for future research, and policy implications from this dissertation.

Research Questions and Major Findings

Life After Clemency: Relationships, Employment, and Physical/Mental Health. The first question concerned the women’s relationships with others; their employment; and their physical and mental health. All of the women’s relationships were changed as a result of their imprisonment; as expected, their familial relationships suffered. Because
of limited opportunities, the incarcerated women only had minimal contact with their family, friends, and children. The women reported that, because they were in prison, their definition of parenting had to change. Some of the women reflected that their relationships with their children were friendlier than the typical mother/child relationship because their children were forced to grow up so quickly. However, some of the women had no contact with their children due to custody disputes. Because the women’s relationships with their families were limited and strained, the women formed their own prison families, especially those with life sentences, where they referred to each other as “mama lifers” and “baby lifers” and took care of each other. The women who had been in prison the longest were considered the “mama lifers” and the “baby lifers” were the women just new to prison.

The women granted clemency struggled with re-connecting with their family and friends once home from prison. The women’s children were often angry and/or withdrawn and the women spent many hours with their children trying to repair their relationships. The longer they were out of prison, the better their relationships with their children and family. It was incredibly hard on the women when they saw how their past abusive relationships and their incarceration affected their children. In order to deal with this guilt many of the women went above and beyond for their children (i.e. buying homes for adult children, moving in with children to take care of grandchildren, providing financial assistance).

Women granted clemency had a difficult time finding employment because of their felony convictions. They struggled to secure stable employment and often depended on family members for material support. Women with family support had an easier time
getting back on their feet and finding employment than those without the support of their families. Other women were unable to work and ended up on Supplemental Security Income (SSI) because of their mental health problems stemming from years of abuse.

Regardless of clemency outcome, many of the women reported having a difficult time with depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder. The help available in prison for the women was mixed and dependent on what counselors/therapists were working in the prison. The women reported that inmates with more severe mental health problems often received the best help in prison. The women out of prison struggled with these issues as well. They reported difficulty finding good counselors who really understood post-traumatic stress disorder. It seemed the longer the women were out of prison, the more settled they felt and the less paranoid, depressed, and anxious they reported feeling. Women from both groups reported physical health problems associated with the abuse or from being in prison and having inadequate health care. Those with physical health problems seemed to struggle more with mental health symptoms as well.

The Women’s Sense of Self. The second research question addressed the women’s sense of self and how their experiences of abuse and imprisonment have affected how they feel about themselves today. Interestingly, the women in both groups talked about seeing themselves as survivors. The longitudinal design of the study revealed how the women granted clemency first had come to see themselves as battered women and then after that, they were able to slowly move from being victims to becoming survivors. This process of moving from victims to survivors started when the women came to prison and became a part of domestic violence support groups. As the women participated in these support groups they gained knowledge and understanding about domestic abuse and
came to realize that they were not to blame for the violence in their lives. For instance, rather than focusing on the fact that many of the women did not call the police or did not successfully leave the relationship, the support groups paid attention to the many ways the women survived in the relationship (i.e. asking others for help, saving money, going to school). As they met other women like themselves they began to see they were not alone. There were other people who had gone through the same things they had gone through and who truly understood their trauma (Tedeschi and Calhoun 2004). Furthermore, these support groups began to reshape their thinking by constantly reinforcing the notion that these women were capable, strong, and deserved respect. As these women experienced this love and support they began to see themselves as survivors. Moreover, some of the women took part in spiritual programming within the prison (i.e. Kairos) that also strengthened the idea that they were lovable people. The women who had some form of a spiritual awakening (either through the religious or spiritual programming within the prison) seemed to find a renewed focus to their lives (Tedeschi and Calhoun 2004). They relied heavily on their spirituality and this aided in their acceptance of this new found identity as survivor.

Not only did the women in both groups see themselves as survivors, but they also began to use their experiences to help others (Tedeschi and Calhoun 2004). This in turn created the belief that, as survivors, they were strong women. As the women began to see themselves in this way, it affected their interactions with others. All of the women felt it was important to stand up and be recognized as survivors and they were constantly reinforcing the notion that they deserved respect. Sometimes this new way of thinking about themselves conflicted with the expectations of others. For instance, the women in
prison had a difficult time with the parole board and other prison staff who viewed them first and foremost as inmates.

The women granted clemency sometimes struggled with forming new intimate relationships because they realized they did not have to be subservient to a man and often had a more equalitarian view on relationships than some of their potential intimate companions. In their attempts at dating many of the women realized they were often much happier by themselves. They liked their freedom and did not want anyone to impinge upon it. Even Allison, who dated a married man, said she liked this arrangement because she could have companionship without the commitment and her autonomy was never threatened.

Coping with the Clemency Decision. The last research question looked at how the women have coped with life stressors since the clemency decision. The women in both groups tended to rely more heavily on informal rather than formal sources of support. The women in prison coped by becoming very active in the penitentiary. They started groups on almost anything they could think of: domestic violence support, parenting, choir/singing, yoga/aerobics, and quilting. Not only did the women start these groups, but they became the leaders as well.

The women in prison also used their belief in God as a way to make it through the day. Their spirituality was a dominant theme in their lives and they felt it was reflected in almost everything they did. Also, by participating in the religious programming they were able to meet their need for intimate connection (hugging, touching), forgiveness, and belief in the possibility of a new life beyond prison.
The women granted clemency and released from prison coped by isolating themselves away from others who did not understand their situations and surrounded themselves with people who could be supportive (i.e. other women granted clemency, family, and friends that understood their situations). The women who had the option relied heavily on their families for financial, emotional, and spiritual support. The women who did not have supportive families relied more on formal sources of support (i.e. government assistance) and were frustrated and disappointed with the lack of help they received. Most of the women granted clemency had a select group of friends (one or two individuals) who also helped them deal with day to day stressors that they met after prison.

Theoretical Relevance

As stated earlier, I used feminist and life course theory to guide my research. Feminist theory provided a gendered framework for understanding the structural inequalities found in our society. From life course theory I used the concept of turning points in the women’s lives and how these altered their life trajectories.

Feminist Theory. Feminist researchers have focused on women’s lack of power in society and how this affects women’s options (Kurz 1989, 1997; Gagne 1998). Not only are women less powerful than men in society (lower pay in the workforce, devaluation of women’s unpaid work in the home), but they also are lacking power in their intimate/marital relationships. In patriarchal societies, the male in the household is still seen as the authority and the woman is assumed to take a submissive role (Kurz 1989). Furthermore, when family violence happens in the home, the victims tend to be the less
powerful (women and children). Violence becomes a way for the abuser to assert power in the home (Dobash and Dobash 1979).

This focus on power is relevant to this study because all of these women lacked power in their homes and in society. There are a number of reasons why there was an imbalance of power for these women. First and foremost these women are living in a patriarchal society where being female is devalued. This affected their financial options (adequate employment and affordable childcare and housing) when they tried to leave their abusive relationships. It also led to the non-responsiveness of community members and social service agencies when they were confronted with helping these women. Unfortunately, domestic violence (because of who its primary victims are) is not always looked upon as a serious crime in our country and therefore help for its victims is neglected (Beattie and Shaunessy 2000).

As abuse victims, the women in this study had many common experiences. Because they were women they were afforded less decision making and authority in their homes. Secondly, their abusive partners tended to take advantage of them from the start of their courtship. For example, many of the women discussed meeting their partners when they were very vulnerable, and that their abusers used their power at an opportune time in order to “get” their wives or girlfriends. As the relationships progressed the women discussed the imbalance of power in the relationships as their abusive partners became very controlling and monitored their every move. The women talked about the escalation of abuse and how fear kept them in their relationships. The women were also constantly reminded of their lack of power when their children were involved in the abuse. Their
abusive partners would often use the children as a way to gain control over their wives and girlfriends.

Furthermore, these battered women who killed had characteristics that set them apart from battered women who do not kill. First and foremost, the abuse the women described was horrendous. They talked about severe beatings, constant threats, and sadistic sexual abuse. They lived with a level of abuse that Johnson (1995) described as patriarchal terrorism. Their feelings of powerlessness in the relationship led them to truly believe their lives were ending. Moreover, unlike most battered women who eventually are able to leave the relationship, these women tried multiple times to get help or leave the relationship and were unsuccessful. When no one listened to these women it further added to their disempowerment.

This lack of power for the women continued even after they ended the relationships by killing their partners. As they entered the judicial system they encountered a gender biased system where they realized they still had no power. They found out that the laws (i.e. self-defense law) as well as how their cases were tried (i.e. character assassinations) were extremely sexist. They were tried, convicted, and sentenced in a courtroom where they had been silenced and were unable to tell their full stories of abuse.

When these women started serving their sentences, they were humiliated, degraded, and re-victimized by the structure of the prison, the prison rules, and the prison staff. Yet, amazingly, these women went from having a false consciousness (not understanding that they were battered women) to having a gender consciousness (seeing and understanding the abuse, putting a name to it, and wanting to stop it). This process occurred in part through domestic violence support groups which provided the
knowledge about abusive relationships. The women took this knowledge and began to see themselves as battered women. The battered women's support groups became a turning point (Kielcot 1994) for the women. Prior to the support groups the women blamed themselves for the abuse which lowered their self-esteem. As they reflected on their abusive pasts and had others validating their experiences, they became empowered and started helping other women. Finally they started shifting their idea of who they were from being victims to survivors. As they continued this journey, their sense of being survivors strengthened and continued to push them to educate and help others about family violence.

Interestingly, how these women came to identify as survivors is exactly the premise behind feminist research. Feminist research seeks to educate people and through this new acquired knowledge empower them to change the system (Fonow and Cook 1991). These women began to use their experiences to educate others. The women in the prison continued organizing domestic violence support groups and talking to the other women in prison and to their children about healthy relationships. The women outside of prison used their experiences and volunteered or worked at battered women's shelters, talked to the media, and taught their children about living violence free lives.

**Life Course Theory.** Life course theorists suggest that everyone has a life trajectory; a path that their life follows. Within this life trajectory there are certain turning points that might alter our decisions and affect where we end up later in life. Life course theorists also believe that people's life trajectory is dependent on several things: when we are born (birth cohort), the timing of certain events (childbirth, marriage, schooling, employment), and the interconnections between people (i.e. how I raise my children will
affect how my children raise their children). Lastly, life course theorists think that people have a say in the choices they make and that they are active participants in shaping their own lives.

Using life course theory to help explain my findings revealed several things. First, the majority of the women in this study were involved in their abusive relationships during the 1970s and 1980s. This is important because at that period of time domestic violence was just beginning to be recognized as a serious social problem (Pleck 1987). When many of the women sought help, they were told by police officers “it was a domestic problem” or the police officers had the abusive partner walk around the block to cool off. It was a rare occurrence for the police to actually make an arrest (Berk, Fenstermaker, and Newton 1988).

Furthermore, the availability of crisis lines and battered women’s shelters was still so limited that the women often did not feel like they had a safe place to stay if they left the relationship. Lastly, because of the lack of education and awareness surrounding domestic violence at this time the women did not have the framework for seeing themselves as battered women. The younger women in this study reported that formal agencies responded more favorably to their help-seeking. Unfortunately, these stories were limited and the women stated that while there had been progress, it was very slow in coming.

The second component of life course theory is how the timing of events affects people’s paths in their lives. The majority of the women had major family problems in their childhoods which altered the trajectory of their lives. The most common form of problem reported was sexual abuse. This victimization at a young age was a major
turning point for these women because it seemed to set the stage for later victimization in adulthood. Because of their early childhood victimization they often had problems in school, dropped out of school, or ran away. If these women were running away from the abuse (either physically or mentally by dissociating or withdrawing) they were not present in school and suffered academically. This affected their self-esteem and self-efficacy, altered their educational attainment, which in turn affected their employability and chances at independence.

Most of the women met their abusive partners at a young age, married after dating only a short time, and had children relatively early in the relationship. The timing of these events happened so quickly that the women were enmeshed in the relationships and had invested a great deal by the time they recognized they were abused. Because their lives were so intertwined with and they were so dependent on their partners, it was difficult to just walk away. Moreover, the women’s lack of education and the psychological problems stemming from the earlier abuse made the women feel that there would be no way they could make it on their own.

This dysfunction that occurred in the women’s childhoods also affected how they raised their own children. Carrie struggled with the decision to keep an abusive partner in her life because she wanted a loving father-figure for her children. This need for her children to grow up with a caring father stemmed from her own childhood where the men in her life abused her. On the other hand Angie ignored the molestation of her daughter because she had been a victim of incest and it was too difficult for her to comprehend that it was now happening to her daughter. Allison also talked about remaining in her abusive relationship because she witnessed violence between her parents, but eventually her
father quit physically abusing her mother. She hoped the same would happen for her. These three examples provide insight into how one generation is connected to another. The choices the women in this study made when raising their own children were greatly affected by what happened in their own childhoods.

According to life course theory people have a sense of agency. As the women struggled to survive in their abusive relationships this sense of agency became apparent. Sarah would sleep with a knife to protect herself, Cindy started sleeping in another bed, Carrie got a dog that would sleep in her bed, Karen turned to her church for help, and Katrina left her abusive relationship. This sense of agency continued for the women when they decided to end the lives of their abusive husbands/boyfriends/(step)fathers.

The turning point for the women to end the lives of their abusive partners usually happened when they realized the effect of the abuse on their children. The women were able to see and recognize the victimization of their children and the never-ending cycle of violence. The women also began to see that they needed to be active participants in their own lives. They no longer were passive, helpless victims that succumbed to dying at the hands of their abusers. Instead, they realized that they had to do something about their situations and did what they could to save their and their children’s lives.

Another major turning point for the women was when they entered prison and in their own words, were finally in a place where they felt safe and free. Because they were in an environment where they felt free to explore their feelings, they were able to start recovering from their past victimization. The women also showed that they were active participants in life when they participated in domestic violence support groups and individual counseling and came to feel that they were responsible for their own happiness.
and recovery. The women started to see themselves as survivors rather than victims. The women also realized that in order to be survivors they had to take action in their lives. The action they took: applying for clemency. Regardless of whether or not the women were granted clemency, all said they started to live with a sense of agency. The knowledge they learned from the domestic violence support groups and the steps they took to apply for clemency also became a turning point. They did things to better their lives and made it a point to teach others about domestic violence. All of the women were aware of the structural constraints in their lives (i.e. being in prison, having a felony conviction) however; they also made it a point to work within these constraints and tried to regain some sort of self-efficacy by actively speaking out about domestic violence and not allowing others to abuse them.

Limitations

Because I used secondary data sets for part of this study, I was limited by the research questions of the earlier projects. One issue that arose was I was unable to follow-up with additional questions to the women interviewed at previous points in time. For instance, in the interviews I conducted a theme about the women’s spirituality emerged. However, I was only able to address this in the Time III data and could not go back to previous waves of data and address this potential theme.

Additionally, because of the difficulty of finding the women who were granted clemency I was only able to follow up with four of these women. Three out of the four women had relationships with one another through their paid and volunteer work at battered women’s shelters in the area. Therefore, it is impossible to know how women who have not maintained a post-prison bond are faring. Further, although I tried various
strategies, I could not locate the other women. The four women I found and interviewed were all African American and so there was no racial diversity in the Time III sample for the women granted clemency.

**Future Research**

There have only been two other studies to date on life after the clemency for battered women: Gagné’s in 1998 and Beattie and Shaunessy’s in 2000. Both of these studies examined what happened to battered women who applied for clemency and were released from prison. Yet, there have been no studies to date that have focused on those who applied for, but were denied clemency. This dissertation was the first study to explore life after the clemency decision for women who received clemency and women who were denied clemency in a mid-western state. It was an exploratory study since so little research has been conducted on this topic. Because this dissertation was exploratory, many themes emerged throughout the study that should be investigated further.

Based on the prominence of this theme, future research should examine the spiritual experiences of incarcerated battered women. In this study, the women who were denied clemency relied on their spirituality to get through almost everything that happened to them once they came to prison. Yet, the women granted clemency and who were out of prison mentioned church or God, but it did not appear to be as salient to them when compared to the women still in prison. This difference could be a result of an increased focus on Christianity and religious programming in prisons within the last ten years (Clear, Hardyman, Stout, Lucken, and Dammer 2000). For instance, the women in prison talked about specific spiritual programming (i.e. Kairos) that they experienced as life
changing for them, whereas very few of the women granted clemency participated in religious/spiritual programming during their time in prison.

The focus on spirituality would be helpful in understanding the process the women went through as they came to define themselves as survivors, they described their relationships with God as also changing. This spiritual component may be an important part of the process and should be looked at in any future studies of victimization, healing, and identity.

Another area that future research should address is a comparison between battered women who kill/attempt to kill their abusive partners and women who are incarcerated for a variety of other offenses related to the battering in their lives (i.e. prostitution, burglary homes). Questions of interest would include their experiences at trial (e.g. were they able to discuss the battering; could they have an expert testify about BWS). In terms of their time in prison, did they develop relationships with other battered women? Also, do these women view themselves differently in terms of their offending compared to those women that kill/attempt to kill their abusers? Finally, if these women leave their violent relationships, does their criminal offending cease?

It also might be beneficial to use survey research to investigate further into some of the themes addressed in this study. Survey research would allow for a more representative sample which would increase the generalizability of the findings. For example, the women in this study felt that the current state of the prison system does not aid in rehabilitation. Furthermore, the women who have been released from prison were disgruntled with the lack of help once out of the penitentiary. Survey research might
address these issues in order to assess what specific programs should be implemented in prison and also what might aid in the post-prison adjustment of formerly battered women.

A final subject for future research is the children of imprisoned battered women. It might be beneficial to explore their lived experiences of growing up in a violent home, having their mothers kill their fathers/stepfathers, and then having their mothers sent to prison. Since most of the women in this study had children and their children's lives have been shaped by having mothers who were abused and imprisoned. It would make sense to examine the effects on children and then use these results to inform policy makers. Since at this point in time most of the children involved are over 18, the study would be retrospective based on their memories, as well as their current situations and relationships with their mothers.

Policy Implications

This study has various policy implications. First, it has profound implications for general issues of women's rights and battered women's rights. The women in this study told stories of encountering communities that were resistant in helping these women because domestic violence was a "private problem". For example, Linda recalled the stabbing incident that led to the death of her boyfriend and how this happened outside of a public restaurant. No one interfered or offered help to prevent the stabbing because no one wanted to get involved in a family affair. Many of the women reported that when they went to various formal agencies for help (i.e. police, hospitals, and churches) they were ignored and sometimes blamed for the abuse. Slowly, the attitude about domestic violence being a private problem is changing as it is given more attention in the media.
However, we need continued education on this topic in order to make people understand that battered women are not mentally ill and are not to blame for the abuse.

This study also brings attention to the gender biased legal system. Even with the introduction of expert testimony on BWS in the courts, it is not a guarantee that these women’s trials will be fair and just. For example, two of the women in this study were able to use BWS in their trials and instead of being tried on the facts; prosecution was based on sexist stereotypes and assumptions. Furthermore, the judge, jury, prosecutors, and defense attorneys were ignorant as to how BWS would even apply in self-defense cases. We need in-depth education in law schools about domestic violence and how BWS fits with self-defense laws.

Moreover, the stories from these incarcerated and previously incarcerated women all point out that they do not experience the prison system as rehabilitative. On the other hand, they reported that the domestic violence programming introduced during their time in prison changed the way they viewed themselves and their life experiences. But mostly the women said that prison is there to house people. Over the last ten years there has been a dramatic increase in the number of women sent to prison (Rathbone 2005). As a result, there are overcrowding issues and money is being spent on building more prisons. We as a society need to re-evaluate the expansion of the prison system, the political emphasis on incarceration as the preferred criminal justice response, and the significance of gender in the criminal behavior of women.

Not only do we have to re-evaluate the purpose of our prisons, we also must take a look at the message we are sending prisoners by not treating them with dignity and respect. Previous research (Hunter 2005) supports the finding in this study that family
support is critical to post-prison adjustment. Yet, because of the rules and regulations in place, the women’s relationships with their families suffer. Furthermore, many of the prison rules put the women at risk for depression and suicide. For example, within the prison the women are not allowed any human touch. As Angie stated, she felt dead inside because of this. Finally, the women felt the process of resocialization (e.g. women are stripped of their identities and become “inmates”) was dehumanizing.

Within the prison walls we also must examine the purpose of the parole board. Months before the women would go before the parole board they would begin to mentally prepare for this meeting. They would withdraw from others and try to figure out what types of things they could do in order to get the parole board to understand their stories. When the women met with the parole board they came up against a group of people who were uneducated about domestic violence. The members of the board would continually blame the women for the abuse in their lives and ask them why they did not leave the situation. Also, the parole board members were unable to understand the women’s transformation from victim to survivor. They blamed the women if they presented themselves as “too strong” or “too confident” because they felt the women truly could have left the relationship successfully. The women were frustrated with the board’s lack of understanding about domestic violence and left the meetings feeling helpless and hopeless. Many of the women discussed that after going before the parole board they would have to take anti-depressants for several months to get back on their feet again. We must educate those who serve on parole boards about domestic violence.

The last issue pertaining to the prison system that we should re-examine is the role of male employees in women’s prisons and their role in the re-victimization of the
women. Almost all of the women talked about their distrust of men and the difficulty of being in an environment where there were so many men in authority positions. Not only this, but the women also recalled specific events where they or other women were harassed by the male workers in the prison. Since all of the women had been previously victimized by males it was hard for them to trust any of the men. However at the same time, the women also expressed appreciation for the one or two men in the prison system they encountered who were caring and treated them with respect. They commented that the one or two “good apples” helped them renew their sense of trust in men and showed them that not all men are abusers.

I do not know the right answer as to whether or not men should continue working in women’s prisons, but I think it is an issue that needs careful consideration. On the one hand the women reported benefits when they encountered men who were not abusive. Yet, on the other hand their stories of abusive men within the prisons were far more prevalent than the few positive stories. Maybe the issue has more to do with the proper screening process of applicants, than with the gender of the person.

Once out of prison the women struggled to readjust to their lives in the free world successfully. One reason was that they were truly not free because they still had felony convictions on their records. The clemency movement made great strides; however, release from prison did not erase the stigma of being a convicted felon. If we are saying these women were justified in defending themselves, then they need to be pardoned. Ammons (2003) found that the assumption that these battered women are dangerous criminals is unfounded and their violent actions were isolated incidents. The felony conviction follows these women everywhere. As one woman stated she feels like she
never got her life back. She said she is constantly being re-victimized because she has the label of felon attached to her at all times.

Moreover, the lack of formal support available to previously incarcerated women is astounding. Studies have found that those with family support adjust better than those without it once they are out of prison. Therefore, we must start re-evaluating the support systems for people who do not have family available post-prison. One way to help post-prison adjustment is to have more realistic pre-release training while in the prison. The women out of prison recalled that the pre-release training lasted six weeks and often what they learned was not relevant once they were released. Also, the women who were granted clemency tried to form a support group once they were out of prison. While this support group failed, some of the women did remain in contact and they reported that this helped them to not feel so alone. Yet, many times parole stipulations include having no contact with other felons once out of prison. This also must be reexamined because for many of the women having others in their lives that have experienced the same things helped them to see they were not alone in their journey.

This dissertation provided a voice for 12 currently incarcerated battered women and six previously incarcerated battered women. These women told stories of how they were beat down and helpless and through it all have now been able to start the process of reclaiming their lives. Their stories can help sociologists as well as others who work with battered women to understand the complexity of domestic violence relationships, the process of surviving in an abusive situation, and how abusive intimate relationships can turn deadly. Their stories help us to see that their failed attempts at getting out of their relationships were often due to structural constraints and not individual short-comings.
These women’s stories also corroborate other research on incarcerated battered women and show that these women are unique criminal offenders. Prior to their incarceration the majority of the women had no previous criminal records. Once inside the prison walls these women blossomed in a place that restricted their freedom. Prison provided a safe place where they felt free to safely bond with others and gave them an opportunity to interact with other women like themselves. The healing process the women described came from the domestic violence support groups and the spiritual programming which brought about posttraumatic growth (Tedeschi and Calhoun 2004). This posttraumatic growth entailed a changing of self from victim to survivor, an awareness of domestic violence issues, a need to help others like themselves, and a renewed spiritual awareness. When the women were released from prison the majority did not re-offend which is also consistent with previous research (Ammons 2003; Beattie and Shaunessy 2000; Gagné 1998) and sets them apart from other criminals.

The women in this dissertation are a unique group of offenders. It is important for future research on women criminals to make this distinction and to separate out battered women who are incarcerated for killing/attempting to kill their abusive partners/fathers versus other women offenders. It also allows us to understand more clearly the turning points that change a person’s status from victim to offender. Finally, this dissertation provides sociologists with key insights into the process of healing and growth from traumatic events.
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APPENDICES
APPENDIX A

HUMAN SUBJECTS APPROVAL

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(330) 275-3681 Fax

May 3, 2004

Rachel Schneider
345 Old Inn St. NE
N. Canton, Ohio 44721

Ms. Schneider:

The University of Akron’s Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects (IRB) completed a review of the protocol entitled “Battered Women Who Kill: Ohio Battered Women Clamency Movement.”

The IRB application number assigned for this project is 5004-02/2.

The protocol qualified for Expedited Review and was approved on May 3, 2004. The protocol represented minimal risk to subjects. Additionally, the protocol matched the following federal category for expedited review:

- Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies

This approval is valid until May 3, 2005 or until modifications are proposed to the project protocol, whichever may occur first. In either instance, an application for Continuing Review must be completed and submitted to the IRB.

If any of the women are back in the prison system, you will need to obtain Full Board approval from the IRB for the study of those subjects.

Enclosed is a copy of the informed consent document, which the IRB has approved for your use in this research. A copy of this document is to be submitted with any application for continuation of this project.

Please note that within one month of the expiration date of this approval, the IRB will forward an annual review reminder notice to you by mail, as a courtesy. Nevertheless, please note that it is your responsibility as principal investigator to remember the renewal date of your protocol’s review. If your project is funded, failure to comply with IRB requirements could jeopardize your continued funding.

Please retain this letter for your files. If the research is being conducted for a master’s thesis or doctoral dissertation, you must file a copy of this letter with the thesis or dissertation.

Sincerely,

Sharon McAlister, Associate Director

Cc: John Zapp, Department Chair
    Kathy Fettig, Advisor
    Phil Allen, IRB Chair

The University of Akron is an Equal Employment and Affirmative Action Institution.

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APPENDIX B

AMMENDED HUMAN SUBJECTS APPROVAL

February 9, 2016

Rachel J. Schonauer
Social Science Department
The University of Akron
Att: 5110 44425-1905

Mr. Schonauer:

The University of Akron Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects IRAA) completed a review of the protocol entitled "Between Women and Violent Crimes: An Exploration of Reproductive Rights and After the Family Movement". The IRAA application number assigned to this project is 2004/0134.

This protocol qualified for expedited review and was approved on February 3, 2004. The protocol represents minimal risk to subjects and matches the following Federal categories of expedited review. 

1. Continuing review of research previously approved by the institutional review board (IRB) as follows: (a) when the research is permanently closed to the enrollment of new subjects; (b) when subjects have completed all research-related interventions; and (c) when research involves only (i) the use of publicly or commercially available data not collected specifically for the research, unless the use includes communications with living subjects, (ii) the use of personal integrity (e.g., documents created by the subject), or (iii) the use of medical information already maintained for direct application to the health of the subject or his/her descendants.

2. Research involving existing data or specimens that are publicly available.

This approval is valid until February 9, 2007 or until modifications are proposed to the protocol, whichever may occur first. In either instance, an Application for Continuing Review must be completed and submitted to the IRAA.

Please note that within one month of the expiration date of this approval, the IRAA will forward an annual renewal letter to you by regular mail. This letter is not to be considered as granting approval. However, the letter will inform you of any changes in the HIV/AIDS guidelines or any pertinent changes in the approval. Please retain this letter for your files. If the research is being conducted for a masters thesis or doctors dissertation, you must file a copy of this letter with the thesis or dissertation.

Sincerely,

[Signature]

Catherine F. Eckert
Department Chair
Phil Allen, IRAA Chair

The University of Akron, Office of Institutional Review Board and the Supporting Entities

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Dear Ms. Schneider,

As noted in my previous letter, The Human Subjects Research Review Committee reviewed your proposal, "Battered Women and Violent Crime: An Exploration of Imprisoned Women Before and After the Ohio Battered Women's Clemency Movement." The committee reviewed your proposal for protection of human subjects and confidentiality, for methodology, and for efficiency with regard to the use of departmental resources. The committee has approved your proposal. Deputy Director Ed Rice (Office of Policy and Offender Reentry), Warden Bobby (TCI), Warden Andrews (ORW) and Warden Tyson-Parker (FPRC) and Warden Shewalter (NEPRC) have also approved the proposal.

I would recommend contacting the Warden's Assistant to make arrangements for interviews, after explaining that the Warden has approved the research. For NEPRC, the contact is Miss Aden, and her number is 216-771-6460, ext. 2002. Please take the Research Proposal Approval form with you to the institutions when you conduct your interviews.

Best wishes to you in your research efforts. Please remember to provide us with a copy of your study, once it is completed. We look forward to seeing the results. If you have any questions or concerns, please contact me by phone at (614)752-1267 or by e-mail at gayle.bickie@drc.state.oh.us.

Sincerely,

[Signature]
Gayle Bickie, Chair
Human Subjects Research Review Committee

July 5, 2005
Rachel Schneider
2466 Old Ehr St. N.E.
North Canton, OH 44721
APPENDIX D

INTERVIEW GUIDE

Time III Interviews (formerly incarcerated battered women who received clemency in 1990)

1) Life after prison
   • Intimate Relationships
     a) Have you had abuse in any of your relationships since being released from prison?
     b) Were you or are you scared to get involved in another intimate relationship?
     c) If you are involved with anyone right now? If so, what is your relationship like?
     d) Do you do anything differently at the start of your intimate relationships now as compared to before you were in prison?

   • Relationships with family, children, friends?
     a) Where are your children living right now? Who has custody of them?
     b) Where were your children living when you got out of prison?
     c) Did you have to go to court to get them back?
     d) Did ex-in-laws or abusive partner (if he didn’t die) try to get custody of children?
     e) Were the courts understanding of your situation if trying to get custody of your children?
     f) How was your relationship with your children right before you went to prison, right after you got out of prison, and now today?
     g) How do your children feel about you & your decision that ended the life of their father?
     h) Is there anything (beliefs, values, parenting practices, etc) that you try to do with your children or teach your children that come from your experience as a battered woman who was incarcerated? If living in a peaceful home is important to you, how do you let your children know this?
     i) Are you still in contact with ex-in-laws? What is your relationship like with them?
     j) Do you have the same friends before you went to prison? If not, why?
     k) Was your family supportive when you were being abused? When you went to prison? When you got out of prison? How?
a) Did family or friends help you with your transition out of prison? Where did you stay? Did you get any monetary or material help from anyone?
b) If you have new friends in your life, how do they react when they find out that you were incarcerated for killing your partner?

- Formal social support since leaving prison
  a) Did the prison adequately prepare you for your transition out of prison? How?
  b) Did you get any governmental assistance to help get you on your feet once out of prison? Housing assistance? Welfare/income assistance?
  c) What would be your advice to women leaving prison?

- Employment
  a) How have you supported yourself since prison?
  b) Has it been difficult to find employment with a prison record?
  c) How have you dealt with having a record? Do you tell employers?
  d) Have you been able to adequately support your children? Go back to school? Get housing?

- Physical & Mental Health Since Prison
  a) Have you had problems with PTSD, depression, anxiety disorders since released from prison?
  b) Have you had physical health problems as a result of the abuse?
  c) Have you sought any help for any of the problems?
  d) If you sought help, was your experience positive or negative?
  e) Are you on any type of medications now to deal with the effects of the abuse?
  f) Have you had or are you in any type of counseling?
  g) Did you have health problems before you went to prison, during prison, after prison?
  h) Have your health problems affected other areas of your life – relationships, work, etc.?

II. Coping after prison
- Religion & coping
  a) Are you a part of any organized religion?
  b) Do you feel you are a spiritual person?
  c) Did religion or spirituality help you cope with the abuse, going to prison, and now life after prison? How?

- Alcohol or substance abuse
  a) Have you used alcohol or drugs as a way to cope with stress after you were released from prison?
  b) Has your usage ever become a problem for you?
  c) Did you use alcohol or drugs as a way to cope with the abuse prior to prison?
• Other ways of coping
  a) Besides religion or the use of drugs and alcohol, do you do anything else that helps you deal with stress? Mediation, yoga, exercise, talk to others, etc.

III. Life change as a result of abuse, killing or attempting to kill, prison, & clemency
  • Identity
    a) Do you view yourself as a battered woman? A victim of abuse? Survivor? Ex-con? Combination of all of these? Has this changed with your experiences?
    b) If you had to answer the question, “Who am I?”, how would you respond?
    c) Do you think of yourself differently today than you did when you first got out of prison? If you do, why? How did this change happen?
    d) How would you like to be remembered?
    e) How would other people describe you?
    f) Has your experience as a battered woman clemency recipient caused you to become more aware of women’s issues and battered women’s issues?
       - Has this awareness led you to do anything differently in your life?

IV. Demographics
  a) marital status
  b) age
  c) children (ages)
  d) educational level
  e) race
  f) employment

Interviews – Women Denied Clemency
Lived experiences of incarcerated battered women who applied for clemency in 1990, but were denied.

1) Life before prison
  • Employment
    a) Did you work before prison?

  • Childhood
    a) What was your childhood like?
    b) Was there any type of abuse in your childhood?

  • Intimate Relationships and abuse
    a) Can you tell me briefly about your intimate relationships prior to prison?
       - type of abuse, frequency and severity of abuse, length of relationship
• Children
  a) Do you have children?
  b) What was your relationship like with them prior to going to prison?

2) Life while in prison
• Relationships with family, children, friends?
  c) Where are your children living right now? Who has custody of them?
     - Did you have any say in where they would go when you went to prison?
  d) Did ex-in-laws or abusive partner (if he didn’t die) try to get custody of
     children?
  e) How is your relationship with your children today?
     - Do you see them?
  f) How do your children feel about you & the action that ended the life of their
     father?
  g) Is there anything (beliefs, values, parenting practices, etc) that you try to do
     with your children or teach your children that come from your experience as a
     battered woman who is incarcerated?
  h) Are you still in contact with ex-in-laws? What is your relationship like with
     them?
  i) Was your family supportive when you were being abused? When you went to
     prison? When you applied for clemency? When you were denied clemency?
     How?
  j) Have you been able to make friends while being in prison? Were they
     supportive when you were denied clemency?

• Clemency Process
  a) What prompted you to apply for clemency?
  b) How long have you been in prison? What is your sentence? What were
     you charged with?
  c) What was the process of applying for clemency like?
  d) How did you feel when you were denied clemency?
  e) How has the decision of being denied clemency affected you?
  f) Have you been able to make peace with the decision that you did not
     qualify for clemency?
  g) Are there programs in the prison that have helped you through being
     denied clemency?

• Physical & Mental Health
  i) Have you had problems with PTSD, depression, anxiety disorders since
     incarceration?
  j) Have you had physical health problems as a result of the abuse?
  k) Have you sought any help for any of the problems?
  l) If you sought help, was your experience positive or negative?
  m) Are you on any type of medications now to deal with the effects of the abuse?
  n) Have you had or are you in any type of counseling?
o) Did you have health problems before you went to prison?
p) Have your health problems affected other areas of your life – relationships, work, etc.?

3) Coping during incarceration
   • Religion & coping
d) Do you feel you are a spiritual person?
e) Did religion or spirituality help you cope with the abuse, going to prison, not receiving clemency?
f) Are there religious services at the prison? Do you attend?
g) Do you pray?
h) Do you read religious/spiritual readings?
   • Alcohol or substance abuse
d) Did you use alcohol or drugs as a way to cope with the abuse prior to prison?
e) If yes – did it ever become a problem?
f) Have you struggled in prison with these issues?
g) If this was a way you coped prior to prison, what did you do to cope when you were denied clemency?
   • Other ways of coping
b) Besides religion or the use of drugs and alcohol, do you do anything else that helps you deal with stress? Meditation, yoga, exercise, talk to others, etc.

4) Life change as a result of abuse, killing or attempting to kill, prison, applying for clemency & being denied clemency
   • Identity
g) Do you view yourself as a battered woman? A victim of abuse? Survivor? Felon? Combination of all of these? Has this changed with your experiences?
h) If you had to answer the question, “Who am I?”, how would you respond?
i) Do you think of yourself differently today than you did when you first went to prison? If you do, why? How did this change happen?
j) How would you like to be remembered?
k) How would other people describe you?
l) Has your experience as an incarcerated battered woman caused you to become more aware of women’s issues and battered women’s issues?
   - Has this awareness led you to do anything differently in your life?

5. Demographics
   • marital status
g) age
h) children (ages)
i) educational level
j) race

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APPENDIX E

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Informed Consent Form – Formerly Incarcerated Battered Women

You are invited to participate in a study being conducted by Rachel Schneider, a doctoral level student from the College of Arts & Sciences, Department of Sociology, University of Akron, Akron, OH.

The project focuses on battered women who received clemency in Ohio in 1990. Specifically, the project will explore the lived experiences of formerly imprisoned battered women who received clemency and how they have negotiated their life after clemency. How have their experiences of being battered, killing or attempting to kill one’s partner, serving prison time, and receiving clemency shaped their lives?

Participation in the project is completely voluntary. If you agree to participate, you may refuse to answer any questions and may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. The interview should last between 1-3 hours.

Your confidentiality will be protected throughout the study. However, I am mandated by the law to report any type of child abuse. Any data obtained from you through audiotapes of interviews will be kept confidential and will not be viewed by anyone but myself and my advisor. All identifying information will be retained in a locked cabinet or other locked storage area. The data linked with any identifying information will be kept for 5 years and will be destroyed upon completion of the project.

There are no anticipated benefits to you as a participant, aside from helping me have a better understanding of how the clemency movement has affected you. There is a potential risk that the interview will cause psychological distress by bringing up issues that may be difficult to discuss. I do have counseling referrals available if you would like them at the end of the interview.

If you have any questions about the research project, you can call me at 330-972-8827 or my advisor Dr. Kathy Feltey at 330-972-6877.

You will be compensated $50 for your participation in this research project. If you should wish to stop the interview at any time, you will still receive the $50.

This research project has been reviewed and approved by The University of Akron Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects. Questions about your rights as a research participant can be directed to Ms. Sharon McWhorter, Associate Director, Research Services, at 330-972-7666 or 1-888-232-8790.

Thank you for your participation!

I consent to participate in this project:

_____________________________  _______________________
Name  Date

I consent to have this interview audio-taped:

_____________________________  _______________________
Name  Date
Informed Consent Form – Incarcerated Battered Women Who Were Denied Clemency

You are invited to participate in a study being conducted by Rachel Schneider, a doctoral level student from the College of Arts & Sciences, Department of Sociology, University of Akron, Akron, OH.

The project focuses on battered women who applied for clemency in Ohio in 1990. Specifically, the project will explore the lived experiences of imprisoned battered women who applied for, but did not receive clemency. How have their life experiences prior to their incarceration and their experiences while in prison shaped who they are today?

Participation in the project is completely voluntary. If you agree to participate, you may refuse to answer any questions and may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. Your participation in this study will not affect your sentence, parole, probation, etc. The interview should last between 1-3 hours.

Your confidentiality will be protected throughout the study. However, I am mandated by the law to report any type of child abuse. This signed consent form will be kept separate from the interview data and there will be no way to link your name with your data. Any data obtained from you through audiotapes of interviews will be kept confidential and will not be viewed by anyone but myself and my advisor. All identifying information will be retained in a locked cabinet or other locked storage area. The data with any identifying information will be kept for 5 years and will be destroyed upon completion of the project.

There are no anticipated benefits to you as a participant, aside from helping me have a better understanding of how the clemency movement has affected you. There is a potential risk that the interview will cause psychological distress by bringing up issues that may be difficult to discuss. If you would like any type of counseling after this interview I will have counseling referrals for you.

If you have any questions about the research project, you can call me at 330-972-8827 or my advisor Dr. Kathy Feltey at 330-972-6877.

This research project has been reviewed and approved by The University of Akron Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects. Questions about your rights as a research participant can be directed to Ms. Sharon McWhorter, Associate Director, Research Services, at 330-972-7666 or 1-888-232-8790. You may also contact them via mail. Their address is as follows: Research Services, 284 Polsky, The University of Akron, Akron, OH 44325-2102.

Thank you for your participation!

I consent to participate in this project:

Name ___________________________ Date ___________________________

I consent to have this interview audio-taped:

Name ___________________________ Date ___________________________