

IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION AND MAINTENANCE
IN DOMESTIC VIOLENCE SHELTERS

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CHAPTER 1:

INTRODUCTION

“I was at my son’s father house, I was in the process of moving back there with him. And he had been out one night, and he had been drinking. And he came in, woke me up, out of my sleep, and he’s in a rage, like, ‘Where’s my money?’ I said, ‘I don’t know what you doin’ Marcus,’ and he hit me with the phone and told me to get out of his house. I was like, ‘Just let me make a call, so somebody could come and get me.’ I always had to hide my cell phone from him, ‘cause he was the type that would take it. So I had it hidden up under the bed, so when I reach over to bend down and get it, I came up and he stabbed me with a knife. I didn’t realize I was stabbed until I felt the blood running down my leg.”

-Deborah¹

Despite its presence throughout history, domestic violence has only been recognized as a social problem in the United States since the 1970s (Dobash and Dobash 1979; Muehlenhard and Kimes 1999; Stark 2007; Tierney 1982). While it is difficult to determine exactly how widespread the problem of abuse is, it is estimated that 960,000 to 6 million women have experienced domestic violence in a given year (U.S. Department of Justice 1998; The Commonwealth Fund 1998; Survey of Women’s Health 1999; Rennison 2003; Tjaden & Thoennes 2000). In

¹ All names and any potentially identifying information have been changed to maintain the confidentiality of the women in this study. The participants were given the option of choosing their own pseudonym; those women who did not choose their own name were assigned one.

2011, The National Network to End Domestic Violence conducted the National Census of Domestic Violence Services, using information gathered from 89% of the existing domestic violence programs nationwide. They found that, in one day, the participating 1,726 shelters provided services for 67,399 victims across the United States; 74% of these services were in the form of emergency shelter. Due to a lack of funding and resources, 6,714 victims were denied emergency shelter nationally in this twenty-four hour period².

As described above, Deborah's experience reminds us how critical emergency shelters are for domestic violence victims. Shelters can represent the difference between life and death for women and their children. However, a shelter's influence does not end there. Within their abusive relationships, women's identities are often minimized and devalued on a regular basis, resulting in a negative self-concept (Farrell 1996; Merritt-Gray and Wuest 1995; Mills 1985; Landenburger 1989). Aside from providing victims refuge from danger, shelters also serve as sites of identity repair and construction (Loseke 2007; 2001). My research takes a symbolic interactionist approach to identity building and maintenance within domestic violence shelters, and considers how the delicate balance between ideology and practice, in addition to inequalities that exist within the shelter environment, influence identity construction. I also explore how stigmatized identities related to both their status as women who have been abused and their status as residents of a battered women's shelter, are managed within the shelter environment, and consider the role that shelter staff has in the identity construction of residents. My study examines four research questions: (1) How do inequalities of sex and gender, sexuality, class, and race and ethnicity, affect identity formation? (2) How does the balance between feminist ideology and the structure of formal organizations affect identity formation? (3) How does identity

² http://nnedv.org/docs/Census/DVCounts2011/DVCounts11_NatlSummary_BW.pdf

construction take place within the shelter setting? Which identities are constructed, and why? How are the identities constructed by shelter staff different from those of the residents? and (4) How do women in shelters manage stigmatized identities?

Shelters serve as “social hybrid[s],” unique environments that function both as formal organizations and as a temporary “home” to those who live there (Goffman 1961, 12). The shelter community influences the interactions of all of the women who work or live in the shelter, thereby affecting their identity construction and maintenance, as they try to create a positive identity for themselves. Identity construction refers to the process by which individuals attach certain meanings to the self as a social object (Blumer 1969). Identity maintenance encompasses the wide range of behaviors meant to “create, present, and sustain...identities” and support a positive self concept, a process also known as identity work (Snow and Anderson 1983, 1348). Interactions and identity construction within shelter communities, however, can be difficult—shelters are microcosms of the larger society (Brown and Mistry 2005). Shelters are not created within a vacuum, and the inequality and bureaucracy that exist in society are replicated in the shelter community. Interactions among and between staff and residents reveal that while these shelter communities strive to rebuild and repair, they are not exempt from hierarchies based on race, class, sex and gender, and sexuality. Certainly, one must consider how this environment influences identity construction and maintenance among the women who work and live there.

Social organizations have been found to influence their members’ identities (Kleinman 1996; Scott 2000), and domestic violence shelters in particular have been recognized as sites of identity construction (Loseke 2007; 2001). I am interested in how the complex communities of domestic violence shelters function as sites of identity construction and maintenance for the women of the shelter. Both staff and residents build, maintain, and repair their identities within

the shelter environment, even as it reflects the inequality that exists in society. However, there are contextual differences in how staff and residents engage in identity building, and staff take an active role in encouraging and stigmatizing certain resident identities.

While the domestic violence literature has examined inequalities in shelters, there is a gap in the research regarding how these inequalities influence identity construction and repair. Within the symbolic interactionist identities literature, the subject of shelters has focused primarily on the victim and survivor identities (Donnelly, Cook, and Wilson 1999; Dunn and Powell-Williams 2007; Ferraro 1983; Leisering 2006; Loseke 2001; 1992). My research expands on the existing literature, describing family, sisterhood, employee, and “good” and “bad” resident identities that are constructed and managed within the shelter community, and further examining how these identities are influenced by the shelter environment, as well as the inequality that exists within it. My research is also unique, in that I am not only looking at the identities of the residents of the shelter; but am also considering the identities that are constructed by the staff members, and how they differ from the identities of the residents. My research will not only fill a gap that exists within the domestic violence literature, but will contribute to the symbolic interactionist literature on identities, as well.

Domestic Violence Shelters: Formal Organizations

Domestic violence shelters within the U.S. initially stemmed from the grassroots movement of second wave feminism, which developed an understanding of “the personal as political” (Hymowitz and Weissman 1978), and inequalities that exist personally, socially, and politically must be changed. As the women’s movement gained momentum throughout the late 1960s and 1970s, domestic violence became a topic of importance, and the first domestic

violence shelter was established in the United States in Minneapolis-St. Paul in 1974 (Evans 2003; Schechter 1982).

Many of these shelters maintained their activist orientation, and were operated using a feminist ideology. This ideology was based on several key assumptions. First, feminists recognized violence against women as another mechanism for maintaining inequality that women face in a patriarchal society (Yllo and Bograd 1988). Therefore, men who assault women are not displaying psychological deviance, as other theories suggested, but are reflecting the patriarchal attitude of society and engaging in a practice that has been condoned and tolerated for hundreds of years (Dobash & Dobash 1979; Ferraro 1993; Miller 2005). A second assumption asserted that because men and women do not have equal power within relationships, they do not engage in equal amounts of violence, and the context of the violence that occurs differs greatly. This point has been an issue of contention between family violence sociologists and feminist sociologists for some time (Anderson 1997; Kimmel 2002; Strauss 1974; 1979).

Lastly, individuals subscribing to the feminist ideology within the domestic violence literature state that the primary concern of scholars should be determining the reason for the ongoing victimization of women in our society. Domestic violence joins incest, rape, and sexual harassment as another variation of the same problem, the subordination of women in society (Russell 1984; Stark 2007). Violence against women, according to feminists, should not be compared to other types of violence that occur within the home, such as child abuse (Breines and Gordon 1983; Dobash and Dobash 1979; Yllo and Bograd 1988). To do so would deflect attention from the actual cause and “obscure the dimensions of gender and power that are fundamental in understanding wife abuse” (Yllo and Bograd 1988, 13). These are the principles on which many domestic violence shelters have been founded since the 1970s (Rosen 2000).

However, as time has passed, shelters have had difficulty maintaining their feminist ideology. To secure funding, many shelters have become client-centered organizations, characterized by bureaucratic tenets, with a focus on individual causes of abuse, rather than the patriarchal oppression that was the focus of the second wave of feminism (Acker 1990; Ferree and Martin 1995; Scott 2005; Stark 2007; Rodriguez 1988; Wharton 1987). This individual focus has resulted in essentially divorcing the personal from the political within bureaucratically-run domestic violence shelters, and the services provided to women are no longer guided by the principle that patriarchal oppression is the root of violence against women. While it cannot be said that feminist ideology and client-centered, bureaucratically run shelters are mutually exclusive, the constant need for funding has, at times, resulted in a diluted feminist message (Ferraro 1983; Ferree and Martin 1995; Kendrick 1998; Scott 2005; Stark 2007; Rodriguez 1988; Wharton 1987). In addition to barriers created by funding, some advocates felt that in order to better serve women's needs and gain legitimacy within the public eye, a more professional approach was needed (Dunn and Powell-Williams 2007). The bureaucratic, client-centered approach was viewed as the more professional approach.

As a result, shelters are imbued with contradiction—they are both professional, formal organizations, and temporary homes. They are composed of formal hierarchies, while simultaneously encouraging women to view themselves as equals. They spread a message of empowerment, but establish rules and regulations that many staff and residents consider revictimizing, but which women must follow. Thus, we see that the shelter communities are very complex environments, which strive to encourage both autonomy and obedience in their residents.

Research on shelters has examined how these formal organizations struggle with balancing their message of empowerment with the necessary policies and rules that will create a structured environment. One issue that the literature addresses is the power difference that has been said to exist between the shelter staff and the residents (Kendrick 1998; Markowitz and Tice 2002; Murray 1988). While this power difference can be illustrated in a number of ways, its presence is often recognized through the “expert” discourse used by staff (Kendrick 1998, 155). Murray’s (1988) qualitative research at a shelter in northern California recognized that while the shelter emphasized a message of empowerment, the staff was considered more knowledgeable than the residents about their own abuse, and the shelter rules and policies reinforced the asymmetrical power structure, creating a contradiction, where women could not become true independent agents of free will. While interviewing various professionals who interact with domestic violence victims, Kendrick (1998) found that shelter staff’s construction of battered women was “surprisingly consist[ent]” (152) with law enforcement, and social and psychological services. The staff’s professionalized view of the abuse was prioritized over the perspectives of the women who experienced it, and the expert discourse failed to incorporate the complexities of the women’s lives.

Markowitz and Tice (2002) also addressed these power differences when they discussed the many dilemmas faced by women’s organizations, and notably shelters, when transitioning to a more “professional” approach, to enhance their legitimacy in the eyes of the financial donors (945). The authors state that because the client-based approach is not necessarily a democratic or a collaborative process, and there are distinct class differences between the professionals and their often lower-class clients, the power and class differences can reinforce feelings of isolation and tension in the clients, failing to provide the help that individuals truly need.

In addition to power differences, another issue that has been addressed in the domestic violence literature considers how certain policies or procedures may be revictimizing towards women. Haaken and Yragui (2003) conducted fifty-one telephone interviews with directors and staff members of domestic violence shelters across the nation to better understand how maintaining a confidential shelter location may be revictimizing to the residents. While the confidential location is established for the safety of the women, the authors point out that many abusers isolate their victims, forbidding them to visit friends and family as a strategic element of their abusive relationship. The staff members they interviewed, while emphasizing the need for safety, also acknowledged that the confidentiality was somewhat illusionary in nature, as they felt certain the location may not be as secretive as they hoped. In the past, certain residents had felt lonely and isolated and revealed the location to a friend; as a result they were immediately asked to leave. The policy of confidentiality thus created a cycle, where women who came from relationships where they were often isolated, came to the shelter for refuge, and were told that, for their safety, they must remain cut off from their friends and family.

Cannon and Sparks (1989) described the shelter policies through the experiences and perceptions of shelter residents. While the women overwhelmingly described their time in the shelter as positive, they also told stories of tensions over issues such as childcare and shelter policies, indicating that the formal organization of the shelter community had difficulty reconciling the concept of agency with the need for obedience.

Shelters, as formal organizations, often struggle to maintain a degree of equilibrium between their feminist ideological roots and their bureaucratic organizational structure. However, in addition to formal organizations composed of rules, shelters are also temporary homes, characterized by relationships and interactions of an entirely different nature. Thus, it is not only

necessary to consider the formal organization of shelters, but also the residential community, how they exist simultaneously, and how these complicated environments influence identity construction and maintenance.

Shelters as Communities

Scholars have considered communities to be socially constructed (Suttles 1972; Hunter 1974), and have researched how they contribute to group solidarity in a variety of ways. Goffman's (1961) study of total institutions demonstrated how communities exist within organizational settings, such as mental hospitals or domestic violence shelters. A community is established, consisting of social networks, woven from a variety of relationships, from couples to mere acquaintances. These interactions not only offer a sense of emotional support in a difficult environment, but also provide a basis for economic and social exchanges, as well—a source of bonding among the residents. In addition, the relationships that are formed help the residents maintain their personal sense of self, in an environment that routinely commits “assaults” upon the self (48). Goffman stated, “...the individual is formed by groups, identifies with groups, and wilts away unless he obtains emotional support from groups...without something to belong to, we have no stable self” (319). When individuals enter a residential facility, such as a mental hospital or a domestic violence shelter, the need for emotional support, and to belong to a group is overwhelming. Thus, the importance of constructing and belonging to communities within total institutions cannot be underestimated.

Scholars such as Scott (2010) and Davies (1989) have recognized that the communities that exist within total institutions are not uniform, because total institutions vary in how “total” they are (Davies 1989, 94). While organizations such as prisons have a high level of bureaucratization and closed membership, thus preventing members from leaving and

demonstrating a high level of totality, domestic violence shelters exemplify a different type of total institution. While many shelters operate using bureaucratic principles, the residents have semi-open membership; that is, while the shelter has a “pass system” that requires that the women fill out formal requests to leave the shelter, they may choose to discharge at any time. Scott (2010) suggests that therapeutic clinics, such as shelters, should be thought of as reinventive institutions (RI) rather than total institutions given that admission is voluntary and involves personal agency (218). Due to the less severe degree of totality involved in these organizations, RIs do not have the strict rules and regulations of total institutions, but their voluntary members offer their own form of social control through performance regulation (221). Members provide surveillance of others’ behavior, measuring their own progress, and constructing identities based on these interactions.

While domestic violence shelters are primarily considered to be a refuge from abusive situations, and have been researched accordingly (Berk, Newton, & Berk 1986; Lempert 2003), shelters also establish their own communities, which provide the setting for all of the interactions upon which relationships and identities are constructed, and managed. Haj-Yahia and Cohen (2008) provided a broad picture of a shelter community, based on eighteen semi-structured interviews with shelter residents. While the study was not an ethnography, and the respondents resided at two different domestic violence shelters, certain reoccurring themes suggested that the subjects thought of the shelter as a total institution, including feelings of isolation, imprisonment, unnecessary rules, and a lack of privacy. While identity construction was not the focus of their research, the women’s detailed perceptions of shelter living, and how it was often connected to their sense of self, led the authors to acknowledge that while one of the main goals of the shelter

is to help women develop their sense of self-worth, there is a lack of research on identity formation within domestic violence shelters (105).

Shelter communities are “social hybrids” (Goffman 1961, 12), environments that function as both temporary homes and total institutions that provide a contextual frame for interactions among both staff and residents. They are formal organizations that struggle to maintain a balance between their feminist ideological roots and their bureaucratic organizational structure, and they are communities that act as temporary homes to women in need. However, the complexities of the shelter environment do not end there. Domestic violence shelters are further complicated by the same inequalities that exist throughout the rest of society, and hierarchies of class, race and ethnicity, sex and gender, and sexuality have been recognized within shelters.

Domestic Violence Shelters: Inequality

Within the domestic violence literature, the relationship that exists between the staff and residents is often a focus of concern. The relationships between the staff and the residents are often viewed as containing a power struggle (Haj-Yahia and Cohen 2008; Murray 1988), which at times, has been related to inequality regimes, where assumptions pertaining to class, sex and gender, race and ethnicity, and sexuality have been incorporated into the organization’s rules and policies (Acker 2006).

Class

While the characteristics of shelter staff may vary, caseworkers at domestic violence shelters, like the second wave feminists who established them (Collins 1993; Crenshaw 1991; Dill 1983; Ferraro 2008; hooks 1984; Newman 1999; Smith 2004; Richie 2000; Zajicek 2002), have been described as “overwhelmingly middle class and Euro-American” (Williams 1998, 154). In particular, bureaucratically organized domestic violence shelters that employ a hierarchy

of authority, in which members are paid based on their academic credentials and expertise, are composed of middle class staff workers (Markowitz and Tice 2002). These middle class staff workers interact with a select group of domestic violence victims—those women who do not have the resources to leave an abusive situation on their own, so they stay at an emergency shelter (Cattaneo and DeLoveh 2008). These interactions then are marked by significant power and class differences. While the presence of a middle class staff alone certainly does not determine that classism exists, the class composition of the staff may influence the shelter ideology and daily operations, creating an environment where class-based assumptions are made.

Sex and Gender

By applying Acker's (1990) research on gendered organizations, domestic violence shelters can be recognized as gendered spaces on many different levels. Because the first domestic violence shelters were the product of the feminist movement, shelter staff was composed of primarily women (Schechter 1982). Therefore, shelters are gendered spaces due to the sex composition of both the staff and the residents. As the number of shelters grew nationwide, the ideology behind many shelters changed to one of client-based professionalism, accompanied by the inclusion of advocates who were men (Wharton 1987). However, despite the increased presence of male advocates, many shelters continued to define their organization as gendered spaces, based on the sex composition of its staff (Mann 2002; Wharton 1987).

While conducting in-depth interviews with group members of twenty-five organizations involved in the battered women's movement, Carol Wharton (1987) found that the shelters that recognized battering as an example of women's subordination within society were less likely to "permit" men to participate in the shelter, both directly and indirectly (153). Similarly, Mann's (2002) ethnographic study of a small community in the process of building a domestic violence

shelter found that as female committee members responsible for the shelter's construction increasingly identified as "strongly feminist," they minimized the contributions of the male community members (266). Eventually, the committee members decided they had "no choice" but to exclude men from the shelter board, as a means of protecting abused women from the "sexist male establishment" (269). While Mann's research only provides a glimpse of one shelter, there is a general pattern that despite the increased number of men working to end domestic violence, shelters continue to have staff comprised of women, and many shelters are not equipped to offer services to men who have experienced domestic violence (1987).

The gendered nature of shelters is also constructed through the creation of symbols and images that explain, reinforce, and occasionally contradict the differences between men and women (Acker 1990). Shelters' use of the battered woman formula story reinforces the dichotic image of women as innocent, defenseless victims, and men as angry perpetrators of violence (Davies, Lyon, and Monti-Catania 1998; Loseke 1992). While the experiences of abused women are often far more complicated than this formula story allows (Ferraro and Johnson 2002; Johnson 1995; 2006), women's experiences are negotiated to better fit within the gendered space (Loseke 2001).

The interactions and the gendered identities that are created based on these interactions are defined by the gendered space of the shelter. The gendered sex composition of the staff and residents results in interactions that take place only among women, often illustrated by conversations and demonstrations of "doing gender" (West and Zimmerman 1987). Residents have constructed and managed gendered identities relating to sisterhood (Few 2005) and mothering (Davies and Krane 2003; Krane and Davies 2007; Krane and Davies 2002; Peled and

Dekel 2010) while living in domestic violence shelters, further illustrating how shelters are gendered spaces.

Race and Ethnicity

Perhaps one of the most explored inequality regimes within the domestic violence literature is racism. An assumption of “whiteness” that has been recognized in domestic violence shelters (Scott 2000; 1998) can be traced back to the feminist movement’s construction of domestic violence as a social problem (Collins 1993; Crenshaw 1991; Dill 1983; Ferraro 2008; hooks 1984; Newman 1999; Smith 2004; Richie 2000; Zajicek 2002). In order to raise consciousness among the general public about domestic violence, advocates of the anti-violence movement emphasized that domestic violence was not limited to a certain “type” of woman—it could happen to anyone. While this “colorblind” approach to domestic violence is credited with the movement’s success, it carried with it an assumption of “whiteness,” which ignored how individual experiences of violence can involve multiple layers of oppression (Collins 2000; Richie 2000). All victims’ experiences were treated as equal, and race was not recognized as having any influence on the abuse of women of color (hooks 1984; Richie 2000).

This assumption of whiteness has been identified within the norms and policies of domestic violence shelters, where the unique needs of different women are ignored (Blitz and Illidge 2006; Haaken and Yragui 2003; Sokoloff and DuPont 2005; Zajicek 2002) and preconceived stereotypes employed by shelter staff results in differential treatment, despite the “colorblind” view of violence (Blitz and Illidge 2006; Donnelly et al. 2005; West 1999).

The domestic violence literature has described staff members as displaying a stereotypical understanding of the differences that exist between victims of color and White victims (Blitz and Illidge 2006; Donnelly et al. 2005; West 1999). Although the social

construction of the “real” victim as morally pure (Loseke 1992) has been challenged by researchers, the policies and norms enacted by staff members tend to reflect stereotypes of women of color that classify them as less sympathetic victims (Blitz and Illidge 2006; Donnelly et al. 2005; West 1999). Women of color are more likely to be labeled by White staff members as drug users, homeless, and generally “undeserving” of shelter, and as a result, are less likely to receive services (Blitz and Illidge 2006; West 1999). In their research on race and domestic violence services, Donnelly et al. (2005) found that African American women, in particular, were described by shelter staff members as better able to withstand violence, and therefore less likely to seek shelter. When African American women did seek shelter, they were often perceived as trying to milk the system, placing them in a no-win situation.

Race and ethnicity have been consistently viewed as having an influence over the treatment received at domestic violence shelters, specifically related to the interactions the victims had with the staff (Blitz and Illidge 2006; Donnelly et al. 2005; Few 2005; Grauwiler 2008; Moe 2007; Zajicek 2002). In a qualitative study on the perceptions of women residing in domestic violence shelters, Muhammad M. Haj-Yahia and Hilla Chaya Cohen (2009) found that women reported very different experiences with staff interaction, and those women who disliked the staff felt that there was differential treatment. One woman named Hanin said, “I feel like some are on the top and some are on the bottom here...and the staff discriminates among women” (102). April Few (2005) came to a similar conclusion after interviewing residents of a domestic violence shelter—African American women reported feeling that they were occasionally treated differently than White residents, and felt that they could not discuss issues of racism with other residents.

Some shelters have recognized this attitude and have taken steps to establish an anti-racist environment within their social organization. Deliberately increasing the diversity of staff, requiring staff to participate in anti-racist training, conducting regular meetings to address issues of concern, and informal discussions have been employed by different shelters as a means of incorporating anti-racist policies (Blitz and Illidge 2006; Scott 2000). However, some researchers assert that these measures will not necessarily change institutional racism within the shelter system (Donnelly et al. 2005; Smith 2004). Andrea Smith (2004) has argued that the inclusion of women of color in the process will not combat the white assumptions of domestic violence shelters—instead, it is necessary to center women of color within the development and organization of the shelters, taking their particular needs and experiences into consideration. Smith advocates implementing a human rights framework in order to end violence “not just for women of color, but for all people” (122), to eliminate racial inequality regimes.

Sexuality

Rates of violence within heterosexual and homosexual couples have been reported to be very similar, with 25%-50% of couples reporting incidents of violence (Alexander 2002; Brand and Kidd 1986; Lie and Gentlewarrier 1991; Lie, Schilit, Bush, Montagne, and Reyers 1991; Lockhart, White, Causby, and Isaac 1994; McClennen 2005; and Pitt 2000). However, the resources available to victims of same sex violence and heterosexual violence vary significantly. Misinformed cultural assumptions concerning the nature of same sex violence, homophobia, and a general lack of understanding on the part of various professionals each contribute to the unequal resources available to the victims in the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) community (Alexander 2002).

Violence among same sex couples has been viewed by society as not being as important or as serious as violence between heterosexual couples (Burke and Follingstad 1999; Poorman, Seelau, and Seelau 2003). Believing that male perpetrators and female victims are the only legitimate type of domestic violence, society has dismissed LGBT victims under misinformed ideas that “women don’t really fight” and “men should be able to defend themselves” (Murray and Mobley 2009, 363). These assumptions are perpetuated within social service organizations that are meant to assist people in dangerous situations, minimizing the abuse experienced by certain individuals, and creating a feeling of exclusiveness around services that are meant to be accessible to everyone.

What is described as a “lack of training” regarding same sex violence exists within domestic violence shelters, as well as the police force and medical community (Alexander 2002, 98). Domestic violence shelters have been perceived by LGBT victims as only accessible to heterosexual women, and many do not consider shelters to be a feasible option when looking to leave an abusive relationship (Bornstein, Fawcett, Sullivan, Senturia, and Shiu-Thornton 2006; Renzetti 1992). Fear of discrimination and homophobia, from shelter staff and residents alike, result in same sex victims choosing to use informal support networks, like friends and family, instead (Bornstein et al. 2006; Merrill and Wolfe 2000; Renzetti 1992). One respondent in Bornstein et al.’s study described her choice as such:

“I’ve heard about lesbians going to shelters—the homophobia, having to hide the violence...the other residents are very homophobic and there’s a lot of violence and trashing.” (Bornstein et al. 2006, 173)

While Renzetti (1992) noted that 13% of the lesbian victims she spoke with went to domestic violence shelters, eight of thirteen described their experience as “not helpful at all.” Similarly, Merrill and Wolfe (2000) found that 60% of gay men who turned to domestic violence

programs for help felt they were either “not helpful” or “made things worse.” Both studies attributed this dissatisfaction to the heterosexist assumptions built into these social organizations.

Assumptions that victims of domestic violence are heterosexual are reflected in the information provided about the topic (Bornstein et al. 2006), the feminist ideology used by some shelters attributing domestic violence to patriarchal oppression (Merrill and Wolfe 2000; Murray and Mobley 2009), and policies that fail to cover or outright deny services to LGBT victims. This results in a heterosexist inequality regime, where the organizational norms do not recognize the importance of sexuality in the experiences of domestic violence victims.

These power struggles and inequality regimes result in tension, which can have a profound effect on those who experience domestic violence. The decision to leave an abusive relationship is a very difficult one, and those who do not have material resources are often left with little choice but to seek help at domestic violence shelters. The presence of classism, racism, sexism, and heterosexism within the shelter system can deter women from seeking out shelter services and leaving abusive situations (Bornstein, Fawcett, Sullivan, Senturia, and Shiu-Thornton 2006; Renzetti 1992).

Staff Relationships and Inequality

The relationships that exist between staff members of shelters also reflect the presence of inequality regimes. Scott (1998), while conducting research at two different crisis centers for women, found that racial alliances were formed within these organizations, but the alliance was only recognized among the women of color. White women never openly recognized the presence of a race-based solidarity, although Scott acknowledged that it seemed to exist. Women of color, however, openly recognized a feeling of solidarity with other women of color, and many spoke of

deliberately befriending these women, and viewing them as allies³. These “alliances” were not the full extent of inequality regimes, however. In a later study conducted at the same organizations, Scott (2005) found that professional opportunities were indirectly linked to the staff’s race. Initially, both organizations avoided the presence of a structural hierarchy to maintain equality among staff members. However, this often inadvertently created informal hierarchies, where staff members who had more time to contribute or who had worked there longer were considered to have more valued opinions. These women, who were financially stable and had more time to contribute to the crisis center, were white. Women of color felt collective decision-making limited their voice; even when asked, they felt they could not speak up, because they didn’t want the exhaustion and responsibility to fight for power.⁴ Even organizations that strive for diversity and equality struggle to establish a truly egalitarian structure (Kleinman 1996; Scott 2000; Ward 2008).

While inequalities pertaining to class, sex and gender, race and ethnicity, and sexuality have been researched within domestic violence shelters, the influence that these inequalities have on identity construction within these environments remains to be explored.

Thus far, I have discussed the feminist history of domestic violence shelters in the United States, and how the feminist ideology has often been traded for a more client-centered, professionalized approach, often as a result of funding (Acker 1990; Ferree and Martin 1995; Scott 2005; Stark 2007; Rodriguez 1988; Wharton 1987). The desire to empower, and yet the

³ However, this sense of solidarity was accompanied by a sense of betrayal when the alliance was broken.

⁴ Scott concludes that just ideological commitment or organizational structure was not enough to combat racial inequality; it is “the synergy of the two, rather than their additive combination, that proves to be the key to real organizational transformation” (252).

need for what are often viewed as revictimizing policies, offer a continuing source of tension in the shelter community.

Another dysfunction of the shelter environment is the presence of hierarchies based on class, race and ethnicity, sex and gender, and sexuality. Just as such inequalities exist in society, their presence within the shelter further complicates interactions between and among shelter staff and residents. It is within these shelter communities that women engage in the process of identity construction and maintenance, as a means of establishing a positive self-concept.

Identities and Self-Concept: A Symbolic Interactionist Approach

Within sociology, the concepts of self and identity have been understood from a variety of perspectives, using many theoretical frameworks. The foundation of my research is based in the processual interactionist approach, more commonly known as the “Chicago School” of interpretation, because it emphasizes the context of the social situation in which identities are created, maintained, and negotiated (Blumer 1969; Gecas 1982; Glaser & Strauss 1967; Strauss 1978; Becker 1964; Stone 1962). According to the Chicago School, constructing and managing a family identity while in a shelter community would result in a very different experience than constructing that same identity within a different context, because the identity and the definition of the situation are conceptually linked (Altheide 2000).

The self, or our “total and exclusive persona” (Altheide 2000, 2) is composed of a multitude of socially situated identities that connect it to the social structure (Gecas 1982). Because these identities are not statuses we “own,” but rather the processual result of our interactions, identities such as mother or employee that are associated with certain groups or organizations, are viewed as requiring only the involvement of that particular status, as opposed to our entire self (Burke 1980; Stone 1962). Thus, the various identities that make up the self

give it different meanings. Therefore, within the shelter community, a woman constructs and maintains many different identities, each of which attributes a new meaning to her self. When she interacts with her caseworker, her identity as a shelter resident in need of assistance engages in the interaction. When she interacts with another resident, with whom she has a close relationship, her fictive kin or sisterhood identity engages in the interaction. How she views herself throughout the course of these interactions may influence the woman's overall self-concept.

Rosenberg (1979, 7) describes the self-concept as "the totality of the individual's thoughts and feelings having reference to [the self] as an object;" in other words, the self-concept could be described as "the meaning that we hold for ourselves when we look at ourselves"(Stets and Burke 2003, 130). Based on our observations, as well as others' perceptions of us, and our idealized view of who we are, the sociological literature has considered the self-concept to be the product of social interaction (Rosenberg 1989; Stets and Burke 1994). Cooley's theory of the Looking Glass Self (1902) provided the groundwork for the term, offering that the self-concept was influenced by the perceived opinions of others. Mead (1934) further built on the idea of reflected appraisal, stating that the self-concept developed through the process of role-taking, and the attitude of the generalized other was then internalized. As the individual takes into account these attitudes and perceived opinions, they develop their own unique view of themselves, potentially reflecting a positive or negative self-concept (Rosenberg 1989). Because the victim of domestic violence is a stigmatized identity in our society, a woman who is engaged in that particular identity while interacting with her case manager may feel a diminished sense of pride, having a negative effect on her self-concept. However, if throughout her time at the shelter, this woman began to identify not as a victim, but as a survivor, her interaction with her case manager

may not be accompanied by a sense of shame. Her interaction is now characterized by empowerment, enhancing her self-concept, due to the change in her identity. The increased use of the survivor discourse in domestic violence shelters is based on the perception that this identity enhances self-concept (Dunn 2005; see Chapter 7 for my analysis of the survivor identity in the shelter).

Identities in Organizations

The interactions between and among staff and residents are further complicated when one considers how individuals use organizations to reaffirm their identities (Hunt and Benford 1994; Loseke and Cavendish 2001; Mills 1940; Reger 2002; Schwalbe and Mason-Schrock 1996; Ward 2004). For example, Scott's (2000) work with crisis centers for women examined the structural policies regarding racism and the meaning that the members associated with them. Each of the locations observed by Scott incorporated a clear anti-racist message in their policies, such as deliberately diversifying the staff so that women of color made up over 50% of the staff and held positions of power. In several crisis centers, mandatory discussion groups were established in order to actively identify experiences of privilege and oppression with the organization. While the discussion groups were generally viewed by the workers as useless, these steps taken by the organization allowed members to identify themselves as anti-racist individuals who were actively opposing racism on multiple levels.

Similarly, Kleinman (1996) found that while members of an organization may be committed to the organization's ideals, the policies and actions implemented can contradict the original intention and challenge members' identities. While observing the alternative organization "Renewal," Kleinman noted that members took pride in their alternative methods and democratic approach to health care. They focused on individuals, and stressed the need to

communicate feelings to build trust. However, members also felt a need to appear “legitimate” to the public, and thus incorporated bureaucratic principles into the organization while ignoring the gender inequality that was created. This contradiction resulted in an organization that stood for an ideal while implementing practices that opposed these same ideals. The inconsistencies that resulted between the intended alternative organization and the actual bureaucratic organization negatively affected members’ identities, resulting in a diminished self-concept, and many left the organization as a result (Kleinman 1996).

Identities of Women in Shelters

In their abusive relationships, many women’s identities are minimized and devalued regularly, resulting in a negative self-concept (Farrell 1996; Merritt-Gray and Wuest 1995; Mills 1985; Landenburger 1989). Women describe this time as feeling like “my soul was gone” (Merritt-Gray and Wuest 1995, 404), as well as “not being whole” (Mills 1985, 113). Domestic violence shelters have been recognized within the domestic violence literature as having an influential role in repairing and reconstructing women’s identities (Loseke 2007; 2001), but there lacks a comprehensive look at how different components of the shelter environment, such as the struggle between empowerment and the structure of the formal organization and inequality, may influence the identities that are created for both staff and residents.

The existing empirical research has focused on very specific types of identity construction in domestic violence shelters, that of the “battered woman” (Davies, Lyon, and Monti-Catania 1998; Loseke 1992) and the “survivor” (Best 1997; Dunn 2002; Loseke 1999). Other identities, such as employees, family, sisterhood, mothers, and “good” and “bad” residents that are constructed in shelters, have received considerably less attention.

Researchers have found that the construction of the battered woman identity, and the corresponding formula story, has had a significant impact on domestic violence shelters, ranging from how shelters are structured and run (Loseke 1992), to determining who is “really” a victim, and therefore qualifies for services (Donnelly, Cook, and Wilson 1999; Ferraro 1983), to shaping how women who have experienced abuse construct their identities (Loseke 2001). In her 1992 ethnography, Loseke found the battered woman identity became the focus of a number of the “South Coast” shelter’s practices—it influenced how the organization structured its rules and policies, how the staff selected their clients, and provided staff with a justification for actively intervening in the women’s lives. Even when the women resented the staff’s influence, or became “troublesome,” their behavior could still be attributed to the identity of the battered woman (5).

The battered woman identity has also influenced who is considered “worthy” of shelter services. Ferraro (1983) examined how staff’s negotiation of “trouble” within the shelter community was connected to the forces that directly influenced how the organization was structured. While a variety of situations were labeled as “trouble,” it often meant distinguishing between women who were “really battered” (297), and women who were “using the shelter” (298), often by applying the battered woman formula story during the intake process. The different women residing in the shelter were also subject to scrutiny, but Ferraro found that the staff members were not always consistent—personal conflicts that existed between staff members influenced which residents were labeled “trouble” (287). Likewise, Donnelly, Cook, and Wilson’s (1999) interviews with the directors of forty-four domestic violence agencies in the deep south region of the United States focused on how inequality factored into the staff’s determination of who qualified as a “victim” versus who was trying to “work the system.” The

authors found that structures of privilege were perpetuated, as the limited shelter space was given to White, young, heterosexual women.

Women who have experienced domestic violence have also been shaped by the identity of the battered woman. Loseke (2001) observed several support groups for domestic violence victims, and noticed that the group facilitators encouraged participants to embrace the “battered woman” formula story. When participants (usually new members) strayed from the acceptable story, they were redirected, and their story was redefined by the facilitator, as well as other support group members. Three major storytelling themes resulted: (1) “Tell Us What He Did To You,” where narratives were directed towards the abuse that the abuser inflicted; (2) “He’s Still Controlling You,” in which the manipulative nature of the abuser was related to past and current problems; and (3) “It Won’t Be Easy,” where the women shared the hardships that accompanied leaving an abuser. These three themes encouraged support group members to identify as a “battered woman.”

Similarly, of the forty semi-structured interviews with women in abusive relationships she spoke with, Leisenring (2006) found that three-fourths of the women at one point identified themselves as victims. However, Leisenring found that the identity was complex for many of the women, and while some of the respondents associated “victim” as having a negative connotation, they still identified with it. Dunn and Powell-Williams (2007) discovered that advocates also have difficulties negotiating the victim identity. In their interviews with thirty-two victim advocates, the authors found that, despite the vocabulary of empowerment that the advocates had been trained to use, they struggled with viewing the women they worked with as possessing agency, and often simultaneously described them as victims, as well as agents of their own will. The authors discuss how the vocabulary available to the advocates limits their ability to articulate

the full experience of the women they work with, and even the emerging construction of “the survivor” left the advocates using a combination of a victim/agent dichotomy.

While victim and survivor identities have been the primary focus of the empirical literature, several studies have considered other identities of women who have experienced domestic violence, and are currently living in the shelter community. These identities include the “ideal mother” (Davies and Krane 2003; Krane and Davies 2007; Krane and Davies 2002; Peled and Dekel 2010), “problem residents” (Wharton 1989), sisterhood, and family (Few 2005). Researchers have also explored the identity of the shelter employee (Holden 1997; Kolb 2011).

Krane and Davies (2007) engaged in participant observation, as well as semi-structured interviews with shelter staff, as a means of better understanding how staff constructed the “ideal mother” identity within a battered women’s shelter. The authors found that the expectations placed on mothers were unrealistic at the best of times, let alone in an unfamiliar environment, after experiencing the stress of an abusive relationship. Mothers within the shelter environment were expected to supervise their children at all times, clean, and cook. In addition, the mothers’ actions were scrutinized, and a simple nap would potentially be viewed as a woman trying to escape her problems and her children, as opposed to being exhausted from watching her children all day. Other studies examining mothering in domestic violence shelters (Davies and Krane 2003; Krane and Davies 2002; Peled and Dekel 2010) came to the same conclusions.

Wharton (1989) engaged in participant observation finding that at times, the staff and residents differed in their opinions on how “empowerment” should be practiced, sometimes resulting in the construction of the “problem resident.” While the staff generally viewed anger as a positive emotion, and did little to stop confrontations because they felt it was necessary to express bottled up frustration, residents who released anger in a way that staff felt was

“unhealthy” were seen as “problem residents.” While the staff’s identity construction of the residents was not the focus of the study, it considered how the women staying at the shelter were perceived for not negotiating identities the same way the staff did.

Few (2005) researched the experiences of thirty rural shelter residents, using focus groups and semi-structured interviews. While Few was particularly interested in the influence of race and ethnicity in the residents’ encounters, and was not concerned about identity construction or maintenance, she briefly described the importance of sisterhood in the residents’ interactions, and how the residents described one another as family. Again, while these topics were discussed rather broadly, these interactions indicate that Few’s subjects constructed both sisterhood and family identities, and that these identities held salience for them. While the importance of sisterhood has been recognized in the feminist movement’s battle for recognition of domestic violence as a social problem⁵, considerably less attention has been paid to how the sisterhood identity continues to be constructed in shelters today. Similarly, while Few’s subjects addressed the importance that the family identity held for them, it was not the focus of the research, and fictive kin in domestic violence shelters remains unexplored, despite the fact that family identities were constructed within the community.

The empirical literature researching the identities of shelter staff has generally focused on facework, and their ability to maintain a positive self-concept surrounding their work identity. Kolb (2011) found that advocates and counselors engaged in different types of identity work, to protect a positive self-concept when an unexpected situation occurred in the shelter. Advocates called upon the idea of the woman’s empowerment to protect their own competency (“we can’t

⁵ The vocabulary of sisterhood has not been universally embraced within the feminist literature. Women of color have criticized the simplistic gendered discourse for ignoring the varied lived experiences of women (Dill 1983; Hill 1990; hooks 1984; Lorde 1984). Please see Chapter 6.

tell her what to do”), while the counselors had a tendency to use their professionalism to justify residents’ decisions.

While she was not specifically researching domestic violence shelters, Holden’s (1997) participant observation of volunteers in a homeless shelter revealed the identity work that had to be accomplished for the volunteers to maintain a positive self-concept. Holden found that shelter volunteers were often required to enforce policies and rules that they felt were unnecessary or oppressive. In order to minimize the effects of role strain, the volunteers strategically engaged in minimizing their differences, and acted as friends, selectively enforcing the rules as they saw necessary. Some volunteers engaged in othering behavior, justifying the rules, based on the residents’ perceived lack of morality.

Despite the all of the research that has been conducted on shelters, there remains a gap in the domestic violence literature. My dissertation research will fill this gap by studying the various identities that are constructed within the shelter community, accounting for the complexities of the shelter environment, including organizational struggles of ideology and practice, as well as hierarchies of inequality. The existing research can also be expanded to consider the techniques used by women in shelters to manage the stigmatized identities that they have, in order to achieve a positive self-concept. In addition, identities are not only constructed and managed by shelter residents, but also by shelter staff, and are therefore constructed and managed in contextually different ways. While employee identities have been examined in the literature, other identities constructed by staff members have not been considered.

My Research

As Scott and Kleinman’s research demonstrates, social organizations significantly impact their members’ identities. This impact can positively reinforce how members view themselves

(Scott 2000) or it can create a contradiction that can lead to a negative self-concept or termination of membership with the organization (Kleinman 1996). Based on the effect that social organizations can have on members' identities, it is important to examine the ways in which domestic violence shelters, as social organizations, provides context for women's identities.

My research will fill the gaps that exist in the domestic violence and identities literature, by examining four research questions: (1) How do the inequalities of sex and gender, sexuality, class, and race and ethnicity affect identity formation? (2) How do the complexities of shelter communities, specifically, the balance between feminist ideology and the structure of formal organizations, affect identity formation? (3) How does identity construction take place within the shelter setting? Which identities are constructed, and why? How are the identities constructed by shelter staff different from those of the residents? and (4) How do women in shelters manage stigmatize identities? I begin by addressing the first research question, and describing how the different aspects of inequality are present within the shelter, affecting the interactions of the residents and staff, and thereby influencing identity construction. Once the inequalities of the shelter environment have been established, I examine the second, third, and fourth research questions, and describe how women in shelters construct and manage a range of identities within these communities. I consider how the delicate balance between feminist ideology and practice influences identity construction, and how the staff is involved in this process. Special attention is paid to the differences that exist between the identities that are constructed by staff and residents.

Chapter Outline

In Chapter 2, I describe the methodology used in this research, and spend some time depicting my research setting, an important part of understanding the shelter community. I document how the Phenomenal Women Domestic Violence Shelter came into existence, as well

as the staff positions, job titles and responsibilities, and a general description of the shelter's physical space. In Chapter 2, I also describe the data collection process as a part of a feminist methodology, and address the methodological concerns of my study.

Chapter 3 begins my discussion of inequality, focusing on sex and gender, and sexuality, as it is relevant within the shelter. I describe the shelter as a gendered space, where a division of labor, symbols and images, interactions, identities and social structures are socially constructed by staff and residents to create a social community that reflects a gendered culture (Acker 1990). Many of the constructions within the gendered space are meant to encourage unity among the women. Gendered beliefs about the "true" nature of men and women are discussed, and the effect these beliefs have on the socialization of children in the shelter, particularly in regard to violence. In this chapter, I also consider the role of men within the shelter as a gendered space, as both advocates and victims. At this point, my focus turns to inequality in regards to sexuality, and how the heterosexual assumption within the shelter creates a closet in which some LGBT women chose to hide, rather than face the potentially homophobic atmosphere around them, as evidenced by the vocabulary used by their fellow residents.

In Chapter 4, I continue the theme of inequality within the shelter community, but explore how it exists in regards to social class within the shelter. The class of both staff and residents are considered, as are the effects of class on the shelter community. While the staff comes from a diverse social economic background, it is generally understood that women who come to the shelter in need of assistance have few economic resources and share common financial obstacles, although there have been exceptions. However, once in the shelter, all residents are given the same donated items of clothing and towels, stripping them of physical markers of their former social economic status, and creating the appearance of a common class

within the shelter. While some women seem to transition into this common class identity quite smoothly, other women from more financially advantaged backgrounds appeared to find it difficult, and engaged in identity work to establish who they “really” were. Despite these setbacks, the common class identity was often a source of bonding for residents, who now not only shared the common experience of abuse, but also the mutual experiences of struggling to start over with very few resources.

In Chapter 5, I complete my analysis of inequality in PW by describing how race is reconstructed and negotiated within the shelter. While at times racial negotiations are quite successful, and the shelter is a site of tolerance and acceptance, there are other times where the peace is not so easily kept. It is these unsuccessful racial interactions that are explored in greater depth. I describe how race influences the interactions between and among the staff and residents. At times, attitudes concerning race appear to be closely related to certain women’s abusive relationships, affecting how they reconstruct race within the context of the shelter community. It is within this community that women construct and manage their identities.

In my remaining empirical chapters, I focus on the various forms of identity construction and management that occur within the shelter community. In Chapter 6, I address my second research question by exploring the supported identities of family and sisterhood that are constructed within the shelter environment, resulting from social interaction. I consider why these particular identities are created, and explain how they function in different ways, for both the staff and the residents. Convenience families, substitute families, and a variety of supplemental families are discussed at length, as are the means used to establish the boundaries for these families. The importance of the sisterhood identity is also considered in this chapter, and how both the staff and residents emphasize gender in both their activities and conversation, as

a way to minimize their differences, and highlight their commonalities, the most important of which was their perception of sisterhood.

Chapter 7 is my last empirical chapter, in which I explore stigmatized identities, answering my third research question. Not all of the residents' identities are supported by staff, and enhance their self-concept; some identities are stigmatized, and must be managed accordingly. I describe two different stigmatized identities that can potentially be attributed to residents, the "victim" and the "bad resident." These stigmatized identities are very much connected, and residents must learn to avoid or manage these labels. The "victim," attributed to women by society, is managed by distancing, embracement, and storytelling, in order to create a positive self-concept.

The "bad resident" is closely linked to the "victim" identity. I describe the victim and survivor discourse, and how both exist, and are simultaneously encouraged for different reasons within the shelter community—one for ideological reasons, the other for practical purposes. When residents use or do not use the appropriate script, they are constructed as "good" or "bad" residents by staff, which is generally based on gratitude, parenting style, which also coordinates with social class, and respect. Residents recognize that these scripts exist, though perhaps not in those terms, and acknowledge the presence of revictimization with the shelter community. Comparisons to jail were frequent. For their part, the staff acknowledged that the shelter's policies were not always conducive to the message of empowerment that they were trying to send, and several staff members distanced themselves from the current rules or authority figures, who they felt were responsible for said rules. They believed in the service they were providing, but not in the policies they had to enforce.

In Chapter 8, I conclude and summarize my research findings on domestic violence shelters, and how they function as both sites of that reproduce and negotiate inequality, as well as sites of identity construction and maintenance. The limitations of this study, along with the possible implications for future research, will be considered. Lastly, the policy implications of my research will be discussed.

CHAPTER 2:
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The Research Site

During the summer of 2005, I began my employment as a part-time monitor of Phenomenal Women (PW) Domestic Violence Shelter⁶ in Ohio. Founded in 1991, PW is a non-profit domestic violence shelter that maintains a confidential location, with room to shelter up to twenty-five women and children. It is also the county's only domestic violence shelter. When I began my employment, PW offered a variety of resources to domestic violence victims, including a 24 hour crisis hotline, protective shelter, case management and advocacy, judicial advocacy, a children's program, support groups, after-care, domestic violence education, and community outreach programs. Throughout my time at PW, certain services, including the children's program and aftercare, were eliminated due to a lack of funding. The universal attitude among the staff was to make do with what the shelter had, and it was not

⁶ All of the names used in this study, including the shelter and the parent company, are pseudonyms. The participants were given the option of choosing their own pseudonym; the women who did not choose their own name were assigned a name.

uncommon for staff members to use their own personal time and resources to help those in need.

The History and Organization of PW

From 1979 to 1991, PW was operated by the local YWCA as The Crisis Center for Domestic Violence. The shelter was, and continues to be, the only domestic violence shelter in the entire county, which has a population of 241,000 residents (2005-2009 American Community Survey). During the fall of 1991, McKinley Inc., a non-profit corporation, took over the shelter, relocated it to a confidential location, and renamed it Phenomenal Women Domestic Violence Shelter. Programs were expanded to better serve victims within the county, and the shelter's handbook states that the goal of PW is "to help women initiate solutions to the problems they are presently experiencing."

The organizational structure of PW has evolved over time. Initially, it began as a democratically-run grassroots organization, where staff members equally shared all responsibilities; by the time I joined the staff in 2005, it was operated under a bureaucratic organizational structure. In other words, the staff was organized into a hierarchy, with specific job titles, responsibilities, and different salaries associated with each position. When questioned about the source of the change, a staff member stated that the shelter had become what it needed to be; as time passed, it became evident that certain rules and regulations were needed. A detailed set of rules and regulations was established, defining what kind of behavior is expected of residents, from how they are expected to parent their children to the assignment of chores. While it was understood that the staff would be working in the residents' best interests, it was the staff who determined what these best interests were. For example, when I started working at PW, cell phones were not allowed in the shelter; residents had to turn in their cell phones upon

entering the facility. In addition, all calls had to be made from the office phone, in the presence of a staff member. The reasoning behind this rule was that the shelter was looking out for the safety of the resident—the abuser might call and try to persuade the victim to return home, and the victim, being in a vulnerable state, might be open to persuasion. By eliminating the abuser’s ability to contact the victim, the shelter staff saw themselves as preventing the cycle of abuse, and helping the victim to become empowered.

However, I witnessed a change in early 2009; several members of the day staff made an active effort to repeal certain policies (such as the cell phone policy) that were viewed as outdated and the cause of unnecessary tension between staff and residents. Not all staff members agreed with this change, but certain allowances were made, and generally speaking, revising certain policies created a friendlier environment within the shelter.

Staff at PW

The day staff includes a program director, house manager, case manager, judicial advocate, children’s specialist⁷, and staff supervisor; in addition, the staff also consists of approximately 6-8 shelter monitors, who are not considered “day staff” because they work during the non-traditional work hours (for example, 4:00 p.m. to 12:00 a.m.). Many of the day staff members have been at the shelter for years, often working their way up the hierarchy. For example, the current house manager was originally hired as a monitor; after working in that capacity for several years, she was hired as the house manager when the position became available. This is generally the case with day staff members, who have worked with one another for years, and maintain a close friendship. The phrase “PW family” has been used frequently

⁷ Again, this position was eliminated, due to a lack of funding.

among staff throughout my employment, and will be described more thoroughly in a later chapter (see Chapter 6).

Within the shelter, the program director has the most authority, and sits at the top of the chain of command. While the responsibilities of the position have changed over time, depending on the executive director of the parent organization, the program director has very little daily interaction with the women staying at the shelter. Instead, she is seen as the public face of the shelter, and therefore, must ensure that the shelter is recognized in the community and among other agencies. This position involves sitting on various committees and boards, and acting as the shelter's spokesperson at social functions and for the media.

The program director also holds the financial responsibility of the shelter, in the form of grant writing. A great deal of the shelter's ability to function depends on grants, and the program director must ensure that the various requirements of each grant are fulfilled, and all necessary paperwork is properly completed. Aside from these important responsibilities, the program director must also address any concerns of the staff, and at times, the residents. Like all day staff members, the program director must also be "on-call," a rotating duty to provide the shelter with an authoritative figure during the non-traditional work hours when the monitors are the only staff members present.

The house manager is responsible for maintaining the shelter's physical space—cleaning, providing, replacing, and repairing anything that is needed, inside or out. The current house manager described her position to me as, "Whatever it takes to run your house is what it takes to run our house, and I have to make sure that we have everything." When one considers how little the shelter can afford to spend to complete this task, it becomes apparent that the house manager has a challenging job. In order to overcome this obstacle, an important component of the house

manager's job is to speak in the community, requesting donations. She must then arrange pick up of donations in a neutral location, in order to maintain the confidentiality of the shelter, and organize them based on condition and use. The house manager is also in the on-call rotation.

The case manager, who works directly with the women in the shelter, meets with them individually when they first enter the shelter, and discusses what their physical and psychological needs are, as well as their short-term and long-term goals. The case manager and resident then create a case plan, which establishes what can be done to address these needs and achieve their goals. Once a case plan is in place, the residents meet with the case manager weekly (or more frequently, if needed) to assess the case plan, and take the necessary steps to progress closer to their goals. The case manager is also a member of the on-call rotation.

While not all of the women who stay at the shelter choose to file charges against their abuser or apply for a protection order, those who do work closely with the shelter's judicial advocate. The judicial advocate is familiar with the legal proceedings related to domestic violence, and acts as a guide for women, helping them with the necessary paperwork, preparing them for what to expect at court appearances, and accompanying them to these court appearances, speaking for the woman if she so chooses. While the judicial advocate is well educated in the court proceedings regarding domestic violence, she is not an attorney, and her services are provided without a fee to the abused women in the county. Her presence allows women who may have otherwise felt trapped by their situations, perhaps by the financial inability to afford an attorney or intimidation by the legal process, to move forward with their court proceedings. The judicial advocate also acts as an on-call representative.

The children's specialist's responsibility is to focus on a different kind of victim of domestic violence—the children who witness the abuse, and are often involved, despite their

mothers' efforts to protect them. It is the children's specialist's job to act as a support system to the children in the shelter, earning their trust, and helping them adjust to life in the shelter. While not a formal therapist, the children's specialist tries, among other things, to engage the children in art and play therapy, and help them express their feelings about the situation. She is responsible for transporting the children to school. The woman who acted as the children's specialist left the shelter in the winter of 2010, and while it was announced that the shelter would start interviewing to hire a new specialist, it was later decided that a lack of funding made it necessary to eliminate the position from the program. As a result, many these responsibilities were eliminated entirely, while others including school transportation, were designated to other staff members.

The staff supervisor works less with the women of the shelter than some of the other members of day staff; instead, she evaluates the work performance of the staff members. This performance review is conducted in various ways. First, the staff supervisor is responsible for interviewing and training new staff members, personally assessing whether they possess the compassion and understanding of domestic violence that is essential to working with this particular population of women. The staff supervisor also reads all staff documentation, such as call sheets, in order to determine that quality service is being provided to women in need. While other day staff members end their workday at approximately 4:00 p.m., the staff supervisor works until 10:00 p.m., in order to supervise monitors, who work during non-traditional hours. The staff supervisor also conducts monthly staff meetings (formerly called "monitor meetings," the name change was intended to convey a more egalitarian attitude among the staff), during which staff discusses current issues at the shelter, and can receive mandatory training. The staff supervisor is also on-call.

Monitors, while undeniably a part of the PW family, are generally not as close as the day staff, presumably because they work by themselves at the shelter, when no other staff members are present (with the exception of the staff supervisor on weekdays). Shelter monitors' primary responsibility is answering crisis calls and assisting victims in whatever way they can. While this may result in bringing women into the shelter, it also involves supplying information about domestic violence, helping women create safety plans, and simply allowing victims to express their feelings about the situation. In addition to the crisis line, monitors are also responsible for distributing donations to residents, raising awareness of the different resources available within the shelter and community, and keeping the general peace in a communal setting among the shelter residents during the hours of 4:00 p.m. to 8:00 a.m. While monitors are expected to keep the general order within the shelter, they are not disciplinary in any sense. If a resident violates a rule or a situation arises, monitors are instructed to contact the designated person who is on-call. On-call decides what steps should be taken, and instructs monitors how to address the situation. If it is decided that the situation requires more attention, on-call comes to the shelter to handle the issue directly.

The Physical Space

PW is located in an urban neighborhood in Alloy, Ohio. Alloy, which has a population of over 66,971 (2010 American Community Survey), was once a prominent center of industry; however, when the steel factories closed in the 1970s, the economy took a drastic turn for the worse, resulting in an increase in poverty and crime. In fact, 25.2% of Alloy's families and 26.1% of Alloy's individual residents live below the poverty line, well above the national average, which is 11.3% for families and 13.3% of individual residents (2010 ACS). In 2007, Alloy was ranked as one of the 20 most dangerous cities in the U.S.; interestingly, this ranking

was celebrated in the community, because Alloy had been ranked among the top 10 in the previous year (CQ Press). While Alloy has put forth a great effort to rebuild the downtown area and encourage new businesses, it continues to be viewed as downwardly mobile. PW's location is in a particularly crime-ridden neighborhood—known crack houses line the street, and a nearby church was robbed one morning in broad daylight. Despite the poor neighborhood, no staff member has ever reported having been the victim of a crime due to the location of the shelter.

An older house, built in 1927, serves as the shelter. The house has two floors, as well as a full basement and attic. The space has been utilized to maximize the number of women it can serve—there are six bedrooms, two full bathrooms, 2 half-bathrooms, a living room, kitchen, dining room, sun porch, playroom, donation room, and an office area. Each bedroom has three or four beds (in some cases, bunk beds), and several have cribs, as well. An effort is made to provide residents with their own rooms, but it is not uncommon for women to have roommates. A small backyard is fenced in; however women rarely use it for anything other than a smoking area due to the cramped nature of the yard. A washer and dryer are in the basement, available for the women to use any time before midnight (it is requested that they finish by midnight, so the monitor who works from 12:00 p.m. to 8:00 a.m. can wash linens).

The shelter's age is reflected in its condition. Water stains mark the ceilings of the majority of the rooms; portions of the ceiling have fallen off in the past due to the intensity of the water damage. The floors give the appearance of being permanently dirty, and despite a professional service's best effort, refuse to come clean. Ceiling fans and air conditioning units constantly break and require maintenance. However, the maintenance crew has very little money to replace anything, so they must try to repair equipment even when it really needs to be discarded. The house manager has truly done her best to combat these issues, but with limited

resources, it is an uphill battle. Walls have been painted, pretty borders have been added to rooms, along with framed pictures and inspirational posters, and the nicest donations have been used to furnish the common living areas; however, age and constant use (and at times, unsupervised children with writing utensils) result in the shelter constantly returning to a somewhat damaged condition.

According to the Executive Director of the parent organization, PW will be changing locations and moving into a newer building in a better neighborhood in the future. However, the date of the move has been postponed several times, and currently, the proposed renovations have not begun. The consensus among the staff is that the move will not happen anytime soon. In the meantime, it has been noted by several staff members that the assumption that PW will be leaving the current building in the near future has delayed the parent company from spending any money on much-needed repairs.

The Current Study

At the time that I began my employment at PW as a shelter monitor, I had no intention of using the shelter as a research site, though I was interested in researching gender violence. However, after approximately two years of working as a shelter monitor, I grew interested in conducting qualitative research on domestic violence, and my experience and familiarity with PW made it a convenient research site. After gaining approval from the program director, I prepared to begin participant observation and in-depth interviews. I began by notifying the shelter staff and residents of my intentions to conduct a study. Verbal consent from the shelter residents and staff was obtained for the observation portion of this study, and written consent was obtained for the recorded in-depth interviews with both groups. Kent State University IRB approval was obtained in August of 2007.

Data Collection: Observation

Participant observation within the shelter was conducted during my 8-hour shifts scheduled throughout each month over a three and a half year period. My job required a great deal of interaction with the residents, and as a result, my constant presence was not considered out of the ordinary. I did not take notes in front of the residents. While they were aware of my researcher status, I did not want to make them self-conscious about their behavior. Instead, I occasionally returned to the office, where I took jotted notes (Lofland and Lofland 1995), or made note of key words or phrases that were expanded into fieldnotes when my shift ended.

Observation was not only needed to provide context for the in-depth interviews conducted with residents and staff, but to also provide triangulation for the narrative accounts offered in the interviews. For the interviews, women were encouraged to tell their personal stories, which contained elements of identity, race, class, gender, age, and violence. Because these are such sensitive topics, it was necessary to compare the interview data with the observational data in order to gain a better understanding of domestic violence victims' reactions to not only their abusive experiences, but the shelter community as well (Patton 2002).

Data Collection: Interviews

From 2008 to 2010, I conducted thirty-one interviews with residents and fifteen interviews with staff members (Lofland and Lofland 1995). Each interview lasted approximately forty-five minutes to one hour in length. If a resident indicated that she was interested in being interviewed, an appointment was made at her convenience. The majority of the time, this meant that I returned to the shelter to conduct the interview when I was not scheduled to work. This was initially done simply because it better fit the residents' schedules, but it also allowed me to

conduct the interviews without appearing to give special attention to any one resident during my shift.

The open-ended resident interviews evolved over time, based on the important themes the women continually addressed in their stories. Initially, the interviews covered three main areas: (1) background; (2) shelter life; and (3) structural support. However, as I began to collect my data, the interviews gradually changed to focus more exclusively on the shelter community. I created a cover sheet to collect basic demographic information, as well as which social services the resident had used in the past. The rest of the interview was reorganized, and again, focused on three main topics: (1) shelter life; (2) shelter staff; and (3) future plans.

The open-ended staff interviews were very similar to the resident interviews. A cover sheet provided basic demographics, and many of the questions about shelter life and shelter staff were reworded from the resident interview to understand how the staff member viewed the shelter and its residents, as well as the interactions that take place within the shelter. The only addition was a series of questions that focused on employment, asking how they came to work at the shelter, what their position entailed, and what they perceived as the philosophy of the shelter. These questions provided a great deal of background on the employees, often revealing underlying attitudes about domestic violence, and in some cases, personal experiences with abuse.

Sample

Of the 31 residents I interviewed, 14 (45%) were White, 13 (42%) were African-American, 2 (7%) identified as Hispanic, and 1 (3%) described herself as Asian. One woman did not identify her race. Of the 15 staff members I interviewed, 8 (53%) were White, 6 (40%) were African-American, and 1 (7%) identified as Hispanic. This is fairly representative of Alloy,

whose residents are 51.3% White, 44.1% African-American, 6.5% Hispanic, and 0.5% Asian (2005-2009 ACS).

Table 1: Race and Ethnicity (Residents)

Race	<i>f</i>	%
White	14	45%
African-American	13	42%
Hispanic	2	7%
Asian-American	1	3%
Unknown	1	3%
Total	31	100%

Table 2: Race and Ethnicity (Staff)

Race	<i>f</i>	%
White	8	53%
African-American	6	40%
Hispanic	1	7%
Total	15	100%

The residents' ages ranged from 18 to 63 years old, with a median age of 30 years old. Four residents chose not to reveal their age. The staff members' ages ranged from 22 to 67 years old, with a median age of 48 years old. Again, this appears to be fairly representative of Alloy as a city, whose citizens have a median age of 38 years old (2005-2009 ACS).

Table 3: Age of Respondents

Subject	Median	Range
Residents	30	18-63
Staff	48	22-67

Note: Four residents chose not to identify their age

The education level of the residents ranged from less than a high school diploma to completion of a bachelor's degree. Of the residents I interviewed, 23% (7) of the women were

currently attending or had attended some high school, and 26% (8) of the residents had graduated high school or had earned their GED. Ten percent (3) of the interviewed residents were currently attending college, and 16% of the women (5) had completed some college courses, although they did not report earning their degree. Associates degrees had been earned by 10% (3) residents, and an additional 10% (3) had graduated with a Bachelor's degree. Five percent of the women (2) had completed the requirements to become STNAs (State Tested Nurse's Assistant). Of the shelter staff, 33% (5) had attended some college, 20% (3) were currently attending college, 13% (2) had earned their Associates degree, 27% (4) earned their Bachelor's degree⁸, and 13% (2) had advanced degrees. Approximately 77% of Alloy's residents have a high school diploma or higher; 10.4% have a Bachelor's degree or higher (2005-2009 ACS).

Table 4: Education (Residents)

Education	<i>f</i>	%
Currently/Attended Some H.S.	7	23%
Graduated H.S./G.E.D.	8	26%
Currently Attending College	3	10%
Completed Some College	5	16%
Associates Degree	3	10%
Bachelors Degree	3	10%
STNA	2	5%
Total	31	100%

Table 5: Education (Staff)

Education	<i>f</i>	%
Currently Attending College	3	20%
Completed Some College	5	33%
Associates Degree	2	13%
Bachelors Degree	4	27%
Advanced Degree	2	13%

⁸ One of the staff members who had earned her Bachelor's degree was currently attending college to earn a degree in a different discipline.

Note: One of the staff members who had already earned her Bachelor's degree was currently attending college in order to earn a degree in a different discipline. Because her highest grade completed was "Bachelors Degree" and she was currently a student, which influenced her workload, I counted her in both categories, so $N \neq 15$.

Data Analysis

Observation continued throughout the time I conducted interviews. As the interviews were collected, three graduate students and I transcribed the data verbatim. All three graduate students were paid for their help.

I used a grounded theory approach in my data analysis, an inductive process in which theory develops as data are collected and analyzed (Glaser and Strauss 1967; 1978; Corbin and Strauss 1990; Straus and Corbin 1990; 1998; Glaser and Holden 2004; Charmaz 2006).

Grounded theory has been described by Corbin and Strauss (1990) as having been theoretically derived from both Pragmatism (Dewey 195; Mead 1934) and Symbolic Interactionism (Ark and Burgess 1921; Thomas and Znaniecki 1918; Hughes 1971; Blumer 1969), and drawing primarily on two important principles from these perspectives, change and "a clear stand on the issue of determinism" (Corbin and Strauss 1990, 5). Actors are perceived as living in a fluid social world, where phenomena are constantly in flux; actors are also considered to have a degree of agency. As a result, grounded theory considers it the responsibility of the researcher to capture not only the changing conditions of the social world, but also how the actor chooses to interact with the evolving world surrounding them, as well. Thus, while a wide variety of characteristics of the shelter community were constantly changing, such as the residents, the staff, and the policies, and though I captured the research site as accurately as I could, my primary focus centered on the actions of the individuals within the shelter, and how they perceived themselves and one another, as well as many of the changes that took place.

The volume of data that I gathered over three and a half years was very conducive to a grounded theory methodology, in which data collection and theoretical development occur simultaneously from the beginning of the collection process, allowing repeating concepts to be viewed as theoretically relevant (Glaser and Strauss 1967; 1978; Corbin and Strauss 1990; Strauss and Corbin 1990; 1998). Throughout the time I was taking fieldnotes and conducting interviews, I continually took note of possible recurring themes and patterns that might be relevant. These notes, referred to as initial or open coding (Corbin and Strauss 1990; Loftland and Loftland 1995) were the first step in the data analysis process. During the open coding stage, I worked with a hardcopy of my data, visually marking what I felt were the emerging themes. I generated 201 initial codes, which covered a wide variety of detail concerning life within the shelter community. After I had established the initial codes, the ATLAS qualitative software program was used to begin refined coding or focused coding (Loftland and Loftland 1995). Certain codes were deemed too broad, and were further conceptualized and categorized to better capture the empirical data. However, other codes were either consolidated or eliminated, based on their theoretical relevance to the current study. In the end, 136 codes were used in the study.

Throughout the data analysis process, I also engaged in memo-writing (Charmaz 2002; 2006), as a means of developing my thoughts on the relationships that existed between the emerging themes. While the process is meant to resemble that of free-writing or journaling, I tried to incorporate some of the existing literature into my memo-writing, to provide a solid foundation for future analysis. Many of these memos became the basis for my empirical chapters.

Data Collection: Feminist Methodology

The key to my research was in the experiences and stories of the women in PW. Therefore, it was apparent to me from the very beginning that a feminist methodology would be the most appropriate approach, due to the importance that is placed on women's experiences (Allen 2011; Cook and Fonow 1986; Fonow and Cook 2005; Ramazanoglu 1989). While there has been debate over whether a unified feminist methodology is plausible (Clegg 1975), I followed the idea used by previous researchers, that feminist methodology is not a rigid set of steps carved in stone, but a general set of principles, meant to enhance a picture of the social world (Allen 2007; Cook and Fonow 1986).

The principles of feminist methodology are not limited to the tenets discussed here; I do not mean to suggest this list to be an exhaustive one (Cook and Fonow 1986). However, throughout the course of my research, the following tenets were the feminist principles that I found to be most relevant, and thus incorporated into my methodology.

First, within feminist methodology, a great deal of importance is placed on women's experiences, as they understand them (Allen 2007; Cook and Fonow 1986; Ramazanoglu 1989). Their stories, as told from their perspective, are of the utmost importance, and should not be altered for grammatical or other scholarly reasons. Their narratives are their lives; changing a story for academic purposes devalues their voice and their lived experiences. Accordingly, as I took fieldnotes and conducted semi-structured interviews, I was careful to ensure that I was not changing the women's voices to my own, out of my somewhat tyrannical need to be grammatically correct. I was also careful not to take the women's comments out of context, in order to keep their stories in the vein that they were intended.

Feminist methodology also accounts for the power differences that exist in scientific research, citing the importance placed on the “canon of objectivity” as its cause (Cook and Fonow 1986, 9). In the interest of value neutrality, a rigid dichotomy develops between the researcher and the researched, which has the potential to develop into an exploitative relationship and has been described as “objectification” (9). While women’s experiences may be the heart of the data, it is important to not view the women involved as mere vessels of knowledge to be mined for information. Feminist researchers address this concern by encouraging semi-structured interviews to contain an element of interaction, as well as emotion, instead of one-sided responses to questions, thereby allowing respondents to become active participants in the research process. I employed this feminist technique, using active listening skills, while conducting my interviews with both staff and residents. While the focus of the interviews always remained on the women, the interactive nature encouraged women to engage and direct the course of the interview, rather than researcher objectification which is characterized by a distinct power difference between the researcher and the subject, severe conformity to a predetermined set of interview questions, and a cold detachment to the women and their stories.

Social change and social action lie at the root of feminist methodology, understanding that knowledge for knowledge’s sake is not enough. Feminist researchers believe that once inequality and subordination are recognized, they must be addressed. In my research on domestic violence shelters, I found that inequality existed in various ways within the community I observed. One of the ways I acted as an agent of social change was by implementing Resident Feedback Meetings (RFMs). After conducting a house meeting, during which residents voiced a variety of concerns, including revictimization (see Chapter 7), I felt that the residents would benefit from a regular forum with the day staff, where their voices could be heard. The change

allowed women to empower themselves by expressing their thoughts, and has encouraged PW to grow as an organization.

In addition to the RFMs, the shelter has also taken steps towards social justice. For example, PW became a Safe Zone for LGBT individuals in 2012. As a feminist researcher, I felt that the decision to implement policies and training that advocate social change said volumes about the shelter community, and their fight for equality.

Reflexivity is valued highly in feminist methodology, as it is believed that objectivity is unattainable, and even undesirable, in a postmodern world (Allen 2007; Cook and Fonow 1986; Letherby 2003; Patton 2002). Instead, researchers have a responsibility to acknowledge their own perspective, and constantly reflect and remain aware of how their own standpoint and potential privilege may influence how they interpret their data (McCorkle and Myers 2003; Riesman 1987). Within the diverse community of the shelter, reflexivity was very important. I would like to address some of the concerns I noted, and how I handled them during the research process.

Throughout the course of conducting my research, I always tried to keep in mind how my own background might influence how I interpreted the social world and the interactions of those around me. Never did this become more apparent than when there were interactions that included race and ethnicity. As a White, middle-class woman with an advanced education, I felt a distinct line drawn between myself and the majority of the women who stayed at PW—it was not always a racial distinction; sometimes it was class based, although it was usually a combination of the two. These lines often appeared at unexpected times, and demonstrated examples of White privilege I have experienced my entire life (McIntosh 1990).

For example, one afternoon, during my shift, an African-American resident came to the office, and asked me for conditioner with sunsheen. I looked in the donation closet for her, and when I did not find any products advertised as having sunsheen in them, I simply got her regular conditioner, not realizing sunsheen is specifically for ethnic hair. When I tried to give her the regular conditioner, she told me she already had some like that, but it did not work very well with her hair type; she was hoping we had some with sunsheen. As a woman who has experienced White privilege her entire life, hair and hair products had never been a concern for me. I know that any sample size shampoo or conditioner that I receive will complement my hair type, and in this situation, I assumed that this was true for all women. I learned that is not always the case for women of all races, highlighting the importance of recognizing researcher positionality (McCorkle and Myers 2003).

Other lines appeared, not necessarily based on privilege, but because I became acutely aware of certain racial differences, and was concerned that I would somehow insult the women in some way. One on-going example was name pronunciation. Because I did not work as consistently as other monitors, I did not see the women as often, and would at times forget their names, or their children's names. Generally, this was not too great a concern—each resident has a binder with their intake information, including her and all of her children's names listed. However, the spellings of the names were not necessarily instinctive, and my fear was that I would insult one of the women by drastically mispronouncing her or her children's names. Despite this concern, actually insulting one of the residents by mispronouncing names has never been realized. If I have ever dramatically mispronounced a name, or more likely, when I mispronounced a name, each resident has been gracious enough in her correction that I have never experienced it as a reprimand. Yet, the fear of insulting someone lingers.

This fear of insulting women of a different race or ethnicity is not limited to names; it can also be applied to being viewed as stereotyping residents, in general. For example, when I come in for my shifts, I usually bring movies, with the understanding that long days at the shelter can become tedious, and watching a movie can break up the monotony. One day, before my shift, I stopped at the public library with the intention of picking up several movies. I found myself trying to pick out what the women would like, and found it to be a “raced” decision. For example, I knew in the past they have enjoyed Tyler Perry’s movies (*Medea’s Family Reunion*, etc.) and the library had Tyler Perry’s *Why Did I Get Married*. I thought of renting it but I worried that my choice would appear as though it were based on a stereotype, as opposed to personal preferences, and somehow insult them. It was very important to me that the women at the shelter know that I was interacting with them based on their personalities, not on a stereotypical assumption made by a middle-class White girl. While I knew from experience that this group enjoyed Tyler Perry’s movies, I felt that by bringing one in, it could be interpreted that I assumed that the group would like it because they were African-American. Clearly, these examples demonstrate how my individual standpoint and position of privilege affected my interactions with the women of the shelter in a variety of ways (McCorkle and Myers 2003; Riesman 1987).

While reflexivity is not exclusive to feminist methodology, the emphasis placed on it within this approach encouraged me to recognize the importance of stepping back, and acknowledge how my unique combination of characteristics, such as gender, race, class, and education may have influenced how I interpreted the events and interactions surrounding me (Cook and Fonow 1986, 5). While characteristics such as race cannot be filtered out of one’s perceptions, I was aware of the possibility, and thus took note during such accounts.

Protecting the Research Subjects

As would be the case with any study, I came across some methodological concerns throughout the research process, which I addressed as best I could. First, there was concern regarding how my status as a shelter monitor could potentially influence the study; specifically, that my dual role as both a paid shelter employee and researcher may place the women in an uncomfortable position of feeling they must participate in order to receive help. This issue was addressed directly. I explained to the residents that their decision to participate in the study would not influence their eligibility to receive services from the shelter, and would not result in any negative consequences. At the time of the interview, I also emphasized that if they changed their mind, or wanted to stop, they could certainly do so, as they were in no way obligated to finish the interview. While thirty-one residents of PW chose to participate, many women declined, leaving me with the impression that the women did not feel coerced to participate in the study. After comparing the two groups on key characteristics such as race, children, age, and education, it was determined that women who did not participate did not significantly differ in any way from the women who chose to participate.

It is also important to consider the sensitive nature of the research on domestic violence. While the interviews primarily focused on the shelter community, there were questions on the interview schedule concerning abuse (for example, “how did you come to be at PW?”), which could be emotional and upsetting for the women. Certainly, their stories were both touching and heartbreaking, and very real. Again, before the interview began, I informed the women that they could stop the interview at any time and they were not obligated to finish it. I also provided them with a hotline number to call, in case they became so distressed that they felt they needed to talk to someone who had crisis intervention training.

Because the women of PW were in the shelter for safety purposes, it was extremely important to protect their names, and any identifying information that could possibly be linked to them. Each woman, as well as her abuser and her children, was given a pseudonym. Because PW is the only domestic violence shelter in the county, it was also necessary to change the name of the shelter, the county, and the city. Every effort was made to guarantee the privacy of the women who participated in this study. The subjects were only interviewed inside the shelter in order to best provide a safe environment; one exception was a woman who chose to be interviewed in her new apartment after moving from the shelter.

In this chapter, I have provided a description of PW, detailing the organization's history, its staff, and the physical setting of the shelter. In the following chapter, I will explore the shelter environment in greater detail, specifically focusing on inequality within the shelter and how it affects identity construction. I begin by considering how the shelter is constructed as a gendered space and the impact that it has on interactions, at times creating cycles of inequality. I will also discuss inequality as it pertains to sexuality in the shelter environment. Before venturing further, I think it necessary to recognize that acknowledging the presence of inequality does not lessen or minimize the importance or value of the shelter, or all of the work that the staff does. However, just as social problems exist in society, they exist in the shelter community. The next step is to examine how these issues are constructed and negotiated within the walls of the shelter.

CHAPTER 3:

SHELTERS: INEQUALITY AND GENDERED SPACES

While domestic violence shelters are recognized as sites of identity construction, (Loseke 2007; 2001), they are also microcosms of the larger society, engaging in hierarchies of inequality and bureaucracy (Brown and Mistry 2005). One way in which inequality manifests is through sex, gender, and sexuality. In this chapter, I will consider how sex, gender, and sexuality influence the interactions that occur within the shelter environment, at times perpetuating the cycle of inequality, as well as creating a foundation for identity construction and repair.

Shelters as Gendered Spaces

In her 1990 article on gendered organizations, Acker described how the hierarchal structures within organizations are not gender-neutral, but are gendered spaces. While Acker explored how patriarchy exists within seemingly neutral policies and procedures, I used her research to describe shelters as clearly gendered spaces. PW is carefully constructed as a gendered space in a variety of ways originally recognized by Acker (1990), including the sex composition of employees and residents, the construction of symbols and images that reinforce the differences

between men and women, and the interactions between men and women that serve as the basis of identity construction.

Sex Composition of Employees

First, PW is a gendered space, based on the composition of its employees and residents. Due to their foundation in the feminist movement, domestic violence shelters initially had a staff composed primarily of women (Schechter 1982). Over the years, many shelters have transitioned from a feminist ideology to a client-centered “professional” approach (Acker 1990; Ferree and Martin 1995; Scott 2005; Stark 2007; Rodriguez 1988; Wharton 1987), which is more open to the male advocates (Wharton 1987). Despite the increased number of men working to end the social problem of domestic violence, shelters continue to have a staff composition comprised of women (1987).

While PW’s uses a client-based approach, the organization only employs women to work within the shelter. Having a staff comprised entirely of women has been viewed positively by residents, and the staff has used their gender to create a unified identity among all of the women in the shelter (see Chapter 6). However, I found the organization had liability concerns for constructing this gendered space, and created new opportunities to encourage male advocates to become involved.

Male Advocates

Through partnering with a local men’s group, PW found a way to incorporate male advocates into the shelter. PW’s gendered space was described as the result of concerns over liability. One of the staff members described the lack of male advocates as an issue of funding:

“We actually ran a batterers’ program, so we had men. A male...was a counselor...One of the problems we had was, because of our setup here, talking about liability. A male here and have the ladies come out, and we’re staffed one person [after 4:00 p.m. and on the weekends]. I mean, because this is where they [the residents] live; this is their home.

Without having dual staff coverage to do that...um, just thought that that would be a disaster waiting to happen...And...our funding is not conducive to being able to double staff.”

-Nadine, Staff

Because the shelter does not have the funding to pay two monitors when a male is on duty, it was viewed as an unnecessary liability for the shelter to hire a male staff member, who would be alone in the shelter with the women for his entire shift. Therefore, when the funding ended for the batterers' program, the presence of a male staff member did, as well. In this particular situation, the shelter's financial resources, or lack thereof, had a larger impact on the presence of male advocates within the shelter than a feminist ideology, as Wharton's research suggests (1987).

Recently, PW has started working with a community group called Real Men (RM), which is comprised of men⁹ who have actively come forward against domestic violence, and volunteer to spend time with the children, especially the young boys, to act as role models. In addition to working with the children, RM members have also organized events to raise awareness for domestic violence, and have volunteered to help maintain the physical appearance of the shelter. Staff recognized that the presence of RM in the community, as well as the shelter, had a positive influence on the residents.

“We're working with a group called Real Men, and that's what they're doing. They're assisting women, and... their job is to try to help eradicate domestic violence, you know? Letting women know that they're more than what some men want to make them. You know, they're more than an object, and more than a punching bag.”

-Wilma, Staff

⁹ All members must pass a background check. A PW staff member personally checks to ensure that Real Men members are not recorded as past abusers.

Similarly, Nadine recognized not only the important influence of RM on the residents within the shelter, but also the children, and more specifically, the boys looking for male role models.

“I thought it was important, that male influence too. You know, the boys can be boys. They [the boys in the shelter] see women all day; they need to have some interaction with men. Positive males. And women also needed to see some positive men doing some things, handling their business, taking care of family, taking an interest in young men. And so that's how we started partnering with Real Men, so they can see that.”

-Nadine, Staff

By providing the positive message that “real men don't hurt women,” RM hopes to encourage a feeling of self-worth and empowerment in women. The group also hopes to instill that same message in children, as Nadine suggested, providing them with a male role model that will encourage nonviolence and respect for others. Their approach often focuses around spending quality time with the children, playing games and participating in activities that require practicing skills such as taking turns, respecting the rules, and both winning and losing gracefully. For example, Charles, an RM member and a local police officer, started spending time with Ron, a 10 year-old boy at the shelter. Charles was a wonderful role model, and Ron looked up to him a great deal. He took Ron to work with him for a day, and because he was so well-behaved, Ron was able to talk on the radio. Later, they played chess, and Charles found out that Ron did not lose well. It was considered an area in need of improvement, and Charles decided they would work on that in the future.

By partnering with RM, PW recognized the unique contribution that male advocates can offer, and encouraged the presence of males in the shelter community, despite the fact that funding and issues of liability limited staff from actually hiring male staff members.

Sex Composition of Residents

While some researchers have argued that women are “as violent” as men within the home (Archer 2000; Fiebert 1997), the feminist literature points out that the effects of domestic abuse are asymmetrical and gendered (Johnson 2006; Ferraro & Johnson 2002; Kimmel 2002). The violence that many women of PW experienced was accomplished in a manner that depended on the subordination of their gender. PW takes in women, based on this common bond of gendered violence, and brings them into the shelter community. Male victims are not offered shelter inside PW.

Male Victims

“The shelter's totally geared towards women, but we all know that there are men being abused, as well as women.”

-Aliyah, Staff

As Aliyah states, domestic violence is not exclusive to women; men experience victimization, as well. According to the National Crime Victimization Survey of 2010, the percentage of female victims of domestic violence (22%) is more than four times that of male victims (5%)¹⁰. Due to the significant difference in frequency, domestic violence shelters seldom have the funding available to offer male victims the same resources that they provide to female victims; in some cases, the presence of male victims may not even be acknowledged. There lies the conundrum for shelter staff: many shelters, including PW, face the on-going problem of not having enough funding available to adequately provide for female victims; they certainly do not have the resources available to provide for male victims, as well. Therefore, because, statistically, male victims are less likely to call, shelters focus what little they have on the victims who are more likely to need their services. As a result, male victims often have access to fewer

¹⁰ Bureau of Justice Statistics, <http://bjs.ojp.usdoj.gov/content/pub/pdf/cv10.pdf>

resources when they are in need of services (Hines, Brown, and Dunning 2007; Muller, Desmarais, and Hamel 2009).

Just as PW could not allow a male to work in the shelter, similarly, PW felt that they could not offer male victims emergency shelter for the same reason—it was a liability to have a male in PW, where he would be sharing living quarters with women and their families. However, there was an alternative process for helping male victims:

“...no one individual needs to be able to be battered or to abuse another individual. And so, and I believe that some men are battered and that they don't report it. We've had some calls that were legitimate cases. But because of our setup, we can't shelter them. We serve them. I mean, we can serve them. We have a whole setup that if a man calls, we have to screen him, and then we would provide them a hotel, or make some other arrangements for them to shelter. Because putting an unknown male in here with women is a liability. Some of the shelters that actually shelter men and...they have it divided. I mean, their shelters are big enough that they have a section for that, and they can staff it. We don't.”

-Nadine, Staff

According to Nadine, PW still made an effort to provide a safe place for male victims to stay; they simply could not stay at the shelter. Other resources follow a similar trend—while the staff tried to help, a lack of funding limited what they were able to do. One of the staff members described her interactions with male victims, and the limited resources available to them in this way:

“I have [received a call from a male victim] once, and there are numbers that I can refer to, and when I've been down in the court, you know, men can come into the court, the [protection order] program and I, I help men get the protection order, but I don't really follow through with their case. Now, they call me, and ask me questions, and after that and I've also answered their questions on the phone, but I don't really give them the service that I would my [female] clients. [In response to why do the male victims receive different attention than her clients] Ah, funding...I believe was what I was told. You know, the grants and everything are for women, but I'm certainly not going to turn someone away if they have a question, I can answer a question for them. And I don't know if there's any other, I know there's hotlines for men too. So, and there's places for them to go, there's a shelter I think in [a town in a different state, about 35 minutes away] and there's one in [a town about an hour and fifteen minutes away], except that one is, ah, for men and women in the same shelter.”

As the above excerpt illustrates, even outside of shelter services, male victims will not receive the same resources as women, because the funding was specifically for female victims and their families. While PW offers domestic violence education, support groups, and judicial advocacy for female victims, these options were not necessarily open to all victims; it varied based on the specifications made by the grants and other sources of funding. By experiencing violence in the context of an intimate relationship, these men, though few in number, have deviated from masculinity norms, and therefore have not generated the same activist response as women who are seen as victims of gendered violence (Lucal 1995). Society does not expect men to be victimized in the same way women are, and funding availability clearly reflects that attitude.

The societal expectation for men to conform to the gendered expectations, maintain their masculinity, and not be victims (Lucal 1995) does not always stay outside the shelter walls. It should be noted that PW staff do not receive training in situations that result in male victims, leaving staff members to believe that it either does not occur or that their own assumptions and biases about the nature of the violence must be true. In some cases, these assumptions centered on trivializing the abuse some men may encounter.

“I’m sure that there are men that suffer domestic abuse, but I have a different spin on that. My theory is that most men that are being abused always think of something to trigger that type of behavior, most women aren’t abusers, most women aren’t. There may be, and I’m not saying there aren’t, because there are women who abuse, okay, but there is a reason, there is a mental deficit behind, a reason why they do it, just as there is men, but all in all, women and children suffer more than any other population.”

-Maria, Staff

While women and children are the more frequent victims of domestic violence, Maria’s theory that most men who are being abused “always think of something to trigger that type of behavior” is the same victim-blaming that shelters have fought for some time. The fact that a

staff member and advocate for domestic violence victims chose to use this particular argument to explain the presence of male victims minimizes the importance and legitimacy of male victimization. Certainly a male victim who called the crisis line and interacted with someone with this particular attitude would be given the impression that he must have done something wrong or something to deserve his abuse. One staff member acknowledged that while it does not happen frequently, when male victims call, it does become the source of some debate among the staff:

“There aren't a lot of men who report abuse. We have them, we'll get them every once in a while. Whenever we get that call, we go to bat with [certain staff members].”
-Crystal, Staff

Many staff members show concern towards male victims, and question the shelter's lack of action and resources towards that particular demographic. Some of this concern stems from first hand knowledge of male victimization. Penny was one staff member who felt particularly strong about this subject:

“I think there's a lot of men who get abused, and I often wonder, you know, do they get the same support that we do, do they have some [resources] for men, you know? That really bothers me, really bothers me...cause I know...a few men that are in abusive relationships, and I mean, I don't even know what, we have a hotline, an 800 hotline, but I have no idea...like what that consists of, when they call there, do they have shelters too? Shouldn't we have that information? I think we should have that information, we could, we get the crisis calls, you know, if we get after them [the crisis lines sometimes refer callers to us] sometimes cause they're victims too. I think we need to give them some kind of support, guidance, you know. But I know a lot of men that have, you know, really been abused, where do they go, you know, I don't even have any idea, I don't have any education on that end of it. Maybe we need to do that...we are [a] domestic violence [shelter], that covers both ends...both male and female.”
-Penny, Staff

Penny's concern is not only for the male victims whom she knows personally; she also points out that as a domestic violence shelter, PW should educate its employees on male victimization and the resources available to men. “Shouldn't we have that information?” she

asks. The lack of training has left her feeling that not only is PW not offering resources to male victims, but it is not providing her with any information so that she could refer them to an organization that could help them.

Jacinda, another staff member, also recognized the need for the community to provide more resources for male victims. She felt that male victimization is a problem that was more common in Alloy than people preferred to think, but due to the nature of the social problem, it was not made public.

“But...I could go on for hours about how my shelter would be, but I know that I would want to have at least a section for abused men, because I think we do have it, I just don't think it's, you know, publicized. It doesn't receive the same attention, and I really believe that we have some battered men out there.”

-Jacinda, Staff

However, the sex composition of the staff and residents is not the only way in which the shelter is constructed as a gendered space. The sex and gender of the individuals in the shelter provides the foundation upon which other aspects of the gender space are created.

Reinforcing Symbols and Images

The gendered space of the shelter has many examples of symbols and images that reinforce and explain the stereotypical differences that exist between men and women. Some of these symbols are found in the resources provided to residents to better understand their abusive experiences, such as the battered woman formula story. Shelters' use of the battered woman formula story reinforces the dichotic image of women as innocent, defenseless victims, and men as angry perpetrators of violence (Davies, Lyon, and Monti-Catania 1998; Loseke 1992). While the experiences of abused women are often far more complicated than this formula story allows (Ferraro and Johnson 2002; Johnson 1995; 2006), women's experiences are negotiated to better fit within the gendered space (Loseke 2001).

PW also had images hanging in the office that reinforced the differences between men and women. Throughout my employment at the shelter, a cartoon has had a permanent place on the office door. Its origin is unknown. It features a cartoon of an apparent female skeleton sitting on a bench, covered in cobwebs and dress aged with time. The caption reads, “Waiting for the perfect man.” While meant to be humorous, the cartoon’s presence in a domestic violence shelter illustrates the gendered nature of PW because it indicates that men are imperfect and will not change, an underlying belief of abusive behavior. Indirectly, the image is used to reinforce the battered woman formula story and the shelter is constructed as a gendered space, creating distinct lines between women and men (Lamont 2002).

Interactions: Cycles of Inequality and Identity Creation

The interactions that take place within the shelter serve as the basis for identity construction; thus, the gendered interactions within PW can be profoundly influential towards the development of the self-concept. While many of the gendered interactions offer a sense of unity (see Chapter 6), others perpetuate cycles of inequality, reinforcing societal attitudes concerning gender and violence.

“How Women Are”: The Inherent Nature of Men and Women

Many of the women at PW revealed beliefs about the inherent nature about men and women, that each sex is biologically programmed to “be” a certain way, and it is inevitable that they each behave in that manner. Generally speaking, the intrinsic mannerisms attributed to women had a tendency to be negative, referring to their innate cattiness or helplessness. These attitudes were often depicted when the women described how well they got along with other residents. Angelica, who got along well with the other residents, explained why that was an unusual occurrence for her.

“Women are conniving, a lot of them are. I don't normally get along with a lot of females, cause it's, they say one thing and do another. They act one way, and then another way, like...I can't deal with the drama from the girls, it [always] ends up being like that...I think it's inevitable.”

-Angelica, Resident

While the current atmosphere was pleasant, and all the residents seemed to get along, Angelica understood this particular moment to be the exception to the rule (“I think it's inevitable”). Angelica was not the only resident to cite the inevitability of drama that will occur if women are together for an extended period of time. Celia also shared that belief.

“Of course, when you get a bunch of women together you're gonna have that [drama]...but after, you know, after almost six weeks of it, I've had my limit.”

-Celia, Resident

However, a sense of cattiness was not the only “essential” feminine quality identified by residents. Women were also compared to men, in both their physical and mental capabilities. It was interesting to note that despite the fact that women were making the comparisons, they did not come out favorably. Stacey, a resident, brought up women's physical weakness, in reference to victimization.

“I don't know why men are like that with women, you know, we're little most of the time, and helpless. And I guess it's a control issue, but, you know, I think it's pretty pathetic to beat someone up.”

-Stacey, Resident

By describing the physical capabilities of women as “helpless,” Stacey intended to demonstrate why it was “pretty pathetic” for men to abuse them, although she acknowledged that it was very likely a control issue. However, by using that particular adjective to describe women, Stacey appeared to make a rather strong statement about the weak physical abilities of women relative to men.

Other attitudes reflected a belief that men think differently than women do, and perhaps to their advantage. Abigail, a staff member, was describing how women become catty, and turn on one another, not just within the shelter, but in a variety of settings. She contemplated how that did not seem to be the case with men.

“It's a power thing with women, I don't know about the men's world, but it's a power thing with women. If you have women and no man...they think quite different than us, they're more logical.”

-Abigail, Staff

In this way, Abigail reinforces several inherent beliefs about women—first, that they will turn on one another and compete for power, and second, that they are less logical than men. It is strongly implied that these competitions are fueled by emotions and cattiness, not by logic and rationality.

The idea of how men and women naturally “are” was further reinforced through the gender socialization at the shelter. The children at PW received gendered messages, often from parents, regarding the acceptable ways in which to behave. Boys received this message far more often than girls did. While it appeared to be acceptable for the girls to violate gender norms, under the guise that they would grow out of the tomboy phase, it was under no circumstances acceptable for a boy. My fieldnotes became punctuated with different accounts of little boys being told to “act like a man.”

“A group of kids were playing outside. The boys were playing basketball, using a Fisher Price plastic basketball hoop, which can be adjusted up to six feet. The boys liked to put it at five feet, and slam dunk. When they wouldn't give the youngest boy, who is six years old, a turn and he started to pout, they [the children] told him not to cry and ‘be a man.’” [April 21, 2007]

Other children were often quick to enforce the lessons of gender socialization. On a separate occasion, tears from a young boy were once again met with scorn, but this time, not by

his peers, but by his mother. The boy's mother was quick to reinforce gender conformity, and how he, as a male, should behave.

“I hear their mom yell at the boys and then yell at the youngest. ‘Quit crying! You a girl? You don’t cry.’” [May 19, 2007]

Mothers who felt it was important to teach boys to conform to gendered expectations sometimes worried how far they should take that message. One afternoon, while I was in the kitchen with several residents, I witnessed a conversation about this struggle. Two women were discussing how they were trying to raise their boys to not cry; however, this plan had been complicated when one of their sons had been bullied by a girl. When the appropriate adults had been alerted of the matter, and still had not intervened, his mother told him to stand up for himself and hit her back. She said she did not want to send the message that that kind of behavior was acceptable, but wanted him to be able to stand up for himself.

As a woman currently residing in a domestic violence shelter, the resident recognized the delicacy of the situation. She did not want to socialize her son to think that hitting girls was acceptable, but at the same time, she wanted him to be able to engage in the gender-appropriate behavior of standing up for himself. Because the girl had defied her gender role, and engaged in bullying behavior, the resident felt her son had to break his gender role and hit a girl, because the adults failed to resolve the issue.

Other women, when faced with the situation of a young girl being hit by a boy, did not view it as reminiscent of their abusive situation, or feel concern that children were receiving messages about gendered violence. It was merely “boys being boys,” and behaving the way children do. At least one little girl, however, seemed to question the fairness of this practice from a young age.

I was in the office one afternoon, when April, an eight year-old girl, came in, and asked if she could talk to me about a “problem.” I asked her what the problem was; she answered, “What do you do if a boy hits you?” I was not sure at first whether she was referring to an experience of her own, or her mother’s abuse, so I asked her what happened. April told me that she was playing outside with the boys, and they hit her. I told her it was good idea to tell a grown-up, like her mom, about it. Then, her mom could talk to their mom. “What if the grown-up doesn’t do anything?” she asked. I told her then it was always a good idea to tell someone else, like the children’s specialist, and she could talk to their mom. “But what if you tell someone and they talk to the kids’ mom, and they don’t do anything about it?” Again, I told her this might be something to tell the children’s specialist. Peaches, her mom, walked in then, looking for her, and asked her what she was doing in the office. April told her we were talking about “that problem from the other day.” Peaches said, “Oh, that’s taken care of.” I asked if this was already addressed, and she rolled her eyes. “Yeah, she’s a tomboy, she tries to play with the boys. They pick on her cause she’s a girl. Nothing big, just picking on her, like boys do.” April did not want to play with the kids for the rest of the day, because “the boys keep messing with me.”

At eight years old, April had learned that when a boy hit her, it was her own fault. When she reported their behavior, nothing seemed to be accomplished (“What if the grown-up doesn’t do anything?”). Even parents, the ultimate authority figure for children, appeared to let the bad behavior go unpunished (“But what if you tell someone and they talk to the kids’ mom, and they don’t do anything about it?”), because they were behaving “like boys do.” While the parents involved in this incident did not see it as representative of societal attitudes towards gender and violence, there are certainly parallels between April’s experience and that of many domestic violence victims. Women are hit, and are often blamed for being involved with a person who

would behave in such a way in the first place (Dunn 2005). These victims then face the difficulty of trying to report this behavior, which is often ignored by various institutions in our society (Huisman et al. 2005). Even police officers, who are meant to protect and to serve, do not always stop repetitive violent behavior, instead encouraging offenders to “cool off,” or informing victims that they will be charged too, if any arrests are made (Ammar, Orloff, Dutton, Aguilar-Hass 2005; Ferraro and Pope 1993; Ferraro 1989). In the end, the boys continued to play, and the girl had to come inside the shelter. April’s experience was eerily similar to those of the grown women staying at PW, though the consequences for her one ordeal were far less severe. By engaging in this socialization process, both April and the boys involved were unintentionally perpetuating a cycle of inequality that reinforced the subordination of women through violence, but on a much smaller scale.

Violating Gendered Expectations

Shelters are both gendered spaces and microcosms of the larger society (Brown and Mistry 2005). Within the shelter environment, women and children expect one another to conform to the gendered expectations that society has constructed for them, and reinforce the cycles of inequality that exist. As a result, lesbian and bisexual women, whose sexual identity is often assumed to be heterosexual unless they state otherwise, face a different kind of stress in the shelter environment, sexual inequality.

Sexuality

“There's a lot of abuse, even though it's same sex. You know, they have the same kinds of issues, plus they have this second [issue]—people telling you that ‘I'm going to out you to your parents.’ And then on top of it, I think...a lot of gay people feel like, ‘I can't trust the authorities, nobody's gonna help me, my situation is different.’”

-Wanda, Staff

In her 1990 article on gendered processes, Joan Acker recognized how gender provides the framework of basic assumptions and practices in social organizations; in other words, the “ideal worker” was a masculine worker, because it was assumed a man was better suited to the tasks required by the organization. Despite the feminist goals and practices that characterize feminist organizations (Martin 1990), the inequality regimes acknowledged by Acker are present in domestic violence shelters, but their existence translates in different ways--the assumed gender of the “ideal worker” becomes the assumed sexual identity of the “ideal” domestic violence victim, or the woman who best fits the victim construction, which is still a heterosexual model. Victims of domestic violence are assumed to be heterosexual (Bornstein, Fawcett, Sullivan, Senturia, and Shiu-Thornton 2006; VanNatta 2005), despite the fact that rates of violence between heterosexual and homosexual couples have been reported to be very similar (Alexander 2002; Brand and Kidd 1986; Lie and Gentlewarrier 1991; Lie, Schilit, Bush, Montagne, and Reyers 1991; Lockhart, White, Causby, and Isaac 1994; McClennen 2005; and Pitt 2000). However, while there is a heterosexist assumption, some homosexual victims allow this assumption to go uncorrected, because as Wanda described above, they feel their situation is “different,” and perhaps leaving the assumption uncorrected is the only way to receive help (VanNatta 2005).

While the majority of women I interviewed and worked with at PW identified as heterosexual, there were several instances where homosexual women¹¹ deliberately misrepresented themselves as heterosexual, for fear of being exposed or “outed,” and later told me personally that they were gay/lesbian. One of the staff members described her experience in this way:

¹¹ Some of these were abused by their female partners; others were abused by men.

“When I worked at a different shelter, I was very quiet [about my sexuality] for a few weeks and I just kind of observed everybody and...people said really awful things. And I thought okay, I definitely can't like, you know, I just was very private. And, [a] woman who came in [to the shelter] who I knew, I've never been one to, like, go out a lot to gay clubs or anything like that because I was in a relationship for 17 years, so I was pretty home bound, but I happened to know this woman from when I was very young, and I used to go out occasionally. And I was so terrified that she was going to say something, you know, about where she knew me. And I was very young and fresh out of college, and the director of that shelter at the time was really mean, and I was kind of afraid of her. One day I just kind of like got up the courage to go to her [the director] and I see this woman and I went to her and I said, um, you know, ‘[This is] my lifestyle, and this woman knew me,’ and I don't know, it just came out almost like a confession cause, you know, cause I was so terrified of this lady, and I'll never forget, like she stopped me, like hugged me, like the mean woman and she was like, ‘It's okay, sweetheart,’ you know? And from that day forward, like she was mean to everybody else, but she was not to me, you know, it was like wow. So I felt a little encouraged by that experience when I came here and, um, and I was a little bit more open.

-Wanda, Staff

Unfortunately, the overwhelmingly fear Wanda experienced at the thought of being “outed” is a source of stress and anxiety that a certain portion of the PW shelter population understand all too well. While the residents of the shelter change over time, thus potentially changing the existing attitudes, homophobia seems to remain constant. Certain terms are used casually, or as insults. For example, I was sitting with a resident, Bonnie, in the kitchen when she began to describe her frustration with her current doctor. When discussing her doctor in disgust, she referred to him as a “fruit” and a “homo,” although he is married to a woman and they have children. It was clearly a use of words to insult him, as opposed to describing him as homosexual. Mona, another resident, was in the room when this occurred. She did not seem offended; on the contrary, she mentioned that she used to clean for him, and that he was “weird.”

While Bonnie may have only meant to say that she was dissatisfied with her doctor, her language spoke volumes. The use of “fruit” and “homo” as general terms to insult her doctor, when others could work equally well in this particular situation, indicated not only the presence of heterosexual privilege, but also the acceptance of verbal violence towards homosexuality

(Pascoe 2005). Mona's indifference towards her choice of words merely reinforced the message that was sent.

Other times, homophobic vocabulary was more blatant—it was not a substitution for other words; it was language meant to belittle a group seen as immoral or “less than.” One example of this blatant homophobia took place when I was having a conversation with one of the residents in the office. The resident brought up “gays” and “how they’re everywhere in TV.” She casually referred to “dykes” on “The New Adventures of Old Christine” and so on, saying that it is fine if they do whatever, even if religiously she thinks it’s wrong, but why put it where everyone can see it? Particularly, kids? She said in high school, there weren’t any gay kids, but her daughter knows a couple at her high school. I ventured that maybe they were there all along, and maybe now they feel comfortable being open about it.

This particular resident is not using the words “gay” and “dyke” in such a way that they could easily be substituted with other words, the way Bonnie did. The vocabulary is deliberately chosen because it is critical of a group that she believes is religiously “wrong.” Homophobic language and attitudes such as these reinforce the inequality regimes within domestic violence shelters by creating an unwelcoming atmosphere for lesbian and bisexual women.

Even playful joking or deliberate agitation between residents has elements of homophobia. One particular resident, Nevaeh, enjoyed agitating other residents by acting as though she was going to kiss them, or by giving them uninvited lap dances. This behavior disturbed some residents so much that they formally complained to the staff, stating they would do something about it if staff did not¹². Their concern did not seem to be her invasion of their

¹² Nevaeh, in fact, would engage in this behavior with staff, as well.

personal space so much as the threat of her same-sex antics; of course, Nevaeh understood their discomfort—that is exactly what made it so fun for her.

For those residents living in fear of being “outed,” such behaviors and comments do not encourage a feeling of acceptance and understanding. If anything, it encourages them to try to “pass” as heterosexual, as a means of avoiding the judgment expressed by those around them. After all, they share a home, if a temporary one, with their fellow residents; if the shelter has a high census, they share rooms with fellow residents. When “dykes,” “fruits,” and “homos,” are part of the vernacular, closeted residents may fear more than judgment is at risk—they may also fear for their safety.

Residents, however, are not the only group that pose a potential threat to homosexual women in shelters. What has been described as “a lack of training” regarding same sex violence has made homosexual women both fearful and mistrustful of shelter staff, as well (Alexander 2002, 98). This concern is not completely unfounded—the training at PW does not address same sex violence at all, allowing any of the staff members’ misinformed assumptions, homophobia, or biases to remain unchecked, even as they work with these victims. Wanda recalled one woman who had quietly told a single staff member that she was bisexual, and how it became the defining factor of identification:

“I think for some reason, for a lot of people, it becomes a defining factor. One day, I walked into work and I had a cup or something, and I went to put it in the [re]frigerator, and one of the staff people was sitting with a woman who had just acknowledged that she was bisexual, and, you know, I’m coming into this thing, I don’t know what’s going on, I’m just bringing something to the fridge, and I look back and she [the staff member] says, ‘Oh, you should talk to Wanda cause she’s blah, blah, blah, blah [referring to her sexual preference],’ and I’m like okay, you know? It’s, I can’t, um, I don’t feel like everybody’s really comfortable just being outright with people. It’s that underlying stuff that it hurts sometimes, you know?”

-Wanda, Staff

While it may have been well-intentioned, introducing a staff member to a resident based on their common sexual identity was not only inappropriate on a professional level, but as Wanda pointed out, was hurtful; she, in an instant, had been reduced to her sexual preference as an identifier. Similarly, the woman who had just entered into an unfamiliar environment and entrusted personal information about herself to a staff member quickly had it announced to another staff member, who had just walked in the room to put an item in the refrigerator. The woman also had been reduced to her sexual preference as an identifier; she had not even been introduced with a name, merely a sexual orientation. While training staff on the realities of same sex violence may not have prepared this staff member to behave differently in this particular situation, it may have given her the sensitivity to recognize it may not be an appropriate way to introduce the topic.

One summer, both PW residents and staff were put to the test when two residents, Ava and Gia, became openly involved in a relationship with one another. Interestingly, the residents who were at PW at that time did not voice any concern or discomfort about the relationship. The same could not be said for the staff.

Ava and Gia transferred together to PW from a different shelter when their abusers discovered where they were staying, and it became necessary for them to change locations for safety reasons. It was apparent from the beginning that the two women were close, but it was assumed to be a friendship based on the traumatic experiences they endured together. Again, there was a heterosexist assumption, largely based on the knowledge that each woman had a male abuser; the idea that either woman could be lesbian or bisexual was simply not considered.

Once she grew comfortable within the shelter, Gia allowed others to see that she was a lesbian.¹³ For example, while other women chatted about which actors they liked, she would talk about which actresses she found attractive. While Ava never partook in these conversations, she would often sit close to Gia, and they would occasionally hold hands. It was not uncommon for Gia to make flirtatious comments to Ava, if she thought no one was paying attention. However, one evening, a staff member walked in on what she felt might have been an intimate moment between the two women, causing the PW staff to reflect on how they felt about the presence of homosexuality within the shelter.

Jayda, a monitor, went out on the back porch, where Ava and Gia were sitting “too close” to one another. Jayda said their heads were very close together, like they were kissing—whether or not they were is unknown. Jayda was not quite sure what she was supposed to do in this type of situation. She wrote down what she saw in the log, and it quickly became a subject of discussion among the day staff the following day. It is unknown if all of the members of day staff were aware that the two women were romantically linked before this point. While Gia felt comfortable describing her sexuality, she only seemed to do so in the midst of conversations with the other women, which tended to occur later in the evening, when the monitors were on duty. Ava simply did not talk about her sexual identity. While some of the day staff may have known in advance, it is possible that this lognote was the first indicator to others that there was a homosexual couple at PW. It was made a topic at the next staff meeting.

At the meeting, the lognote regarding Gia and Ava was addressed, and Jayda was asked to describe exactly what she saw. Jayda’s description was fairly straight forward, and without bias or emotion—she walked onto the back porch, where she saw the two women sitting next to

¹³ I deliberately did not use the phrase “come out” because Gia did not formally “come out” to anyone. As she grew comfortable, she simply was herself; there was no need for an announcement.

one another. Their heads were very close, but she was not certain if they were kissing. Wanda spoke about how, as staff members, we all have biases and how we cannot allow them to influence how we treat people. Jayda mentioned to the monitor next to her that she felt like she was being attacked, although Wanda kept saying, “I’m not talking about you, I mean all of us.” This topic initiated an in-depth conversation regarding the appropriate response if the staff should ever come across an intimate moment between two female residents. Should we say or do anything at all? Should it be logged? Tamara pointed out that it might be a good idea to log the incident, just to let other staff members know that it occurred. Wanda was concerned that alerting people of an occurrence would make it difficult for people with biases to treat everyone the same. One staff member brought up that mothers may not want their kids seeing that kind of intimacy, regardless of whether it was a homosexual or heterosexual couple. Another said after all the violence the kids witnessed, it might be a good thing for them to witness an affectionate relationship. It did not get resolved, but it was decided that if an intimate moment takes place in their bedroom, it is not our business. If it is in any other room in the house, and it is definitely physically intimate (the definition of which was never specified—hugs and holding hands could be considered physically intimate) monitors are to contact on-call for further instructions.

Essentially, there was not a formal resolution, and the entire staff was left with rather vague instructions—if they “definitely” witnessed physically intimate contact that was inappropriate, they are to contact on-call. However, the solution was extremely subjective, and therefore the actions taken (or not taken) would largely depend on which monitor was working, how she chose to determine if two women were sitting “too close,” and how she defined “inappropriate.” Wanda later expressed her frustration at the entire situation.

“[In regards to the episode where two female residents were rumored to have kissed] There was a whole big deal because one of the staff people that, they had kissed, and it

was in the log. And it was clear to me, like, the whole way that it was handled, and then going back and talking to people, because the first reaction [of the day staff], ‘Oh, they can’t do that, they can’t do that,’ which is, you know, understandable... We really went back and talked to the staff person, [who] hadn’t actually seen her. You know, she saw one sort of lean towards, it was just these really vague details. Finally, it was just [one of those] things that was really fueled by, you know, homophobia, just like ‘Oh, my God, they’re not, oh, gross, they can’t do that here.’ And at this time, you really see, people’s underlying beast sort of get un-caged inadvertently, especially it’s fascinating when people think they’re sort of like PC [politically correct], you know, and this stuff sort of comes out.”

Wanda felt that the incident between Gia and Ava shed light on the masked homophobia that existed within the shelter, particularly among the staff, who often think of themselves as politically correct and open-minded. It was not until these same politically correct and open-minded people were faced with the discomfort of acknowledging there were women in the shelter who did not match their heterosexist assumptions, that the mask slipped, and a different set of attitudes emerged (“...it was really fueled by...homophobia, just like ‘Oh, my God, they’re not, oh, gross, they can’t do that here.’”). While the one staff member who actually witnessed the interaction maintained that she was unsure she had witnessed anything at all, and it remained undetermined whether the women had actually kissed, Wanda felt some staff members’ masks had slipped; their immediate reaction had been to interpret this vague situation as disgust for the behavior of homosexuals, in general.

While overt homophobia among the staff has occurred, it is also not typical. The pattern of staff members reinforcing heterosexist privilege is more common, if unintentional. Heterosexual staff members who have carried the invisible backpack of privilege (McIntosh 1990) are only aware of what it is like to be a part of the majority, and to see their lifestyle represented everywhere in society as the acceptable norm. The heterosexist assumption reinforces the idea that every other woman in the shelter also participates in this lifestyle. Wanda

described great concern that this heterosexist privilege and assumption within the shelter would create a feeling of unwelcome for certain women.

“I think there needs to be some kind of identification...that's why we got some of those posters with women who dared, all these women of different, you know, races and backgrounds...because there has to be some identification. If you walk in the door and you don't see anything [you can relate to], you know? So often in society, when you're gay, you don't see yourself reflected in anything. I mean, you just see, sort of, not you, and it's very uncomfortable because there's sort of a heterosexual presumption, and so I'm sensitive to that. I don't ever want women to come in here and think that there's a presumption that they don't belong here.”

PW has always recognized the importance of women being able to identify with the shelter, specifically within the context of race and ethnicity. Wanda mentions “those posters” in the shelter, with women from different races and backgrounds, meant to encourage women to identify with some element of the shelter, in addition to the diverse staff. However, as Wanda points out, the homosexual community is not given that same opportunity. There are no posters of prominent gay or lesbian women with which to identify, and there is a “heterosexual presumption” that such posters will not be necessary. It does not seem to be an intentional exclusion—simply one based on heterosexist assumptions and privilege. However, the motivation, or lack thereof, does not solve the problem at hand—the presence of a heterosexist inequality regime that remains unacknowledged by the majority of the staff.

The Future

While there is an undeniable presence of a heterosexist inequality regime at PW, there is hope for the future. PW has made progress regarding its efforts to reach out to the LBGT community. In the summer of 2010, PW had a table at the Annual Gay Pride Celebration, which

takes place in the Alloy downtown area every year. Flyers and information were handed out, and all of the current residents who were interested went downtown to partake in the festivities¹⁴.

Further steps were taken in 2012, when PW initiated steps towards making the shelter a certified Safe Zone for the LGBT community. In order to become certified, every member of PW's staff would have to undergo official training about violence in LGBT community; this training would be incorporated into the hiring process, so that all PW staff members, new and seasoned, would be well-versed on the topic, and sensitive to the needs of any LGBT residents who may stay at the shelter.

I feel it is important not to overlook these progressive steps. Inequality regimes, homophobia, and heterosexist privilege exist in many organizations (Ward 2008; Merrill & Wolfe 2000), including domestic violence shelters. When those who live and work in these organizations refuse to acknowledge the existence of inequality or privilege, the opportunity for change dwindles. PW, however, has recognized the presence of inequality within its walls, and has taken an active stance against it. The staff has committed themselves towards improving PW, so that all victims can feel safe within the shelter environment.

Conclusion

The gendered nature of the abuse that brings women to the shelter provides the residents of PW with a certain commonality, and often provides a sense of bonding (see Chapter 6). However, the concepts of sex and gender are complex ideas, and even within a shelter community that is composed entirely of women, cycles of inequalities can be perpetuated. Women within the shelter socialize their children with the lessons that mainstream society continues to emphasize; that boys "don't cry," and that it is normal for little boys to play rough with little girls. If she

¹⁴ Participation in the event was voluntary, and residents who were concerned about safety had the option to stay at the shelter.

cannot handle their rough play, she should come inside the shelter. The similarities of the children's circumstances and their own were not recognized by most mothers, setting up new cycles of inequality, fueled by more societal lessons.

While men are not employed by PW, for liability reasons, the shelter has actively taken steps to ensure that men have the opportunity to act as advocates against domestic violence, as well. PW began a partnership with Real Men (RM) in order to incorporate positive male role models in the lives of women and children in the shelter, and by doing so, have extended the boundaries of what is often seen as a "women's issue."

While the feminist literature maintains that domestic violence is disproportionately directed against women (Johnson 2006; Ferraro & Johnson 2002; Kimmel 2002), men have also found themselves to be the victims of domestic abuse. While PW offers services to these individuals, like most shelters, they are significantly more limited than those resources available to women, simply due to the lower frequency of reported calls from male victims. The already-limited funding that the shelter receives often specifies its use towards women and children of domestic violence, making it difficult for shelters, such as PW, to offer the same kind of resources to male victims when they do call for assistance. However, some staff members voiced a wish to receive training in this area; if PW does not have the resources to help these individuals, where can staff direct them, so they can get the help they need?

In addition to male victims, staff training also does not include any information on abusive gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgender relationships. There is a heterosexist assumption that all women in PW are heterosexual, and their male abusers are their husbands or boyfriends. The vast majority of the time, this assumption is accurate. However, there have been several notable occasions where the heterosexist assumption was incorrectly made, and the woman in

question simply failed to correct it, finding it easier to “pass,” than to correct the mistake, and face the potential judgment and ridicule of her fellow residents, and perhaps, staff. The very few who have been open about their sexuality have had their actions, and potential future actions, placed under a microscope, and discussed at great length. Heterosexual women at the shelter have the privilege of not having their sexual lives discussed openly by staff in this way, as well as not being introduced as a single characteristic.

PW has taken progressive steps towards becoming a more inclusive shelter by increasing their presence in the LGBT community and participating in Safe Zone training. The concern that PW shows for the comfort and safety for all women in domestic violence situations is important, as inequality within the shelter environment is not limited to sex, gender, and sexuality.

In the next chapter, I examine how social class influences the experiences of women at PW. I look at the organizational structure of the staff, but I also consider how social economic status shapes the lives of the women who stay in the shelter. Social class can at times become a source of manipulation within abusive relationships, influence the options that are available to escape these relationships, and can offer the appearance of a common class, encouraging some women to engage in boundary work. In Chapter 4, I will address these issues, as the subject of inequality is further explored.

CHAPTER 4:

CLASS INEQUALITIES IN SHELTERS

It has been well-established within the literature that domestic violence is not restricted to a particular class or “type” of woman—it occurs on every level of the social hierarchy (Bograd 2005; Goodman and Epstein 2008). However, it is important to recognize that social class provides different contexts in which women experience their abuse, therefore creating different kinds of obstacles for leaving. These socioeconomic obstacles influence the demographics of women who stay at domestic violence shelters (Cattaneo and DeLoveh 2008). While some women leaving abusive situations may stay with family or friends, this is not always an option. Many abusers isolate their victims from their social networks, severing the social ties that might provide them with a place to stay, and a possible exit strategy to leave the relationship (El-Bassel, Gilbert, Rajah, Folleno, and Frye 2001; Levendosky, Bogat, Theran, Trotter, von Eye, and Davidson 2004; Tan, Basta, Sullivan, and Davidson 1995; Williams 1998). Other women are ashamed of their situation, and are reluctant to approach friends and family for support (Barnett, Martinez, and Keyson 1996; Dunham and Senn 2000). As a

result, the strategy chosen to leave the relationship often depends on the material resources available. Women with access to material resources are financially able to rent a hotel room, a separate apartment, or even move to a different city (Williams 1998). However, these are not feasible options for lower-income women, who are more likely to utilize domestic violence shelters as a means of escaping an abusive relationship (Cattaneo and DeLoveh 2008; Williams 1998).

Issues concerning class, however, do not cease to exist once women enter domestic violence shelters. Concerns regarding staff, class-based policies and assumptions (Acker 2006; Markowitz and Tice 2002), financial obstacles, and boundary work influence interactions, and thus, identity construction and maintenance that take place within PW. Each of these concerns will be discussed, as the salience of class within the lives of domestic violence residents is explored.

Staff and Class

The domestic violence literature has found that, while there are always exceptions, caseworkers at domestic violence shelters have been described as “overwhelmingly middle class and Euro-American,” (Williams 1998, 154). In particular, bureaucratically organized domestic violence shelters that employ a hierarchy of authority, in which academic credentials and expertise influence one’s job title, are composed of middle class staff workers (Markowitz and Tice 2002). This difference in class between shelter staff and the women residing in the shelter has been suggested to result in Acker’s (2006) inequality regimes, where classist assumptions are incorporated into the shelter policies and rules (Markowitz and Tice 2002). While the presence of a middle class staff alone certainly does not determine that classism exists, the composition of the

staff's class may structure the shelter ideology and daily operations, creating an environment where class-based assumptions are made.

PW's approach to staffing is unique in this regard. While there are certain members of the day staff who hold higher positions on the hierarchy of authority based on their academic credentials and degrees, it is not the case with all members of day staff. Some members of day staff have a high school education; likewise, while monitors are considered to be lower on the hierarchy of authority, staff who fill these positions come from a wide variety of backgrounds, some with college degrees, others without. This diverse approach to staffing at all levels of the organization allows a broad social economic group to structure the environment within the shelter, resulting in a unique community where, at times, class is minimized by staff, while at other times, class becomes very salient (see Chapter 7; Good and Bad Parenting).

Minimalization of class as an important factor in shelter living was best captured through a question that was posed in the staff interview schedule. I asked staff members if they thought there was a certain type of woman that seemed to adjust more easily to shelter living. Despite their different backgrounds, both day staff and monitors answered in a similar way.

“You get some people that you would never think would adjust to shelter living. And there's no type. Like I can't say a lady from this area or a woman from this area—it's the inner personality. There have been some women that I've thought, ‘Oh God, they're never going to adjust to shelter life.’ I come in here, they're sitting down talking, and they're just comfortable. They're glad to be safe. And there's some women who come from situations that are not as nice as the shelter, that come with their nose up. There is no characteristics...there are not, because I've seen it happen both ways.”

-Nadine, Staff

While Nadine acknowledges there have been instances where she anticipated a woman not adjusting to the shelter, realistically, she states that there is no “type” of woman who best adapts to shelter living. She specifically mentions how class cannot be used to predict a woman's shelter experience—some women who come from very little “come with their nose up” at PW,

and what it has to offer. Nadine feels that “it’s the inner personality” that best describes how a woman will adjust to shelter living.

Other experienced staff members agreed with the primary importance of personality, but introduced class as being at least partly influential, in some way. These staff members brought up that adjusting to the shelter is sometimes a challenge for women who come from a different background. While many of PW’s residents are often working or lower class, there have been times when middle and upper-class women who did not have access to their financial resources have stayed at the shelter, as well. Some staff members made a point to bring up the difficulties they face in adjusting to shelter life.

“I don't think it really matters what, you know...what age you are, you know, nationality you are, or class status you come from, it really, it depends on the person how well they're gonna adjust. I think it [depends]...how bad you really want it, and how you adjust to the shelter really means how you're going to adjust to a new environment, how well are you going to, you know, adjust to something that's completely different than what you've been in. I mean, you know, you can have somebody that's a doctor, and they come into the shelter and they're like, ‘Whoa,’ you know? ‘I can't, I can't live like this. I'll just go back, I can't deal with this.’ That person, you know, they're already saying that the first few minutes they come in here, you know, they might not stay here, [or] they might [decide to stay at the shelter], because they realize, ‘Oh my God,’ you know, ‘I don't want to go back to him beating me.’

-Jacinda, Staff

Like Nadine, Jacinda agrees that there is not a particular demographic, including class, that will determine whether a woman will adjust to the shelter. For Jacinda, this predictor is more closely linked to how committed the woman is to leaving the abusive relationship. If a woman is really committed to this goal, Jacinda feels that it will assist with how well she adjusts to a different environment, like a shelter. Another staff member shared this view.

“I think, I think it's really their personality, and I think it's also what, where they came from and what they're used to.”

-Joan, Staff

Just as her co-workers stated, Joan first and foremost felt that a woman's ability to adjust to shelter life was simply a matter of personality. However, like Jacinda, Joan felt that it was important to recognize how class could create another layer of complexity, and make the transition even more difficult for middle-class or upper-middle class women who were used to a more comfortable lifestyle than what the shelter could provide.

One staff member who had been recently hired at the time of the interview, and therefore had the least amount of experience of all the staff, made an interesting remark regarding the idea of adjustment to shelter living. While her co-workers stated that it was a matter of personality, but nuanced by class, she approached the topic in a different way.

“The women that have been to prison, the women who have been in rehabilitation centers, the women that have been homeless, um, they certainly adjust better than a young woman that has come from a steady home background, whose first time being abused, having to go through some type of communal living. I certainly would say yes, they do adjust better, from just being um, around different people and this type of situation.”

-Aliyah, Staff

Unlike the other staff members, Aliyah never mentioned personality as a determining factor as a means of adjustment, and was the only one not to do so. For her, it appeared to solely be an issue of class. Women from a steady background who were experiencing communal living for the first time did not adjust well, because they were not used to being around “different people” and “this type of situation.” Women who had lived in prisons, rehabilitation centers, and had been homeless had more experience in institutional living environments, seemingly preparing them for the communal living of a domestic violence shelter. Aliyah thought women coming from difficult backgrounds would appreciate the amenities of the shelter, while middle or upper-middle class women who were used to certain luxuries would cringe, missing the life they had back home.

While the literature reveals a concern for inequality regimes of class in domestic violence shelters, due to an overrepresentation of middle-class “Euro-American” employees, PW’s unconventional hiring practices allow for a diverse group of women from various socioeconomic backgrounds to collaborate on the policies and practices of the organization (Williams 1998). This strategy renegotiates how class is understood by the staff within the context of the shelter in multiple ways. In their interviews, the overwhelming majority of the PW staff primarily focused on the residents’ personality, as opposed to class, in regards to what determines whether the women would adjust to shelter life; however, there are still indications that class plays an important factor in how the residents are viewed by the staff in the shelter (see Chapter 7; Good and Bad Parenting). Thus, within the shelter community, the PW staff’s understanding of class varies based on the specific context of the interaction.

Residents and Class

The concept of class exists in a very unique way among the residents of the shelter, as well. The shelter takes its residents, despite their backgrounds, and creates what appears to be a common class within its walls; that is, due to the nature of emergency shelter, women often arrive at PW with little physical evidence of their social class. All of the women are supplied with the same donations, giving them the appearance of a common class, leaving them with non-physical markers, such as body language and communication style, to engage in class-related boundary work (Lamont 2002). In order to provide a better understanding of the salience of class in the lives of the residents, I will describe the financial hardship that is faced by many of the women before reaching shelter.

Financial Obstacles: Economic Abuse

While none of the other staff members agreed with Aliyah that class alone determined the success of the program for a particular woman, she pointed to an obstacle that becomes very difficult for some women to overcome--financial hardships. Finances complicated many of the women's lives, and had for some time. Many of them had been economically abused, forced to hand over their paychecks or use them to buy items for their abuser; in fact, a number of altercation resulted from this person demanding money, and the woman being unable or unwilling to part with it.

“When I was eighteen, me and my grandmother had got into a physical altercation with each other because I had got a check, I guess, from my mom's situation, [her mother was murdered by her father in a domestic violence situation]. And I couldn't get it 'til I was eighteen. Well, she [her grandmother] had it in her head [that she was going to get the check]...she actually told me she was going to kill me and bury me next to my mother. Like, my grandmother's in the church, and you see this innocent old lady, but inside those four walls, it got crazier and crazier the older I got.”

-Princess, Resident

Princess was not at the shelter as a result of the violence that existed between herself and her grandmother; once she received her check at eighteen years old, she moved away from that situation. But from a young age, Princess was already threatened and put in an unfortunate position by someone who was supposed to care for her because she did not automatically sacrifice her resources, and thus, her economic independence.

Abusers often feel the need to control finances as an extension of the individual's independence—for a woman to have a paycheck or a job is a symbol of her ability to live a life of her own, and have a means to support herself in that life. Therefore, for many abusers, it is a threat (Davies et al. 1998).

In Faye's case, her husband became very involved in all aspects of her job, including whether or not she was allowed to cash her paycheck. One afternoon, she told me how she used to work close to where they lived, because her husband had allowed her to have a job. She

worked at a resort, washing dishes, and then worked her way up to serving coffee, and was eventually put in charge of a coffee shop. This bout of independence ended when she and her husband moved to a trailer park, which was too far to continue working at the coffee shop. Instead, Faye got a job at a casino, about six miles away from their home. Her husband thought six miles was too far; Faye explained that his disapproval actually meant that he could not control her all the time at that job, so he would not let her take his truck to work. If she went, she would have to take a taxi. “That was \$30 a day! That took a lot out of my check. Then he wouldn’t let me cash it! I could go and cash his, but he wouldn’t let me cash mine,” she told me. She found ways to discreetly pay any personal bills, but her husband deliberately made it difficult for her.

Faye’s husband never told her she was not allowed to work in the casino, but his behavior continued to have a profound impact on whether or not Faye could realistically continue to work there. She did not have access to transportation, so she would have to take a taxi, severely limiting the amount of money she could earn. The money she eventually earned could not be cashed. Deliberate obstacles were set, seemingly so Faye would grow tired of trying to hurdle them, and simply stay home instead.

At times, an abuser’s desire to control finances is not only based on a need to ensure that a sense of independence is gone, but also as a means of fueling any kind of addiction the abuser may have. Lucy’s son turned to drugs and alcohol after receiving a serious medical diagnosis. It was during a drunken rage that he attacked her.

“...he said, ‘I need some more money,’ and I said, ‘I don't have any, I don't get paid ‘til, you know, two days.’ He says, ‘I know you have money,’ he was just talking, he didn't even know what he was talking about. And, and I didn't even know he had been drinking [at that point], and cause they [the police] did an alcohol level on him [later], they thought how the heck was he even walking...The next thing I know...he came over my bed in two seconds, and put his knee on my chest, and he had black gloves on. When I see the black gloves, I'm, that kind of made me wonder, ‘Why you've got these gloves on when I've got the air [conditioning] on?’ And he put, he, um, put his knee on my chest,

and knocked me backwards, and he put his hands around my neck. My head went down, like this, automatically, and he kept telling me, 'Look at me! Look at me! Look at me! You want to know what pain is? I'm gonna show you what pain is!' He wasn't saying, 'I'm going to kill you' and it wasn't his voice...it was, it was just, it was just like evil or something."

-Lucy, Resident

Trying to convince someone who is both drunk and mistrustful that she did not have money to give him is a difficult task, and upon failing to do so, Lucy had to fight her son for her life.

Financial Obstacles: Abusive Jobs

Not all women in abusive relationships experience economic abuse, in the sense that they are not allowed to work. Many of the women who find themselves turning to PW for help are at a socioeconomic disadvantage, and must work long hours at humbling and unrewarding jobs, where they are treated in a demeaning and condescending manner. These jobs are not unlike the abusive relationships they are currently experiencing. Common jobs that fell into this category were housekeeping, factory work, and telemarketing. I learned more firsthand one evening, as I spoke to some of the women about their past job experiences.

I went to the kitchen and chatted with Lucy, Peaches, and Sissy. They were talking about common jobs that they had had--they each had worked in housekeeping; Sissy had cleaned for Alloy State University's dormitories. She told us about fifteen people were hired, and after a couple of days, only two people remained. She was disgusted with the college students, and how they treated her. "Told me to get him a glass of water. Like I was his maid," Sissy said about one college student, with distaste. However, she kept working there because they raised her pay since there were only two people cleaning. All of the women had also worked in a factory making Tupperware; Sissy and Peaches both talked about how they had to be stacked a certain way, how the lids had to be put on while they were hot, and how it burned their fingers. They

explained when people came in to work for the first time, it was common to see them get up and leave after twenty minutes, and never come back. Sissy talked about seeing the worker next to her have a heart attack, and how the supervisor had just let him fall on the floor. Sissy had to stop her work, and go tell someone to call 911, and get the worker a rolling chair to wheel him to the door. Sissy and Peaches both worked the midnight shift in the factories, and talked about feeling so tired, standing on your feet, and how everything just blurs together after a while, with only a short break to perk you up. Peaches told us a story about how she was so exhausted one night, she fell asleep on the toilet while she was on break. Her co-workers only found her because they heard her snoring from the bathroom stall. All three women had also worked at telemarketing and call centers, which I had also done. We discussed the horrible things people would say, and how you would still have to call them back and get yelled at again. Sissy used to work at a place that was entirely based on commission. “Some people can do that. They can sell anything,” she explained. “I’m not one of them--that was not my thing.”

While Lucy, Sissy, and Peaches happened upon this commonality just through casual conversation, I found that many of the women in the shelter had or have jobs that shared certain characteristics, including low-wage, demeaning work that often requires physical stress. They could relate to the difficulties associated with the job, including dangerous work (“[they] both talked about how [the Tupperware] had to be stacked a certain way, how the lids had to be put on while they were hot, and how it burned their fingers”), cold and uncaring supervisors (“Sissy talked about seeing the guy next to her have a heart attack, and the supervisor just let him fall on the floor”), and sheer exhaustion (“[they] talked about feeling so tired, standing on your feet, and everything just blurs together after a while, with only a short break to perk up”).

Like the three women above, Kesha, another resident, was also a telemarketer, as well as a housekeeper. As discussed above, telemarketers are vulnerable to being harassed over the phone when they call customers, and housekeepers engage in physically taxing work. Kesha was a night cleaner, which meant she not only was responsible for physically demanding work, but she was responsible for working the midnight shift, a time that can be both exhausting and unsafe. In addition to these jobs, Kesha also was a cashier, which often required long hours of standing, as well as a degree of emotional labor (Hochschild 1983). As a cashier in a small restaurant, Kesha was expected to smile and make friendly conversation with the customers about their meals. An eight-hour shift of making change and pleasant small talk was emotionally exhausting, and was particularly demeaning when Kesha was fired over accusations of stealing food.

The economically disadvantaged women I spoke with were able to find employment in a variety of settings—restaurants, factories, call centers, and even housekeeping in university dormitories. However, each of these different environments were, in different ways, reminiscent of the abusive relationships the women experienced. The women described the demeaning nature of the work, and how people had treated them. Sissy’s story of the student telling her to “get him a glass of water” was particularly suggestive of an abusive relationship; if the context of this particular quote was not known in advance, quite frankly, one might have assumed it was spoken by her husband, not a college student in a dormitory. Stories of yelling customers, and critical supervisors supported the idea of these particular jobs as being a somewhat caustic environment. The physical demands of the jobs can leave marks, as well (“[they] both talked about how [the Tupperware] ...burned their fingers”); while these types of scars are certainly not the same as those resulting from physical abuse, it must be recognized that women who work these particular types of jobs will bear them. Middle-class women will not.

Financial Obstacles: Shelters as a Last Resort

When women experience economic abuse, or if they simply face the struggles that coincide with coming from a lower income household, it limits their ability to leave their abuser. Leaving requires resources, an asset that is not available to many of these women, so they are left with several options: they can stay with their abuser longer, and try to save a little more, or they can walk out with whatever they have, and risk the unknown. It should not be surprising that many women would prefer to delay leaving their abuser until they feel they are better equipped to handle the situation; however, due to emergency situations, many find it necessary to leave in a hurry. PW is often viewed as a last resort.

One evening, I answered a crisis call in which the woman in question clearly demonstrated how PW was viewed as the last possible option. The woman was being discharged from the hospital, due to a domestic violence incident, and while she said that she was not afraid of her husband and did not think he would try to find her, she did not feel she should return home. Wearing only a hospital gown, due to the nature of her abuse, it was important for her to find immediate shelter, and her options were limited. She needed a place to spend the night until she could find an apartment the next day; she did not want to impose on her friends and neighbors, she did not want to go to the homeless shelter, and she did not have the money for a hotel, especially around the holiday, she told me. This particular woman clearly examined all of her available options before calling PW; a shelter was not her ideal choice, and if there were any possible alternatives, she would have chosen them. PW was the last option available, however, so she became a shelter resident.

Lucy also looked for other options before calling the shelter, but found that her limited income could not afford housing, as well as all of her other necessities.

“She [a nun from a local church] had called my daughters, and told them that she thought there were some problems going on because of his [Lucy’s abuser’s] medication, but that I was, that I was asking her to try to find me places where I could go temporarily cause I was only getting a little over \$400, and you can't even get an apartment. And I tried looking in the paper for, like, could I get a stinking little room to live in, and I couldn't find nothing...and so I tried [the shelter].”

-Lucy, Resident

After he was diagnosed with a serious and potentially fatal medical condition, Lucy chose to stay with her son in his home, and help take care of him. After he attacked her and was arrested, the police informed Lucy that she would have to leave his home because her name was not on the lease. Lucy’s daughters, both of whom live about an hour away, did not want their mother to come stay with them, even on a temporary basis. When Lucy could not find an affordable apartment, the shelter became the only feasible option.

Shelter: Creating a Common Class

“I think that for some women, this is as good as, or parallel to, what they've experienced in terms of quality of the environment, for some women...we understand that that's a continuum of domestic violence works, you know, like anybody [can experience domestic violence]...but we don't get...really rich women, you know. And presumably they have other means, but I think occasionally we do get somebody who this is sort of a step down for.”

-Wanda, Staff

As Wanda describes, domestic violence can affect any social economic class, but the women who tend to contact the shelter tend to come from lower class and working class backgrounds, where there were not any other options available to them. However, occasionally, women from more advantaged circumstances also contact the shelter for help. Once inside, PW acts as the great equalizer for the women, greatly reducing the physical appearance of economic differences that may have existed between them outside of the shelter. Due to the emergency nature of the shelter, most women arrive with only the clothing they are wearing, or if they had time to plan, a bag of clothing and important items, such as medications and social security cards.

It is not uncommon for women who arrive at the shelter to receive several days worth of clothing from the donation room to wear, until they receive a voucher from the house manager for a local Goodwill store. All of the women receive the same donated toiletries, the same number of faded towels, and often have to share rooms with one another, depending on how high the census is. While some women may have had certain luxuries outside the shelter, these items were left behind, making the physical class distinctions between residents more difficult to determine. However, for some women, non-physical class markers, such as communication style and preferences, remain, setting clear boundaries between themselves and the “other” (Lamont 2002). Lindsay, Anne, and Maddie were three residents who once had economic advantages not typical of all women staying at the shelter. However, as their economic status became more difficult to physically ascertain, each woman had a unique reaction to the common class identity, sometimes engaging in boundary work.

The common class identity created by shelter living affects people differently. Some women recognize the change as sacrificial and necessary, and try to adapt. One example of such a resident was Lindsay. Lindsay came from a wealthy family, attended respected schools, and lived in a nice neighborhood.

“I grew up in a quarter of a million dollar home. I grew up somewhat spoiled? I mean, my parents lived within their means, but I got pretty spoiled. And then after I left [my parents’ house], and got my own place...I had a house that's, God, it's not my house, his house, but a home that I left that's brand new. I left a brand new house, a house that's been completely gutted and made up again, so I mean this [referring to the shelter], it was a big change, big change.”

After marrying her husband, Lindsay had three young sons, and decided to be a stay at home mom. When her husband became abusive, it was necessary to take her sons and seek shelter, and she found herself facing a new challenge. Despite the fact that Lindsay had been upper-middle class her entire life, she had no source of income--she had never finished college,

she was estranged from her family, and now she found herself without a degree, and very little job experience. However, Lindsay was willing to adapt.

“I still have it stuck in my head that I'm staying home with the kids, which was definitely the bomb, I had a lot of fun with the kids, but I would like to start school...I want to take that phlebotomy class, it's self-contained, so I can make some money. And I would really like to sign up for that same nursing program, but it's about a year and a half wait to get there. I was thinking if I could take that phlebotomy course, 2 or 3 months and it's 3 nights a week, that would pay me good money, so I can make good money while I go to school. And then I wouldn't overload myself with anything that's major. Study, study, study, study, study. And that's a two year program, so...I mean I'll be in my own place, paying the bills, getting everything done, so I don't think that would be throwing too much at myself right now. I just got to figure out a way to live. And get food stamps, I'll have just...enough, literally just enough, well, not enough for cigarettes, I'll figure out something for that. I'll literally have, you know what I mean, just enough, so that's the plan. Afterwards, after that, I'm not looking too much further ahead. I don't want to put too much on.”

While Lindsay came from an upbringing that gave her the option of not working, she understood when the circumstances changed, and was willing to adapt accordingly. While she acknowledges that there is a part of her that is reluctant to let go of being a stay at home mom (“I still have it stuck in my head that I'm staying home with the kids”), Lindsay took a realistic look at the future, and became genuinely interested in what it could hold for her (“I would like to start school...I want to take that phlebotomy class...and I would really like to sign up for that same nursing program”). She is very aware of how difficult her new life will be, particularly compared to her financial past (“I just got to figure out a way to live”), but she is also aware that there is help available to her in the form of food stamps, and other government aid. She is willing to adapt.

Not all social economically advantaged women who come to PW are able to transition smoothly into their new lives as common class residents. As a form of economic abuse, many of their partners have complete control over their bank accounts and finances. By leaving the relationship, women lose access to the economic class with which they formerly identified.

While they may be able to leave behind certain items, some women find it significantly harder to leave their identity as a certain “type” of person, largely associated with class. I found that in order to combat this change and adjust to their newfound social stigma, these women would often try to relate their identity through storytelling (Snow and Anderson 1987). These identities often centered around careers and degrees they had earned, in what felt like deliberately avoiding the word “class,” while maintaining a boundary between the “others” at the shelter and themselves (Lamont 2002). Advantaged women seldom brought up their economic privileges or identities in front of the other women—storytelling usually took place in the privacy of the office. I often felt that these particular women felt that they could relate to me personally, based on our similar demographics in class and education, and thus felt the need to tell me about who they *really* were, as opposed to the common class shelter resident they appeared to be.

One resident, in particular, seemed to struggle with the common class identity. Anne, who was a nurse, stayed at PW with a group of women who were not as educated as she was; her identity as a nurse seemed to become increasingly salient as she tried to reinforce to the staff that she was not one of the “others.” It was important to Anne that the staff recognize that she was different from the rest of the residents—she may be wearing the same donated clothing, and using the same donated toothpaste, but she had gone to school, worked hard, and earned a degree, and felt her accomplishment had drawn a line between herself and the other women. When Anne found out I was in graduate school, she was very interested to talk to me about the classes she had taken, which of them she had liked, which of them she had not liked, and so forth; it provided her with an opportunity to assert her identity as a person with a degree, and see her for who she “really” was.

Other times, economically advantaged women tell their stories under a different set of circumstances. While Anne was eager to assert her identity, and enjoyed engaging in conversations that would highlight her knowledge, others allow staff to see their identity, but with a certain degree of embarrassment and shame. They do not understand, with their knowledge and their upbringing, how they could have allowed such a thing to happen to them. Maddie was one such resident.

One evening, Maddie, a new resident, came in the office to talk to me. She told me that she related to me; I think she felt this way due to our similar backgrounds. We both come from the same social economic status, both have advanced degrees, and we both have had professional jobs (Maddie was a successful businesswoman before coming to the shelter). She began to cry, saying that she has made so many bad choices. She knew she was smart, but she made so many bad choices, how could she have done that?

Maddie's identity as an educated and successful businesswoman was not asserted to distinguish her from the rest of the residents, like Anne, but to question how she had reached the point in her life where she would have to stay at a shelter. She knew she was intelligent and capable; what she had difficulty understanding was how she could have "made so many bad choices." Because Maddie viewed her advantaged identity as a reason why she should have known better than to get involved with an abusive man, it became a source of embarrassment and shame, a social stigma that she felt separated her from other residents in the shelter.

Common Class Bonding

While residents at PW bonded over many issues, including their abuse and concept of sisterhood, the common class that was created within the shelter offered many experiences with which the women could now identify. For example, despite the fact that some of the women had

come from middle and upper-middle class backgrounds, almost all of the women who entered the shelter now found it necessary to apply for government assistance, in order to afford to start over on their own. Because asking the government for assistance was such a common experience in the shelter, it both became a source of bonding and neutralized any previously existing class difference. If a woman's request for assistance was denied, all of the other residents could empathize with her situation—she would now have to file an appeal, and perhaps look for a job, or possibly a second job, just in case she was denied again. Because residents viewed government programs as their hope for a better future, there was a sense of anxiety that revolved around the idea of being rejected.

Elaine was a 48 year-old woman who suffered from a physical disability, and was physically, verbally, and mentally abused by her husband. Convinced that she would leave him for another man, her abuser kept her isolated in their apartment. He would put tape on the outside of the door as he was leaving, so he would know if Elaine left, presumably to meet other men, while he was gone. She was not allowed to have a phone, and she was not allowed to have a job.

“He alienated me from everybody, so...and I have no income, I've applied for disability, you know, so, um...I've got so much going on in my mind, like what I'm gonna do if they deny my disability? And, you know, I'm gonna have to find a job, and I don't have a vehicle and, you know? So basically just a lot of thinking goes on throughout my day, you know?”

-Elaine, Resident

Elaine had a documented physical disability, but she knew there was a possibility that she could still be denied assistance. If that was the case, her options were limited. She would have to look for a job, but since her abuser isolated her, she had been out of the workforce for quite some time. Also, Elaine did not have a vehicle to get to work, further complicating her job situation. She could take public transportation, but the bus does not run everywhere in Alloy; therefore, she

would have to look for a job, as well as housing, that were along the same route. Certainly, one could understand Elaine's anxiety.

Celia lived a middle class lifestyle before coming to the shelter. She had never needed to use any kind of government assistance in her life, but once she left her abusive husband, and was preparing to start over on her own, it became necessary. She described the stereotypes that she used to have about people who used government programs.

“I had no reason to use it [assistance programs], didn't know there was anything out there, so...it's really, I don't mind paying taxes anymore, I really don't. Honestly, I really don't mind, I used to think, well...they just don't want to work, they just want everything handed to them. I'm paying taxes and, and they don't want to do anything, and that, that's really not the case, [not] at all scenarios. There, there's a lot of different situations I've learned about that I can't stereotype like I did, so I've learned.”

Celia's experience as a common class shelter member allowed her to experience the need for government programs in a way that her other life never did. In doing so, it opened her eyes to certain stereotypes she harbored, and allowed her to let go of them.

Women at the shelter are often looking for some source of income so they can start over on their own. Many of the residents use government assistance programs, and many require a job to provide an income, in addition to what they receive. Some women have the time to complete a training program or to take classes for a job that will pay more and will be associated with a higher level of prestige; however, not all women at PW have that option. As a result, many women at PW continue to work in the types of jobs previously discussed in this chapter, those that resemble the abusive relationships that they have just left. Certainly, these jobs are not ideal in the identity construction process—it is difficult to repair a positive sense of self-worth when undergoing negative experiences that so closely resemble victimization. However, these women will continue to take these jobs because they are often the only paycheck available to them, and will hopefully provide them with the opportunity to be independent.

Another point of common interest among the women is their need to find coping strategies to help them manage their financial limitations. Some of the women at the shelter have more experience than others with living on a limited budget, and have spent most of their lives using these coping strategies. Sharing coping strategies can be an education as well as an opportunity to bond with fellow residents.

I witnessed an example of sharing coping strategies one afternoon, when two women, Sissy and Ty, went into the kitchen to scour the newspaper for apartments and jobs, a regular occurrence at PW. Ty got the classified section first, and talked about a three bedroom house on the West Side of Alloy for \$100-some a month. "I wonder what's wrong with it," she muttered. Sissy shrugged. "Sometimes, nothing." Ty also found another 3 bedroom with all the utilities included for \$500. "That's a lot," she said, "but when you think about how much you spend on electric, it's probably cheaper." She told us about a time when she lived in a house where the rent was \$345, and when she got the heating bill, it was higher than the rent. "I called the company and told them. They said I could pay a fixed amount of \$185. I said I can't pay that much a month; I was on welfare at the time. I wound up putting it in my son's name. I know you're not supposed to do that, but I did."

Sissy and Ty were both hoping to rent affordable 3-bedroom houses in Alloy; because they both had a limited budget, their search was a bonding experience. They also shared their knowledge concerning their search, so it would benefit them both ("That's a lot, but when you think about how much you'd spend on electric, it's probably cheaper"). For example, Ty described a situation from her past, where the house she was renting did not include heat, and the difficulties that it created for her. Ty even went further to confide that, in financial desperation,

she violated the law to get by. By engaging in this behavior and storytelling in this fashion, Ty and Sissy bonded over the need to cope, and find a new home within their budget.

Conclusion

Class remains a complex issue at PW, for both the staff and the residents. PW has employed women from a broad range of social economic backgrounds to a variety of positions within the organizational hierarchy. These nontraditional hiring practices result in a very diverse staff who create a community within the shelter where class is reconstructed and renegotiated in various ways, depending on the context. At times, the staff minimizes the importance of class, such as when they discuss the factors that determine success within the shelter. In these instances, the staff instead emphasizes the importance of personality, only mentioning class as a nuancing presence. At other times, the staff, despite their varied background, still operates under policies and rules that have middle-class assumptions (Acker 2006), and class becomes very salient, particularly for parents (see Chapter 7; Good and Bad Parents).

Women who become residents of PW are likely to have felt class struggles long before they experience the community of the shelter. Some of the women have experienced economic abuse, and were not allowed to work independently, or were forced to give their paycheck to their abuser, severely limiting their financial independence. Others, though able to work, toiled under low-wage jobs that were both demeaning and physically exhausting, resulting in stories that were faintly reminiscent of the abusive relationships they were currently experiencing. Despite these obstacles, when faced with the decision to leave, lower-class women often turn to shelter as a last resort. It is only when it becomes apparent that there are no other feasible options that they contact PW.

Once in the safety of the shelter, all of the residents are provided with the uniform donations of the material items they were unable to bring with them in their haste. In this way, the shelter unintentionally creates a common class, where the physical markers of the residents' previous social economic status are removed. For those residents experiencing downward social mobility, this change can be a difficult one, and women sometimes assert their class identity in different ways to engage in boundary work.

The shelter also serves as a community where the residents engage in common class bonding. Becoming members of the same group also means that the residents often face the same obstacles; as a result, they share many of the same fears and anxieties, as well as many of the same joys and elations. Starting a new life in this situation often requires a degree of financial stability that women in shelters do not necessarily have; therefore, bonding often focuses on financial hardship (ex. receiving government assistance, coping strategies).

This is not to say that there are not occasional class conflicts within PW—there are. There have been divisions based on many characteristics, and class has been one of them. However, the uniform environment provided by the shelter, in addition to the lack of material items from the residents' former lives, tends to support a common class within the shelter.

In this chapter, I addressed how women engaged in the process of “othering” and boundary work, based on class identities. However, conflict within the shelter did not only result from class conflict. In the next chapter, I explore race and ethnicity within the shelter environment, and how both staff and residents negotiates the concept of race. At times, the diverse group of women negotiate their differences successfully, and the multicultural atmosphere is one of tolerance and acceptance. At other times, there is tension and conflict between and

among residents and staff. It is within this environment that women reconstruct and manage their identities

CHAPTER 5:

NEGOTIATING RACE AND ETHNICITY IN THE SHELTER COMMUNITY

Racial Segregation Outside the Shelter

Despite the end of the Jim Crow laws that established “separate but equal” facilities for different races, segregation remains a reality in the US. According to the 2000 Census, two-thirds of the residents in metropolitan regions would have to move in order to create a proportionately integrated area; it should be noted that these changes would have to be made in both the north and the south (Feagin 2004). This residential segregation extends into social segregation, where people overwhelmingly associate only with others who share their race (Bonilla-Silva, Goar, & Embrick 2006). According to the 1998 Detroit Area Study (DAS), 87% of the White respondents stated none of their closest friends were Black; similarly, in the 1997 Survey of Social Attitudes of College Students, 68% of the White respondents said that none of the five people with whom they interacted the most on a daily basis was Black (2006).

The city of Alloy shares this pattern of racial segregation. According to the Index of Dissimilarity, which was based on the 2000 Census, the White-Black dissimilarity index is 64.2, and the White-Hispanic dissimilarity index is 50.4. In other words, 64.2% of White residents in Alloy would have to move, in order for Whites and African-Americans to be equally represented in all neighborhoods; 50.4% of White residents would have to change residences, in order for Whites and Hispanics to be equally integrates in all areas. If the literature is any indication, the geographic segregation that exists in Alloy translates to social situations, as well.

The diverse women of PW live in this racially segregated world, where interaction among people of different races and ethnicities is very limited. When these women enter PW, as both staff members and residents, they are entering a new environment that is significantly more integrated than the “outside” world. This forced integration therefore creates an artificially constructed community, where both staff and residents must negotiate race in a way that is not generally done in their everyday lives. While there have been times when it appeared that these racial negotiations were effortless, and the multicultural atmosphere at the shelter was one of tolerance and acceptance, it should come as no surprise that there have also been times the various women of PW struggled to negotiate the concept of race, resulting in great tension.

Inequality in PW

Although efforts continue to battle inequality regimes, the domestic violence literature seems to suggest that shelters continue to be White organizations overwhelmingly run by White women (Scott 2000; 1998). In this way, PW is a unique shelter. PW has a racially diverse staff, but unlike some shelters, where diversity is limited to the monitors and lower level positions, the diversity at PW has reached all levels of the organization, including the program director. The wide variety of staff members present is not entirely random—the shelter is very aware that

domestic violence can happen to anyone, and that the women they help can come from any race or ethnicity. Therefore, they try to ensure that there is enough variety among the staff, not just in terms of race, but also in characteristics such as age and education, as well, so the women at the shelter can always find a staff member they feel they can identify with, or that they can feel comfortable talking to. This approach has been applied for years, and the staff and the residents have both expressed approval and appreciation for the recognition that diversity coupled with a sincere desire to help others can make a difference in women's lives. One White staff member, Abigail, described why she thought it was important for the PW staff to engage in such diverse hiring practices.

“I think we need the blend [of different staff people] ‘cause abused people are different ages, different races and religions. I think we need that, ‘cause we start getting into just one type of person, they're not going to understand [everyone's perspective]...you can't understand all of it. So, I mean, I think you need all that diversity because that's what we have, diverse people that come in, and you can learn from [each] other. I didn't know a whole lot of things about...what would I say? I won't say ‘hood,’ but...you know? What would you call that...inner city, maybe? I didn't know a whole lot, just what I read in books, on the news. And some of the co-workers grew up in the inner city. And they understand these people, more than I ever can, no matter how many books I read. And so we need to have them here. They respond to that, what they [women from the inner city] need. They get people, probably a little less of them, but abuse crosses all barriers, you'll get somebody in that's like you [referring to me, personally], middle class, has an education, and then no way can an inner city [staff member] respond to them. They think they're spoiled and have it too nice, you know, and the streetwise people are quite different than the ones that are a little more protected growing up. They [PW staff, in general] need, I think, everybody working together, and the common bond would be a passion for domestic violence shelters or to help people with abuse and that would be the common link between no matter what background you're from.”

-Abigail, Staff

Residents agreed with Abigail's reasoning. When asked about positive experiences or characteristics of PW, Princess, an African-American woman, specifically noted the diversity of the staff.

“And being that there is different ethnic groups of staff here and things like that, I like that. There's not one particular race.”

-Princess, Resident

Thus, PW is a unique shelter, in that it made the conscious decision to combat inequality regimes by hiring a diverse staff to better serve the women who require its help. While both staff and residents recognize this choice as a positive strategy for everyone involved, the reality is that diversity, in both the staff and residents, exists artificially in PW, and negotiating race can sometimes be difficult.

Tolerance

While suddenly renegotiating racial interactions in a new community was not necessarily easy or instinctive, racial tension was not necessarily an incessant presence within PW. With each group comes different women, with different personalities, and a different set of attitudes. There have been instances where the residents of PW have been very diverse, and got along quite well.

“It's like a family setting, it doesn't make no difference what color you is, what race, it doesn't matter like that here. Everybody here gets treated the same, there's no favoritism...there's no prejudiceness. It's just one big family.”

-Alexa, African-American Resident

Alexa's experience at PW was very positive; all of the residents, despite their differences, were close (“like a family setting”), and Alexa felt the staff treated everyone equally. Simply by the timing of her stay, Alexa encountered a group of women who focused on their gendered experience of abuse, and where racial differences, though they existed, did not “matter.” As a result, she had a very positive experience at the shelter.

Similarly, Stacey, a White resident, also arrived at the shelter at a time when the atmosphere was free of racial tension. All of the women seemed to connect, and there did not appear to be any concerns over communal living issues. As one would expect, Stacey also reported having a very positive experience at the shelter.

“So I haven't had any negative people at all, they've all been great to me. Race? Um, there's good and bad in all races, and you can be mean or not, but I haven't experienced it here.”

-Stacey, Resident

Stacey acknowledges that “there’s good and bad in all races,” but specifies that everyone at PW has “been great” to her, and she had not experienced any racial tension (“I haven’t experienced it here”). At times, PW simply appears to be free of the racial intolerance that otherwise exists in the world.

Racial tolerance at the shelter among the residents does not exist because differences are ignored—I found that residents allowed discussions of race to develop organically. I witnessed one example of such a discussion when I brought the movie *Hairspray* (2007) to the shelter, and everyone, including some younger children sat down to watch it. The movie takes place in the early 1960s, and addresses the topic of segregation. The kids did not understand why the Black kids and White kids in the movie were not allowed to dance together. Gertrude, an older African-American woman, answered, “That’s how it was back then.” This comment led to an interesting conversation between the kids and adults about segregation and serious aspects of American history, which they had not yet learned.

While the conversation was introduced as an explanation to the children in the room so they could better understand the historical context of the movie, it developed into a dialogue of both White and African-American women describing the injustice of inequality. At other times, movies and TV shows simply highlighted how the racial tolerance within the shelter was unique from the prejudice and discrimination of the “outside” world.

One night, a group of residents and I decided to watch *Freedom Writers* (2007), during which, Sidney, an African-American woman, braided Bianca, a White woman’s, hair. It occurred to me as we watched that this movie in particular was an interesting pick, because racial tension is

a major theme, and there we were—a rather diverse group of Whites, Blacks, and Iranians, getting along and watching it together. On this particular night, with this particular group of women, race was reconstructed, and it was not viewed as a concern. The gendered experience of abuse bonded this group, and gender continued to bond in other ways, such as hair braiding. This act had continuing significance, because hair braiding is often associated with race, particularly when it is done by an African-American woman. But in this instance the interaction, while taking place between an African-American woman and a White woman, seemed to focus less on race, and more on the commonality of gender.

Racial tolerance at the shelter extends beyond the interactions between the residents; the staff members have expressed how much they enjoy working with different kinds of women, as well. The shelter has provided them with the opportunity to meet a variety of women from different backgrounds that they would not, perhaps, otherwise meet.

“I enjoy it [working with different types of women], it gives me a chance to understand what different women are coming from, different backgrounds and different, um, ethnic traditions and stuff like that. Like, we had a couple women that were, you know, Arabian, well, Arabic...Middle Eastern women and, you know, their different cultures and how they do things. And, of course, the African-American women who...have different cultures than the Caucasian, I mean everybody has a different, and some are the same and some are different, and just being able to talk to them...you know? Different things from this point of view, I enjoy it, I enjoy talking to people.”

-Jayda, African-American Staff

Staff members, like Jayda, may occasionally experience racial tension at PW with residents, but more often than not, they enjoy talking to the many different women who come to the shelter, and learning about unfamiliar ethnic traditions and cultures. Some staff members developed this inquisitive nature at an early age.

“I grew up in a neighborhood where there were many different cultures, European, African, Puerto Ricans, everybody. I grew up with all walks of life, and a curiosity to know other cultures, [I] always had that curiosity. I just wanted to go in their house, [and] see...how they think and what [it] was like, it was just inborn in me. It was so

natural for me, I can remember as early as six years-old, wanting to know how other people lived, are we all the same or not? So my curiosity led me to never have biases, never judge somebody because they're different from me and I just, I'm more inquisitive.”
-Maria, White Staff

Maria personally felt that this curiosity is what prevents her from judging others, including the residents at the shelter (“my curiosity led me to never have biases”). Perhaps it is a similar sense of curiosity that drives the personal relationships that exist between the other staff members and residents. Certainly, the relationships that exist at the shelter are not always permeated with racial tension. Many positive relationships have developed at PW, among the staff, between the staff and the residents, and among residents, as well. However, it is important that the moments of racial tension are not disregarded, as they leave a lasting impression on those people involved.

Racial Tension: Among Staff Members

As stated previously, the diverse PW staff considers themselves to be family, and this family identity is reflected in their interactions. However, all families experience times of distress and tension, and PW is no exception. While the overwhelming majority of racial tension that exists within the shelter presents itself through other interactions, PW staff has experienced it, as well—sometimes, as a direct result of these other interactions. For example, when a certain African-American resident began making racial remarks to different White staff members (myself included), according to PW’s policies, her actions should have resulted in immediate discharge. However, despite numerous incident reports being filed by several staff members, the resident was never asked to leave.

The racial tension that existed between this particular resident and the White members of the staff grew, and as the resident’s behavior continued to remain unsanctioned by the day staff, another kind of tension began to exist among the staff.

“Nothing ever gets done. I’ve been here for a year and I know that [a resident making a racial remark towards a staff member] happened a couple times, like a lot of stuff doesn’t get done and it should [referring to the fact that there were no serious repercussions for the racial remarks]. And I feel like they [certain members of day staff] just look. They hear it, they know it, and they look over it, thinking that it’s gonna be okay, and it’s gonna pass, but they don’t [do anything]...And it shouldn’t be like that, you shouldn’t let that shit go.”

-Jayda, African-American Staff

It was stated among some of the staff that because this resident got along well with certain African-American members of day staff (bringing them baked goods, chatting with them in the office, etc.), she would never be discharged as she should be for so blatantly breaking the rules. This was not the only time the idea of racial favoritism was suggested amongst the staff.

I spoke to one staff member, who felt that race influences day staff activity, and racial favoritism exists at both the residential and staff level. The staff member referred to an African-American resident, who has consistently broken the shelter rules and policies, and yet, has not been discharged. “She has had a difficult background, and that’s why we’re putting up with so much of her bad behavior, but at the same time, if it were a White woman behaving this way, she’d be gone by now,” the staff member commented. Favoritism has also been said to exist at the staff level, as well. It was suggested by this same staff member that several people felt that one of the African-American staff members, in particular, was racist against White people, even those she has worked with for years. Reverse discrimination and preferential treatment shown to staff members of her own race were voiced concerns.

This excerpt suggests a very serious allegation—that not only are certain members of day staff believed to display racial favoritism towards residents, but towards their co-workers, as well. Despite the serious nature of these accusations, no staff member has ever filed a formal complaint regarding racial favoritism, to my knowledge. If the staff feels these situations are occurring,

they are discussed among themselves, as they happen. The situation is then over, and they move forward. Formal complaints are not made.

Racial Tension: Between Staff and Residents

Staff members are not the only individuals to mention the presence of racial favoritism within the shelter. Residents have acknowledged both racial favoritism and reverse discrimination between staff members and residents, as well. While the domestic violence literature has found otherwise (Blitz and Illidge 2006; Donnelly et al. 2005; Few 2005; Grauwiler 2008; Haj-Yahia and Cohen 2009; Moe 2007; Zajicek 2002), every resident of PW who brought up the issue of racial favoritism felt, or said they heard that others felt, that African-American residents had a distinct advantage in the shelter over White residents.

“Some people say they think that the [race] card [is] played...like if you're Black, you get better treatment.”

-Angelica, White Resident

While it is difficult to discern whether Angelica actually heard other residents discuss the “race card,” or if perhaps she personally felt that way, and simply felt uncomfortable discussing it, the fact remains certain White residents feel that staff members favor certain women based on their race and ethnicity. Another resident, who also felt the presence of reverse discrimination, was very reluctant to discuss it:

“...get myself in trouble, um, I think there's a little bit of reverse, um, Black people cry right away discrimination, ah, ‘They're treating other people better than me,’ when, in fact, I'm almost seeing quite the opposite, that they're getting, they're getting the attention...somewhat faster, and stuff. And they, I really feel that they get by with more, I really do.”

-Celia, White Resident

Without specifically referring to “the race card” as Angelica had, Celia also conveyed that she felt African-American residents “cry...discrimination,” when from what she observed,

they actually received more attention and faster services from the staff, at the expense of the White residents.

Anita, a Hispanic woman, was the sole non-White resident to voice a complaint concerning differential treatment between staff and residents. One evening, after dinner, she mentioned to me that race was an issue in the shelter, and that it was sad that “certain women” were treated better or worse by staff because of their race. Concerned, I suggested that she talk to day staff about this issue, because it was a serious complaint that needed to be addressed. She agreed, and said she was planning on it. Like the other women, Anita also felt that reverse discrimination existed at PW.

Sometimes, the “better or worse” treatment that Anita mentioned had less to do with the services provided by the staff, as much as whether the residents felt like they were legitimately listened to by the staff when an incident between two residents of different races occurred. One memorable example happened when two young children were playing together, and the little White boy allegedly called the little African-American girl a “nigger.” The little girl’s mother was certain that the event had happened, but did not feel the boy understood what he was saying.

“One of the kids calling my daughter a nigger. But it's cause he didn't know, you know, what it means. His mother had to tell him, you know, ‘You don't say that,’ and what the meaning behind it was, you know? Like, little Black kids say ‘nigger’ all the time, they don't know what it is.”

-Alyssa, African-American Resident

The little boy’s mother, however, was not convinced that the event had occurred. There were questions as to who had actually witnessed the name-calling, and there did not seem to be any clear answers. Despite the different stories that seemed to emerge, the day staff felt that Lindsay, the boy’s mother, should have a conversation with him about the word, and why it was

not appropriate. Lindsay felt that the staff had automatically sided against her, simply because she was White.

“But I think sometimes...sometimes actually it [diversity] almost becomes an issue. I do, and I've never felt like...[that] and I do. Like I think sometimes some people don't listen. I think sometimes every now and then...I think people get caught up, and I think sometimes it [reverse racism] does happen, I do, I really, truly do. And finally somebody will get the [other side of the] story in here and like I said, the other day [when Lindsay's child was accused of calling Alyssa's child a nigger] it sounds like, it was just like the side [of the story] was out of control. I said, 'Now, if they would have said, cause he [using finger quotes to emphasize her disbelief] 'said' the 'n' word, and I know, he said they were an asshole, any other word, I would have said, 'Yep, he said it.' You could have said that he dropped every bomb in the book and I'd have been like, 'Eh, yep, he probably did,' but ...I know for a fact he didn't, he's scared to use that word, because over the summer, he was using it, I told him. I explained it to him, I was very brutally honest with him, he's terrified to use that word.”

-Lindsay, Resident

Lindsay's disbelief at the possibility that her son used a derogatory term was not shared by the staff, and despite the reasoning she offered, it was assumed that he had relapsed into using the same language that Lindsay describes that he had used the previous summer. Therefore, she was asked to handle it accordingly. Lindsay felt that staff chose not to listen to her (“some people don't listen”) because she was a White woman, fighting a seemingly uphill battle—defending her son against accusations of using racist language, which by itself, had caused a great deal of drama within the shelter. Lindsay felt that her side of the story never had a chance to be told, because of her race.

However, not all examples of racial tension that exist between the staff and residents stem from feelings of racial favoritism or perceptions of reverse discrimination. As stated previously, several of PW's residents became very vocal in their dislike for White staff members through various interactions. Because these residents were not discharged for their racial statements, their continued presence in the shelter led to a heightened sense of tension between

certain members of the staff and these particular residents. I had the experience of being among these staff members.

I was personally unaware that there was any kind of animosity in the shelter, until I was working one shift, and I heard Kesha, an African-American woman, deliberately speaking loudly to Princess, another African-American woman, with the intention for me to hear her. She was upset, because I had been working on a craft project with another resident's children, and not hers. She then said something about "White monitors" that was not exactly clear, but was clear in her tone. At the time, I wanted to point out that I was not playing with Anne's children either; Ashley's children happened to be the only ones who were around at the time. Instead, I decided to simply give her some space. I did, however, warn Madison of the general tone of the house when she arrived for the next shift, and told her about the "White monitors" comment. Madison played with the children a lot too, and if she happened to sit down with a game without Kesha's children, I was concerned that it could be interpreted that the monitors were ignoring her children.

Playing with the residents' children is not considered a part of a monitor's duties; however, when the shelter is quiet, many monitors choose to interact with the kids, as a way of making their shelter stay more comfortable. Therefore, it is unusual for a resident to raise a complaint that a monitor is not playing with her children, particularly when they were preoccupied elsewhere, and I was surprised that Kesha was upset by my lack of interaction with her kids. I was also rather taken back to hear Kesha use race to describe the interaction, because in my mind, the decision to engage with Ashley's biracial children had little to do with race. Kesha felt otherwise.

Feagin (1991) states that acts that "might seem minor to white observers" can carry significantly more weight to minority group members, because the behavior is not viewed as an

individual act (115). It is a continuation of behaviors, not only as one more in a series of acts, personally directed at them as an individual, but also in a long history of discriminatory behaviors as a member of an entire race. Therefore, Feagin might note that when Kesha, an African-American woman, saw that her children were not included in a craft project headed by a White woman, it was simply one more instance of discrimination in a long line of experiences that she had had in her life.

Kesha was not the only resident to find a staff response unsatisfactory, and attribute the experience to race. Nevaeh, an African-American woman, was another resident who also became involved with racial tension within PW. When staff members close the office door at PW, it is done for confidentiality purposes, and it signifies to everyone in the shelter that the office is currently off-limits. There is a sign posted on the door, informing residents to please return to the office later. Nevaeh had a habit of ignoring this sign, and entering the office when she needed to speak to staff. Eventually, this led to a situation with Jacinda, a staff member.

One afternoon, Jacinda and I were both working at the shelter at the same time. Jacinda was in the office, speaking with a White resident, while I was in the dining room, chatting with some of the other residents. One resident's White son came upstairs from the playroom, and went into the office to see his mother, closing the door after him. He told his mom, "That tall Black lady was mean to me." At this point, Nevaeh walked into the office to talk to Jacinda. Jacinda told her that the door was closed for a reason, she was speaking with someone else, Nevaeh needed to knock. Nevaeh disregarded this comment, and continued to defend herself against the boy. Jacinda told her she needed to leave, and she needed to knock before she comes into the office. The frustration built, with Nevaeh wanting to talk, and Jacinda telling her that she could not just walk into the office. Finally, the pressure hit the point where Nevaeh started swearing,

and left the office. She came into the kitchen, visibly upset, muttering, “Bitch. I gotta get the fuck out of here.” I asked her what was wrong, assuming there was an issue with another resident. She shook her head, and said, “You don’t wanna know.” Jacinda came in, very annoyed, but calm. She said, “You can’t just walk in the office when the door is closed.” She turned to me and told me there was a crisis call. Even from the office, where I was taking the call, I could hear the confrontation taking place in the kitchen. Eventually, Jacinda came in the office, angry but composed, and shut the door behind her, to call on-call from another line. Nevaeh followed her, and started pounding on the door. I quietly told Nevaeh I was on a crisis call, but her concern was that she get a chance to speak to on-call, and tell her side of the story. Her main concern was to have a chance to defend herself. She continued to pound on the door, and at one point, she shouted Jacinda’s name. After she explained the situation to on-call, Jacinda gave her the phone. Nevaeh told on-call that Jacinda was yelling at her, and she didn’t need to disrespect her like that. In the meantime, at on-call’s instruction, Jacinda wrote up Nevaeh because she swore at Jacinda in front of the children. In the other room, she also made a comment about “these White girls.” I informed Madison of the incident when she came on shift. The “White girl” comment was addressed, and Madison sighed, and said, “It always turns to that.” Jacinda agreed--sometimes race isn’t an issue, she said. But a lot of times it is brought up; even if it is not the main issue, it’s sort of always lurking in the back.

The initial conflict between Jacinda and Nevaeh appeared to be based on issues other than race—Jacinda wanted Nevaeh to respect the boundaries of the office, and not walk in when the door was closed; Nevaeh wanted to be given an immediate opportunity to defend herself against the accusations that a little boy was bringing against her. However, as the conflict escalated, Neveah grew frustrated, and like Kesha, felt that this interaction was one more in a

series of interactions, where she was not being given the same opportunities other residents were given, because of her race. She did not feel she was given the opportunity to defend herself against the White boy, and she felt disrespected by the White staff member. Race had been salient throughout the entire interaction. When one considers the intensity of the interaction at hand, one can truly appreciate how difficult negotiating race can within the context of the shelter community.

Not all of the racial tension that exists between the staff and residents in the shelter results from what residents say; on the contrary, some of the tension comes from the staff's vocabulary, or on one occasion, the staff from McKinley Inc., the shelter's parent company. It was this occasion involving the McKinley staff member that provided the most obvious example of inappropriate racial vernacular. Both the residents and staff of PW were equally horrified.

At the time when this incident occurred, there had been a host of maintenance issues with the shelter. The ceilings were stained and leaking, and all of the appliances were temperamental, not working for what appeared to be no apparent reason. One of the maintenance men arrived to fix some of problem areas, and brought his brother-in-law along. The fact that he brought an unapproved visitor was already an issue, because it broke the shelter's confidentiality policy. However, this was not the most memorable problem he created that day. The maintenance worker was outside with several PW staff and residents, and a stray cat wandered by. He asked if any of the women were Asian; Cassie, one of the residents, said yes. Cassie is bi-racial, half Korean and half African-American. At this point, he continued, saying, "Uh-oh. That cat's in trouble. You know all the weird things they eat." Several of the staff members who witnessed the interaction stated that even his brother-in-law looked embarrassed by his behavior. Supervisors were called; however, McKinley Inc. was very low on maintenance staff when this

event took place, and if PW wanted to have any of its other maintenance concerns addressed, he would have to come back to the shelter, potentially creating a situation where Cassie may have to interact with him, despite his ethnically charged comments.

While the objectionable comment was not made by a member of PW staff, it was made by a member of McKinley Inc.'s staff, which still represents the organization, if indirectly. Therefore, this particular employee's comment could be viewed as representing both McKinley Inc. and PW, associating the shelter with a stereotypical view of Asians. Moreover, due to a lack of maintenance staff, the shelter was unable to fire, suspend, or even isolate the offending worker from the shelter. While it was assumed that there would be consequences for the racist remark, quite frankly, McKinley Inc. required the employee's services too much to take such measures. As a result, after an apology made, he was allowed to return to the shelter, as necessary, even if it meant that he may interact with the resident that he initially offended. The woman was not only insulted by a McKinley Inc. staff member, but PW staff was unable to remedy the situation, and the woman knew that, due to the circumstances, she may have to interact with the same employee again. As a result, she took steps to avoid any interactions with this maintenance worker; she asked staff to let her know if he was coming to the shelter, and she either stayed in her room, or made plans to be elsewhere. While the shelter and the PW staff were not directly responsible for the ethnically charged comment, the encounter still left the shelter tarnished.

Other examples of racial tension between staff and residents have emerged as the result of the different interpretations of the meaning of racially charged words. Conflicts of this nature seem to happen to one monitor, in particular, who uses what she views as neutral words and phrases, which are then used in the presence of residents of different races and ethnicities, who

feel that these words and phrases are racially charged. The consequences of these interactions range from mild dislike and tension to more serious threats.

An example of an interaction of this nature was described to me by a resident one day. I was in the kitchen, talking to one of the new residents, Izza, an African-American woman, who was pleasant, but did not have a good night. When I asked what happened, anticipating trouble with another resident, she told me that the problem was with the White staff member who was working. Izza took great offense because she heard Abigail say “you people,” and felt that it was a racially insensitive comment. Abigail often refers to residents and staff of all races as “you people;” she uses it as a generically collective term, without regard to race or ethnicity. However, its continued use sounds very offensive because unless it is clear that Abigail, a white woman, is addressing an entire group of women of all races, it appears that she is referring to a minority group as “you people.” This particular issue, in addition to a few other altercations dealing with the rules, upset Izza greatly, who said she would have left PW if she had another place to go.

At times, words that seem significantly less charged still elicit an emotional response, particularly when the residents view them as condescending. One night, Abigail was conducting a house meeting when one such word generated a negative response in an African-American resident, which escalated to the point where the woman threatened to call the police.

When describing it to me the next morning, Abigail said she did not remember saying it, but she called Janet “honey.” Janet got visibly upset, stating that was not her name, call her Janet. Abigail calls everyone “honey;” it is used as a term of endearment. Apparently, Janet did not care for it; perhaps she thought it was condescending, particularly considering the racial differences of the actors involved. Out of habit, Abigail slipped and called her ‘honey’ a couple more time, and Janet said she wanted to leave, and she wanted to call 911. When Abigail asked

why she wanted to call 911, Janet responded, “You can’t keep me here against my will.” Abigail told her she could leave whenever she wanted to. Another resident tried to calm her down, and she did not leave. Abigail felt bad about the incident—she really did not mean to keep saying “honey” after she was corrected, she told me.

One adult calling another adult “honey” is generally not a major offense in our society—certainly not one that would offend as easily as referring to a group as “you people.” And yet, Abigail’s unintentionally condescending remark had a profound impact on Janet. While it may have simply been due to the fact that she had already made her dissatisfaction with the term known, and its use was a continued, unwanted presence, Janet’s dramatic reaction indicates the possibility that racial tension was also involved in this interaction. Abigail was a White woman continually calling her, an African-American woman, “honey.” While she may have felt the term alone was condescending, the racial difference added a new level of complexity to the interaction. As Feagin (1991) explained, it may have been viewed as one more act in a series of behaviors that Janet had to experience, as the result of being an African-American woman in a White privileged society.

Racial Tension: Among Residents

The primary source of racial tension in PW results from conflict that occurs between the residents. Domestic violence affects the lives of many different women, of various races and ethnicities, and the residents of PW live in a shelter community that does not reflect the same racial negotiations of the “outside” world. At times the differences are not a concern, and the residents connect on a level that seems beyond racial boundaries. At other times, however, the prejudicial attitudes that exist with the women outside of the shelter follow them in, creating tension.

Some of these prejudicial attitudes appear to be the result of stereotypical archetypes presented in the media, as opposed to actual negative interactions women have had with people of different races. Other women, however, have had race play a part in their abuse (Crenshaw 1991), thereby having a profound impact on how they view and negotiate race within the shelter community. One of such women was Kim, a White woman who had come to the shelter as a means of escaping her African-American abuser.

Kim stayed at the shelter at a time when race was very salient at PW; an African-American resident had directed several racial remarks towards White staff members, and everyone at the shelter, staff and residents alike, felt the racial tension in the atmosphere. The general atmosphere of the shelter did not alleviate Kim's mistrust of African-Americans, which she indicated was the result of her African-American abuser, who had often used her race against her. Her vocabulary, however, hinted at the presence of color blind racism (Bonilla-Silva 2002; 2003), which may have existed beforehand.

“When I met him in Springfield, he was popular. I mean everybody likes him, he's very well-spoken when he's...and I don't want this to sound racist, because obviously I'm not racist if I'm going to contemplate marrying a Black man, but he's well-spoken around White people, around appropriate settings where you have to use appropriate language. But when we came to Alloy, he became a ghetto thug. It was a transformation, just who are you? I mean and he would talk nasty to me, and he would get drunk, and go off the wall and call me ‘slut’. I'm cheating on him, and I'm a blond haired, blue-eyed devil. ‘That bitch, you put your White hands on me, I'll kill you.’ I mean, that's in my restraining order.”

-Kim, Resident

Like most abusers, Kim's boyfriend initially presented himself in the best possible light—he was popular, well liked, and well-spoken. Kim was even contemplating the possibility of marrying him. And, again, like most abusers, he asked Kim to move with him to Alloy, separating her from her life, her friends, and her family—and she did. It was then, once she was

isolated from other forms of social support, that he changed (“became a ghetto thug”), and revealed his abusive side (“he would get drunk...go off the wall, and call me ‘slut’). Moreover, it was at this point in time that he began to acknowledge her race as a negative attribute (“I’m a blond-haired, blue-eyed devil”). However, it is important to note that in her narrative, Kim had also used strategic means to acknowledge her boyfriend’s race in a “safe” way; she used what Bonilla-Silva refers to as a “semantic move” to establish a disclaimer, and remove herself from a possible racist identity (“I’m not racist if I’m going to contemplate marrying a Black man”), but follows it with a statement that reveals a back-handed compliment toward her African-American partner (“he’s well-spoken around White people), establishing a color blind racist attitude towards an entire group of people. This pattern continued throughout her narrative.

“[At first] He went on and on about how much he loved White women. ‘Oh, I’ve loved White women ever since I was 13 years-old, and I had a couple children by White women. And I’ve only been with White women, and I don’t care for Black women.’ I mean I didn’t even view him as a Black man per se, cause he’s very handsome, very handsome, like Billy Dee Williams [an actor]. Handsome, well-dressed, well-groomed, motivated, or so I thought. But...and I would notice how he would treat people here and talk to people, but when it came to me, he talked to me like I was dog shit...I was a little White girl, and he would always call me ‘Valley.’ You know, I’m a valley chic, according to him. The deal that...we lived in was in a crack neighborhood, in a house full of cockroaches. And I didn’t expect to just tolerate it, and be quiet.”

Kim’s race was not initially considered a negative attribute—in fact, it seemed to be a point of attraction with her boyfriend (“he went on and on about how much he loved White women”). While Kim states that she did not view her boyfriend in racial terms, only as a very handsome man who was very popular, it appears otherwise. Her off-hand comment, once again, meant as a compliment towards her partner (“I mean I didn’t even view him as a Black man per se, cause he’s very handsome”) reveals an assumption that African-American men are not handsome, which is considered a part of the White racial frame, or considered White “common sense” (Feagin 2008). Thus, despite her claim to be color-blind, Kim appeared to be quite

conscious of her boyfriend's race, and by complimenting him as an individual, and specifying that he was not like other Black men, revealed a negative attitude towards his entire race.

As time passed and the couple moved to Alloy, Kim felt that her abuser saw her race as an indicator that she thought she was better than him, and felt the need to put her in her place. While he accomplished this task through physical and emotional abuse, he also assigned Kim a nickname, "Valley", to symbolize what he felt was her superior attitude. Much of Kim's abuse revolved around her abuser trying to instill a humble attitude in her. He was not alone in this endeavor—her abuser's cousin also took part in this task.

"You can never be right with a Black person, you're wrong from [the beginning], especially if you're White, who cares what you have to say, it just automatically puts you in the wrong. Automatically, automatically, I mean I was assaulted by one of his cousins when we first got to Alloy, you know why? Because I'm Republican. And he said, 'We don't like it, we don't like it, you put on airs, you're a college girl, you're, you know, we like gangster thug.' I don't want this is me being prejudice, because I have never been prejudiced in my life before, but I will never associate with Black people on that level again. It's not happening. Culturally, there is a vast difference that I didn't even realize until I came to Alloy...and I'm sorry to have discovered that in this life. I mean you can get along with Black people, or you don't have to be prejudice, but to get involved that intimately, not good. Not good. But if he had turned out to be a nice guy, quit drinking, do right by me, I would have been saying something completely opposite...[except] he did, treated me horribly."

While she still included a disclaimer to shield her from being identified as racist ("I don't want this is me being prejudice, because I have never been prejudiced in my life before"), at this point in her narrative, Kim's prejudicial attitude changes drastically. Previously, Kim's color blind racist attitude was limited to back-handed compliments that described why her partner was superior to the rest of his race. After experiencing an abusive relationship with him, however, Kim's negative attitude was directed towards the entire race, and expanded to new levels. First, she used a rhetorical strategy known as projection, blaming existing tension and conflicts on African-Americans, in general ("You can never be right with a Black person, you're wrong from

[the beginning]”), and supporting her statement with a testimonial of her experience with her abuser’s cousin (Bonilla-Silva 2003; 2002). Kim also stated that there were “vast differences” that existed between races, culturally (“Culturally, there is a vast difference that I didn't even realize until I came to Alloy”). Using culture to explain racial differences has replaced biology in the post-Jim Crow era; the biologization of culture has become a common practice among color blind racist Whites (Feagin 2004; Bonilla-Silva 2003). By projecting that Blacks people have negative attitudes against Whites, and that the “vast differences” between the two races is culturally based, Kim revealed an attitude of color blind racism in her narrative.

Kim clearly harbored prejudicial attitudes towards African-Americans, and brought those beliefs into the shelter with her. She felt that “you can never be right with a Black person...especially if you’re White,” and while “you can get along with Black people,” she has no intention of ever associating “with Black people on that level again.” The racial context that was associated with the abuse that occurred between Kim and her African-American abuser and his family left a lasting mark on her memory, thereby affecting her interactions among the diverse women of the shelter. Because Kim stayed at the shelter at a time when there was already racial tension, her jaded attitude was simply reinforced, confirming that there really is a “vast difference” between people.

While Kim was the most obvious example of a resident who displayed prejudicial attitudes and had a negative experience in an interracial abusive relationship, she was not the only one. Bonnie was another White resident who had been involved in a relationship with an African-American man who had become abusive, who later revealed a sense of distrust towards that particular race.

I was unaware of any kind of prejudicial attitude, until we had a conversation one day about moving out of the shelter. Bonnie had originally planned to move out in a few days, but her housing complex called, and informed her that her room was not ready yet. Initially, she was anxious to move out, but her mood changed, and she became very nervous and concerned about leaving PW. She kept referring to the fact that men will also be living at the housing complex, a source of great discomfort for her. On this particular day, for the first time in memory, she brought up race in relation to her fear as well. “It’s 85% Black!” she whispered to me, while we were sitting in the kitchen, discussing her move. Her comment surprised me—I knew Bonnie’s abuser was African-American, and at the time of the conversation, I wondered if this was the source of the issue.

However, the literature points to a larger trend at play. While the contact hypothesis (Allport 1954) asserts that maintaining close interactions among people of equal status in a non-competitive atmosphere will promote positive attitudes and reduce prejudice, some researchers have found evidence to the contrary. When subjects were not tested in a laboratory setting or other forced circumstances, Sigelman and Welch (1993) found that “contact between blacks and whites does not always affect racial attitudes, and even when it does, the effect is not always meaningful” (792). Similarly, while conducting qualitative interviews, Bonilla-Silva (2002) found that although White people claimed to have Black friends, or even “mixed” family members, it did not necessarily stop them from revealing prejudicial attitudes. In fact, many of the respondents brought up their minority friends and family members as proof that they could not be prejudice or racist, despite their views.

Bonnie’s prejudicial attitude towards African-Americans may have resulted from her abusive relationship with an African-American man. However, as the literature points out, there

is also the possibility that this prejudicial attitude existed beforehand, and remained unchanged throughout the duration of the relationship. It is also possible that it was a combination of these two factors, previously existing attitudes emphasized by an abusive experience, reinforced many of the stereotypes that exist about African-American men. In any case, Bonnie's prejudicial attitude was now firmly in place, and the end result was that her independence was a source of fear, because it was so closely linked to living in a community with African-Americans.

In the case of Lucy, a White woman, it was determined that she simply did not trust certain individuals who reminded her of her abuser. One indicator was ethnicity, as I found when she had to interact with a prosecutor who reminded her of her abuser. Lucy had come into the office, and asked several questions about her upcoming hearing; apparently, the cause of her concern was the prosecutor, who had told her that she did not have to be present. She said she did not trust him because he was a "dago," which reminded her of her abuser. It seemed to be the sole reason for her mistrust.

Aside from her honest demeanor ("she said she did not trust him because he was a 'dago,' which reminded her of her abuser"), Lucy's vocabulary ("dago") also indicates the negative attitude and mistrust in others that her abuser reinforced, if not instilled in her. It had a lasting effect, and Lucy continued to be mistrustful of those like her abuser.

Sometimes, abusers managed to create feelings of racial tension in other ways. Princess was an African-American woman who was dating an abusive African-American man, who often used race to verbally abuse her. For example, one night, while they were out eating dinner, he suddenly grew agitated, and began speaking to her very aggressively.

"He says, 'I'm leaving you for a White girl, at least they listen. At least they do what they told to do.' I'm like, 'You serious?' He's like, 'Yeah, I'm serious. I'm sick of you, you just want to do what you want to do, come and go when you please.' I said, 'You are like my [abusive] father, you didn't birth me!' So he left me alone, we ate dinner quietly,

went over his friend's house...we pulling out of the driveway, and he's like, 'Yeah, Joe [referring to his friend], we about to go to the bar. And I'm about to find a White girl.'”
-Princess, Resident

Unlike Kim and Bonnie, Princess was involved in an intraracial relationship; however, one does not have to be in an interracial relationship for an abuser to escalate feelings of racial tension. Princess's abuser incorporated race into his verbal attacks, thereby creating conflict, when he stated that her behavior was racially motivated, and that a White woman would not behave that way. He pursued that thought throughout the night, and invited his friend Joe to join him. Princess never needed to have an actual negative experience with a White person—her abuser created a negative experience with a White woman for her. Certainly, abusers can leave a lasting impression on their victims that has little to do with bruises or abrasions.

The women who come into the shelter, saddled with these experiences and many others, sometimes come with negative attitudes directed at particular racial or ethnic groups. Regardless of their origin, these negative attitudes can have a profound impact on the experience that different residents have while staying at the shelter. Staff acknowledges that the racial tension often looms in the distance, not brought up directly, but is understood to be present, nonetheless.

An example of said tension began one summer. One of the White monitors, Madison, was the first to report in the staff log that there was tension in the house. The calm that previously existed had disappeared, and two cliques had formed: Felicity and Andi, who were African-American, and Gia, Ava, Bianca, and Andrea, who were White, with the exception of Gia.

The delicate balance of what appeared to border on racial tension was completely upset very shortly afterwards, when Gia left the shelter, making the cliques, intentional or not, African-American residents versus White residents. Everyone present felt the difference. What had

otherwise been tension in the house was now racial tension, Jacinda, a White staff member pointed out. When I asked her to specify what about the situation made it racial tension, she explained nothing had necessarily been said or done, but that a certain feeling was now looming.

Sometimes, the racial tension in the house is punctuated by outbursts between residents, thereby noting that its presence was always looming, and these verbal altercations are the most recent example of its physical presence. Kesha, an African-American resident known for having tense encounters with White staff members, also created tension with other residents. At times, her outbursts became reminiscent of the verbal abuse some of the residents recently escaped.

A situation such as this occurred one afternoon, while I was at PW. Anne, a White resident, was washing the floor, and Kesha came downstairs and was immediately livid that her Bath and Body Works body wash was by the kitchen sink. She immediately blamed Anne, shouting that it was not the kind of soap you use for dishes. Anne told Kesha that she found the body wash on the floor, and put it on the counter so the kids would not get to it. Anne was speaking in a slow, calm manner when giving her explanation; it appeared that she was trying to deescalate the situation, not unlike what she may have done with her abusive husband in similar situations. Kesha grabbed the body gel and stormed upstairs, muttering angrily to herself the whole time. Anne looked at me and said, "Watch. She'll be talking about this the whole day." It looked as though Anne was right. From downstairs, I could hear Kesha talking loudly to Princess about finding her body wash by the dishes, telling her that Anne's kids probably took it, and Anne was probably going to keep it, and other unfounded accusations. Anne asked me to talk to Kesha, before the situation got out of control. I was concerned about approaching Kesha, as I was under the impression that she still felt hostility toward me, [from my last shift, when she made a 'White monitors' comment toward me], but I went upstairs. Kesha was standing in her

doorway, talking to Princess, holding the body wash. I assured her that no one used her body wash on the dishes or for any other purpose, and that Anne only put it on the counter to keep the kids away from it. She turned on me angrily, and said, “I know you wrote me up.” I did not quite understand what she meant by this statement, because a “write up” refers to giving a formal written warning, which I never gave. She continued, “[A staff member] came and talked to me about what I said,” which made more sense. She thought I had written her up about her comments because someone talked to her about it [although there still were not any consequences]. Kesha threw her hands up in the air, and said, “It doesn’t matter. I’m leaving this week anyway. I’ve had enough of this place.” She walked down the hall towards the steps, still talking to herself. “People at this shelter act like they want to help you, act like they care that a nigga beat you up, but they don’t.” While she generalized to the whole shelter, her tone indicated to me that she was directly referencing my research. I felt bad that she did not think I cared about her experience, because I do. But the tension in the shelter was thick, and it seemed to center on Kesha.

The tension in this particular situation was both intense and multifaceted—as a staff member, I encountered another moment with Kesha that seemed to be racially motivated, in part because it was connected to my previous interaction with her, in which she made a loud complaint about “White monitors,” for my benefit. I had documented Kesha’s remark in the staff log, and while day staff did not discharge her as the shelter policies state will be the consequences for such behavior, a member of the day staff did say something to her about it, alerting Kesha of my actions. Thus, when I tried to convince Kesha that her body wash had not been compromised by another (White) resident, I had lost before I began. Our previous encounter, and the apparent racial distrust Kesha felt, was still fresh on her mind.

There was also tension between the residents in this encounter, which became very similar to that of an abusive relationship. Kesha immediately assumed that Anne had used her body gel, and then concluded that she also used it to wash the floor. When Anne tried to explain the situation, Kesha was not interested in listening to her side of the story, and stormed upstairs, to talk about it with Princess, another African-American woman. No racial comments were made at this time, but racial tension was still felt by those present. Kesha's recent history of making negative racial remarks to White women created a situational context for her verbal attack on Anne, a White woman. This behavior, when combined with how she recounted the situation with Princess, another African-American woman, reinforced a feeling of racial tension, without a single derogatory word having been said.

At other times, racial tension escalates due to racial remarks that are clearly stated. One afternoon, an argument between two roommates escalated, and what had initially been a disagreement about mopping suddenly became about race. Though the tension had been bubbling beneath the observable surface for some time, all it took was a simple disagreement over a weekend chore for it to boil over.

It was early Saturday afternoon, and I was downstairs, when I heard shouting coming from an upstairs bedroom. I rushed upstairs, and located the source of the ruckus as Room 4, where Alexis, a White woman, and Deborah, an African-American woman, had been roommates due to a high census. The shouting match had started off as a simple disagreement over when to mop the room; it had quickly escalated into an argument over boundaries ("It's my room, too!"), and had further built to the point where Alexis had loudly called Deborah a "bitch." It was this insult that set Deborah off, who said, "You want to be Black? I'll teach you how to be Black!" before storming downstairs. Alexis, who is White, often gave the impression of wanting to be

Black. She has biracial children, but more importantly, she spoke and presented herself as a stereotypical Black woman. Her speech was peppered with phrases such as “Girl, please,” and she interjected, “Nigga, please” into stories that she told me. This particular phrase always made me uncomfortable when she used it, because she is not Black. Alexis is White and I always wondered how the African-American women felt about her use of it. I do not doubt that Alexis views this presentation as her authentic self, and means no offense, but Deborah’s reaction indicated that it had been grating on some nerves.

Alexis presented herself in a way that she felt was authentic, but others, particularly the African-American women in the house, felt was inappropriate, due to her race. While nothing was ever said directly to her, the disapproval remained ever present, until an unrelated issue pushed it to the front of the conversation. It should be noted that even as it became the center of the conversation, this particular outburst was never truly addressed. Deborah went outside, calmed herself, smoked a cigarette, came back inside, and apologized for the racial comment. It was unrelated to the real issue, she said, which had to do with the mopping.

Negative attitudes pertaining to race are more likely to be illustrated in small moments and comments, instead of notable outbursts such as these. Some of these comments, I felt, were only made to me because I was a White woman; if I had been another race or ethnicity, I seriously questioned whether or not I would have heard it. For example, after receiving a crisis call, I began to prepare for a new family coming into the shelter. One of the White residents began asking questions about the new family. One of the questions she asked was whether they were White or Black. I said that I did not know; I did not see the need to tell her that information in advance.

The need to know the race of an incoming family in advance indicates a certain preoccupation with the importance of skin tone. However, this resident was not the only woman to do so. Different residents use, or describe others who use, vocabulary that offer a glimpse into a prejudicial attitude and the salience of race within the shelter.

“I mean a lot of people [in the shelter] say, ‘Oh, because, because she's White or Black, that's why she's not doing it fast enough, Black people, you know, White people work faster. Black people do [the work slower].’ So, I heard people say that.”

-Ashley, White Resident

While Ashley offers that she hears other residents make these remarks, and that she does not necessarily share their opinions, it still indicates that there are very stereotypical attitudes held within the shelter about African-Americans. Some of these attitudes only seem to arise during times of duress. Mona, a White woman, experienced a great deal of stress, not only from her own abuse, but even more so when she received a phone call from her oldest daughter, informing her that her younger daughter had run away. She remained missing for six days. Mona feared the worst, and anxiously waited to hear any news. Finally, she received a call while I was working.

The call came from Mona's oldest daughter. The police had picked up her younger daughter, who had run away from the group home, and had been missing. Because she was a minor and had been covered in hickies when they picked her up, the police brought her to the hospital for a rape kit. When I asked where she had been this whole time, Mona informed me that she had been staying with her “Black drug dealer boyfriend,” and she spat the entire phrase out in utter disgust. I had never known Mona to harbor prejudicial attitudes towards African-Americans prior to this conversation.

Mona's anger was, at least in part, directed at the boyfriend. While her disgust may have been directed at his occupation, as well as the fact that he had clearly engaged in some degree of sexual behavior with her daughter, Mona chose to attach “Black” to the phrase as well. He was

not simply a drug dealer, he was a Black drug dealer, and Mona had made him so. This specification hints at the presence of a prejudicial attitude.

Conclusion

Years after the end of Jim Crow laws, racial segregation has divided the nation so that individuals tend to live and socialize with those of their own race (Bonilla-Silva, Goar, & Embrick 2006; Feagin 2004). However, domestic violence affects all races and ethnicities, and when women come to PW, they suddenly find themselves in a community where integration occurs in a significantly different way. This difference makes it necessary for all women of the shelter, both staff and residents alike, to reconstruct and negotiate race in a new context. At times, this negotiation is quite successful, and the multicultural nature of the shelter appears to be one of tolerance and open dialogue. At other times, the reconstruction and negotiation of race causes tension at PW on many different levels: among the staff, between the staff and the residents, and among the residents.

While racial tension among the staff seldom occurs, there was a point in time when there were concerns about racial favoritism towards both African-American staff and residents. Staff and residents alike indicated that African-American residents were receiving differential treatment, based on race; staff also raised concerns about preferential treatment being given to African-American staff members, based on race. However, despite these issues, formal complaints have not been made.

Racial tension between staff and residents has a tendency to occur between White staff members and minority residents. With the exception of one derogatory comment made by a maintenance worker, the White staff members generally did not understand how the interaction became a racially tense one. Interactions are viewed very differently based on the race of the

participants involved; the White member tends to view the situation as minor, but the minority member views it as another discriminatory act in a long line of behaviors they have experienced personally, and another act against their race, in general, contributing towards their discrimination on a much larger scale (Feagin 1991). Thus, while staff members may not have viewed the situation as a race-related incident, the residents felt it was yet another situation in which their race had counted against them in some manner.

Lastly, and most commonly, there is tension among the residents. While all of the women of PW are reconstructing and negotiating race, some residents are already harboring negative attitudes towards a particular group. At times, this negative attitude is the result or reinforced by their abuser incorporating race into their victimizing strategy. In any case, these prejudicial attitudes make it difficult to maintain a peaceful environment; in fact, tense confrontations based on race have occurred multiple times. However, it is far more common for racial prejudice to reveal itself in smaller, more intimate moments.

Negotiating race in a forced community such as a shelter is a difficult task; sometimes the women of PW are successful in this endeavor, sometimes they are not. But PW strives to help women of all races and ethnicities by hiring a diverse staff, in order to ensure all women feel represented, and that they can identify and speak comfortably with someone on staff. Thus, while racial inequality regimes continue to exist in shelters today, PW continues to fight against them, and attempts to address racism in the process.

I have explored how sex and gender, sexuality, class, and race and ethnicity influence the interactions that occur within the shelter environment. In the next chapter, I address my research questions regarding identity construction in the shelter community, focusing on how

and why certain identities emerge within the context of the shelter. I also consider the differences that exist between the staff and resident identities, and the various functions that they serve.

CHAPTER 6:

CONSTRUCTING FAMILY AND SISTERHOOD IDENTITIES

Social organizations establish a framework for the identities of those who participate within them in a variety of ways (Hunt and Benford 1994; Kleinman 1996; Loseke and Cavendish 2001; Mills 1940; Reger 2002; Schwalbe and Mason-Schrock 1996; Ward 2004). Combinations of micro, meso, and macro factors contribute to members' identities, including interactions with others within the organization, diversity of membership, leadership, geographical location, and cultural and political environments (Loseke 2007; Reger 2002).

Domestic violence shelters are organizations and communities that provide an environment in which both staff and residents construct their identities in different ways and for different reasons. Staff members construct several identities, including a work identity, which is associated with both accomplishing tasks, as well as engaging in emotional labor (Hochschild 1983). These two different components of the work identity can appear to conflict at times, due to a lack of resources and shelter rules, and different staff members try to reconcile

this difference in a variety of ways. The family identity that exists among the staff often serves as a coping mechanism, helping the women function through the emotional stress that accompanies their work, and creating a unique bond.

Residents of domestic violence shelters also construct new identities within the shelter environment, often as a means of repairing the devalued identities and damaged self-concepts that resulted from their abusive relationships (Farrell 1996; Merritt-Gray and Wuest 1995; Mills 1985; Landenburger 1989). Therefore, the identities that are constructed during this time are often described as having great value to the women. One of the identities constructed is the family identity, which can be accomplished in several ways. Women facing difficult times in their lives do not always have their blood or legal families available for support for a number of reasons. Constructing a family identity creates a source of strength when many women find they need it most. Residents are also encouraged by staff to construct a sisterhood identity, which emphasizes the commonality of gender, and reminds them of the gendered nature of their abuse.

In this chapter, I will explore the identities that are encouraged in the shelter, or the identities that attest to the shelter's positive influence in the women's lives. By stating that these particular identities are encouraged, I do not mean to imply that they are any less authentic than any other identity constructed by the women at PW. Both the residents and the staff stressed the importance of these identities to me in their interviews and throughout my fieldnotes. My focus on the shelter's encouragement of certain identities is meant to emphasize that while PW may be a site of identity construction, not all identities are equally encouraged.

Often, the residents and the staff engage in the same identities; however, it is important to understand the differences that exist between these statuses, both in how and why they are constructed. I will highlight these differences as I describe them.

Staff: Family

The phrase “PW family” has been used frequently among staff throughout my employment, and is not an exaggeration. When the shelter’s Judicial Advocate was killed in a car accident one winter, it was very clear that it was more than the loss of a co-worker. It was more like the loss of a family member. While the current residents at the time were still able to accomplish their errands, PW otherwise shut down for a week. A shelter in a neighboring county offered to take PW’s crisis calls, and the staff gathered and grieved together. When a woman was hired to fill the Judicial Advocate position, she openly admitted that she was nervous and a bit wary, because the PW staff was known for their close ties, and she did not know if she would ever be accepted, or if she would simply be “the replacement.” While she was accepted with open arms, her concern demonstrates the presence of voluntary kinship that is openly recognized to exist at PW.

Voluntary kin (Braithwaite, Wackernagel Bach, Baxter, DiVerniero, Hammonds, Hosek, Willer, & Wolf 2010), also referred to as fictive kin (Chatters, Taylor, & Jayakody 1994; Ibsen & Klobus 1972; Muraco 2006), refers the close relationships that people develop with others, whom they consider to be family, despite the lack of blood relation or legal ties. While there are several categorizations of voluntary kin that perform different functions, PW’s kinship network would best be described as a “convenience family” (Braithwaite et al. 2010). Convenience families are voluntary kin that form around a specific context, time period, or stage of life--in this case, the shelter. While it may appear that the PW staff are simply close friends, it is important to note that the voluntary kin identity applies, due to the unique experience they share with one another on a daily basis. Working at a shelter offers a distinctive, and sometimes traumatic, daily routine, which is seldom routine. When staff members were asked what a typical day was like for them,

most of them laughed at the idea of “typical,” and described their schedule as depending on the day and circumstances.

“So, there’s like really no normal day. No normal routine at the shelter because...it all depends on what’s going on. Like I said, you come in to do one agenda, before you know it, the agenda you come to do is...you’re not doing because of the...like when there’s a crisis call. You might run into a crisis situation. So each day is different.”

-Wilma, Staff

Jacinda, another staff member, echoed that sentiment:

“You know, it really, it really depends. No day is the same day here.”

A staff member named Aliyah also emphasized that there is no “typical” day at PW:

“Well, that’s an interesting question because every day is a new day. I mean, there is no typical day.”

Aside from being unpredictable, working at the shelter is also accompanied by witnessing and reacting to very negative experiences as a part of the job description. Many of these experiences have a profound effect of staff members, who learn to adjust to the situation, but never seem to grow desensitized. A number of the staff members described stories that revealed a sense of self-imposed responsibility to the residents, accompanied by intense sadness and even guilt if they felt they were not able to help the women to the extent they had hoped. Staff can relate to the emotional stress caused by these disappointments and heartbreaks and often commiserate with one another when such negative experiences occur. Even the most supportive friends and family members will not quite understand what a “bad day” at the shelter means, but the PW convenience family knows. Their stories describe such days:

“You know, it hurts my heart when they leave. There’s one young lady...and I knew I was...I just really felt like I was going to reach her. And I came in the next day to assist her with her kids, cause she worked midnights, so you know she was used to being at home and coming in and going to sleep with her kids running around the house. Well, at the shelter you can’t do that, you know. You have to be up with your kids, so that was really kind of hard for her to be up with her kids. So, you know, I sat back and I told her

that I would come in and I would assist her with her kids, you know, until they went to the playground, and then she'd get her rest then. So I sat down, really talked with her and was really, really getting through to her. Well anyway, the next morning when I woke...I jumped up and, you know, made it my business to hurry up and get in here, and when I got here...the only way I can sum it up, it was like someone who works in a nursing home and they get attached to a patient, and they go see that patient... next day that patient's dead. You know? And that was the feeling I had when I came because she was gone...that just really bummed me out...I really wanted to come. I really wanted to help her, and I really wanted her to see, you know, a different side because she was so beat up. Life had her so beat up, and...I don't know, that just hurt me when I came in and she was gone. It really, really, really hurt me."

-Wilma, Staff

Wilma's desire to help a particular woman, and feeling that she was unable to do so "really, really hurt" her, and left a lasting memory with her. Some of the situations that had the most significant impact on the staff dealt with children. Madison, though not directly involved in the situation, witnessed an event that she remembered as her most negative shelter experience.

"I remember we had a resident, she had been here a couple times before, and she had quite a few kids. And the last time that she was here, when Children Services actually came in and took her children, and I happened to be on shift that day. And that was...that was a really rough day. That was hard. It was hard, it was hard watching that. That was probably the worst thing I've seen here."

-Madison, Staff

Crystal also recalled a heartbreaking work experience, involving children at the shelter. When she had to become involved in the situation, another member of the PW family offered their support and stayed with her.

"Rebecca, she had four or five kids? The oldest was 16, and then there was Shanna, who was nine or ten. She was outside in the back, playing, and something happened, and she got smart with her mom. Then she climbed over the wall in the back, and over to the shed, and she sat up there and refused to come down. So finally, we get her down, and she goes upstairs to their room. Suddenly, her one sister comes down, saying she put a plastic bag over her head. So I go upstairs, and she has this heavy plastic over her head, not like a bag from the store, like a heavy Ziploc bag. She has it over her head, and she's breathing really deep. I asked her, 'What are you doing?' And she was crying, saying she didn't want to live anymore. That...that was hard. We sent her to [a psychiatric clinic] to be evaluated. She saw a counselor that she could talk to, and that seemed to help. But her mom didn't want her there, I guess she [daughter] was sharing things that her mom didn't want her to tell anybody, about their life. She pulled her out. [Day staff]

wanted to call CSB [Children Services Board], and have her taken away, on the basis that no one here could stay on suicide watch with her overnight. So [another staff member] and I stayed overnight, to watch her until morning, and we could send her somewhere. That was bad. That was the first one to ever make me cry...But I work well under pressure. It's not until afterwards that I break down."

-Crystal, Staff

When discussing their most negative shelter experiences, several staff members discussed the deaths of past residents at the hands of their abusers. When Wanda approached the topic, she not only spoke about the sense of loss, but also feeling a sense of failure.

"When I worked with her [current resident] mom, I was really thinking that I could save people. And when her father set the house on fire and her mother got burned, I felt such an immense...sense of failure. Just, there had to be something I could have done to prevent her from being with this crazy man and...I remember I went to see her in the hospital, cause she was in a coma for a while before she died, and I said, you know, a bunch of things to her, but one of the things that stuck out to me was 'I'm sorry,' cause I thought, you know, that maybe there was more I could have done."

-Wanda, Staff

Maria, another staff member who spoke about the deaths of past residents, simply stated that it was the most difficult aspect of working in a domestic violence shelter.

"I think the worst of the worst is when we lost victims because parents help them, and they go back with their abusers. And unfortunately, there's been six or seven women in my service here that have died because of the abuse. I guess the hardest part of the job."

-Maria, Staff

As these stories demonstrate, even the closest friends or family members lack true understanding of what working in a shelter entails. Having a bad day at work while working at a shelter carries a very different meaning than a bad day in some other context. As a result, the staff at PW have a bond of voluntary kinship, a convenience family, that offers support to one another as they experience these difficult trials as a part of their job. The PW convenience is reinforced through rituals and interactions on a daily basis.

One ritual that reaffirms the PW family identity is gathering together for meals. Sharing meals has been viewed as providing a glimpse into the inner workings of our social relationships;

who we eat with, how often we eat together, and what we eat can indicate the importance of our social bonds with others (DeVault 1991; Valentine 1999). For the PW staff who share meals on a daily basis, food symbolizes the unity and the family identity that exists among them. Just as more traditionally defined families are encouraged to share a meal as an essential component of family life, the PW voluntary kinship places great emphasis on placing their hectic schedules on hold for a short time in order to eat together.

While day staff will routinely call the shelter on their morning drive and offer to buy coffee for anyone who is interested, the most commonly shared meal is lunch. The ritual begins during the late morning, when one of the day staff members will ask, “Where are we eating today?” At this point, a large file folder filled with take-out menus from different local restaurants is summoned, and everyone present contributes to the decision-making process. While it would be simple for each individual to choose a different restaurant of their liking, and order exactly what they want, this option is seldom used. Instead, the staff collectively discusses the different possibilities, and ultimately chooses one restaurant from which they will all order. If the decision is a close one, it is very likely that the restaurant that “lost” the discussion today will win tomorrow. One staff member, often someone who has to leave the shelter to run an errand, collects money and picks up the food. While one could argue that choosing one restaurant could be considered a matter of convenience, it is undeniable that doing so provides an opportunity for the staff to interact, and reaffirm their family identity.

The decision-making process generally takes an hour to an hour and a half, depending on how busy the shelter is, and is truly a bonding experience. As the menus are passed around, stories are told of past meals, and recommendations are made to one another. Sometimes these stories address cultural or racial differences, and open lines of communication that may not have

otherwise existed. For example, while looking at a menu for a soul food restaurant, I mentioned they had ox tails as a special. Wilma, an African-American woman, laughed. “Oh, that’s Black people food!” she said. She discouraged me from trying it. “I don’t even eat that. Or pigs’ feet. They’re pure fat—nasty!” During this time, Wilma learned of my love of greens and cornbread, which led to another conversation about the best places to order them. The process of selecting a common meal provided a glimpse of our similarities and differences, and it reinforced our bond.

The lunch process also provides an opportunity for PW staff to share with one another, and offer random acts of kindness. While these daily interactions appear minor, they enhance the bond that exists among those who share the voluntary kin identity. For example, Nadine was telling the other staff about a meeting she attended that was catered by a café across town. She was describing how wonderful their muffins were, when I mentioned that I had never heard of them. With that, Nadine drove across town, and bought muffins for each of us, hand-selecting flavors that she felt matched our personality. Nadine has also been known on occasion to randomly bring in fresh donuts for everyone, for no apparent reason. These random acts of kindness reinforce the genuine feelings of the family identity, and it is accomplished through food.

The significance of the shared meal is not lost on new staff members. The shelter hired a new employee, specifically for the job of transporting residents to their appointments. Kylie’s transportation schedule meant that she worked during traditional work hours with the day staff, and witnessed the decision-making process. However, Kylie had a sensitive stomach, and did not eat much—a cup of coffee for breakfast, and a regular meal for dinner was all she ate. Lunch did not exist for her, which meant she was left out of this bonding experience with the other staff members. It did not take long for Kylie to decide to eat her one meal during lunch, instead of

dinner. Her decision had very little to do with her appetite, and she openly acknowledged that this change had occurred because the lunch process was “fun.” Thus, she rearranged her meal planning to ensure that she could participate in this mealtime ritual, and reaffirm her membership within the voluntary kinship.

It is worthwhile to note that while it is not unusual for co-workers to eat lunch together, PW has incorporated a degree of ritual into to process that can be attributed to the convenience family identity. The PW family will not only eat in a common room, but also insist on ordering their food from a common restaurant every day. Just as a family will not individually cook their own meal and then sit together, neither will the PW family. Ordering from different restaurants provides an opportunity to introduce one another to their favorite places, a culinary show-and-tell. It also differs from the typical workplace in that the PW family will try to set time aside so they can all eat together. While it is not always feasible, most work environments make no such effort.

Another way that interactions are used to reaffirm the family identity is through the active construction of collective memories. Communicating memories of shared past experiences are not simply told to inform others—it is an interactive process that continually reconstructs what is understood of the past, while also establishing a sense of solidarity among the in-group (Bietti 2010). It has been claimed that this process is apart of all families’ daily interactions (Fivush 2008). While it has not been specified whether this claim includes voluntary kinship, my experience at the shelter would suggest that it does. PW staff engages in what has been called “collaborative remembering,” where they draw from their well-established relationships and experiences to reconstruct the past to create a sense of unity among the PW family (Bietti 2010). Collaborative remembering is often accomplished in very subtle ways—stories are told on a daily

basis that require the listener to draw on past constructions of people or events to fully grasp the meaning of the narrative. For example, in the past, I have answered the phone during the day shift, and have been greeted by a pleasant voice on the other end of the line, identifying herself as a specific member of the staff at McKinley Inc., the parent company. After putting her on hold, I relayed her presence to the members of the day staff. This announcement was met by a collective groan, and a quick debate over who “had” to talk to her. This reaction is standard. While this behavior may appear odd to an outsider, those individuals who are members of the PW family understand through their shared memories of the past that this particular woman only contacts the shelter when she feels mistakes have been made. While I personally have not been on the receiving end of these reprimands, my own interactions have been reconstructed through other staff members to reflect the impending doom her calls represent. This process unifies PW staff, as it provides an “other,” who cannot know or sympathize with the full extent of the staff’s experiences or responsibilities. The other merely makes demands, without understanding or caring how unreasonable they are. Thus, collaborative remembering reaffirms the voluntary kin identity.

PW staff also demonstrates their family identity by displaying certain accommodative behaviors in their interactions. In their 2009 study, Soliz, Thorson, and Rittenour established that certain accommodative behaviors, such as supportive communication and self-disclosure, are positively correlated with perceptions of a shared family identity. While the study did not take voluntary kinship into consideration, PW ‘s family identity has certainly been supplemented with examples of supportive communication and self-disclosure.

Supportive communication, which Soliz et al. (2009) based on the Quality of Relationships Inventory (Pierce, Sarason, & Sarason 1991), refers to whether an individual feels

they can turn to another member of the family for support and advice about personal problems. Staff members often turn to one another for support and advice. While their concerns are sometimes work-related, and another professional opinion is valued, they are often personal, and they seek the help of their voluntary kin. When Summer's long-time boyfriend was accepted into a graduate school in another state, she faced an unsure future. She would be moving to an unfamiliar area, without any kind of job awaiting her. Such a financially unstable future "scared the fuck" out of her, and she turned to her PW family for advice and reassurance. Jacinda, another monitor, encouraged her, recalling how several years back, she moved across the country under similar unstable circumstances, with only \$500 to her name. "It was the scariest, but the best thing I could have done," she told Summer. Jacinda's support was sought and received, reaffirming the family identity.

A related accommodative behavior is self-disclosure, which is considered a reciprocal act in which individuals within the family disclose personal feelings and information about themselves to one another. Self-disclosure occurs on a regular basis at PW; every staff member is very forthcoming about their experiences and feelings¹⁵. While some of this shared information is rather light and not of any great consequence, such as Abigail's addiction to junk food, other examples of common knowledge that is shared openly among the staff is considerably more serious. For example, when she was younger, Jacinda was in a very serious car accident that left her in the hospital, and killed another individual. Jacinda was cited as responsible for the accident, and was charged with vehicular manslaughter. Certainly, Jacinda did not have to disclose this personal information to the entire PW staff; however, she chose to do so, which displays a sense of trust and acceptance in the voluntary kinship of PW. Such trust did not go

¹⁵ These confidences are often in addition to those staff members who speak openly about their past experiences as domestic abuse victims.

unrewarded—to my knowledge, no staff member has used this information to judge Jacinda in any way.

On another occasion, I was speaking with Wilma about an inspirational book we had both recently read, and it led us to discuss how you never know what an impact you may have on someone's life. To elaborate on that point, Wilma told me what the other staff members already knew—that when her mother had to give her and her siblings to social services, there was a case worker who had a profound impact on her. “She was there through everything, my abuse, my abortion. Everything.” In one sentence, Wilma disclosed a series of very personal life events—being taken out of the custody of her mother by social services, being in an abusive relationship, and terminating an unwanted pregnancy. Sharing these experiences would take a great deal of faith in those she confided in, particularly the abortion, as she was knowingly in the presence of several rather conservative religious staff members. However, as with the case of Jacinda, her faith was not given in vain, and the voluntary kin of PW accepted Wilma and her past with no questions asked. The presence of both of these behaviors is not only positively associated with perceptions of a shared family identity (Soliz et al. 2009), but is also considered to be an important factor in a feeling of group solidarity and satisfaction with the family.

Despite the fact that the PW staff is very diverse in race, ethnicity, age, education, and sexual preference, among other characteristics, their social differences are often minimized by their in-group membership and shared voluntary kinship identity (Gaertner & Dovidio 2000; Soliz & Harwood 2006). Their diversity is not necessarily ignored; it is simply considered secondary to their social identity as family members¹⁶.

¹⁶ However, race is salient in the shelter—one staff member in particular was thought to engage in reverse racism (See Chapter 5).

While collective memories and accommodative behavior can be accomplished in less intimate work environments, PW's staff engages in these behaviors in a manner that reinforces the convenience family identity. Other interactions that contribute towards the family identity are significant because they take place outside the walls of the shelter. The strong bonds that are formed among the staff members are not limited to the interactions that take place throughout the workday. Staff members have established a book club, shopped, danced, eaten, celebrated, and grieved with one another in a variety of environments outside of PW. Just as one's family identity does not "end" when one leaves the house, the voluntary kin identity of the PW staff exists well outside the boundary of the shelter.

Staff: Employee Identities

Those women working in domestic violence shelters often do so because they feel it is a worthwhile job that positively influences others. Seven of the fifteen staff members I interviewed acknowledged having personal experience with domestic violence¹⁷, and their work is a way to "pass on" or "give back" to the community or support system that helped them through a difficult time in their lives. Six of the fifteen staff members interviewed who had attended or were currently attending college specified that their chosen field was in social work, counseling, or other related fields. Therefore, their presence in the shelter reinforced their interest in helping others. In other words, it is safe to conclude that those who work at the shelter consider their job to be a reflection of who they are, and what is important to them. As a result, maintaining a positive sense of self-worth is very much connected to their work identity.

¹⁷ This was not a direct question on the interview schedule for the staff. Staff members who told me of their past abuse chose to share this personal information without any prompt. Therefore, I must acknowledge that other staff members may also have experienced domestic violence, and chose not to share their experience with me.

Maintaining a positive work identity can sometimes become problematic, because the rules and policies meant to provide safety and comfort to all of the women can at times be viewed as condescending or revictimizing. For example, women do not have the ability to leave the shelter at any given time; instead, there is a pass system¹⁸. Women must fill out the proper forms, stating where they are going, how long they will be there, how they can be reached, who they will be with, and what safety precautions they will take. The shelter operates in this fashion for several reasons. First, the pass system is meant to protect women from their abusers. By knowing where women are, and how long they intend to be there, the shelter knows they are safe. If they have not returned from pass, the shelter can try to contact them at the number provided on the form, and ensure they are safe. Secondly, on weekdays during regular business hours, the shelter tries to provide free transportation to the women by driving them to their destinations in a van owned by McKinley, Inc., the shelter's parent company. The pass system allows the shelter staff to create a transportation schedule that will ensure that the women are able to get to their destinations on time and at no cost. However, the pass system does create a situation where women are encouraged to empower themselves and make their own decisions, while the shelter simultaneously tells them whether or not they are "allowed" to leave the shelter. Even women who have their own form of transportation cannot simply walk out of the shelter and go somewhere, even if they leave contact information—they must obtain approval from the day staff.

This creates role strain for staff members—they must enforce rules to maintain safety and order at the shelter, but at the same time, there are often feelings of discomfort in doing so (Goode 1960). By following the rules, a staff member may have a somewhat diminished self-

¹⁸ This policy changed after I completed my participant observation and interviews.

concept, because they no longer feel they are helping others in need, but treating them as subordinates. Wilma, a staff member, described her feelings about the pass system:

“...I was in a domestic violence situation when I was younger, and one of the things I hated about that was that I always had to ask the person that was abusing me, my boyfriend, if I could leave, if I could go to the store, if I could do that. And they do that here, and I just think that’s something I think is wrong. You have kids, why should you have to ask another person if you can go somewhere? You know, so. [If I had my own shelter] My shelter would be set up different like that for those reasons.”

Joan, another staff member, shared that sentiment.

“I think it’s difficult when you have rules, you know? It’s hard to tell an adult, ‘You have to be back by a certain time.’ They’ve been under an abuser’s rules for so long, and then, give them more rules. I just think that’s, it’s kinda continuing that cycle.”

“They are grown women, and these unnecessary rules put them back in a controlling situation” was a common refrain heard throughout the staff interviews. How can one maintain a positive self-concept when reinforcing policies that one personally believes to be revictimizing? Staff members at PW deal with this issue in different ways. Some, typically those who have less interaction with the women, use the argument that the ends justify the means, and that these policies, though not ideal, are the best way to ensure that the women are safe and the shelter is maintained. Thus, they prioritize their work identity, and by upholding the rules and policies, reinforce this identity. However, those staff members who engage in more face-to-face interaction with the women tend to have more difficulty using this strategy. Holden (1997) found that volunteers in homeless shelters facing a similar type of role strain employed four different strategies in order to maintain a positive self concept; certain staff members at PW often use these same strategies.

First, some staff members try to befriend the residents. This friendship is limited due to the nature of the interaction; regardless of how easily the residents and staff converse, there will always be the underlying truth that one is paid to be in this setting, while the other is present out

of necessity. Likewise, the staff member's casual interactions are limited by McKinley Inc.'s policies; for example, staff is not permitted to socialize with residents outside of the shelter environment, including social networking sites. However, this contextual difference is minimized to allow the interaction to appear more organic. Staff members may bring in movies, cook or eat with the residents, share cigarettes, watch TV, or just chat to emphasize their friend status. Monitors, who work by themselves during non-traditional work hours, often dress casually. While this wardrobe choice may be made for reasons relating to comfort, not friendship, it also minimizes the differential status between employee and resident.

Secondly, some staff members may try to distance themselves from personal characteristics that might emphasize differences between the staff and the residents, and instead, emphasize their commonalities. Certain staff members felt it was important to let the residents know about their own abusive past, as a means of creating a bond between them. Aliyah, an African-American monitor, stated:

“You have to kinda build a bond, I guess, you know? First of all, I think, letting them know that we all have something in common. You know? That I'm not any different than you are, that I am a survivor of domestic violence.”

Commonalities are not limited to past victimization, however. Social economic status is often a source of difference between staff and residents. While domestic violence occurs among all social classes (Bograd 2005; Goodman and Epstein 2008), some women have the resources to stay at a hotel or rent an apartment. Those women who do not have such resources are more likely to utilize the shelter system (Cattaneo and DeLoveh 2008). Therefore, some staff members find it necessary to minimize this difference in social class. Tamara, an African American monitor, explained how and why this minimization occurs.

“I think that these women already have insecurities coming in here...they see us pull up, well, some of us, in our red cars, and we get to go to McDonald’s and Burger King, and we talk about how we’re going on vacation, and we’re doing this and we’re doing that. And I know that it has to, somewhere in them, kinda hurt...I try [to censor myself]...I don’t say, you know, ‘It’s payday!’ You know what I mean?”

As a monitor, I found myself engaging in this same minimization process that Tamara described. For example, I became engaged and planned my wedding while I was a monitor at the shelter. Quite a few residents acknowledged my engagement ring, and asked me questions about the upcoming wedding and honeymoon. While I avoided talking about my significant other for privacy reasons, I found myself deliberately leaving out certain wedding details (such as the fact that our parents paid for the entire ceremony and reception) because I did not want the lower or working class women of the shelter to view me as different from them. Instead, I emphasized certain aspects of my lifestyle that we shared in common. For example, when a new, high-tech washing machine was bought for the shelter, one of the residents asked me what all of the different buttons were for. Honestly, I answered that I did not know, because the washing machine in my apartment building only has three buttons—hot, cold, and start. While this comment was meant as a humorous-but-true response to why I did not know how to operate the new machine, it emphasized our class similarities. She now knew that I lived in an apartment, implying that I could not afford a house, and that the apartment I lived in had older appliances, and therefore must not be an expensive or elaborate complex.

Third, some staff members combat role strain by using their own discretion when enforcing the shelter rules. Certain rules that are viewed as unnecessary or minor, such as swearing or vigilant supervision of children, result in a verbal warning when broken, instead of a write-up. Sometimes these violations are simply ignored. Madison, one of the younger monitors,

indicated how her age added discomfort to adhering to the rules, and how that influenced her behavior.

“I could be their daughter, half of them. And I feel weird, reprimanding them for not doing their chore. I feel kinda weird doing that sometimes. But...I try to...if it happens once, I try to let it slide. But if it happens any more than that...I still am uncomfortable with the whole writing up thing, but I’ll do it, if it’s necessary. But I try to keep it to the minimum.”

If the staff member feels that the violation is serious enough to warrant some kind of disciplinary action, but still want to avoid role strain, they may simply pass the responsibility to someone else. Monitors may simply relay the problem to the staff member who has the shift after theirs, or it may be noted in the staff log for a day staff member to resolve during regular business hours. In either instance, the staff member avoids being viewed as an employee or rule enforcer by the residents, and can maintain a positive rapport with them. However, it should be acknowledged that if a staff member uses this strategy on a regular basis, other staff members may resent them for asking others to do their “dirty work,” and the staff supervisor may become involved. Interestingly, sometimes this strategy backfires, and the residents lose respect for the staff members for not addressing the issue with them directly. Alyssa, a 29 year-old African American woman staying at the shelter, distinguished between which staff members she respected.

“Cause they gonna be straightforward, they gonna let you know...if they got a problem with something that I’m doing or anything. They gonna come to me, they gonna tell me, they ain’t gonna wait a day later or 10 o’clock at night to leave it in a note. They gonna come to me, and I like that. Address me when I’m doing something wrong, you know what I mean? Or there’s something you feel ain’t right, let me know right then and there. Don’t wait, cause I’m gonna did something else, you know what I mean, and not even remember that. That’ll make you mad, like, you know, when another resident, um, I guess she had did a couple of things or whatever, but they was never addressing her with it, they was just, you know, waiting and writing it down and writing it down in a letter. And then this weekend, you leave a letter like that and you think...get it done with, and move on.”

Lastly, staff members may take an entirely different approach to alleviating a negative self-concept resulting from role strain. Staff may occasionally engage in othering, justifying the flawed policies because of the residents' "lack of moral fiber" (Goode 1960; Holden 1997). This strategy is not the same as prioritizing one's work identity, during which time one decides the benefits of the policies outweigh the costs, and are therefore the best course of action to protect and assist the women in the shelter. Othering implies that the rules and policies are needed, not for safety and assistance, but because the residents are not trustworthy. Staff members seldom use this tactic to refer to all of the residents; instead, othering is used to deal with an individual resident who has been labeled as a troublemaker.

One example of this approach occurred when Nevaeh, an African-American woman in her early 20s, entered the shelter as a result of the pressure she received from Children's Services. Nevaeh lived with her boyfriend and her 2 year-old daughter, and while her boyfriend was occasionally physically abusive to her, she did not seek help until he punched her 2 year-old daughter in the face. At this point, she brought her daughter to the hospital, and Children's Services were contacted. They informed Nevaeh that if she brought her daughter back in the home to live with her boyfriend, they would take her daughter away. They informed her she was a victim of domestic violence, and she should call the shelter. Nevaeh resisted this identity—she did not feel that it accurately captured her experiences; however, she had no other living options, and she did not want to lose custody of her daughter. So, Nevaeh and her daughter reluctantly came to live in the shelter.

From the moment she stepped in the door, it became apparent that Nevaeh resented having to stay in the shelter. Not only was this asserted verbally, but it was reflected in her behavior as well. As a result, Nevaeh was quickly labeled a troublemaker by the staff, and all of

the policies were therefore seen as necessary and justified in her case. At one point, Nevaeh's abuser called her cell phone and tried to convince her that if she did not return home, he would take her to court and she would lose custody of her daughter. Not sure of her legal rights and the judicial process, she consulted a member of day staff to see if these threats were legitimate. Certain staff members reacted with vindication, telling other staff that allowing residents to have their cell phones was a mistake. Nevaeh had spoken with her abuser, which violated the first rule of the shelter. They felt this incident proved that the cell phone restriction was needed; this resident had clearly demonstrated that she could not be trusted with her cell phone. By engaging in othering, staff members were able to reinforce rules that may otherwise create role strain (Goode 1960; Lamont 2002).

Residents: Family

Just as staff members establish a unique voluntary kinship, residents likewise engage in a family identity, both among themselves and, at times, with the staff members. However, it is important to note that while residents also refer to a "PW family," it is very different from the family identity the staff has created. As previously described, the staff's voluntary kinship is identified as a convenience family because it is created based on the situational context of working in a shelter, an experience that other friends or family members are not likely to fully grasp. It is a long-standing relationship, and many of the staff members have known one another for years. Residents' voluntary kinship may also be considered a convenience family, because it is based on a unique situational context where they are living in a communal setting due to an abusive relationship. Both the abusive relationship and the subsequent communal living are experiences that friends and family members may not be able to relate to; other residents in the shelter, however, can. This commonality has the potential to create a bond among the residents

that can develop into a convenience family. However, certain factors in the residential family add a complexity to the voluntary kin identity that does not exist within the staff PW family.

Aside from being classified as a convenience family, a resident's voluntary kinship may also be understood to be a substitute family or a supplemental family, based on her particular circumstances (Braithwaite et al. 2010). Substitute families are voluntary kinship networks that completely replace the existence of any blood and legal kin, who may be absent due to death or estrangement (2010). For residents at PW, estrangement is the more likely scenario. It is a common strategy of abusers to isolate their victims from their social networks, particularly their families, who may interfere with their relationship (El-Bassel, Gilbert, Rajah, Folleno, and Frye 2001; Levendosky, Bogat, Theran, Trotter, von Eye, and Davidson 2004; Tan, Basta, Sullivan, and Davidson 1995; Williams 1998). Other women are ashamed of their situation, and are reluctant to speak to their families, for fear they will discover the truth (Barnett, Martinez, and Keyson 1996; Dunham and Senn 2000). As a result, some residents have little to no contact with their blood and legal families. In the case of Brittany, a 25 year-old Iranian woman, it became necessary to stop communicating with her family because they were becoming abusive. Brittany left her abusive husband, only to be reprimanded by her very traditional family, who felt it was her duty to return to him. She refused; at this point her family, and particularly her father, bombarded her with threats, physical, emotional, and verbal abuse, and destroyed her property. Fearing for her safety, she came to PW.

Unfortunately, Brittany is not the only resident who had to seek shelter in order to escape an abusive family. Lady, a 21 year-old African American woman, described why she came to the shelter.

“Me and my mom, we had an altercation. She thought I stole something, which I didn't. She came in, ransacked my room, she was out of control. Like, she pushed over my

baby's bed while she [the baby] was still in it! There were always arguments...my family life was pretty messed up."

For women who have little to no contact with their families, the voluntary kinship of shelter residents is not only a family of convenience, existing due to the situation they are in—it is a substitute family, a replacement for a social support system that no longer exists in their lives. As one would imagine, the voluntary kinship identity has a great deal of importance in these particular instances.

For other women at the shelter, the PW family is a supplemental family, fulfilling certain functions that their blood and legal family is unable or unwilling to fulfill, despite their continued presence in the residents' lives. Braithwaite et al. 2010 identified four types of supplemental families, all of which have been represented in various residents' experiences: (1) voluntary kin who fulfill needs not met by blood and legal family; (2) voluntary kin who enact a role not present in blood and legal family; (3) voluntary kin enacting a role that is underperformed by blood and legal family; and (4) voluntary kin enacting a role for geographically dispersed blood and legal family.

In the first type of supplemental family, women maintain some kind of relationship with their blood and legal families, but feel that the relationship lacks the understanding and acceptance that is generally expected of a family. In some cases, this distance has always characterized the relationship; in others, it results from the abusive relationship.

"I was adopted when I was six, I never felt like I fit in anywhere. I was more than comfortable growing up, but I was not given empathy growing up. There was no interaction."

-Kim, Resident

Based on how Kim describes her family, it is understood that the close, loving interactions that generally typify families did not exist in her family of orientation. While she

explains that she was adopted at the age of six, and was always “comfortable,” the lack of empathy and connection present leaves room for a supplemental family, which the shelter can readily provide.

While Kim seemed to attribute a sense of not fitting in to being adopted, Deborah’s family, who were related by blood, simply “was not a close knit family.” Thus, when Deborah was stabbed by her son’s father, the shelter became a more feasible option, than contacting her family. Lucy faced a similar situation when looking for alternatives to shelter; her daughters told her that she could not stay with them, so she called PW. Lucy described her relationship with her own mother as strained, at best.

“I really didn’t think of her as my mother...I didn’t hate her, I didn’t love her. There was no love and no hate in the house. There was like nothing where I grew up.”

-Lucy, Resident

The lack of emotion in the home where Lucy was raised stands in stark contrast to the loving home that is often associated with the family. It is understandable that certain residents would turn to the shelter community, and construct a supplemental to fulfill their emotional needs.

Family members are often accepting and understanding, until the abusive relationship begins; unfortunately, it is at this particular point when the individual often needs their family’s support the most. Frustrated by their child’s involvement in an unhealthy relationship, women described how their families cut them out of their lives.

“And I’m sorry to say, I have...friends and family here a little bit, but they’re not helping me. My dad is here, and he ain’t helping me, and they right here in Alloy.”

-Princess, Resident

Despite their geographic proximity, Princess' friends and family, particularly her father, were not emotionally available to help her when times were difficult. Ashley, another resident, identified her father's unwillingness to support her, after he learned of her abusive relationship.

"I had my Daddy here, I would say he's supportive, but since I've been here, I've kinda changed my mind...he's really upset with me because I left in the first place. And every time I go over his house, he keeps talking about 'what you done did, you gonna get in another mess'...he just keeps talking that. And when I'm here [the shelter], they don't say that to me. You know, 'you messed up' and all that stuff. They don't say that to me here. My Dad said it to me, and that got me kinda upset cause he's real mad at me, cause I gotta do this. And I want to just up and tell him I'm going to do it myself, there's people at the shelter that will help me, you know?"

-Ashley, Resident

At times, it is the woman's presence in a shelter that is not accepted by the family. One woman, Holly, let her children visit their grandmother for an afternoon, only to receive a call later in the day. Her mother had decided that because Holly had left her abusive husband and was staying at the shelter, that she was "homeless," and therefore, her mother would not give her children back to her. She threatened Holly, telling her that she would call Children's Services if Holly interfered in any way. While Holly tried to maintain a relationship with her mother, the lack of acceptance made their family interactions strained, at best. Her supplemental family, however, could offer the support that was lacking.

A second type of supplemental family are those voluntary kin who fulfill a certain role that did not exist in one's blood and legal family. Lucy, a 60 year-old White woman, felt the other women, and particularly the children in the shelter, supplemented her own family in this way. Lucy had three grown children, two girls and one boy, none of whom had children of their own, or were particularly close to their mother. Her presence as one of the older residents of the shelter allowed her to act as a grandmother figure to those around her, a role that she felt she

excelled at, and gave her a sense of purpose. Lucy described her role as the grandmother in this way:

“When you get up in the morning, pass one of them, say ‘Hi, how are you?’ She’s on her way to school, you don’t have time, but you smile. You see someone having a bad day, you put your arm around her, say ‘I understand.’ I don’t even have to know the facts, but I understand. And that’s sometimes all they need to know.”

With the women and children acting as the grandkids she never had, Lucy was given a supplemental family, one she deeply cherished.

Third, the supplemental family may take over a particular role that is not performed well by the blood and legal family. Braithewaite et al. (2010) specify that this differs from the first category of supplemental family, in which the blood and legal family cannot accept or meet the emotional needs of the individual, in general. In this particular category, there is a specific role that cannot be fulfilled, and the voluntary kin supplements for that particular need.

“Mom is very...she doesn’t know how to be a mom. And I think she’s not a bad person, but sometimes to be a mom, you just got to sit back and listen, and not sit there for hours, telling you what you could or shouldn’t do. Or what you did is wrong. Or how you screwed up. My mom thinks everything deserves a lecture. If you screwed up, then she was going to give you a two hour lecture on ‘you know better than to screw up.’”

-Anne, Resident

Anne specifies that her mother is not a bad person, she simply “doesn’t know how to be a mom.” This lack of knowledge exemplifies what can be supplemented by the voluntary kinship.

Some families have difficulty understanding the severity of the abuse, and either feel the women are overreacting or become unable to cope with it themselves. Ava, a 26 year-old White resident, became very upset while trying to communicate to her sister over the phone why her advice of “try not to think about it” was not an adequate way to deal with her victimization. She described how her ex-boyfriend had choked her with the phone cord and locked her in the closet, and began to cry. While her sister was never able to offer her the support she needed, a fellow

resident heard her crying, and came into the room. She put her hand on Ava's shoulder, for the rest of the conversation. When family could not perform the task of caring for Ava's emotional needs, her PW family could.

Lastly, supplemental families may exist, not due to any kind of problems within the blood and legal family, but simply because they are geographically unavailable. Again, this geographic isolation is a strategy often employed by abusers; as a result, some residents in the shelter were far from their families as a direct result of their abuse. This distance may not have affected the quality of the relationship, but still creates barriers, nonetheless.

Claire's constant relocation meant that she was geographically dispersed from her friends and family. While she always considered herself to be an independent person, the isolation kept her family from realizing "how miserable" her quality of life had become.

"...back and forth, move to move. And I've always just taken care of myself...I don't think people realized how miserable things were in that house."

-Claire, Resident

Stacey, another resident, had also been isolated as a part of her abuse.

"I'm up here, I don't know anyone. I have no relatives up here, I came up here with my husband, so I don't know anyone. Now, if I was back home and this happened, I would just move in with one of my sisters, or my mom and dad, and you know, I could do that, but it's harder."

-Stacey, Resident

While Stacey had maintained a close relationship with her parents and sisters, she had moved with her husband to a new area, where she did not know anyone; it was at this point that the relationship had deteriorated, and become abusive. Constructing a supplemental family in the shelter community supplies the kinship that is otherwise geographically unavailable.

Some of the residents spoke specifically about the fictive kin at PW, and what it has meant to them during their stay. Mesh described how her PW family provided the opportunity to bond with other women.

“...it gives me a chance to talk, and be with different, talk with people, different kind of people. I like it cause I’m usually alone, um, I’m alone out here in Ohio.”

-Mesh, Resident

Melissa, another resident whose family was from another area, agreed with this idea.

“I don’t have anybody in the state of Ohio that I’m related to, you know? So, it’s nice to know that I have that [PW family]. It’s very warm and welcoming, and you know, [I’m] very grateful they are here to help, because I have no family. All my family’s from out of town, and so I really had nowhere to go that I felt was safe.”

-Melissa, Resident

Geographic obstacles, in these particular cases, meant the residents’ families lived out of town. However, geographic barriers can still exist, even when family lives within the same town. Lack of transportation, institutionalization, and even the shelter’s own limited pass system and rules about confidentiality regarding the shelter location can make it difficult for women to see their families and loved ones. These limitations emphasize the need for the PW supplemental family to help fill the void that blood and legal families leave. In this way, we see that the residents’ substitute and supplemental families, while created in a similar environment as the staff PW family, serve additional functions that add a certain degree of complexity to their relationships.

In addition to the added functions the PW family serves, there are also other characteristics of the residents’ voluntary kinship that distinguish it from the staff family. First, whether the resident identifies her voluntary kin as a convenience, substitute, or supplemental family, she is undertaking this identity during a difficult and vulnerable time in her life. While the staff may create a family identity as a result of stressful job, it is understood that the stress is

confined to that particular area of their life, and can be put aside at the end of the workday.

Residents, however, are burdened with a stressful personal relationship that has built up to the point where it has spilled into other areas of their life, and it is no longer safe for them to live in their homes or stay with their friends. Because this family identity is created as a direct result of such a difficult time, it holds a great deal of significance. This significance, accompanied by the isolation that many women experience as a part of their abuse, often makes the family identity their greatest support system. Claire described a “horrible, horrible day” she had during the winter, and how the PW family supported her.

“...I can’t remember if the whole day had been bad, or if it had just gotten bad after I picked [my daughter] up. I stopped at McDonald’s to get her something to eat before we got back. And, I rolled down my window at the drive-thru. It was raining, it was cold, and when I went to roll my window back up, it wouldn’t go up. And I’m like, what the heck? I had never, ever, ever had that problem. And it would not go up. So I’m driving down Main Street, window all the way down, she’s complaining about her body being cold, I’m getting more and more aggravated, and I just cannot figure out what is going on with this stupid car. So, and then, it just hit me, it’s because I’ve never had to worry about my car before. [My abuser] took care of it, because he could fix most of the stuff that was wrong with the car. So I’m like, now what am I going to do? I don’t have the money to get this thing fixed, I can’t call him to fix my car, um, and the stupid window won’t go up. So I’m driving down Main Street, and I went to [the pharmacy], cause [my daughter] had gone to the doctor, and he had given her a prescription for some medicine and the prescription that he wrote, the medicine is either nonexistent or really hard to get. So the pharmacy was supposed to be calling him, to see about changing the prescription. Since my window was down anyway, just go to [the pharmacy’s drive-thru]. Prescription wasn’t there. They kept saying that they had been trying to get in touch with the doctor, and he had never called them back. So that aggravated me. So, I needed to go to [the grocery store]. And when I pull into the parking lot, and the stupid window still won’t go up on my car. So I get out of the car, thinking maybe the wire isn’t hooked up on the battery good, or something, so I popped the hood, and I’m standing in the rain, banging on the battery,, nothing. I get back in the car, I’m fiddling around with stuff. I got so frustrated that I just started kicking it, up under the steering wheel, just kicking it. I was so aggravated. And in a miraculous way, all of a sudden it came on. So I rolled up the window, ran inside the store, get whatever I needed to get, ran in there, came back out. And my headlights were still on. And I said, ‘If it’s not one thing, it’s something else.’ So we came [to the shelter], and I walked in the door, and I was so pissed, just because of my car, because I hate not having a car. I work on the road, I take [my daughter] to school [on the other side of town]. My job, I travel. I have to go to [a different county], I need a car. And just all this going through my head, and I just, I thought if I was at

home, my car would be fixed. It would be worth it to me just to go home just to get the car fixed. And um, so I came in [the shelter], and everybody said, ‘What’s wrong? What’s wrong?’ And I was like, ‘My car.’ And Jacinda [staff member] goes out there with me, and my lights will not go off, I knew that the battery was going to die. I’m like, I just didn’t even want to speak. And that’s not me. Jacinda came out there with me, in the cold and the rain, and was helping me to unhook the battery, cause by that time, the battery was already super, super low. So she was unhooking it for me, in hopes that it would start up for me the next day, I got all this on my mind, and what I’m supposed to do [at that night’s house meeting], [was] ‘What Would You Say to Somebody Else’ [who came to the shelter after you]? And so I was like, ‘I’ll just pass.’ I just won’t say anything. Everybody came and started hugging me, and they were just trying to support me. And...one of the things I don’t do is reach out for help. I just don’t do that. And, um, so, that meant a lot to me. That...they saw, and they came to me. So, that...that really, it helped. And the next day, Jacinda came early to give me a jump with her car, and she jumped it for me. It started, and thank God, it’s started ever since.”

In spite of these close relationships that are created during times of duress, it is important to note that not all residents of PW are automatically members of the residential voluntary kinship. The same elements that the staff uses to reaffirm their family identity has, on occasion, been used by the residents to distance themselves from other residents, reinforcing boundaries to establish who is considered family and who is not (Lamont 2002). This othering process is openly acknowledged to exist by both staff and residents, who recognize that the shelter has a very delicate balance that can be upset with the addition of one new resident.

“I think it just depends. There’s not one, you know...today could be a good day, and then somebody else will come into the mix, and then...the whole dynamic changes. It just depends on who’s in the shelter at the time.”

-Joan, Staff

Occasionally, it appears that conflict or tension will center on one individual, in particular. Whether that person is the cause of the tension, or labeled a scapegoat by the group is more difficult to determine.

“Like, sometimes I feel like tension floats around the same person. It involves the same person, and goes with any group, too. I think there’s always the one person, they always wind up in it, every time. They just attract attention—but, yeah, there’s a pattern.”

-Wanda, Staff

Because the population of the shelter is constantly changing, the groups are subject to change, as well. Therefore, the in-group and out-group memberships fluctuate, and the women that were originally constructed to be a part of her family, may eventually be constructed to be a member of her out-group.

“Each group of people is so different. You can throw one person in here, and the dynamics of the whole...they shift...[it] could change tomorrow. I’ve seen it. One client’s getting along really good with everyone, and then another group of clients come in and then suddenly she’s in that group of clients, and the people that she’s been cooking with and laughing with...[aren’t her friends anymore].”

-Nadine, Staff

Angelica, a resident, summarized the shelter community group dynamics quite simply.

“Honestly, it’s like being in high school all over [again].”

-Angelica, Resident

The criteria that distinguish one as an “other” is not static. It changes as the members of the kinship change—again, the absence of one resident can result in a significant shift in the group dynamic. While the presence of boundary work is sometimes attributed to individual personalities, themes of seniority and various forms of discrimination emerged.

“Sometimes age. Sometimes, it’s race. And sometimes, it’s no apparent reason. Why this group is bonded...is [the attitude] that ‘we’ve been here longer, so we take ownership.’ I see that a lot. This is their shelter at some point after they’ve been here. And so, when somebody new comes in, they’re sort of, ‘You’re on my territory.’ They become territorial about the shelter.”

-Nadine, Staff

Wanda, another staff member, also described the variety of characteristics that she witnessed become salient in the othering process.

“I’ve seen it divide along racial lines, I’ve seen it divide along age lines, I’ve seen it divide along class lines. I mean, it’s just kind of difficult.”

-Wanda, Staff

Some of the residents identified negative attitudes as characterized by a particular “type” of woman, reinforcing boundaries of who belonged and who did not. Sometimes, as in the case with Kim, these attitudes dealt with race (see Chapter 5).

“It’s not a racist thing, because I was going with Blacks for quite some time, but I really get uncomfortable when Black women come in because they’re loud, they’re obnoxious, they’re rude, they’re self-centered—they think it all revolves around them. And they’re not interested in anything you have to say, and they bring a lot of chaos. I hate to say it, but they do.”

-Kim, Resident

At other times, these attitudes dealt with other characteristics, such as age.

“My roommate and I have come to the conclusion that there is one girl who is very prejudiced against older people...she has a thing against older people. Anything and everything she can [do to] single us out...she likes to single us out separately, so that nobody else is there when she does stuff. Um, for instance, we tried to watch...we had said all week that we were waiting on *The Apprentice* to come on. She made fifteen trips, in and out of the room, slamming doors, opening the [other] door, just standing there, turn[ing] around and laugh[ing]...I mean, just obnoxious stuff, anything to interrupt.”

-Celia, Resident

One summer, there were six women in the shelter—three African-American women, and three White women. Initially, all of the residents seemed to get along, although two of the African-American residents formed a closer bond with one another than they did with the other residents. They began to isolate themselves from the others, and the boundary work began on both sides (Lamont 2002). Members of the different groups went out of their way to avoid interaction with the other group, and complaints were made to staff about the others and their behavior, whether it was their cell phone use or their bathroom habits. However, it was not until the third African-American woman left that racial tension began to creep into the shelter. Up until that point, the division appeared to be based entirely on personality; now, there was now a visible distinction between the White women and the African-American women. Voluntary

kinship, while considered important to the residents, is not static—it can change very quickly, and for a variety of reasons.

As Celia indicated above, these boundaries can be maintained in a variety of ways. Just as sharing a meal reinforces the family identity, refusing or excluding someone from a meal establishes a boundary between the in-group and the out-group. Those women who are considered members of the voluntary kinship will often prepare the meal together, an activity that can be considered recreational, due to the lack of activity in the shelter. As a result, the process of planning and cooking the meal are not simply necessary steps to produce an end product, but an afternoon activity where voluntary kin exchange ideas and recipes, and share culinary experiences. The voluntary kin then sit down, and share the meal, reinforcing their shared identity¹⁹.

At times, the shelter staff may be invited to share the meal with the residents; this invitation also carries meaning, offering an honorary kin title that symbolizes acceptance and trust. However, a staff member must not simply assume they are invited to eat with the residents—to do so fails to recognize the legitimacy of the voluntary kinship and the rituals that reinforce it. On occasion, several members of the day staff have helped themselves to dinner without an invitation. These violations were immediately noted by the residents, who felt that they were treated as the staff's personal chefs; as a result, tension was created within the house between the staff and the residents. It is also understood that if a staff member is invited to eat with the residents, that the meal will be eaten at the table with them, for the same reason—the shared meal represents voluntary kin membership. To take the food elsewhere, such as the office, is to ignore the significance it holds. The exception to this rule is if a crisis call comes in during

¹⁹ Holidays at the shelter, such as Thanksgiving, tend to be particularly significant.

the meal; it is then understood that due to circumstances outside of the staff's control, they cannot remain at the table.

While it is not expected, staff members can do their part to encourage this bond by treating this invitation as they would respond a neighbor's dinner invitation. Complimenting the cook or asking the cook to share her recipes are both examples of proper etiquette that reinforce the sense of family that is associated with the shared meals. If staff has the time to help make any of the dishes, set the table, or assist with the clean-up afterwards, doing so indicates to the resident that they appreciate the invitation, and respect the voluntary kinship that exists.

“Thanksgiving was a really good memory for me. I work every major holiday here. I work Christmas day, and I work Thanksgiving day, cause I want to be able to give them a family-like atmosphere. I know they're, like, half of them aren't gonna be with their families, and you know, it was nice. There was a woman here, and she had a broken arm and she couldn't lift the turkey, so we actually made Thanksgiving dinner together. And it was, it felt like family...it feels like family.”

-Jacinda, Staff

I once heard a former resident speak publicly about her experience at PW's annual domestic violence vigil. Elizabeth was an older African-American woman who, after over 30 years of abuse, left her husband and came to the shelter. She mentioned that she remembered coming in and seeing that the women and I had just finished icing the cupcakes we had made, and kept asking her if she wanted one, or a cup of coffee. She laughed, and said it was that environment that enabled her to thrive, and become the woman that she is now. “Feeling like family,” as Jacinda put it, can refer to both the relationships that exist among the residents or relationships between staff and residents.

The out-group is minimally included in this process of preparing and sharing meals. They will not be invited to partake in the preparation of the meal, and, at times, will not sit and eat with the in-group. Sometimes this exclusion is subtle; someone will claim they are “tired” or

“don’t feel well,” and explain that she will eat later. Other times, the in-group simply will not inform the out-group that the meal is complete, and will eat without them. In either situation, the different groups recognize the significance of sharing a meal, and avoid it, in order to maintain boundaries.

Sometimes, the tension in the shelter exceeds this level. Not only do the women no longer want to share a meal with the other group, but they no longer want to share food at all. The shelter provides food for all of the women; if they would like to buy additional products (often specific brands of chips or pop), they are encouraged to use their own resources to do so. However, there is a strict rule against labeling food in the shelter; anything that is brought into the house must be shared. As a result, one way in which boundaries are maintained between the in-group and the out-group is by hiding food for only one group’s consumption. At one point, the shelter’s residents were so divided, that the staff began to find cans of pop hidden outside in the snow, and pop-tarts planted in the bathroom cupboard, with the cleaning supplies. One resident explained this behavior as a means of dealing with others’ greediness.

“Just like yesterday, I guess somebody bought something, and she didn’t even get to drink it. Someone else drunk it before she even, you know...she bought it.”

-Princess, Resident

The women staying at the shelter do not have many resources. If someone decides to use some of her limited money or funds from her food card, and indulge on a special treat, such as soda pop, it would be very frustrating to learn that another resident finished it before she had the opportunity to enjoy it. The shelter’s policy against labeling food would deny the woman any possibility of filing a complaint to the staff. While this point was initially addressed to point to the greediness of others, this same behavior is sometimes employed as a passive aggressive attack on other women in the shelter. Regardless of the motivation, the behavior against the woman

who bought the product would not have technically broken any rules, thereby not resulting in any type of punishment.

One of the residents, Claire, acknowledged that within her time at PW, food had become a major source of conflict, tension, and boundary maintenance (Lamont 2002).

“One of the big, big issues they’ve had with us here is food. I don’t know how I would do that any different.”

-Claire, Resident

Former resident Bianca described how food was used as a strategic tool, not only for boundary maintenance, but also as possible ammunition against out-group members.

“It was tough sharing everything with everybody, the food. Just like, you bring it in, you have to share it. Except, not everybody was the same with that. Some people would bring in food, and eat it in front of you. But if you bring something in, they’re the first ones to go and tell on you, because you didn’t share it. Or taking food upstairs to their rooms.”

-Bianca, Former Resident

Sharing food and meals represents a bond; refusing to do so highlights a complete lack thereof. Avoiding interactions with one another, sometimes in a very obvious manner, is another example of distancing behavior. It should be noted that the avoidance of any interaction makes it impossible for the women to engage in actively constructing shared memories or engage in accommodative behaviors associated with family identities.

“Some moms go [to the children’s playroom], depending on how well they get along with the other ladies. Depending on their drama preference. If they don’t want to deal with all that, they can go there.”

-Crystal, Staff

While avoiding interaction and engaging in distancing behavior can sometimes avoid drama, as Crystal describes, at other times, it can enhance the sense of tension and conflict in the shelter community. Former resident Bianca described how these particular types of distancing residents behaved:

“Or then you have the kind [of residents] that are...they come in, and they don’t want anything to do with anybody, they mad at the world. The energy they give off to everybody is just so negative, you just don’t want to be around this person. There was a lot of conflict...yeah, whether it was me and another person, or one of my friends and another person...”

-Bianca, Former Resident

Other boundary maintenance strategies are more aggressive, resulting in residents becoming confrontational with one another, or deliberately trying to make the other’s life more difficult.

“You know, [there] was a woman here, that...she pushed me, because she was trying to get at another resident to start a fight...we had to discharge ten people.”

-Jacinda, Staff

Sometimes the confrontations begin seemingly about nothing, and escalate to a breaking point. Kim identified her own involvement in a recent conflict with an out-group member, stemming from a random situation that appeared to be harmless.

“I had a blow-up today...there was a situation where one of the women just went on and on and on and on about...well, it was getting to the point, I just, you know, ‘Shut up already! Shut up!’”

-Kim, Resident

Such tense interactions are not uncommon, and Stacey, another resident, mentioned another occurrence in passing.

“I heard someone, I don’t even know who and who, but they clashed today and got smart with each other.”

-Stacey, Resident

One memorable evening, Ruth asked me for a pair of black pants for another resident’s daughter. Claudia, a 19 year-old resident, overheard, and told her that she had already given the girl an extra pair that she had. Ruth responded that the girl didn’t want “her stinky-ass pants,” and a fight broke out. Ruth, without any apparent provocation, disrespected Claudia as a means

of maintaining a boundary between them, solidifying her status as “other.” Both were discharged from the shelter.

As a result of this severe boundary maintenance, some residents choose to leave the shelter before they complete the program, and secure new housing arrangements. While it is difficult to discern whether they relocate to another safe location or return to their abuser, it is disheartening to know that the safe haven they turned to in their time of need became the site of more subordination and bullying behavior.

Despite the significance that is placed on the residents’ PW family identity, it is a temporary construction, as their stay in the shelter is for a limited amount of time. Thus, when a resident leaves the shelter for a more permanent housing solution, the close bonds that constituted a voluntary kinship slowly fade. Initially, the former resident will try to maintain close ties with her PW family, but as time progresses, the shared experiences of communal living and abusive relationships become distant memories, connected to an identity she no longer carries. Even residents who leave the shelter at the same time, with plans of becoming roommates or living close to one another, eventually break the kinship bond. There is seldom a memorable fight or event that severs the voluntary kinship; it is merely the result of no longer sharing the situational context that instigated the convenience family.

The Importance of Sisterhood

The family identity is not the only example of fictive kinship that is constructed in the shelter community. The sisterhood identity also plays an important role among the shelter staff and the residents, although its presence did not come as a surprise. The idea of “sisterhood” is historically significant within the shelter movement in the United States.

When the feminist movement gained momentum in the 1970s, claims-makers worked hard to establish domestic violence as a topic of importance, and largely white, heterosexual, middle-class feminists called on the notion of “sisterhood” to establish unity among women against the oppressive patriarchal system that was responsible. However, the vocabulary of sisterhood was not universally embraced—women of color criticized the overly simplistic gendered dichotomy for ignoring the varied lived experiences of women, and the various types of oppression that made up the “matrix of domination” (Collins 1990). As a result, the language of sisterhood, though not entirely discarded, has been generally viewed as inadequate within the feminist literature (Dill 1983; hooks 1984; Lorde 1984).

However, the vocabulary of sisterhood is still present, if under a somewhat different guise. In order to raise consciousness among the general public about domestic violence, advocates of the past and present emphasize that domestic violence is not limited to a certain “type” of woman—it can happen to anyone. This continues to imply a certain sense of unity among women, ensuring that the concept of sisterhood has not been entirely erased.

PW is no exception. Just as the second wave feminists introduced the sisterhood vernacular in an effort to bring women closer together, the language of sisterhood that exists within the shelter seeks to unify the staff and residents in two different ways—through a sense of common oppression, whether through abuse or patriarchy in general, and by “doing gender” (West and Zimmerman 1987).

Both staff and residents of the shelter identified the residents’ experiences as unifying, despite the differences that exist among them. The criticism of third wave feminists that sisterhood does not acknowledge women’s different life experiences is not directly addressed within the shelter. Despite the diverse staff, led by an African-American Program Director, and

the diverse community that it serves, racial and ethnic oppression and the “matrix of domination” are not directly acknowledged. Instead, all experiences are equalized under the heading that while “there is no one type of abuse²⁰,” “we’re all here for the same reason.”

Again, the purpose of this is to unify the residents, who often vary in age, race, ethnicity, religion, upbringing, and class, among other factors. Using language that emphasizes their common oppression creates a sense of solidarity among them. During one night shift, a major verbal fight broke out among the residents, and escalated to the point where on-call was contacted, and a member of the day staff came in. The staff member sat everyone down, and reminded them that they were all here for the same reason, indicating that the real enemy was not each other, but those who were responsible for their abuse. This approach worked—the women informally apologized to one another, citing stress over their abuse as the real reason for the altercation.

Staff members are not the only ones who minimize the differences that exist among the women. Residents acknowledged the differences, but focused on their similarities using this language of sisterhood.

“...being here, you're pretty much forced by the situation to share with other people, to trust other people with whatever, and...I really like to sit around and talk about things, and not, you know, what brought us here, because mine is so, everybody's is different. Mine wasn't physical, except for basically that last night. Mine was more emotional and mental. Um, so mine is a lot different from some other people's. But I just really like the fact that no matter what, we all have common ground, and I try to get everybody to see that, you know. We're all here for the same reason, basically.”

-Claire, Resident

Sisterhood not only creates a sense of solidarity among the residents, but between the staff and residents, as well. Many of the staff members were once in abusive relationships, and

²⁰ It is this “there is no one type of abuse” disclaimer that allows the staff to handle certain situations on a case by case basis, without openly acknowledging a matrix of domination.

often tell the women about their experiences. These stories also minimized differences, and emphasize how similar they are, and how they can understand where the women are coming from. There was never any indication that women may experience abuse differently.

“...there's something about somebody who has been through the...same thing that these people are here for, and has then gotten past just the survival of it, moved on in their life, and think the capabilities of being more effective are...truly there. So I know exactly how they feel, exactly what they're going through, what they experience, how they think.”

-Maria, Staff

Another staff member described the importance of sharing their stories with one another:

“...so you have to kinda, ah, build a bond, I guess, you know. First of all, I think, letting them know that we all have something in common. You know? That I'm not any different than you are, that I am a survivor of domestic violence. And I think once you, um, let the wall down, and let them know that, hey, we got something in common, then it kinda all plays together.”

-Aliyah, Staff

Some staff members specifically mentioned patriarchal oppression as a unifying presence among women:

“I believe that, you know, women are absolutely equal and capable...you know, um, we're treated like shit, you know, systemically...we still have some, some major societal problems in terms of the model of...masculinity and...femininity and just some of the things that socially are put down.”

-Wanda, Staff

Clearly, both staff and residents of the shelter unify under the common bond of oppression, using the concept of sisterhood to illustrate this relationship.

The language of sisterhood not only unified through common abusive experiences, but also through the experience of what it means to be a woman. The shelter consists of an all-female staff. According to the Program Director, this is because there are times when only one staff member is present in the shelter, and if that person was male, the women staying there may not

feel comfortable. Funding would not allow for double-staffing. However, residents indicated that female staff members were preferable to male because of the sisterhood that women share.

“We're all women here, and women understand women. Like, if you sent a man to go to the store and pick up some pads and juice, he'd get you tampons. A woman knows. You know, she will write it down and go get it, because she knows.”

-Lady, Resident

Solidarity through sisterhood was accomplished by emphasizing gendered activities and conversation. Again, this was used to minimize differences and highlight the importance of sisterhood. These gendered behaviors included styling each other's hair, giving one another manicures, and discussing topics like motherhood, shopping, shoes, appliances, and men. Interestingly, even women who ordinarily would not participate in certain gendered activities, would do so, as a means of connecting to the other women. Hair braiding, for example, often bridged racial and ethnic differences to create a sense of sisterhood among the women; in fact, in some instances, that was precisely why it was done. When Jennifer, a White 20 year-old woman, entered the shelter, she was visibly shaken and scared. Peaches, an African-American woman in her late thirties, took her under her wing, invited her to watch a movie with the rest of the ladies, and offered to braid her hair. Jennifer later told me that she had never had her hair braided before, but she accepted the offer, nonetheless. Both the offer and the acceptance of said offer had very little to do with Jennifer's grooming and personal appearance. It represented a bond of sisterhood.

Conclusion

Within shelter communities, both shelter staff and residents construct identities that are shaped by the social organization in which they are formed. However, the statuses of the women in question affect the nature of the interactions that take place; therefore, identities of staff and residents vary significantly, both in their construction and their maintenance.

In this chapter, I specifically addressed the identities that are encouraged in the shelter community, in other words, those identities that emphasize the positive influence that the shelter has had in women's lives. These positive identities focus on family and sisterhood, offering a sense of unity to the women of the shelter in a variety of ways.

Staff members at PW are known beyond the organization for their close ties, and have constructed a convenience family identity, based on their common, atypical, and sometimes traumatic work experiences that could not be understood by most friends or relatives. This fictive kinship identity is reinforced through various rituals, most notably through meals, and the selection the lunch venue. Staff members also reinforce their family identity through collective remembering, an interactive process where all of the family members actively construct collective memories, as well as engaging in accommodating behaviors.

In addition to their family identity, the staff also must maintain a positive employee identity, which can be a difficult balance. For many of the staff, their role at the shelter holds personal significance, and they do not see their position at PW simply as a means to a paycheck. It is a way to combat a social problem that they feel very deeply about. Therefore, when their job requires that they enforce rules or policies that seem harsh or revictimizing, many staff members experience role strain. However, many have found strategies cope with role strain, including befriending residents, minimizing differences, using discretion when enforcing rules, or in some cases, othering certain residents to justify the presence of said rules.

The identities that the residents constructed and maintained were similar, but again, the execution was significantly different. Like the staff, residents also constructed fictive kin identities; however, the need for these families often went beyond the convenience family identity the staff used. Thus, the residents also employed substitute and supplemental families identities,

particularly when their blood or legal families either (1) did not perform their functions; (2) were not present; (3) underperformed their tasks; or (4) were simply unavailable, due to being geographically located elsewhere. Family identities did not automatically include all residents in the shelter, and to a certain extent, that contributing factor may have made their membership feel a little more special. Boundary work established in-groups from out-groups; family members share meals and activities. Non-group members will find reasons to avoid one another, or will at times try to make life more difficult for one another. The divisions that make up these groups change on a regular basis.

One common way for the staff to try to alleviate tension between in-groups and out-groups is to reaffirm the sisterhood identity. All of the residents are reminded that they share a common oppression, and that “they are all here for the same reason.” The emphasis on solidarity in the sisterhood identity does not stop with the residents; the staff also engage in this identity construction, as well. In addition to building on the idea of oppression, residents and staff also bond over the common experiences of womanhood, and reinforce the sisterhood identity through gendered activities, such as polishing their nails together, or having gendered conversations, about shopping or raising children.

This chapter focused on the encouraged, positive, familial identities that staff and residents construct and maintain in different, but important ways, to establish a positive self-concept. In the next chapter, I will consider how do women of the shelter manage stigmatized identities given to them by society, as well as the shelter staff.

CHAPTER 7:

MANAGING STIGMATIZED IDENTITIES

While the shelter community is recognized as a site of identity construction for women who have experienced domestic violence (Loseke 2007; 2001), identity building and maintenance is not limited to positive identities within the shelter. The domestic violence literature has found that both society and staff members in shelters have constructed a variety of negative identities for women using their services (Krane and Davies 2007; Loseke 2007; Few 2005; Haaken and Yragui 2003 Donnelly, Cook, and Wilson 1999; Wharton 1989). PW's residents have been labeled and stigmatized by both society and shelter staff, and must learn to manage these negative identities to create and maintain a positive self-concept. In this chapter, I will discuss the construction and management of stigmatized identities of "the victim" and the "bad resident" within the shelter community, focusing on the circumstances that encourage these labels. I will conclude the chapter by considering how these stigmatized identities recreate a feeling of victimization in the residents of PW.

The Social Stigma of the Victim Identity

Like many populations with stigmatized identities, domestic violence victims often find themselves employing different strategies, such as identity work, to establish a positive self-concept (Rosenberg 1979). These stigmatized identities exist not only in their everyday lives, but also within the context of the shelter community. Women within PW often engaged in various types of identity work to reconstruct their identities in such a way that supports a positive self-concept.

Women in shelters who have established their identity as a victim find themselves in a precarious position. They have been labeled with a stigmatized identity, and based on their presence within the shelter itself, everyone they interact with on a daily basis is aware of this stigma. Of course, other women share this stigmatized identity within the shelter, but it still presents a situation where one's devalued identity cannot be hidden, and every interaction acknowledges the victim identity as a master identity (Roschelle & Kaufman 2004). Therefore, it becomes necessary to engage in identity work within the shelter environment to reconstruct a positive self-concept.

I found that women in the shelter reconstructed identities to establish a positive self-concept by using the in-group stigma management techniques identified by Snow and Anderson (2001; 1987): (1) distancing; (2) embracement; and (3) storytelling.

Distancing

In order to reconstruct a positive self-concept, it becomes important to not only assert who you are, but also who you are not. Women often feel the need to distance themselves from the shelter and the opportunities the shelter offers them, as a means of projecting an image of a proud, deserving woman, to establish their self-worth. This is done by complaining about the

shelter programs, policies, employees, the upkeep or cleanliness of the building, the type of food present, transportation available to them, and even other residents. While the shelter is not affiliated with any particular transitional housing, clients' case managers often meet with other agencies and community members to help them set up new housing. Residents sometimes distance themselves from the housing opportunities made available to them, dubbing them as too small, not located on the floor they wanted, and so forth. The ultimate goal is to demonstrate that the woman is better than this establishment and what it has to offer; that she no longer has to humbly accept whatever is given to her, but that she deserves better and will not accept less than that without a fight. She has distanced herself from the shelter, and, in doing so, she also distanced herself from the victim identity.

During one afternoon shift, a group of women gathered in the kitchen to vent about the shelter, and how they all planned to sue PW after they left. Their reasoning varied from the way shelter staff treated them to one mother feeling that her daughter would not have gotten sick, had she not been staying in the "filthy" shelter. No lawsuits emerged after any of the women left; this distancing strategy merely allowed them to feel better than their current circumstances and their need for shelter.

It has been previously discussed how women within PW engage in boundary work to establish who they identify as their voluntary kin. A similar process is used to distance oneself from the stigmatizing identity of the victim. Women also distance themselves from other women staying in the shelter, as a means of establishing who they are not. As a result, newer residents, or residents who seem to display the weakness associated with the victim identity, experience both aggressive and passive aggressive attacks from other residents who are using this strategy. Passive aggressive tactics include general othering behavior, such as not including the victim in a

planned meal, making an obvious show of leaving the room when the victim enters, and being deliberately messy in an area the victim is responsible for cleaning. Spreading rumors and talking viciously behind the victims' back is also a method used daily. Sometimes the attacks become more confrontational, involving verbal abuse, threats, and physical contact. All of these methods are meant to establish that this woman is no longer a weak victim, unlike certain others, and she actively engages in boundary maintenance to reaffirm that aspect of her new identity. Nevaeh, the previously discussed "bad resident," also serves as an example of a woman who distanced herself from the victim identity by distancing herself from the women in the shelter.

Embracement

Not all women reconstruct their identity by distancing themselves from the "victim persona." Instead, some women recognize their victim status as evolving into survivor status, which is a source of pride and empowerment often promoted by the shelter. Their survivor status signifies their ability to endure horrific experiences, and summon the strength to carry on. Because they were a victim, they are currently a survivor, which a badge that is worn proudly. This could also be defined as "covering" (Snow and Anderson 2001); that is, instead of denying or distancing themselves from the stigmatized identity, a positive association is instead attached to it. For example, some women choose to act as a welcoming committee to new residents, taking them under their wing, and orienting them to their new environment. This is done by telling them about the routines of the shelter, inviting them to partake in recreational activities, and by telling the new resident about their own abuse, encouraging her to stay strong. In this way, women use their stigmatized identity as a former victim as a source of expertise to help others.

One example of embracement was Noelle, one of the residents in the shelter, who became very protective of Carrie, a new arrival, as was evidenced at a house meeting one night. Carrie did not attend the house meeting because she was not feeling well. When the women began to divide up the house responsibilities during the meeting, Noelle asked to be given Carrie's chores. She became somewhat defensive of her stance, stating that while Carrie was dealing with abusive issues like the rest of them, she was also struggling with her college courses, and was not feeling well. Noelle said she would rather take care of her weekly chores for her, than have her deal with that stress, too. By taking Carrie under her wing, looking after her welfare, and stating to the rest of the residents that Carrie was in greater need of help than the rest of them, Noelle by contrast established herself as someone who was a protector, not a victim.

In addition to acting as a welcoming committee, women who choose embracement as a stigma management strategy also act as cheerleaders, encouraging the other women when they encounter difficulties. When women are denied government assistance, cannot find affordable housing, or face intimidating judiciary proceedings where they know they will have to encounter their abusers in court, the cheerleaders offer their support.

"I'm usually like the cheerleader. I'm usually the one that's trying to keep everyone's spirits up. It's my nature, it's what I do."

-Claire, Resident

Cheerleaders operate in different ways. Positive attitudes are sometimes offered under the guise of humor or silliness, but deliberately done so for the same reasons other cheerleaders offer support.

"They're trying to get calm, and you know, and I try to help 'em. I try to be silly, make 'em laugh, which they do, they think I'm a goofball, which is fine with me cause it makes them relax."

-Lucy, Resident

Storytelling

Sometimes women reconstruct their identity by engaging in storytelling, either speaking about their past or fantasizing about their future. While women in the shelter will sometimes engage in fictive storytelling, their stories often take on a more realistic tone. For example, some women talk about their past boyfriends who treated them exceptionally well, showering them with gifts, and often accepting her children as their own. They often blame themselves for the failure of the relationship, but they stress that they could have had a stable, healthy relationship, had they chosen it. Unlike the victim identity, this creates an identity based on agency, acknowledging their own decisions, and establishing their desirability among men other than their abusers. Anita, a Hispanic woman in her mid-30s, often engaged in storytelling about past boyfriends. “There was this nice doctor who wined and dined me. He treated me like a queen,” she said. “Everyone liked him, even my brother liked him. But I liked thugs...” She concluded her story by telling the other women that she recently ran into him at the grocery store. “He’s married now, has a wife and kids. And he’s happy. That could have been me,” Anita said. While a tone of regret was unmistakable in her story, Anita claimed responsibility for her decisions; *she* liked thugs, so *she* ended this relationship. This sense of agency separates her from the passive victim identity.

Similarly, Princess, an African-American woman in her early 20s, felt that it was important to note that her abuser was not “The One;” he had merely been a way to pass the time while the man she really cared about was in jail.

“[He said,] ‘Ain’t nobody going to treat you like I treat you,’ and I was like, ‘What you fail to realize is I was about to get married, three years before I even met you.’ I said, ‘The only reason I didn’t get married was because he’s in jail, and that is the only man who ever did it for me.’ He was the one who taught me how to love, taught me what a relationship was. And what he [abuser] failed to realize was, I still kept in contact with that man. That’s where my heart was, that’s who I knew I’d wind up being with. I

always knew. And I shouldn't have did it, but I'm only with you [abuser] because I'm passing time."

Princess also claimed responsibility for her actions—*she* should not have gotten involved with someone else while the man she really cared about was in jail, but *she* made that choice, and it empowered her to know that she did not need her abuser. She knew she had a better alternative waiting for her.

Combining Strategies

These strategies were not exclusive—women in the shelter frequently engaged in more than one of these behaviors. Mona, for example, arrived at the shelter wearing oversized men's clothing--her boyfriend would not allow her to wear women's clothing because he felt it showed off her body too much, and would be a sign of her flirting with other men. She was literally shaking with fear that he would somehow find her, and finish her off, as he often threatened to do. She engaged the victim identity, and visually represented it, as well. One of the other women took her under her wing, and she began to gain more confidence. She started to identify as a survivor, and embraced her victim identity as a sign of her strength. Just as someone helped her, Mona began helping other women who were new to the shelter, introducing them to the rules and inviting them to share meals with her. Over time, however, Mona's enthusiasm waned and she began avoiding new arrivals or obvious "victims," actively distancing herself from them, and then eventually from the shelter, as well. The more distancing Mona engaged in, the more confident she became that she did not belong in the shelter anymore, with the victims. It allowed her to rid herself of the stigmatizing identity of a victim.

However, the victim identity can prove advantageous to women in the shelter. While PW theoretically encourages a discourse of empowerment that corresponds with the survivor identity, staff members find in their everyday interactions that encouraging the victim discourse increases

efficiency and helps distribute limited resources. Therefore, while the shelter's ideology is one of empowerment, their practice focuses on the discourse of sympathetic victims.

Sympathetic Victims

In order for domestic abuse to be successfully constructed as a social problem in the 1970s, it was necessary for second wave feminists to characterize abuse as involving extreme violence (Martin 1976) that resulted in both physical (Hilberman and Munson 1977-1978) and psychological injuries (Hilberman 1980), which occurred repetitively (Dobash and Dobash 1979) and intentionally (Pagelow 1981; Loseke 1987). However, it became apparent that not all victims were considered equally sympathetic; as a result, second wave feminists courted public sympathy by constructing "the morally pure victim" (Davies, Lyon, and Monti-Catania 1998; Loseke 1999; 1992), a blameless woman who was severely injured by a horribly abusive man. The image struck a chord, and the identities of the "battered woman" and "the victim" were created.

Domestic violence shelters, established in the U.S. as a direct result of this claims-making strategy, aim to "repair" these damaged identities, centering their mission statement on the "battered woman" and the "victim" (Loseke 2007; 2001). However, services become limited to those women who display what Loseke has referred to as the "official reality" of domestic violence (Loseke 1987). Shelters have a limited amount of room and resources available, and it becomes necessary to filter requests for shelter in some way, in order to determine who will be approved. Those requests submitted by women who identify as victims, and use the victim discourse (Leisenring 2006) are more likely to be taken seriously, and thus receive shelter (Dunn 2001; Loseke 1992; 1987).

The use of the victim discourse to gain entry to shelter is further complicated when one considers the increasing relevance of the survivor discourse in contemporary shelter culture (Best

1997; Dunn 2002; 2005; Loseke 1999). The survivor discourse has been used increasingly as a replacement for the victim discourse because it emphasizes a sense of agency and an active choice in women's behavior. Many shelters are increasingly built on this message of empowerment, and encourage the survivor identity in theory, but due to a severe lack of funding, must provide resources only to those women whom they feel need their services the most. The crisis calls that are considered to be the most "in need" are those that follow the victim identity script (Dunn 2001; Goffman 1959; Leisenring 2006; Loseke 1992; 1987). Thus, while shelters may theoretically support the survivor discourse, practice reveals the victim identity script to be a far more effective tool for women in need of services. Women who use the survivor discourse are often regarded with suspicion, on the basis that they are not "really battered" (Ferraro 1983, 297).

The requirement of using the victim discourse does not end once a woman gains access to the shelter. However, once in the shelter, she is also presented with the survivor discourse. In this section of the chapter, I will describe how both the victim identity script and the survivor discourse are present in different aspects of shelters, and specifically within PW. I will focus on the consequences of whether or not shelter residents embrace these scripts in the approved context, and the resulting effect on their identities--primarily, how the staff constructs them as "good" or "bad" residents, and what each of these identities entails. Because the distinction between good and bad residents often depends on how closely the residents adhere to the shelter policies, I explore the class and race implications that may exist in the policies, and how the policies can create an unfair disadvantage for certain residents, who are more likely to receive a bad resident label. Lastly, I focus on the topic of revictimization within the shelter, and how shelter policies can recreate the feeling of being in an abusive environment.

The Victim Identity Script

Originally conceptualized by Goffman (1959) as a component of dramaturgy, scripts are defined as culturally shared stories or “an expected unfolding of events” that are both considered appropriate and “provide a rationale... for a particular issue or course of action” (Vanclay and Enticott 2011, 260). The victim identity script that is used to gain entry to the shelter, and is encouraged within the shelter community, originated from the same second wave feminist ideology that was used to construct domestic violence as a social problem, and therefore provided the foundation for domestic violence shelters (Davies, Lyon, and Monti-Catania 1998; Loseke 1999; 1992; Murray 1988). Despite the fact that not all shelters operate under a feminist assumption, domestic violence organizations continue to use the victim identity script (Acker 1990; Ferree and Martin 1995; Scott 2005; Rodriguez 1988; Wharton 1987), as do many social service organizations operating under a variety of ideologies (DeGarmo, Feltey, and Pendelton 1993). Elements of the victim identity script can be found throughout the shelter, reflected in rules and policies, the shelter staff, and the resources they provide to the residents in order to better understand their abusive situation. One example of such a resource is the Power and Control Wheel, a concept developed in 1984 by the staff at the Domestic Abuse Intervention Project (DAIP).

The Power and Control Wheel is meant to illustrate the many ways women are controlled in abusive relationships, describing how abusers use coercion and threats, intimidation, emotional abuse, economic abuse, isolation, minimizing or denial of responsibility, male privilege, children, and even existing systems of oppression (Chavis and Hill 2009) to establish their own dominance within the relationship, and keep their partner subservient (Appendix A). Many shelters have adopted it, and have used it as a means of interpreting women’s experiences through the victim

identity script. It is a tool meant to assist women in recognizing the patterns of victimization they have experienced in their relationships, thus recognizing themselves as victims. PW, for example, includes a copy of the Power and Control Wheel in the information packet that is given to each client at the time of intake, and it is listed as a recommended topic to discuss during house meetings. Residents of PW are encouraged to use the vocabulary of the Power and Control Wheel to describe their experiences, and are, at times, corrected if they use a different discourse, a practice that is not considered unusual within the shelter culture (Loseke 2001). For many shelters, the purpose of informing women of their victimization is so they can transform into survivors²¹.

Survivor Discourse

While tools such as the Power and Control Wheel illustrate the victim identity, shelters, including PW, also emphasize the importance of the survivor discourse (Dunn 2005). Empowerment and agency are key words in the survivor discourse; however, at PW I found that the survivor discourse quickly becomes complicated in a way that the victim identity script does not.

The staff at PW feels very strongly about the empowerment of women and upon their arrival at the shelter, the residents are encouraged to use the victim identity script, with the intention that they will then empower themselves with knowledge and become survivors. In the context of a house meeting, when a woman is discussing how she feels about her past relationship, it is easy for staff to encourage the woman to embrace the empowering survivor script and let go of the victim identity script. But within the context of everyday shelter interactions, it becomes more difficult and sometimes, the lines between “agency” and “entitled”

²¹ There are various interpretations as to what constitutes a survivor of domestic violence (Dunn 2005). I am operating under the definition used by PW, which is based on individual empowerment.

become blurred. At PW, the residents were indirectly encouraged to use the victim identity script in their everyday interactions, because it reinforced the residents' subordinate status, making the interaction more convenient for the staff, who were limited in their time and resources. The staff still strongly believed in a message of empowerment; they simply found that it was difficult to operate the shelter on a day-to-day basis, if residents were using the survivor script to interact with them. As a result, both the victim and survivor scripts existed within the shelter, and residents were encouraged to use them at different times. When discussing their abuse and their future plans, the survivor discourse is appropriate; when interacting with the staff, the victim script is used. Staff distinguish whether residents use the scripts appropriately or not by providing them with good and bad resident labels.

“Good” and “Bad” Residents

Both victim and survivor identities are accepted within PW. However, when interacting with the staff, there are consequences related to which script is used. Women who engage in victim-appropriate behavior and discourse are more likely to be considered “good residents” or “nice residents,” whereas women who use the survivor discourse that is filled with messages of agency are more likely to be viewed as “bad residents.” The staff commonly uses the terms “good” and “bad” residents to summarize the behaviors of individual women or the group in general. It is important to understand that the relationships that exist between the staff and the residents are more complex than these labels indicate; staff members, in addition to having a professional relationship with residents, often have close personal attachments with them as well. Thus, by using the terms good and bad resident, staff members are not trying to indicate their like or dislike for the resident; they are often trying to communicate in a short amount of time, such as

between shift changes, who is at the shelter and what type of behavior the other staff member can expect of them.

I would like to emphasize that using the appropriate victim script alone does not necessarily qualify someone as a good resident; if a woman's behavior does not correspond with her victim script, she is likely to be seen as insincere, and therefore a bad resident. Good and bad resident labels are often constructed from a combination of characteristics and behaviors that are created and upheld through the everyday interactions among and between staff members and residents and the interpretations of the social situation.

Good and Bad Residents: Gratitude

The master status of a good resident is that of a morally pure victim, who has principles and stands on high moral ground (Loseke and Cahill 1984). One way that is expressed at the shelter is through gratitude. Residents exhibit their gratitude toward the shelter and its staff for helping them in their time of need. Gratitude can be expressed verbally, and through their compliance with the shelter rules and policies. Completing chores in an acceptable manner, cooking for the house without complaint or special requests, and complying with the rules of the pass system reflect the obedient nature of the good resident, who feels that following the rules is a small price to pay for their safety. Crystal, a member of the day staff, voiced her recognition of constructing identities for the residents.

“We don't treat everyone the same all of the time and it's not necessarily based on black or white. It's more about whether someone is a 'good resident,' you know, they're quiet. If you have someone who's a little more verbal, they tend to be treated differently.”

Good residents do not question the staff or the shelter policies. They quietly accept the conditions of the environment around them. It is important to recognize how closely this parallels the victim identity within the abusive relationship, where the victim had to both anticipate and

quietly accept whatever kind of environment the abuser created (Davies, Lyon, and Monti-Catania 1998; Loseke 1999; 1992).

Bad residents, on the other hand, question both the staff and the shelter policies. The staff has described this behavior as acting entitled, and view it as not appreciating what the shelter has done for them. Entitled residents are those who are viewed as manipulating the shelter system for their own purposes. “Manipulation” or “using the system” are terms used by staff, which encompasses a variety of misdeeds, from gaining access to the shelter when they are not “real” victims of domestic violence to taking more shelter donations than they are seen as needing. Both of these offenses are rooted in the idea of women laying claim to scarce resources that the shelter has difficulty providing to all who need them. This results in an effort on the part of the staff to regulate the resources available to the residents, to determine who “really” needs shelter or donations, and who is exploiting the system. In the excerpt below, Wilma, a member of day staff, expresses frustration that certain residents make unreasonable demands, considering they live at the shelter for free.

“One of the things we do here at the shelter is, even if they have means of getting things for themselves, we don’t encourage it. We sit back and we give them whatever they need to survive. Um, if I had my own shelter, um, if they had the means...to do some things on their own, I would encourage them to do it. I wouldn’t just allow them to have everything at no cost, cause then there’s really no responsibility; they just take things for granted. You know, because I see that here. I see what food gets wasted, and it’s because, ‘Well, I didn’t pay for it.’ Um, I can see a gallon of milk go out of code, one day out of code. It expires on the 20th, and today’s the 21st—‘Well, I’m not drinking that, that’s expired.’ Whereas, if you were at home, you’d drink that milk. You know?”

Betty is an example of a woman who was labeled as a bad resident due to what the staff saw as a lack of appreciation and excessive demands. The shelter operates largely on donations, and much of what staff is able to provide for residents comes directly from donations. Betty was very specific in her needs—she would only use certain brands of hair conditioner or cough syrup.

The staff explained to her that the shelter very rarely buys these products—they are donated. If she had a preference as to which brand she used, they recommended that she buy it for herself. Betty did not think this response was acceptable, and contacted the executive director of McKinley, Inc., the shelter's parent company. The executive director agreed with the staff, and told her that if she preferred to use certain brands that the shelter did not have, it was her responsibility to purchase them. Betty never quite accepted this answer, and her status as a bad resident was solidified.

Certainly, the staff did not commend Betty for empowering herself, taking charge of the situation, and speaking to the executive director of McKinley Inc. While she was engaging in behavior that indicated that she was not a victim, but an agent of her own free will, the general consensus was that she was unnecessarily making life difficult, and drawing attention and resources away from other women who had more important issues that the staff needed to attend to. This situation demonstrated how the victim identity script had the ability to make interactions between residents and staff more efficient, and convenient for other residents.

LaTanna, another "bad resident," was notorious for constantly asking staff members for various items of clothing and toiletries. It was known that she did not actually need these items; she hoarded them. When staff began to notice the excessive amount of donations she was keeping in her room, she began to develop a system where she would ask a staff member for one item, and then wait until the next shift to ask the next monitor for more donations. By using this strategy, she gave the appearance of not asking for too much, while she was, in fact, gaining a great number of items. Different staff members spoke with her about this behavior, and explained how it hurt the shelter, and PW's ability to help other women, but it had no effect. LaTanna merely waited until the next shift to ask for more.

LaTanna's behavior was perceived as defying that of the morally pure victim—she deliberately misrepresented herself to the staff in such a way to ensure she received the most donations possible. Even when the staff spoke to LaTanna, in an effort to explain why she could not have the number of donations she wanted, she continued to make requests. Her “manipulation of the system” violated the cultural feeling rules regarding sympathy (Loseke 1987); her lack of the victim discourse labeled her as a bad resident.

Bad resident identities can remain, even when the resident is no longer in the shelter. During the holiday season, the shelter receives a large number of donations that are meant to be Christmas gifts. The House Manager carefully rations these donations, and is therefore able to not only distribute them to the current PW residents, but the women and children who stayed at the shelter in the past year. One day during the holiday season, Deborah, a former resident, called. She had received holiday gifts from the shelter last year, after she had left, and wanted to know if she would receive gifts this year, as well. The staff explained they only have the resources to provide gifts to people who had been in the shelter in the last year, and after the call ended, were floored by what was viewed as greed. How long did she expect the shelter to provide for her? Despite the fact that Deborah had been viewed as a good resident while she was in PW, she began to be constructed as a bad resident, due to what was viewed as a sense of entitlement on her part.

Just as PW must decide who is most in need of help in order to determine who will gain entry to the shelter, a similar philosophy determines who receives holiday gifts from PW. The staff feels that women and families in the shelter, and who have left PW in the past year, are in more need of financial help around the holiday season because they are assumed to be in transition. Families in such circumstances, particularly when children are involved, are

considered morally pure victims of the highest order (Loseke 1987); holiday gifts are meant for them. While Deborah thought she was making an innocent inquiry, it was interpreted as threatening the limited resources of the most morally pure victims of them all—children. Their morally pure status emphasized that she no longer had a victim identity.

Occasionally, PW is presented with situations where the distinction between reasonable requests and bad resident behavior becomes somewhat blurred. TaChelle, an African-American woman, had been in an abusive relationship with a white man, who constantly berated her and told her how “dirty” she was. In what the staff suspected was a related behavior, TaChelle would take several hour-long showers daily, and was very conscious of how clean she was. As a result, in the course of a week, TaChelle would ask for twenty bars of soap²². It was determined that she did need it—she would only ask for more when she used up her own bar. However, the staff felt that they could not keep supplying her with soap at such a rate, although there was plenty available, as soap is probably one of the most frequently donated items. They explained to her that she would have to buy her own soap, and made a formal note to all the staff that they were not to distribute any more soap to her. Cutting off donations to a certain resident is usually reserved for dealing with extreme “bad” resident behaviors (such as when LaTanna was stockpiling donations), but TaChelle was given this treatment, as well.

When staff members refer to residents who manipulate the system, they may also be referring to women who have not experienced domestic violence, but create a story in order to gain entrance to the shelter. Over the course of their stay, their story eventually unravels, and the staff encourages them to find housing elsewhere as quickly as possible, to make room for women who are in need of emergency shelter. Lying to staff and using the shelter and its limited

²² As recorded in the staff log book. She may have received more, but such occurrences were not formally logged.

resources when a woman is not really a victim of domestic violence can be a source of great frustration among the staff, who feel that a real victim may be unable to access resources intended for her, due to the imposter's manipulative move. However, there are various shades of gray in this situation. It is known to the staff that the vast majority of the imposters are homeless, and had no other option for housing. While there is a homeless shelter in Alloy, it reaches capacity quickly, and has rules concerning drug testing. Also, because it is a religious-based organization, it requires its residents to attend religious services; these factors make the homeless shelter a less appealing alternative to some. Instead, a story is concocted to allow their family to find a temporary home.

Anita, a Hispanic woman with three children, was often suspected of manipulating the system. She had been in an abusive relationship for many years, and had come to the shelter numerous times in the past when she had been in severe danger. However, the staff often felt that Anita had an entitled attitude towards the shelter, and on at least one occasion, exaggerated her story to gain entry. For example, when I answered one of her crisis calls, she calmly began, "I don't know if you're new, but I used to be there, and I need a place to go." She then proceeded to tell me that she was already at the pick-up location, but was very reluctant to describe any kind of recent abuse. Her calm demeanor, assumption she would be admitted despite not completing an assessment, and vague story regarding her abuse, created suspicion among all of the staff members (including myself) regarding her genuine need for shelter. Anita and her children were admitted, but she was constructed by the staff (again, including myself) as entitled based on her demeanor on the telephone, and was suspected of being a manipulator before she entered²³.

²³ For some staff members, Anita's entitled label may have also been influenced by her behavior during her past stays at PW. Because this encounter was my first interaction with Anita, my label was solely based on her demeanor on the phone.

Theft, or suspected theft, of shelter property may also result in the bad resident identity. Again, this behavior, while detrimental to the shelter's ability to provide to all those in need, is primarily viewed as reflecting an attitude of entitlement—these residents take beyond what is necessary, and are ungrateful for what was freely provided to them. Many of the supply closets that hold donations have had their locks picked, and a large number of items have been removed. Initially, deadbolts were installed to deter this problem; later, when the deadbolts were somehow bypassed, padlocks were added to the security setup.

The shelter property most commonly taken is linens, towels, toiletries, and paper products, such as toilet paper. It has often been suggested, by both staff and other residents, that these particular items are taken before the resident leaves the shelter permanently, in order to avoid paying for them when they are in their new home. This hypothesis certainly makes sense—many of the women who use PW's services have a limited income, and are transitioning from living rent-free in a communal home with free utilities and food to a house or apartment where they will have to make their dollars stretch to cover the necessities. Saving money by taking shelter property, such as shampoo, can seem somewhat victimless, when faced with the daunting task of starting over on a budget. However, such assumptions concerning the motivation behind thefts are considered irrelevant, and women accused or suspected of theft of shelter property are considered to be bad residents.²⁴

Good and Bad Residents: Parenting

For those residents who brought their children to the shelter, parenting skills become an important indicator of whether the good resident identity will be applied to an individual. However, all childrearing styles are not equally valued; just as institutions such as the education

²⁴ Theft of other residents' belongings can also result in bad resident status

system provide an advantage to children who are raised in a home that employs “concerted cultivation,” (Lareau 2002) the organizational structure of the shelter requires children be raised in a manner that reflects White middle class ideals (Lareau 2003; Acker 1990; Scott 1986).

Concerted cultivation is a childrearing strategy that has been correlated with the middle class in both qualitative (Lareau 2003) and quantitative studies (Cheadle & Amato 2011). This middle class approach to raising children focuses on actively encouraging children’s talents, opinions, and skills (Lareau 2002), most notably by enrolling them in multiple extracurricular activities that are organized by adults. Parents also use reasoning and extended explanations to direct their children’s behavior, viewing the situation as an opportunity to introduce new vocabulary or ideas as a part of their children’s socialization process. It is not uncommon for children to also use these opportunities to negotiate the terms of their behavior, at times employing the vocabulary gained from previous parental encounters. As a means of remaining actively engaged in their children’s lives, parents also interact with the institutions their children encounter, although they are not entirely positive; parents are often willing to intervene and offer criticism of the institution’s approach to their children, in order to ensure their child’s talents are encouraged in an optimum way. This approach prepares the child to also question institutions in the future, attributing a sense of entitlement in children (Lareau 2003; 2002).

While this approach is not the only childrearing strategy, institutions, such as the education system, informally support it as the superior choice, placing children raised in this fashion at a distinct advantage. The organizational policies and rules of PW, particularly those rules pertaining to children, reflect a preference for a concerted cultivation approach. Those mothers residing at the shelter who are familiar with a middle class upbringing are more likely to raise their children in a manner that the shelter will find acceptable, thus earning the good

resident status. However, because shelter residents tend to be lower-class women who do not have the resources to make alternative living arrangements, a different childrearing method is often used.

Lower class mothers are more likely to engage in the natural growth method of childrearing (Cheadle & Amato 2011; Lareau 2003). The accomplishment of natural growth cultural logic is based on the understanding that if a parent provides a child with love, food, and safety, their child will naturally grow and develop into a properly socialized adult (2003). Unlike concerted cultivation, this approach allows children to engage in unstructured, spontaneous play with other children, often members of their kin. Instead of reasoning and extended explanation to guide behavior, directives are used. Children are not given the opportunity to negotiate the circumstances of their behavior, and rarely question adults. Parents do not question or interfere with institutions that interact with their children; however, that does not necessarily mean parents trust these systems implicitly. There is a degree of distrust that exists, and children learn this attitude. The institutions are not challenged, but it is understood that their actions may not entirely be in the family's favor. Children raised in the accomplishment of natural growth are at a distinct disadvantage because institutions favor other childrearing methods. Lower class mothers at PW, who are more likely to use this cultural logic of parenting, are also at a disadvantage; they are more likely to be viewed by staff as a bad resident for using a strategy other than concerted cultivation.

Supervision, behavior, discipline, and quality time, components of concerted cultivation, each contribute to what the shelter considers to be worthwhile parenting skills. Mothers are expected to supervise their children, regardless of age, at all times, with no exception. If a mother needs to use the restroom or take a cigarette break, she must fill out a childcare form, describing

where she will be, when she will return, and who will be responsible for her children during this time. However, good residents supervise or fill out childcare forms consistently, but not excessively. A mother who is “overusing” the childcare forms will be perceived as taking advantage of others’ generosity, and will be labeled a bad resident. Carla, a 29 year-old White woman, was considered a good resident by staff for closely supervising her energetic 17 month-old daughter, particularly because that task was a rather daunting one, which often required her to run after the little girl for most of the day.

Bad residents leave their children unattended, particularly young children. Unsupervised children become particularly problematic when the children wander into the office where the staff may be busy with a variety of important matters, including crisis calls. Simona, a 20 year-old biracial mother, seldom supervised her three year-old daughter Lee, who habitually walked into the office and refused to leave. Lee disrupted many crisis calls, and although Simona otherwise qualified as a good resident, she began to develop a bad resident reputation.

Mothers are also responsible for their children’s behavior, so if children act out or create a mess, even when supervised, it reflects poorly on their parenting skills. Therefore, having well-behaved children who clean up after themselves can help women earn the good resident identity. Rita, an African-American woman in her 20s, had just arrived at the shelter when she was constructed as a good resident, based on her attentiveness and how well she cleaned up after her five children.

Poor supervision is magnified when the children misbehave regularly, or leave continuous messes. As Rita demonstrated, messes are not necessarily damning by themselves, as long as the mother takes responsibility. Bad residents do not take responsibility for their children or their messes. For example, Ruth consistently avoided cleaning up after her five children by

claiming the mess could not be theirs, because they were not allowed to have whatever constituted the mess. Even when staff members or other residents witnessed her children creating a mess, she continued to deny their responsibility. Thus, Ruth became a bad resident.

In addition, a mother's reaction to her child's poor behavior influences the bestowal of a good resident identity. Physical discipline is not allowed in the shelter, which is meant to be a violence-free environment. Therefore, women who find alternative disciplinary actions, such as time out or taking away a privilege or treat, are viewed as having good parenting skills. When her ten year-old son pushed his little sister off the monkey bars, Peaches, an African-American woman in her 30s, sent him to their room for an hour, warning him that the next time he acted up, he would be punished for the entire day. Her prompt, non-violent reaction reflects the behavior that is encouraged and rewarded by the shelter staff.

Physical punishment of children can be grounds for an automatic bestowal of bad resident identity. This behavior is considered particularly unacceptable within the shelter, where it is emphasized that violence is never an appropriate response. Staff members sometimes assume that the women at the shelter also subscribe to this idea, because they experienced violence in their relationships. However, this assumption is not always true, as some women do not view physical discipline of children as abusive or violent, particularly if they do not hit or spank their children. Regardless, it is viewed as the responsibility of staff members to intervene when mothers use physical discipline.

“[My daughter was misbehaving, it reached the point] where I was roughing [her] around, I ain't gonna say really roughing around, but I picked her up [by her arm], [and said], 'You better sit your ass down.' That was like the second day I was here--I mean, I was past my wits, like my head is about to pop off. I can't take it. And [a monitor] was like, 'You know, I got to write you up. You can't be, you know, yelling at her or hitting.' I said, 'I didn't hit her, I picked her up and I went like that [indicating that she sat her daughter in the chair, while holding her arm].' I said, 'A hit is a hit. You can say I slammed her down [into her chair], or whatever, but I didn't hit her.'”

-Alyssa, Resident

While Alyssa openly admitted that she was physical with her daughter, she did not feel that her actions were unacceptable disciplinary measures because she did not hit her daughter. The shelter policies do not allow for blurred lines of distinction, however, and the monitor wrote her up. These inconsistent ideas of what constitutes acceptable disciplinary measures between staff and residents results in bad resident status. While some mothers who are caught physically disciplining their children are guided to use other means of punishment, there have been several occasions where the physical discipline was considered so severe that it required that the staff contact Children's Services, who took the children away. In these instances, the staff is not the only group who constructs the mother a bad resident. Other residents, and perhaps more importantly, the state constructs them as unfit parents, and negates their parental rights (Reich 2005).

Lastly, women who spend time interacting with their children by reading to them, coloring, or engaging in other forms of play, are considered to be "better" mothers than those women who use the TV to occupy their children's attention. Erica, a 38 year-old White resident, was a middle school teacher, and often spent a great deal of time not only with her children, but the other children, as well. She thoroughly enjoyed creating craft projects for them, and the staff dubbed her a "good resident," largely based on this behavior.

Bad residents rely on the TV as a means of entertaining their children, and do not monitor what type of program their children are watching. Their lack of censorship is understood by staff to translate to a lack of caring about their children. Daisy allowed her six year-old son to stay up with her one night and watch a scary R-rated movie. The next day, during a conversation with staff, she casually mentioned that he had nightmares after watching the movie. The day staff was

horrified that she had allowed him to watch such a movie at his age, and told her she was no longer allowed to let her children watch R-rated movies. Daisy, while mildly annoyed that her parental decisions regarding movies was revoked, did not dispute their decision. Despite her cooperation, she was seen as a bad resident.

Clearly, certain parental strategies are considered more desirable than others, and mothers within shelters are judged according to which method they use. These choices are not made randomly—they are connected to social class (Cheadle & Amato 2011; Lareau 2003; 2002; Kohn 1977) and in some cases, race (Cheadle & Amato 2011; Deater-Deckard et al. 1996; Giles-Sims, Sraus, & Sugarman 1995). While Lareau (2003; 2002) did not find race to be a significant predictor of childrearing practices, other researchers have found that English-speaking White parents are more likely to utilize concerted cultivation than African American, Hispanic, or Asian parents, even when social economic status is controlled (Cheadle & Amato 2011). In particular, it has been determined that African American parents are more likely to use physical discipline, such as spanking, than White parents, indicating a preference for accomplishment of natural growth method (Deater-Deckard et al. 1996; Giles-Sims, Sraus, & Sugarman 1995). Thus, lower-class minority women are more likely to be subjected to the bad resident identity, based on their parenting practices.

Good and Bad Residents: Respect

Another defining characteristic of good residents is how well they interact with the other women in the shelter. Residents who are friendly, or at least respectful, to the other women and children in the shelter, can earn the good resident identity. Having this particular characteristic will, at times, compensate for lacking other qualities of the good resident. For example, Mesh, a withdrawn 23 year-old African American resident, had a difficult time interacting with the other

women in the shelter. Her odd behavior made the other residents uncomfortable, and they often avoided her or used her as a scapegoat for any problems that existed. This resulted in Mesh becoming even more withdrawn, and more socially awkward, which led to a downward spiral of negative interactions with the other women. When Savannah, an African-American woman in her 30s, came to the shelter, she befriended Mesh, inviting her to watch movies, share cigarettes, and stood up for Mesh when others criticized her. Having a friend in the shelter had a noticeable impact on Mesh—she smiled, became less withdrawn, and grew more talkative as time passed. As a result of her friendly demeanor towards Mesh, the staff often described Savannah as an ideal resident, despite the fact that she regularly had to be reminded to supervise her six children, a behavior that would typically warrant a bad resident identity.

Bad residents are confrontational and territorial, creating a hostile and tense environment within the shelter that is reminiscent of the abusive situation that these women just left. Their interactions with the staff and residents are strained, at best. Kesha, a 31 year-old African American resident, initially got along well with everyone when she arrived, but quickly became a dominating presence in the shelter. She bullied the other residents, and everyone felt the need to tread lightly when she was around. On one occasion, she accused another woman of stealing her hairbrush. She was screaming so loud that when the monitor approached her and asked her to calm down because she was scaring the children, Kesha did not stop—not because she was ignoring the monitor, but because she could not hear the monitor's request over the volume of her own voice. Several women left the shelter and returned to their abusers to escape Kesha. Her failure to interact well with others, and her revictimization of other residents led her to be considered a bad resident.

Good and bad resident identities are rarely constructed based on one significant event that occurs in the shelter; instead, they are woven together through the accumulation of minor occurrences that happen on a daily basis. Consistently completing chores and cooking duties in an acceptable fashion over the course of a resident's stay is often more likely to earn a good resident identity than one instance of monumental selflessness. Similarly, a bad resident will seldom earn this title in one act of defiance. Daily interactions over time construct and maintain these resident identities.

At times, women within the shelter behave inconsistently, and their accumulated actions cannot be interpreted quite so easily, thus making it more difficult to identify them as good or bad residents. Inconsistencies in behavior can be caused by a variety of factors, including staff on duty and other residents. Many residents alter their behaviors based on which staff member is working, particularly during the hours when only one staff member is present. This behavioral adjustment is often based on who the resident feels a personal connection with—if there is a particular monitor she feels she can relate to, a resident is more likely to comply with the rules and be a good resident on that staff member's shift. Therefore, when staff members confer about good and bad residents between shift changes, it is entirely possible that inconsistencies will litter their reports. While a resident may be a good resident during one shift, there is no guarantee that she will behave the same way for a different shift.

Similarly, the composition of other women staying in the shelter at any given time can also lead to a change in a resident's behavior. Depending on the current population of the shelter, a woman may receive subtle messages from her fellow residents that a certain script is preferred, and she may be discouraged from using a different discourse. In such situations, in an effort to maintain positive associations with the other women, a resident may change her behavior to

match those of her reference group. Because the duration of a resident's stay at the shelter may last several months, it is not unlikely that her reference group will change, as will her behavior (see Chapter 6 for examples of boundary maintenance).

Inconsistencies in identity construction do not end with the residents—staff members can engage in this behavior, as well. Case progress, or decline, can cause a resident to be inconsistently identified as a good or bad resident. If a resident uses the survivor discourse in the inappropriate context in the staff, she will likely be constructed as a bad resident. But if the qualities associated with the survivor script enable her to progress on her case plan quickly, the staff recognizes her advancement as a characteristic of a good resident. The ultimate goal of empowerment and completing the program is what ultimately matters, and the staff celebrates any resident who accomplishes this task. Likewise, women who adhere to the victim identity script and follow the rules may be viewed as good residents, but if they are too committed to the victim identity and do not make progress in their case plan, may be constructed as bad residents.

Just as the poor have been classified as the “deserving” and “undeserving” poor by politicians and the public alike (Gans 1994; 1993; Myrdal 1962), the shelter constructs identities that determine who the deserving and undeserving residents are. Good residents, the morally pure victims who obey the shelter rules without question, are worthy of the limited shelter resources that are available because they will both appreciate and not misuse them. Bad residents, however, are undeserving of the limited resources available because they do not fit the social construction of who a shelter resident should be. When one considers how elements of class and race can factor into the shelter's policies, it creates questions concerning who exactly the good or bad resident is likely to be.

Revictimization

Residents at PW are aware of the good and bad resident labels that exist within the shelter, though perhaps not in those terms, and generally try to use the encouraged script to secure their position as a good resident. If they feel that their actions or words venture past the point of the encouraged script, a disclaimer is often added, as a means of backtracking into more acceptable territory.

“Yeah, sometimes [I feel like we’re treated like kids], yeah, but I wouldn’t complain about it. I might complain about it, but not to anybody else, I’d probably say it to myself. Like, ‘Man, I, I’m like just...I’m really miserable today,’ and once in a while, I’d say nothing and just walk away, ‘cause if I really tell somebody how I feel, they would tell [a particular member of the day staff]. I probably would get in trouble for it, so. It wouldn’t be nothing bad though. I mean, it’s just like I said, it’s not just me getting help, I have to be considerate and patient for all the other women here too.”

-Kaye, Resident

Even as Kaye confided her true feelings about how the staff treats the residents, she felt the need to add a disclaimer stating she understood that she needed to be considerate and patient, in order to ensure she was not seen as ungrateful, and therefore, a potential bad resident.

The expectation of living by a certain set of rules and managing one’s interactions based on a predetermined script, in order to avoid a bad resident identity, can create a great deal of stress for shelter residents. Many PW residents equated living in the shelter, and abiding by the shelter’s rules, as a form of revictimization, where they left one controlling situation for another. Other comparisons included jails or prisons, indicating that women felt that their behavior and activities were beyond their own control. This is not an unusual comparison—the literature on domestic violence shelters often cites feelings of revictimization among women using shelter services (Haj-Yahia & Cohen 2008; Haaken & Yragui 2003). In fact, Koyama and Martin (2002) acknowledged this revictimization with another version of DAIP’s Power and Control Wheel, demonstrating how shelters inadvertently can use power and control to dominate their residents’

lives (Appendix B). While they stress that the actions that are taken are done with the best intentions, Koyama and Martin emphasize the importance of recognizing the conflict between empowerment and the shelter's regulations. While all of the issues addressed by Koyama and Martin's Power and Control do not necessarily apply to PW, the women described the frustration of being a part of an organization that encourages empowerment, and yet maintains a structured set of rules that limits agency among the residents. The pass system was a commonly cited source of frustration.

“I have issues with the pass thing. I understand that there has to be rules and regulations, but I'm a grown woman, you know? If I know what time I'm coming back, and if I check in and let people know I'm safe, why not?”

-Lady, Resident

While Lady acknowledges that rules and regulations are needed, her statement acknowledges an attitude of infantilization within the shelter, where the residents are treated as children who have to ask permission from the staff, as opposed to empowered adult women who partner with the staff to create a personalized safety plan. Although the pass system is structured to keep the residents safe, Lady indicates that other means could effectively accomplish that goal without stripping the women of their independence. Other women shared Lady's concern.

“I would change, the part of bein' secluded, y'know. We came in here, y'know, because of abuse, everything we did was the choice of our abuser, how our life was ran, and when I came into the shelter...it was like the same aspect of havin' to ask, 'Can we go here? There?' We can't make our choices that we choose. I would, uh, if I was in charge, there wouldn't be no passes. You would just come and tell me that you goin' to such and such, and I'd make sure that you was going to be safe. And as far as having to ask, I just feel like we're kids. Just give us space, y'know. We need that space. We trying to get away from that abusiveness. It like we abused here. Cause everything you do, it has to be okay [with day staff].”

-Deborah, Resident

As Deborah indicated above, residents also described feeling isolated from the outside community, and felt they lacked the ability to interact with the outside world. Again, this limited

access to outside activities is reflected in the original Power and Control Wheel (DAIP 1984), where abusers isolate their victims as a means of controlling every aspect of their lives, including who they can talk to, where they can go, and what they can do. While the motivation behind the shelter's policies regarding the pass system stems from safety concerns, not an unhealthy need to control others, residents reported feeling a distinct lack of agency, and a familiar feeling of revictimization.

“When I got there on um, what was it? A Wednesday, well, early Thursday morning. And they wouldn't let me go to school the next day because I hadn't talked to the case manager, and I really, I felt like that was the worst thing in the entire world, telling me I can't go to school? Yeah, I was heartbroken.”

-Bianca, Resident

The ability to make personal decisions does not necessarily belong to the residents. Despite the fact that Bianca wanted to try and maintain a degree of normalcy during an extremely difficult time in her life by continuing to go to school, she was unable to do so until she met with a case manager. The staff's decision was based on safety—they wanted to have a safety plan in place before Bianca went to school, where her abuser might know her schedule. However, Bianca's complete lack of control over her situation within the shelter created a sense of stress and revictimization,

“[The worst part of being here is] not having [the ability] to go out places...because my big fat abuser's locked up, so my abuser is away [but I am still not allowed to leave the shelter].”

-Mesh, Resident

While residents who were restricted by legitimate safety concerns still felt the constraints of the shelter, one woman particularly experienced the limitations of the shelter. Since her initial admission into PW, Mesh's abuser had been arrested and was now in jail; therefore, there no longer appeared to be a safety risk. However, she still lacked the personal freedom to make individual choices while at the shelter, based on policies that were put in place for safety reasons.

“Like, it’s really not at all that bad, I mean...you have to give up, you know, you can’t just go out anytime you want to, but if you want to be safe, then that’s what you have to do. Like, it’s not, I mean...okay, yeah, it feels like we’re locked up, but at least you’re safe.”

-Sidney, Resident

While Sidney emphasizes the need and importance of the safety that the shelter provides, she ultimately admits that the shelter “feels like we’re locked up,” indicting the lack of control residents feel they have over their lives. While Sidney indicates that sacrificing control over your own life is what is necessary “if you want to be safe,” other residents express more complex feelings. Some residents indicated that the revictimization they experienced at the shelter rivaled the type of control they encountered from their abuser.

“Have a day and time when, if you wanted to, you could go to a chapel or whatever you want to call it, and do that. Because, you know, if I was in jail, they’d have to let me [go to church]. I’m not in jail...why can’t I do this? [Later in the interview] You know it’s like, for all this, I could be at home, enjoying my cable in my house, with my food, and my TV. With all the drama that I get here, I could be at home. Cause its just like being at home.”

-Claire, Resident

The control that exists within the shelter (“if I was in jail, they’d have to let me [go to church]”), coupled with the “drama” that can take place in a communal living setting, creates a negative sense a familiarity for Claire. The main difference between the revictimization of the shelter and her abusive relationship, she indicates, is that if she were at home with her abuser, she would at least be able to enjoy the comforts of home. Situations like Claire’s are not unique, and present a difficult choice to women who are unsure of their decision to leave their abuser permanently. Anne’s experience at the shelter also reflects this situation, where the revictimization of the shelter competes with the abuse of her husband, to the point where she questions her decision to stay at PW.

“Well, when you come from being controlled in everything you do, the last thing you need is a thousand more rules. Um, I want a cell phone for a sense of security, in case. I

look at it like this, if you're gonna call your abuser, you're gonna call whether you have a phone, um, whether you have access to one here or anything. But, you know, I look at it like this--if a person's gonna go back, they're...even more thinking about it by keeping 'em oppressed and angry and frustrated, they might as well go back, that's all. If it wasn't for the kids, I would have went back by now. Actually, it was worse [at the shelter than at home]. [My husband] wasn't really on me that much as far as the kids, but now [at the shelter], every move I make, I have [day staff criticizing me]. I sat there and told [member of day staff], you know, I'm doing the best that I can with four [children] under 7 [years old], you can't always be in the same room with all of 'em at one point in time."

-Anne, Resident

Anne addresses an important point--while her husband was abusive in other ways, he did not question or criticize her parenting skills. The shelter, however, requires a concerted cultivation approach to parenting, and when Anne did not live up to the staff's expectations, she was labeled a "bad" resident. Anne felt this criticism severely, particularly because she had never been viewed as an inattentive parent before, even by her abusive husband. For Anne, this type of revictimization rivaled the abuse of her husband, to the point where she felt she would have returned to him, had it not been for her children.

Anne was among a number of residents who felt that, at times, revictimization at PW was not only the result of the shelter policies, but also the attitude of the shelter staff. Bianca begins by describing a situation where a simple interaction quickly spirals into what she feels is an example of infantilizing behavior on the part of the staff member.

"There was one monitor; there was a rule that there was no sleeping on the couch. We all accepted that rule. I was lying on the couch, watching *Roseanne* and a certain monitor walked by, and said, 'Oh, honey, there's no sleeping on the couch.' And I said, 'Okay, but I'm not sleeping.' And she said, 'Yes, you were, I seen you when I walked by, you were sleeping.' And I said, 'But I'm not sleeping!' And she was like, 'Well, if you get an attitude, I'm going to have to write you up.' I mean, there are certain things about certain monitors that...I got mad at um, the House Manager once, and I don't even remember what it was about, but I remember slamming a door, it was the first and only time I've ever done that."

-Bianca, Resident

The interaction begins pleasantly—the monitor passes, and passively informs Bianca that she is not to sleep on the couch. The monitor even uses a term of endearment (“honey”), emphasizing how benign the situation is. Bianca acknowledges the rule (“Okay...”); however, the trouble starts when she challenges the monitor’s perception of what she was doing (“...but I’m not sleeping”). At this point, when it becomes apparent that neither the monitor nor Bianca is going to change their stance, the monitor threatens to write her up for having “an attitude.” Even as Bianca told me her story, she still expresses frustration, moving her hands in an exasperated manner. The implied source of this frustration seems to be rooted in her inability to communicate her position to the monitor in any way that would not be considered defiant. The monitor’s infantilizing attitude (“Well, if you get an attitude, I’m going to have to write you up”) reduces Bianca’s status to that of a child; therefore, she loses her ability to articulate her side of the story, and must accept the conditions the monitor and the shelter has created for her.

Unlike Bianca, some residents did not have one particular story to illustrate how the attitudes or behaviors of the shelter staff made them feel revictimized. One resident, in particular, had very strong feelings regarding the day staff, partially fueled by how she felt the day staff perceived the women in the shelter. She acknowledges in the following excerpt that these perceptions may be caused by a variety of factors, including education.

“I’m not real big on ‘em [the day staff]; they’re real uppity, you know. It’s like, we’re not an inmate population. You know, if, I were working in this setting with women, I would treat them with kid gloves. I mean, we’re not here because we want to be, but because we have to be and, you know, I can’t speak for everybody, but I’m very grateful to be here. But as I said in the meeting last night, the quickest way to piss me off is to condescend to me...[and it feels like there are a lot of condescending attitudes]. A lot, a lot. A lot. It’s just, it’s just the way that they treat you, it’s like...like I said we’re not inmates here, we’re not social experiments, we’re not...we’re here because we’ve been badly hurt. And you know, don’t make us feel like, ah...we’re a bunch of losers or something. Somehow, I think that because maybe a lot of them are college educated, or I don’t know why, they just, eh, I just get the impression that they think we’re, um, stupid. Because, I don’t know. Well, because we’ve gotten ourselves mixed up with abusers, or

I don't know what it is. Maybe it's that they're bureaucrats at heart, want everything by the rules, everything by the, you know, and I can understand that up to a point, but you have to have flexibility too, you know. In a way, that's like coming from the abusive situation that we just left, it's like we tried our best to do what you wanted but we couldn't because these were all the factors, and that's still not good enough. You're still gonna get nailed."

-Kim, Resident

While there were frequent criticisms of the shelter policies, one group of residents, in particular, decided to organize their thoughts at a house meeting, and asked me to have it formally presented to the day staff, in hopes that these issues would be addressed. Their list of topics ranged from the very simple ("Can we get a lighter mop?" "Why do we have to complete our chores at a certain time?") to the more complex ("What is the staff going to do about the recent thefts?" "Why do we have to pay the price for past residents' poor behavior?") Even as these women discussed their concerns, they actually used the term "revictimization" to describe how they felt that once again, they were in an environment where they had no control over their life, and they were meant to simply respond in whatever way the shelter deemed appropriate. The staff had an interesting reaction to these concerns.

In their interviews, staff members often acknowledged how the structure of the shelter was not always conducive to the message of empowerment. However, the staff also seemed to feel that changing the policies were beyond their capabilities; the ability to change the rules belonged to a higher power, and therefore, they could only enforce the rules already in place. Thus, the staff felt it necessary to distinguish between themselves and the "others" who were responsible for the revictimizing structure of the shelter.

"Um, I think I would be a little bit more lax than we are here with women's passes, because I was in a domestic violence situation when I was younger, and one of the things that I hated about that was that I always had to ask the person that was abusing me – my boyfriend – if I could leave, if I could go to the store, if I could do that. And they do that here, and I just think that's something I think is wrong. You have kids, why should you have to ask another person if you can go somewhere? They're grown

women, why can't they have a cell phone? You know? Who am I to take a cell phone from you? Why do you have to come out here [the office] to use your cell phone? That's what kids do at home. Kids don't even ask their parents to use the phone; they just be on the phone. You know, so why do you have to come out here to use your phone? That's crazy. I never did like that policy. I think it's demeaning the person. Because...I think it was because it was a form of control coming from the dark ages. You know, at a time when the shelter was first set up, you know, and because it was confidentiality reasons. I believe in the beginning it was for the right reasons, you know, for the right reasons, but it was just another, to me, it was just a form of control that we were controlling."

-Wilma, Staff

Wilma distances herself from the controlling policies in several ways in the above statement. First, after describing the controlling relationship that she was once in, Wilma says "they" also require that level of control at the shelter. Despite being a member of the shelter staff, she did not use the pronoun "we." Wilma does not consider herself to be a part of the structure that engages in these policies; instead, she distances herself from the structure through her careful choice of the word "they."

Next, Wilma frankly states her disapproval of certain policies, distinguishing her own personal beliefs from the shelter rules, and explains her reasoning—the residents are adult women, and the rules are demeaning to them. Later in the narrative, she reinforces her disassociation with the controlling aspect of the shelter by describing the policies' origin as coming from "the dark ages," when "the shelter was first set up." While Wilma notes that these rules were implemented for "the right reasons," she feels the need to stress that they were in place before she began working at the shelter.

Similarly, other staff members distanced themselves from authority figures, who they felt possessed the power to influence the policies that were responsible for the revictimizing atmosphere that seemed to exist in the shelter. By distancing themselves in various ways, the

staff members are essentially drawing a line, and showing that they choose to stand with the residents of the shelter.

“They’re grown women, you know? The whole getting written up thing, that’s a crock. We’d have these staff meetings, and everyone was just so frustrated with everything. It felt like we were working in a prison. So we kept putting it in [a member of day staff’s] ear. Finally, she gave in to it, [this person] agreed that the policies weren’t working. We still needed guidelines, but we had to let them be responsible for their own lives and make their own decisions. We can’t make them go from one controlling situation into another.”

-Crystal, Staff

In her narrative, Crystal creates two distinct sides of a debate—the authority figure who felt the regulations were necessary, and “everyone” else, who was “so frustrated” and felt “we were working in a prison.” There is no question where Crystal’s loyalties were; her constant use of “we” indicates that the authority figure was the other responsible for decisions that created revictimization within the shelter.

Another staff member who often distanced herself from authority of the shelter was Wanda. Interestingly, throughout her many years at PW, Wanda had worked her way up the organizational hierarchy to the point where she had a degree of authority in her position. However, because she was well aware of the revictimization that existed at PW, and felt that her hands were tied to do anything about it, her method of distancing was unique.

“One of the things that I used to hear a lot when I was a monitor, was if you give them enough rope, they’ll hang themselves. So this is the deal with not giving them passes, not allowing them to use the phone, you know. Kind of having a prison set up, um...what we’re working toward is a point...that these women are really needing to be empowered, um, cause they haven’t been, and there are certain entities [that] come forth and just make decisions for them, and again, sort of reaffirm their lack of ability.”

-Wanda, Staff

Wanda refers back to a time when she had a lower position, and thus was not an authority figure herself. She often heard staff members with higher authority suggest that giving residents the freedom to live their own lives and make their own decisions would only allow them to hurt themselves. The shelter, in other words, was better equipped to make decisions for the women. However, it is clear that Wanda does not agree with the authority's rationale; she describes the resulting organizational set up as a "prison," and describes what "we're" doing to change this mentality within the shelter.

Lastly, as a monitor, Madison also made an effort to distance herself from the opinions of the authority figures that were perceived to needlessly reinforce the revictimizing policies within the shelter. Madison's job was the farthest removed from possessing any form of power over changing the current policies view of the situation. Her position also required the most interaction with the women, and due to the hours that she worked, she had the opportunity to know the residents very well. However, as Madison discussed the power differences that revictimization created between the staff and the residents, it appeared when staff distanced themselves from an authority figure, they had a tendency to do so in the same way. Job titles did not affect the distancing process.

"... our list of rules are so long, and they're so many...some of them aren't even rules. They're, like, on there, and I don't even know why. I don't think I would set, you know, pass limits, stuff like that. Give them a little bit more freedom, but still know where they are, know where they're going, making sure they're safe, that kind of thing. I always felt kinda strongly about [the policy against having cell phones], cause you know, a lot of the staff members were worried, 'Oh, they can call their abuser.' We've had women sit right in the office, and call their abusers. If they want to, they're going to find a way to talk to them. So I just think...I think just letting them have a cell phone also feels...like it's still something, making them feel like...cause I feel like, when they would come in, and we would take their cell phones, I felt like they were kinda bummed about it. You can't have it, we're taking something away from them. And that's not the type...they're coming from that type of environment. I think here they should allowed to have more freedom, you know, stuff like that."

-Madison, Staff

Madison “felt kinda strongly” about the shelter’s policy against cell phones, and distanced herself from the reasoning shared by “a lot of the day staff” that the women should not have cell phones because they may contact their abusers. She carefully distinguished between the rationale the others used (“they can call their abuser”), and her own opinion (“if they want to, they’re going to find a way to talk to them”). Madison supports her claim by reiterating that taking away cell phones creates a power difference between the staff and the residents (“you can’t have it”) that is reminiscent of the controlling environment they just left. Crystal, Wanda, and Madison distance themselves from the actions and opinions of an authority figure to emphasize that they are not involved in the revictimization that occurs in the shelter.

For other staff members, it was important not to distance themselves from a particular authority figure or policy-maker, but to simply express their own opinions regarding the residents’ rights, in contrast to how the shelter approaches such rights. When staff members compared their personal beliefs to the shelter rules, they often justified their position by pointing out the revictimizing nature of the shelter structure.

“I believe that they should have their cell phones, they have a right to communication, I mean that’s a control issue and that’s what we’re trying to get them away from is people who are controlling and then if we’re the controllers, then they’re just, they might as well go home, I mean we’re not beating them, but sometimes control is worse than beating somebody...you feel helpless that way, when people control you, you feel helpless and it...I believe that having a cell phone gives them the right to communicate with their family without asking us first to use our phone...”

-Jacinda, Staff

Unlike Wilma, Crystal, Wanda, or Madison, Jacinda uses the pronoun “we” multiple times to refer to the shelter and its staff. Despite that fact that she disagrees with the current

policies, she does not necessarily distance herself using that particular strategy. Instead, Jacinda uses the phrase “I believe” to distinguish her thoughts from those implemented by the shelter, and points out the contradictions in how the shelter tries to help victims (“that’s a control issue”), and the negative consequences associated with it (“you feel helpless that way”). In fact, several staff members indicated empathy towards the residents, and considered how difficult it would be to live by the shelter rules.

“Here, they have a lot of rules that you have to follow. The [residents] that probably...the women that probably got controlled the most and couldn’t do anything, coming here would be easier for them because they’re used like to getting controlled and having rules and stuff, and coming here is probably freedom for some, and others it would be torture. I don’t mean it would be torture, ‘cause I don’t...but it would, it’d be all these rules and regulations that you have to deal with. Like I, I like to leave when I want, and come in when I want...and I can’t talk on the phone? You know, stuff like that. I couldn’t...I like to eat what I want, when I want, how I want, where I want, you know. Just a lot of rules to go by. I don’t know, it’s just little things that bothers me the most...I can’t go to the mall, I can’t go to church, you tell me I can’t go to church, you know, at least when I was with him, I could go to church, you know.”

-Jayda, Monitor

Jayda contemplates how control over daily occurrences, for example, what she eats, would be taken away within the shelter; moreover, she recognizes that for some women, that level of control would not be sacrificed if they chose to stay with their abuser. While some women would simply be grateful for the “freedom,” it would be “torture” for others. Her acknowledgement that she would not want to live by the shelter rules (“I couldn’t”) indicates a difference of opinion regarding which rules she feels should be implemented, and the rules that the shelter actually operates by.

Some staff members, instead of actively distancing themselves from authority figures or highlighting their personal beliefs concerning the shelter policies, simply acknowledged the presence of revictimization as a part of the policies’ flaws. While these staff members recognized

the importance of establishing rules for the betterment of the shelter and all of the women within it, they were also quite frank about the cycle of abuse continuing within the shelter.

“I think it’s difficult when you have rules, you know, it’s hard to tell an adult, you know, you have to be back by a certain time and I think for a woman...they’ve been under an abuser’s rules for so long and then, then give them more rules, I just think that’s...it’s kind of continuing that cycle. I mean, you have to have some rules, because we have to keep everybody and, um, and I think we’re doing a good job of just keeping, trying to keep it individualized even though we have certain rules. I think there’s times when we do sometimes, um, allow certain things to happen because of that person’s situation, so I think that’s the best you can do is just to make sure everyone is treated as an individual within the confines of the rules.”

-Joan, Staff

One monitor, Abigail, truly seemed to feel torn. While she empathized with women going from one controlling situation to another, and she viewed that as interfering with the empowerment process, she also saw a need for the policies. In fact, some residents were “abusers” (or “bad residents”), and the rules were needed to keep them in check.

“We’re just adding more control. I mean, it’s for a reason, policies, reasons for their safety, but...when you get here, it’s all these things again, just not done in a mean way, but you’re still, you know...it’s still from one control [situation to another]. That would be really hard, I think, cause you’re supposed to feel uplifted after you deal with the initial shock, you’re supposed to feel kind of uplifted in a shelter, where there’s hope. And that would kind of stop the hope...but then again, you can’t let them run free cause some of them...they’re so needy, they’re abusers, I mean abusers as far as going by regulations [referring to those women who abuse the system].”

-Abigail, Staff

Abigail’s narrative brings up an important point. While the staff appeared empathetic towards the women’s revictimizing experiences within the shelter, there was a limit to their sympathy. When the residents formally presented a diverse list of suggestions to the staff, there were two distinct reactions from the staff. Staff members who identified themselves as “client-centered” and had supported, and in some cases advocated for, certain policies changes felt these were very legitimate statements that needed to be taken seriously in order to improve the quality of the shelter. This portion of the staff included the majority of the monitors, and several

members of day staff. The remainder of the staff, which included the majority of the day staff and one monitor, felt differently. Despite their comments made during the interviews that recognized revictimization and encouraged empowerment, the formally presented list was viewed as another example of residents becoming too comfortable within the shelter, and complaining about minor issues, instead of making progress on their case plan. They were acting entitled, and now they were bad residents.

The basis of this division made sense, to the point where it felt predictable. Those staff members who had a closer, more personal relationship with the residents (monitors, and certain day staff members) were more likely to take their arguments to heart, and really question if the current policies and structure were the most beneficial for the residents, and what could realistically be done to change it. Staff members who had less interaction with the women were less likely to take their arguments seriously, citing too much free time as the cause of their complaints.

Conclusion

Domestic violence shelters are sites of identity construction and maintenance (Loseke 2007; 2001); however, not all of the identities that are created within these environments are positive. A variety of negative identities have been constructed by both society and staff members (Krane and Davies 2007; Loseke 2007; Few 2005; Haaken and Yragui 2003 Donnelly, Cook, and Wilson 1999; Wharton 1989), and women engage in identity work to manage their stigma.

Based on their presence within the shelter, the residents' stigmatized identity of the victim was considered common knowledge. Despite the fact that the women shared this negative identity, the accompanying stigma required that they manage it within the shelter community.

Women accomplished this task through distancing, embracement, and storytelling. By applying these strategies, they were able to maintain a positive sense of self-worth, while residing within a domestic violence shelter.

While the “morally pure victim” was originally constructed in order for domestic violence to be recognized as a social problem, shelters, including PW, continue to use it as the basis for the victim identity script. This script acts as a filter to determine which victims are most worthy for the shelter’s limited space and resources. Even after women have gained entry to the shelter, they find that adhering to the victim identity script, as well as the shelter policies, can improve their chances of being labeled a good resident by the staff.

However, the shelter regulations are built upon white middle-class standards that exist in organizations, potentially placing lower-class minority women who are familiar with different standards at a disadvantage. These women are more likely to be constructed as bad residents, who are undeserving of the resources and services available to them. The residents are well aware the good resident/bad resident dichotomy that exists, and try to follow the predetermined script to maintain the more favorable label.

While the rules and regulations of domestic violence shelters are meant to encourage safety, it often creates another environment in which women do not have control over their lives. Both residents and staff acknowledge the presence of revictimization within the shelter; residents expressed frustration at the lack of control they had over their lives, the amount of isolation they felt from the outside world, and at times, compared it directly to the abusive situation they had left behind. The attitude of staff members was viewed as the source of more contradiction between the shelter’s message of empowerment and its regulations. The staff also felt revictimization was present within the shelter, and often tried to distance themselves from it,

highlight how their personal beliefs were different, or simply point it out. However, when the staff was formally asked by the residents to address these issues, they quickly became bad residents who had become entitled, and had too much time on their hands.

In conclusion, the social construction of the “morally pure victim” continues in the shelter culture today, and its presence continues to have consequences for those who are unable to adhere to the appropriate script. A shelter resident, based on factors such as class and race, may easily be labeled a bad resident, and therefore less worthy of the limited resources the shelter has to offer.

In the final chapter, I revisit my research questions and summarize my findings, and address the limitations of my study. I then consider the potential for future research, based on my findings. Lastly, I will discuss the policy implications of my study, and the importance of my research on a much larger scale, as I consider how domestic violence shelters may use my study to improve their services.

CHAPTER 8:

CONCLUSION

My research focuses on identity construction and maintenance within PW's shelter community, and explores how the complexities of the shelter environment, such as the struggle between the organization's ideology and practice, and the presence of inequalities, influences the identities that are constructed by both staff and residents. This study is the result of three and a half years of participant observation, and forty-six semi-structured, in-depth interviews with both residents and staff (31 residents, 15 staff) at PW domestic violence shelter. In this chapter, I will summarize my research findings, discuss the significance of my contribution to both the sociological literature and to the advancement of advocacy, address the limitations of my study, and consider the potential direction of future research related to this dissertation. Finally, I will discuss the policy implications of my research, and the importance of this study on a much larger scale.

Research Questions and Findings

My research addressed four major questions: (1) How do the complexities of shelter communities, specifically, the inequalities of sex

and gender, sexuality, class, and race and ethnicity, affect identity formation? (2) How does the balance between feminist ideology and the structure of formal organizations affect identity formation? (3) How does identity construction take place within the shelter setting? Which identities are constructed, and why? How are the identities constructed by shelter staff different from those of the residents? and (4) How do women in shelters manage stigmatized identities?

Findings: Community and Inequality

Sex, Gender, and Sexuality

PW offers emergency shelter for women and their children who have experienced domestic violence, providing residents with a degree of commonality that is understood to be gendered, due to the nature of the abuse. Sex and gender are constructed and negotiated in other ways in the shelter, creating a gendered space (Acker 2006). For reasons concerning liability, all of the shelters' employees are women, and the interactions between the women at the shelter often become examples of "doing gender," such as painting their nails or sharing recipes with one another (West and Zimmerman 1987). These gendered behaviors are often socialized in children, although there are complications associated with these messages in a domestic violence shelter. Some women within the shelter chose to socialize their children with the lessons that that "boys don't cry," and that it is normal for little boys to play rough with little girls. One mother, in particular, struggled with the decision of whether she should have told her son to hit a girl who was bullying him, after he reported her behavior to the proper authority figures and the issue was not resolved. As a women currently residing in a domestic violence shelter, she did not want to tell her son that it was acceptable to hit a girl; however, it also seemed unacceptable to allow him to continue to be victimized by a girl. Certain women in PW not only found themselves socializing their children with gendered messages of what boys and girls "do," but also

reinforcing messages that justified male violence and female victimization, setting up new cycles of inequality.

The shelter is also visually constructed as a gendered space through symbols and images that express, explain, and reinforce the differences that seemingly exist between men and women. For example, in the staff office, there is a cartoon that has been hanging on the wall for years. It depicts a cartoon skeleton in a dress, sitting on a bench. There are cobwebs hanging from her bones. The caption reads, "Waiting for the perfect man." While it is obviously meant to be humorous, the presence of this image reinforces that the shelter is a gendered space where assumed heterosexual women struggle with the faults of men.

To say that PW is a gendered space is not to imply that men are not involved in addressing domestic violence as a social problem. In the past, male involvement at PW was limited because men were not employed by PW, for liability reasons. However, in recent years, the shelter has taken an active role as a means of including men in the advocacy process by partnering with Real Men (RM). RM is an organization that encourages men to extend the boundaries of what is often viewed as "a women's issue," and combat domestic violence. RM also offers its members as examples of positive male role models in the lives of women and children in the shelter, in an effort to stop intergenerational violence and to teach young children what "real men" are like.

However, the gendered space of shelters can create barriers for male victims. Though it has been found to happen less frequently, men have also found themselves to be the victims of domestic abuse (Johnson 2006; Ferraro & Johnson 2002; Kimmel 2002). Due to the disproportionately fewer number of cases involving male victims, the resources available to them is significantly limited in number. PW, like most shelters, receives a very restricted amount of

funding, which often specifies that it must be used to benefit women and children affected by domestic violence, making it difficult to offer the same kind of resources to male victims when they call for assistance.

In addition to male victims, further barriers also exist for gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender victims of abuse. As with many organizations, a heterosexist assumption exists within PW that all residents are heterosexual, and their abusers will therefore be male, and very likely be their husbands or boyfriends. While many of the PW residents are heterosexual, several notable exceptions have highlighted the presence of the heterosexist assumption. On these occasions, LBGT women adjust to the heterosexist assumption by “passing,” and failing to correct the staff’s assumption. The vocabulary and slang used by certain residents may contribute to an environment where individuals feel it may not be safe to be open about their sexuality. The very few women who have chosen to be open about their sexuality found the residents to be accepting of them, but encountered some obstacles with staff that heterosexual residents did not have to face. For example, the “outed” women had their actions, and potential future actions, placed under a microscope, and discussed at great length. Heterosexual women at the shelter were not subjected to having their sexual lives discussed openly by staff in this way, as well as not being reduced to a single defining characteristic.

PW has recognized the need to become more inclusive, and has taken an active stance towards increasing its presence in the LBGT community. Participating in local Pride festivals, handing out literature to the LBGT community, and initiating Safe Zone training to ensure that staff will be educated in matters concerning abuse in LBGT relationships indicates that PW is not a static organization; they are interested in moving forward, and improving the services they offer to all women.

Class

Class is an issue that affects the staff and the residents at PW in very different ways. While the staff comes from a range of social economic backgrounds, their class cannot necessarily be correlated with their position in the organizational hierarchy. The diverse staff then participate in creating a shelter community where class is framed in significantly different ways, based on the context of the situation. When the staff discusses the factors that will determine whether a resident succeeds in the program, they minimize the importance of class, focusing instead on characteristics such as personality. In other circumstances, class becomes very salient. For example, the staff, despite their varied background, still operate under policies and rules that have middle-class assumptions (Acker 2006), and parents are judged as “good” or “bad” residents based on these class assumptions.

The majority of the residents of PW have experienced the difficulties associated with class before they arrived at the shelter. In addition to physical, emotional, verbal, and sexual abuse, some of the women have experienced economic abuse, and were not permitted to work or were forced to give their paycheck to their abuser, thereby limiting their independence. Those women who were able to work often did so in conditions that were faintly reminiscent of their current abusive relationships, involving low-wage jobs that were both demeaning and physically exhausting. When these lower-class women made the decision to leave their abusive relationships, they often explored all of their alternatives, before considering the shelter as a feasible option. It was only when there were no other choices available that they contacted PW.

After entering the shelter, often in a state of emergency with very few personal effects, all of the residents are given the same donated items—clothing, toiletries, towels, and washcloths. Residents are thus stripped of physical indicators of their social status, and the shelter

unintentionally creates a common class, where social economic status becomes visually difficult to determine. Although few residents come from middle-class or upper-class backgrounds, those women who do can have a difficult time transitioning into a common class resident. Some women reject the idea, and assert their class identity in different ways, as a way of engaging in boundary work.

Becoming a member of the common class often unifies the women of the PW community, and offers a source of bonding. The residents face the same challenges, share similar fears and anxieties, and celebrate the same joys and elations. Because they share the obstacle of starting over with a degree of financial instability, bonding often focuses on financial hardships, such as receiving government assistance and financial coping strategies.

Race and Ethnicity

Despite the end of Jim Crow laws, racial segregation has divided the nation so that individuals tend to live and socialize with those of their own race (Bonilla-Silva, Goar, & Embrick 2006; Feagin 2004). However, when women come to PW, they find themselves in a forced community, dictated by circumstance; thus, integration occurs in a significantly different way. Race, therefore, must be reconstructed and negotiated within the shelter community, by both staff and residents alike. These negotiations have varying degrees of success, ranging from moments when the shelter environment appears to be one of tolerance and open dialogue to situations filled with racial tension. The tension that results from unsuccessful negotiations of race can exist among the staff, between the staff and the residents, and, most commonly, among the residents.

Racial tension among the staff occurs the least frequently; however, in the past, there were voiced concerns about racial favoritism towards both staff and residents. Both staff and

residents offered concerns that African-American residents and staff members were receiving preferential treatment in the shelter. Despite the serious nature of these of these accusations, to my knowledge, the no one has ever filed a formal complaint with the organization, or the parent company.

Interactions between staff and residents that result in racial tension tend to exist between White staff members and minority residents. When these situations occurred, the White staff members generally did not understand how the interaction became one based on race. Feagin (1991) describes this pattern, where the interactions are viewed through a different lens, based on the race of the participants involved. White participants tend to view the situation as a minor infraction, and the resulting conflict as an overreaction; the minority participant views it as yet another discriminatory act in a long line of behaviors they have experienced personally and another act against their race, in general, that has been contributed towards their discrimination on a much larger scale. While the conflicts between staff and residents may not have been initially viewed by staff as race-related incidents, the residents felt they were yet another situation in which their race had counted against them in some manner.

The most common form of racial tension in PW is the tension that exists among the residents. Women who join the shelter community come from many different backgrounds and upbringings, and some residents enter the diverse environment with negative attitudes towards a particular group. In some instances, the negative attitude is the result of their abuser strategically incorporating race into their victimizing process. Regardless of their origin, these prejudicial attitudes make it difficult to maintain a peaceful environment in a multicultural community. Racial prejudice reveals itself in a broad spectrum of ways, from smaller, conversational moments to tense confrontations.

Findings: Identity Construction

Social organizations have been known to influence the identities of their members (Hunt and Benford 1994; Loseke and Cavendish 2001; Mills 1940; Reger 2002; Schwalbe and Mason-Schrock 1996; Ward 2004). PW is no exception; both the shelter staff and the residents construct identities that are shaped by the shelter community. However, the type of interactions that occur largely influence the identities that are constructed; as a result, staff and residents' identities vary significantly, both in their construction and their maintenance.

Family and Sisterhood

One of the most openly discussed staff identities within the organization is the family identity. The PW staff often refers to themselves as "family," and is known throughout the parent company for having ties that extend beyond the typical workplace relationship. They have constructed a convenience family identity, based on their common, atypical, and sometimes traumatic work experiences that could not be understood by most friends or relatives. Rituals, including meals and the selection of the lunch venue, collective remembering, and accommodating behaviors reinforce their family identity.

Another identity that staff members construct and maintain is the positive employee identity, which often becomes a difficult identity to achieve. Many staff members choose to work at PW because domestic violence is a social issue they feel personally connected to, and by engaging in this work, they are helping an important cause. Therefore, when it is necessary to enforce rules that seem harsh or even revictimizing, many staff members experience role strain. In order to manage the stress associated with role strain, many staff members apply certain strategies, including befriending residents, minimizing differences, using discretion when enforcing rules, or in some cases, othering certain residents to justify the presence of said rules.

Because the residents' interactions were significantly different from that of the staff, their identities were, as well. For example, while the residents also constructed family identities, they took on a very different meaning because the need for these families often went beyond the convenience family identity the staff used. Thus, the residents also employed substitute and supplemental families identities, particularly when their blood or legal families either (1) did not perform their functions; (2) were not present; (3) underperformed their tasks; or (4) were simply unavailable, due to being geographically located elsewhere. Membership in these fictive kinships was also not guaranteed; family identities did not automatically include all PW residents, and boundary work helped to establish in-groups from out-groups. Because the shelter population was subject to change at any given time, membership in in-groups and out-group can, and does, change as well. The deliberate inclusions and exclusions of individuals in certain activities can result in a tense atmosphere within the shelter community.

The staff addresses this issue by encouraging the women to construct a sisterhood identity, reminding them of their common bond, and that "they are all here for the same reason." The staff, many of whom are also former victims of abuse, also engage in this element of identity construction, as well. The sisterhood identity cannot be entirely reduced to the commonality of oppression, however. It is also about the shared experiences of womanhood, and the sisterhood identity is often reinforced through gendered activities completed as a group, such as polishing nails or having gendered conversations about shopping or raising children.

Stigmatized Identities: The Victim and the Good and Bad Residents

Not all of the residents' identities enhanced their self-concept. Certain identities, whether constructed by society or other individuals within the shelter, were stigmatizing and the residents had to learn to either manage them or avoid them entirely.

A common stigmatizing identity that all residents shared was the identity of the victim. This particular identity was constructed by society, and based on their very presence within the shelter, residents' stigmatized identities are considered common knowledge; thus, they must learn to manage it within the shelter community. Women accomplished this task through distancing, embracement, and storytelling. By applying these strategies, they were able to maintain a positive sense of self-worth, while residing within a domestic violence shelter.

The victim is directly connected to the other stigmatized identity the residents had to manage while in the shelter—the bad resident. The “morally pure victim” was originally constructed in order for domestic violence to be recognized as a social problem; however, for many shelters, including PW, it became the foundation for the victim identity script, acting as a filter to determine which victims are most worthy for the shelter's limited space and resources. The victim identity script continues to remain salient, even after women enter the shelter; those women who follow the victim identity script, as well as the shelter policies, improve their chances of being identified as a good resident by the staff.

However, it is important to recognize that the shelter policies are based on white middle-class standards that exist in organizations, potentially placing lower-class minority women at a disadvantage. Because they are more likely to violate the white middle-class standards, these women are also more likely to be considered bad residents, who are “taking advantage of the system,” and are generally considered undeserving of the resources and services available to them. The residents are well aware the good resident/bad resident dichotomy that exists and try to follow the predetermined script to maintain the more favorable identity.

While the policies PW implements are meant to encourage a safe and pleasant atmosphere, they often create another environment in which women, who have a recent history of

disempowerment, continue to lack the ability to exercise control over their own lives. Revictimization within the shelter is acknowledged by staff and residents alike; residents expressed frustration at their on-going lack of agency, their isolation from the world, and several women made direct comparisons between the shelter and their abusive relationships. The attitude of staff members was viewed as the source of more contradiction between the shelter's message of empowerment and its policies. A number of staff members agreed that revictimization was present within the shelter, and was an issue, as it conflicted with the message of the shelter. As they discussed their concern, the staff often tried to distance themselves from the revictimizing policies and decisions of the shelter, demonstrating how their personal beliefs were different from those of the authority figures who were responsible for implementing such rules. At other times, staff members distanced themselves from the revictimizing shelter policies by simply making a note to point out its presence. However, when the staff was formally asked by the residents to address these issues, a number of staff members quickly identified the residents as bad residents who had become entitled and had too much time on their hands.

Contribution

Shelters have been recognized within the domestic violence literature as having an influential role in repairing and reconstructing women's identities (Loseke 2007; 2001). However, the domestic violence literature lacks a comprehensive look at how different components of the shelter environment, and specifically the struggle between empowerment and the structure of the formal organization, as well as inequality, influence the identities that are created for both staff and residents. While studies have considered ideology (Acker 1990; Ferree and Martin 1995; Scott 2005; Stark 2007; Rodriguez 1988; Wharton 1987), inequality regimes (Acker 2006; Blitz and Illidge 2006; Donnelly et al. 2005; Mann 2002; Markowitz and Tice 2002;

West 1999; Wharton 1987) and identity construction (Davies, Lyon, and Monti-Catania 1998; Ferraro 1983; Leisenring 2006; Loseke 1992) in shelters independently, there is a considerable gap in the research acknowledging how these subjects are connected to one another.

However, it is important to understand, as researchers and advocates, that the identities constructed within shelters are not created independent of context. Resident and staff interactions are influenced by factors including shelter ideology and practice, sex and gender, sexuality, class, and race and ethnicity. Although the Chicago School of symbolic interactionism emphasizes the importance of the context of the social situation on identity construction (Blumer 1969; Gecas 1982; Glaser & Strauss 1967; Strauss 1978; Becker 1964; Stone 1962), the existing identities literature on domestic violence shelters has not considered how shelter ideology and practice and inequalities impact the identities that are created and repaired within shelters. My research contributes towards advancing this scholarship, connecting the literature on identity construction, inequality, and feminist ideology in formal organization.

My research also expands the existing symbolic interactionist literature on resident and staff identities. While research on identity construction in domestic violence shelters exists, it primarily focuses on the victim and survivor identities (Donnelly, Cook, and Wilson 1999; Dunn and Powell-Williams 2007; Ferraro 1983; Leisening 2006; Loseke 2001; 1992). However, other resident identities are constructed within the shelter environment, resulting from significant interactions among the staff and residents. My research considers the continuing importance of the victim and survivor discourse, but also explores family and fictive kin, sisterhood, and “good” and “bad” residents that are constructed and managed within the shelter community. Family and fictive kin identities (Chatters, Taylor, & Jayakody 1994; Ibsen & Klobus 1972; Muraco 2006) and sisterhood identities (Lawston 2009) have not been studied in domestic violence shelters, and

would therefore offer a major contribution to the identities literature. While the past research has explored “problem residents” or “trouble” (Ferraro 1983; Wharton 1989), my analysis of “good” and “bad” residents connects these identities to the largely ignored contextual issues, including hierarchies of inequality and organizational ideology and practice.

My research also advances the existing knowledge on staff identities and how they differ in construction and management from resident identities. The existing literature on staff identities focuses on the work identity and staff members’ ability to maintain a positive self-concept (Holden 1997; Kolb 2011). I build on the existing research, discussing the intricacies of the work identity, but also describing how staff construct and manage family and sisterhood identities, as well.

While my research advances the sociological literature to gain a better understanding of identity construction within the complex environment of domestic violence shelters, it also offers a practical application for advancement in advocacy. Therefore, I would like to elaborate on the findings that I feel can be used to improve the structural support of domestic violence shelters.

Advancing Advocacy

The decision to leave an abusive relationship is a very difficult one, and those who do not have material resources are often left with little choice but to seek help at domestic violence shelters. I found that many women consider shelters a last resort and only call if they do not have another option (see Chapter 4). Therefore, my findings are relevant for domestic violence advocates interested in improving their services for women in crisis who may be undecided about leaving their abusive relationship on a permanent basis. By developing a more thorough understanding of how emergency shelters act not only as sites of identity construction and repair,

but also as sites of inequality and revictimization, steps can be taken towards improving the resources available to women in need.

Inequality

The domestic violence literature often recognizes the relationships between the staff and the residents as containing a power struggle (Haj-Yahia and Cohen 2008; Murray 1988), as well as inequality regimes (Acker 2006). These power struggles and inequality regimes result in tension, which can have a profound effect on those who experience domestic violence. I found that sex and gender, sexuality, class, and race and ethnicity became salient during interactions between staff and residents, often reinforcing hierarchies of inequality.

Interactions that perpetuate inequality vary—staff members may reinforce such hierarchies when speaking with residents on matters of sex and gender, sexuality, class, and race and ethnicity, including policies regarding the “correct” way to raise their children (see Chapter 7), using the phrase “you people” (see Chapter 5), and same-sex partners (see Chapter 3). While inequality is reinforced by individual behavior, it is important to note that it is also found within the organizational policies.

These findings are a concern to the field of advocacy—the presence of inequality within the shelter can deter women from seeking shelter services and leaving abusive situations (Bornstein, Fawcett, Sullivan, Senturia, and Shiu-Thornton 2006; Renzetti 1992). Therefore, advocates must seriously reflect on the behavior of their staff and their residents, and recognize the systems of oppression and privilege (McIntosh 1990) that are engaged in order to actively pursue change within the organization.

Revictimization

Shelters are also sites of revictimization resulting from shelter rules and policies. While PW sincerely believes in an empowering message, the everyday efficiency of a formal organization requires the compliance of the victim identity script. As a result, women are labeled as “good” or “bad” residents based on their ability to follow a certain set of rules established by a predetermined script. The stigmatizing bad resident identity has consequences—not only does it influence interactions with others in the shelter, but it also has the potential to deter access to future shelter resources. As a result, most residents are careful to be compliant, mindful of the staff, and follow the victim identity script so they will not be a “bad resident.”

Many PW residents recognize living in the shelter, carefully abiding by the approved script, and following the shelter’s rules as a form of revictimization. They describe the shelter as another controlling situation, frequently comparing it to jail or prison, where their behavior and activities were beyond their own decisions. This is not an unusual comparison—the literature on domestic violence shelters often cites feelings of revictimization among women using shelter services (Haj-Yahia & Cohen 2008; Haaken & Yragui 2003; Koyama and Martin 2002). Residents also describe staff attitudes as both revictimizing and infantilizing, and resent not being treated as adult women.

Situations of revictimization within domestic violence shelters present a difficult choice to women who are unsure of their decision to leave their abuser permanently. Both situations rob them of agency, and the shelter cannot offer the comforts or the familiarity of home. Claire, one resident I spoke with, mentioned that she might as well return to her house because it was “just like being at home” (see Chapter 7). Recognizing revictimizing policies and attitudes is a necessary step toward improving shelters and breaking the cycle of victimization.

Change

As evidenced by the interviews, the staff at PW was well aware that the policies were not empowering the women at the shelter. They spoke of their distaste for enforcing unnecessary rules and at times, how they felt change was beyond their control. Over time, however, the policies began to change. Women were allowed to bring their cell phones into the shelter and the pass system evolved into a Safe Hours format, where the women could leave the shelter between 7:00 a.m. and 7:00 p.m. The concept of write-ups also changed dramatically, so that women who were having difficulty with shelter living had an opportunity to meet with the day staff and discuss possible issues and potential consequences. These organizational revisions resulted in improved interactions between staff and residents.

The staff at PW also continues to address the issue of inequality within the shelter. PW took active steps towards becoming more recognized in the LBGT community, and in 2012, had all of their employees undergo Safe Zone training to become more aware of the issues that face LBGT victims of domestic violence and how they can adapt to better meet the needs of all victims.

PW's staff put a great deal of time and effort into examining the shelter, recognizing its weaknesses, asking what could realistically be improved, and then taking the necessary steps to achieve it. Self-reflection and adaptability were key factors used to offer better services to individuals in crisis. Therefore, when considering how to advance advocacy, it is not only important to consider the concerns of the PW community, but also its achievements. When shelters like PW have the courage to reflect, and potentially change, in order to better serve all victims of domestic violence, as opposed to remain static for fear of the unknown, significant concerns like revictimization, classism, racism, sexism, and homophobia become much more

manageable because it is understood that the staff knows and cares that they exist, and are taking the steps towards eliminating the issue.

Limitations

While my status as a shelter monitor allowed access to the research setting, it also had the potential to influence the study. The women were informed that their decision to participate in the study would not influence their ability to receive services, and there did not appear to be any significant differences between the women who did and did not chose to participate. However, the women who were interviewed were aware of my dual role as a researcher and a monitor, and they may have altered or eliminated certain narratives about their experiences in the shelter as a result. While I engaged in participant observation as a means of triangulating the data, my monitor status is an important limitation to consider.

While there did not appear to be any significant differences between the women who did and did not participate in the study, selection bias is also an important limitation to consider (Collier and Mahoney 1996; Winship 1992). The residents' self-selection process may have been influenced by a number of variables, including my monitor status, social class, race, age, education, and personality. The interviews also may have been influenced by the time of year the women stayed at the shelter. Because my summer schedule allows me to work more shifts than the rest of the year, it is possible that the women who stayed at the shelter during that time felt more comfortable with me and decided to participate, thus creating selection bias.

I used criterion purposive sampling in my research, interviewing and observing respondents who were either currently living or working in a domestic violence shelter (Patton 2002). Because my sample was not randomly selected, and all of my data comes from one domestic violence shelter, my research findings cannot be generalized to a larger population.

While generalizability is often considered a limitation of non-probability samples in general, purposive sampling has specifically been considered to be susceptible to researcher bias.

Future Research

Throughout my research, certain recurring themes surfaced that did not directly pertain to my research question, and therefore were not elaborated on in this study. In the future, however, I would be interested in focusing on these areas of study. First, a significant portion of my fieldnotes were dedicated to the activities of the children in the shelter, such as behavioral problems, their interactions with the other residents, and their visible reaction to having lived in an abusive environment. While I did not feel expanding on this topic was relevant to my research questions, which focused on the adults in the shelter, I would like to use this data in the future to better understand the shelter community from the children's perspective.

Secondly, intergenerational abuse was not an uncommon occurrence for residents at PW. Many of the women I had spoken with had come from families where there had been abuse, and several women had lost their mothers as a result of the abuse. Princess, a young African-American woman, had witnessed her mother's murder at the hands of her stepfather when she was seven years old. June's mother had been a resident at PW; after leaving the shelter, her abuser set the house on fire, taking her life. While these stories were told, they were not the focus of my research, and so they were often edited from the chapters. Future research could focus exclusively on the experiences of those women who are the products of intergenerational abuse, voicing their unique perspective, as some of them had lived in PW as both children and adults.

Lastly, the majority of the women I spoke with had experienced revictimization, in the sense that they had either been involved with multiple partners who had been abusive, or they had experienced an on-going cycle of abuse with their current partner. Some of the women, such as

Anita, had been residents at PW multiple times, resulting from the actions of the same individual. Anita and her children had stayed at PW on three different occasions that I am aware of, and was determined to make a new start each time. However, her abuser was the father of her children, and she felt that withholding visitation rights would be unfair, as he had always been an attentive father. He remained involved in the children's lives, and as a result, he always seemed to be able to ease himself back into her life, as well. Anita was not alone in this struggle. Many women who stayed at PW, for various reasons had difficulty separating entirely from their partner, regardless of the abusive nature of the relationship. My research, however, focused on shelter communities and the identities constructed within them, as opposed to the cycle of the abuse, and as a result, I did not elaborate of this story. This theme was prominent, though, and is therefore an important study to consider for future research.

Policy Implications

The policy implications for this study are far-reaching, ranging from education to bills currently being debated in Congress. First, as I observed the shelter environment and the women in PW shared their stories with me, it became apparent that there continues to be a societal misunderstanding regarding the nature of abusive relationships, and those who experience them. I witnessed family members advise victims to "try not to think about it," or try to take custody of the children, after the mother left the abusive relationship, on the grounds that the family was in a shelter, meaning the children must be homeless, and she was an unfit parent. These stories illustrate an ongoing ignorance of domestic violence in our society. However, this woeful lack of knowledge is not limited to individual members; it extends into the support systems and institutions meant to help women, as well.

Some women had negative experiences with structural support systems that were supposed to be in place to help them, based on a lack of understanding of domestic violence, and was often exasperated by factors such as immigration status. Joan, a PW staff member, described working with a legal immigrant, who had been very reluctant to contact the police, because her husband had told her she would lose her citizenship if anything happened to him. In her struggle to free herself and her young children from her physically abusive marriage, she encountered resistance from those sources that were meant to assist her. First, she went to a lawyer, so she would be aware of her legal rights, and have assistance throughout the divorce and while she obtained a protection order. Her lawyer charged her five thousand dollar to get a protection order, which can be completed for free, and then charged an additional ten thousand dollars for services that were undetermined, as she was then unavailable, and never completed any further casework. At this point, the woman went to another lawyer, and, due to her husband's battle for custody, was ordered to see a court appointed psychiatrist, who was not only reluctant to consider the issue of domestic violence, but continued to bring up cultural issues instead.

“...and for a professional to not understand, and especially someone who's looking out for those children, and not want to address the domestic violence, but wanted to address the why aren't they speaking English in the house? Things like that...”

-Joan, Staff

Despite the horrific beatings that her husband inflicted on both her and the children, the woman found herself having to defend her own parenting, and particularly her language choice in the home. The people who were meant to help her appeared to be revictimizing her, and making it more difficult to break free of her abusive situation. Thus, education of domestic violence is essential to improving the lives of women and children in these situations. Friends, family members, and those who work in the structural support systems who may encounter them cannot afford to be ignorant of these issues.

In addition to the need to educate public attitudes, there are currently political decisions being made regarding the financial future of domestic violence shelters, such as PW. The Violence Against Women Act (VAWA), originally passed in 1994, and reauthorized in 2000, and again in 2005, is currently in jeopardy. VAWA is a federal law initially signed by President Clinton, as a means of coordinating a national community-organized response to violence against women. Over \$1.6 billion dollars was allotted over a period of six years to combat domestic violence and sexual assault; 25% of the funds supported sexual abuse programs and community shelters, such as PW. Funding also supported law enforcement, data collection, and enhanced training in matters pertaining to violence against women in the criminal justice system. Many grants programs regarding violence prevention and education were also established (Stark 2007).

In addition to funding, VAWA also took significant steps towards increasing the safety and protection of women, making it a federal offense to cross a state line to violate a protection order. The act also made it illegal for an individual subject to a restraining order to possess a firearm and ammunition, and imposed harsher penalties for those individuals found guilty of the federal crime of domestic violence (Stark 2007).

Despite the significant amount of protection VAWA has offered, its future is unclear. VAWA expired at the end of September of 2011, and though the government has granted the law's current programs temporary funding while their fate is being decided, the politics surrounding an election year may cause the bill to not pass. The current bill that the Senate has approved (68-31) expanded the bill to include coverage for illegal immigrants, Native Americans, and gay, lesbian, and transgender victims of abuse²⁵. While House Republicans have indicated a

²⁵ http://articles.cnn.com/2012-05-18/politics/politics_violence-against-women-act_1_senate-democrats-republican-leaders-bipartisan-support?_s=PM:POLITICS

desire to reauthorize VAWA, they have expressed that they will not do so with the current expansion in place.

Throughout my research, I noted the importance of funding to shelters in general, and the impact that it has on the decision-making process at PW, specifically. Many of the issues that the women of the shelter faced were not necessarily due to the shortcomings of the staff, but due to a lack of funding. For example, the significantly fewer resources offered to male victims were not the result of an oversight on the part of the staff, but a limited amount of allocated resources, the majority of which specified that they must be used for servicing women and children. When a maintenance worker from the parent company made a racial remark to one of the residents at the shelter, the inability to supply another worker meant the best the shelter could do was ensure the worker offered an apology, and try to provide the woman with advance notice if the individual had to return to the shelter for a scheduled maintenance trip, in order to avoid him. These issues were based on limited funding. Should VAWA not be reauthorized, shelters such as PW would take a significant blow to an already struggling budget, further limiting how many victims they could take help.

Final Remarks

Domestic violence shelters, like PW, are unique environments. Serving as both formal organizations that struggle to balance ideology and practice, and temporary residences, these “social hybrids” (Goffman 1961) are their own community, constructed and negotiated by the women living and working within them. However, the community is not created within a vacuum, and all of the societal issues and inequalities that exist outside the shelter exist within the shelter community, as well. The interactions surrounding the constructions and negotiations of

sex, gender, sexuality, class, and race influence how the shelter staff and residents construct and maintain various identities, as a means of reconstructing and maintaining a positive self-concept.

My research explored this unique environment, describing both the inequalities and bureaucratic struggles of the community, and the identities that result from the interactions that take place within it. Domestic violence shelters are primarily viewed as safe havens, functioning as an emergency refuge to those individuals who need them. But for the women of PW, the importance of the shelter did not end once their safety was determined. The community, however flawed, was both recognizable and influential in their identity construction.

Evelyn, a 40 year old Asian resident, described the shelter community's influence in her life, and in doing so, provided a wonderful quote to conclude this study:

“The people who have been working here? ...you know, they've been really helpful, you know, they really go out of their way to find ways for you? I'm having, I'm in the verge of, um, completing my RN for, um, nursing? And they're helping me do it, they called the main office for me, to have a computer there set up. They're [the institution through which Evelyn was taking classes] not having review classes for classes for RN, I guess? So I guess [a staff member] and some lady, they were going to call Alloy University? To see, you know, if they're having it? Even though [a staff member] told me, 'It's a long way, but it's surely, we will get there.'”

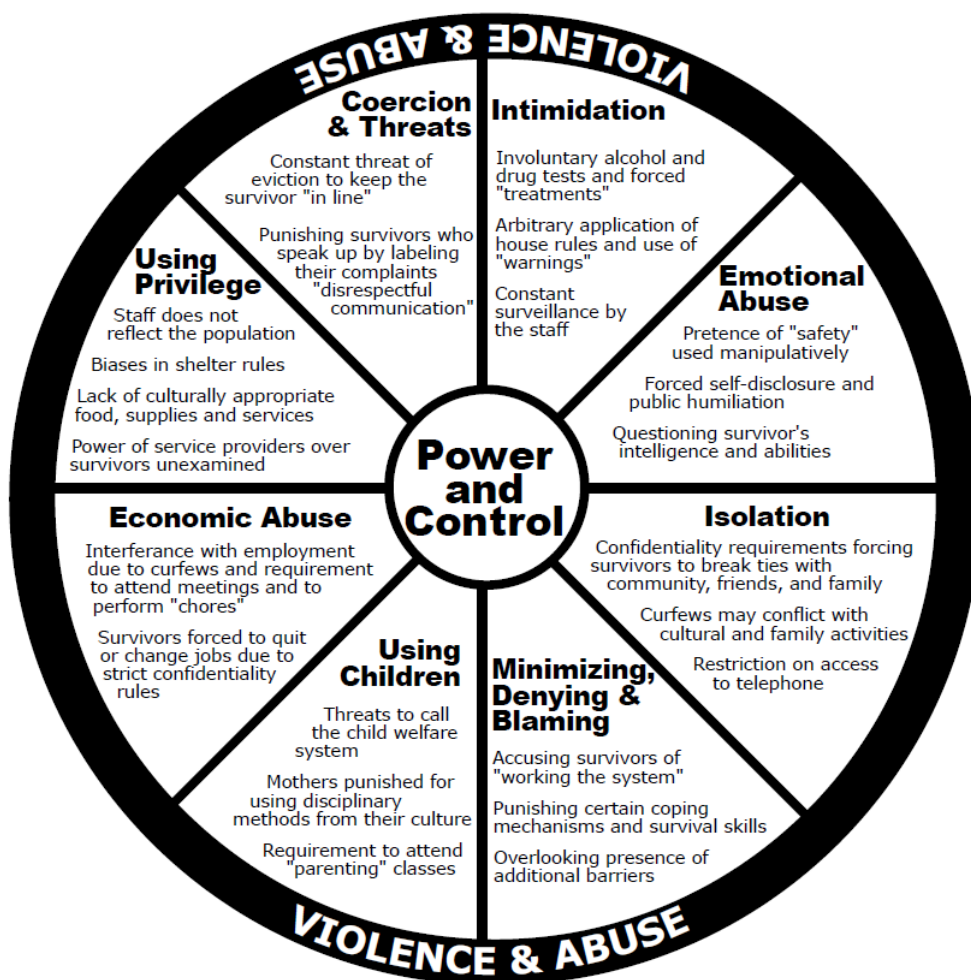
Appendix A

Power and Control Wheel (DAIP 1984)



Appendix B

Power and Control Wheel Within Shelters (Koyama & Martin 2002)



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