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dissertation entitled

UNDERSTANDING THE HELP-SEEKING DECISIONS OF MARGINALIZED BATTERED WOMEN

presented by

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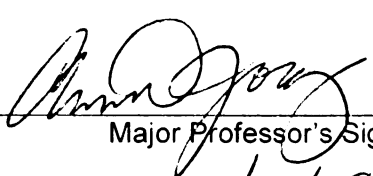
has been accepted towards fulfillment
of the requirements for the

Doctoral degree in Criminal Justice



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1/16/08

Date

UNDERSTANDING THE HELP-SEEKING DECISIONS OF MARGINALIZED BATTERED WOMEN

By

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A DISSERTATION

Submitted to
Michigan State University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

School of Criminal Justice

2008

ABSTRACT

UNDERSTANDING THE HELP-SEEKING DECISIONS OF MARGINALIZED BATTERED WOMEN

By

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This dissertation uses data from in-depth, semi-structured interviews with nineteen battered women from marginalized social groups to explore how and why they made decisions to get help. Participants were recruited from community-based intimate partner violence (IPV) support groups in two research sites: a medium-sized Southeastern city and a large Midwestern urban center. Interviews were conducted to explore the informal and formal help-seeking strategies the women used, their reasons for using and satisfaction with those strategies, and the barriers to help-seeking they encountered. Data from this study also suggest that historical factors such as childhood victimization influence battered women's help-seeking. Two key concepts, help-seeking *inhibitors* and help-seeking *promoters*, are identified, as are the specific mechanisms through which childhood victimization inhibits and/or promotes help-seeking. These findings offer support for the application of two existing theoretical frameworks, feminist pathways and life course models, to battered women's help-seeking. Finally, the theoretical, practical and research implications of these findings are addressed, especially as they relate to marginalized women.

For you, Mom. How I wish you were here to read this.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

It goes without saying that the completion of this dissertation depended in no small part upon the tireless encouragement of many colleagues, relatives, and friends.

I owe an immense debt of gratitude to my parents, Alan Burgess and the late Diane Dimitroff. Since the time I was seven years old and my greatest professional desire was to be the first female Major League baseball player, my parents have pushed me to pursue my dreams. I would not be the scholar or the woman I am today without their unconditional love. Meanwhile, my sister Megan Burgess has provided me with emotional support and, when I needed it most, laughter. I also would like to say a special word of thanks to my in-laws, Marilynn and Bill Peterson and Ron and Rose Proctor, for loving and supporting me as if I were their own daughter.

I also consider myself very fortunate to be a member of the MSU family. The faculty, staff, and graduate students in the MSU School of Criminal Justice are among the most collegial, supportive, and just plain fun people I've ever had the privilege of knowing. All of my fellow graduate students made my time in Baker Hall exceedingly enjoyable. In particular, I cherish the guidance and lasting friendship of Cedrick Heraux, Kristy Holtfreter, Joe Schafer, Brandon Kooi, Carol Zimmermann, Sean Varano, Beth Huebner, Sameer Hindjua, and Justin Patchin. I am especially grateful to faculty members Tim Bynum, Merry Morash, and Sheila Royo Maxwell, and to my dissertation committee members: Maxine Baca Zinn (Department of Sociology), Steven Chermak, Edmund McGarrell, and Christina DeJong. Christina in particular has been a constant

source of support and encouragement for me—both professionally and personally—and I am blessed to have her as a mentor and as a friend.

Of course, none of my work would have any value without the most important people in my life: my husband, Bryan, and our daughters, Anna and Maya. Bryan has been encouraging me to do great things since I first met him, and I struggle to find words that can adequately express how integral his unwavering support, companionship, and love have been to the completion of this dissertation. Likewise, my daughters have allowed me to appreciate life's most precious gifts. No amount of academic achievement can ever compare to the incalculable joy and satisfaction I get from being a mom. You all make life worth living.

Finally, this work is dedicated to the bold, brave, and beautiful women who shared their stories and their lives with me. I am humbled by your grace, your strength of character, and, most of all, by your courage.

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CHAPTER ONE:
INTRODUCTION

Once regarded as a private family matter unworthy of legal or governmental intervention, intimate partner violence (IPV) is considered an important issue for academic researchers, public policy makers, and women's rights advocates alike. This shift in public consciousness occurred largely due to the efforts of feminist activists and members of the anti-violence and women's rights movements during the 1970s and 1980s. Prior to this time, battered women had few avenues to assist them in disclosing or escaping their abuse. Today, however, myriad laws, policies, social agencies, shelters, hotlines, and other resources exist to assist IPV survivors.

What is less clear is the extent to which these opportunities exist for women on the margins of society: women of color, poor and working-class women, lesbian women, immigrant women, and others. Research suggests that women from marginalized social groups, including women of color (Sokoloff, 2004; West, 2002), poor women (Purvin, 2007; Sokoloff, 2004), immigrant women (Raj & Silverman, 2002), and women in rural communities (Websdale, 1998), are at increased risk of IPV to begin with. In many cases these women seek different outcomes in dealing with their abuse than majority-group women (Abraham, 2000; Bui, 2003; Kingsnorth & MacIntosh, 2004; Richie, 1996; Sokoloff & Pratt, 2005; Websdale, 2001). Obviously, all women desire cessation of abuse. However, the prevailing assumption that women also wish to leave their abusive partners may not reflect the specific desires of certain battered women, including minority-group women (Fugate, Landis, Riordan, Naureckas, & Engel, 2005; Richie, 1996). Consequently, it is problematic to assume that IPV is uniformly experienced by

all women, or that all battered women will respond to their victimization in similar ways. As Sokoloff & Dupont (2005, p. 2) observe:

> Although much pioneering work on domestic violence approached intimate partner violence as a monolithic phenomenon that affected all women the same, this 'universalizing' approach increasingly has been regarded as inadequate and inappropriate to explain the experiences or address the needs of battered women from diverse backgrounds.

Additionally, insufficient attempts have been made to theorize about battered women's help-seeking. As discussed in Chapter Three, despite several efforts to place help-seeking in a theoretical framework, ample room exists for the improvement of these frameworks. As no existing efforts have focused specifically on the experiences of battered women from marginalized social groups, this dissertation seeks to fill that void by theorizing about help-seeking using the experiences of marginalized battered women. Specifically, this analysis uses in-depth, semi-structured interviews to explore factors influencing the help-seeking decisions of a sample of marginalized battered women in two research sites: a medium-sized Southeastern city and a large Midwestern urban center. By placing marginalized battered women at the center of the analysis, this dissertation seeks to identify new theoretical concepts that help elucidate the unique experiences of these women.

Summary

This analysis is particularly important for advancing criminological theory because it offers insight and understanding into *how* and *why* marginalized battered

women choose specific courses of action in response to their abuse. Because they are anchored in the experiences of marginalized battered women, findings from this dissertation can inform important policy strategies for addressing and preventing IPV among women who are particularly vulnerable and who face significant barriers to help-seeking. Better understanding of marginalized women's experiences allows for more targeted policies and research aimed at improving the lives of underrepresented and underserved populations of battered women.

CHAPTER TWO:
EXAMINING BATTERED WOMEN'S HELP-SEEKING

While existing IPV research has provided significant insight into the help-seeking experiences of battered women, the unique needs of marginalized battered women—including women of color, poor and working-class women, immigrant and refugee women, lesbian women, non-Christian women, and women from other minority groups—remain underresearched and undertheorized. Although IPV has been a popular research topic since the 1970s, studies that focus on marginalized battered women are less common. As this chapter reveals, the underrepresentation of marginalized women in the body of criminological IPV research is particularly regrettable given the significant obstacles to help-seeking these women face. To illustrate these ideas further, this chapter is divided into three sections. The first section examines battered women's help-seeking via the criminal justice system. The second section identifies barriers to help-seeking that are experienced by the general population of battered woman, irrespective of their social location. The third section describes the specific barriers to help-seeking that exist for marginalized battered women in particular, especially women of color, poor and working-class, and immigrant women.

Battered Women's Help-Seeking Via the Criminal Justice System

Help-seeking battered women utilize a wide range of outlets, including both informal and formal sources of support. However, research suggests that many women use formal outlets only after informal outlets prove inadequate (Macy, Nurius, Kernic, & Holt, 2005), or after the relationship violence becomes particularly severe or life-

threatening (Fugate et al., 2005). Thus, at least initially, battered women may prefer to rely upon informal sources of support by reaching out to relatives and friends (Kaukinen, 2002; Morrison, Luchok, Richter, & Parra-Medina, 2006), drawing upon their faith communities or their own spirituality for support (Potter, 2007), or engaging in self-help or private survival strategies (Lempert, 1996). Moreover, as the third section of this chapter reveals, informal avenues of help-seeking may be used more frequently by marginalized women who face significant structural barriers to accessing formal outlets.

Once the decision to pursue formal sources of help is reached, though, many battered women turn to the criminal justice system for assistance. For example, women seek help by calling the police (Abel & Suh, 1987; Bowker, 1984; Coulter, Kathryn, Byers, & Alfonso, 1999; Hirschel & Hutchinson, 2003; Hoyle & Sanders, 2000; Hutchinson & Hirschel, 1998), pursuing the prosecution of their abusers (Bui, 2001; Ford, 1983, 2003; Goodman, Bennett, & Dutton, 1999), or by obtaining orders of protection (Fernandez, Iwamoto, & Muscat, 1997; Fischer & Rose, 1995; Zoellner et al., 2000). Of course, battered women also pursue formal avenues of support outside of the criminal justice system by entering domestic violence shelters (Gondolf & Fisher, 1988; Krishnan, Hilbert, & VanLeeuwen, 2001), reaching out to medical and healthcare personnel (Bacchus, Mezey, & Bewley, 2003; Duncan, Stayton, & Hall, 1999; Peckover, 2003; Van Hook, 2000), or utilizing other non-legal support systems (Chatzifotiou & Dobash, 2001; Goodkind, Gillum, Bybee, & Sullivan, 2003). Nonetheless, the criminal justice system remains an important source of support for battered women, and it is particularly important for criminologists to understand battered women's help-seeking

experiences with the criminal justice system. Thus, women's utilization of the police, prosecution, and orders of protection is described in detail below.

Calling the Police

Though the police are one of the most frequently used resources for battered women (e.g., see Bowker, 1983), there is great variety in the extent to which battered women call the police, and in what they want from the police. Estimates of the percentage of battered women who call the police vary considerably. According to the U.S. Department of Justice's Bureau of Justice Statistics (1998), about half of all incidents of IPV experienced by women are reported to police, an estimate nearly identical to that produced by Langan & Innnes (1986) in their analysis of National Crime Survey data. In addition to these official data sources, interviews with more than 6,000 shelter residents in Texas similarly revealed that 54% of women reported their abuse to police (Gondolf & Fisher, 1988). However, the Langan & Innes study has been criticized for presenting a "far higher reporting prevalence rate" than other studies (Hutchinson & Hirschel, 1998, p. 438), and several analyses have reported the percentage of battered women who call the police to be far less. For example, Bowker (1983) conducted interviews with 146 battered women in Milwaukee and found that only 38% of women called the police even after the worst incident of violence, and that fewer than 10% involved the police after the first violent incident. Other studies also estimate that fewer than 10% of battered women report their abuse to the police (see Hutchinson & Hirschel, 1998 for a review), including studies of Black women in particular (Richie, 1996; Websdale, 2001).

Further, while in most cases it is a woman's call to the police that initiates contact with the criminal justice system (Erez & Belknap, 1998), survivors differ widely in terms of what they want the police to do when they arrive. Many women do not want the police to make an arrest, but rather simply want the police to stop the abuse (Buzawa & Austin, 1993; Hoyle & Sanders, 2000). Wishing only for the police to "teach him a lesson" or to provide their household with some "peace and quiet," many women draw clear distinctions between police *removing* and *arresting* their partners (Hoyle & Sanders, 2000). Thus, despite having initiated contact with police, many women categorically do not want their partners to be arrested or to serve jail time (Hirschel & Hutchinson, 2003).[1] Consequently some women withdraw their statements to police after their partners are arrested but before charges can be filed (Hoyle, 1998). That many battered women want their partners to avoid formal sanctions like arrest is echoed by the fact that some women choose not to pursue prosecution of their partners.

Pursuing Prosecution

There exist relatively few investigations of battered women's decision-making regarding prosecution of their abusive partners, leaving criminologists with only a "partial picture" of survivors' desires (Goodman et al., 1999, p. 428). Based on what little is known, it is "common knowledge" that battered women frequently resist the prosecution of their partners (Goodman et al., 1999, p. 428). For example, interviews with battered women reveal that between half (Erez & Belknap, 1998) and three-quarters (Ford, 1983) of women drop charges against their partners or simply fail to appear at their hearings. Though termination of prosecution by battered women typically is regarded as

[1] Of course, this assumes that there is not a mandatory- or pro-arrest policy at work. While a discussion of mandatory arrest (and no-drop prosecution) policies is beyond the scope of this work, readers are invited to explore the extensive body of research in this area.

undesirable by court officials, evidence suggests that allowing women to drop charges against their partners—at least in the case of victim-initiated charges—may actually benefit women by protecting them from further violence (see Ford, 2003 for a discussion). For women who do not wish to prosecute, though, the reasons they provide are familiar: fear of reprisal, unfamiliarity with the system, reluctance to get their partners in trouble, and economic dependence on their partners (Goodman et al., 1999; see discussion in the following section). For women who do wish to prosecute, evidence suggests that their decisions are influenced by the amount of social support to which they have access, the severity of the violence they experience, and the presence of children shared with the abuser (Goodman et al., 1999). Not surprisingly, similar concerns also influence women's decisions about obtaining protection orders.

Obtaining Protection Orders

Our understanding of battered women's decisions regarding orders of protection is not much clearer than our understanding of their prosecution decisions. For example, research is inconclusive as to whether women are satisfied with the protection they receive from their orders, whether their orders are adequately enforced by police, or whether their orders succeed in actually preventing re-abuse (Burgess-Proctor, 2003). As with other stages of the criminal justice process, women who are economically dependent on their partners tend to have less success with their protection orders than more financially independent women (Burgess-Proctor, 2003). Interestingly, women who have limited access to resources may report less success with their orders because they have differing expectations, as research suggests that some poor women obtain protection orders to act as a makeshift divorce when they cannot afford a legal one (Websdale,

1998, 2001). On the other hand, increased severity of violence and a feeling of reaching a tolerance limit (i.e., "enough is enough") seem to prompt those women who do pursue protection orders into action (Fischer & Rose, 1995), though at least one study indicates that escalation of abuse *impedes* completion of the protection order process (Fernandez et al., 1997). Finally, as with studies of battered women's support for prosecution, protection order studies indicate that many women—perhaps more than half of those who initiate the protection order process—withdraw from the process by terminating their orders or by reconciling with their partners while their orders are still in effect (Zoellner et al., 2000).

General Barriers to Help-Seeking

Though availability of its resources to battered women has improved in recent decades, the criminal justice system (and, for that matter, other formal avenues of support) is not always accessible to battered women. Research exploring battered women's help-seeking has identified several barriers to help-seeking that exist for the entire population of battered women, irrespective of their social location. Three of the most common barriers to help-seeking are discussed below.

Fear of Reprisal

Perhaps the biggest impediment to help-seeking for battered women is fear that reaching out for help will prompt their partners to exact revenge through escalating violence (Bui, 2001; Erez & Belknap, 1998; Fischer & Rose, 1995; Ford, 1983; Krishnan et al., 2001; Zoellner et al., 2000). As Ford (1983, p. 469) observes of the women in his sample: "[Some] women were simply too frightened to continue [with prosecution of

their partners]. Having underestimated the wrath of a man arrested and threatened with future confinement, these victims backed down in response to threats". As it turns out, women's fears about reprisal are warranted. Increased violence following a period of separation or attempted separation is so common that it has its own term: "separation assault" (Mahoney, 1991). It is widely recognized that perhaps the most dangerous period of time for a battered woman is immediately after she moves out, files for divorce, or otherwise makes an effort to leave the relationship (Kurz, 1996; Mahoney, 1991). Moreover, many intimate partner homicides have been shown to occur in response to attempts at separation (Websdale, 1998). Women's fears about prompting retaliation are borne out in the help-seeking literature as well. In one study of 419 battered women in Charlotte, NC, participants who advocated for their partners' arrest were more likely to be reabused, indicating that help-seeking can be physically risky for women (Hirschel & Hutchinson, 2003). Similarly, Goodman, Dutton, Vankos, & Weinfurt (2005) found that women who directly resisted their partners' violence (e.g., by fighting back physically or sleeping in a separate room) were more likely than their counterparts to experience reabuse.

By extension, the severity of abuse that a woman experiences also plays a role in her decision to seek help, though there is not a directly positive relationship as one might expect. That is, increased severity of abuse has been associated with both increased (Gondolf & Fisher, 1988; Goodman et al., 1999) and decreased (Reidy & Von Korff, 1991) help-seeking efforts. Of course, in some instances women are simply physically restrained by their partners and thus prevented from seeking help (Fleury, Sullivan,

Bybee, & Davidson, 1998). On the whole then, concerns about abuse severity and their partners' retribution can severely impede women's help-seeking efforts.

Economic Dependence

As with fear of reprisal, research consistently indicates that women's economic dependence on their partners handicaps their help-seeking efforts (Abraham, 2000; Bui, 2001; Fischer & Rose, 1995; Goodman et al., 1999; Horsburgh, 1995; Krishnan et al., 2001; Moe, 2007; Websdale, 1998). For example, in a study of 448 battered women in Seattle, participants who reached out to legal outlets were significantly more likely to have higher levels of education and income, suggesting that poor women may face difficulty accessing formal agencies for assistance (Macy et al., 2005). If an incarcerated partner means the loss of the family's sole source of income, the absence of readily available child care, or is in any other way financially debilitating, it is easy to see why women might decide against seeking outside help. In the stark words of one survivor, "It's easier to know when you're next butt kicking is than to know when your next meal's coming" (Petersen, Moracco, Goldstein, & Clark, 2004, p. 72). Moreover, economically dependant women who leave their abusive partners only to become homeless face a particularly cruel circumstance: some homeless shelters turn away women who are not currently being abused (Petersen et al., 2004), while protection order applications sometimes require the filer to provide a permanent home address (Moe, 2007). Finally, these economic barriers are especially salient for poor women whose ability to maintain employment is seriously compromised by their intimate partner victimization (Browne, Salomon, & Bassuk, 1999).

Family & Privacy Considerations

Emotional, social, and psychological ties resulting from cohabitating with, being married to, or sharing children with abusive partners can present a real challenge for help-seeking battered women (Bui, 2001; Erez & Belknap, 1998; Fernandez et al., 1997; Fischer & Rose, 1995; Goodman et al., 1999; Kingsnorth & MacIntosh, 2004). Indeed, a desire to preserve the family unit complicates help-seeking decisions immensely. For example, Kirshnan, Hilbert, McNeil, & Newman (2001) found that women who wished to reconcile with their partners reported their abuse to police less frequently than women who did not intend to reconcile. This finding has serious implications for married women who may be more motivated to reconcile, although at least one study suggests that married women are *more* likely to seek help than are non-married women (Hutchinson & Hirschel, 1998). Similarly, 88% of participants in one shelter-based study indicated that they did not contact the police because they did not want anyone to know about the abuse, or because they did not want their partners to get into trouble (Fleury et al., 1998). Along with those who are economically dependant, then, women who wish to preserve their family unit face barriers to reaching out for help (e.g., see Fischer & Rose, 1995). In particular, battered women often make clear distinctions between wanting to end their *abuse* and wanting to end their *relationship* (Campbell, Rose, Kub, & Nedd, 1998; Fugate et al., 2005; Gondolf & Fisher, 1988).

Further complicating matters is the presence of children and the impact of the abuse on the children. Certainly, concern for children can prompt women into calling the police or leaving their partners (Abraham, 2000; Fine, Roberts, & Weis, 2005). In one study, participants who shared children with their abusive partners were over three

times more likely than their counterparts to cooperate with the prosecution of their partners (Goodman et al., 1999). However, other research suggests that a desire to preserve the family unit that includes shared children impedes help-seeking efforts (Petersen et al., 2004).

Specific Barriers to Help-Seeking for Marginalized Battered Women

The existing IPV literature recognizes that battered women face barriers that undermine their willingness and ability to seek help. However, the additional challenges that marginalized battered women face only recently have been documented: While fear of retaliation, economic dependence, and family and privacy considerations represent barriers that exist for the entire population of battered women, marginalized women face additional structural barriers than can further stunt their help-seeking efforts, particularly using formal avenues of support.

These barriers are especially problematic given that women from marginalized social groups are particularly vulnerable to IPV in the first place. Research reveals that women of color (Sokoloff, 2004; West, 2002), poor women (Purvin, 2007; Sokoloff, 2004), immigrant women (Raj & Silverman, 2002), and women in rural communities (Websdale, 1998) all are at greater risk of IPV than their majority group counterparts. For example, estimates from the 1998 National Crime Victimization Survey point to elevated IPV rates among Black women and women with lower household incomes (Rennison & Welchans, 2000). Similarly, the National Violence Against Women Survey finds elevated rates of IPV among Black and American Indian/Alaska Native women, and elevated rates of rape by an intimate partner among Hispanic women (Tjaden &

Thoennes, 2000). Consequently, the specific barriers outlined below can exacerbate marginalized women's already heightened vulnerability to IPV.

Isolation

Perhaps the most common barrier for marginalized battered women is the debilitating isolation they often face. It is true that isolation is a problem for the general population of battered women (Levendosky et al., 2004), particularly because isolation is a control tactic often used by batterers to keep their partners subordinated and alienated from their families and friends (Fleury et al., 1998; Johnson, 1995). However, isolation is even more pronounced for marginalized battered women. One way that marginalized women experience isolation is in absolute terms of geographic isolation, as in the case of rural battered women. Living miles away from the nearest neighbor and from sources of support such as police stations, and sometimes lacking access to transportation or an in-home telephone, rural battered women face enormous isolation that can prevent them from seeking outside help (Krishnan et al., 2001; Websdale, 1998). For example, conversations with police officers in rural districts reveal that response times after receipt of a 911 call can be upwards of 40 minutes in very isolated areas, surely discouraging women from calling the police (Websdale, 1998).

Alternatively, cultural isolation is experienced by rural (Websdale, 1998) immigrant and refugee (Abraham, 2000; Bui, 2004), Native American (Hamby, 2000; Rasche, 1988), and Orthodox Jewish battered women (Horsburgh, 1995). For example, Websdale (1998, p. 162) draws parallels between rural battered women's geographic and cultural isolation, noting that their "general physical immobility is a metaphor for their sociocultural isolation". Similarly, Abraham (2000) observes that immigrant women

from Southeast Asia often rely on resistance strategies within their relationships rather than turning to outside sources for help because of the intense cultural isolation they feel once in the United States. Unfamiliarity with the American legal and criminal justice systems, absence of acquaintances outside of the immigrant community, and lack of awareness about the resources that are available to battered women all act to keep immigrant battered women isolated from services. Particularly in the case of immigrant women, this cultural isolation may stem from language barriers (Abraham, 2000; Bui, 2004; Rasche, 1988; West, Kaufman Kantor, & Jasinski, 1998). That is, for women who do not speak English (or who exhibit a preference for their native language), the prospect of calling the police and/or disclosing abuse to English-speaking social service agents becomes almost wholly untenable. Moreover, isolation within the immigrant culture can mean that immigrant battered women are dependent on friends and family for help, including batterers' relatives who often are dismissive of the abuse (Abraham, 2000; Bui, 2003, 2004; Raj & Silverman, 2002). Finally, as with other marginalized women, lesbian women can feel isolated from family and friends who disapprove of their sexual orientation, and this isolation can be particularly damaging for women who are abused by their partners (Kaschak, 2001; Morrow & Hawxhurst, 1989).

Patriarchal Cultural Norms

As an extension of this cultural isolation, many marginalized battered women are subjected to cultural norms that emphasize women's submissiveness and men's right to maintain control over their female partners. These patriarchal cultural norms create intense pressure for some marginalized battered women to preserve their family unit despite the abuse they endure (Bui, 2004; Fine et al., 2005; Raj & Silverman, 2002;

Rasche, 1988). It is important to note here that this statement should not be interpreted as an indication that some cultures are more approving of violence against women. As Das Dasgupta (1998) notes, reports of dowry deaths and wife-burning in Middle Eastern countries create the illusion for many Americans that "other" cultures condone IPV. Of course this is not the case, as these crimes are just as offensive to public consciousness elsewhere as they are in the U.S. However, it remains the case that many marginalized battered women feel the weight of cultural constraints that either emphasize the role of wife as caregiver and provider, that discourage them from leaving an abusive relationship, or both.

For example, South Asian and other immigrant women frequently face serious cultural pressure to remain with their abusive partners, stemming from traditional beliefs about the sanctity of marriage (Abraham, 2000; Bui, 2004; Raj & Silverman, 2002). Likewise, Puerto Rican women are burdened by traditional gender-role expectations that can make it difficult to leave an abusive partner (Fine et al., 2005). In the case of rural women, cultural norms that emphasize female submissiveness to male partners and the right of men to use violence toward their female partners, what Websdale (1998) dubs "rural patriarchy," can be extremely powerful inhibitors to help-seeking. Finally, Orthodox Jewish women's help-seeking may be impeded by religious and cultural pressure to maintain the family unit and to submit to husbands' requests (Horsburgh, 1995), though similar pressures may exist for Catholic, Muslim, or Protestant women as well.

Fear of Public Scrutiny

Next, women from communities of color and immigrant communities often choose not to contact the police or to engage in other types of formal help-seeking for fear of opening their community to undue public scrutiny. Help-seeking women of color (Richie, 1996; Websdale, 2001; Wolf, Ly, Hobart, & Kernic, 2003), Muslim and Orthodox Jewish women (Hajjar, 2004; Horsburgh, 1995), rural women (Websdale, 1998), and lesbian women (Morrow & Hawxhurst, 1989) all face the possibility that by disclosing their abuse they will invite further negative stereotyping of their communities. Lesbian battered women often are reluctant to disclose their abuse for fear of exposing the gay and lesbian community to further stigmatization, believing that "public discussion would reinforce homophobia" (Morrow & Hawxhurst, 1989, p. 58). Native American battered women express concern that "drunken Indian" stereotypes will influence police officers' determinations of aggressor and victim at IPV scenes (Wolf et al., 2003, p. 125). Anti-Semitism can prevent Orthodox Jewish from contacting authorities about their abuse, while beliefs that Jewish men are not violent and that IPV is not a problem in the Jewish community act as additional barriers (Horsburgh, 1995). In a similar manner, the idea among many Black women that IPV is a "white woman's problem" (Websdale, 2001) not only leads to shame and embarrassment for Black battered women, but also yields reluctance to opening up the Black community to further stereotyping. Of course, in communities of color and in the African American community in particular, the role of discrimination toward men of color must not be overlooked.

Discrimination & Institutional Racism

As Richie (1996) notes, discrimination against abusive men of color can act as a barrier for their partners in several ways. First, Richie reports that the Black battered women in her study were "deeply loyal" to their Black male partners, particularly in light of the treatment men of color receive by agents of the criminal justice system. To be sure, the overrepresentation of young men of color in every stage of the criminal justice process is one of criminology's most robust and enduring findings (Allen & Austin, 2000; Spohn & Holleran, 2000; Steffensmeier, Ulmer, & Kramer, 1998). Moreover, ugly incidents of police brutality against young men of color help to perpetuate a long-standing and deeply ingrained distrust of the police in communities of color (Anderson, 1999). As Rasche (1988, p. 159) observes, for battered women of color, "Fear of the police may also derive not so much from concern that they won't do anything, but from concern that they will do too much." Finally, and more broadly, institutionalized racism that works to stunt the upward mobility of young men of color (Massey & Denton, 1993; Wilson, 1987) creates a sense of allegiance between women of color and their male partners (Richie, 1996; Websdale, 2001) that can prohibit them from "betraying" their partners by calling the police. Still, the impact of institutionalized racism goes beyond women's fears about their partners' treatment. Battered women of color and immigrant battered women also have reason to fear their own exposure to unfair or discriminatory treatment by criminal justice officials, whether via overzealous arrest and/or confinement (Bui, 2001; Rasche, 1988) or via reduced likelihood of arrests on their behalf (Robinson & Chandek, 2000). Clearly, these realities can act as aggravating forces that prevent women of color from engaging in help-seeking.

Fear of Deportation

For immigrant battered women, fear of deportation is perhaps the most salient barrier to help-seeking, and for good reason. "Under [federal immigration law passed in 1996], intimate partner violence, including restraining order violation, is grounds for deportation if the abuse occurred within five years of entry into the United States" (Raj & Silverman, 2002, p. 386). But immigrant women are not limited to concern that their intimate partners will be deported, as they also fear deportation of their children or themselves (Bui, 2001, 2004). Further, abusers may threaten to keep or destroy their partners' immigration documents or prohibit their partners from learning English or learning about American laws. Echoing the ideas of cultural isolation discussed earlier, Raj & Silverman (2002) call this specific type of IPV "immigrant-related abuse," which they describe as being culturally specific and extremely powerful. Thus, whether out of concern about loss of immigrant status if the abuse is reported, or out of a general ignorance of American IPV laws, fear of being deported acts as a monumental constraint for immigrant women (Abraham, 2000; Bhuyan & Senturia, 2005; Bui, 2001, 2004; Raj & Silverman, 2002; Rasche, 1988). Of course, formal help-seeking is nearly unthinkable for undocumented women, as disclosing their abuse also means exposing their illegal immigration status. In fact, reluctance to disclose illegal activity also acts as a barrier for other groups of marginalized battered women.

Participation in Illegal Activities

Battered women who have been arrested, who have outstanding warrants, or who participate in illegal activities often avoid reporting their abuse to authorities, especially the police (e.g., see Abel & Suh, 1987; Erez & Belknap, 1998; Moe, 2007). To be clear,

raising this point is not intended in any way to perpetuate the stereotype of women of color as criminals. Still, the fact remains that for many marginalized women, participation in the illegal economy is one (and perhaps the only) viable means of income (Richie, 1996). For example, Richie (1996) reveals how Black battered women whose victimization experiences led them to criminality (often after being forced by their abusers into selling drugs or prostituting themselves) had strong prohibitions against contacting the police or other official agents. Fears of arrest on drug charges make substance abusing battered women less likely than their counterparts to disclose their abuse to authorities (Erez & Belknap, 1998). For example, interviews with 92 mostly African American battered women revealed that participants who reported higher levels of substance abuse were two times less likely than their counterparts to cooperate with the prosecution of their partners (Goodman et al., 1999). The role of substance abuse is particularly important in this context, as evidence suggests that battered women sometimes use drugs and alcohol to self-medicate as a means of surviving (Rogers, McGee, Vann, Thompson, & Williams, 2003; Websdale, 2001).

Summary

This chapter demonstrates the importance of studying help-seeking, particularly among marginalized women. More information is needed to increase our understanding of the extent to which women from all backgrounds utilize the criminal justice system and other avenues of support for help. It is clear that there are many barriers to help-seeking that exist for all battered women, including fear of reprisal, economic dependence, and family and privacy considerations. For battered women from

marginalized groups, though, the impediments to help-seeking are even greater, yet their experiences tend to be underrepresented in the academic literature. In the following chapter, I show that the experiences of marginalized women also are absent from efforts to theorize about help-seeking, and assert the importance of theorizing about help-seeking from the perspective of marginalized women.

CHAPTER THREE:
THEORIZING HELP-SEEKING FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF MARGINALIZED WOMEN

Despite the existence of numerous studies, as a whole the body of help-seeking scholarship remains underdeveloped from a theoretical standpoint. Much existing help-seeking research is largely descriptive and does not attempt to *explain* women's behavior. That is, most help-seeking studies simply report differences between sample subgroups without investigating why those differences exist or what influences women's decisions. While we have some understanding of *what* help-seeking strategies battered women use, there has been comparatively little attention devoted to explaining *how* and *why* they decide to use those strategies (Goodman et al., 1999; Kingsnorth & MacIntosh, 2004). Thus, battered women's help-seeking is in dire need of theoretical development (Kingsnorth & MacIntosh, 2004).

Further, help-seeking among marginalized battered women in particular has been almost completely ignored. Although a few help-seeking studies specifically sample women from marginalized groups (e.g., Bui, 2003; Krishnan et al., 2001; O'Campo, McDonnell, Gielen, Burke, & Chen, 2002), this research is mostly descriptive. In general, marginalized women have been left out of efforts to theorize about battered women's help-seeking, a circumstance that is particularly regrettable given their heightened vulnerability to IPV and the immense barriers to help-seeking that they face, as outlined in Chapter Two.

Therefore, a sizeable void exists in our theoretical understanding of battered women's help-seeking decisions, particularly among women from marginalized social

groups. It is the aim of this analysis to help fill that void. With that goal in mind, this chapter is divided into two sections. The first section examines the theoretical frameworks for help-seeking offered to date, and evaluates the relevance of these frameworks for marginalized women. The second section demonstrates the importance of anchoring theories of help-seeking theory in the experiences of marginalized women.

Existing Theoretical Models of Help-Seeking

While there are many empirical studies of women's responses to IPV, theoretical development of battered women's help-seeking is lacking (Goodman et al., 1999; Kingsnorth & MacIntosh, 2004). To illustrate, after analyzing data from detailed interviews with 419 battered women to conclude that married women are consistently more likely than unmarried women to seek help, Hutchinson & Hirschel (1998, p. 449) remark: "[I]n retrospect, it would have been invaluable to have asked the women in our sample why they sought each type of help....". In this case, asking "why?" is an empirical afterthought. Clearly, to know that certain battered women are more or less likely to seek help without knowing *why* does little to advance our understanding of this issue. Still, some effort has been made to place help-seeking in a theoretical context. The theoretical models for understanding battered women's help-seeking that have been offered to date are discussed in detail below.

Battered Woman Syndrome & Learned Helplessness

Lenore Walker's (1979) groundbreaking book, *The Battered Woman*, arguably was the first attempt to theorize about the actions and decisions of abused women. As part of the broader Battered Woman Syndrome she postulated, Walker (1979) offered an

explanation for why women remain with their abusive partners even in the face of severe abuse. Borrowing learned helplessness theory from psychology, Walker (1979) argued that being exposed to intermittent abuse psychologically "paralyzes" battered women and leads to resignation and submissiveness to their partners. Severe abuse thus creates a powerful sense of helplessness in battered women, and this helplessness is manifested in their failure to leave the abusive relationship. Though not necessarily a theory of help-seeking per se, Walker's (1979) thesis posits that women's help-seeking efforts will decrease as the severity of violence escalates, and as their accompanying psychological "paralysis" becomes more pronounced.

Although laudable as an effort to place battered women's actions and decisions in a theoretical framework, learned helplessness has been criticized for emphasizing pathology in battered women (Gondolf & Fisher, 1988; Grigsby & Hartman, 1997), and for perpetuating the stereotypical image of battered women as passive and meek (see Gondolf & Fisher, 1988 for a review).[2] More importantly, several empirical studies of battered women's help-seeking find evidence that directly refutes learned helplessness theory (Bowker, 1983; Pagelow, 1981), including subsequent work by Walker herself (1979). In response, Gondolf & Fisher (1988) proposed an alternative conceptualization

[2] There is a great deal of literature criticizing learned helplessness theory and the "pathological" view of battered women it engenders. In brief, critics charge that individualistic approaches such as learned helplessness often prompt a focus on pathology in battered women, leading to remedies that include "treatment" for their "illness". Moreover, this type of model is dangerous in terms of its tendency to stifle understanding of battered women's actions. "[P]erhaps influenced by a research literature that emphasizes pathology in battered women...criminal justice officials seeking to explain why victims do not cooperate with prosecution frequently derive psychological explanations citing domestic violence victims as depressed, emotionally dependent, or suffering from learned helplessness" (Goodman et al., 1999, p. 428). Taken to the extreme, this approach can lead some officials to conclude that battered women are "addicted" to their abusive partners or to the abuse (Websdale, 1998, p. 147). For a more thorough discussion of these issues, see Gondolf and Fisher (1988).

of battered women that emphasizes the survival strategies women use and that highlights the magnitude of their help-seeking.

Battered Women as "Survivors"

Gondolf & Fisher's (1988) causal model suggests that, in contrast to learned helplessness, women's help-seeking actually *increases* in response to escalation of abuse, whether to themselves or to their children. Using data collected from 6,000 interviews with shelter residents in Texas, Gondolf & Fisher (1988) discovered that increased abuse combined with batterers' increased anti-social behavior (i.e., substance abuse, general violence, and arrests) was related to greater help-seeking efforts. Therefore, this theory emphasizes that battered women are survivors who actively resist and respond to their abuse by engaging in a wide array of help-seeking strategies.

The "battered women as survivors" theory represents a marked advancement in help-seeking theorizing, particularly over learned helplessness. However, in the causal model, the variables that are hypothesized to influence battered women's help-seeking are limited to the individual and interpersonal levels. In other words, there is no opportunity to examine how women's socio-cultural context—that is, their relative privilege or disadvantage based on social characteristics—shapes their help-seeking decisions. While subgroup analyses revealed that white women experienced fewer barriers to help-seeking than their counterparts, and that Hispanic women had the longest duration of abuse and were less likely to reach out to certain outlets for help (Gondolf & Fisher, 1988), the existing model does not make adequate allowances for the influence of structural forces on the actions of help-seeking battered women. However, the "barriers" model of help-seeking does attend to these structural issues.

The Barriers Model

Writing in the field of pyschotherapy, Grigsby & Hartman (1997) developed a theoretical model that aims to understand battered women's behavior within the context of both individual- and structural-level factors. According to the authors, this "barriers model":

> places the battered woman in the center of four concentric circles. Each circle represents a layer of barriers in the battered woman's experience that potentially impedes her safety. These layers include: barriers in the environment; barriers due to family, socialization, and role expectations; barriers from the psychological consequences of violence; and finally, barriers from childhood abuse/neglect issues (Grigsby & Hartman, 1997, p. 485).

The authors identify barriers in the first (environment) layer that include lack of money and transportation, inadequate response of police or the criminal justice system, discrimination and language barriers, and issues related to culture and immigration, among others. Additionally, barriers in the second (role expectations) layer reflect cultural issues such as religious and familial values, and beliefs about family violence. Although this theoretical model recognizes that structural forces can shape the actions and decisions of battered women, it has its own limitations.

First, this model is designed more to improve intervention for therapists rather than to explain battered women's help-seeking. In other words, while the barriers model may be useful in understanding the difficulties certain women face in reaching out for help, the primary purpose of this model is to suggest appropriate intervention strategies

for therapists rather than to explain battered women's help-seeking. Second, it is not clear that the development of the barriers model was based on empirical evidence. While Grigsby & Hartman (1997, p. 485) indicate that the model "was developed as a result of [our] combined experience of 23 years of work with thousands of battered women in shelter and nonshelter settings," the development of the model seems to have been based on anecdotal evidence rather than systematic data collection. While there has been some preliminary empirical support for this model (Anderson et al., 2003), its utility for understanding battered women's help-seeking – particularly for marginalized women – remains uncertain.

Still, the concept of barriers appears to be theoretically important to understanding battered women's help-seeking, as other analyses suggest. For example, data from face-to-face interviews with 491 battered women in Chicago-area medical facilities reveal that barriers including hassle, fear, confidentiality concerns, and tangible loss were salient in the decisions of women *not* to seek help (Fugate et al., 2005). Perhaps more important theoretically, evidence suggests that such barriers impede women's help-seeking only until a particular *threshold* is reached, at which point women's concern for their personal safety prompts them to seek help in spite of these barriers (Fugate et al., 2005; see also Campbell et al., 1998). Unfortunately, research into these issues to date is insufficient, and, as with the other models, attention to the experiences of marginalized women is non-existent.

Rational Choice Theory

More recently, Kingsnorth & MacIntosh (2004) placed battered women's help-seeking in a theoretical context using rational choice theory. In their analysis, the authors

suggest that battered women's support for official action is based on a "complex decision making process in which they seek to weigh the costs and benefits of involving criminal justice system officials in their lives" (Kingsnorth & MacIntosh, 2004, p. 322). For example, the authors state that different groups may arrive at different conclusions about help-seeking during their cost-benefit analysis, noting that race/ethnicity, cohabitation, and prior history of violence each significantly influence whether battered women choose to involve criminal justice authorities. This idea is supported by other studies that have relied on the concept of rational or reasoned action to understand battered women's actions, particularly in terms of women's stay/leave decisions (e.g., see Choice & Lamke, 1997).

However, rational choice theory is too simplistic to be a sufficient theoretical framework for understanding the complex help-seeking decisions battered women make. As the discussion in Chapter Two makes clear, marginalized battered women face enormous structural and cultural forces that complicate their help-seeking decisions beyond simply weighing the pros and cons of leaving their abusers. Therefore, rational choice theory is inadequate because its focus on simply evaluating and selecting from available options is too individualistic, de-contextualizes the experiences of battered women, and isolates women's decisions from the broader social structure (e.g., see Websdale, 1998). For example, regarding the limited selection of "options" for rural battered women, Websdale (1998, p. 171) remarks, "Rural battered women's 'choices' often boil down to remaining with abusers and enduring/resisting violence, leaving the abuser and enduring poverty under the welfare system, or leaving the abuser and entering wage work in a hostile gendered capitalist economy". Although women forced to choose

between unappealing help-seeking options undoubtedly do weigh the costs and benefits of each, failure to consider that structural forces dictate the availability of those options severely limits rational choice theory as a model to explain help-seeking. Although Kingsnorth and MacIntosh (2004, pp. 311-312) rightly observe that we must move away from studies that "characterize victim support for intervention as a static single-stage phenomenon rather than an evolving orientation capable of change over time," rational choice theory is too astructural to be theoretically relevant to the experiences of marginalized women.

The Psychological Process Model

An even more recent effort to theorize about battered women's help-seeking appears in the psychological literature. Liang et al. (2005) propose a process-oriented theoretical framework for understanding help-seeking. That is, the authors view help-seeking as a reciprocal three stage decision-making process in which women: (1) recognize, define, and appraise their abusive relationship as problematic, (2) decide to seek help for this problem, and (3) determine the appropriate help provider (i.e., informal versus formal systems of support). Importantly, the authors note that this process both influences and is influenced by individual (e.g., severity of violence, self-blame), interpersonal (e.g., nature of relationship with partner, concerns over negative police response), and socio-cultural (e.g., cultural norms, limited access to resources) factors. With inclusion of this socio-cultural element, this framework represents an improvement over the rational choice model; however, it does not go far enough to address the unique vulnerabilities of marginalized women or the structuring influence of intersecting systems of power. Rather than simply recognizing that structural forces influence individual help-

seeking decisions, a viable theoretical help-seeking model must be grounded in the unique experiences of marginalized women.

Centering Help-Seeking Theories on Marginalized Women

We know from the discussion in Chapter Two that women from marginalized social groups, including women of color, immigrant women, poor and working class women, and women living in rural areas, are particularly vulnerable to IPV. In addition, Chapter Two illustrates that marginalized women face significant barriers to help-seeking beyond those that exist for the general population of battered women. It is also true that efforts to theorize about battered women's help-seeking have excluded the unique experiences of marginalized women. Taken together, these factors provide justification for developing analyses that are centered on marginalized women, yet there is another reason why efforts to understand help-seeking should begin with women from marginalized social groups, as discussed below.

Even as late as the early 1980s, IPV was regarded by most government and public officials as a private family matter that did not warrant legal intervention. Agents of the criminal justice system were especially reluctant to become involved in domestic disputes, either because they implicitly condoned men's use of violence against their female partners or because they believed that familial violence should not be the concern of the state (Ford, 1983). In order to counter this prevailing attitude and in an effort to bring woman battering to the forefront of public consciousness, mainstream anti-violence activists adopted rhetoric that emphasized the *criminalization* of IPV. These advocates

wanted to establish a "law and order" approach in which IPV was treated seriously by the criminal justice system (Richie, 1996; Sokoloff & Dupont, 2005).

Of course, assault has always been a crime. However, feminist activists recognized that while stranger and intimate partner assault "are legally identical, they are sociologically distinct" (Hoyle & Sanders, 2000, p. 14). For example, advocates criticized the fact that stranger assaults were sanctioned by the criminal justice system more harshly than were intimate assaults, and attempted to give "equal justice" to women who were assaulted by their intimate partners (Hirschel & Hutchinson, 2003; Richie, 1996). Moreover, the criminalization of IPV was intended to serve both general and specific deterrent purposes, as well as symbolic purposes by emphasizing the "moral unacceptability of domestic violence" (Hoyle & Sanders, 2000). The most visible result of this law and order orientation was the establishment of mandatory- and pro-arrest policies, as well as "no drop" prosecution policies that eliminated women's ability to halt prosecution of their partners (Bui, 2001; Ford, 2003; Hoyle & Sanders, 2000).

One unintended consequence of this stance was the positioning of the criminal justice system as the primary means of help-seeking for IPV (Almeida & Lockard, 2005; Josephson, 2002; Richie, 1996), as evidenced by the heavy emphasis on criminal justice responses embedded in the landmark Violence Against Women Act ("Violence Against Women Act", 1994). As a consequence, a norm developed in which battered women were expected to invoke the criminal justice system to prove that they were "serious" about getting help (Ford, 1983, 2003; Hirschel & Hutchinson, 2003; Hoyle & Sanders, 2000). These efforts to emphasize the criminalization of domestic violence were especially damaging to marginalized battered women because they fostered reliance on a

criminal justice system that often is unresponsive to, and at times blatantly discriminatory toward, marginalized women and men (Richie, 1996; A. Smith, 2005; Websdale, 2001). As Almeida & Lockard (2005, p. 318) succinctly observe, "Given the racism, classism, sexism, and homophobia inherent in the criminal justice system, heavy reliance on that structure to end family violence is problematic".

Equally problematic for marginalized battered women is a second piece of antiviolence rhetoric that emphasized the *universalization* of IPV. "It can happen to anyone" was a phrase echoed by early activists in order to emphasize that IPV transcends race and class status. As a political strategy, then, feminist advocates purposefully downplayed the fact that women from marginalized groups are more vulnerable to IPV in favor of emphasizing that all women are equally susceptible to abuse (Crenshaw, 1991; Richie, 1996; Sokoloff, 2004). The problem with this universalizing approach is that it served to reaffirm the needs of majority-group women. As Richie (2000, p. 1135) notes, "when the national dialogue on violence against women became legitimized and institutionalized, the notion that 'It could happen to anyone' meant that 'It could happen to those in power.' Subsequently, the ones who mattered most in society got the most visibility and the most public sympathy...".

This rhetoric ignored marginalized women's increased need for specialized IPV services, the funding for which may be reduced based on the idea that white, middle-class women must have services available to them, too (Josephson, 2002). In other words, it was suggested that there is a risk posed even to those women whom we would least expect to be victimized by their intimate partners: white women of means. This observation was particularly problematic for marginalized battered women, who face

daunting structural barriers to help-seeking as outlined in Chapter Two. As a result, the unique needs of marginalized women were glossed over in favor of a universal "battered women's" experience (Hamby, 2000; Josephson, 2002; Richie, 2000; Sokoloff, 2004).

Thus, rhetoric that emphasized the criminalization of IPV fostered reliance on a criminal justice system that marginalized women had limited opportunity or inclination to use, while rhetoric that emphasized the universalization of IPV called attention away from the structural barriers that influence help-seeking among marginalized women. In addition, the idea that all women are equally vulnerable to IPV reduced justification for providing services that are targeted at marginalized women's unique needs. Considered together, the end result was the "erasure" of marginalized battered women from anti-violence measures (Richie, 2000, p. 1135). By alienating women who are particularly vulnerable to intimate abuse, these circumstances ultimately did a disservice to marginalized battered women.

Together, this "erasure" of marginalized women, coupled with their increased vulnerability to IPV, their exposure to additional help-seeking barriers, and their absence from efforts to theorize about help-seeking, create a need for analyses that can offer a corrective. Specifically, it is crucial that IPV studies—particularly those that aim to make theoretical advancements—are centered on the experiences of women from marginalized social groups (Sokoloff, 2004; Sokoloff & Dupont, 2004, 2005; Sokoloff & Pratt, 2005). For example, theoretical frameworks of help-seeking must recognize the structural nature of IPV (Websdale, 1998; Websdale & Johnson, 1997) and must inform intervention strategies that are culturally competent and relevant for marginalized women (Almeida & Lockard, 2005; Coker, 2000).

Summary

This chapter demonstrates the need to improve theoretical frameworks of battered women's help-seeking. Although several attempts have been made to theorize about help-seeking, the absence of marginalized women's experiences hampers these efforts and leaves much room for improvement. These factors set the stage for this dissertation, which focuses on the experiences of marginalized women and which aims to advance and improve help-seeking theory, as discussed in the following chapters.

CHAPTER FOUR:
METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this dissertation is to improve understanding of battered women's help-seeking, and to advance a theoretical framework of help-seeking that is rooted in the experiences of marginalized women. To that end, this dissertation uses a qualitative analysis of data from in-depth, semi-structured interviews. This chapter presents an overview of this study and is divided into two sections. The first section provides justification for the use of qualitative methodology, while the second section outlines the research project and offers descriptive data for the sample.

Methodological Justification

Qualitative research methods have several advantages that are relevant to this dissertation. First, qualitative analyses allow access to data concerning particularly sensitive topics (Rosenblatt & Fischer, 1993) and to particularly vulnerable populations, such as marginalized battered women, that may otherwise be inaccessible to researchers (Maeve, 1998). Further, qualitative methods are characterized by an interpretive and reflexive relationship between researcher and subject (Maeve, 1998). The relative proximity of researchers to their subjects coupled with the desire to unearth the meanings attached to subjects' experiences provide qualitative researchers the opportunity to increase disclosure of sensitive information and access to hard-to-reach groups. "Qualitative strategies are also advantageous in studying topics where feelings, thoughts, meanings, and accounts are complex, qualified, ambivalent, situational, or different at

different times" (Rosenblatt & Fischer, 1993, p. 173). In other words, qualitative methods are particularly appropriate for collecting data in contexts that may otherwise challenge or frustrate information-gathering conducted using quantitative techniques. Clearly, battered women's experiences are complex, and this is particularly true of women from marginalized social groups. As a consequence of the complexity and variation that characterize these experiences, qualitative approaches are especially applicable to the study of battered women's help-seeking.

Second, one goal of qualitative methodologies is "thick description" (Cupchik, 2001). This means that qualitative analysis is undertaken in an attempt to collect rich and detailed information about social phenomena from the perspective of the participants and their lived experiences. "Thick description" refers to the identification and reconstruction of meanings that individuals attach to certain events. In other words, "this type of analysis is directed toward drawing out a complete picture of the observed events, the actors involved, the rules associated with certain activities, and the social contexts in which these elements arise" (Berg, 2004, p. 181). The utility of qualitative analysis in contextualizing research findings is particularly advantageous for social science inquiries.

Third, qualitative methodologies are particularly advantageous in theory development (Creswell, 2003; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998; Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2003). As Hagan (2000) notes, qualitative researchers seek to develop "sensitizing concepts" that advance one's understanding or explanation of reality. Because the emphasis of qualitative research is on describing, understanding, and explaining the experiences of individuals in particular settings, it follows that such rich information is useful for developing theories that attempt to explain social phenomena. Further,

qualitative methodologies typically are marked by inductive logic—that is, deriving general themes from specific observations—which further adds to their utility in theory development. Finally, the ability of qualitative methodologies to access information of a sensitive nature or among vulnerable populations enhances their utility for theory construction:

> [Qualitative] methodology allows extensive probing in areas that have not been well studied and in which tightly structured nonqualitative approaches are difficult to use because of a lack of theory or research literature to guide tightly structured investigation. Thus, qualitative family research can be valuable in theory development (Rosenblatt & Fischer, 1993, p. 173).

Investigations of help-seeking benefit greatly from a tool that facilitates theory development (Liang et al., 2005), therefore qualitative analysis is especially appropriate in this analysis.

Methodological Overview

Research Questions

This analysis seeks to answer the following research questions: How do battered women marginalized by intersecting race, class, and gender systems make decisions to get help? What factors influence their decisions? What is important to them as they make the decision to get help, and as they decide which outlets to pursue for assistance?

Research Sites

Battered women who attended IPV support groups were recruited from two research sites: "Southeast City," a mid-sized urban city of roughly 190,000 residents in a southeastern state, and "Midwest Metro," a large urban center of roughly 900,000 residents located in a midwestern state.

Southeast City

The first research site, Southeast City, is the largest city in Southeast County and one of most populous cities in the state (pop. 190,000). According to the 2000 U.S. Census, the city population is 55.6% white, 37.1% Black, and 8.6% Hispanic, while just over half (53%) of the city's residents are women (see Table 1). The median household income in 1999 was roughly $37,000, and 15.2% of the city's population was living below the poverty level at that time. Southeast City is demographically quite similar to the county in which it is located, though it has a slightly higher Black and Hispanic population and its residents tend to be slightly poorer than county residents. Moreover, though there are several small cities adjacent to Southeast City, the county itself contains many rural areas as well.

Table 1. Research Site Population Data, Year 2000

	Southeast City	Southeast County	Midwest Metro	Midwest County
Population	190,299	306, 919	911,402	2,016, 202
Percent female	53.0	52.2	52.9	52.0
Percent Black	37.1	25.6	81.6	42.2
Percent white	55.6	68.5	12.3	51.7
Percent Hispanic	8.6	6.4	5.0	3.7
Percent H.S. grads (age 25+)	80.2	82.0	69.6	77.0
Percent homeowners	55.8	65.6	54.9	66.6
Median home value	$102,200	$114,000	$63,600	$99,400
Median income*	$37,006	$42,097	$29,526	$40,776
Percent below poverty	15.2	11.0	26.1	16.4
Land area (sq mi)	109	410	139	614
Persons per sq mi	1706.7	747.2	6855.1	3356.1

* Denotes 1999 data

Southeast County, and to a lesser extent Southeast City, has demonstrated a strong commitment to addressing IPV through intra-agency collaborations and partnerships. For example, the county recently consolidated representatives from all of its domestic violence support services (e.g., law enforcement, legal aid, victims services, etc.) in the county court building, located in Southeast City, in an effort to streamline service provision for IPV survivors. The city's shelter (in which the support group is housed) was funded principally by United Way monies, as well as state and federal funds and private donations. A converted retirement home that is striking in its attractiveness, the shelter houses 24 women. In addition, several of the adjacent cities have their own shelters as well. Some of the Southeast City participants mentioned that they either had been to (or had the opportunity to go to) a shelter in a nearby city, suggesting that reasonable opportunities exist for women to receive emergency shelter. The agency that

runs both the support group and the shelter is a county-level service provider that offers a broad array of family support services not limited to domestic violence programs, so it is well connected to the community. Finally, with respect to law enforcement, both the county and the city police departments have either mandatory- or pro-arrest policies. This fact will become important during the discussion in the following chapter of women who were court-ordered to attend the support group because they were arrested after having called the police.

Midwest Metro

The second research site, Midwest Metro, is the most populous city both in Midwest County and in the state, having just under a million residents. According to the 2000 U.S. Census, the city population is overwhelmingly Black (81.6%), with just 12.3% white and 5.0% Hispanic residents (see Table 1). Like Southeast City, just over half (52.9%) of Midwest Metro's residents are women. The median household income in 1999 was $29,526, and over one-quarter (26%) of the city's population was living below the poverty level at that time. Midwest Metro is demographically very unlike the county in which it is located, having roughly twice as many Black residents as, and a median income roughly $10,000 less than, Midwest County. Moreover, a sprawling suburban area surrounds Midwest Metro, and the county itself is home to some of the most affluent communities in the U.S.

As with many other of its public services, Midwest Metro is characterized by inadequate domestic violence services relative to the number of residents it must serve. For example, there is only one battered women's shelter in a city of nearly a million people. Although that shelter has 67 beds, the program director in Midwest Metro

indicated that there often is insufficient bed space because residents may have as many as five or six children staying with them, thereby reducing the actual number of beds available for women requiring emergency shelter. The only other women's shelter in the county is located some 30 miles away in a (predominately white, affluent) community that is largely inaccessible to many of the city's residents, particularly those who are poor and/or who lack transportation. The faith-based agency that runs the support group—located in a small, non-descript building—is small and self-contained, and is funded chiefly by individual and corporate donations, as well as by grant monies. Moreover, it is one of only two such programs for IPV survivors in the entire city. Finally, crime rates in Midwest Metro are notoriously among the highest in the nation, meaning that the city police department must respond to substantial amounts of serious, violent crime. Thus, as expressed by at least one participant in this research site, long delays sometimes can occur after a call to police is placed.

Sampling Strategy

This study utilizes a convenience sample of women from marginalized social groups who had experienced at least one incident of emotional, verbal, physical, or sexual abuse by an intimate partner, and who attended a community-based IPV support group. This sampling frame was chosen in an attempt to access women who had used the broadest array of help-seeking behaviors possible, both informal and formal. For example, unlike women in shelter- or police-based samples who by definition have engaged in relatively substantial formal help-seeking, several women in this sample had engaged in little formal help-seeking, limited only to support group attendance. Of course, all of the women in this sample had engaged in *some* type of formal help-seeking

by attending the support group (or by utilizing the criminal justice system, which then resulted in their support group attendance), meaning that the sample necessarily contains selection bias. Still, by not limiting the sample to women who had *necessarily* called the police or sought shelter, this study maximizes the spectrum of help-seeking behaviors utilized by the participants.

Participants were recruited by a key informant from the support group in each city. The key informants assisted in identifying and scheduling interviews with women who were willing to participate in the research study. Each participant who was interviewed was compensated in the amount of $25. The money for this remuneration was provided by the Michigan State University School of Criminal Justice, and was given to every participant who was interviewed, regardless of length or completeness of the interview.

Interviews were conducted between May and August 2006. I began by interviewing women in Southeast City. Once initial interviews there were completed, I analyzed the data and looked for emerging themes. Suspecting that some of the themes identified during the first round of interviews might be regionally specific, I sought out a group of similarly situated women in a different geographic area by selecting Midwest Metro as my second research site. With the addition of a non-southern research site, I aimed to explore whether and to what extent the experiences of the women in Southeast City were shared by the women in Midwest Metro by comparing data from the two locations.

Safety & Privacy Concerns

As the sample consists of battered women, maintaining the physical safety of the participants was paramount. This research project posed little additional risk to participants beyond what they had already experienced. Interviews were conducted where the support groups normally met, so participants were not asked to travel to an unfamiliar location. Each participant was informed before her interview that if at any time she believed her safety or the safety of her children to be at risk, she should immediately terminate her participation in the study and take the necessary safety precautions.

Participants' privacy was protected in several ways. First, participants chose pseudonyms for use during the research project. (I assigned pseudonyms to women who chose to use their real names during the interviews.) Once interviews were transcribed and data analysis was completed, the interviews were re-checked to ensure that no identifying information was included in the transcripts. At no time were the pseudonyms linked with participants' real names in the final analysis. Second, data confidentiality was maintained by storing all files on a password-protected computer to which I alone have access. I also obtained verbal and written consent from each participant. Before being interviewed, every participant signed a complete informed consent form stating: (1) that her participation is entirely voluntary, (2) that she may discontinue her participation in the project at any time and with no consequence (particularly if physical safety is a concern), and (3) that provision of support group services is in no way contingent upon or otherwise influenced by her participation in the study. Finally, participants were given

the opportunity to ask questions or voice their concerns about the study or their participation in it before interviews began.

Analytic Strategy

A systematic analysis of the research literature on battered women's help-seeking was first conducted in order to identify factors shown to influence help-seeking, and to aid in the formulation of questions for the interview instrument.[3] The interview instrument contains many questions that I aimed to cover during the interviews; however, as the interviews were semi-structured, each of these questions was not asked in a sequential fashion. Rather, I asked the participants three broad questions: (1) What was it like for you growing up?, (2) What was your relationship with your partner like?," and (3) What was the first time you decided to tell someone or get help?, and followed their responses from there. I was sure to cover each question on the interview instrument during the interview, although I did so by asking questions in an order that made sense in the women's developing narratives.

After collecting and coding interview data in the first research site (as described below), I identified themes that were important to understanding the participants' help-seeking decisions. Once the first round of data collection was completed, I selected an additional research site, from which I collected a second round of data. Results from the second round of data collection were compared to the first and themes were re-examined and refined.

It is important to note that the data in this dissertation are not limited to women's current romantic partnership. That is, I made the decision to include and analyze information about help-seeking in any abusive relationship that women had experienced.

[3] See Appendix A for the interview instrument.

This decision was made for two reasons, one practical and one theoretical. First, including information only from current relationships would have dramatically reduced the amount of data in this study. Some of the most insightful and informative comments women made concerned previous relationships, and this useful information would have been lost had I excluded prior relationship data from the analysis. Second, it became clear during data analysis that women's previous experiences with abuse and help-seeking were theoretically relevant. This discovery, coupled with a desire to maximize data quantity and quality, resulted in the decision to include any and all help-seeking experiences.

Coding Scheme

Data from the in-depth interviews were coded using an evolving coding paradigm. First, data were coded using an *open* coding system, an unstructured approach to coding in which the researcher identifies themes as they emerge from the data. The aim of this initial stage of coding is to identify concepts that fit the data (Strauss, 1987). Once I became comfortable with the themes that emerged from the open coding system, I moved on to a second and more refined coding system, *axial* coding. In axial coding, data analysis is centered on one category at a time; in other words, the category forms the axis of the code. As the researcher becomes more confident in the categories identified in open coding, a transition is made to focusing on particular categories through axial coding (Strauss, 1987). The final coding system was *selective* coding, in which data are collected and coded systematically around the principle, or *core category* (Strauss, 1987). A core category is one that anchors the data analysis, and that unites all of the themes that are identified throughout the coding process (Strauss, 1987). Thus, once a core category

has been identified, axial coding gives way to selective coding, which is used to specifically code around the core category.

Initial (open) coding was performed using the N6 software program. This program facilitates the coding process and provides an electronic means of categorizing and sorting blocks of text. Once I moved from open to axial and selective coding, I no longer used the N6 program and instead coded by hand. Whereas the software program was useful in the early stages of analysis when I was dealing with large amounts of data, as the data analysis became more directed and manageable I felt it was easier and faster to code by hand.

Trustworthiness & Credibility

Where quantitative studies demonstrate rigor though reliability and validity checks, qualitative studies use alternative measures of "trustworthiness," such as credibility. "Credibility, a criterion of trustworthiness in the naturalist paradigm that is similar to internal validity, is concerned with whether the reconstruction in the research findings represents constructed realities of participants" (Wuest & Merritt-Gray, 1999, p. 115). Some suggested steps for ensuring credibility of one's findings include documenting important decision-making processes in an "audit trail," and keeping research memos in order to record important thoughts, ideas, impressions, and hunches (Cutcliffe & McKenna, 1999). Other strategies for ensuring trustworthiness include triangulating data sources, maintaining a reflexive journal, and debriefing with fellow researchers (Lopez & Emmer, 2000). Several of these steps to ensure credibility and enhance trustworthiness were taken in this study. First, I created research memos detailing my initial reactions, insights, observations, and ideas about preliminary

findings. These memos were coded for themes along with the interview transcripts, and they also serve to document the development of my data analysis. Further, I engaged in peer debriefing by sharing my memos and the coded interview transcripts containing my emerging findings with my committee members. I also debriefed regularly with my dissertation chair, who observed my presentation to the participants in both research sites, as well as my first several interviews. Finally, I also spoke informally with the key informants in both research sites and shared with them my emergent findings. I took notes during my conversations with the key informants and, when appropriate, used their insight in analyzing the data.

Researcher Reflexivity

A defining characteristic of qualitative methodology is researcher reflexivity. Reflexivity "implies a shift in the way [researchers] understand data and their collection. To accomplish this, the researcher must make use of an internal dialogue that repeatedly examines *what the researcher knows* and *how the researcher came to know this*" (Berg, 2004, p. 154, emphasis in original). In other words, rather than assuming a stance of assumed neutrality, reflexive researchers evaluate how their presence shapes the construction of knowledge at each stage of the research process (Malterud, 2001).

From the outset, I worried about the social distance between myself and the women I would interview, and what effect our dissimilarities might have on the information they chose to reveal to me. Certainly, I share little in common with the women in my study: I am white, college educated, not economically disadvantaged, and not an IPV survivor. This is particularly true in Southeast City, where my status as an outsider also included being a "yankee". (Some of the women there took good-natured

jabs at me about by my "accent".) I also was cognizant of how my status as a university researcher shaped the women's impressions of me. For example, several of the women addressed me as "ma'am," despite my repeated assurances that such formality was unnecessary. Thus, I anticipated that the women might regard me either with skepticism and distrust or with an exaggerated sense of deference (or a combination of the two), and wondered about how this dynamic would influence the amount and type of information the women chose to share with me during the interviews.

Informed by the assumptions of feminist standpoint epistemology (e.g., see Hartsock, 1998), I proceeded with the understanding that I could achieve at best only a partial understanding of the women's experiences. I also was keenly aware that the manner in which the women represented their lives likely would have differed had they been interviewed by a member of their own community. With that knowledge in mind, I worked to establish a trustworthy relationship with the participants in order to facilitate their willingness to speak with me. For example, after meeting with me privately, the key informants in each site spoke to their clients on my behalf, describing me as a safe ally in whom they could feel comfortable confiding. The key informants' endorsement acted as a "buffer" against the social distance between myself and the women, encouraging them to share their experiences with me. I also made an initial presentation introducing myself and describing my research project to the women in each research site during one of the group counseling sessions. Despite my initial concerns that I would be greeted with skepticism and distrust (and notwithstanding the surprising amount of nervousness I experienced before my very first address in Southeast City), my presentation was met

with a mixture of excitement and appreciativeness, and the women generally were eager to speak with me.

Like other researchers who have interviewed across great social distance and found their participants to be generally forthcoming (e.g., Websdale, 1998), I perceived the women to be extremely candid during their interviews. Time and again, they shared with me—an outsider and a complete stranger—incredibly painful, private, and personal details of their lives. In fact, more than one woman stated that I was the first person to whom she had ever revealed such intimate details of her relationship. After the interviews were completed, women in both research sites expressed gratitude for the opportunity to tell their stories, and thanked me repeatedly for taking an interest in—and thereby acknowledging and validating—their experiences. For these reasons, I believe that providing the women the opportunity to "give voice" to their experiences went a long way toward overcoming the potential challenges presented by our social distance.

Sample Characteristics

The sample for this study consists of 19 women: 15 from Southeast City and four from Midwest Metro (see Table 2). The women range in age from 21 to 57, with the mean age being 31. The sample is fairly racially diverse: 12 (63.2%) of the women are Black, 5 (26.3%) are white, one is a Spanish-speaking Latina, and one self-identified as "multicultural". Like all four women in Midwest Metro, eight women in Southeast City lived in the community at the time of the interview, while the remaining seven women

were shelter residents.[4] Just over half (57.9%) of the women were employed in some capacity (part-time, full-time, or self-employed) at the time of the interview. Seven women (36.8%) were married to their partners at the time of the interview, and all but four (78.9%) have children. Five of the 15 women in Southeast City were court-ordered to attend the support group, either because they had been arrested on scene after calling the police for help, or because they had failed to appear at a hearing at which they were scheduled to testify against their partners (i.e., they were "show-caused" into the support group). It is not possible to be court-ordered into the program in Midwest Metro, so this issue did not apply to the women there.

[4] The support group in Midwest Metro provides extended services—that is, after the time of initial crisis and often after a woman has left her partner—which likely explains why none of the women in that city stayed in a shelter at the time of the interviews.

Table 2. Sample Descriptive Data (N=19)

Variable	N (%)
Location	
Southeast City	15 (78.9)
Midwest Metro	4 (21.1)
Age	
Range	21-57
Mean	31
Race	
Black	12 (63.2)
White	5 (26.3)
Latina	1 (5.3)
Multi	1 (5.3)
Residence	
Community	8 (42.1)
Shelter	7 (36.8)
Employed	
Yes	11 (57.9)
No	8 (42.1)
Married	
Yes	7 (36.8)
No	12 (63.2)
Children	
Yes	15 (78.9)
No	4 (21.1)
Court-Ordered*	
Yes	5 (33.3)
No	10 (66.6)

* Southeast City only (N=15)

The women in this study experience marginalization in multiple and multiplicative ways. First, 14 of the 19 participants (73.7%) are women of color who occupy a marginalized social location on the basis of race/ethnicity. Two of the women are immigrants (one white, one Latina); the former moved to the United States from Germany as young child while the latter arrived from Mexico as a teenager. Many of the woman experienced economic marginalization, in some cases because they had grown up

very poor, but more often owing to ongoing financial struggles in adulthood. For example, eight women (42.1%) were unemployed at the time of the interview, and several discussed at length their economic hardships, including lack of transportation and insufficient money for housing, child care, and, at times, basic necessities such as diapers. Further, most of the economically marginalized women are women of color, thereby underscoring the role of intersecting systems of power such as race/ethnicity and class. As for other sources of marginalization, a few of the women recounted growing up in remote, rural areas of the country, while the two foreign-born women described experiences of cultural isolation. However, all of the women reported having male partners, so none was marginalized due to sexual orientation; likewise religious marginalization was not a factor as none of the women identified as being non-Christian.[5]

Women in the sample experienced a wide array of abusive behaviors in their relationships, ranging from verbal abuse only to savage, life-threatening beatings. Notably, eight women (42.1%) had been in more than one abusive relationship (see Table 3), sometimes going back as early as high school. This finding has important implications for help-seeking, as Chapter Six reveals, but for now it is relevant to recall that the abuse data reported here include experiences from any of the women's relationships, not necessarily her most current partner.

[5] See Appendix B for a data display of participants' demographic profiles.

Table 3. Abuse Experiences in Any Relationship

Type of Abuse	N (%)
Verbal/emotional abuse	19 (100)
Threats/control tactics	17 (89.5)
Partner substance abuse	11 (57.9)
Moderate physical abuse	18 (94.7)
Severe physical abuse	8 (42.1)
Sexual abuse	5 (26.3)
Child threats/abuse	6 (31.6)
More than one abusive partner	8 (42.1)

Some abusive behaviors were universally experienced. For example, every woman in the sample reported experiencing verbal and/or emotional abuse, such as when their partners called them names or made embarrassing or degrading comments about them. Similarly, all but two women reported that their partners threatened them (often involving threats to kill), or engaged in control tactics such as taking away car keys or refusing access to cash. In some cases these measures of control were extreme, leaving women virtual prisoners in their own homes. For example, Lana's partner insisted that she shower with him, and failing to obey him would result in physical abuse. Similarly, Nikki was not allowed to leave her bedroom for long periods of time under her partner's threats of death. In some cases, control was exerted in the form of physical violence with which women were "punished" for their transgressions, like overcooking their partner's broccoli or failing to stop a housefly from entering the home. Other control tactics centered around the children. For example, Keira tearfully recalled how her partner prevented her from attending to her young son, whom he had locked in a bedroom, despite the toddler's extended sobbing and frantic pleas. Nearly 60% of the sample reported that their partners' abusive episodes were fueled by drugs and/or alcohol use, or that their partners had a substance abuse problem.

All but one woman reported incidents of moderate physical abuse. (The exception, Eleanor, had a partner who emotionally abused her and who physically abused the minor child living in their home, but who never physically assaulted her.) For the purposes of this analysis, moderate abuse includes violence that generally would not require immediate medical attention, including slapping, hitting, punching, kicking, biting, pulling hair, and the like. In contrast, eight women (42.1%) experienced severe physical abuse, or that which likely would require immediate medical attention. Examples of severe physical abuse experienced by the participants include being burned with a hot iron, being kicked in the head with a steel-toed boot, and being struck in the head with a cast-iron frying pan. Some women's injuries even were disfiguring or life-threatening, including broken noses, jaws, teeth, and ribs, stabbings, and, in Nikki's case, having her nipple bitten off of her breast. Several women reported being assaulted while pregnant (or that the abuse began after they became pregnant), and at times their fetuses were endangered. Five women (26.3%) reported that their partners sexually assaulted them, with some describing how their partners treated them like "sex slaves." Additionally, six women (31.6%) indicated that the abuse was directed at their minor child(ren), either in the form of verbal abuse or threats or involving actual physical abuse.[6]

Summary

This chapter presents justification for the use of qualitative methodology in this dissertation, and provides an overview of the research project. The sample descriptive data familiarizes the reader with the study participants, and serves as a reminder that they

[6] See Appendix C for a data display of participants' abuse experiences.

are real women who have had very real—and very frightening—experiences with IPV. Research results concerning the women's help-seeking decisions are presented in the following two chapters.

CHAPTER FIVE:
RE-EXAMINING HELP-SEEKING

The results of this dissertation are presented in two parts. First, this chapter presents information about the women's help-seeking strategies and the factors that shaped their help-seeking decisions. This chapter also returns to the discussion of barriers begun in Chapter Two to see what, if any, barriers to help-seeking were encountered by the participants. Next, Chapter Six identifies concepts and themes that emerged from the data that may be used in offering a theoretical framework for understanding battered women's help-seeking decisions. Together, these two chapters provide a thorough picture of the women's help-seeking that emerged from this analysis.

Help-Seeking Strategies Used

Quite purposefully, this dissertation uses the broadest possible definition of "help-seeking". In contrast to analyses that count the number of participants who engage in pre-determined help-seeking activities (i.e., calling the police), in coding the data I identified as help-seeking any behavior that might reasonably be conceived of as an effort to ameliorate abuse, including actions like praying for guidance or changing the locks. My decision to include private or personal survival strategies is supported by other help-seeking studies that have done the same (e.g., see Bowker, 1983). Once tallied, I divided these strategies into two categories: informal and formal. In contrast to informal strategies, formal strategies involve a person or agency acting in an official capacity, or a source of support that is "officially sanctioned by the community" (Bowker, 1983, p. 87).

Some researchers draw distinctions between "personal" strategies, such as hiding or attempting to dissuade one's partner from becoming violent, and informal strategies like telling friends or relatives about the abuse (Bowker, 1983). However, as a criminologist the primary distinction of interest for me is informal versus formal help-seeking (especially using the criminal justice system), therefore in this analysis I consider "personal" and "informal" strategies together. Finally, using an inclusive approach to coding help-seeking behaviors allowed the most complete possible picture of help-seeking to emerge.

Informal Strategies

Mirroring the findings of most help-seeking studies, participants in this study engaged in a wide array of informal help-seeking strategies (see Table 4). At the most basic level, six women (31.6%) told a relative or a friend about the abuse, while three women (15.8%) told their pastor or someone at their church. Some of the women engaged in what can be described as very private help-seeking strategies, such as secretly plotting their escape from the relationship (15.8%), engaging in peacekeeping strategies like complying with their partners' requests for sex or money (10.5%), avoiding their partner by sleeping in separate rooms (26.3%), or other preventative measures like changing the locks or their telephone number (10.5%).[7]

[7] See Appendix D for a data display of participants' informal help-seeking strategies.

Table 4. Help-Seeking Strategies Used in Any Relationship

Help-Seeking Strategy	N (%)
Informal	
Fought back/used self-defense	10 (52.6)
Separated from partner/moved out	7 (36.8)
Prayed/ask for God's help	7 (36.8)
Told family or friends	6 (31.6)
Fled the home	5 (26.3)
Avoidance/slept on couch	5 (26.3)
Told pastor or people at church	3 (15.8)
Alerted neighbors (e.g., by screaming)	3 (15.8)
Plotted to leave/planned escape	3 (15.8)
Contemplated killing partner	2 (10.5)
Used peacekeeping (e.g., complied with request for sex or money)	2 (10.5)
Asked partner to go to counseling	2 (10.5)
Changed locks/phone number	2 (10.5)
Used private/self-help	1 (5.3)
Formal	
Contacted police	14 (73.7)
Entered shelter	11 (57.9)
Took out warrant/pressed charges	9 (47.4)
Obtained protection order	7 (36.8)
Sought out support group*	6 (42.9)
Went to hospital for medical treatment	4 (21.1)
Told other professional personnel (e.g., social worker)	4 (21.1)
Testified in court	3 (15.8)
Filed for divorce	3 (15.8)
Told medical/health care personnel	3 (15.8)
Hired attorney	1 (5.3)

*Excludes court-ordered women (N=14)

It is important that these types of private or surreptitious forms of help-seeking be recognized. While outward appearances might suggest that women using these personal methods did not actively seek help, in fact they engaged in what Gondolf & Fisher (1988) termed "survival strategies," which, though private, are nonetheless examples of help-seeking. One poignant example helps to illustrate this point. In her interview, Keira recalled one strategy she used to fend of her partner's sexual assaults: "I wouldn't bathe thinkin' he wouldn't touch me because of it...." Keira's attempts to make herself undesirable in an effort to prevent her partner from raping her emphasize that it is important to use an inclusive definition of help-seeking. Stated differently, her efforts might otherwise go undetected in investigations using more narrowly defined help-seeking behaviors.

Other women used more visible informal measures, such as fleeing the home (26.3%) or, rather ingenuously, alerting neighbors to an incident of abuse by screaming (15.8%). As Rhonda succinctly recalls, "What it was, I didn't call the police, but I didn't keep myself quiet in that house." In this instance, Rhonda's informal help-seeking was relatively fruitful, as she continues, "And somebody heard my scream. And he testified in my case [about] what he heard." Additionally, ten women (52.6%), described fighting back against their partners, sometimes using weapons and, in at least one case, potentially lethal violence. In fact, two women seriously contemplated killing their partners as a means of escaping the abuse.[8] Other types of relatively visible help-seeking strategies used by the women include moving out of the house or separating from their partners

[8] This finding raises the question of lethal violence as a form of help-seeking, an option to which some women may turn particularly in the absence of perceived alternatives (Dutton, Hohnecker, Halle, & Burghardt, 1994). Although related, this issue is beyond the scope of this paper.

(36.8%), or, taking the opposite approach, asking their partners to attend marital counseling (10.5%).

Personal Spirituality

One of the most prominent themes to emerge from this analysis is the crucial role of women's church communities and/or personal spirituality in their decisions to seek help. In fact, it was the frequency with which women in Southeast City spoke passionately about their faith in God that prompted the selection of Midwest Metro as an additional research site. Religiosity is generally accepted to be higher in the American South than in other regions of the country (Smith, Sikkink, & Bailey, 1998), therefore I wanted to know whether personal spirituality would be as important to similarly situated women in a non-southern location as it was to the women in Southeast City. As it turns out, spirituality-based help-seeking was not regionally specific, as women in both research sites drew upon their personal faith as a source of support.[9] Four women from Southeast City and three from Midwest Metro (seven women total; 36.8%) prayed for guidance or asked God for help in their relationships, while one woman from each research site (two women total; 10.5%) drew strength from a particularly inspirational hymn or gospel song. Other researchers have demonstrated that personal spirituality is an important source of support for Black battered women (Few & Bell-Scott, 2002; Potter, 2007), a finding that is unsurprising given the importance of Black spirituality more generally resulting from the African slavery experience (Few & Bell-Scott, 2002). Interestingly, though, spirituality was not limited to Black participants in this study, as some white women also spoke movingly about their faith in God. Thus, for the seven

[9] Although these findings are not intended to be generalized to the broader population of battered women, they are still presented with caution given the far smaller sample size in Midwest Metro than in Southeast City. Please see discussion of sample size in Chapter Seven for more information.

women who described drawing upon their faith as a means of seeking help, it proved to be an extremely important source of support.

While some women spoke to their pastors, church leaders, or other parishioners in an effort to get help, others described how their own individual spirituality was a key source of strength for them. These women discussed at length how, when they felt that all else was lost, they still had their faith in God to fall back on; in other words, "God was all I had." Indeed, it is perhaps unsurprising that women whose partners had isolated them almost completely would draw most deeply from the one source of support that no-one could take from them: their personal faith. In the following dramatic example, Rhonda describes how her decision to finally flee her abuser was prompted by hearing God instruct her to do so:

> And he—after he beat me like that he laid down and went to sleep! Laid down and went to sleep. Now one thing [was] tellin' me to bash him upside his head...You know what I'm sayin'? I think that's where my whole spiritual thing came in, [because] something was like, "Rhonda, *get out*." Because I know if he wake up, I'll probably be dead.... I was like, "Oh my God, he's asleep." [But then I heard the voice] sayin', "Rhonda, get out!" I think it was God, 'cause it was just so *clear*. It was like, "Rhonda, get out!" It wadn't even my subconscious. Man, I threw on my Timberlands, blood all over from drippin' on my shoes and clothes. Ran over there, got my son, wrapped him up—he had on pajamas—I packed everything that I thought he would need. All I had on was bloody clothes, [but] I didn't care... I [will] never forget that. [Later] I told my mom, "I

heard the voice of God." I know in the...Old Testament when God used to speak to people...that's how He spoke to me...He just spoke and said, "Get out!" and I got out...[I]t wadn't my voice. It was somebody else..."*Get out.*" And I left, 'cause I think that God knew that he was gonna wake up, 'cause He knew that the devil was in his heart, and [that he would] kill me because he beat me so bad...

Formal Strategies

In addition to the informal strategies described above, women also availed themselves of more formal strategies involving the criminal justice system or other professional outlets. In fact, it appears as though women in this analysis generally used formal strategies more often than informal strategies. This discussion of formal strategies begins with women's use of the criminal justice system, and then continues onto other formal avenues of support. [10]

The Criminal Justice System

Police. Fourteen women (73.7%) called the police for help (see Table 5). This is a sizeable percentage of women, and offers hope that the women in this study did not face some of the barriers to police utilization that were outlined in Chapter Two. However, women's intentions in calling the police often varied, as did their satisfaction with the help they received once police arrived. With respect to their intentions, some women called the police with the hope that their partners would be arrested, whereas others simply wished for the police to diffuse the situation. In some cases women's reluctance to have their partners arrested despite calling the police appeared to stem from practical concerns, as several women echoed the sentiment that "he doesn't do nobody

[10] See Appendix E for a data display of participants' formal help-seeking strategies.

any good in jail". However, at other times it seemed to be rooted in women's genuine concern for their partners. For example Lana's ambivalence is palpable: "I didn't want him [in] jail. I didn't want him in trouble...I just didn't want him to do mean things [to me]".

With respect to satisfaction, there was tremendous variation. Some women felt validated by the responding officers, whom they described as "supportive" and who treated their situations seriously and with respect. For example, several women noted with gratitude that on-scene officers gave them materials about domestic violence resources, encouraged them to make use of those resources, and in some cases physically transported them to the shelter. Indeed, several officers expressed laudable compassion, sensitivity, and understanding of IPV dynamics, as when they warned women, "What about when he gets tired of breaking things?," or "I went on a case and it didn't end up as good as yours did." Lana recalled that one officer "was trying his best" to convince her to admit that her partner had assaulted her, telling her, "All you have to do is nod your head and we'll arrest him right now." All of these examples offer reassurance that police officers often respond appropriately to IPV calls.

Meanwhile, other women expressed dissatisfaction with the police response to their calls. For example, Tammy noted that the police failed to arrest her partner on an outstanding domestic abuse warrant, while Olivia expressed concern about the amount of time it took for the police to respond to her call (perhaps unsurprising given the high volume of calls police officers in Midwest Metro must field). Other women felt that the responding officers were condescending and dismissive toward them. Not surprisingly, especially in the case of those who themselves were arrested, women who were

dissatisfied with the police sometimes remarked that calling the police had "backfired" on them.

This "backfire" constitutes a worst-case scenario from a help-seeking perspective. For example, Melanie had never told anyone about the abuse in her relationship, despite the fact that it had gone on "for years". One day, after her partner threw a full beer can at her face, she decided to call the police, which marked her first ever attempt at help-seeking. Based on claims that her partner made that she had injured him, and despite bruises on her face from where the beer can had hit her, the responding officers decided to arrest her and not her partner. She describes her arrest this way:

> It was terrible. Um, I couldn't believe that I was being arrested. I really couldn't. And it was like, the attitude that the officer had, he was like, "Well, I had to come out so somebody's going to jail," you know. And I just couldn't believe that. You know, just like that I was being arrested.

Obviously, for Melanie and others like her, calling the police did not result in the desired outcome, and, as described below, more than one woman expressed that she would never again make use of the police unless her life depended on it. Still, it is important to remember that many women praised the police and reported high levels of satisfaction. Thus, women's experiences with the police were far from universal.

Prosecution. A slightly smaller group of women (47.4%) made use of the criminal justice system by requesting warrants or pressing charges against their partners. Interestingly, of the nine women who agreed to press charges, only three actually testified in court against their partners. In some cases testimony might have been unnecessary, but in other cases the women described changing their minds and deciding against going to

court, sometimes out of fear of reprisal, but other times out of a desire to reconcile with their partners. As described in Chapter Four, aside from those who were arrested on scene, other Southeast City women were court-ordered into the support group ("show caused") as punishment for failing to testify against their partners.

Like the police, the court system sometimes was a source of dissatisfaction for the participants. In particular, women were dissatisfied both with the judicial process, which many found extremely frustrating and confusing, as well as with individual judges. Several women described being overwhelmed by the paperwork that was required of them, and explained that their resulting confusion was misinterpreted as deceit by the judges in front of whom they appeared. For example, Darlene describes how her "tounge-twistin'" stemming from her exasperation with the court process led the judge to believe that she was "misleading the court" about the circumstances of her assault, resulting in her being sanctioned. Similarly, Gretchen recalls how frazzled she felt during the court process after several days' absence from her home, which she had fled:

> And we spent all day in the courthouse fillin' out the paperwork. Oh, God, we were there [for] five hours. And then from there they take you into the courtroom, before the judge, and I was just so...you know...[it was] just so much to, to go through, I didn't know what was going to happen. And, uh, it was just rough...And I'm sittin' here and I'm like, "My whole world is just fallin' apart. I don't know what I'm going to do." I can't go home, I can't even get my contacts in. I'm wearin' my glasses, no makeup, my hair—I mean, I, you know—I'm like, "God!"

Finally, still other women recalled feeling as though they were given short shrift by judges who did not give them a chance to fully explain their experiences. However, not every court experience was negative, as some women commented that individual court staffers were helpful and encouraging, thereby alleviating some of their anxiety about the court process. As with the police, then, women's experiences with the court system were varied.

Protection orders. Seven women (36.8%) obtained protection orders against their partners. Often securing a protection order as an additional measure of safety, these women shared Olivia's philosophy: "Let somebody know in the system". As with the other two criminal justice resources, women experienced varying levels of success and satisfaction with their protection orders. On the positive side, Nikki reported that her protection order was very successful in keeping her partner away from her, noting that he did not contact her at all during the time the order was in place. However, in a painful bit of irony, Nikki also explained that the judge failed to renew her protection order *because her partner had not bothered her*, and that once the order expired her partner resumed harassing and threatening her:

> I got a order of protection, it lasted two years. Last year January the order of protection was up. That's when the harassment calls started. That's when I went back to the police to tell 'em [*claps hands*] to give me a new order of protection, but they wouldn't give it to me. That's when the death threats started. "I'ma kill you, and I'm gonna take my kids." So it got to the point where he shot out the front of my door, of my house, and

um, my kids were upstairs. Twelve bullets went through my house... I needed my order of protection renewed and they wouldn't do it.

They wouldn't do it, because he hadn't bothered you in two years, right?

Yep. That's why...I didn't understand [it]. The only reason he stayed away was 'cause of the order of protection. If he stayin' away 'cause of the order of protection, give me another one!

Similarly, Gretchen recalls with disbelief how the judge refused to issue her a protection order. Gretchen's husband, angry that she had inadvertently run into her ex-husband (and the father of her eldest son) at a Christmas gathering, locked himself in their bedroom for two days, emerging periodically in silence only to retrieve more beer from the refrigerator. Describing her husband as a "volcano" ready to erupt, Gretchen sensed the danger she and her youngest son were in:

> And, you know, [there were] beer cans on the counter, and I'm thinking, you know, "That's not good." He's been locked in the bedroom since Christmas Eve, hasn't even come out to have anything to do with Christmas Day with his child, he was just fixated on, you know, my ex-husband [showing] up [at the party the day before]...I looked at [my son] and I said, "I'm not stayin' here, let's go." So we left.

Despite her husband's ominous behavior and her keen awareness that his fury was "festering," the judge decided that a protection order was not warranted because Gretchen's husband had not physically harmed her or her son. Given situations like this in which their proactive efforts at help-seeking prove fruitless, it is easy to understand why women can be disillusioned and dissatisfied with orders of protection.

Prior criminal justice help-seeking. A final word about criminal justice help-seeking is warranted here. It is especially important to consider how women's experiences with the criminal justice system can influence their inclination to again use criminal justice resources in the future. For example, one of the few existing studies to specifically examine this issue found that, logically, women were more likely to reuse the criminal justice system for help with IPV if they initially were treated well by the system, among other factors (Fleury-Steiner, Bybee, Sullivan, Belknap, & Melton, 2006). As data from this dissertation reveal, the opposite idiom also applies: negative experiences can dissuade women from using the criminal justice system again.

It is particularly problematic when women who have negative experiences with the criminal justice system decide against re-using it in future, as this cuts off an important and potentially valuable avenue of support. For example, Gretchen recalled how inadequate domestic violence laws and ineffectual police response during her first abusive relationship nearly two decades ago soured her on the criminal justice system:

> If [the laws then were the same as the laws now, the police] would have gone and picked him up immediately because I had marks all over my body from where he would throw me down the stairs and stuff. Now it's automatic. Back then it wasn't. So, um, you know, I mean, you don't go to the police because my experience with my first husband was, well, you know, "You're still married! He can do whatever he wants to you!" Unless he's actually, you know, in front of their face, that's when they'll take him off [to jail]... [At that time I] never really had, uh, any laws to really protect me or help me, and I never went to the police.

Other examples involve criminal justice staff who were dismissive or rude to women as they attempted to navigate the system. For example, Olivia described feeling belittled by the court staffer who assisted her in filing her protection order, whose attitude suggested, "We've heard it all before". In Lana's case, she took offense when a police officer questioned her decision to press charges against her partner by asking her, "Do you really want to go to court over a push?" Similarly, Paula felt manipulated by the police into taking out a warrant against her partner, an action for which she later was sanctioned when she attempted to drop the charges.

Understandably, bitterness and disillusionment with the criminal justice system were particularly acute for the five women from Southeast City who were arrested, incarcerated, and/or court-ordered to attend the support group. In terms of fostering a healthy criminal justice response to IPV, instances in which battered women are themselves arrested after calling the police are especially damaging. Over two decades of research, community organizing, and awareness-raising have been dedicated to encouraging battered women to utilize the criminal justice system, and to train police officers to treat IPV seriously. However, some of the women in this study who turned to police or the courts and themselves were punished expressed understandable reluctance (and at times outright refusal) to involve the criminal justice system again. As Paula, who was arrested, jailed, and court ordered to attend the support group, bluntly remarked, "And now, going through what I've been through? I think if he hit me I'd be damned if I'd call the police. Because I'm not the one who—I'm the one in trouble here....I don't trust the police here now." Though these experiences thankfully do not represent the

norm, they nonetheless have serious ramifications for battered women's willingness (or lack thereof) to use the criminal justice system as an avenue of support.

Other Formal Avenues

Shelter & Support Group

Eleven women (57.9%) sought shelter as a means of reprieve from their abusive relationships, and all eleven were from Southeast City. This finding likely is an artifact of the sampling strategy. The support group in Southeast City is located in the shelter, therefore shelter residents were easily recruited for participation in the study. However, this finding also may reflect the relative inaccessibility of shelter space in Midwest Metro, as none of the four women interviewed there had ever stayed in a shelter. As described previously, shelter space in Midwest Metro is woefully inadequate relative to the number of city residents. Additionally, six of the 14 women who were not court-ordered (42.9%) sought out the support group on their own, absent shelter residency. Four of these women were from Midwest Metro, which again likely is a sampling artifact as none of the women there entered the support group via shelter residency or court order, as was the case in Southeast City.

Almost unanimously, women reported being very satisfied with both shelter and support group services. Satisfaction was not entirely universal, though, as there were a few sources of contention. Not surprisingly, the chief complaint women had about the shelter involved the harsh realities of shelter life, such as loss of freedom and the difficulties of living in a confined space with many other people. For example, some women cited disputes with other shelter residents as being a problem, while other women spoke of their annoyance at having to abide by shelter rules and regulations. Still other

women described shelter residency as "embarrassing," and experienced feelings of depression and resignation in their first few days there. As April describes:

> And I thought about [going to the shelter] long and hard. I was like, "Leave *all* my stuff from home and just go to this place?" When I got here I just cried and cried and cried. I felt like I was in a prison. [Because] I couldn't, you know, go walk in the kitchen and cook my food, or sit on my couch and watch a DVD with my baby, you know. Let her play in her room with any of her toys. It was just really, really hard. Really hard.

Despite these problems, nearly all of the shelter residents recognized the crucial assistance the shelter provided to them. Most women, even those who described having initial regret at entering the shelter, ended up praising it for providing a sanctuary from their abuse and a safe haven to which they and their children could escape and feel secure. Gretchen was particularly effusive in her praise: "But a place like this gives you safety and everything. Safety, shelter... It gives you a new beginning to get, you know, to finally get out. And every city should have one. They really should."

Similarly, the support group elicited equally heartfelt praise from women in both Southeast City and Midwest Metro. In some cases, the primary benefit women derived from the support group was financial, such as housing vouchers, grocery coupons, or other sources of financial assistance. In other cases, women noted that the support group provided them with assistance in job training, resume writing, and other practical skills. However, the primary source of satisfaction for support group members was the support, encouragement, guidance, and validation they received from their fellow members. In

particular, women noted the tremendous value of hearing stories of other women with abuse experiences, and knowing that they were not alone. Although hearing stories of abuse more severe than their own initially caused some women to downplay or doubt their own victimization, they all agreed that their fellow residents were quick to point out that abuse of any type or severity is unacceptable.

Notably, satisfaction with the support group even extends to the women who did not participate voluntarily. Though several of the court-ordered women expressed initial feelings of resentment and defiance at being forced to attend the support group, they all came to appreciate the knowledge that there are other women who have experienced abuse by an intimate partner. Paula recounts her shifting feelings this way:

> Oh no, [at first] I was [*whispers*] pissed! And I put it off for a long time... there were times that I coulda come [to the support group] that I was just really puttin' it off because I was mad and didn't think I was the one that was supposed to be in therapy. Which, I see now that it does help me. It really helps a lot...

Finally, it is worth noting that two women, Nikki and Jackie, believed deeply enough in the benefits of seeking counseling services that they actively sought out a support group despite no longer being with their abusive partners in an effort to find continued support.

Legal & Medical Systems

Only one woman (5.3%) availed herself of legal assistance by hiring an attorney, and just three of the seven married women (42.9%) filed for divorce. That comparably few women sought legal assistance may or may not be a function of the relatively low socio-economic status of the participants, though it is noteworthy that the one woman to

hire an attorney (Gretchen) is a white woman who is employed full-time. As for medical help-seeking, four women (21.1%) went to the hospital to seek treatment for injuries, though it is important to point out that in two of those four cases their partners took them to the hospital.[11] Interestingly, of the four women who went to the hospital, only one disclosed to emergency room doctors what really had happened; the remaining women lied about the origin of their injuries. When asked why they concealed the abuse from the doctors, women gave answers including fear of her partner (Nikki), ambivalence about her role in the altercation (Bethany), and concern about disappointing her family (Rhonda). Ironically, the one woman who told the truth was not believed because her partner accompanied her to the hospital. In Izzy's words:

> He had stomped on my shoulder, you know, when I was layin' down one time, we got in a fight. And I had to go to the hospital and they thought I was crazy because he *took* me, and I kept tellin' them he did it, you know...
>
> ***They didn't believe you?***
>
> They thought I was crazy. They said, "Are you high?" [*laughs incredulously*] I was like, "No." You know, it hurt for months. When I would cough or sneeze or anything it would hurt real bad up in here [*points to shoulder*].
>
> ***And you told them that your partner had done that to you?***
>
> Mm hmm. And they asked me if I was high [*laughs*], at the hospital. It was, like, 4:00 in the mornin', you know.

[11] Two other woman, Fran and Paula, disclosed the abuse to a personal physician or a mental health professional.

And then that was it? They never followed up? Or –

...I mean, he took me [to the hospital]. I guess they [figured], "Well, he wouldn't be here, you know, if he [had hurt me]."

Lastly, four women (21.1%) disclosed their abusive relationship to some other professional, such as a social worker or their children's teacher or daycare provider.

Reasons for Help-Seeking

During the interviews women described many and varied reasons for seeking help. The two most common reasons given by participants in this study have been well documented in the help-seeking literature: over half of the women (57.9%) were motivated to seek help either out of concern for their children's safety and well-being, or out of a feeling that they had reached the threshold of what they could endure (see Table 5).

Table 5. Reasons for Help-Seeking

Reason	N (%)
Desire to protect children	11 (57.9)
Reached threshold ("enough is enough")	11 (57.9)
Religious motivation	7 (36.8)
Recognized toll abuse was taking/wanted to better self	6 (31.6)
Abuse got particularly severe (e.g., weapon used)	4 (21.1)
Wanted to document abuse/didn't want partner to get away with it	4 (21.1)
Believed abuse was life-threatening; feared death	4 (21.1)
Desire to break cycle of violence	3 (15.8)
Tired of lying about abuse	1 (5.3)
Abuse occurred in presence of others	1 (5.3)
Desire to protect other family members	1 (5.3)
Saw friend in similar situation	1 (5.3)
Felt situation was getting out of control	1 (5.3)

First, many women expressed that, while they believed they could tolerate the abuse, they could not stand the toll the abuse was taking on their children. In some cases, this happened after the first time that the woman's partner focused his abuse on one of her children, as in this incident recalled by Rhonda:

> But, the last time with this one, he swung my baby, his daughter. That's what drew the line with me. He grabbed her by one arm like a *rag doll*—she like this [*dangles arm limply*]—and swings her over me. I grab her, 'cause I don't know if he gonna let her go or knock her arm outta socket. [*snaps fingers*] That drew the line.

In other cases, women agonized over the emotional toll that their own victimization was taking on their children. For example, several women noted seeing a negative change in their children's outward demeanor, and consequently fretted over their mental if not their physical health. In Keira's case, her anguish over her partner's threats to harm her children spurred her into action:

> And I [thought to myself], "I can't do this no more, 'cause you're hurtin' my—you're hurtin' me, but you're hurtin' my kids most of all. And I can't have my kids hurtin' because of you." I mean, uh, I just can't do it. God done blessed me with kids to love and to love me back, and that was, like, the only love that I was gettin'. I mean, I cherish that, so I couldn't have him threatenin' me with my kids or threatenin' my kids. I just couldn't do that, so that was what pushed the decision [to leave].

Second, other women expressed a more nebulous feeling that they had simply reached their breaking point in terms of tolerating the abuse. Termed by some researchers as a "threshold," (Fugate et al., 2005) the idea that "enough is enough" is an important theme of this study. Phrases such as "last straw," "I couldn't take nothin' else," "tired of everything," and "just had enough," illustrate that, once their breaking point was reached, women were motivated to seek help when they previously had not. In Bethany's case, her threshold was reached when an injury she sustained left a scar, a permanent reminder of the abuse she had sustained: "That was like a wake up call. 'Cause I don't want no more scars from no more men. That is my goal... I'm not takin' nothin' from nobody else."

Alternatively, six women (31.6%) stated that they were motivated to get help after recognizing the toll that the abuse was taking on them, or out of a desire to better themselves. As Samantha put it, "I knew that I was a beautiful young lady and I deserved better than that....[so] I separated from him." Four women (21.1%) found motivation for seeking help after the abuse directed toward them became particularly severe, such as if a

weapon was used for the first time, while an equal number were prompted into action when they perceived that their lives were seriously in danger.

The previous section described the role of personal faith in the lives of many of the women in this study, therefore it is not surprising that seven women (36.8%) had some sort of religious motivation for seeking help. For example, Rhonda rationalized her decision to get help this way:

> Now, if God already promised us troubles with the days that we have, why add troubles on top of that?...The Bible says He *promised* us these days—the days of plague, the days of this, the days of that...Now, if you already promised all these troubles in this world, why you goin' sit there and let somebody hit on you? Why you goin' to sit there and let somebody disrespect you?

Similarly, this passage from Jackie's interview echoes the use of scripture to justify her decision to seek help: "I had to put God first and leave the devil alone, 'cause he wadn't nothin' but the devil. So I made a decision: I kept God in my life and I left the devil alone. He was the devil in my life, so I had to get rid of him. Either I'ma be on the Lord's side or the devil's side..."

The remaining reasons for seeking help were offered by fewer women in the sample. Three women (15.8%) described a desire to break the cycle of abuse or prevent their children from growing up in an abusive household as they had. This finding has important theoretical implications and will be discussed in more detail in Chapter Six. Other reasons for getting help expressed by individual women include being tired of lying about the abuse, being embarrassed after the abuse occurred in the presence of

others, wanting to protect other family members, seeing a friend in a similarly abusive situation, and feeling that they were no longer able to keep the situation under control.

Barriers to Help-Seeking

Chapter Two outlines several barriers to help-seeking identified in the existing literature, including general barriers that apply to the entire population of battered women (i.e., fear of reprisal, economic dependence, and family and privacy considerations), as well as specific barriers that apply especially to women from marginalized social groups (geographic isolation, cultural isolation, patriarchal cultural norms, fear of public scrutiny, discrimination and institutionalized racism, fear of deportation, and participation in illegal activities). The results of this dissertation indicate that many women experienced general barriers to help-seeking, but that, perhaps surprisingly given the focus on marginalized women in particular, very few experienced specific barriers. However, despite the limited influence of those specific barriers, closer inspection reveals that marginalization nonetheless matters in battered women's help-seeking.

General Barriers

It is clear that fear, economic dependence, and family and privacy considerations weighed heavily on the minds of many women and negatively influenced their decisions to seek help. For example, six women (31.1%) described staying silent out of fear, at times for their life after their partners threatened to kill them and/or their children if they told anyone (see Table 6). In fact, some women were so fearful that they went to great lengths to conceal their injuries from others, so as not to arouse suspicion and chance retaliation from their partners. Helen poignantly describes her efforts to keep her injuries

hidden: "You cover it up with makeup. [If] somebody pull some of your hair off, you buy you a wig or you cut your hair or you blend it in together and you just blend stuff. You blend it in together to make it work."

Table 6. Barriers to Help-Seeking

Barrier	N (%)
General Barriers for All Women	
Family/privacy considerations	13 (68.4)
Fear of reprisal	6 (31.6)
Economic dependence	4 (21.1)
Specific Barriers for Marginalized Women	
Isolation (geographic)	3 (15.8)
Isolation (cultural)	2 (10.5)
Patriarchal cultural norms	--
Fear of public scrutiny	--
Discrimination & institutionalized racism	--
Fear of deportation	1 (5.3)
Participation in illegal activities	--

Slightly fewer women (21.1%) stated that economic dependence was a barrier to help-seeking for them. For some it was a matter of their partners being the primary breadwinner, while for others it was simply the material comforts offered by their relationship that mattered the most. April's words are instructive here: "If [another] guy even looked at me I'd get smacked in the face...But he took care of me, you know what I'm sayin'? He bought me clothes, jewelry—bought me everything." Other women were dependent on their partners for emotional rather than financial security. For example, Connie notes that she was not in love with her partner, though she stayed with him because doing so made her feel "like she belonged somewhere."

In contrast, nearly 70% of the women experienced barriers related to family and privacy considerations, including concern for children they shared with their partners,

their own embarrassment, shame, or humiliation at being in a battering relationship, or their genuine love and concern for their partners. Bethany's words summarize this first point well:

> You know what? I never called the cops on my son's dad.
>
> ***OK. Tell me why.***
>
> I don't know.... I never had that family thing or anything, and I had a kid with him ...So I was tryin' to keep that family thing goin' on between me and him. It wasn't like I was scared of him not to call the police....I guess 'cause it was my son's dad [I decided against it]....

Next, for other women it was shame or embarrassment that kept them quiet. As the "athletic and smart" child in her family, Rhonda felt self-imposed pressure to conceal that she was being beaten by her high school boyfriend. Her fear of disappointing her family, whom she believed expected great things of her, compelled her to keep her abuse a secret from them.

Finally, other women's silence was prompted by the genuine affection, care, and concern they felt for their partners. For instance, Nikki describes her tremendous efforts to cover up for her partner (even after his abuse left her severely injured), prompted mainly by a desire to protect her family:

> ***Was it you going to the hospital on your own?***
>
> Yeah, on my own....I went by myself. [I would] wait until the sores got real old, like a day or two. 'Cause back then if they [were] brand new you could get assault [charges brought], but if it happened a couple of days

earlier [the authorities] can't do nothin' about it. See, me knowin' the law I knew what to do.

So you did that on purpose to protect your partner?

Protect my partner. Mm hmm. 'Cause I didn't want to see him in jail, and all of this mess. So that became...a way to protect him, but there was nobody to protect me. And I didn't think about me...Everything I did, I did for him, I did for my children. That was it.

Specific Barriers

Far fewer women reported experiencing the specific barriers relevant for marginalized women outlined in the help-seeking literature. Three women (15.8%) expressed obstacles to help-seeking stemming from the geographic isolation of living in a rural area. On the most basic level, Keira had no telephone in her home, which obviously drastically limited her ability to get help. More abstractly, the other two women described feeling constrained by the relative lack of privacy that comes from living in a small, rural community. As Rhonda knowingly remarked, "This town is small, and when people know about your old situation [with abuse], they try to run with that...You never let anybody know about your situation if you can help it." In Rhonda's view, she believed that her current partner felt entitled to hit her because he knew, via the local gossip mill, that she had been abused by a previous partner.

Cultural isolation also was cited as a problem by Connie, a Spanish-speaking Latina from Mexico. Language barriers were less of a concern for Connie than the "immigrant-related abuse" she experienced, including her partner's threats and taunts about her undocumented immigrant status. Of course, these experiences relate to fear of

deportation, which Connie experienced to a limited extent. More than fearing deportation, though, she felt threatened by her partner's constant intonations that, absent basic documentation such as a birth certificate or driver's license, her calls to the police would be futile. In Connie's words, she did not have "an identity," as her partner repeatedly reminded her, so she was dissuaded from contacting authorities about the abuse.

Interestingly, patriarchal cultural norms, fear of public scrutiny, and discrimination/institutionalized racism were not discussed by any of the women in the sample, at least not with respect to their abusive adult relationships. Additionally, participation in illegal activities was not identified as a barrier by the one woman who admitted to having a criminal history.[12] In fact, when I asked Izzy whether the fact that she had "been in trouble before" was a concern for her in telling others about the abuse or in calling the police, she responded that is was not. However, while there was not a direct relationship between her criminal record and her reluctance to contact the authorities, there was an indirect relationship as her history of drug abuse resulted in two of her four children being removed from her custody. As a consequence, Izzy was reluctant to call the police about her abusive partner for fear that the authorities would take away her two remaining children. Though this barrier to help-seeking clearly involves concern for shared children as discussed under "general barriers," it also has roots in her illegal drug use as well. In her words, "I didn't call the police, I didn't go to

[12] While not engaged in illegal activity per se, Lana expressed concern that her failure to appear at court hearings at which she was scheduled to testify against her partner would get her into trouble. Of her decision she states, "That next month [my partner abused me] again, but I wouldn't go to the police because I was scared I was gonna get in trouble since I didn't go to court the other times..."

the hospital, I didn't do none of that, 'cause I didn't want anybody to know, you know? I'm dealin' with [protective services]; I didn't want them to find out..."

Given the marginalized social status of the women in this study, it is surprising that so few of them described experiencing the specific barriers for marginalized women outlined in the help-seeking literature. That none of the women identified patriarchal cultural norms, fear of public scrutiny, or discrimination/institutionalized racism as impediments to their help-seeking efforts begs the question: does marginalization matter to battered women's help-seeking efforts?

Despite the fact that participants did not speak at length about specific structural barriers, closer inspection of patterns in the data suggest that marginalization does matter, as women of different social locations sought help in different ways. For example, women who relied most upon formal strategies tended to occupy positions of relative social privilege, often owing to their majority group racial/ethnic or socioeconomic status (see Table 7). As was noted previously, the only woman to hire an attorney is white and employed full-time, and relatively few of the married women sought a divorce, perhaps signaling a lack of resources necessary to successfully engage the legal system. In contrast, a different group of women—namely those occupying positions of relative social disadvantage—turned instead to informal strategies. Women who relied most upon informal strategies tended to be Black and/or economically disadvantaged. In other words, women using the broadest array of formal mechanisms tended to have more privileged social locations, while the opposite is true of women who concentrated their help-seeking efforts on informal channels. Taken together, these findings suggest that even when not explicitly acknowledged, socio-structural barriers do impede the help-

seeking efforts of certain groups of women, particularly via formal channels.

Table 7. Number and Type of Help-Seeking Strategies Used

Number of Strategies	Informal	Formal
6	Rhonda, Olivia	Gretchen, Paula
5	Bethany, Keira, Lana	Bethany, Nikki, Fran, Izzy, Tammy
4	Nikki, Tammy, Eleanor	Samantha, Lana, Olivia
3	April, Gretchen, Helen, Fran, Paula	Connie, Rhonda
2	Jackie	April, Keira, Eleanor
1	Samantha, Darlene	Helen, Darlene, Melanie, Jackie
0	Connie, Izzy, Melanie	--

However, a few women engaged in extremely limited help-seeking of any kind, yet these women were not necessarily the "most" marginalized as one might expect. Melanie's help-seeking, for example, was almost non-existent; she never told anyone about the abuse and waited "years" before taking any official action against her partner. However, Melanie is employed and has no children—factors that elevate her social status relative to the other women in the sample. While it is possible that her limited help-seeking is attributable to individual-level factors, given the overall help-seeking patterns described above, it is also possible that this analysis failed to fully account for the influence of structural barriers on Melanie's help-seeking. As other IPV researchers who study help-seeking have noted, "subtle and institutionalized forms of [discrimination] are not easily detectable, particularly by persons in the middle of a crisis, as were the women in this study. Hence, it is likely that their help-seeking efforts were affected in ways beyond those explicitly identified" (Moe, 2007, p. 693).

Summary

This chapter re-examines the help-seeking behaviors of the women in the study by identifying and describing the types of help-seeking strategies they used, their reasons for using (or not using) particular strategies, and the barriers to help-seeking that they faced. Results indicate that women's help-seeking was vast and varied, involved both informal and formal sources of support, and resulted in varying degrees of satisfaction. In particular, women reported having both positive and negative experiences with the criminal justice system, and these related to their future inclination to use the criminal justice system. This chapter also follows up on the discussion of help-seeking barriers first raised in Chapter Two. Findings suggest that while women experienced many of the general barriers that exist for the entire population of battered women, they experienced relatively few of the specific barriers that exist for marginalized women. Upon closer inspection, however, patterns in the data suggest that marginalized still does matter in battered women's help-seeking. The next chapter extends this discussion in the context of a theoretical framework for understanding battered women's help-seeking.

CHAPTER SIX:
PATHWAYS TO HELP-SEEKING

The previous chapter followed up on the "barriers" to help-seeking that were discussed in Chapter Two. In the help-seeking literature, barriers are conceptualized as issues that exist contemporaneously in the relationship. In other words, barriers are conditions or characteristics of the relationship such as fear or isolation that women experience while they are involved with their abusive partners. As outlined in Chapter Two, much of the existing help-seeking literature examines how these barriers negatively affect battered women's help-seeking decisions. Other contemporaneous factors such as abuse severity, presence of children, and marital status also have been shown to influence women's help-seeking decisions (Fernandez et al., 1997; Goodman et al., 1999; Hutchinson & Hirschel, 1998).

However, data from this analysis suggest that other, historical factors also influence women's help-seeking. In addition to the barriers described previously, battered women's help-seeking is shaped by life events that predate their intimate relationships. Further, data suggest that one historical circumstance is particularly powerful in influencing women's help-seeking: exposure to childhood trauma and abuse. Women's childhood victimization experiences shape their adult help-seeking in two ways. First, childhood victimization acts as an *inhibitor* to help-seeking. This term, appropriated from chemistry, describes a substance that retards a chemical reaction or prevents it from reaching completion altogether. Used metaphorically, use of this term suggests that trauma experienced before a woman enters her abusive relationship can

preclude her help-seeking efforts in later years. Second, childhood victimization also can work in the opposite manner, that is, by facilitating future help-seeking. In these instances, rather than working as an inhibitor, exposure to childhood trauma acts as a *promoter* of help-seeking. In both cases, the results of this analysis suggest that explanations of battered women's help-seeking must include consideration of prior life experiences.

In this chapter I examine how battered women's experiences with childhood victimization either inhibit or promote help-seeking in their adult intimate relationships. Key concepts that emerged from the data represent specific mechanisms through which child victimization inhibits or promotes help-seeking. I also explore the theoretical implications of these findings by arguing for the extension and application of two existing theoretical frameworks—feminist pathways and life course models—to battered women's help-seeking.

Childhood Victimization

Summary of Women's Childhood Victimization Experiences

To begin, it is important to note that childhood victimization was *not* a theme I asked specifically about during the interviews. As indicated in Chapter Four, I asked three broad questions during each interview: "What was it like for you growing up?," "What was your relationship with your partner like?," and "What was the first time you decided to tell someone or get help?". It is in response to the first question that women disclosed having experienced abuse, neglect, or other victimization as children.

That the women in this study almost uniformly had childhoods fraught with physical and sexual abuse, neglect, substance abuse, and other types of victimization is perhaps the strongest theme that emerged from the data. Indeed, there is some evidence to suggest a link between violent childhood experiences and adult IPV victimization (Coid, Petruckevitch, Chung, Richardson, & Moorey, 2001; Whitfield, Anda, Dube, & Felitti, 2003; Wyatt, Axelrod, Carmona, & Loeb, 2000). What is more, girls from marginalized social groups are more likely to be victimized as children than their counterparts. For example, national-level data collected via the National Child Abuse and Neglect Data System reveal that girls are slightly more likely than boys to experience childhood maltreatment, and that children of color (Pacific Islander, American Indian or Alaskan Native, and African American children in particular) have the highest rates of victimization (*Child Maltreatment 2004*, 2006). Similarly, focus group research conducted by a Canadian research alliance found that isolation, inaccessibility of services, and social ills like racism and homophobia exacerbate vulnerability to victimization for marginalized girls (*Violence Prevention and the Girl Child*, 1999). Therefore, while it is not necessarily surprising to discover that marginalized battered women in this study had been victimized by abuse and neglect as young girls, the magnitude and severity of the abuse they suffered was indeed striking.

Every woman in the sample experienced at least one type of childhood victimization (see Table 8).[13] Women most commonly were physically abused by a parent or other relative (50.0%) or witnessed parental domestic violence (44.4%). Moreover, approximately twenty percent of the sample were sexually abused as girls, either by a relative (16.7%) or by someone else (22.2%). Moving beyond physical abuse, many women were victimized by the unhealthy home environments in which they

[13] The one exception is Darlene, from whom I did not collect thorough background information due to time constraints during our interview. It is not known for certain whether Darlene experienced childhood victimization, so her data are excluded from the calculation of percentages appearing in Table 8. However, comments from her interview suggestive of victimization are included in the discussion that follows.

were raised. For example, seven women (38.9%) reported substance abuse by one or both parents (most typically alcoholic fathers), while nine women (50.0%) had parents who either were divorced, separated, or had never lived together. Finally, 15 of the 18 women from whom background information was collected (83.3%) described growing up in a home that might best be characterized as chaotic or traumatic. Women who were raised in traumatic environments lost a parent to suicide or suspected homicide, lived with a series of different caregivers, or were singled out by their parents and treated poorly compared to their siblings or other children in the home. Moreover, most women experienced more than one type of victimization. Women in the sample experienced an average of three types of childhood victimization, while one woman reported as many as five types of victimization. In short, the early lives of most women in the sample were characterized by exposure to abuse, violence, trauma, and instability.[14]le 8. Childhood Victimization Experiences (N=18)*

Type of Victimization	N (%)
Chaotic/traumatic environment	15 (83.3)
Parents divorced/separated	9 (50.0)
Physically abused by relative	9 (50.0)
Parental physical violence	8 (44.4)
Parental substance abuse	7 (38.9)
Sexually abused by other	4 (22.2)
Sexually abused by relative	3 (16.7)
Min = 1 Max = 5 Mean = 3	

* Background information not collected from one participant

Childhood Victimization & Help-Seeking in the Existing Literature

The suggestion that childhood and adulthood victimization experiences are linked is not unique to this dissertation (e.g., see Tjaden & Thoennes, 2000). Though not nearly as voluminous as the body of scholarship devoted to the "cycle of violence," which suggests that children who experience violent abuse grow up more likely to perpetrate violence acts against others (Widom, 1989), a substantial number of studies exist that examine the connection between childhood and adulthood victimization. Termed "revictimization" and studied almost exclusively by psychologists, the idea that victimization begets victimization has received empirical support (Coid et al., 2001; Roodman & Clum, 2001; Whitfield et al., 2003). However, there have been scant efforts

[14] See Appendix F for a data display of participants' childhood victimization experiences.

to explain precisely *how* childhood victimization might lead to adulthood victimization. To date, the etiology of revictimization is most often discussed using the language of low self-esteem and learned helplessness (Frisch & MacKenzie, 1991; Whitfield et al., 2003). While researchers acknowledge that childhood victimization does make one vulnerable to adult victimization (Dutton, 1993), we know very little about why this is so. Even more puzzling, this relationship has scarcely been addressed by criminologists, feminist or otherwise, despite the relevance of this line of inquiry to the field.

It contrast to the seemingly straightforward proposition that childhood victimization can heighten one's vulnerability to adulthood victimization, it may seem initially less intuitive to consider that childhood victimization could influence adult women's *help-seeking*. After all, most predictors of battered women's help-seeking are contemporaneous factors as discussed previously. However, as with revictimization, psychological research offers preliminary support for a relationship between childhood trauma and adult women's help-seeking.

In studies of battered women's "coping"—a conceptual cousin to help-seeking—psychologists have found that the ways in which adult battered women deal with their relationship violence are shaped by historical and contextual factors such as exposure to childhood trauma. In these studies, coping often is conceptualized using two distinctions. The first distinction is between "approach" or "engagement" coping, characterized by active behaviors such as talking to others or making a plan of action, and "avoidance" or "disengagement" coping, characterized by passive behaviors such as withdrawal (Waldrop & Resick, 2004). The second distinction is between "cognitive" coping, involving changing one's manner of thinking about a situation, and "behavioral" coping,

which involves "observable actions" (Waldrop & Resick, 2004, p. 292). Researchers investigating how childhood victimization influences adult coping behavior explore the extent to which women with and without a history of trauma engage in approach versus avoidance coping, or in behavioral versus cognitive coping.

For example, Mitchell and Hodson (1986) found that battered women who had no history of violence in their family of origin used more active coping strategies as the violence in their intimate relationship worsened. This finding lead the authors to conclude that, as a moderator in the relationship between abuse severity and coping, childhood exposure to violence reduced coping efficacy. Similarly, Taft, Resick, Panuzio, Vogt, & Mechanic (2007) found that childhood physical and sexual abuse were negatively associated with engagement coping, while witnessing parental IPV was positively associated with disengagement coping. Finally, Dutton (1993) suggests that "A battered woman with a history of childhood abuse may be even more vulnerable to the efforts of others to control her, and thus less able to protect herself from others" (p. 1224).

Here again, though, the criminological literature has been perplexingly silent about potential linkages between childhood victimization and adult battered women's help-seeking. To date, no criminological research has attempted to place this relationship in a theoretical context, or to examine precisely *how* this relationship might operate. Further, no study has considered how childhood victimization might have a positive impact by acting as a promoter of help-seeking. Therefore, this dissertation represents a first step toward opening a dialogue in criminology about exactly how having a history of victimization can influence battered women's future help-seeking behavior. To that end,

this dissertation identifies five mechanisms through which childhood victimization inhibits battered women's help-seeking, and three mechanisms through which it promotes help-seeking. While some of these mechanisms echo findings from the psychological coping literature, others appear unique to this analysis.

Childhood Victimization Experiences as Help-Seeking Inhibitors

There are several ways in which battered women's experiences with childhood victimization make them less inclined to seek help, particularly using formal channels. On a basic level, strained family relations stemming from a violent home life sever one potential avenue of help-seeking for women. Just as batterer-imposed isolation restricts women's opportunities to tell loved ones about the abuse, so does estrangement from parents stemming from childhood abuse and neglect. However, the data further suggest five specific mechanisms through which childhood victimization experiences inhibit battered women's help-seeking: establishing women's expectation of abuse, lowering their sense of self-worth, prompting withdrawal, engendering learned silence, and promoting attachment to their abusive partners. Each of these five mechanisms is discussed below.

Establishing Expectation of Abuse

The first way childhood victimization inhibits battered women's help-seeking is by *establishing an expectation of abuse*. That is, for women who grew up in households in which they were emotionally, physically, and/or sexually abused, such behavior is perceived as being normative or commonplace. In other words, violence and abuse became the model for how family members interact with one another, particularly in intimate relationships. As Gretchen put it:

> The marriage was abusive before [my pregnancy], and our, uh—the whole time we dated was abusive. I mean, he would—oh God, he was so controlling, so jealous, you know? And, um...God, really, he was really, he was really a nutcase back then. And I knew it, and I saw it and—but then I guess I just didn't think much of it 'cause it's just normal, you know? It's all I've ever known from males. Never seen a good, normal relationship with a male, you know?

Similarly, Lana remarked: "I thought, well, I guess you could say now, looking back, maybe [my stepfather] was controlling. He [was] controlling because I saw a lot of things he did and I didn't think it was right, but I was looking through a child's eyes so I thought, 'Well, maybe that's just how it's supposed to be when you're grown ups'."

What is important about this observation is that many of the women, in explaining why they did not seek formal avenues of help, either directly or indirectly referenced the attitude that they had developed about familial violence based on their early experiences with victimization. In other words, women expressed that they were not particularly motivated to seek help because, for them, ending up with a violent partner was not necessarily an extraordinary circumstance that warranted action or intervention on their part. Their previous experiences with abuse and violence had shaped their worldview such that violence was an expected, if not condoned, aspect of intimate relationships.

For example, consider this comment from Helen, a woman who experienced horrific physical and sexual abuse as a young girl: "I am so good in tunin' stuff out, because I had got so many licks [as a child that] I tuned stuff out. Now [if] somebody come over here and smack me a couple of times, I'd probably just sit and take it.

Because it was a part of my life." Clearly, Helen describes in very stark terms how her inclination toward help-seeking has been inhibited by her childhood victimization experiences, and her words recall the avoidance and withdrawal that are indicative of disengagement coping. In fact, she initially did not seek help once her partner became abusive; instead, the authorities were alerted only after the nurse who had performed her mammogram called the police after surmising that she had been abused.

Nikki, who was severely physically abused by her mother and repeatedly sexually molested by her mother's boyfriend, made similar comments. As an adult, Nikki stayed with her abusive husband for nearly ten years, despite his vicious (and, on more than one occasion, life-threatening) attacks on her. Though she had gone to the hospital on numerous occasions for medical treatment, she never once disclosed the nature of her injuries to hospital staff, or to the police who were called in when hospital staff grew suspicious of her repeated, severe injuries. In the following exchange, notice how Nikki initially contributes her silence to fear, but then quickly shifts to her expectations of abuse:

> So before when I used to come [to the hospital] I'd be like—I never said anything anytime [the police] asked me what happened. I never said anything. They'd call a social worker down. I still never said anything.
>
> ***How come?***
>
> Fear. Of him. I had fear of him. At the time I thought that was love.

In Nikki's case, equating her partner's violence with love kept her from disclosing her abuse to authorities despite being presented with opportunities to do so. Though Nikki engaged in some degree of help-seeking by going to the hospital, the expectation of abuse

that she had developed as a child—after the people she loved hurt her repeatedly—prevented her from doing anything beyond simply mending her wounds. What is more, Nikki was aware of the connection between her childhood abuse and her adult decision-making, as she told me, "I [have] to step back to show you where the neglect started...I have tell you [about the childhood abuse] in order to make you understand why I fell for [my husband], and [why] I stayed with him...".

Lowering Sense of Self-Worth

The second way childhood victimization inhibits battered women's help-seeking is by *lowering their sense of self-worth.* This theme is related to establishing expectation of abuse, but more directly involves a woman's reduced self-esteem as a result of her childhood victimization, and, by extension, her willingness to stay with her partner despite his abuse. For example, some women talked pointedly about growing up in unloving households, so that love was not something of which they felt worthy as adults. After learning that her mother had attempted to abort her and after her mother's attempts to give her away as a small child, Nikki had such a devalued sense of herself as to question, "Why was I even born?". Paula was similarly despondent over her alcoholic parents' lack of participation in her young adult life: "I lettered in two sports in high school. No one was ever there [to watch me compete]. Everyone else's parents were there [but mine]". Other women described how they had been called names their whole lives, so that they were less likely to respond negatively when their partners did the same. This is not to say that the women were not affected by the verbal abuse; on the contrary, several participants remarked that the cruelty of their partners' words hurt worse than the

physical blows. Instead, it is suggested only that their lowered sense of self-worth desensitized them to the verbal abuse and kept them from demanding cessation of it.

Helen's description of her childhood, in which her father sold her sexually in order to pay off his gambling debts, echoes both of these sentiments:

> And, I never really knew love, you know? I never had nobody just to love me genuine. And, when I look at myself in the mirror, I still don't see myself 'cause I just don't know who I am. I just feel like, you know, a punchin' bag or somethin'.... I just felt like a sex slave all my life. When you daddy sell you...what is you really worth? If your own daddy will sell you? His own child? What you really worth, ma'am?

The lasting pain of Helen's violent childhood is evident in her words, but also in her limited help-seeking, as discussed previously. Similarly, Lana addresses how her lowered sense of self-worth as a result of her traumatic upbringing affected her perception of her adult relationship with her partner: "...I told [my partner that] I didn't think I was his type or whatever, but really to be honest, I didn't see myself as anybody's type...I guess I thought it just *grand* if *anybody* liked me, you know?"

Lana's observation relates to help-seeking because women who experienced a lowered sense of self-worth often rationalized their decisions to stay with their abusive partners or to keep their abuse a secret. As described in Chapter Five, despite repeated abuse Lana initially resisted calling the police or engaging in any other type of help-seeking. However, after a particularly severe assault she finally called the police and her partner was arrested. Shortly thereafter she received a phone call from her partner in jail, after which she expressed relief that he was not "mad" at her. Pleased that

he was not angry with her, she posted his bail and later failed to attend a hearing at which she was scheduled to testify against him, resulting in her being sanctioned by the court. Thus, Lana's repeated decisions to accept her partner back into her life or to terminate the help-seeking that she had initiated appear related to her need for acceptance that reflects her lowered sense of self-worth stemming from her childhood trauma.

Prompting Withdrawal

The third way childhood victimization inhibits battered women's help-seeking is by *prompting withdrawal.* As discussed, withdrawal and avoidance are two behaviors indicative of disengagement coping strategies, which research suggests are more often utilized by women with a history of childhood victimization (Taft et al., 2007). In these instances, women's early experiences reinforce for them that the violence in their lives is most appropriately dealt with on their own, without involvement from others. For example, some participants described responding to their childhood victimization by "withdrawing" from those around them. In recalling her childhood during which she was physically abused by her mother and sexually molested by her mother's ex-husband, Keira states, "I had all types of abuse, and I just suppressed it in." Melanie expressed a similar sentiment: "I was like, more so, um...withdrawn. Um, I stayed like in a shell. I was – I just didn't want to be seen. Uh, I hated to come home from school. [I'd rather] just go anywhere, you know, than to come home. And when I did I was just in a shell. I wouldn't leave my room or nothin'."

These observations are important in relation to help-seeking. In Keira's case, she relied upon covert, internal methods of help-seeking, echoing Taft et al.'s (2007) finding that childhood abuse is associated with decreased engagement coping. Keira did not

initiate contact with the police (though this admittedly would have been difficult as she did not have a telephone), and despite telling a counselor about the abuse did not pursue any formalized help-seeking. Instead, she carefully planned her escape in secret over a period of weeks. In Melanie's case, her partner had been abusive "for years" before she finally decided to get help by calling the police, stating : "I just put up with it." In both of these cases, the women's inclination to respond to their partner's abuse by "putting up with it" or by otherwise keeping their experiences a secret may be rooted in their withdrawal and seclusion as young victims of abuse.

Engendering Learned Silence

The fourth way childhood victimization inhibits adult battered women's help-seeking is by *engendering learned silence*. Some women's silence stems from observing their mothers' response (or lack thereof) to IPV. For example, the bitterness in Paula's voice was unmistakable as she described her mother's failure to leave her abusive father:

> And he's hitting her, he's got her down he's hitting her. I don't know how many nights that I went to bed and prayed to God that something would happen to him, that he wouldn't come back home, because Mom wouldn't get us out, because if she—she had opportunity. My dad's mother tried to get her to leave and come and live, take us and live with her. And, but if she went there she'd have to straighten up, she couldn't drink. She couldn't stay drunk all the time, so, it was more worth it to her, and it didn't matter if I had done anything [to help my mom] or not.

Similarly, Gretchen described her own mother's unwillingness to leave her abusive father in plainer terms:

> She basically just took it. I mean, um, she just took it. She let him treat her that way, you know...I remember one time when I was real small he tried to choke me to death, and my mother took me and we went out, and she had somebody come pick us up and we went to their house, and I was really young but I remember her, I guess, talking with a friend, like, "You don't need to go back to that." You know, "You need to get away from that," and all that. And then Daddy comin' and gettin' us and going back home. But, uh, she just took it.

In both of these examples, Gretchen and Paula recall that their mothers did not seek help in any way that was perceptible to them. Both of these women also expressed some reluctance to engage in formal help-seeking when they found themselves in their own abusive relationships. When asked directly about whether she contacted the authorities about the violence in her marriage, Gretchen stated clearly her unwillingness to do so that recalls her learned silence: "I never went to the police, and I didn't go to the hospital because, I don't know, you just don't, you know? I've always taken care of myself."

Finally, and most ominously, some women actually were reprimanded or punished for attempting to seek help as children. Helen recalled how at age 11 she received a "whoopin'" from her parents after she told them that her uncle had been sexually molesting her. Similarly, Keira told her pastor about her physically abusive mother, but he told her that he "couldn't get into it because that was my mother". Through their negative experiences with help-seeking as children, Helen and Keira learned that telling others about the violence in their homes not only was ineffectual, but

also brought about serious negative repercussions. As discussed previously, both women relied most heavily upon personal self-help strategies.

Likewise, Paula described how help-seeking backfired on her when she called the police as a teen to report instances in which her father assaulted her mother. Paula stated that when the police officers did not arrest her father after she had called them to her home, she would "be in that much more crap" for attempting to seek help on her mother's behalf. This recalls Dutton's (1993) assertion, based on examples from her clinical practice, that battered women who grew up with parental IPV to which the police were unresponsive may "learn" during childhood "that the police were not a viable option to stop the violence" (p. 1220).

Promoting Attachment to An Abusive Partner

The fifth way childhood victimization inhibits adult battered women's help-seeking is by *promoting attachment to their abusive partners*. For example, more than one woman talked in very candid terms about her attempts to fill an emotional void left by a destructive upbringing—most often through a father's absence—with her partner's affections, despite the abuse. As Izzy recalls:

> I was always—I thought of my son's father as a father, kinda, because my father left. He was gone, and he—the way [my partner] took care of me, and the children...I always wanted it, you know? I was like, 'Forget what he does to me. He takes care of me.'...I think that was a big part of it, I

didn't want to leave him. I did but I didn't, 'cause I didn't have nobody to take care of me.

Similarly, Nikki remarked, "But, it wasn't even all about him anymore because his dad and his mom became a mother and father to me, just as they were to him. And his father gave me something that I didn't have with my dad: a relationship."

Commitment to staying with an abusive partner stemming from a woman's own traumatic childhood is perhaps best exemplified by Lana's experience. Lana displayed an almost maddening amount of justification for and rationalization of her partner's behavior. In her interview she recounted how she repeatedly made excuses, ignored, or downplayed his abuse, or expressed hope that he would change. However, the shock of inadvertently discovering as a teenager that her mother's husband was not her father—and the doubts about having loving and trustful relationships with men that developed as a result—might help explain her continue willingness to stay with her abusive partner:

> You know, he really went through a lot, and I felt...hurt *for* him, you know? And I felt like – and I guess I knew kinda how it was to, you know, have things go wrong when you're a child and stuff...so I just thought, I thought he needed a better chance at life, you know?... "He just needs somebody to love him," this is what I'm thinkin', you know? Well, if he just knows somebody really, really loves him and really, really cares about him, [things might be different].

Finally, while this discussion has focused on childhood victimization as an inhibitor, eight women (42.1%) had been victimized in previous intimate relationships. To date, the criminological literature on help-seeking (or the broader IPV literature, for

that matter) has not adequately examined the consequences or causes of women's experiences with serial battering relationships. To my knowledge, there is no study in existence that systematically examines women's experiences with multiple abusive partners. However, using the psychological literature on re-victimization as a guide, it is reasonable to conclude that, as with childhood victimization, women's prior experiences with adult relationship violence also can inhibit their future help-seeking efforts as well. Indeed, after her parents showed tremendous support and intervened on her behalf in her first abusive relationship, Rhonda recalled, "I could not possibly let them know I was goin' through that again!" Therefore, prior IPV victimization may very well function in the same manner as childhood victimization, though there are too few data in this study to analyze this issue in sufficient detail.

This analysis suggests five ways that childhood victimization inhibits battered women's help-seeking: by establishing women's expectation of abuse, lowering their sense of self-worth, prompting withdrawal, engendering learned silence, and promoting attachment to their abusive partners. Through these mechanisms, women's early exposure to violence and abuse dissuades them from pursuing formal help-seeking strategies as adults. However, in some cases childhood victimization can also work in the opposite manner by facilitating battered women's help-seeking, as discussed below.

Childhood Victimization Experiences as Help-Seeking Promoters

Childhood victimization can have the opposite influence and can compel women to seek help when they otherwise might not. Data from this analysis suggest that even though childhood victimization primarily acted as an inhibitor to help-seeking, in some cases women drew strength from their past experiences and used them to facilitate their

help-seeking. The data suggest three specific mechanisms through which childhood victimization experiences promote battered women's help-seeking: by encouraging women's boundary-drawing, fostering a "fighter" mentality, and inspiring their determination to end the cycle of violence. Each of these three mechanisms is discussed below.

Encouraging Boundary-Drawing

The first way childhood victimization promotes battered women's help-seeking is by *encouraging boundary-drawing*. Several women shared how the abuse they had suffered as children enabled them to establish clear limits for their intimate partners. For example, after years of verbal abuse from her father (as well as a previous intimate partner), Paula established "ground rules" with her husband by demanding that he refrain from calling her names: "'You will not call me out of my name, because I will not tolerate it.' 'Cause once you start tolerating it, they keep doing it...I put up with it too many years from someone else to go—just to go to someone [new] and let them do it." Paula's use of her past victimization experiences (including years of being beaten and whipped by her alcoholic father during a childhood she likened to "hell") to draw boundaries with her partner are evidenced even more clearly in a second example. She recalls in the following passage her response to an altercation in which her partner grabbed her—an act that clearly crossed the physical boundaries she had established for herself:

> If I don't want to be touched, don't touch me. And if you do, if I can't overpower you I'm going to call someone who can...if you put your hands on me I will call 911 right then....When I say "let me go"—after my

childhood, when I say, "Let me go, don't touch me" that means *let me go*. Now! ...And I'm sorry. I know he didn't hit me. I know he didn't bruise me. And I know he was telling me he loved me. [*clenches teeth*] But when I tell you to get your hands off me, I mean get your hands off me! I don't—after all I went through growing up, that's as far as you're taking it with me.

While grabbing her in itself was not a serious act of abuse, in the context of Paula's violent upbringing this action clearly crossed an invisible line, prompting Paula to involve the police in her situation.

Although this chapter focuses primarily on childhood victimization, as with the previous discussion of inhibitors there is evidence that prior IPV victimization can also promote battered women's help-seeking through boundary-drawing. For example, Bethany had a similar experience to Paula, although her prior victimization came courtesy of a previous intimate partner rather than a parent. Still, the influence of that abuse on her desire to establish boundaries is clear in the following passage:

> This ain't the first time somebody's done told me they loved me and cared about me and then beat me up or somethin'. So when I got with [my second partner], and he even got close to, like, intimidatin' me or whatever, I was ready to go...I told him, I said, "Now, my son's dad done dragged me. I gotta scar for the rest of my life on my back....I don't want nothin' else from you! OK?

In this way, Bethany sets clear limits for what is acceptable in her relationship, which provides a baseline for her to engage help resources should that limit be breeched.

Fostering "Fighter" Mentality

The second way childhood victimization promotes adult battered women's help-seeking is by *fostering a "fighter" mentality.* Interestingly, several women used the term "fighter" to characterize themselves as a result of their abusive upbringing. This "fighting" mentality promotes help-seeking by giving women a stance from which to combat their victimization; in other words, they can fight back against abuse and take care of themselves. For example, Olivia describes herself as "a fighter" growing up. She notes that she did not back down from her step-father's verbal abuse, and in fact would respond in kind to his harsh words. With her partner, the first time he physically assaulted her was the last, as she called the police as soon as he became violent. As she explains, "I was a fighter, you know, by then..."

Similarly, Darlene recounts a difficult upbringing in an urban northeastern city, where the kids there "make you want to fight". In describing her intimate relationship, she touches upon her youthful experiences, "I [kept] my guard up, because of my lifestyle, you know, how I was raised." Here, Darlene's "fighting" instinct is manifested in her willingness to both physically and legally resist her partner: "And he's just holdin' me down, tryin' to... take my strength away, you know? 'Cause he's tryin' to make me weak, but I kept comin' back, you know? Kept comin' back. And I pressed charges on him." Eleanor exhibits a similar tendency, as when she "knocked [her partner] back" and noted, "I've always been the person to defend myself. Growing up I was a fighter."

Finally, Gretchen's "fighting" mentality has many sources: her physically violent and alcoholic father, the bullying she experienced as a consequence of being German-born and speaking little English, and a prior violent partner. In describing how her

"fighting" mentality led to her use of violent resistance, Gretchen touches on all three of these sources:

> There was this one boy that, you know, all through elementary school, he...called me names...So I kinda got tough, you know, with that, and with my dad, and with my first husband. Because I would fight back. I would hit him back. And my second husband, I would hit him. I would literally hit him, and at times I was afraid I would literally kill him. I would get put to that point, and I have got to that point where I would literally kill him. I mean, I just, it wouldn't take much for me to just kill him, and he's twice my size. And I was ready to do it and I would have done it, and um—you know, being that angry is really scary. I mean, you get put in that position and it's either going to be you or [him], and it's going to be [him]! You know. But um...[*very quietly*] so I've been fighting all my life.

Clearly, when Gretchen feared for her life, the toughness she developed from prior experiences with victimization enabled her to physically fight back. Further, in each of these examples, this "fighter" mentality recalls the notion of "survivor" used to emphasize resilience, agency, and tenacity among battered women (e.g., see Gondolf & Fisher, 1988).

Inspiring Determination to End the Cycle of Violence

The third way childhood victimization promotes adult battered women's help-seeking is by *inspiring determination to end the cycle of violence*. This is perhaps the most straightforward and logical mechanism through which childhood victimization

promotes battered women's help-seeking. The premise is simple: women learn from their experiences that they do not want to duplicate with their intimate partners the unhealthy and abusive dynamics of their families of origin. For example, Connie had been sexually abused as a child, and it was her husband's threat to rape her that prompted her to call the police. In this instance, it was a threat to repeat the specific trauma that she had endured as a child that spurred Connie to contact the police, even when she had not done so previously.

Another way that childhood abuse promotes women's help-seeking is the exact opposite of the learned silence that develops while watching their own mothers remain with their abusive fathers. That is, whereas some women watched their mothers "take it" and learned that this is the appropriate strategy for handling IPV, other women grew up adamant that they would not end up like their mothers. Thus, the parental IPV in April's household informed her help-seeking decisions in two ways. First, it was her mother who encouraged April to seek shelter in the first place, using her own experiences with April's abusive father as her guide. Second, April describes her attempts to "get some stuff taken care of" by enrolling for classes, getting food stamps, and getting her own apartment, and notes, "I want my baby to have a normal life and not see what I saw [growing up]." Though not ameliorative strategies per se, April's efforts to gain independence certainly constitute help-seeking, and are informed by the trauma of her childhood.

Similarly, Olivia moved out when things with her partner began to "fade". Though her mother wanted her to stay with her partner because he was handy around the house, she told her, "Well, yeah, look, I'm not about to go through abuse like you did..." In terms of help-seeking, Olivia called the police after the first time her partner physically

abused her; compared to the other women in the sample, this is remarkably swift help-seeking. Similarly, Olivia connects her reasons for seeking out the support group to watching the parental IPV in her home and her resulting low self-esteem. Of her decision to leave her abusive partner, she comments, "Or I coulda just followed my mother's footsteps...you know, I could be so blind to men out here today and do whatever they tell me to do..."

Finally, Jackie, who is Olivia's half-sister and whose father was responsible for the IPV directed at her (and Olivia's) mother, described a similar desire to avoid the victimization that her mother endured. Indeed, Jackie exhibited a very matter-of-fact attitude in her help-seeking: she made the decision to leaver her partner, and she did, without looking back. Again, compared to many of the other women, this type of quick and decisive separation is uncommon. However, Olivia's willingness to leave her partner seems to have clear roots in her refusal to end up in a battering relationship as her mother had:

> I done seen—I grew up with it, and I seen my momma go through it, and I'm not 'bout to go through it, especially in front of my kids. You know what I'm sayin'?..... I done seen that—I done been there, done that.... So, I had a choice to either stay there and get my butt whooped or leave. It ain't like he had a gun to my head sayin', you know, "You better stay with me." So, hey! I left him alone.

What Determines Whether Childhood Victimization Inhibits or Promotes Help-Seeking?

As the foregoing discussion reveals, this analysis suggests three ways that childhood victimization promotes battered women's help-seeking: by encouraging

boundary-drawing, fostering a "fighter" mentality, and inspiring determination to end the cycle of violence. However, for most women exposure to childhood violence acted as a help-seeking inhibitor through one of the five mechanisms described in the previous section. Consequently, one important question raised by these findings is what determines whether childhood victimization inhibits or promotes a woman's help-seeking? One possible factor is severity of childhood victimization. For example, some women whose narratives offer examples of help-seeking inhibitors—like Keira, Nikki, Paula, and Helen—were victims of extremely severe childhood abuse, whereas this is not true for women like Olivia and Bethany who provided examples of help-seeking promoters. This is not always the case, however, so victimization severity alone cannot differentiate between help-seeking inhibition and promotion. An alternative explanation is that severity of *relationship* violence matters. As noted previously, several of the women who experienced help-seeking promoters engaged in remarkably quick and decisive help-seeking, sometimes by calling the police or leaving their partners after the first incident of physical abuse. The violence in these women's relationships obviously was less extensive than that of women who remained with their abusive partners for many years before seeking help, therefore it is possible that childhood victimization is more likely to promote help-seeking in the early stages of IPV or before the violence has become particularly severe. Still, this observation does not fully explain why prior victimization promoted some women's help-seeking and enabled them to "get out" quickly, while other women with similar victimization histories were inhibited in their help-seeking efforts.

Additionally, it is possible that it is not childhood victimization *per se* but rather the resulting exposure to help-seeking resources that matters in distinguishing between inhibitors and promoters. In this case, women who were cut off from avenues of support or who had negative experiences with help-seeking agencies as children may be more likely to experience help-seeking inhibitors than women having favorable childhood experiences with help-seeking. For example, Tammy described how her decision not to enter a battered women's shelter was rooted in unpleasant memories of staying in a shelter as a child with her mother:

> ***Had you ever thought about going to the shelter?***
>
> Nooo...
>
> ***No?***
>
> I had kids and I didn't—I used to stay at a shelter when we was kids because my mother had went through the same situation with [her boyfriend]. And that's—I would not suggest a shelter for no-one.... We used to stay in the shelter a long time ago and it's not good for nobody...That's why I never jumped up and went....

That is, it may be that positive help-seeking experiences stemming from prior victimization facilitate battered women's later help-seeking, while negative help-seeking experiences inhibit future help-seeking. The inhibiting influence of negative help-seeking experiences may be particularly pronounced for girls of color and other marginalized girls, as Helen's comments reveal. Noting her family's prominence among the Black upper class, she remarked that the child abuse "was always a secret in my family," and that the resources available to victims like herself at that time were

nonexistent: "You got little kids, you know, bein' abused, and they didn't have all this, uh, psychiatrist stuff for Black people". In this way, social-structural forces also likely play an important role in determining whether childhood victimization (and the resulting help-seeking experiences) inhibits or promotes adult battered women's help-seeking, making these findings especially relevant for marginalized women.

Theoretical Advancement

Taken together, the results of this analysis suggest that past life events (most saliently childhood and other past victimization experiences) influence women's help-seeking. In other words, past experiences matter in shaping future behavior. Obviously, this observation does not constitute a theoretical breakthrough, as this is one of the fundamental tenets of life course or developmental theory (e.g., see Elder, 1998). However, this analysis advances theory through what Snow (2004, p. 134) has described as "theoretical extension":

> In this process, one does not generate or develop a new theory per se, but extends pre-existing theoretical or conceptual formulations to other groups or aggregations, to other bounded contexts or places, or to other sociocultural domains. As such, theoretical extension focuses on broadening the relevance of a particular concept or theoretical system to a range of empirical contexts other than those in which they were first developed or intended to be used (p. 134).

The results of this dissertation support the theoretical extension of two existing frameworks—feminist pathways and life course models—to the study of battered

women's help-seeking. In criminology, both of these frameworks exclusively examine offending outcomes, but this dissertation reveals that they also are useful in examining alternative outcomes such as help-seeking. Below I describe each of these models, and then offer justification for extending these models to the study of battered women's help-seeking.

Feminist Pathways Model

The term "feminist pathways" refers to a body of research that examines the influence of girls' childhood victimization experiences on their adult criminality and offending behaviors. "Since the late 1970s, feminist criminologists have increasingly referred to this link between victimization and trauma with subsequent offending as the 'pathways' approach. Stated alternatively, the pathways approach identifies girls' and women's (and sometimes, boys' and men's) victimization and trauma histories as risk factors for trajectories into offending behaviors" (Wilson & Belknap, in press). In particular, feminist pathways research aims to use girls' and women's voices to explore linkages between their childhood victimization and their adult offending behaviors (Belknap, 2007). "Thus, the feminist pathways research to date typically attempts to gain data that are quasilongitudinal by asking girls and women to discuss their lives and attempts to sequence major events (e.g., abuse by parents, school experiences, delinquent and criminal behavior, and so on)" (Belknap, 2007, p. 71).

Perhaps the best known pathways analysis is Daly's (1994) examination of female offenders. In this article, Daly explores the diversity of circumstances, including abuse experiences, addiction, relationship dynamics, and economic marginalization, that lead to women's criminality. Daly (1994) identifies various categories of women who follow

distinct pathways to criminal behavior, including: "street women," who became involved in street life (i.e., hustling, prostitution, drug dealing, etc.) often after fleeing a troubled home, "harmed and harming" women, who act out violently after being abused or neglected as young girls, "battered women," who are in violent intimate relationships, and "drug connected women," whose drug addiction came via a relationship with a boyfriend or parent. By distinguishing the various avenues by which women become involved in offending, Daly aims to "transform the abstraction called 'the female defendant' into a woman with a biography and a set of relation to others. By bringing some detail of a woman's life into view," Daly explains, it is possible to "understand the conditions and circumstances that spawn violence and illegal forms of economic gain" (Daly, 1994, p. 21).

Other studies also employ the feminist pathways model. For instance, Richie (1996) uses a pathways analysis to develop her theory of gender entrapment, designed to explain offending among Black battered women. Gaarder & Belknap (2003) examine the life histories of 22 girls incarcerated in an adult women's prison in order to identify their pathways to crime and their previous victimization experiences. More recently, Reisig, Holtfreter, and Morash (2006) explore women's risk of recidivism across various pathways to crime, while Wilson and Belknap (in press) conduct a pathways analysis of the extensive sexual abuse histories among a sample of 391 incarcerated women. As is clear from these examples, this type of research almost exclusively focuses on offending behaviors. However, feminist pathways shares similarities with another framework used to explore offending and other phenomena as well: the life course model.

Life Course Model

The life course or developmental model, as its name suggests, examines the development of human behavior over the course of time and in the context of historical and situational events. The life course model is characterized by "the notion that changing lives alter developmental trajectories" (Elder, 1998, p. 1), and has been applied to the study of myriad phenomena ranging from the development of psychiatric disorders to disease epidemiology. As such, the life course model includes two key concepts: "trajectories," defined as pathways of behavior such as education or work, and "transitions," or short-term events such as graduation or the birth of a first child that alter trajectories by acting as "turning points" (Elder, 1998). Thus:

> [Life pathways] refer to the social trajectories...that are followed by individuals and groups through society. Life transitions...are always part of social trajectories that give them meaning and form. The multiple trajectories of individuals and their developmental implications are basic elements of the "life course," as conceptualized in research and theory (Elder, 1998, pp. 1-2).

Within criminology, the life course model is used to examine patterns of offending (i.e., trajectories of crime) over time. In particular, life course criminologists attempt to identify factors that predict the onset of deviance and persistence of criminal behavior, as well as desistance from crime (Sampson & Laub, 2005). One topic of particular interest to life course criminologists is stability and change in offending patterns, or "the question of whether (and why) adolescents persist or desist from crime as they age across the adult life course" (Sampson & Laub, 2005, pp. 12-13). Here, as

with the general body of life course research, transitions or turning points that alter trajectories of offending are of particular interest.

The last two decades have seen a proliferation of criminological research that uses the life course model. Perhaps the best known and most influential application of the life course model in criminology is Sampson and Laub's research on juvenile delinquents in Boston using data collected over the span of nearly 40 years by Harvard researchers Sheldon and Eleanor Gleuck (see Sampson & Laub, 2005 for a review). In their first book, *Crime in the Making*, Sampson and Laub (1993) developed their age-graded theory of informal social control, which states that social bonds in adulthood strengthened through transitions such as marriage or employment can disrupt trajectories of offending begun in adolescence. In their second book, *Shared Beginnings, Divergent Lives*, Laub and Sampson (2003) elaborated on their previous work by suggesting that social control, as exerted through the institutions of work, family, and marriage, is influential in aiding the desistance process. As with other life course analyses in criminology, the work of Sampson and Laub primarily is concerned with trajectories and turning points as they relate to offending and desistance.

The feminist pathways and life course models share many similarities, including a focus on trajectories of behavior and the role of transitions in altering or shaping those trajectories, as well as a concern with criminality (or desistance) as an outcome. In other words, to date almost all feminist pathways and developmental criminological studies attempt to explain how and why offenders (whether male or female) commence and continue their behavior, as well as why they cease offending. Though they differ in that feminist pathways models center on girls' and women's offending and specifically

examine the role of past victimization experiences, both of these models share a concern with explaining and predicting offending. However, the results of this analysis suggest that these models should be extended and applied to non-offending outcomes as well, including battered women's help-seeking. I offer three arguments to support the theoretical extension of feminist pathways and life course models to battered women's help-seeking, and each is discussed in turn below.

Extending Feminist Pathways and Life Course Models to Help-Seeking

First, there is significant conceptual overlap between theories of battered women's help-seeking and feminist pathways and life course theoretical models. Recall that the key concepts in these models are trajectories (pathways of behavior) and transitions (turning points that can alter trajectories). While used almost exclusively to understand offending (or desistence), these concepts have corollaries in the help-seeking literature. For example, at least one scholar has envisioned help-seeking vis-à-vis women's decisions to leave their violent partners as a trajectory or "pathway" (Patton, 2003). In her study, Patton (2003, p. 4) defines pathways as "enablers," or "the public, private, and community services (formal support) and family, friends, neighbours, work colleagues, fellow students, and other members of the community (informal support) that women perceived enabled them to overcome or remove identified barriers to leaving and starting a new life". Similarly, Patton (2003, p. 4) defines turning points as "those events that most influenced the decisions that contributed to a woman being able to leave and establish a new life, as well as the points at which women made their life changing decisions".

Indeed, the concept of "turning points" has been used in other analyses to explain battered women's help-seeking decisions. For example, Taylor (2002) examines the "defining moments" that allowed Black battered women to "disengage" from their abusive relationships, and notes that such moments can include listening to other women's stories of abuse, witnessing the abuser's violence toward others, observing the impact of the abuse on children, accepting the abuser's rejection, and receiving encouragement from other women. Encountering one or more of these defining moments serves as a turning point that prompts women to leave their partners when they previously had not been inclined to do so. Similarly, other scholars have examined women's help-seeking using the concept of a "threshold," or a tolerance limit of abuse that once surpassed prompts women to seek help (Fugate et al., 2005). Actions such as harm to the children or the perceived threat of death can serve as turning points at which women decide that "enough is enough" and that action is warranted (Fugate et al., 2005). Data from this dissertation also support this idea, as over half of the participants suggested that their help-seeking was prompted by the feeling that they had reached the limits of what they could endure.

Findings from this analysis suggest that the life course concept of transitions or turning points, and the concern with prior victimization found in feminist pathways, both are particularly relevant to help-seeking. In contrast to Patton's (2003) conceptualization of pathways as "enablers," data from this study suggest that help-seeking *itself* should be considered a trajectory of behavior, like offending. Specifically, adult battered women's inclinations to use or avoid certain help-seeking strategies appear rooted in their childhood (and other prior) victimization experiences. In other words, childhood

victimization experiences can launch long-term help-seeking trajectories that inform the decisions of adult battered women. Once established, women follow these pathways until an event or series of events compels them to adopt an alternative help-seeking trajectory.[15]

For example, when childhood victimization acts as a help-seeking inhibitor, a woman's help-seeking trajectory may involve avoidance of outside sources of support until a particular turning point compels her to adopt an alterative help-seeking trajectory involving the police or other resources. Both Keira's and Melanie's help-seeking fit this pattern. Both women described "withdrawing" in response to their childhood victimization, and their help-seeking trajectories as adult battered women involved little to no utilization of formal avenues of support. For both women, though, a particular turning point (abuse of her children for Keira, severity of the abuse and "enough is enough" for Melanie) prompted them to select an alternative help-seeking trajectory that involved reaching out to formal avenues of support.

Second, use of feminist pathways and life course models improves upon existing theoretical approaches to help-seeking. As discussed in Chapter Three, existing frameworks used to theorize about battered women's help-seeking have shortcomings that severely limit their usefulness: they do not make sufficient allowances for structural forces that shape (and often constrain) women's help-seeking options, they too often rely upon a pathological view of battered women as helpless and handicapped, they reduce women's help-seeking decisions to simplistic (and de-contextualized) "cost-benefit" analyses, and they are not particularly relevant to the lived experiences of women from

[15] These turning points need not be "defining moments" as Taylor (2002) suggests, but also could be "a succession of choice points" that occur over time (Elder, 1998).

marginalized social groups. In contrast, feminist pathways and life course models offer improvements in many of these regards.

For example, use of feminist pathways and life course models moves beyond understandings of battered women's decision-making, such as learned helplessness, that often focus on pathology in battered women. Moreover, narrow explanations of battered women's help-seeking that focus solely "why women stay" often amount to little more than victim-blaming. Instead, a theoretical framework that views women's help-seeking as a culmination of previous life experiences holds greater explanatory power (and thus has greater utility) than more myopic approaches. As IPV researchers have recognized the need for theories of help-seeking that are more complex than pathological or victim-blaming approaches (Gondolf & Fisher, 1988), feminist pathways and life course models seem especially worthy of adoption.

Similarly, the life course model in particular improves upon the rational choice approach by placing human agency (or the ability to choose a particular course of action) in a historical and sociopolitical context, thereby recognizing the barriers to help-seeking that exist and acknowledging that women make the best choices they can given their (often severely limited) options (e.g., see Websdale & Johnson, 1997). Indeed, the importance of understanding human agency within the confines of historical, structural, and institutional forces has not escaped life course researchers, who note that "individuals construct their own life course through the choices and actions they take within the opportunities and constraints of history and social circumstances" (Elder, 1998, p. 4). Similarly, life course criminologists make the same point, arguing that "human agency cannot be divorced from the situation or context, once again making choice situated or

relational rather than a property of the person or even the environment; agency is constitutive of both" (Sampson & Laub, 2005, p. 38). Thus, feminist pathways and life course models move beyond narrow examinations of help-seeking to contextualize and literally broaden our view of battered women's decision-making processes.

Moreover, feminist pathways and life course models allow for the development of help-seeking theories that consider how women's help-seeking behaviors might change over time. This is a crucial advancement over previous models of help-seeking because women's help-seeking varies over time and in response to changing life circumstances. For example, some women in this study described experiencing both inhibitors *and* promoters at different points in their lives or in different abusive relationships. This observation raises important theoretical questions that are best answered by examining help-seeking over the life course: how does the influence of childhood victimization on help-seeking vary at different times in a woman's life? Might women's childhood victimization experiences inhibit certain types of help-seeking but promote others? What about prior intimate partner victimization experiences? These types of questions are best answered by conceiving of help-seeking as a trajectory or pathway and by considering how various events alter women's help-seeking trajectories.

A related issue is whether it is childhood victimization itself or the resulting exposure to help-seeking agencies (or some combination of the two) that influences adult battered women's help-seeking, as discussed previously. While some of the inhibitors and promoters identified in this analysis reflect consequences of the victimization itself (e.g., establishing expectation of abuse, lowering self-worth, promoting attachment to abusive partners, and encouraging boundary-drawing), others may more accurately

reflect the extent to which women had access to (or success with) help-seeking organizations as children (e.g., learned silence, prompting withdrawal, fostering a "fighter" mentality, and inspiring determination to end cycle of violence). Thus, it is likely that both actual victimization experiences as well as prior help-seeking experiences shape battered women's help-seeking. Disentangling these influences is a difficult task. Fortunately, feminist pathways and life course models provide a framework for answering these and other questions about exactly how prior victimization experiences influence battered women's help-seeking.

Third, that feminist pathways and life course models allow for inclusion of context and structure makes them particularly relevant to women who are marginalized by intersecting systems of power such as race, class, and gender. That is, women do not make decisions to seek help in a vacuum, or only within the confines of their relationship, but rather those decisions are made within the influence of historical and social factors. Elder's (1998) life course concept of "linked lives" is instructive here. Elder (1998, p. 4) states that "lives are lived interdependently, and social and historical influences are expressed through this network of shared relationships". Thus, not only are battered women's help-seeking decisions shaped by prior life events such as childhood victimization, they also are constrained by "social and historical influences" such as racism, sexism, poverty, and so on.

If socio-structural forces, for example, limit the accessibility of culturally relevant services for immigrant women and women of color, then their help-seeking options necessarily are reduced. Again, Helen's comments about the lack of help resources for abused Black children during her youth illustrate the importance of evaluating how

social-structural forces shape help-seeking throughout women's lives. Drawing upon evidence from sexual assault research which suggests that Black women may not fully reveal the extent of the harm they experienced to service providers (Hine, 1989), and that culturally-specific factors influence Black women's decisions to report their sexual assaults (Neville & Pugh, 1997), it is clear that a theoretical framework that can situate marginalized women's help-seeking decisions in a socio-cultural context is necessary. As data from this and other studies demonstrate, the lives of marginalized battered women are linked not only to their own prior experiences, but also to the broader social structure. Clearly, then, a framework that makes allowances for these forces has particular relevance for battered women who are marginalized within that structure.

Further, the feminist pathways model is particularly valuable to the study of marginalized battered women's help-seeking because it privileges and emphasizes women's lived experiences. That is, feminist pathways studies are informed by feminist standpoint epistemology, an approach to gathering knowledge that asks questions from the perspective of women' lives (Harding, 1991). The use of standpoint epistemology is especially applicable to gathering knowledge about women from marginalized backgrounds, as this approach assumes that people from oppressed groups have a particularly acute view of the social world: "[T]he material deprivation of the oppressed gives them a perspective—an access of knowledge—that the oppressors cannot possibly have" (Bartlett, 1991, p. 386). According to standpoint epistemology, every individual has only a limited view of the social world, yet individuals from oppressed groups whose daily experiences are marginalized have a more complete view of the social order. Thus,

this approach can be used to "give voice" to women whose experiences are typically under-represented in claims about knowledge, including marginalized battered women.

Summary

Findings from this analysis suggest that prior life events such as childhood victimization influence battered women's help-seeking decisions. In particular, childhood victimization experiences can either inhibit or promote battered women's adult help-seeking. These results suggest that help-seeking theorizing should make use of feminist pathways and life course models to fully account for the influence of past life events on later behavior. To date, feminist pathways and life course models in criminology have focused exclusively on offending outcomes. However, the results of this dissertation suggest that these models are useful in understanding how battered women's "pathways" to help-seeking are shaped by past life experiences such as childhood victimization. In particular, extension of feminist pathways and life course models to help-seeking offers an improved theoretical framework for understanding women's help-seeking decisions (especially those of marginalized women) that is free from the shortcomings of existing frameworks. The practical and research implications of these findings are the subject of the next chapter.

CHAPTER SEVEN:
CONCLUSION

The purpose of this dissertation is to broaden our understanding of battered women's help-seeking experiences by placing help-seeking into an appropriate theoretical context. Moreover, this analysis aims to center this understanding on the experiences of women from marginalized social groups who are especially vulnerable to IPV and who face additional barriers to help-seeking. In particular, data from this study offer support for the extension and application of two existing theoretical frameworks—feminist pathways and life course perspectives—to battered women's help-seeking. Indeed, conceptualizing women's "pathways" to help-seeking as being influenced by prior life events offers an advancement over previous models of help-seeking that consider only contemporaneous influences on women's decisions. After first describing the limitations of this study, I conclude this chapter by outlining implications of this dissertation for policy and future research.

Limitations

The chief limitation of this dissertation is that the time allotted for data collection and coding was truncated, thereby hindering my ability to fully explore the phenomenon under study. My data collection schedule was guided by practical constraints as well as by empirical concerns. That is, I set a deadline at which to stop data collection in order to ensure that I had sufficient time to finish my analyses and complete my dissertation. The issue here is not that 19 participants is necessarily an insufficient number of cases, as other similar studies have used a similar number of cases. For example, Lopez and

Emmer (2000) conducted in-depth interviews with 24 adolescent male offenders to generate a theory of delinquent crime contexts, while Wuest and Merritt-Gray (1999) examine the process by which women successfully leave their abusive intimate partners using in-depth interviews with 15 IPV survivors. Indeed, I am confident that the sample in Southeast City was sufficiently large, as many similar themes emerged across interviews there. However, I am less confident in the completeness of the data from Midwest Metro, where only four interviews were conducted before my deadline for data collection was reached.

The small number of participants in Midwest Metro is problematic for another reason as well. While sample size per se is not a concern as generalizability is not a goal of this analysis, I had hoped for a more balanced number of participants from each research site so as to make cross-site comparisons. I was able to make some cursory cross-site comparisons, including the observation that the role of personal faith in women's help-seeking does not appear to be regionally specific. Undoubtedly, though, conducting more interviews in Midwest Metro would have improved this analysis not only by promoting data saturation, but also by enabling more thorough data comparisons between the research sites.

Still, several efforts were made to increase the number of participants from Midwest Metro. For example, the support group staff spoke about the project at several meetings and encouraged women to participate in this study, while I was extremely flexible about interview scheduling and offered additional gas money beyond the standard $25 to offset transportation costs. However, based on conversations I had with the key informant there, it is my understanding that the reason for the low turnout was

due to economic disadvantage: it simply was not possible for women in Midwest Metro to find the time or transportation necessary to make an additional trip to the support group location in order to be interviewed. That is, undue financial burdens related to transportation, child care, or employment absence precluded study participation for many women in Midwest Metro. Although both the support group staff and I worked hard to accommodate the women at this site, and although many women expressed initial interest in participating in the study, in the end participation simply was not logistically or economically tenable for women in Midwest Metro. Of course, it is precisely these economically marginalized women whose experiences this analysis sought to capture, further illustrating the limitation presented by the low number of participants in Midwest Metro.

Despite these limitations, this study makes a significant contribution to the help-seeking literature by advancing a theoretical understanding of battered women's help-seeking that is centered on the experiences of women from marginalized groups. As such, the results of this analysis have implications both for policy as well as for future research, which are discussed in turn below.

Implications

Policy Implications

This dissertation suggests several important implications for policy. First, if childhood victimization influences adult battered women's help-seeking decisions as this analysis suggests, then support group staff, counselors, and therapists who assist battered women must be trained and prepared to address women's earlier experiences with trauma

as well as the violence from their intimate partners. That is, rather than focus exclusively on women's relationship violence, services for battered women also should provide strategies for counteracting the negative effect of prior abuse for women with a history of victimization. As seen in this analysis, childhood victimization experiences can inhibit women's help-seeking in several ways. With this knowledge in mind, proactive service providers can work on altering women's perceptions of abuse expectations, improving their self-esteem, addressing their tendency to withdraw, and encouraging them to utilize both informal and formal help-seeking strategies rather than keeping the abuse to themselves. In sum, service providers must be prepared to address the full continuum of violence directed at battered women over the course of their lives.

In the same way, service-providers for victims of child abuse and neglect must be aware that inhibiting future IPV help-seeking is a potential long-term consequence of childhood victimization. Among the many deleterious effects of childhood trauma, then, is inhibition of future help-seeking for girls who go on to experience IPV in later years. Therapists, counselors, and others who provide support and services to survivors of child abuse and neglect can use this knowledge to make young girls aware not only of their elevated risk of IPV victimization, as suggested by the re-victimization literature, but also of their risk of inhibited help-seeking as suggested by this dissertation. Conversely, girls can be encouraged to make use of their childhood victimization experiences to facilitate help-seeking, should they find themselves involved in an abusive intimate relationship. By encouraging young girls to use their victimization experiences to establish personal boundaries, develop a self-image as "fighters" or "survivors" of abuse, and commit to

ending the cycle of violence, service providers may be able to prevent some of the enduring emotional and behavioral damage that childhood victimization can cause.

Next, the relevance of women's previous help-seeking experiences to their decisions about whether and how to seek help in the future is of particular importance, especially where the criminal justice system is concerned. As the statements made by some of the court-ordered women in Southeast City reveal, it is crucial that the criminal justice system's interactions with battered women be responsive, reasonable, and respectful. At the risk of repeating what has become a *de rigeur* admonition among criminologists who study IPV, it is crucial that agents of the criminal justice system continue to receive training that educates and sensitizes them to the realities of relationship violence. While police response to IPV has improved greatly over the last two decades, there is still room for improvement as suggested by continuing evidence of inappropriate police response to IPV (DeJong, Burgess-Proctor, & Elis, 2007). While officers may experience understandable fatigue and frustration with IPV calls, and while this may cause some officers to lash out at the women who place those calls, this analysis reveals that even one negative interaction with a responding officer can embitter women to the point that they vow not to involve the police again. Similarly, women in this study who perceived the judge in front of whom they appeared to be dismissive or unfair expressed similar resistance to re-using the criminal justice system. As long as the criminal justice system is positioned as the primary mechanism of help for victims of IPV (Almeida & Lockard, 2005; Josephson, 2002; Richie, 1996), it is imperative that its agents strive to have positive and supportive interactions with battered women. If not, women may continue to be dissuaded from using the very mechanism that they are most

expected and encouraged to use, thereby severely limiting avenues of help-seeking available to them.

However, an alternative approach would be to alleviate some of the tremendous burden placed on the criminal justice system as a help-seeking mechanism for battered women by increasing women's usage of other sources of support. For example, the near unanimous satisfaction with support group services expressed by the participants in this study suggests that such services have the potential to be profoundly positive influences in women's lives. This finding, coupled with the suggestion that counseling services for battered women address the prior abuse experiences of those with a history of childhood victimization, indicates that counseling, therapy, and support groups are particularly deserving of increased attention. Moreover, the finding that some battered women rely heavily on their spirituality and personal faith for support in their abusive intimate relationships indicates that the response of faith groups to IPV should be expanded and improved. For example, IPV education and training for church leaders is an obvious place to start, while faith-based support groups where women can feel comfortable voicing their beliefs and are empowered to share the strength of their convictions may be particularly beneficial for some groups of battered women.

Additionally, the focus of this analysis on women from marginalized social groups suggests the need for services directed toward battered women that are both accessible to and relevant for marginalized women. Regarding accessibility, it has been established that marginalized women face tremendous barriers to help-seeking that can make it challenging for them to access the criminal justice system, support groups, legal assistance, and other sources of support. Moreover, as women from marginalized

backgrounds are particularly vulnerable to IPV, it is essential that accessibility of these services be improved in order to increase women's safety. Finally, IPV researchers and practitioners alike recognize that services for battered women must be culturally sensitive, so as not to reproduce systems of power that disadvantage and disenfranchise marginalized women (Donnelly, Cook, Van Ausdale, & Foley, 2005). This study echoes these suggestions, and provides further justification for enabling access to help-seeking resources for those women who are in the greatest need and who face the most significant challenges to receiving them.

Finally, I ended each interview by asking women what advice they would give to other women who are in abusive relationships and are thinking about getting help. Aside from the straightforward command to "get out" no matter what the cost, the most common response women gave was to "know the signs" of abusive behavior. Undoubtedly drawing upon the counseling they had received in their support group meetings, women spoke pointedly about how they had misinterpreted (or simply missed altogether) their partners' behaviors that should have served as warning signs. For example, women frequently commented that they initially considered their partners' obsessive attention to their attire, their friends, and their interactions as flattery, and only in retrospect recognized them as tactics of control and manipulation. Thus, many women concluded that awareness education is crucial; that is, it is imperative to educate all young people about warning signs of IPV. This emphasis on early awareness is particularly important given that several women in this study experienced their first abusive relationship as teens, an age many people assume is too young for IPV to occur. Thus, it is recommended that all state sex education curricula be required to include a

module on IPV. Just as American students are educated about the perils of sexually transmitted diseases in an effort to reduce infection rates, so should students (male and female alike) be educated about relationship violence so as to reduce the occurrence of IPV.

Research Implications

This dissertation also suggests several important implications for future help-seeking research. First, this study has clear implications for the type of research designs used to study help-seeking. Clearly, in order to adequately assess whether childhood victimization experiences influence future help-seeking behaviors, it is necessary to seek out and interview adult battered women who have no history of childhood victimization in order to compare their help-seeking decisions to those of women who were victimized as children. Thus, comparisons between women with and without a history of childhood abuse are required to more fully explore the proposition offered in this analysis that childhood victimization inhibits and/or promotes help-seeking among adult battered women. In order to make such comparisons, a broader and more purposeful sampling strategy than was used in this analysis is required. One strategy would be to sample a large enough group of battered women so that a sufficient number with no history of childhood abuse are included. However, given evidence to suggest that prior victimization is common among adult battered women (Coid et al., 2001; Whitfield et al., 2003), a purposive strategy in which battered women with no history of childhood victimization are actively recruited likely is necessary.

Similarly, the focus of this analysis on feminist pathways and life course models suggests that future help-seeking research should continue to make use of life-history

interviews. As their name implies, life-history interviews are those in which participants are asked to describe events that happened over the course of their lives. Life-history interviews have been used in feminist pathways research of battered women (Richie, 1996) as well as of other populations of victimized women and girls (Gaarder & Belknap, 2003), and are particularly useful in exploring battered women's pathways to help-seeking. Life-history interviews not only allow researchers to study the influence of childhood victimization experiences, but also of prior battering relationships as well, an important point hinted at by the results of this study.

Finally, this dissertation provides justification for continued efforts to understand the experiences of battered women from marginalized social groups. Marginalized women are particularly vulnerable to IPV, just as marginalized girls are at higher risk of child abuse and neglect than their counterparts. Additionally, marginalized women face significant barriers to getting help beyond those that exist for the entire population of battered women. Further, this study suggests that marginalized women's increased risk of childhood victimization may translate into inhibited IPV help-seeking. It is therefore recommended that future help-seeking research continue to be anchored in the experiences of these women, so as to better understand these processes. Of course, one important goal of help-seeking research should be the improvement of service provision for battered women. Thus, to improve the safety and well-being of women, it is important to be especially attendant to the needs of marginalized women and girls who are most at risk of victimization.

Conclusion

This dissertation is particularly important for advancing criminological theory because, unlike much existing help-seeking research, it examines the specific experiences of battered women who are marginalized by intersecting systems of power such as race/ethnicity, class, and immigrant status. Moreover, this analysis offers insight and understanding into *how* and *why* marginalized battered women choose specific courses of action in response to their abuse that is missing from existing knowledge. Finally, because it is anchored in the experiences of marginalized battered women, the findings can inform important policy strategies for addressing and preventing intimate partner violence among women who are particularly vulnerable to abuse. Better understanding of marginalized battered women's actions allows for more targeted policies for servicing underrepresented and underserved populations of battered women, which is the ultimate goal of this research.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A
INTERVIEW INSTRUMENT

Introduction

In this interview, I am going to ask you background questions about yourself, questions about your relationship with your partner, and questions about how and why you decided to reach out for help. It is possible that some topics may be difficult for you to discuss. You should not feel pressured to talk about anything that makes you uncomfortable. However, the more completely you answer the questions, the more we can learn about women's experiences with domestic violence. At any time during the interview, please feel free to take time to collect your thoughts or to ask for a break if you need it.

Before we begin the interview, I want to remind you that nothing that you tell me today will be traced back to you. To ensure that your responses are anonymous, I would like you to select a pseudonym for yourself that I will use during the interview and when I write up the results of this study. This interview will be audiotaped. To ensure that you feel comfortable speaking freely, I will use this pseudonym when I address you so that your real name will not be recorded on the tape.

Background Questions

1. First, why don't you start by telling me a little bit about yourself – perhaps where you live or whether you are employed? [*Demographics*]
   Probe: How old are you? Do you have children?

2. Now that I know a little bit more about you, I'd like you to tell me about what your childhood. Can you describe for me what it was like for you growing up? [*Family context*]
   Probe: Who did you live with while you were growing up? Where did you live? Do you have brothers and sisters? (If substance abuse in the home is disclosed, probe who used drugs and how that affected the participant. Use as a segue for probing about participant's substance use.)

3. Did your parent(s) work outside of the home? If so, what did they do? [*Cultural values/social roles*]
   Probe: What was this situation like for you (and your siblings)?

4. What was your parent's relationship like? [*Prior victimization/exposure to violence*]
   Probe: Did they seem happy to you? Why or why not? (If abuse is disclosed, probe who abused whom and for how long. Also, how did the person who was abused respond?)

5. Can you tell me about any activities that you were involved with outside of your home – for example, in your school, community, church, etc.? [*Community context*]

Probe: Did you attend community events, know your neighbors well, frequently interact with other people from your town at community events, and so on? Do you live now in the same community where you grew up?

6. What, if any, role did the church/organized religion play in your upbringing? [*Cultural values*]

7. How aware were you as a child of your race/ethnicity? Your gender? Your class? Did you share these characteristics with most of your friends and neighbors? [*Social location*]

8. How aware are you today of your race/ethnicity, your gender, and your class? Today, do you share these characteristics with most of your friends and neighbors? [*Social location*]

Relationship Questions

Now that I know a little bit more about you, I'd like to talk about your relationship with your partner. Here, I'm going to ask you about behaviors that your partner may have engaged in, including physical abuse (hair pulling, punching, choking, etc.), sexual abuse (forcing sexual contact, demanding types of sex that you don't like), verbal abuse (calling you names), emotional abuse (humiliating you in front of others, threatening you or your children, injuring pets or cherished possessions), and control tactics (refusing you access to finances, removing the phone or car keys, or threatening to kill himself, you, or your children). Your partner may have engaged in one, some, or all of these behaviors. Please think of all of these types of behaviors when I ask you about "abuse" in your relationship.

1. How did you and your partner meet? How long have you been together? Do you share children together? [*Relationship dynamics*]

2. What words would you use to describe your partner? How did/does he relate to your children (if applicable)? [*Relationship dynamics*]

Probe: (If partner's substance use is disclosed, probe for severity, duration, frequency, and correlation with physical abuse.)

3. In your current relationship, how did/do you think of yourself as a partner? Wife? Mother? Can you tell me a little bit about how you view your role in the family? [*Cultural values*]

Probe: Does your partner view these roles in the same way? If not, how does your partner view your roles?

4. What is/was your relationship like? [*Relationship dynamics*]

Probe: Are things different now than when you first met? How?

5. If abuse is disclosed: What types of abusive behavior has your partner engaged in? [*Abuse characteristics*]

6. When did the abuse first begin? Can you remember the first time that your partner was abusive toward you? How about the first time your partner used violence (if applicable)? [*Abuse characteristics*]

7. What type of abusive behaviors were most common in your relationship? How frequently did the abuse occur? [*Abuse characteristics*]

8. Can you describe for me the most serious incident of violence or abuse that occurred? Did you ever fear for your own life? Your children's lives? Your partner's life? [*Abuse characteristics/control*]

9. Were your children ever targets of abuse? If so, did how did this make you feel? Did it influence your decision whether or not to reach out for help? [*Control*]

10. For many women with abusive partners, being isolated is a serious problem. Did your partner do or say things to make you feel isolated, or to actually isolate you, from your friends, family, or community? [*Control/isolation*]
    Probe: Can you give me an example?

11. What were your initial reactions to the abuse? Did they change over time? How so? [*Response to abuse*]

12. Even though domestic violence is a crime, some abused women never really think of themselves as "victims". Can you tell me a little bit about how you thought about yourself in terms of the abuse that you experienced? (Examples: As a victim? A survivor? An outcast? A strong woman who could keep things together?) Did this influence your decision whether to reach out for help? If so, how? [*Self-definition*]

Help-Seeking Questions

Now that I know more about what your relationship with your partner was like, I'd like to ask you some questions about how and why you decided to reach out for help.

1. Did you do something to try to stop the abuse or to get help? What did you do?

2. If help-seeking is disclosed: Do you recall when you first told someone about the abuse? Who was that person? How did that person react? How did their reaction make you feel? [*Initial H-S/influence of others*]

3. Do you remember when you decided to get help? Was there one particular event that changed your mind ("enough is enough"), or was it a slow build-up of events? [*Threshold*]

4. Can you tell me more about how you decided to reach out to these outlets? How did you reach that decision? [*H-S motivators*]

Probe: Did anyone help you make that decision? If family only – why did you chose not to use a formal outlet? What about the criminal justice system? Medical facilities such as going to the emergency room or talking with your doctor?

5. How would you describe your social supports – friends, relatives, or co-workers, or other people who offered to help you? What about formal agents – social workers, attorneys, police officers, victim advocates, etc. Did you have people like this who offered to help you? [*Social support*]

6. What did you expect from the outlet that you reached out to? In other words, what was the outcome that you were looking for? [*H-S expectations*]

7. Were you satisfied with that outlet? In other words, did you feel like you got the support that you needed or the outcome that you wanted? Why or why not? [*H-S satisfaction*]

Probe: Can you give me an example?

8. Did you know other women in abusive relationships? Did their experiences with reaching out for help affect your decision? [*Influence of others/barriers*]

Probe: For example, do you have a friend or relative who had a very positive or a very negative experience with the justice system, the shelter, and so on?

9. What about family or friends? How did your relatives or friends respond to your decision to get help? [*Cultural values*]

Probe: Can you give me an example?

10. Now I want to ask you about some possible outlets that you have chosen not to use. Can you tell me about why you chose not to use this outlet for help? Did you consider it and then decide against it? Or did it not really ever cross your mind? [*H-S barriers*]

11. Did anything about the idea of reaching out for help worry or scare you? [*H-S barriers*]

Probe: Can you tell me more about this? What specifically worried you?

12. Many women are particularly concerned that, while they want the abuse to stop, they do not want for their relationship to end. Can you tell me about what you wanted in terms of your relationship with your partner? [*H-S barriers*]

Probe: Did your desire affect your decision about reaching out for help? If so, how?

13. Is there anything else that you want to tell me? Advice you have for other women who are abused by their partners? Something you want to tell people who might read this research about your experiences? [*Other*]

APPENDIX B

PARTICIPANTS' EXPERIENCES OF ABUSE IN ANY RELATIONSHIP

Name	Verbal/ Emotional Abuse	Threat/ Control Tactics	Partner Substance Abuse	Moderate Physical Abuse	Severe Physical Abuse	Sexual Abuse	Child Threat/ Abuse
SOUTHEAST CITY							
Not Court-Ordered							
April*	X	X		X	X	X	X
Bethany*	X	X		X			
Samantha	X	X		X			
Connie	X	X	X	X	X		X
Rhonda*	X	X	X	X	X		X
Keira	X	X	X	X		X	X
Nikki	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Gretchen*	X	X	X	X	X		
Helen	X	X		X	X	X	
Fran	X	X	X	X			
Court-Ordered							
Darlene	X		X	X			
Izzy*	X	X		X	X	X	
Melanie	X	X	X	X			
Paula*	X	X		X			
Lana*	X	X	X	X			
MIDWEST METRO							
Jackie*	X			X			
Olivia	X	X	X	X			
Tammy	X	X	X	X	X		
Eleanor	X	X					X
Total N (%)	**19 (100)**	**17 (89.5)**	**11 (57.9)**	**18 (94.7)**	**8 (42.1)**	**5 (26.3)**	**6 (31.6)**

* Denotes women having multiple abusive relationships

APPENDIX C

PARTICIPANTS' INFORMAL HELP-SEEKING STRATEGIES USED IN ANY RELATIONSHIP

Name	Told Family/Friend	Told Church	Separated/ Moved Out	Fled Home	Prayed/Asked God for Help	Alerted Neighbors	Plotted Escape
SOUTHEAST CITY							
Not Court-Ordered							
April	X			X			
Bethany				X	X	X	X
Samantha	X						
Connie							
Rhonda	X			X	X	X	
Keira		X			X		
Nikki			X	X			
Gretchen			X			X	
Helen	X						
Fran			X		X		X
Court-Ordered							
Darlene							
Izzy							
Melanie							
Paula		X					
Lana			X	X			
MIDWEST METRO							
Jackie	X				X		
Olivia	X		X		X		X
Tammy			X				
Eleanor		X	X		X		
Total N (%)	**6 (31.6)**	**3 (15.8)**	**7 (36.8)**	**5 (26.3)**	**7 (36.8)**	**3 (15.8)**	**3 (15.8)**

APPENDIX C (CONTINUED)
PARTICIPANTS' INFORMAL HELP-SEEKING STRATEGIES USED IN ANY RELATIONSHIP

Name	Fought Back/ Self-Defense	Consider Killing	Peace-Keeping	Private/ Self-Help	Avoidance	Asked for Counseling	Changed Locks/Phone
SOUTHEAST CITY							
Not Court-Ordered							
April					X		
Bethany	X						
Samantha							
Connie							
Rhonda	X		X				
Keira	X	X		X			
Nikki	X	X					
Gretchen	X						
Helen	X		X				
Fran							
Court-Ordered							
Darlene	X						
Izzy							
Melanie							
Paula					X	X	
Lana	X				X	X	
MIDWEST METRO							
Jackie							
Olivia	X						X
Tammy	X				X		X
Eleanor					X		
Total N (%)	**10 (52.6)**	**2 (10.5)**	**2 (10.5)**	**1 (5.3)**	**5 (26.3)**	**2 (10.5)**	**2 (10.5)**

APPENDIX D

PARTICPANTS' FORMAL HELP-SEEKING STRATEGIES USED IN ANY RELATIONSHIP

Name	Contact Police	Get Warrant/ Press Charges	Testify in Court	Obtain PPO	Enter Shelter	Hire Attorney	File for Divorce
SOUTHEAST CITY							
Not Court-Ordered							
April	X				X		
Bethany	X	X			X		
Samantha	X	X	X				
Connie	X				X		
Rhonda				X	X		
Keira					X		
Nikki	X			X	X		
Gretchen	X		X	X	X	X	X
Helen					X		
Fran	X	X		X	X		
Court-Ordered							
Darlene		X					
Izzy	X	X		X			
Melanie	X						
Paula	X	X	X		X		
Lana	X	X			X		X
MIDWEST METRO							
Jackie							
Olivia	X	X		X			
Tammy	X	X		X			X
Eleanor	X						
Total N (%)	**14 (73.7)**	**9 (47.4)**	**3 (15.8)**	**7 (36.8)**	**11 (57.9)**	**1 (5.3)**	**3 (15.8)**

APPENDIX D (CONTINUED)
PARTICPANTS' FORMAL HELP-SEEKING STRATEGIES USED IN ANY RELATIONSHIP

Name	Seek Support Group†	Go to Hospital	Tell Medical Personnel	Tell Other Professional
SOUTHEAST CITY				
Not Court Ordered				
April				
Bethany		X		X
Samantha	X			
Connie				X
Rhonda*		X		
Keira				X
Nikki	X	X		
Gretchen				
Helen				
Fran			X	
Court Ordered				
Darlene	--			
Izzy*	--	X	X	
Melanie	--			
Paula	--		X	X
Lana	--			
MIDWEST METRO				
Jackie	X			
Olivia	X			
Tammy	X			
Eleanor	X			
Total N (%)	**6 (42.9)**	**4 (21.1)**	**3 (15.8)**	**4 (21.1)**

* Partner took to hospital; † Excludes court-ordered women (N=14)

APPENDIX E

PARTICIPANTS' CHILDHOOD VICTIMIZATION EXPERINCES (N=18)

Name	Parents Divorced/ Separated	Parental Physical Violence	Parental Substance Abuse	Physically Abused by Relative	Sexually Abused by Relative	Sexually Abused by Other	Chaotic/ Disruptive Environment
SOUTHEAST CITY							
Not Court-Ordered							
April		X	X				X
Bethany				X			X
Samantha	X		X				X
Connie					X	X	X
Rhonda	X						
Keira	X		X	X	X		X
Nikki	X			X	X		X
Gretchen		X	X	X			
Helen		X	X	X		X	X
Fran		X				X	
Court-Ordered							
Darlene	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
Izzy	X						X
Melanie		X	X	X			X
Paula		X	X	X			X
Lana	X						X
MIDWEST METRO							
Jackie		X		X			X
Eleanor	X			X			X
Tammy	X					X	X
Olivia	X	X					X
N (%)	**9 (50.0)**	**8 (44.4)**	**7 (38.9)**	**9 (50.0)**	**3 (16.7)**	**4 (22.2)**	**15 (83.3)**

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