

ESCAPE ROUTES: AN ECOLOGICAL APPROACH TO UNDERSTANDING  
INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE AND ORGANIZATIONAL  
INTERVENTIONS

by

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(Under the Direction of Patricia Richards)

ABSTRACT

The problem of intimate partner violence (IPV) and the role of various organizations—including shelters, courts, law enforcement, and child protective services, among others—is a pervasive one affecting every demographic in society. The issue is compounded by structures of inequality and stubbornly enduring assumptions about victims of domestic violence that are held by the broader society and, in turn, by those who inhabit positions within the institutions with which victims come into contact. This dissertation focuses on the experiences of actors working within agencies responding to intimate partner violence, how they perceive their role, interact with victims/survivors, and collaborate with partners in other agencies. The purpose of this research is to help understand underlying bias within institutions and highlight how responses might be hindered by cultural constructions of victimhood and violence, as well as the constraining structures of institutions. I explore these issues through interviews with actors working with the organizations that respond to intimate partner violence and survivors of IPV in a mid-sized southeastern city with a well-developed team of

responders to domestic violence. I find that the collaborative model of coordinated community responses (CCRs) is a useful tool for communities responding to violence but requires improvement to better address response. I examine the restrictions placed on victims through cultural understandings of victimhood and violence and address how the criminal legal system can improve approaches to intimate partner violence. Finally, I discuss the implications for future research and ways that these themes can contribute to improvements in the way our institutions, and the people within them, respond to IPV.

INDEX WORDS: Gender-based violence, Intimate partner violence (IPV),  
Coordinated community responses (CCRs), Domestic violence,  
Nonprofits, Courts, Law enforcement, Shelters

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## PROLOGUE: I WILL SURVIVE

I'd like to begin this dissertation by sharing some of my participants' stories to illustrate how victims of intimate partner violence are underserved by the institutions available to them. These are, of course, not representative of all victims and, being self-selected, come from those who have found ways to cope with their trauma and find support through both official and personal channels. Some of these women sought help through non-profits, the police, the courts, and other agencies. Some of them used nonprofit resources but nothing else. Some of their experiences with agencies were positive, though in many cases institutions failed to provide support and safety. By starting with the voices of women who shared their stories with me during this project, I hope to give some context and provide some examples of how cases of intimate partner violence play out in the lives of its survivors. These women experienced the system in the mid-sized southeastern city of Cedar Hills. This city has an active community focused on responding to intimate partner violence, led in large part by the local domestic violence shelter, Safe Harbor.

### *Marie*

Marie is a 26-year-old white woman with three children under the age of eight. She is a physically small person, with large brown eyes and chestnut curls framing her face. Tattoos scatter across her hands and fingers. Marie began her interview at a coffee shop, her choice, by saying she couldn't have caffeine because of heart and brain issues

that likely resulted from a violent incident with her abuser. She experienced a powerful blow to the side of her head, leaving her with temporary loss of eyesight in one eye. Later, doctors found that she had a brain injury, a clot in her brain, and she had suffered a mini-stroke. As a result of the anxiety and stress of the situation, she also developed a heart condition called pericarditis, a build-up of fluid around the heart that required draining.

Marie grew up in poverty with her mother and one brother, with other family close by and cousins who were often around. She described the situation as having a lot of negativities with many people doing drugs around her, though she did not get involved with them herself. Her first love, her high school boyfriend, was killed in a car accident. She was 18 when she met her second boyfriend, 9 years her senior. A year into the relationship she became pregnant. It was at this time she learned that the father of her child was married with four children. She recounts that there was no indication in the apartment that she visited many times that anyone else lived there. After learning of the situation, she distanced herself from him, making him angry. Sometime after the birth of their daughter, he appeared at her mother's house, where she was living, and argued with her. He eventually both hit her and sexually assaulted her while her daughter was in the other room. When he left, she was afraid to call the police because she didn't want him to get in trouble. Later, she did take out a temporary protective order (TPO) requiring him to stay away from her. Soon after, she experienced another rape at the hands of one of her brother's friends who was at the house. She was again afraid to call the police, but she called a friend, and that friend called the police, who arrested the perpetrator. After this, she went through a period of being depressed and isolated herself.

After making peace with her experience, she enrolled in college a second time, got her own apartment, and met her second abusive boyfriend. As with the first abuser, he was sweet and charming, and the relationship seemed wonderful. When she got pregnant with her second child, he wanted her to get an abortion. She was already a single mom and felt comfortable raising another child on her own and told him he could be as involved as he wanted to be, but she was having the baby. At her ultrasound appointment, she found she was carrying twins, and this seemed to make him interested in being a father. However, two weeks after finding out she was carrying twins, about 14 weeks into the pregnancy, they had an argument and he struck her, after which she experienced abdominal pain. Reluctantly, she went to the hospital and discovered that she had lost one of the twins.

On Mother's Day of 2017, Marie went to her boyfriend's family home with her children. During the visit, her boyfriend took her phone and saw that another man had texted her, someone she had been seeing during one of their breaks and with whom she never became physically involved. He accused her of lying about that relationship and then struck her in the face, causing her to black out. Her children witnessed the incident in horror. Regaining consciousness and seeing the effect on her children, she grabbed the kids and took them to the car. At the same time, her boyfriend was trying to grab their son. Finally, she was able to lock him out. She started to drive home but realized she could not see out of one eye and had to pull into a store parking lot and have her mother come get her. Her mother took her to the hospital, and they returned home. A cousin noticed her injuries and called the police about the incident. Officers came to take a report and she obtained a year-long TPO.

After that year she was hopeful that the anger management and family violence classes he was required to take had changed him and began letting him have visitation with their son. This arrangement seemed to work out until she began seeing someone else, her current boyfriend and the father of her youngest child. She decided then they would not be able to co-parent and requested a child support order. She was told by child services that she should have no contact with him while they conducted an investigation. However, he came over to where she was living with her current boyfriend, and banged on the door, demanding to see his son. She told him she had been advised not to allow that until the case was finished. He became irate, returned to the car, and came back with a gun, threatening to shoot them. At this point, she did call the police and had her first negative experience with an officer and the court system. After explaining what had happened, the officer refused to pursue charges. He told her that he would write up a report and that she could take that report and try to get a TPO herself but that he didn't think that was appropriate because her ex-boyfriend had not *used* the weapon.

Marie filed the TPO paperwork at the courthouse and received a court date. Her ex-boyfriend did not show up in court, so the case was continued. At the second court date, he was late, and the judge first ruled in favor of the protective order. Upon this ruling, her ex-boyfriend entered the courtroom, told the judge he had had trouble finding parking, gave his side of the story, and the judge denied the TPO after talking with the ex-boyfriend. Marie recalls feeling betrayed by the system at that point, that the judge didn't care, but that the women in the courtroom, the court reporter and the file clerk, looked surprised at what they were hearing from the judge. In the month since that court

hearing, her ex has not contacted her again, but she remains discouraged. She now feels like “nobody’s gonna do anything until he kills me.”

Marie used the services of the university Family Law Clinic during her first TPO experience and found the process to be much easier. She never used shelter services, as she never lived with her abusers, but she did attend a support group through another agency. While reluctant to share her experiences at first, after about 8 months she began to speak about them and became increasingly comfortable. She found that discussing her experiences made a huge difference in how she felt, helped her to understand what had happened to her, and accept her past. In the group, she made a friend who has helped her during more difficult times. She attributes much of her healing to the presence of this close friend who is there to support and validate her.

Marie’s story sheds light on the difficulty survivors have using law enforcement and the courts to provide for their safety. She was successful in gaining temporary protective orders only after she had been physically attacked in ways that left visible damage. In these cases, police officers and judges seemed to understand that she had been abused and was at risk of further attacks if action was not taken. When her abuser showed up to threaten her with a gun, however, she was not taken seriously, although the threat of harm was very real. It seems that victims must first be injured before they are deemed worthy of protection.

### *Pam*

Pam is a 35-year-old white woman, cisgender, and bisexual. She has straight black hair, pulled back, and tattoos across her arms, including a set of tiny footprints. She has a Master’s degree and one birth daughter. Now about 14 years old, that daughter was

openly adopted by a lesbian couple, so Pam does get to see her. Pam is from Pittsburgh and, at 21, hitchhiked her way to Cedar Hills. There, she met a man whom she describes as “super punk” who was traveling around the country. She always wanted to have a “sort of Jack Kerouac *On the Road* trip” and was happy to find a companion for it.

After starting out on their adventure, she found her boyfriend wanted to live outside of the cash economy and didn't want to work, leaving her to find a series of odd jobs as they moved around the country. She says they were “basically homeless and hungry all the time” and she didn't want to sleep in any more alleyways. She returned home and discovered that she was pregnant. Her boyfriend wasn't interested in being a dad and she didn't feel capable of raising the child. Pam felt extremely guilty but had no education, no steady income, and hadn't even received prenatal care until she was 5 months along. After the adoption process, she returned to Cedar Hills but decided she hated it and went to Chicago instead. She recalls that she was very depressed at the time and wanted to start over somewhere new. She says of that time, “emotionally and mentally, I didn't realize I was depressed and that was the first time I started having panic attacks. I didn't know what they were.” It was only recently that she realized that the trauma from the adoption was causing her tremendous anxiety, depression, and panic attacks.

After a short time, Pam returned to Cedar Hills, appreciating the warmer weather. Upon returning, she went through a period of partying, again realizing recently that it was a very typical reaction to what she had gone through. She met Dave at a concert in Cedar Hills, which has a flourishing music scene. He was performing and impressed her with his passionate stage presence. She says, “I still remember being like being at the show

and telling my friends like, 'I'm gonna marry that guy.' That was kind of hyperbolic, but it was also like, 'That's the guy for me.'" Pam is a photographer and had taken pictures of the show, deciding later to send him the pictures. He asked her to lunch, where he was very charming. She felt drawn to his personality and creativity.

Pam says now that she missed many warning signs that she ignored because of low self-esteem and a habit of clinging to anyone who paid attention to her. The most significant red flag was that Dave was a much more severe alcoholic than she had realized. Around 6 months into the relationship she got out of denial and confronted him about his drinking, as she walked on eggshells in attempts to prevent conflicts. "I'm trying to figure out how to, how to help him and how to survive and how to keep all of these balls in the air," she recalls. She would come home from work and look for bottles under the sink so she could gauge how drunk he would be and how much abuse she would receive that day.

They were living in what she describes as a "punk house" with several roommates, but she found herself the one taking care of the finances, collecting and paying the rent, and covering any missing rent herself since her name was on the lease. At this point she felt the crushing weight of multiple responsibilities, managing the household, working a collection of part-time jobs, and trying to take care of a very addicted partner while suffering his abuse. She now realizes that she had become very isolated as well, avoiding contact with her friends and his bandmates. Toward the end of the relationship, she felt unable to trust anyone. She knew that he was cheating on her and reached out to the woman to warn her about him, "I know you're seeing this guy. He's

my boyfriend and I just have to let you know he's an alcoholic and sometimes he tells people that he's single, but he's really not."

The first violent incident occurred several months into the relationship and began with Dave hurling insults at Pam, calling her a slut and shaming her for past casual relationships. She slapped him, and he became physically aggressive, at which point she fought back in self-defense. They continued to argue over his drinking, lack of financial contributions, and seeing other women. He would often slap her or push her against the wall. Pam describes the time as being very chaotic and this would enrage her. He would tell her that she was just as violent as he was and that she was physically abusive. He would tell their friends, "She hits me too." She was ashamed of the abuse, having considered herself a strong woman and a feminist who would never let someone treat her that way. However, she says:

When you're in that kind of relationship, you think you're in love with somebody, and you don't realize they're going to hit you. They don't hit you on the first day. It's after you've become attached and developed feelings. That's when it started and everything escalated and he would sometimes go into rehab and every time he went into rehab, then he would relapse... all of these crises kept happening.

Dave was eventually arrested for shoplifting a bag of chips. He received a year of probation along with anti-theft and anger management classes. Pam paid for all these classes, pointing out how unfair it is for poorer criminals because if the court doesn't receive payment, the offender goes to jail. She says, "If he couldn't pay to go to his anger management, if he couldn't pay to go, like, his therapy sessions or whatever, then they would take him to jail. If he couldn't pay the probation, they take him. I mean, that's just

like the trade-off, like and that's how they keep poor people in prison..." Pam did her best to make sure Dave didn't go to jail, especially fearing he would go into detox and have seizures. Briefly, he went to Alcoholics Anonymous, and she went to Al-Anon meetings, but she felt they were unhelpful because they minimized the abuse she described to them.

During the relationship, Pam tried to leave several times but always returned. About 5 years into the relationship, she was growing tired of living a very unstable life. By this time, she was in college and, in addition to her household responsibilities and the difficulties in her relationship, she was now having to navigate absences and late assignments with professors who were sometimes flexible, sometimes not. Finally, she finished her art degree and had an exit show. Her family came down from Pennsylvania for the event, but her boyfriend was drunk and nearly didn't show up. Five months later, she reached her breaking point and told him she was moving into a friend's guestroom in a month. Although this meant breaking her lease, which she had done everything to avoid, she was now having panic attacks and unable to eat, as her anxiety manifested as nausea.

Pam began to write as a coping mechanism, starting a blog where she found a robust group of supportive readers. She found their feedback and concern helpful and encouraging. After the last fight, lasting all night, she found herself up and writing at 6:30 in the morning. She told a friend online she was ready to leave. Soon after, that friend and several others showed up at her house with a truck, packed her things for her, and moved her into her friend's guest room.

Within two weeks of moving out, Pam was struck on her bicycle by a drunk driver, breaking both of her legs. The driver was found guilty of DUI but not guilty of serious injury by vehicle because Pam's bike was missing a reflective light, a \$14 part that she couldn't afford until her next paycheck. Since her friend absolutely refused to have Dave in the house, the 3 months Pam spent in the living room and was unable to walk gave her time to detach from him. One day she was on the telephone with him and said how traumatizing the abuse had been. He replied that *he* had been traumatized too—because she was hit by a car and, at first, he didn't know if she was dead. The false equivalency was astonishing along with his lack of remorse over his behavior. She realized, "Normal people don't do this."

Pam did call the shelter hotline several times, often after an all-night argument, just needing someone to talk to, but when they'd mention safety planning, she would get scared and say she wasn't experiencing abuse, just a difficult relationship. "It was just that fear of like uprooting my whole life...What about my cats? What about, how am I gonna get to class? I don't drive, so like are you people going to drive me to school every day? Are you gonna drive us to work?"

Pam only contacted the police one time, when Dave was throwing things at her and nearly struck her with a flying space heater. She was greatly concerned for her safety and discussed the situation with their roommates. While they were punks who were generally anti-law enforcement, they were all at a loss as to what else they could do in a dangerous situation and all agreed it was the only choice. Knowing the police were on their way, Dave ran away and hid in the bed of a truck. He was eventually located and told he was going either to jail or the hospital due to his intoxication. Pam felt the

interaction with the officer was positive. He was patient and understanding and not nearly as condescending as she expected him to be. However, she also felt very uninformed about the requirements for domestic violence calls:

Basically, I told his police officer, I was like, “He didn’t hurt me and, you know, he didn’t, like he was attacking me, but he didn’t actually hurt me, and he’s just really drunk and, basically, I want him to, like, not be on this property. Like, I don’t want him to be here tonight but, like, I don’t want him to go to jail,” and I kind of thought that like if I told him that I’m not pressing charges, then like he wouldn’t go to jail. So, it doesn’t work that way, especially because I didn’t know about the Georgia family violence laws or anything like that. Like, you, you’re just gonna get arrested if you get called on...

Dave opted to be taken to the hospital and Pam rode with him and the officer. She recalls he was on perfect behavior and trying to come across as harmless to the officer. After being dropped off and left at the hospital, Dave ended up being taken to jail in the end. At this point, Pam felt betrayed because they had been told he could choose jail or hospital. She remembers getting victim notifications, but she was just ignoring them, and he wasn’t allowed to talk to her or have any contact with her. Years later she found that she had no idea how family violence cases were prosecuted and was unaware they could proceed without her input or participation in the process.

Eventually, Pam got into counseling and also saw a psychiatrist. She credits her recovery to the therapy she received through a local nonprofit that does outreach to the music community in Cedar Hills. She has continued in therapy for several years and expresses extreme gratitude for the help she received through that organization. Pam also

published a zine chronicling her relationship and recovery; like the blog she started during the relationship, this was cathartic for her.

In the end, Pam's barrier to safety, where she fell through the cracks, was that she really could not leave without causing herself financial difficulties and losing her pets. Without transportation, she didn't know how she would fulfill her obligations if she went to the shelter. Ultimately, she stayed so long because she was afraid of breaking her lease and what that would mean for her both financially and in terms of ever getting another lease. Like many survivors, Pam only contacted law enforcement when she felt her physical safety was at risk. Additionally, she didn't categorize herself as a victim when the abuse was happening and believed her response of fighting back made her abusive as well. She was protective of her abuser, paying for his classes and worried about him detoxing and having seizures. She didn't even pay attention to notices from the court and never spoke to prosecutors. Ultimately, it was not the police or the courts that provided safety. As many victims experience, her concerns about the arrest of her abuser were dismissed, leaving her to deal with medical emergencies and pay costs to keep him in compliance.

### *Carla*

Carla's story is a particularly interesting, unique case that illustrates the many ways victims might be failed by our institutions. She came to Cedar Hills to attend graduate school and was accepted into the same MA/Ph.D. program as her college boyfriend. While the relationship had been what she described as emotionally abusive from the start, it wasn't until they had moved to Cedar Hills and become engaged that he became physically abusive and he hit her for the first time. Carla said it continued until

he hit her hard enough to leave a mark. As she was working as an instructor, she had to cover the bruises before she left so they wouldn't be visible. The violent physical abuse stopped at that point because he realized that people were going to notice, and they might report him.

Being in the same degree program as her abuser meant there were many spaces where they were still around one another. This was especially upsetting to Carla because it meant being in a classroom or an office with her ex-boyfriend. Carla initially went to the campus office for relationship and sexual violence prevention (RSVP), whose staff was very understanding and supportive, but did not have the capability to intervene with the university department in any official way. That office was only able to offer advice and direct her to counseling services or the domestic violence shelter. Carla felt it was imperative that she not be required to sit in class or share office space with her abuser, and went to the Title IX office on campus, in the Equal Opportunity Office. Reporting here prompted a student conduct investigation, which she describes as an ugly process that resulted in her own suspension from the university. The investigation took a year since once she reported him for abuse, he filed a counterclaim with the university saying that *she* was emotionally abusive to him. She did not pursue a temporary protective order at the time, thinking the physical violence had been too long ago. The outcome of the university investigation was that they were both suspended from campus. The investigator further cited her survival strategies as emotional abuse, arguing that they should each have the same consequences and that the department needed to heal because the department itself was a victim. The RSVP office was able to validate her, confirming that the language in the paperwork was particularly victim-blaming. She appreciated the

support she got through RSVP, but the suspension meant she could neither attend classes nor fulfill her assistantship duties.

Consequently, she had to take a break from the program and delay graduation. Carla was informed that even if she did complete all requirements, her degree would be held for another year. In the meantime, she could not enter campus, or talk to her abuser or anyone in the department. Having originally planned to continue into the Ph.D. program, she found this experience so traumatic that she will not be continuing even if she is able to graduate with her Master's.

During the process, she found that both the professors and the other students in her department either disbelieved her or preferred not to take sides in what they perceived as a personal relationship drama. Carla felt like she had believed she was in a liberal educational environment with lots of feminist scholars, who would say that they were supportive of women, and most of her department was made up of women, and she had expected that those women would be more supportive of her. However, they communicated to Carla that they didn't want to get into her relationship drama. Her response was, "This is not my relationship drama. This is domestic violence." She found many of her fellow students thought that she might've been the emotional one because she would find herself sometimes being outspoken and being "bitchy, and making some quick snide comments or critical comments" about her boyfriend. They took this as evidence that he was not the aggressor. She recalls hearing many times that they didn't think that he could be doing those things because he seemed like such a nice guy. This ended what were she believed very close contacts and friendships that she had had in her department and that made up the bulk of her support system here in the Cedar Hills.

Carla did find the university's counseling services to be helpful in dealing with her trauma; however, they have a limit of 12 sessions, which is definitely not enough time to deal with the trauma of an abusive relationship, so she subsequently had to find another counselor to work with. She was recommended to EMDR therapy and dialectical behavior therapy (DBT), both of which she has found helpful. This therapy was very helpful for her and she can text her counselor if she is in crisis and her counselor will coach her through those moments. Carla never sought help from Safe Harbor while she was in an abusive relationship. As other survivors expressed, she was afraid she would be pressured to move into the shelter, but Carla was on the lease of the house she shared with her abuser and was fortunate to have the resources to live on her own. She believed that they didn't offer the kind of support she needed or wanted at the time. She also didn't feel ready for a support group at the time. After the relationship ended, she became a night and weekend advocate at Safe Harbor. Through her work, she has found support and validation from her coworkers and shelter residents. The support she gets from her work environment has helped to alleviate many of her doubts and reduce the denial that she struggles with.

Carla's story highlights the many institutional barriers victims of IPV can face. While a unique situation, her case shows so many ways victims are failed, and even harmed, by structures that are ostensibly in place to provide safety. Her repeated attempts to seek protection backfired at every turn. The agencies that understood abuse and provided counseling services had no control over the agencies that could have enacted real safety measures. In addition, she also diverged from the ideal victim in that she fought back, appeared angry, and her abuser was well-liked in their department. As far as

the legal system is concerned, Carla believed, with good reason, the physical abuse that left bruises was the only kind that would qualify her for a protective order, so she did not pursue legal aid.

These stories have been used to highlight the many ways that survivors of intimate partner violence experience the systems in place that are meant to provide safety. While each case is unique, the choices and challenges faced by these survivors are common, as are the barriers they encountered when seeking help. In the forthcoming chapters, I will examine different agencies, namely nonprofits and shelters, law enforcement, and the judicial system, which respond to intimate partner violence, highlighting the common issues they face and how these organizations collaborate with one another in their attempts to reduce domestic violence.

## CHAPTER 1: CONFRONTING INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE

The problem of intimate partner violence and the role of various organizations—including shelters, courts, law enforcement, and child protective services, among others—is a pervasive one affecting every demographic in society. The issue is compounded by structures of inequality and stubbornly enduring assumptions about victims of domestic violence that are held by the broader society and, in turn, by those who inhabit positions within the institutions with which victims come into contact. The persistence of racial and gender hierarchies and incomplete or misconceived definitions of victimhood and violence lead to unequal and problematic responses to domestic violence by the institutions which are in place to protect and help victims. Even the criminalization of domestic violence has resulted in outcomes that sometimes place women at greater risk. While well-meaning, the unintended consequences of these policies can lead to social service interventions that jeopardize the custody of children and may exacerbate the control tactics of already-controlling partners. Many possibilities need to be considered before making assumptions about what is best for domestic violence victims. What is “best” varies from one situation to the next and should not be determined by individuals or institutions without consideration of the victim’s input and particular position.

This dissertation focuses on the experiences of actors working within agencies responding to intimate partner violence, how they perceive their role, interact with

victims/survivors, and collaborate with partners in other agencies. The purpose of this research is to help understand underlying bias within institutions and highlight how responses might be hindered by cultural constructions of victimhood and violence, as well as the constraining structures of institutions. Clients may attempt to shape themselves into images favored by structural conditions, a strategy that privileges some groups while disadvantaging others. Shelter workers and advocates help survivors shape their narratives into coherent stories in order to strengthen legal cases, meaning survivors must tell a story that is not quite their own (Lawless 2001). This study focuses on how the process of leaving violent relationships is complicated by structural inequalities.

Because women are disproportionately affected by domestic violence, at greater risk of harm from domestic violence, and more likely to be displaced by domestic violence, this is an important area for research and can lead to better policies and procedures for helping domestic violence victims. Additionally, research in the area is limited with few broad qualitative studies addressing the complex relationships between survivors, assumptions, and institutions.

This research extends scholarly research on experiences of and responses to intimate partner violence. Several studies have explored the dynamics within various institutions, such as shelters, courts, child protective services, and law enforcement. Additionally, many scholars have examined the experiences of actors within particular agencies responding to IPV. However, few studies bring these experiences into conversation with one another. I seek to provide a holistic account of the experiences of actors within the systems that respond to violence and take an ecological approach to understanding how parts of this system work together or challenge one another. While

research exists on multi-agency models such as coordinated community response (CCR) teams, discussed in detail below, most of this research focuses on only one organizational dimension, and most of this is centered on advocacy and counseling (Shorey et al. 2014). Furthermore, little attention has been paid to these models within sociological literature and current research ignores structural inequalities and institutional as well as individual bias. A recent call for more attention to sexual and gender-based violence within the discipline of sociology was put forth by Armstrong et al. (2018), pointing out the paucity of research in this area.

This research is imperative for gaining a more holistic understanding of the paths and processes survivors of violence traverse. Bias embedded within institutions blocks access for some survivors while encouraging others to shape themselves into “worthy” victims. We need a more nuanced, intersectional, and power-conscious understanding of victims and victimization if we are to address the roots of intimate partner violence. Prior research has not sought to understand separation from intimate partner violence as a system with structural components. If organizations either fail to collaborate or share a common set of faulty assumptions, individuals get caught in a lose-lose situation where they cannot satisfy all necessary criteria for every organization and thus may give up altogether or settle for unsatisfactory outcomes. Increased knowledge of these processes can contribute to better policies and procedures within organizations that respond equitably to survivors in various circumstances.

A recent study estimates that at least one in seven homicides globally is perpetrated by an intimate partner. Over one-third of female homicides worldwide result from partner violence (Stöckl et al 2013). In 2017, 149 people were killed by an intimate

partner in the state of Georgia alone (Georgia Commission on Family Violence), ranking Georgia among the top 10 states for the rate at which women are killed by men according to the National Coalition Against Domestic Violence. These numbers are eye-opening but do not even include those who are injured, living in fear, or under the intimidation of coercive control. Given the worldwide prevalence of intimate partner homicides, research exploring the processes by which agencies approach providing assistance and understanding how this system works for and/or against survivors can help advocates and policy-makers develop more effective strategies for preventing and responding to domestic violence.

On a typical day in the United States, domestic violence hotlines will receive over 20,000 calls, according to the National Coalition Against Domestic Violence (NCADV). Despite this alarming number, less than 40% of domestic violence victims actively seek help (Short 2020). In the United States, half of all female murder victims were killed by an intimate partner. Sixty-five percent of murder-suicides are perpetrated by an intimate partner, with women making up 96% of victims. In 2017, 149 people were killed by an intimate partner in the state of Georgia alone (Georgia Commission on Family Violence), ranking Georgia among the top 10 states for the rate at which women are killed by men according to the National Coalition Against Domestic Violence. Responding to this form of violence is overwhelming and vitally important.

Whatever circumstances lead a victim of intimate partner violence to seek help, eventually many do turn to at least one of a variety of service providers when seeking guidance and support. This can follow a variety of different pathways, from simple safety planning with a domestic violence advocate to reaching out to law enforcement and the

court system for assistance. Community members in diverse types of organizations—shelters, counseling centers, police departments, and the legal system—may encounter survivors at any point in their journey. While every survivor comes from unique circumstances, there are common routes of escape when they decide that they must leave an abusive relationship. At some point, the victim makes contact. Understanding how actors within these organizations are trained, their approach to victims, and how they work together in response to IPV can point to areas that remain deficient and highlight why certain relationships among agencies can help or hinder the continued safety of IPV victims.

#### *Coordinated Community Responses (CCRs)*

The practice of coordinating agencies to respond to domestic violence in an integrated fashion began with an experimental program conducted by the Domestic Abuse Intervention Program (DAIP) in Duluth, Minnesota in 1981, and has developed into the most widely used intervention program for domestic abuse in the United States. The Duluth Model emphasizes the coordination of community responses among multiple agencies to empower survivors and hold abusers accountable (Bohall et al. 2016). Based on feminist theory and concepts of power and control, the model uses a “power and control wheel” to explain how men use privilege, abuse, violence, and intimidation to control women. As a batterer intervention, the Duluth Model has shown mixed results, with some studies showing a decrease in recidivism (Burge et al. 2015; Herman et al. 2014), and others reporting that the model does not account for individual-level factors or female-perpetrated violence, and minimal positive effects of the intervention (Schrock & Padavic 2007; Stover et al. 2009).

Regardless of its usefulness in batterer intervention, the model's strength lies in its emphasis on coordinated community responses (Pender 2012). Streamlining resources and responses from legal teams, advocacy groups, law enforcement, child and social services, health care services, and other community-based responders to domestic violence keeps everyone informed of the entire process and consolidates all aspects of the issue under one case file. Ideally, there should be full integration and agreement among members and all interested parties should be involved. Coordinated responses can relieve victims of the stress of trying to navigate services on their own, many of which they may not even know to exist. Despite this ideal vision, however, there is no standard protocol for implementing this type of program and communities are left to figure out this collaboration on their own. Furthermore, many localities do not appear to have integrated services, with largely separate agencies and poor communication among them (Shorey et al. 2014).

Research on coordinated community responses to domestic violence (CCRs) to date has largely focused on individual components such as the criminal justice system, advocacy, child services, health care, and counseling. However, research on components has not been balanced and the bulk of attention has been given to advocacy (Allen et al. 2004; Bell & Goodman 2001; McDermott & Garofalo 2004; Sullivan 2006; Sullivan & Bybee 1999) and counseling (Bennett et al. 2004; Bennett & O'Brien 2007; McNamara et al. 2008). There is a particular lack of research related to the criminal justice system's response to victims of intimate partner violence (as opposed to its response to perpetrators) and its integration with other agencies in CCR programs (Shorey et al. 2014). Additionally, there is a need for research with a system-wide lens, as "to know and

understand the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of one component of these programs, one must also understand the interrelations between components” (369).

*Biased Institutions/Unequal Outcomes*

Acker (2006, 2010) has theorized about the gendered nature of organizations, pointing out how organizational processes themselves lead to inequalities. Organizations can claim neutrality but practice prejudicially because they are composed of roles performed by individuals who exist within gendered (and raced and classed) social contexts. This has been examined in a variety of settings related to intimate partner violence. One of these arenas is the court system. Meier and Dickson (2017) examined whether custody cases involving allegations of parental alienation, both with and without abuse claims, had gendered outcomes. Their results show that mothers who raise claims of domestic violence are at a disadvantage in child custody cases. Even with expert testimony in their favor, they often fail to overcome a “presumption of falsity” (318) that results from faulty assumptions that mothers falsely accuse fathers in order to gain custody.

Law enforcement is another area where research shows pre-existing attitudes influence interactions. A 2018 study shows how laws are unequally applied when domestic violence victims wound or kill their abuser (Ijoma 2018). While Black women and transgender women are more likely to experience intimate partner violence, they face steep punishments after relying on laws that are meant to protect victims. These victims recount racism and sexism from law enforcement (*see also* Richie 2017). Ijoma traces this to “controlling narratives” that paint Black people as perpetrators rather than victims

and transgender people as “inherently deceitful” because of their refusal to conform to gender norms (283).

In immigrant communities, victims are often shamed and pressured to present an image of an intact and cohesive family. As Dasgupta (2005) explains, “the individual abuser and victim...are nested within the supportive circles of social institutions and culture. The ubiquity of both institutions and culture encourages and maintains abuse and victimization at the individual level” (59). While immigrants arrive with their own socialization and cultural backgrounds, American society brands them as “other” and deficient so that they are not only concerned with their safety and that of their children, protecting their extended families from disgrace, but they must also contend with a system that victimizes them further by encoding their lower status into laws, behaviors, and social practices that devalue these women. Particularly in cases where women depend on their marital relationship for citizenship status, they are at the mercy of their abusers and this power is solidified under the law (60).

Women in same-sex relationships that turn abusive are at additional risk of negative stereotypes and perceptions coming from community responders. In a mixed-methods study, Hassouneh and Glass (2008) found that stereotypes shaped women’s experiences through individual, familial, community, and societal perceptions and responses. As in many minority communities, women who experience same-sex intimate partner violence fear reporting will add to already-existing stigmas surrounding their community. Beliefs about aggression as a male trait and women as nonviolent lead to a myth of a “lesbian utopia” where women do not harm or oppress one another. This myth serves to reinforce gender stereotypes of nonviolent and submissive women and increases

the difficulty for victims of labeling and reporting violence (319). When women do become violent, it is depicted as a non-serious “cat fight” (320) that cannot result in any real harm. Abusers in these circumstances can use gender stereotypes to play the victim and/or gain access to protective spaces where they can further victimize their target. Negative stereotypes, reluctance to report, and community protectiveness are amplified in cases where victims are both lesbians and women of color (Kanuha 2005).

Not only do race and sexuality produce negative attitudes and outcomes for intimate partner violence victims, but class and poverty are strong influences in shaping both policy and treatment within organizations aimed at providing services to victims. Working-class women have fewer resources, both financial and in terms of cultural capital, to help them through the process of separation. They may display emotional or animated behaviors that others see as inappropriate or they may not be able to control their children in public spaces due to a lack of child care (Villalon 2010). Brush’s (2011) study of battered women and public policy is particularly useful in understanding how policy can exacerbate the disadvantages of working-class women who suffer from intimate partner violence. Changes in welfare policies in the 1990s required women seeking public assistance to work, with the idea that this was the answer to both violence and poverty—women would be able to support themselves and their children through employment while receiving extra assistance from the government. These policies, however, actually prevented women from seeking help and increased the likelihood that they would stay with an abusive partner. Harassment at work from their abusers along with low-paying jobs made it difficult to maintain employment and nearly impossible to finance a separate household and childcare. Gengler (2012) likewise indicates that the

women who end up in shelters are disproportionately from lower classes—as these women have fewer resources to explore other options—and then are subject to surveillance by shelter workers and state agencies. Websdale (1998) finds a similar lack of resources, along with more distant neighbors and closer family ties in rural settings, prevents women from leaving abusive partners and separates them from the services they need.

Even within spaces designed to empower women, cultural assumptions influence how advocates are also affected by prevailing cultural beliefs that influence how they approach and feel about clients occupying marginalized intersections of identity. Women at the shelter Gengler (2012) studied were required to attend classes on parenting and life skills like budgeting and balancing checkbooks. These were not only culturally irrelevant for women of various class and race backgrounds but assumed that the women needed parenting and financial advice. This assumption carries an inherent judgment that it was the bad choices and poor skills of these women that had resulted in their abuse and subsequent shelter stay and not, as Gengler notes, “structural gender arrangements, economic exploitation, or both” that resulted in their victimization (517). Furthermore, it implies that their situations would improve, and future abuse could be avoided, if only the women would take on white, middle-class values and behaviors. Similar patterns of judgment from nonprofit workers have been recounted by Villalon (2010) in her study of Latina immigrants near the southern U.S. border and by Cox (2015) in documenting the experiences of Black women in a Detroit homeless shelter.

Prior research has shown that coordinated response can be effective, yet institutions continue to hold bias created by poor understanding of the causes and

consequences of abuse. Since those working within agencies that respond to IPV are influenced by the same cultural myths and assumptions, the way they respond to victims can be counterproductive. Since victims often lack the resources to live independently, and there is a weak social safety net, some opt to stay with their abusers in order to keep and provide for their children. Those who manage to leave often end up in a system that blames them for their situation and fails to provide sufficient support or respect. This study adds to our understanding of how and when these issues arise and how agencies also work to combat these barriers to safety.

### *Theoretical Framework*

In this section, I will outline the major theoretical contributions of this project. The process of separation from intimate partner violence, the ability to access resources, and to present as a worthy victim occurs at multiple levels. This is not only a structural issue, but also an interactional one, so multiple traditions are required to examine how survivors navigate and experience systems. I will discuss the usefulness of feminist frameworks, particularly feminist pathways and the consequent impact on help-seeking, the role of inherent bias and conflict within the state and institutions/organizations, the role of power, and defining violence and victimization.

The critical traditions are “committed to critique and change” (Prasad 2005:109). Similar to Harding (1987), I view feminist work as starting from the experience of women, benefitting women, and dedicated to positive change for women. In studying intimate partner violence, feminist viewpoints are very useful for my research and one of the main traditions my work is grounded in. Feminist theory helps to frame the history of

violence against women and how it has been viewed and defined over time, as well as the impact of ideas of femininity, masculinity, and power surrounding the issue.

### *State and Institutional Roles*

Theories regarding the state and institutional role are needed to understand the function of organizations and organizational actors in reproducing attitudes about victims, how they are best helped, and who bears responsibility. Catherine MacKinnon's work on a feminist theory of state is a good starting point for understanding how law and culture are implicitly driven by gender (as well as race and class) assumptions (MacKinnon 1989). MacKinnon argues that state institutions inherently contain gender hierarchies because those institutions are designed by men with the assumption of male dominance. While policies may look gender-neutral, they nonetheless play out in gendered ways. In their study of family court practices, Meier and Dickson (2017) found that violence remains invisible in the family court system despite efforts to bring enhanced attention to domestic violence issues, with mothers remaining at a disadvantage particularly when they bring up incidents of abuse. These trends lead to an impossible situation where women can be prosecuted for staying in an abusive household and exposing their children to violence, but they may also be prosecuted for kidnapping their own children if they remove them from the home (Cross 2018; Fentiman 2017; Wingfield 2017). These findings illustrate how MacKinnon's theory is useful for understanding the impact of implicit bias within organizations on victims of intimate partner violence and how these biases may lead to different outcomes for people with different relationships to the power structure.

While the state may be androcentric and patriarchal, it is not uniformly so. Most organizations that respond to intimate partner violence either exist under the umbrella of the state or are subject to state policies due to funding requirements through state subsidies or grants. These entities may hold similar assumptions about victims, power, and violence, but their assumptions may also be out of sync because the state, rather than being a sovereign, unified whole with a clear and cohesive position, exists in fragmentary units that advance and retreat at varying rates, rather than in lockstep. Rather than viewing the state as fickle and contradictory, Pringle and Watson (1998) encourage a conception of the state as an “erratic and disconnected...series of arenas...The current collection of practices and discourses which construct ‘the state’ are an historical product, not structurally given. What intentionality there is comes from the success with which various groupings are able to articulate their interests and hegemonize their claims” (63). In examining the various organizations under the direction of the state, their conflicting and contradictory nature is better understood by viewing them as having been formed separately and with their own histories and power struggles rather than seeing them as mercurial elements of a single institution.

### *Interactional Dynamics*

On an interactional level, theoretical insights from social psychology can aid in understanding how inequalities persist within organizations. Ridgeway (1997, 2011) contends that gender inequalities persist because of deeply embedded cultural understandings about gender that are reproduced in day-to-day interactions, leading to differences in access to resources, power, and status based on cultural assumptions. Gendered assumptions operate in the background during interpersonal interactions,

framing these interactions even when actors remain unaware of it. Expectations vary by context and intersect with other status beliefs such as race and class. Not only does gender (and race and class, etc.) reside in individuals, but it is also present within cultural rules and expectations, organizational practices, and resource distributions (Lorber 1994; Martin 2004; Risman 2004). Integrative perspectives allow us to see how inequality is reproduced among and between these different levels. In their study of campus sexual assault, Armstrong et al. (2006) discuss Risman's (1998) assertion that consistent, interdependent levels of interaction lead to the reproduction of gender inequality, with processes at each level depending on those at the other levels. While socialization instills gendered expressions into individuals, cultural assumptions guide interaction in gendered ways. Because people operate according to these expectations, they create institutions where these gendered dynamics are infused, so that the structures that surround us reinforce the same hierarchies of male dominance and female subordination. These same processes are present within the dynamics of intimate partner violence when women are expected to behave in gendered ways, submissive, not fighting back, allowing male partners to dominate, and are punished by abusive partners when they do not seem to be following these rules. Not only are they punished at the interactional level of the intimate relationship, but also in interactions with actors responding to violence, who carry these same assumptions. Institutions also reinforce these norms in the ways that laws are written and enforced.

As a result of these organizational and interactional processes, collaborative efforts aimed at bringing together various organizations to simplify and centralize approaches to family violence cases through coordinated community response (CCR)

teams, may be more or less effective depending on the degree to which actors within those organizations hold compatible views and can relate to categories of victims.

### *Power*

An understanding of power is essential to studies of intimate partner violence (Stark 2009), as well as attention to how groups of people are defined in socially constructed ways by those in power (rather than exercising self-definition). In a patriarchal system, men exert power over women which is derived from their structural position. This position allows them to gain dominance through social attitudes and beliefs as well as through legal structures. Both the dominance of men and the subordination of women are upheld and reproduced through gender norms and expectations that are widely held in Western societies (Anderson 2009; Stark 2009). Men can use violence and aggression to dominate women in personal interactions and in ways that may seem invisible (Stark 2007) because macro-level inequalities create and justify the gender roles this violence enforces. Gender inequality is then reproduced through actions that deprive women of autonomy and systems that accept these deprivations as standard practice (Stark 2009).

Institutional power, infused with male, raced, and classed power ideologies, allows dominant groups with hegemonic control to define, categorize, and give meaning to other groups. This power, according to Bourdieu (1984), becomes normalized so that powerful groups generally do not need to use physical violence to compel conformity from subordinate others. Their definitions and meanings are internalized within individuals—individuals who work within institutions and whose interactions with other individuals are predicated upon these assumptions, including victim/survivors who have

internalized these characterizations (Loyal & Quilley 2017). Patterns of male domination, according to Grzyb (2016), are “deeply rooted in the mindsets, the *habitus* in Bourdieu’s terminology, of both men and women, and of law enforcement practices” (1048). Further, “symbolic power has the power to create belief, obedience, and a consensus in the dominated. Such categories and modes of perception are generated by the state and inscribed into the institutions, categories, and artifacts of the social world (Loyal & Quilley 2017:433). This allows us to conceive of a framework for understanding the movement of power between macro-, meso-, and micro-levels that provides for the reproduction of inequalities in the context of intimate partner violence.

At the individual level as well, power is not evenly distributed in the form of resources. Survivors who possess material resources as well as greater cultural capital—knowledge, connections, education, etc.—are more likely to successfully navigate services and be taken seriously by institutional actors than those without this capital. Some victims may not understand their workplace or legal rights as victims of domestic violence (Stone 2010) and may have difficulty understanding criminal and civil case differences (Epstein 1998). Survivors who do not understand emotional display rules, lack child care during meetings, or otherwise seem to be difficult or to have labor-intensive cases, are more readily dismissed in practice than clients who are “deserving of justice [and] who promised to have easy cases leading to successful resolutions” (Villalon 2010:100). Not only does a lack of power in the form of cultural capital prevent some survivors from exercising all of their rights within this system, discouraging encounters and misinformation often lead them back into abusive situations (Bybee & Sullivan 2005; Greeson & Campbell 2013).

Taken together, this body of theory provides a foundation for examining responses to intimate partner violence and how actors within organizations may approach their work with implicitly biased understandings of how men and women should act and what constitutes acts of violence, and how punishment should or should not be handed out. Organizations themselves as well as the people who compose them take on gendered, raced, and classed perspectives. Victims also internalize these widely shared beliefs and judge themselves as they believe others judge them. The fractious nature of state organizations can increase the level of difficulty experienced by those seeking relief from abuse. Power dynamics then allow some groups to maintain dominance while imposing definitions on others in ways that advantage dominant groups and potentially erase more insidious forms of violence.

### *Methods*

Feminist theories and methodologies are particularly useful for examining and framing these issues. Insights from standpoint, intersectionality, and Haraway's (1998) concept of situated knowledges are helpful for shaping questions, approaching research, and presenting interpretations of issues in intimate partner violence and women's experiences with providing and seeking help. Additionally, researcher reflexivity is vital to locating the researcher in the project and understanding how her position also influences the research process. The feminist tradition can orient research in a variety of ways. Feminist studies proceed from the experiences of women, gather information useful for understanding and combatting inequality, and place the researcher into the context along with the study participants. A focus on women and women's issues, power, resistance, and positionality are consistent with the practices of the feminist tradition.

This study explores the attitudes, beliefs, and experiences of those who work with survivors of intimate partner violence in the process of separation. Interviews with survivors help to inform analysis of institutional patterns and provide examples of some of the ways victims experience these interactions. To address these experiences and underlying assumptions, I employ qualitative methods, specifically, in-depth interviews and content analysis. These are best suited to answer questions about experience, deep meaning, and process (Becker 1996; deMarrais 2004). To address the relationship between disadvantaged groups and organizations, Sjoberg et al. (1991) take the position that bureaucratic, hierarchal organizations are incapable of universal fairness, as they contain “built-in structural bias,” asserting that the only way to truly present the voices of the disadvantaged is through “careful collection of case material by social scientists who take the worldview of the economically disadvantaged and set the latter’s voices (and their pain) in relationship to the powerful organizational structures that influence their lives and over which they have so little control” (60). Qualitative interviews, then, are most helpful in gaining a deep understanding of the experiences of responders and survivors of violence and how those experiences relate to organizations and the process of reproducing social inequalities.

Institutional ethnography positions research as a discovery originating in the everyday experience of people. This begins “where people are and proceeds from there” (Smith 2006:3) to the institutional dimensions and relationships that produce those experiences. The value of this approach is in its ability to “extend people’s ordinary knowledge of how things are put together in our everyday lives to dimensions of the social that transcend the local and are all the more powerful and significant in it for that

reason. We participate in them without knowing what we are doing” (3). To understand the experiences of survivors separating from abusive relationships, the actions and attitudes of those assisting them, and the social context in which all of this operates, starting from lived experience and working outward is an especially useful approach. Institutional ethnography is an ideal starting point for research into intimate partner violence and the role of institutions. I explore how institutions such as the courts, law enforcement, and shelters both challenge and maintain assumptions about victims of intimate partner violence. By gathering the experiences and perceptions of those who work every day within various agencies that respond to intimate partner violence, hearing how they work together and understand their jobs along with their relationships with other agency actors, I am better able to develop knowledge of the larger structures in which people live out their day to day lives, perhaps unaware of how they fit into the bigger picture.

I employ an ecological perspective to understand the interrelationships and interactions among various actors responding to intimate partner violence. By conceptualizing the location, agencies, and victim/survivors as existing and operating within an interconnected web of relationships, I attempt to examine the linkages and the fault lines that reveal the fragility of this system. Like the introduction of an invasive species to an environment has the unintended consequences of perhaps suffocating native trees, resulting in loss of wildlife habitat followed by the proliferation of other life forms that would have been controlled by the now-gone predators, failures in coordinated responses have consequences that reverberate throughout the system. My framework is adapted from Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory, originally designed to

explain human development and the multiple levels that affect risk factors. This model has since been used widely in a variety of disciplines, most notably by the World Health Organization (WHO) in determining risk factors related to poor health. Heise's (1998) ecological framework based on the model was used to understand the causes of domestic violence. Here, I adapt the model to focus on multidimensional *responses to*, rather than origins of, intimate partner violence, the interrelated agencies and actors within the system, and the ways disruptions in one part of the system damage the entire ecosystem.

### *Site and Sample*

This project involves a case study conducted in a mid-size Southeastern city that I will call Cedar Hills<sup>1</sup>. This location is ideal as an atypical case, and one which will offer a unique perspective on the experiences of survivors and organizational workers because the area is known to have a longstanding commitment to dealing with domestic violence and a very active local domestic violence shelter with strong ties and collaborative relationships to many community organizations. The shelter has been extremely successful in outreach efforts and participates in the local domestic violence task force—teams which, in Georgia, oversee efforts at coordinated community responses to domestic violence. This task force meets monthly, but many of the agencies—shelter offices, a nonprofit that responds to sexual violence, their counseling services, and the Domestic and Sexual Violence Task Force of the police department—share space and work closely with one another, providing service workers with opportunities to build relationships and rapport with actors in different spheres of the response effort. Shared facilities

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<sup>1</sup> I use pseudonyms throughout this dissertation to protect the identity of all participants and organizations included in this study. In addition, any information taken from websites or written materials that could potentially be identifying has been removed.

(Prepejchal 2008) and information systems (Clark et al., 1996) have been noted as improving coordination between agencies, improving communication and familiarity with the different ideologies of actors within the system (Prepejchal 2008). Additionally, the shelter director works to train judges in the state and co-wrote the Domestic Violence Benchbook. The site meets many additional “best practices,” though not all, mentioned by Clark et al. (1996) in their review of six cities with coordinated community responses. The court and shelter both provide victim advocates to help assist victims with different parts of the aftermath of an incident of IPV, law enforcement officers receive special training in domestic violence, although it has been reduced in recent years, and there are dedicated personnel for handling domestic violence cases in both law enforcement and the court system. What Cedar Hills is primarily lacking in terms of the criteria designated by Clark et al. (1996) is a dedicated Family Violence Court and comprehensive training of police officers.

While the site is not typical of towns in Georgia or elsewhere in the United States, studying an atypical case provides an opportunity to observe how the best-case scenario does and/or does not work for all survivors, and the challenges service providers still face even within this setting. Successful collaboration does not necessarily imply lack of assumptions throughout the system, and strong cultural biases can emerge even in places that actively work toward satisfactory outcomes for all survivors. Furthermore, while Cedar Hills is a progressive town itself, it is located within a state that imposes constraints on responses to violence and limits options for various actors. One of the more controversial policies involves mandatory arrest, which demands an arrest must be made in domestic violence cases where there is probably cause to believe a crime has

occurred. Such policies limit the discretion officers can exercise in individual cases, and often lead to dual arrests or arrests made that may put the victim in greater danger once the offender is released. These types of directives attempt to provide blanket solutions to situations that are incredibly complex and require a broader array of responses than a one-size-fits-all punitive approach. No site can escape the larger state processes that dictate the amount of discretion allowed within state agencies and nonprofits at the mercy of state and federal funding. Looking at this one atypical case allows us to find examples of how large-scale processes and widely held beliefs continue to shape the attitudes and experiences of people working within the system. While not widely generalizable itself, examining a case like this can highlight the ways that systems continue to fail, even with well-designed, well-intentioned and well-connected response teams. The experiences of actors in this system serve as examples of how the state and pre-existing stereotypes and cultural expectations can constrain community actors and give insights into how actors in every system exist in some tension with forces outside of their control.

According to Sjoberg et al. (1991), the case study “provide[s] a richness and depth to the description and analysis of the micro events and larger social structures that constitute social life” (6). An atypical, or extreme, case has the added advantage of increasing predictive value and refining our understanding of sociological principles (60-61). In this case, decreasing the probability of institutional gridlock and assuming a degree of collaboration allows us to examine the deeply embedded assumptions that may be used to characterize survivors. In a well-integrated system, if there is no bias, outcomes among variously situated individuals should be quite similar. While the organizational relationships may be atypical, I have no reason to think the actors

themselves and their experiences are not typical. These qualities make Cedar Hills a useful and logical site for research (Luker 2008).

Epistemologically, I approach this study from a feminist standpoint perspective, keeping the diverse social locations and multiple standpoints of participants in mind while looking for patterns that may emerge from their shared experiences (Naples 2003). Dorothy Smith writes that unlocking structures makes possible “a different conception of how it is or might become relevant as a means to understand our experience and the conditions of our experience.” ([1974] 2014:40). I consider participants creators of their knowledge and experts on their experience. As a researcher, I sought to collect information reflecting the multiplicity of experiences, sought patterns, and located these experiences in the larger social structure. I conducted research between 2019 and 2022, ultimately interviewing 5 survivors of intimate partner violence (one of these also worked for the domestic violence shelter, so she recounted experiences both as a survivor and a service provider), 6 people working in the shelter and/or nonprofit services, 4 law enforcement officers, and 4 people working in the legal system. In addition, I reviewed training materials used by law enforcement for domestic violence training of new officers, annual reports from the shelter for the years 2016-2021, the Georgia Domestic Violence Benchbook—a guide for judges handling domestic violence cases, prosecutor, judicial, and law enforcement protocols developed by the Georgia Commission on Family Violence, as well as information from agency websites. These helped me to better understand how service providers within these agencies are trained, best practices according to experts on handling domestic violence in different agencies, and background information on the shelter itself.

I had originally planned to focus primarily on survivor interviews and include courtroom observations in this study, but the unforeseen COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent lockdowns starting in early 2020 led to a dramatic change in plans. Prior to the lockdowns, Safe Harbor published my call for participants in their monthly newsletter, which resulted in 3 survivors contacting me for interviews. One survivor I found after a friend said there used to be someone who told their story at public events and I searched through the local newspapers for coverage of the events until I found a name, searched her contact information, and reached out to her explaining who I was, the research I was doing, and my interest in talking to her. A fifth survivor was a former student who contacted me the following semester about an interview. Restrictions imposed because of the pandemic made it virtually impossible to recruit additional survivors, as one of my strategies had been placing postcards in public places, which were largely shuttered during the pandemic. Interviewing survivors about sensitive topics is also best done in person. Face-to-face conversation allows a degree of comfort, as they can understand more about me from nonverbal cues, which is not possible over telephone or virtual avenues. This led to focusing my research more on service providers and law enforcement and legal system actors since I was able to email them directly and set up interviews both in person, via phone, and virtually, once a modified IRB was approved for zoom interviews. In addition to necessitating changes in interview focus and structure, I was unable to make observations in court during domestic violence hearings because the courts were closed to the public. I gained access to most of the service provider interviewees by emailing them to explain the nature of my research and my interest in speaking to them. Agency staff and contact information is publicly available, so I

requested interviews from a great variety of people I found through these searches. On about two occasions, an interview was set up after one of my participants recommended that I reach out to someone they thought would be helpful to me. Many requests went unanswered, including to workers at the campus Relationship and Sexual Violence Program, the law school's Family Justice Clinic, a number of counseling centers that partner with the task force to provide service to victims of domestic violence, and religious organizations. The timing of this study was a particular stressful one for those responding to intimate partner violence and a lack of response in no way reflects a lack of commitment to the issue; rather, demands on time and energy left little bandwidth for taking on extra meetings.

#### *Semi-Structured Interviews*

Interviews are useful when researchers “want to gain in-depth knowledge from participants about particular phenomena, experiences, or sets of experiences” (deMarrais 2004:52). Based on Rubin and Rubin's (2012) responsive interview model and their discussion of conversational partnerships, I designed my interviews to be flexible and adaptable, allowing for new ideas and patterns to emerge. I consider my participants to be experts on their own experience and very much learned from them. While in some ways I have insider knowledge, I am not part of their world and can only use my own experience to relate or empathize in some way to what my participants tell me. At the same time, I strove to use the research process to move from a state of “acquaintance with” to “knowledge about” the subject (Merton 1972).

I conducted 19 in-depth, semi-structured, open-ended interviews, lasting from about 45 minutes to almost two and a half hours. For in-person interviews, I asked the

participants to choose a location where they would feel comfortable. This ended up being coffee shops for many, sometimes in my on-campus office, and often in the offices of service providers. Allowing participants to identify a location helped them feel more relaxed, which made it easier for them to express attitudes, make complaints, or identify problems they might otherwise hesitate to express. I recorded all interviews using a voice recorder for in-person interviews, a phone app for telephone interviews, and Zoom recording for virtual interviews.

After completing interviews and downloading the interviews to my computer, I first used Otter.ai app to generate transcripts. I then cleaned the transcripts while listening to the audio to ensure complete, verbatim transcripts. Additionally, I often jotted notes and reflections on a notepad during and after the interviews to keep a general record of the context and my initial thoughts and ensure accuracy. I read transcripts line-by-line to gain an impression of emerging themes and patterns and note my initial impressions. I then re-read transcriptions coding for themes I identified as well as emerging from the second and subsequent readings. I used “in-vivo” coding to reflect the words of participants’ in my analysis (Marshall and Rossman 2016). I continually revisited relevant literature to increase my understanding of the data and help with my interpretation and analysis. It bears noting that experiences with intimate partner violence are heavily affected by social characteristics such as race and class. While my initial aim was to provide an intersectional analysis my sample does not provide me the ability to do justice to those intentions.

*Mapping the Dissertation*

In the next chapter, I outline prior scholarship and ways shelters and nonprofits have come to respond to intimate partner violence and how Safe Harbor fits into these models. I discuss definitions of victimhood commonly used and argue for a reimagination of these myths would better allow agencies to serve victim/survivors. I then discuss the ways that victims encounter services and the operation of coordinated community response models, including how Cedar Hills employs these practices. I also discuss the particular situation of Safe Harbor and the experiences of non-profit workers.

In Chapter Three, I discuss law enforcement and the way that this agency confronts IPV, outlining the history and shifting responses to IPV. I argue that our understanding of what violence entails needs to be expanded beyond a male model of physical aggression to include non-physical forms of violence such as psychological abuse, isolation, and subtle intimidation. I situate the Cedar Hills Police Department and the perceptions and practices within the department within currently recommended approaches as well as examine officers' beliefs about victims and trauma-informed approaches, and mandatory arrest policies.

In Chapter Four, I discuss the legal response to intimate partner violence and the ways that cases move through the legal systems. I outline different aspects of legal intervention and highlight how the Cedar Hills attorneys and prosecutors handle cases. This chapter explores the ways the legal system can be used to seek safety and justice for victims, but also the limits and shortcomings of the judicial process.

In the final chapter, I discuss major findings and implications from this research. I discuss how persistent cultural myths, based on gendered stereotypes, continue to shape

the ways that victimhood is constructed along with which acts or behaviors constitute “serious” violence that is worthy of recognition. I then discuss the urgent need for first-line responders to be thoroughly trained in recognizing and recording intimate partner violence. If we are to address IPV as a crime and a legal matter, it is vital that actors within those agencies understand its patterns and correct faulty assumptions about this type of violence. Finally, I discuss the implications of these findings and suggest ways that organizations might better respond to IPV.

CHAPTER 3: GIMME SHELTER:  
ENCOUNTERING SHELTERS AND NONPROFIT ORGANIZATIONS

In this chapter, I position my research within the context of prior scholarship and models of response to intimate partner violence. I argue that scholars, responders, and the general public should reimagine our definition of victimhood to encompass the actual ways that victim/survivors behave, rather than stereotypes of how victims should act. I discuss how victims encounter services, the history and current standards of practice among community agencies for working together to provide a collaborative, integrated response to domestic violence. These include Family Violence Centers, which house multiple responding agencies in one location, and coordinated community responses, a model for how agencies can work together to produce the easiest possible route through confronting violence. Cedar Hills utilizes both approaches, being one of the first locations to develop a dedicated Family Violence Center and a Domestic Violence Task Force consisting of several organizations that meet regularly to keep one another apprised of new developments. I then discuss the issues the *Safe Harbor* shelter faces, and the perceptions and experiences of non-profit workers who work with domestic violence victims/survivors.

*Defining Victimhood*

Included among chief concerns with responses to DV, are definitions of victimhood and assumptions embedded in misunderstandings about the kind of people

(women) who become victims of intimate partner violence. In their study on myths in police reports, Twis et al. (2018) identify several categories of common myths:

- (a) victim-blaming myths (Harrison & Esqueda, 1999; Policastro & Payne, 2013; Yamawaki et al., 2012),
- (b) myths regarding traditional gender roles (Harrison & Esqueda, 1999),
- (c) myths that excuse the perpetrator (Hirschel & Buzawa, 2013),
- (d) myths that suggest women unconsciously desire to be battered (Harrison & Esqueda, 1999), and
- (e) minimization myths (Peters, 2008; Stanley, 2012; Yamawaki et al., 2012).

These myths are widespread and contribute to continued violence against women.

Gengler (2012) points out the fallacy of requiring shelter clients to attend parenting classes or budget management training. Such measures assume that victims lack the knowledge and skills to fit the norm of white, middle-class motherhood/womanhood and succeed in freeing themselves from the cycle of violence. Underlying this assumption is a sense that these women might have never fallen victim to violence had they acquired the ability to budget and could have protected their children better if they knew more about appropriate parenting. Neither of these skills or lack thereof correlates with the probability of intimate partner violence. Further, this fuels the belief that individual characteristics are responsible for situations that are out of the victim's control. Instead, these should be understood as a consequence of socio-cultural factors, including gendered expectations and ideologies.

Because victimhood is so tightly constructed, survivors who do not fit the mold of an "innocent" or "perfect" victim are at a disadvantage. These women are more likely to

be disbelieved, dismissed, labeled either hysterical or as perpetrators themselves, and denied justice for their failure to emulate this definition of victimhood. Moreover, survivors may make efforts to fit the image of the ideal victim to be taken seriously and gain the sympathy of workers within the multiple agencies they encounter on their journey (Villalon 2010; Gengler 2012; Sweet 2019). Just as rape victims are re-victimized and blamed for their assault when they don't fit the impossible, perfect victim role, so too are survivors of domestic violence blamed for their own abuse. Sarah describes the assumptions about victims that they encounter regularly:

I think people have...this picture of women that are affected by domestic violence. It's, you know, they're always going to be low-income, they're probably a minority. They probably did something wrong to cause this. They probably have a bunch of children, and that sort of thing. And that's really not the picture that we see. I've seen women that have very high income. I've seen women that have no income. I've seen everything in between. I've seen people with disabilities, people not with disabilities. I've seen women with and without children. All different races, ethnicities. You name it- they've probably stayed in our shelter at some point, so it really affects the whole gamut of people.

Sarah lists many of the myths she hears about victims of intimate partner violence but counters them with her own experience of seeing women from many different circumstances in her work at Safe Harbor. Although IPV disproportionately affects marginalized women, women of color or those with few economic resources, it does not exclusively affect only one category of women.

Emma, an intern who has been at Safe Harbor for several months, lists similar misconceptions she encounters about victims of IPV, “It’s just an assumption that these...that these women are just like...they’re stupid or they’re putting their kids in danger on purpose. Or they’re being neglectful.” Emma explains that what she actually sees in the shelter are many kinds of victims who have been trapped in impossible situations but are doing their best to keep themselves and their children safe. The myths she points out have to do with victim-blaming and the misconception that victims have multiple choices about staying or leaving.

Michelle, who has been working at Safe Harbor for several years and is currently a child advocate, encounters the same myths:

That’s the biggest misperception about victims is that... “Well, why don’t they just leave?” And it’s a way to blame the victim for, oh well it’s just personal choice, you know, they just chose [it]. They stayed in a bad situation and, you know, that was dumb of them, or something like that.

Michelle specifically calls out victim-blaming myths that assume a lack of intelligence and a choice to stay in dangerous circumstances, rather than a complex array of considerations and circumstances that keep women trapped in abusive relationships.

The language of survivorhood leads to what Sweet (2015, 2019) refers to as the “medicalization of victimhood,” wherein women can “heal” through counseling and processing their trauma to avoid re-victimization in the future. This characterization implies their lack of self-awareness and proper boundaries led to their abuse and that, in turn, fixing these deficiencies can prevent future abuse. This includes the assumption that they have fallen prey to these patterns due to unhealthy relationship dynamics, poor self-

esteem, and the normalization of abuse in their lives. Additionally, it is believed that they could not properly assess and react to demeaning treatment and need to relearn healthy boundaries and interpersonal skills. While any one of these characteristics may be true in individual cases, they explain neither the abuse nor the victim's decision to endure it.

Increased surveillance of women as a result of the takeover Battered Women's Movement by organized, state authorities has emerged as invasive screening procedures at schools, medical clinics, and hospitals, which target specific groups of women (Bumiller 2010). These forms of social control place women in low-status positions at additional risk of institutional control by increasing watchfulness at the schools and in the doctor's offices of high-risk women. While well-meaning, the unintended consequences of these policies can lead to social service interventions that jeopardize the custody of children and may exacerbate the control tactics of already-controlling partners. Child services can remove children from an abusive home, and the fear of this outcome can lead women to hide abuse if they are unable to find a way out of their situation. Additionally, the questions and watchfulness in these contexts can feel invasive, again leading women to minimize or hide abusive behaviors.

I argue we must redefine victimhood to be more inclusive and accepting of the reality that victims are not static, docile individuals, going about their daily lives in a perfectly executed performance of a dutiful partner, wife, and/or mother, innocent and without agency, defenseless against the unprovoked attacks of a monstrous other. Victims/survivors of intimate partner violence are multi-faceted, agentic, dynamic participants in their own stories. They react, evade, defend, and attack when necessary. Perpetrators can be charming, successful, unassuming, and perceived to be good fathers,

good providers, and wonderful partners, all while terrorizing their partners at home. None of these actions, however, preclude their status as victims or perpetrators of violence. They can, unfortunately, limit the seriousness with which the justice system, and even non-profit providers, address them. Carla describes feeling judged as a less-than-perfect victim by mutual friends and colleagues as she dealt with anger both during her relationship and after the breakup:

It's not at all like I thought it would be as a survivor and it's not...I don't think a lot of people get it. I think people don't get how victims feel like, angry afterwards and not just...like there's a huge perception, I feel like, that a victim who gets out should just be meek and relieved and like just so happy in your next relationship and- because like they aren't getting hit anymore, and it's...And like no one paid attention to the, like the emotional dysregulation that comes out of it. Like I've had to deal with a lot of anger management problems...

She describes that her disclosures were disregarded because she displayed emotions that were strong and angry rather than sad and afraid. These reactions are not unusual for victims of IPV, who experience a whole range of emotions in response to trauma. Carla didn't seem like the kind of person to be a victim of IPV because she was generally confident and outspoken. She went on to describe other ways that she felt judged and blamed by mutual colleagues:

And, too, like the idea of fighting back, like, what does that mean in that...like people would say in the department, well, we thought she was the one emotionally abusing him because she would be really snippy or, you know, critical of him in public. And it's like, that was my one, like, safe place to make

my commentary without threat, right? Or “she was just really irritable and combative in class,” and I was like, “you know what? I wasn't safe at home,” like...And I and I never got away from him, right?

Carla explains more of her trauma responses that were misconstrued as abusive behaviors in herself. Having no outlet to release her frustration, she sometimes did it in spaces she considered to be safe. Because colleagues didn't necessarily see this behavior from her boyfriend, they assumed Carla was in fact the more aggressive partner.

The issue of responding to difference is one of vital importance. There is great power in controlling definitions and responsiveness. According to Crenshaw (1991), the women who dominate a movement determine which differences matter and which categories of women get to participate in leadership (289). Gengler (2012) provides an example of how strategies meant to empower victims can work to reproduce the same hierarchies and patterns they claim to resist. The concept of empowerment used at some shelters itself contains elements of power imbalance. An emphasis on personal choice may “inadvertently imply blame, and shift responsibility for change onto battered women, and away from abusive men, social service and criminal justice agencies, or a broader culture of violence (Berns 2004; Leisenring 2006).” This tactic “can ultimately mean a coercive relationship initiated by more-powerful ‘experts’ who believe they know what’s best for the less-powerful groups they are ostensibly trying to empower (Cruikshank 1999)” (Gengler 2012:503).

Patricia Hill Collins suggests that self-definition is necessary for challenging the images and assumptions placed on oppressed women by external forces ([1986]2014:309). Collins further emphasizes the necessity of self-definition:

The insistence on Black female self-definition reframes the entire dialogue from one of determining the technical accuracy of an image to one stressing the power dynamics underlying the very process of definition itself...When Black women define themselves, they clearly reject the taken-for-granted assumptions that those in positions granting them the authority to describe and analyze reality are entitled to do so. Regardless of the actual content of Black women's self-definitions, the act of insisting on Black female self-definition validates Black women's power as human subjects ([1974]2014:210).

It is important, then, to allow victims of domestic violence to define themselves and replace "externally derived images" of themselves with authentic images. If outside forces are defining women and their experiences for them, who is benefitting from these assumptions and what do they gain from it? Why should we believe that the "bad choices" of women who find themselves in dangerous relationships are any different from the missteps of anyone else, if they are missteps at all?

### *Reaching Out*

A phone call, an internet search, or confiding in a friend, are all early steps in the process of separation. Seemingly simple searches and conversations, however, are rife with danger when communications are monitored, and the reactions of abusive partners are unpredictable. Victims of violence cannot use their personal phones or household computers. While many domestic violence information websites provide a "safe button," an option to quickly exit the site and delete it from the history, there is always a chance of being seen too soon or web searches retrieved by an abuser. Though staying in an abusive relationship is risky, the reality is that leaving will be the most dangerous time for

victims. Battered Women's Support Services (2020) reports that "77 percent of domestic violence-related homicides occur upon separation and there is a 75 percent increase of violence upon separation for at least two years."

For many survivors, their first contact with any agency starts with a phone call, either to a friend, a hotline, a shelter, or law enforcement. These calls come after much thought and anxiety over how to successfully and safely separate from an abusive partner. Amanda, a 49-year-old mother of two, recounted how she finally left her abusive husband, whispering to her mother one morning:

I can't, I can't live like this anymore. I'm terrified." And my mom started crying and she was like, I've just been so worried about you living in this crap with him. He's so mean to you. And she said, I'm going to try to find you some help today because I want you to go get away and, and so, she called her neighbor who was her good friend, Shirley, and told her everything and so Shirley knew about Safe Harbor and Safe Harbor was new... So Shirley contacts Safe Harbor and then calls me and she's like, "Listen, I need you to, to pack, you know, just throw some things, necessities for you and your daughter in a bag. Um, I found you guys some help, you know, I contacted this place called Safe Harbor. They have a safe house and I'm going to come pick you up in the van. When I call you, you know, be ready to when you see me pull up, you and your daughter run out and get in the van and... and then I'm going to take you to, you know, meet an advocate and Safe Harbor and set it up." So that's what we did. And she picked us up, we met an advocate, and then we went into the shelter.

Other survivors I spoke with made calls to law enforcement, but only when they felt there was no other choice because of extreme physical danger, and still minimized the seriousness of the situation. Pam explained her experience of reluctantly turning to law enforcement for assistance since she and her friends are generally anti-establishment and part of punk culture:

It was a moment where I realized like this is pretty messed up, like, he tried to throw like, we had a—like a space heater that I guess was kind of like, that, yeah.... And he like threw that at me and I'm like, that's, you know, it didn't hit me but that's really dangerous! Like you could start a fire and all this other stuff. So I call the cops, um, and that was another thing because like I live in this punk house with, like, all these dudes mostly, and they- they knew kind of what was going on and, like, a couple of the guys had told me like, “if you ever need help, like, let me know, blah, blah blah, I'll be there for you.” And that was one of the times I, like, I came downstairs you know, to the main area. I was like, I, you know, “Dave’s really drunk, he’s throwing stuff at me, like, I- I actually need help.” And they didn't know what to do. And everyone is just like, ‘Oh, maybe we should call the cops,’ and then there's this whole thing because like, we don't want to call the cops...

Once a survivor has reached out, or encounters services as a result of someone else making the call, it is of the utmost importance that the person on the other side of that encounter understands the significance of the situation and responds in a way that will ensure the safety of the survivor. Without proper training, well-meaning service providers can miss important details or neglect to provide a proper response. Next, I will discuss

the history of the movement to combat violence against women, initially called the Battered Women's Movement, and how shelters developed. I will then discuss the specific shelter in Cedar Hills, Safe Harbor, and the experiences of those who work in the nonprofit sector.

### *Non-Profits*

Many survivors, if not most, reach out first or only to domestic violence hotlines or seek other more discreet avenues, such as counseling centers or support groups, for assistance, as opposed to the legal system. Many use the services of a domestic violence shelter. Domestic violence shelters first came to prominence in the 1970s as the feminist movement began addressing issues of violence against women, including sexual and partner violence. Women began to advocate for the state to take this violence seriously by labeling incidents as more than "domestic disturbances" and moving the issue from the private to the public sphere (Bumiller 2010).

Domestic violence shelters started as houses run by organizations of women to provide safety for women leaving abusive partners. Eventually, these became more formal shelters, which could serve as a centralized location for women (currently some/many shelters include all sex and gender identities) to seek various forms of assistance in living with and escaping from violent partners. Bumiller (2010) points out that these small, grass-roots centers began as "distinctive 'feminist organizations' that explicitly recognized the need for less hierarchy, democratic decision making, and women working with women," a position that was decidedly anti-state (Bumiller 2010:3). However, as these centers grew and required greater and greater resources, state funding

became a concern, leading to increased rules and regulations and turning the movement into one much more involved with the state and, ultimately, dependent on it.

At the same time, the legal system was bringing domestic violence out of the shadows of the private sphere and more explicitly condemning these behaviors as crimes, rather than “family matters.” With the passing of the 1994 Violence Against Women Act (VAWA), federal funds became available to support shelter activities and train law enforcement personnel and others in responding to intimate partner violence. Shelters subsequently became more hierarchal, more bureaucratic, and subject to the demands of the state. In building community responses, feminist organizers had to grapple with the contradictions involved with partnering with state agencies such as law enforcement and the court system, which they distrusted and characterized as institutions infused with male power that didn’t take women seriously and legitimated violence against them (Schneider 2000). This dilemma led to what Sack (2004) labels “curious allies,” where feminist advocates found themselves working alongside traditional law enforcement toward a common goal of reducing domestic violence, albeit with different ideologies guiding them.

By 1920, every state had officially made “wife beating” illegal, but it wasn’t until the 1970s that the legal system began to consider domestic violence a serious crime. In New York state, beating became grounds for divorce in 1966, but only if it was proven to have happened a sufficient number of times (Pennsylvania Child Welfare Resource Center). Wisconsin became the first state to criminalize domestic violence in 1971. In 1984, victims of domestic violence first became eligible for compensation through the Victims of Crime Act of 1984 (HR 5366). However, it was not until the Violence Against

Women Act of 1994 (VAWA) that domestic violence became a federally recognized crime. Since then, the act has been reauthorized in 2000, 2005, 2013, 2018, and 2022, each with additional protections. This was the first time the federal government acknowledged domestic violence and also began to allocate funds directed at encouraging coordinated community responses to domestic violence (Pennsylvania Coalition Against Domestic Violence). Until 1976, every state had a marital exemption regarding sexual assault that prevented even the possibility of consequences if a man raped his wife; essentially, marriage itself implied consent, regardless of an individual's willingness to participate. It was not until 1993 that every state recognized marital rape as a crime. Individual states vary tremendously, even today, in definitions of domestic violence and criminal responses to the problem. Local policies and guidelines also guide responses to and the consequences of domestic violence situations.

The purpose and mission of domestic violence shelters have always been to accommodate and support survivors. While the early shelters primarily aimed to provide safe living spaces, shelters today engage in many more services, such as phone and text lines, safety planning, support groups, and resources for multiple other providers to assist in as many or as few ways as survivors desire. While they inform the community and hope to protect the community through education and helping women out of abusive relationships and, if necessary, navigating the criminal legal system, their focus is on the individual survivor's needs and wishes. Although they engage in community outreach and education, their primary focus is on giving survivors the resources and space to decide which services they want and when to approach them. Adult survivors are

provided confidentiality and autonomy in requesting services and choosing whether to report incidents to law enforcement.

The Duluth model was introduced as an idealized vision of how a variety of community actors and agencies could work together to provide a coordinated, streamlined response to domestic violence cases. In this model, shelters are but one resource among a network of collaborative actors responding to the same crime in diverse but specific ways. Current research on shelters elaborates on the benefits and advances shelters have made in combatting domestic violence; indeed, rates of intimate partner violence dropped from 15.5 to 5.4 per 1000 people from 1995 to 2015, while police reports have increased only marginally (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2017). Yet, research also suggests some problematic trends still to be addressed. Among these is how to best serve a diverse population and house as many traumatized individuals as possible with limited resources, little space, and enough oversight to facilitate a peaceful living space.

Balancing the need for structure and responsibility with empathy for individuals dealing with stressful levels of trauma and ongoing effects of violent experiences can be very difficult to reconcile for people on the front lines. Shelter workers themselves report experiencing tension between serving survivors and managing shelter rules. Sarah found it difficult to resolve being in a position of authority and enacting consequences for shelter residents who had only just left a highly controlling environment:

You're working in such an emotional environment where it's not always touchy-feely happy...My job was to enforce certain rules to keep the house clean. And it was so tough because I was essentially just...I was having to be in this position of authority...That was probably one of the most difficult things to, to navigate... I

would try to make that kind of appeal of, like, “You know, let’s just really do this together,” and try to make it less authoritative. But there were times I had to write people up...and they would just be like, you know, “I hate you.”

To minimize the power difference, Sarah tried to emphasize that tasks were a mutual responsibility rather than a command she was giving but still experienced resentment coming from residents. There were times she even neglected to write up residents who were slacking on the rules because she didn’t agree with the process of disciplining survivors. This was also a way she could avoid pushback from residents. In the next section, I discuss Safe Harbor and the ways this shelter reaches out to the community and participates in a coordinated community response to domestic violence. I also explore the ways that shelter work can be difficult for its employees, though they work to challenge assumptions about victims of IPV, and how they coordinate with their community partners.

### *Safe Harbor*

Beginning in the late 1970s, first as a hotline through personal home landlines and a network of safe houses in private homes, Safe Harbor was incorporated in 1990 to provide housing and safety services to women in the surrounding four-county area. It was part of a cooperative effort of community partners seeking to address the issue of violence against women in Cedar Hills. While it started with few resources and relatively untrained volunteer staff, it has grown into a major force among local nonprofits and serves as a model for others looking to succeed in organization, outreach, and fundraising. The current mission of the shelter states, “Safe Harbor is a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization working to end domestic violence through prevention and educational

programs, crisis intervention, ongoing supportive services for survivors of domestic violence and their children, and systems change advocacy in our community.”

Administrative offices and meeting rooms share space with other members of the coordinated community response team, another nonprofit dedicated to responding to sexual and child violence, and the Domestic and Sexual Violence Police Unit.

Outreach efforts and the housing units have steadily improved over time and the shelter currently has units in 2 locations. Recently, funding has allowed for the housing units to provide private, secure rooms for each client and/or family receiving housing services. This development has allowed for reduced tensions and greater autonomy for clients sharing space under difficult circumstances. In the organization’s 2021 annual report, the organization recorded 2393 hotline calls, 188 text line conversations, 131 clients sheltered, 580 clients served in outreach, and 25 clients served in long-term housing. In 2018, 250 presentations and trainings were held concerning prevention and education about domestic violence.

In terms of staff and training, the shelter has 5 full-time staff members and utilized 39 interns in 2021, adding up to 20,374 service hours for the year. Staff and interns complete at least 40 hours of intense, in-person training, in addition to 7 hours of training videos and quizzes developed in partnership with the local university’s Leadership and Advancement Institute.

For the fiscal year 2021, Safe Harbor received \$1,434,304 in revenue. Fifty-five percent of that revenue was generated through grants and contracts, including government grants from the county, the Criminal Justice Coordinating Council, the Emergency Food and Shelter Program, and the U.S. Department of Housing & Urban

Development. Other sources include 17% from the non-profit-run thrift store, 17% from contributions, 8% from investments, and 3% from events organized by the non-profit. Such events include a yearly dance contest, a retro-themed lip-sync night, a step competition, and a performance of *The Vagina Monologues*. Ninety-two percent of all revenue is spent on program services.

### *Working in Shelter*

While resources are more plentiful currently, in past years the shelter has foregone maintenance and improvements that worried the staff on occasion. One employee recounted an incident when the housing unit suffered a rat infestation in the attic. Mothballs were placed to deal with the problem, but there was a concern that the chemicals could be affecting both the service providers and the residents, one of whom may have been pregnant at the time. In this case, shelter management prioritized financial restraint over the possible safety of residents and workers, as Sarah, a long-time shelter worker who had lost her mother to domestic violence describes:

I thought about that the other day how [the director] crawled up into there to remove mothballs and actually fell out...I do feel bad about that. I do feel bad. But at the same time, it was horrible. It was not working conditions. And things like that where I felt like, okay, I don't feel respected. I don't feel like- I feel like I'm ignored. You know, I'm this young person. It's like, nobody's taking me serious- even seriously or treating me like a, like, I'm at like my voices [?] like, "Oh, be quiet. Be quiet, please." But at the same time, I'm working 40 hours- or sometimes more- a week. I just felt like, I'm so tired of, you know, not sleeping. You just start getting a little like a small child, you know?

Sarah found some work conditions unacceptable and had safety concerns when corners were cut. She felt dismissed when she raised concerns due to her young age and exhausted from long night and weekend hours. Sarah was also in college at this time but unable to work fewer hours or daytime shifts because she did not yet have a degree that would be required for more senior positions.

Other staff and interns relate particular stressors involving long hours of constant availability, combined with other school and family obligations. Emma, an intern from the local university who had been at the shelter for several months, recounts the difficulties of balancing her shelter duties with school and sleep schedules:

I've had particular difficulty, like I said, with the text line. It's just a difficult thing. It's just not fun. It's really stressful and it's 24 hours for a week that you have it. So, um, that means that interns need to be on call even after they leave the location...[W]hen I have the text line...I usually don't sleep very well that entire week because I'm worried that I'm gonna sleep through a text...It's just kind of known...that it sucks. That it's the worst. There's...a particular like tone when someone has texted and I know the tone and every time anyone hears it, because you have to have it on you all the time, even in classes, everyone just like groans or tenses.

The long hours interns work, especially when on 24-hour call to answer the crisis text line, took a toll as well. Emma also points out that she is unable to sleep during the week she has this duty for fear she will miss a text. It also interferes with other school obligations because it must be answered immediately.

Related to this issue, participants reported that the limited staff and close quarters of the shelter made it difficult to not only tolerate demanding work conditions but also to extend resources to some victims, especially when there were additional issues like substance abuse or mental health needs and contributed to tense living conditions in the shelter as well. Michelle expresses doubts that shelter living itself can really provide residents the space to fully recuperate and find comfort while they are still worrying about their safety around other individuals:

I think it would be difficult while you're living in the shelter to have any thinking space because you're also like, "Okay, who is this person sleeping over there? Do I need to be worried about my possessions? When do I get to watch TV? When do I get to cook?" ... All this navigation and we're not just talking about people who have domestic violence issues. There's so much overlap with other chronic problems like...drug abuse issues and mental health issues."

Michelle explains how residents are dealing with multiple issues at once while also being asked to adjust to communal living with strangers and new expectations. While staying in the shelter provides safety in the short-term, staff are skeptical about the level of healing that can take place before residents move on to more stable home environments.

### *Challenging Assumptions*

While staff acknowledged that they felt stressors related to working in a demanding role and sometimes doubted the extent of relief they could provide their clients in the immediate aftermath of separation, nonprofit agency staff all liked to believe that they were challenging the assumptions about domestic violence victims. Sarah elaborates:

I like to think that we are actively working against them. I like to think that we are actively trying to challenge them, and a lot of times victims themselves are perpetrating these assumptions when, you know, talking about their fellow housemates and themselves, and so we're working to educate them on, you know, "No, this is not the case. This is, this is actually how it is. No, you are not weak because you came to a shelter. You are not weak because he used to beat you up.

This illustrates the issue of survivors having internalized common assumptions themselves and that shelter workers actively try to dispel myths about victimization for survivors as well as the public and those working in other agencies.

Safe Harbor's staff and interns are trained in trauma-informed responses and recognizing behaviors in survivors that result from having been abused. Their pre-service training consists of 40 hours of training on recognizing and responding to violence as well as knowledge of resources available for survivors of IPV. Shelter staff also conduct training for the police department and prosecutors who work in domestic violence cases and work closely with those offices to help with responses to cases of IPV. According to the latest annual report, Safe Harbor staff working in the Family Justice Center reviewed 1437 police reports for domestic violence and made contact with 533 victims named in those reports, being proactive to screen reports for IPV and making sure the victims from those reports know about services available to them. In addition to this work, Safe Harbor also provides presentations to students in middle school through college about dating violence, hoping to educate students to recognize the signs of abuse early on and dispel myths about victims of intimate partner violence.

*Working with Partners*

Shelter staff also indicated that other agencies, particularly law enforcement and court personnel, needed to be better educated in handling domestic violence. While Safe Harbor's director holds trainings for judges and the shelter also reaches out to law enforcement, prosecutors, and advocates with the courts, staff continue to see misconceptions commonly held by some officers. Sarah explains the difficulties she sees with officers who are not aware of common traumatic responses and behaviors of victims:

Sometimes they do feed into those stereotypes. I know we've worked a lot with police officers educating them about domestic violence and what it looks like and, you know, a lot of officers will have a really difficult time if they are called out to a scene and the woman is like, "Never mind. Never mind. It's okay. You know, it wasn't that bad. I shouldn't have called. I'm sorry." And the officers are like, "You're just wasting our time." You know, what we're training the officers to see is that "Turn around, he may be giving her intimidating looks behind your back and you're not seeing it and she's just terrified of what is going to happen, so she's just saying never mind." And that happens in the court system too, is that someone will drop a case all of a sudden and it's out of fear usually.

Sarah shows her discouragement when officers and court personnel fail to note the intimidation victims of IPV receive and the many complicating factors that lead them to recant or drop interest in prosecution. While these agencies receive extensive training, if the individuals are not interested or not paying attention, they can fall into a pattern of dismissing the severity of IPV and minimizing victims' fears. At the same time, she

acknowledges there is great variety in individual officers' abilities to notice and understand intimate partner violence situations:

We've had officers that are just so great and understanding. They get it, and we've had officers that are the exact opposite and then everything in between. I think that [our county], again I'm really proud of [our county]—they're a lot better than a lot of places because I've had victims call from other counties and when we're safety planning, we often encourage them to call 911 if they feel threatened and they're like, "No! They don't do anything! They don't help. They make it worse. They come out, they take his side, or they just don't do anything and they leave, and then he's even more angry with me, so no, I'm not calling 911. What else can I do?" which is difficult because if someone is in a really, really, really dangerous situation, there's weapons in the home or whatever the case may be, and they're unwilling to call 911, that's scary. It's very scary, but I can't blame them if they have been re-victimized by the police time and time and time again, you know, they don't want to call the police and I don't blame them. And then sometimes we've got people that really trust the police and they call 911 a lot and they get the help that they need.

Sarah highlights that, although some officers are less informed about IPV, she thinks the Cedar Hills does an exceptional job responding to victims. She also points out that some victims from neighboring counties, who also use Safe Harbor's services, show distrust of the police because of bad experiences with officers who did not help them and sometimes took the side of the abuser when responding to domestic disputes. This makes it less

likely that a victim will turn to law enforcement during subsequent incidents, as we saw in Marie's story, and reinforced by those in law enforcement in the next chapter.

In conclusion, shelters and nonprofits in Cedar Hills began much the same way as in the rest of the country and the shelter works hard to employ a collaborative and victim-centered approach to their work as well as their dealings with law enforcement and other agencies. They maintain relationships with other members of the Domestic Violence Task Force and engage in community outreach that involves training and education directed at these partner agencies as well as the local schools. Community organizations can also request presentations or educational materials. Staff overall communicate they are proud of the work they do yet find it stressful and report vastly different experiences with different police officers. They most often attributed this to the inexperience of the officers themselves and their lack of training. While officers in Cedar Hills do receive training on domestic violence that exceeds what is offered in other districts, not all officers are equally engaged with the training, and only some seek out additional information and training in handling IPV cases, an issue that will be discussed further in the following chapter.

### CHAPTER 3: KNOW YOUR RIGHTS INVOLVING LAW ENFORCEMENT

We cannot make sense of public responses to intimate partner violence without a detailed understanding of how law enforcement confronts this issue. Often the first interaction a victim has in terms of receiving services is with a police officer, whether they called 911 themselves, or a friend or neighbor reported violence. Therefore, we must examine the attitudes, training, and actions of law enforcement officers who are so often the first responders and first documentarians of IPV incidents. In this chapter, I situate the practices and experiences of the Cedar Hills Police Department within the context of currently recommended approaches to domestic violence police responses. I will first discuss the ways that violence itself is defined. Socio-cultural understandings of violence and the ways it is identified inform both individual and institutional responses to behavior. I provide an overview of how approaches to domestic violence have changed over the last century and the impact of officers' attitudes and perceptions. Next, I will discuss the importance of comprehensive training and the challenges faced in Cedar Hills. I then review mandatory arrest policies and trauma-informed approaches to policing domestic violence. Throughout, I will examine the ways that this part of the ecosystem affects, and is affected by, other agencies within the system.

### *Defining Violence*

The way that violence itself is defined can create problems for victims of intimate partner violence. Without attention to how we culturally tend to identify and recognize violence—what does and does not count as violence—drives police responses to IPV. Violence tends to be characterized in a masculine way—a physical, forceful impact that renders the victim injured or marked physically. Too often, victims who do not show physical marks of violence are perceived as overreacting, oversensitive, or even dishonest. Yet physical violence is not the only form of violence, and it is only one indication of abuse. Stark (2006) emphasizes that abuse is not limited to physical violence and defines abuse as multifaceted. Epstein and Goodman (2019) describe in detail the ways that physical harm is prioritized over psychological, emotional, and other types of harm is written into the law. In contrast to the weight the justice system puts on physical violence, many survivors recount the daily exposure to coercive control as far more damaging than the sporadic physical assaults they suffered (418). Likewise, Johnson (2009) argues that all forms of abuse are interrelated and “not only do these abuses cause severe emotional distress, physical harm, isolation, sustained fear, intimidation, poverty, degradation, humiliation, and coerced loss of autonomy, but... most domestic violence is the fundamental operation of systemic oppression through the exertion of power and control (1107).” She concludes that protection should be available to women suffering any form of domestic violence in order to rebalance power dynamics and decrease abuse.

Johnson (2006) argues that failing to differentiate various forms of domestic violence has led to numerous misconceptions and confusion in the study of violence. By

collapsing all domestic violence into one category, it is made to appear that intimate partner violence is not gendered and that violence by men and women is indistinguishable. However, he finds that there are four types of domestic violence and breaking down incidents by these categories highlights the very gendered nature of this phenomenon. The tactic Johnson refers to as “intimate terrorism” is overwhelmingly enacted by men against women and is linked to multiple other forms of control (1010). This is the form of violence seen most often in those who seek assistance at shelters. Importantly, this form of abuse is not limited to physical fights. Control tactics such as threats, economic control, use of privilege and punishment, using children, isolation, emotional abuse, and sexual control all converge to create an abusive, fearful environment for victims. These tactics do violence to the victim emotionally, psychologically, and physically, and need to be defined as violent if we are to have an accurate understanding of intimate partner violence.

Stark (2006) links control to sexual inequalities between men and women, the privileged access men have to women who are their intimate partners, and the extension of control over social spaces through spying, stalking, and harassment. This entrapment of women is rooted in sexual politics—it is not merely “domestic” or about physical “violence.” If only those things that are defined as violent are taken seriously, as is so often the case, then it is important that all of the elements of what he calls “coercive control” be defined as violent so that they are taken seriously and, in turn, victims are taken seriously.

Anderson (2009) contributes to the understanding of intimate terrorism/coercive control as a gendered phenomenon by putting forth a multilevel theory of gender as

identity, interaction, and social structure. Unstable masculine identities require control, while feminine identities are used by controllers first by flattering the victim's femininity and then challenging it. Drawing on Judith Butler's work on gender performativity, Anderson articulates that particular performances of gender are required in coercive control. Traditional masculinity requires control over others and the positioning of men as dominant and women as subordinate. Traditional femininity itself is performed in the domestic sphere, which aids in the isolation of victims. Women's roles as child-care providers and nurturers also hinder attempts to separate from abusive partners. Mothers are reluctant to leave children in order to flee an abusive home and often fear losing custody to partners who have parental rights and threaten to keep the children away from them or to harm children.

Not only is gender performance linked to control and violence, as Anderson and Stark both claim, but gender itself is also a form of structural inequality that increases women's vulnerability. Performing traditional femininity, women stay in the home, defer to men, protect the reputation of their partner and/or family, and become easy targets for abuse. It is telling that coercive control increases in response to women's increased status and greater gender equality (Anderson 2009:1451). If this form of violence were not about gender, there should not be a difference related to women's movement toward equality. Coercive control is also related to the attitudes that men hold about gender—those with more traditional attitudes are more likely to react to a partner's independence with violence (1451).

*Shifting Approaches to Domestic Violence*

Approaches to domestic violence by law enforcement agencies have changed dramatically over the last century. In a review of domestic violence policy, Lutze and Symons (2003) point to patriarchal systems and the implementation of policies that stem from gendered institutions that assume masculine models of power as the source of women's unequal protection under the law. They argue that policies "become distorted in ways that undermine their effectiveness" and urge attention to the power imbalances between the state, abuser, and victim (320). They identify three phases of domestic violence policy. The first phase they label "male privilege and right to discipline," a period of accepting men's right to abuse women. Around the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, American courts began to move away from the "rule of thumb" encoded in English common law and often attributed to Sir William Blackstone that dismissed any "discipline" a man might give his wife so long as the instrument of abuse was no thicker than his thumb (Lutze and Simons 2003; Hirschel et al. 1992). Even as attitudes slowly shifted, law enforcement largely regarded violence between spouses, or in the home, as a private matter to be handled within the family. When police did respond, officers retained attitudes that these incidents were not police matters and action tended to be ineffective and insufficient (Hirschel et al. 1992, Miller 2003).

In the 1970s, social movements and the momentum of second-wave feminism drew attention to the problem of domestic violence and women's right to protection under the law. Lutze and Symons refer to this as "male power and the right to protect," and it marked a turning point in how law enforcement responded to intimate partner violence as public pressure forced a cultural shift in how domestic violence was

perceived, forcing it into the public sphere. With greater responsibility placed on police departments to take violence against women seriously, departments reacted with aggressive mandatory arrest policies. Under mandatory arrest policies, officers were required to make an arrest when probable cause existed. These policies were driven by early research findings that arrests were the most effective responses to intimate partner violence and the greatest deterrent to repeated incidents, led by Sherman and Berk's (1984) Minneapolis Experiment. The United States Attorney General in the same year recommended arrest as the preferred response to domestic violence calls (Attorney General's Task Force on Family Violence 1984).

Subsequent research found mixed results from mandatory arrest policies. Notably, some scholars found that while arrests increased, prosecutors discouraged victims from pressing charges and were apt to label victims "uncooperative" or "unworthy witnesses" (Ford and Regoli 1993). Further, the practice of dual arrests, taking both parties into custody and letting a judge sort out who was the primary aggressor, led to victims being arrested and deterred from reporting (Chesney-Lind 2002; Miller 2003). Lutze and Symons (2003) summarize:

Victims reported that mandatory laws may be more helpful to other women than to themselves, that the police were unable to keep them safe from their abuser, and they did not trust that the police would make an arrest even when asked (Miller 2003; Smith 2000, 2003). Victims who did not pursue prosecution because of fear, distrust, and the emotional and physical reality of their abuse were viewed as uncooperative (Dawson and Dinovitzer 2001). Ultimately, women

who accepted men's "protection" through the system would receive services and those who were "uncooperative" would be abandoned...(323-324).

The third phase identified by Lutze and Symons is "collaborative empowerment." This includes an emphasis on interagency collaboration and cooperation and the holistic and victim-centered approach to intimate partner violence discussed in the Duluth Model. This most recent phase attempts to maintain a more communicative and victim-centered approach, rather than either dismissing victims or maintaining a single focus on arrest and punishment.

#### *Officer's Attitudes Toward IPV Victims*

Given that domestic violence-related calls make up the largest category of calls to law enforcement (Friday et al. 2006), the attitudes and perceptions of law enforcement officers themselves are another important factor in how they respond to intimate partner violence. Fleming and Franklin (2020) explored how officers' endorsement of common myths surrounding intimate partner violence influenced their handling of incidents. Their study highlights the influence of gender role expectations and traditional notions of masculinity, which can shape officers' understanding of IPV incidents and their willingness to take action. As officers are not immune to cultural gender stereotypes (Garza and Franklin 2020; O'Neil 2019), and they operate in a male-dominated field, they may be particularly influenced by myths about victims of domestic violence and frustrated by behaviors that may seem incomprehensible (Lockwood and Prohaska 2015). Studies find these misunderstandings lead to victim-blaming and a lack of willingness to help (Goodson 2020). After all, why does the victim not simply leave once law enforcement is involved?

Studies find that perceptions of victim credibility and well victim-blaming can influence officers to express skepticism about victim statements and the actual severity of their situation. Gover et al. (2011) suggests that police officers may have doubts about the truthfulness of victims of IPV, potentially leading to a lack of thorough investigation or victim support. Johnson (2004) additionally found that officers may perceive victims as unreliable or manipulative, often blaming them for the violence they experience. These victim-blaming attitudes can result from social stereotypes and misconceptions about IPV, leading to lack of empathy and support (Davis and Taylor 1997)

In addition to officers' perceptions of victims' veracity, they may see them as passive or irrational (Clark 2021), and attribute this to individual, rather than social, factors (Serrano et al. 2023). Consequently, some officers may believe that incidents lack seriousness when victims recant or withdraw complaints (DeJong et al. 2008). Because of these perceptions, victims may not receive interventions that would help them to safety as officers lack awareness of the dynamics of abuse and coercive control (Gover et al. 2011).

Negative perceptions of IPV victims can lead to inadequate investigations, failure to hold offenders accountable, and lack of protection for IPV victims (Johnson 2004). When victims feel dismissed or disbelieved, they can be deterred from reporting or seeking help in the future (Davis and Taylor 1997) or cooperating with investigations (Dawson and Dinovitzer 2001).

### *Training in IPV Response*

Given the impact that law enforcement response has on victim safety, and that it is vital for officers to understand the dynamics of IPV, it is essential to look at how

officers are trained to approach domestic violence calls. Gondolf and Fisher (1988) found that officers trained in the Duluth Model were more likely to make arrests, issue protection orders, and coordinate with other agencies. However, agencies remain inconsistent in their responses and ability to assess and manage risk (Saxton et al. 2022).

Barriers to adequate training include high turnover, shortened training periods, and lack of funding. Since officers receive little training on the cycles and patterns of violence, they fail to recognize meaningful factors and red flags when called to domestic violence incidents. This means that the necessary documentation that would indicate patterns of abuse and lead to successful prosecution never makes it into police reports. Unless individual officers take it upon themselves to pursue additional training, they remain unfamiliar and ineffective in handling incidents of IPV. Further, they misread trauma responses and traumatic memory as evidence of instability and deceptiveness in the victim (Epstein and Goodman 2019:420).

#### *Cedar Hills Police Department*

In this section, I discuss the Cedar Hills Police Department's approach to intimate partner violence. While the department requires more training in domestic violence than in many other localities, they still struggle with a shortage of officers and high turnover rates. Getting officers on the street has resulted in shortened training sessions that leave new officers with less training than the department previously offered, which was made worse under pandemic conditions. At the time I spoke with Sexual and Domestic Violence Unit detectives, half of their department had tested positive for Covid-19 and the entire unit was under quarantine but still trying to investigate and respond to cases as well as possible. In addition to the struggles the department faces, I will also discuss the

state's mandatory arrest policies as well as trauma-informed policing, and how this looks in the Cedar Hills police department.

Law enforcement officers in Cedar Hills have historically been provided exceptional training in responding to domestic violence. In addition to the day of training offered in the police academy that serves agencies throughout the state, the department had provided additional, 2-3 days of training that consisted of simulations of domestic violence calls that required officers in training to respond to and write a report on a situation and subsequently spend another day simulating testimony in court, having to base their case in court on the documentation they had written after responding to an incident of IPV. Marcus, an African American man in his late 20s with two young children, spent his first 2 years in law enforcement working for the Cedar Hills Police Department. He recalled his training experience when he first entered law enforcement, describing the type of exposure he received, and felt overall satisfied with the training he received through the department.

[W]hen we go to the police academy, there's- I want to say maybe like a six-hour block, four-hour block or something like that, dedicated to handling domestic violence and that's something that every police officer in the whole state of Georgia will do because it's part of our mandated training. Um, however, Cedar Hills goes a step beyond. We do additional training where we pick up additional skills. And we dedicate a full two days to domestic violence training. We do simulations where...They kind of reenact some of the scenarios that they are investigating and stuff like that...I think Cedar Hills does go, you know, a step beyond most agencies that I've dealt with.

Marcus describes how the training he received with the city police department goes far beyond the training in the state-wide police academy. He entered the Cedar Hills department before they had cut training back to only one day, so the simulations he describes have been cut from the current training program.

In addition to his training with Cedar Hills police department, Marcus subsequently transferred to another, more metropolitan area, where he was surprised by the lack of awareness among his fellow officers.

It is a large, uh, a vast difference on how they handle domestic violence calls.

Yeah, I think it's more so just because of the lack of training. A lot of things that I ask for- I was like, "Hey, do you have like domestic violence pamphlets." I was like, "What are your services here?" And they're like, "What are talking about? Like, the only thing we talk about is the TPO process." I'm like, "yeah, I'm sure you guys have more." And I was able to find some domestic violence pamphlets. And they're like, "Yeah, we don't even hand those out. You can take as many of those as you want." And was like, "Yeah, I will."

Marcus was surprised at the lack of knowledge his new colleagues had about services for domestic violence victims and the failure of his new department to inform victims of resources. This is consistent with the beliefs of other officers in Cedar Hills who express confidence in the department's overall response to domestic violence and provides an example of very small actions that can easily lead to breakdowns in the system and a lack of safety provided to victims.

It has become increasingly difficult in recent years to maintain the level of awareness and the quality of training new officers receive. This problem is driven by a

high turnover among officers in the department, meaning there is a need to get new officers out of training and on the street in the least amount of time. Training modules have been severely cut, despite the officers in the sexual and domestic violence unit being vocal about their concerns that these cuts in training will lead to complications down the line. Lieutenant Williams, a 20-year veteran of the department who oversees the sexual and domestic violence unit and coordinates the department's overall relationships with community partners at the Family Justice Center, explains some of the issues the lack of training has led to:

I've got a very young department. When I say young, well, some of them look like babies to me...I've been here 20 years. We're at a point where we are counting tenure in terms of months, not years anymore, months. And so what does that do? Well, when you take away experience...you get things like reports that may not be as well-written as they should be, ...follow-ups that never happened, you know...and there's a lot of different reasons for that. And our training, our training has been cut, the amount of time that an officer spends in training has been cut, to facilitate getting them out onto the road quicker. And we have seen a significant...decline in quality of reports. [I]t's kind of a catch-22 in policing, because we don't have enough hands on deck, and they're looking around on how to save money and how to how to get people out. And I don't think when, when the powers that be made these decisions, they probably didn't really understand it-what they were doing. So we've been doing a lot of in-person training with all the patrol units and all the officers to try to overcome some of these challenges. Whereas we, at one time, had a whole 40-hour week of domestic violence training

that we did in-house for officers, in addition to the 40-hour block they got through the police academy because Cedar Hills is a very different community. So...we taught in addition to theirs... [but] that was reduced to just I think about eight hours, a day.

Here, Lt. Williams highlights his worry that the poor quality of reports and lack of experienced officers meant that the knowledge gained through tenure and experience is not being developed, and reports are not reflecting the attention to detail that is required for those reports to be effective in deterring future incidents of IPV or assisting attorneys in prosecuting those cases. It is important to note here that the area of training cut as a result of staffing shortages and high turnover is the domestic violence training, indicating a lack of prioritization of gender-based violence that can be seen throughout public institutions overall (Acker 2006, 2011; Epstein and Goodman 2019; MacKinnon 1989).

In addition to the challenges of having a young department, the practice of shifting officers and detectives around to different specialty areas exacerbates the problem of developing expertise through prolonged experience in any area. This results in seasoned detectives working in the area of domestic violence being removed from positions concentrating on this particular crime, to be replaced by others who have little or no experience and, often, less passion for the issue overall. This is presumably to make officers' experience more well-rounded but creates a lack of knowledge and disjointed institutional memory (Lindblom 1959, Corbett et al. 2003), which argues the past influences the future as knowledge is built incrementally. If institutions have consistent memory, it allows for smooth transfers of knowledge over time. Sgt. Matthews, who has been with the department for 12 years and came to policing after an earlier career in

retail, is now in his 40s. He expresses his disappointment in knowing he will soon be moved to another division, despite having his heart really centered on responding to domestic violence. He also expresses frustration with a lack of control over what happens when offenders move into other areas of the justice system, especially when violent offenders are easily released from jail:

But when you're really in this and your heart's in it, you're looking at that victim knowing that, I'm sorry, ma'am. He's gonna be beating you again next week. And I've done everything I can legally do with exception and tying them up and taking them to the county and dumping them off over there... So I'm glad these victims are here because I know they're going to get the best service they can here. But then what? You know? Then what? So, it is very stressful. It is so stressful. And that's why your people who've been doing this so long leave. The newbie will leave because of a different set of stressors. And then older folks, I'm an older folk, I think, and we leave because the continued other stressors that go on and it's very frustrating. But like my heart's in it. I'm going to be here until they move me and again, they will in a couple months, they've already told me. The chief's already told me I'll be moved again. So finally got stability and... out the door again, move somewhere else.

The knowledge that after years of learning about intimate partner violence response, an area where Sgt. Matthews has a particular connection as a survivor himself, is disturbing and upsetting to him. This lack of consistency and loss of expertise in this unique form of violence creates barriers to effective policing. While it may be helpful to have officers trained in several arenas, it is a failure for victims of domestic violence. Both Sgt.

Matthews and Lt. Williams agreed it was “because our chief doesn’t know anything about policing.” This was a reference to the chief being relatively inexperienced as a chief and, only two years into his tenure, ready to leave. In fact, the chief retired the following year. The police chief is a position appointed by the county manager, and this chief had arrived from outside the department. It should also be noted that the previous chief had been asked to resign due to high turnover and low morale (Red and Black, 2019), indicating general dissatisfaction in the department was not new and had apparently been simmering for much longer than the current chief’s time there. As a result, in addition to creating a less effective response to IPV, there seems to be a lack of confidence in the department overall. The officers I spoke to were all proud of their personal work in the Sexual and Domestic Violence Unit but discouraged by the lack of personnel dedicated to the unit. For them, this meant they couldn’t put the time and attention to detail into cases that they would have preferred. The reduction of detectives in the unit without a reduction in cases put extreme stress into work that detectives felt was already demanding before those cuts. This is one way that actors within institutions are constrained by forces outside of their control. Police budgets and personnel decisions are made by politicians and administrators, who may not take into consideration how these decisions directly impact victims of IPV and the ability of law enforcement to adequately respond to this issue. When the system is stressed, the detectives working in sexual and domestic violence are reduced, contributing to a breakdown in the system because this means their work, already affected by the cuts in new officer training, will be even less comprehensive due to limited personnel in their department, which later affects prosecution of these cases.

### *Mandatory Arrest Policies*

In the state of Georgia, officers are mandated to make an arrest when they can determine there is probable cause that a crime has occurred and can identify a predominant aggressor. Of the law enforcement officers I interviewed in this study, all of them espoused a pro-arrest approach. Officers didn't frame this in terms of aggression or punishment but believed the practice was absolutely necessary for victim safety. Sergeant Matthews, who oversees the sexual and domestic violence unit for the police department, argued for arrests as the best way to ensure victims remained safe and hopefully would have adequate time to leave the residence before the abuser returned:

I say we're a pro-action, pro-do-something department, where we're gonna do something. We're not just gonna take the report. So I tell the officers, "Now you don't leave until you know her safety is 100% guaranteed. You can't guarantee, you're not leaving."

Sgt. Matthews tries to instill in officers that they absolutely must be sure the victim is safe before leaving the scene of a domestic violence call, adding that less pressing calls can wait if it means ensuring victim safety. He is adamant that the responding officer has to do more than just take a report and leave and, if at all possible, they make an arrest.

Pro-arrest is something I used a lot in presentations over the years...if you don't have that arrest, you don't break the cycle. If you don't break the cycle, they're never going to get out. We got to have something that takes him out of that, or the offender, takes them out of the- the equation. So, they have that open door to get out that window. Something now they're introduced to services now where it could be DFCS could talk to him about anger issues, he might build a level

himself back out and become a decent human. But she's probably going to talk to the therapist finally, going to see that there is a whole 'nother world of safety out there. Until that arrest happens, they don't get any of that...because if we leave there without the arrest, and leave her the pamphlet for Safe Harbor, he's just gonna tear it up. He's gonna- he's gonna use that as a trophy, saying you call this and see what happens. So it's a really interesting dynamic. I'm glad other people have done the research to prove it, that the arrest is the ultimate saving grace for the victim to create a victim into a survivor.

Sgt. Matthews reiterates his stand on pro-arrest, elaborating that he believes it is the only way to break a cycle of abuse. He expresses concern with not only just removing the abuser from the home but also hopes this will connect both parties to additional services that might help abusers learn new strategies for dealing with anger and get victims into therapy, so they understand they are in a dangerous situation and they have options for getting out.

Sergeant Matthews goes on to emphasize that his concern with the possibility of moving away from arrest policies will mean an increase in fatalities. Additionally, he expressed a serious concern that even with mandatory arrests, recent reforms on bonds have resulted in jails failing to hold offenders long enough for the victim to escape.

There's also some other challenges, too, with some of the justice reform right now, where we're finding domestic violence offenders getting out on OR [own recognizance] bonds or walking away almost immediately as they get in. The victims are having time- they- they don't have the time to get out. At one time, they had to stay there for 24 hours. They had to secure a bond. Now they're not.

And so, I've- I've got numbers now that show that we've, um, actually for aggravated stalking and family violence orders violations have doubled in the last year. So that tells me that...they don't care about the bond conditions. They- they just got away. They just walk in and walk right back out. So, you know, we're seeing a lot of offenses and, and my theory of how that's going to happen, we're gonna end up with a lot more fatalities, because these bond conditions and that accountability is what's keeping people from killing each other and going back and re-offending.

Sgt. Matthews is frustrated with the lack of safety the justice system can provide for victims of IPV and notes their data show increased fatalities as a result of releasing offenders quickly and without bond. While these changes are practical and welcome in many circumstances, in the specific case of IPV offenders, Sgt Matthews believes there should be more nuanced policies rather than a one-size-fits-all approach.

Even when a TPO assault- and a TPO is a heavier piece of paper than a bond condition. They're still going back...and maybe it's some pandemic stuff, maybe they have no other place to go...[W]hat it tells me and what I'm seeing out there with more- we're having more incidents at the same location between the same people that we've already arrested a dozen times...I think domestic violence needs to have its own little world when it comes to bonding and accountability and everything else. There needs to be a whole 'nother set of rules with it.

Sgt. Matthews points out that it makes sense from the perspective of victim safety at the moment of encounter that removing the abuser provides the best possibility that the victim can leave safely. As much as jail/prison reform rightfully takes aim at long,

unnecessary incarcerations, the quick release of domestic violence offenders puts victims in particular jeopardy.

### *Trauma-Informed Approaches*

Another complicating factor when considering the dynamics of intimate partner violence is that victims are often not prepared to separate from their abuser, for a variety of reasons, and if they are not ready to leave, they place themselves in greater danger if they call or speak to the police. Because of these unique challenges victims of IPV face, it is vital that law enforcement officers understand trauma-informed approaches to handling IPV incidents, recognizing the agency and resilience of survivors and giving them some measure of control over decision-making (Gavey 2005). Victim-centered approaches can contribute to increased victim safety by prioritizing the provision of resources, referrals, and comprehensive support services (Peterson and Panfil 2016). Trauma-informed responses to domestic violence aim to address the unique needs and experiences of survivors while minimizing potential retraumatization during interactions with law enforcement. These responses prioritize a sensitive, empathetic, and supportive approach to ensure the safety and well-being of survivors.

An important aspect of trauma-informed police responses is the recognition that many survivors of domestic violence have experienced trauma and may exhibit certain behaviors or reactions as a result (Office for Victims of Crime, U.S. Department of Justice, n.d.). It is important that officers understand the impact of trauma and develop skills to respond appropriately through empathy, active listening, and validating survivors' experiences.

Moreover, trauma-informed police responses involve a shift from a punitive approach to a victim-centered approach (Safe & Together Institute, n.d.), in line with the collaborative and cooperative approaches most recently favored among responders to IPV (Lutze and Symons 2003). This emphasizes survivor safety and empowerment while holding perpetrators accountable and involves connecting survivors with appropriate resources such as shelters, counseling services, or legal assistance. This approach demands that a cooperative model be in place, such as coordinated community responses that bring multiple community-based organizations specializing in supporting survivors of domestic violence together to work as a team.

Several jurisdictions have implemented trauma-informed police responses to domestic violence with positive outcomes. For example, the San Diego Police Department in California has adopted a trauma-informed approach and has witnessed improvements in the reporting of domestic violence incidents, increased survivor satisfaction with police interactions, and enhanced trust between survivors and law enforcement (San Diego Police Department, 2016).

Cedar Hills has longstanding relationships among the various agencies that respond to IPV. The police unit dedicated to handling domestic violence cases is housed in the same building as offices for the domestic violence shelter, a sexual violence and child abuse nonprofit agency, and the sexual assault nurse examiner (SANE). Working alongside partners in the domestic violence task force (a community-wide group of responders from many additional organizations together) allows law enforcement to build close relationships and have access to service providers who are extensively trained and experienced in dealing with the unique issues faced by survivors of IPV and the trauma

responses that can often be misunderstood by officers who are not trauma-informed. Additionally, those relationships lead to better coordination of services because multiple agencies are easily accessible. For example, Sgt. Matthews discusses how he takes many reports because someone from Safe Harbor may be doing an interview or intake down the hall, and if their client wants to discuss the case or file a report with the police, an out-of-uniform officer, certainly less intimidating than a uniformed patrol officer who might initially respond to an incident, is readily available.

They can come to the Family Justice Center where we got couches, and it's a house, we're dressed down. We usually wear, like, button-ups or polo shirts. There's no suspects allowed at the Family Justice Center, so it's a place they can come and be safe. Now that that's one way we get our cases, and usually from that we'll follow up. We'll find a history. We're able to then develop a bigger case, better case, and find a solution that is more fitting for that family. So, arrest might not be the solution for- maybe this is a new offender, maybe this is someone who has anger issues. Maybe we can try to help them on both sides of it. Now, we also get cases another way. And that's when [sexual assault agency] or Safe Harbor has walk-ins. And it's completely confidential until the point where they say a crime has occurred and I want to report it to the police. And they say, "Do you want to? Because we got a detective down the road here, or down the hallway. And I've taken many reports from the Family Justice Center from the interactions that they go through that way. And we're very successful with those because we're not that uniformed officer showing up at the door with, you know, in the middle of the night... it's a little bit different setting a little bit softer setting.

Unfortunately, the few survivors I spoke with did not have experience with the Family Justice Center or with the whole collection of services, so I don't have their perspective on this. However, police detectives felt the Center allowed them to interact with survivors in a less scary, less traumatizing way, rather than while they are in the process of handling an immediate incident of violence. In contrast, officers speaking to a victim on the scene of an incident are often interacting while an abuser is still present, listening to the interaction, and able to use intimidation to control their victim at that moment.

Other providers who use the Family Justice Center space, like those from Safe Harbor or the sexual assault service, note that they had good relationships with the officers at the center and appreciated that they were able to collaborate with them. Nadia, who started out working for Safe Harbor and now works for the nonprofit responding to sexual assault, and Valerie, a clinician who works providing services for the Cedar Hills Latino community, both note that the only issue they had experienced concerning the Family Justice Center was its location right next to the police department building, which some survivors found intimidating.

In addition to softer approaches to speaking with victims of IPV, the Cedar Hills Police Department has long been involved in training for mental health crises and crisis intervention, key components of trauma-informed approaches. Sgt. Matthews is proud that the department was employing best practices before it became more common for agencies to do so, focusing on areas like mental health and a collaborative Family Justice Center, one of the first in the nation:

We had a mental health unit before it was even called a mental health unit. We were training our officers and mental health crisis response before anybody else

was even talking about it. We have a Family Justice Center before anybody was even talking about it...We train everybody else how to do these things. Other departments come to us to learn how to do crisis intervention, to do mental health response.

Because Cedar Hills was an early adopter of coordinated approaches and expanded mental health and domestic violence services, they do serve as a resource for other communities trying to develop similar approaches. Having a mental health unit, in particular, is an advantage when dealing with many types of calls but can be particularly useful for victims of domestic violence who have experienced trauma, and well as for spreading knowledge about trauma-informed responses.

Individual officers I interviewed each related their understanding of the complexity of IPV and understanding that victims may seem contradictory or evasive due to trauma responses and complex socio-economic factors. Debbie, who was recently a patrol officer and now is a new detective in the Domestic Violence Unit indicates an understanding of the delicate nature of IPV calls, an ability to empathize with victims, and her perspectives on the difficulties faced by victims:

[M]ost often you make an arrest. And, um, you know, of course, that doesn't always- that's not always what the victim wants to happen. And that's reasonable, of course. You know, those are very complex situations where people are dependent on one another for shelter and food. And also care about one another despite how they may act. So, it can be delicate...Because of the complexity of domestic violence, there's so many layers and so many reasons why people stay and believe that it'll get better. And it's just, it's not, not all cut and dry, you know.

Debbie acknowledges that she is required to make an arrest if a predominant aggressor can be determined with probable cause, but that may not be what the victim desires, and indeed may not be what is best for the victim, highlighting the tensions that individuals within institutions often experience when, as agents of the state, they are constrained by state policies and the prioritization of possible community harm over the best responses for the victim. Additionally, she expresses frustration that many officers misunderstand trauma responses as inconsistent and perhaps untruthfulness on the part of victims, placing it within the context of a current case:

I have a case that I'm working right now where the victim was pistol-whipped. After she was strangled, she managed to grab- managed to grab a gun that the suspect was wearing, and like, try to get away from him. And he took the gun away from her and hit her in the head with it. And she was- she- she fled to a friend's house. And the friend, I think it took a little bit of time, about 45 minutes or so for her to convince her to call 911. There was a little bit of a delay there and, um, then officers came and interviewed her and she had a visible injury...she told the officers what happened and her statement didn't change ...of course, with trauma, I know that sometimes statements do change. And that's something that people don't always understand as far as officers, you know. Like, "Well, things are, she seems like she's changing her story." Well, that's how trauma works! ...That's exactly how you remember things when you've been through a traumatic experience...The officer who responded got a few other officers together because there were weapons involved, and they went over to the house...And by the time they got over to the house, she's pulling out of the driveway...[and] there's this

level of frustration where you're like, "Why would you do that, you know? You know, this person hurt you and X, Y, and Z, you know?" And it's hard, I think, for some, some officers to understand that. If you think about the whole, the whole picture, the- all of the factors where you know, you have, you have a two-income household where, you know, you can't afford to pay the bills by yourself. And, yeah, he- he does hurt you, but "things are gonna be so much worse when I get evicted because I can't pay my bills and he finds out I talked to the police and comes and hurts me more."

In this example, Debbie explains a case where a woman suffered extreme violence but then was reluctant to cooperate with police, and how officers do get frustrated when a victim's behavior doesn't seem to make sense. While many officers can be confused by this behavior, Debbie also describes how trauma-informed approaches can help make sense of this behavior for officers. This is another area where the lack of training required for new officers leads to misunderstanding situations they come across. If new officers were trained in trauma responses and memory, they would be more inclined to label erratic-appearing behaviors as logical consequences of PTSD—numbing, which might look too unemotional; hyperarousal, which might look too emotional; and intrusions, which cause the victim to reexperience traumatic situations (Epstein and Goodman 2019). They might see inconsistencies in victims' stories without understanding how trauma often becomes embedded in memory as a series of disconnected flashes missing a coherent timeline. The lack of training for all officers leads to victims falling through the cracks and difficulties in other parts of the ecosystem.

Debbie, like Marcus, had sought out additional training in handling domestic violence calls. Prior to her time at Cedar Hills, she had supervised drug and mental health courts in another county and with the state probation department, which provided her with experience in handling cases but also helped her develop her trauma-informed approach. On top of the training in the police academy and the standard Cedar Hills training, officers can opt for additional classes. Debbie attended an additional 40-hour training and two extra 2-3-day workshops. She further practices trauma-informed policing by understanding that sometimes victims would prefer to talk to her as opposed to a male officer, or that they may be more comfortable speaking with someone outside of the department altogether, and can give out information for Safe Harbor, so the victim can speak to someone confidentially without involving the legal system.

When I get cases, people are already past that immediate threat. And they're—they're sometimes back to a honeymoon stage, or just feeling like they can manage it on their own. And so sometimes people don't want to talk to me, or they, they're uncooperative. And when I tried to investigate further, and you know that, I just see that as part of the complexity of the situation. There are a multitude of reasons why it would be better for them to not talk to me. I get- I get that, you know, I appreciate the- I appreciate, though, that there is often the potential for violence. And that's...what I'm trying to prevent trying to steer them away from. But that's where I have to try to use my resources to maybe- maybe it's Safe Harbor reaches out to them instead of me, you know, where it's more, you know, yeah, there's a legal issue here but it's clear to me that they really don't want things to be handled through an arrest. And even though by law, I may

be mandated to do that, in the event that I can develop this case enough. It may be...the best course of action just to have someone with a service provider reach out and say, you know...you don't have to report anything to me about x, y, z, but can I help you?

Like Debbie, all my law enforcement participants acknowledged the internal struggle involved in balancing the natural frustration with hesitant or uncooperative victims with the knowledge that victims are caught in an incredibly complex set of circumstances. Along with the necessity of being particularly observant in instances where a victim might be evasive, officers can also try to relate to their experiences on a personal level. Marcus describes one incident:

I've seen people would, you know, put on scarves and stuff to kind of hide gashes, um, you know, on top of their head and stuff like black eyes and stuff. And you know, you wouldn't have noticed it...if I didn't see kind of like the scarf being extremely damp, you know, towards her forehead and, um, just noticing those type of things...you have to really pay attention. They had a previous domestic violence incident in which he was arrested, maybe about five days before that, and he had bond conditions that he was not supposed to return to the residence... Well, he came back to the house and, you know, did all of those things...So, you know, we were able to take him to jail. But just, that lady was so uncooperative in the beginning...she felt like she had handled the situation, but just being able to continually kind of talk to her and just kind of explain my past. I kind of use my personal experiences to kind of show, um, in these situations, um, and it kind of made her feel more at ease. And she kind of finally opened up and I

think we ended up, uh, getting a better report for, you know, the investigators to kind of piggyback off of and I think he got sentenced to some years in prison, so, for that incident.

Here, Marcus acknowledges the frustration of being misled and distrusted but uses observational skills developed through training, and his own personal experience as the son of a domestic violence survivor, to build trust with the victim and eventually resolve the situation in a way he believes will lead her to safety.

In sum, responding to IPV is a complicated undertaking for all departments, exacerbated by an inadequate understanding of the dynamics of this type of violence, common misconceptions about how victims and perpetrators do or *should* behave, and limitations in both training officers and holding offenders. The reduction of training hours in Cedar Hills has resulted in less detailed reports and officers unable to identify non-physical forms of violence. As Lt. Williams and Sgt. Matthews have noticed, the poor quality of reports and missed red flags mean it is more difficult to hold offenders accountable and increases the possibility of escalating violence. While some officers take the initiative to learn more about trauma-informed approaches and what that means for best practices when assessing domestic violence situations, it is not required, leaving many officers lacking awareness of what they are seeing, neglecting to include important details in their reports, and discounting victims when their behaviors doesn't fit cultural expectations.

While approaches to IPV and beliefs about the role of law enforcement have changed considerably over the last century, many common myths persist about the victims involved. The officers I spoke to continue to be frustrated by victims who are

unwilling to cooperate, even while they understood the practical reasons for these behaviors. Much of the difficulty of handling victims of IPV could be alleviated through increased training in the dynamics of domestic abuse and understanding the role of trauma, which the officers themselves continue to request from the department. What the department does, of course, is out of their control. Mandatory arrest policies can provide opportunities for victims to leave abusive situations, but research has shown mixed results and mixed feelings among victims. Officers in Cedar Hills both credit mandatory arrest policies as a safety valve and acknowledge that victims have legitimate reasons for not wanting their abuser, who often brings in necessary income and shares children in the home, to be arrested. Close collaboration with other agencies and training in trauma-informed approaches have enabled officers to inform victims of multiple routes to support services, even if they refuse assistance from law enforcement.

If there is a criminal case to be made, victims may then encounter the legal system and be asked to cooperate with the office of the District Attorney, which takes on felony cases, or the Solicitors Office, which handles misdemeanor cases. Not only is the victim in the case crucial to the cases made, but this is when officers' initial reports can really make a difference. On the other hand, this is also where the lack of training continues to disrupt the system. In the next chapter, I will explore the dynamics of the court system and how they work with other agencies to provide the best possible outcomes for victims of IPV.

## CHAPTER 4: LAY THE LAW DOWN: NAVIGATING THE CRIMINAL LEGAL SYSTEM

The legal response to intimate partner violence cases plays a crucial role in addressing the needs of victims, ensuring their safety, and holding perpetrators accountable. In this chapter, I outline different aspects of legal intervention and highlight how Cedar Hills attorneys and prosecutors handle cases. One of the first books on IPV, Del Martin's *Battered Wives* (1976), details the many ways the legal system and other agencies have failed victims of IPV by misunderstanding both victims and violence, as well as approaching cases with little concern. While advances have been made in the prosecution of family violence cases, much of her criticisms from 50 years ago remain relevant today. I will discuss the process and impact of temporary protective orders (TPO) and how Cedar Hills handles cases that make it to the judicial system. I will also describe the collaborative efforts of the service providers working with victims in the court system. Throughout this chapter, I show how individual interests are overridden by state interests, leading to actors within the justice system to feel tension between serving victims and weighing the needs of the community safety. These are tensions that are inherent within the justice systems of the United States, speaking to a broader public issue that is not limited to Cedar Hills. Because the state brings charges and is ultimately concerned with harm to the state, victims can be done a disservice and actors within the system are sometimes ambivalent when the need to serve the community disempowers

the victim. This is another area that exposes the harm done to the whole system when one area breaks down. The problems with training discussed in the previous chapter are seen to exacerbate the difficulties of prosecuting cases. This is further complicated by cultural assumptions about victims and violence held by judges and juries.

### *Domestic Violence Laws*

Domestic violence laws vary across jurisdictions, but their common goal is to prevent and respond to violence within intimate relationships. These laws typically define domestic violence, outline criminal behaviors, and establish mechanisms for reporting, investigation, and prosecution. In the United States, the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) and its subsequent reauthorizations provide a comprehensive legal framework for addressing domestic violence, offering protections to victims and allocating resources for prevention and intervention efforts (Legal Information Institute, n.d.).

In their Model for Prosecutorial Protocol for Family Violence Incidents (Georgia Commission on Family Violence, n.d.), the Georgia Commission on Family Violence lists the state's definition of family violence:

Official Code of Georgia Annotated, §19-13-1 defines family violence as the occurrence of one or more of the following acts between past or present spouses, persons who are the parents of the same child, parents and children, stepparents and stepchildren, foster parents and foster children, or other persons living or formerly living in the same household:

1. Any felony; or
2. Commission of offenses of battery, simple battery, simple assault, assault, stalking, criminal damage to property, unlawful restraint, or criminal trespass. The

term "family violence" shall not be deemed to include reasonable discipline administered by a parent to a child in the form of corporal punishment, restraint, or detention. (Ga. L. 1981, p. 880, § 1; Ga. L. 1988, p. 1251, § 2; Ga. L. 1992, p. 1266, § 3; Ga. L. 1993, p. 1534, § 3.)

This narrow definition outlines the limits on incidents that can be reported as family violence. It is especially important to note that the relationships that count as family violence are restricted to people who either share children or currently or previously have shared households. The definition neglects to include violence between dating partners who have never lived together. While many of the offenses listed can be prosecuted on their own, they don't count as family violence unless the relationship meets those requirements. Interestingly, and perhaps unwittingly, the statute does consider incidents that would not typically be considered "family" incidents, such as between roommates or former roommates, as family violence. Furthermore, there are few elements of coercive control listed as offenses, outside of stalking, trespass, or damage to property. Elements of coercive control can only be used as supplemental evidence in addition to crimes that often leave physical evidence.

#### *Temporary Protective Orders*

One of the first interventions once an officer has taken a report and has determined a crime occurred is that the victim will apply for a temporary protective order. (TPO). Obtaining and enforcing protective orders can be challenging for IPV victims due to lack of access to legal assistance, little understanding of the process, and lack of physical evidence (Russell 2012). A TPO is meant to prevent any further contact between the victim and perpetrator and includes more serious consequences than a bond

condition. If there is only a bond condition in place after an arrest, a violation is only another misdemeanor charge, whereas violating a TPO may constitute a felony.

Nonetheless, TPOs are repeatedly violated (Logan et al. 2009). If TPO violations are severely prosecuted, offenders may realize the justice system will not tolerate these transgressions. However, if TPOs are violated and the response is limited, or nonexistent, the violations will likely continue. The effectiveness of protective orders is contingent upon consistent enforcement and monitoring, which varies greatly (Goodman and Epstein 2008).

In order to file a TPO, either the responding officer can initiate the process, or a victim can fill out an application with the Clerk of Court. The victim provides a statement of the offense and an argument for why they need a TPO, along with any police report(s) they may have. The victim then might either receive a short-term order or wait in the courthouse until a judge is available to sign or reject the order, depending on jurisdiction. If the judge finds there is insufficient cause for granting a TPO, they may deny the order. If an initial order is granted, it remains in place until a hearing can be held with both parties present in the courtroom. The perpetrator must be served with papers outlining that a TPO has been applied for and a hearing is scheduled but it is common that they avoid being served. If they cannot be found to be served, the process can grind to a halt and they can escape accountability. If there is a hearing, and both parties are notified and in court, a judge can choose to dismiss or continue the order. Extended orders tend to be for one-year periods that can be renewed. In severe cases, the victim may be given a lifetime order of protection.

In Cedar Hills, victims must file with the clerk's office and wait at the courthouse for a judge to be assigned the case on a rotating basis, then must appear before the judge, who reviews the paperwork and decides whether to grant the order. This can be prohibitive for some victims who lack transportation, the ability to possibly miss work for an unknown amount of time or means to pay the \$25 filing fee. In recent years, the court has imposed additional restrictions and only accepts TPO applications at 11 a.m. and 3 p.m. and applicants must wait until the judge is available to meet with them privately. If the judge approves, they receive a 30-day order. At the hearing, if it is granted, they receive an extended order for one year. Cedar Hills does have additional resources to help with TPOs, through the Family Violence Clinic at the local law school and legal advocates who work for the domestic violence shelter, both of which help victims through the process of application and will appear in court with them. This process is another area where responses to IPV falter, making it difficult for the most vulnerable survivors to obtain TPOs and access the safety they can afford, making it easier for the abuser to continue harassing them. Without a TPO, victims are more likely to continue to be dismissed and silenced. For offenders, the penalty for repeated incidents is less steep, leaving their victims at greater risk. If the system fails at this access point, other agencies in the ecosystem may not know to respond at all.

According to the survivors I spoke with, getting a TPO is hit-or-miss depending on the judge who gets assigned to TPOs on any particular day. Marie had two positive experiences with responding officers and judges granting her TPOs, but her third encounter was especially upsetting from the initial response through the court hearing. She has now lost faith in the ability or willingness of the legal system to protect her.

After the incident mentioned in Marie's story, when her ex-boyfriend showed up at her house and threatened her and her current partner with a gun, the responding officer determined a TPO was not appropriate because he had not *used* the gun and declined to start the TPO process. Consequently, she went to file in person and found the judge also unconcerned and "nonchalant" about the whole situation.

It was like they weren't really understanding about the situation, and I'm like, "the first time that I got a TPO, like y'all were all gung-ho about a TPO and all I did was hit my head but now when he's actually coming to me with a firearm, yeah, like, y'all really don't care about that?" I mean, that doesn't really make any sense! ...So, I went to the courthouse the next day...they did a TPO. They ended up asking me, they were like, "So how did he come at you?" And...they were like, well, technically he didn't use the firearm.

Marie's ex-boyfriend did not show up for the first scheduled hearing, so the judge continued the case. At the second hearing, he also did not show up on time and the judge approved the order. However, after the approval, her ex-boyfriend did arrive in the courtroom, explain his side to the judge, and the judge reversed course and denied the order, siding with her abuser and doubting the seriousness of her story.

If judges are unaware of the dynamics of IPV and lethality factors, such as the use of weapons—and I would argue he did use the weapon—it can endanger women and give offenders permission to continue their intimidating tactics.

He didn't show up. So they were like, "Well, we served him and he didn't show up so, I mean, I guess we will go ahead and give you the TPO. Well, he walks in as soon as the judge said that I was like, "No, no, no! ...I was like, "You said the

words, it's already in motion.” And he walked in. He was like, “I'm sorry, I was parking, like there was no way I could get up here in time.” It was a horrible case, now reopened. And I was like, “Right when I get it!” So, after he said the case is reopened, he ended up listening to my testimony, listened to his testimony and basically believed him and was like, “Oh, well she’s just basically crying wolf.” And let the TPO go. And said that we weren’t gonna have a TPO. So I was like, “Okay, it's gonna take to the point where this guy kills me in order for y'all to figure out y'all should have just done your job.”

In this case, Marie felt like her concern for her safety was brushed off by the system and that it had failed her. Even though she had previous positive interactions with both the police and the court system, this one made her feel like they didn’t care about a situation that she felt was considerably more dangerous than her other cases.

Marie’s first TPO was also facilitated by the Family Justice Clinic, which she described as a very positive and much smoother process, but this time she lacked legal representation, which has been found to have a significant impact on the outcome of TPO hearings. Lacking funds for private attorneys who can write more coherent narratives and argue for the victim in court, many victims fall through the cracks of the legal system (Durfee 2009). The failure of the system to protect Marie during her most recent TPO process, with both the officer and judge discounting her, is a major breakdown of the system. If these actors don’t take victims seriously, the situation snowballs to the point where it will be more difficult to get help and be taken seriously when the next incident happens. Further, victims become discouraged and are less likely to seek help at all in

future encounters. While there are strongly supportive actors in place, they don't have the power to make a difference without similar efforts in other areas of the system.

### *Prosecution and Court Proceedings*

While temporary protective orders are a civil response to incidents of intimate partner violence, evidence of a crime may lead to prosecution in a legal setting.

Misdemeanor cases are referred to the Solicitor's Office, while felony cases are handled by the office of the District Attorney. The process of moving from initial police report and arrest to the court system tends to be fluid and may bounce from one office to the other as information is gathered. For this study, I was able to interview four participants who worked with the solicitor's office: an assistant solicitor who had previously handled all sexual and domestic violence cases, the prosecutor currently handling those cases in a position funded through the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA), a former victims' advocate, and a legal advocate who works through the domestic violence shelter. At the time of this study, the District Attorney's Office was in a time of severe turmoil and working with a drastically reduced, overworked staff. As such, I was unable to interview anyone within that office. Nonetheless, with eighty percent of domestic violence cases (Bureau of Justice Statistics) being prosecuted as misdemeanors, the combined experience of my participants working within the legal system is illuminating.

Gathering and presenting evidence can be particularly challenging in cases of IPV since these cases often lack evidence if no visible injury is present or the victim is reluctant to testify, which is often the case (Aiken and Murphy 2000). The complexity of proving non-physical elements of coercive control—emotional, psychological, financial, and other forms of control—can make it impossible to successfully argue cases of IPV

involving only these elements. It is imperative for people handling these cases to be educated on the dynamics of IPV as well as trauma-informed practices.

The first evidence prosecutors have in cases of IPV are the original police reports from the incident(s) under examination. This is one way the ability of responding officers to properly document every detail of an incident comes to bear on the court's capacity to hold offenders accountable. If evidence is lacking in the report—photos, witness statements, and other details—the officer will be an ineffective witness and prosecutors will have a much lower chance of successfully making a case for the victim. This evidence is often the only way prosecutors can convince a jury to convict perpetrators of IPV, because in most cases the victims themselves are uncooperative. Victims must continue to “negotiate their lives” around the abuser and determine the best way to keep themselves safe, as they fear retaliation (Snyder 2019: 38). This makes them less likely to speak out against their abuser, either not showing up in court, or testifying that the abuse wasn't serious or didn't happen at all (Foley 2022). The pattern of abuse the victim has experienced can lead them to avoid cooperation with the criminal legal system, as the system is unable to provide a complete solution to their problem (Snyder 2019).

#### *Cedar Hills Legal Response*

In this section, I will highlight the issues faced by actors who assist clients while navigating the legal process in intimate partner violence cases. Using the experience of prosecutors in the Solicitor's office along with interviews with victim advocates with the court as well as the shelter, I discuss the frustrations voiced as a result of the shift to young, inexperienced police officers who fail to provide sufficient evidence for prosecution, and sometimes provide false information to victims. The cuts to the Sexual

and Domestic Violence Unit also mean that cases are not as thoroughly investigated as they should be, pointing again to threats to ecological stability stemming from cuts to training and personnel in the police department. Attorneys and advocates echoed the statements of police officers in Chapter 3, feeling uneasy about the release of offenders and the consequences to victims who are then put in further danger. In addition, my participants noted feeling the tension between serving individual victims and their commitment to community safety. Finally, I discuss how this side of the response to IPV continues to collaborate with other agencies in spite of the difficulties they point out.

#### *Issues with Law Enforcement*

In Cedar Hills, Tom Fields, an assistant solicitor who had previously been the special prosecutor for sexual and domestic violence cases, summarizes some of his experiences with the cutbacks in training among new police officers as especially problematic:

I think the follow-up [courtroom simulation] day was extremely helpful because we got to sit and talk to them for a day and see how much they actually paid attention, because then they would show up and then you could see... I mean, we'd have people who would be trying to explain the TPO to a victim and they were calling it a PTO...you can tell how much they were really paying attention 'cause some of them would come in and they would- they would have been taking notes, and they were really trying hard. And the other ones who were sort of, you know, going...flying by the seat of their pants, didn't really know what was going to happen next, and were saying a lot of things to victims that were sort of half true.

Tom is feeling the effects of the loss of in-depth training for new officers and sees misinformation that officers give to victims as a real problem that then plays out poorly in terms of the victim's ability to access information and resources. Victims look to the police to calm a situation down and point them toward resources with accurate information. They may never get that information or take the appropriate next steps if they receive misinformation instead. Tom explained:

Like, you can't just say all of these things, you have to tell them- you know, if you don't know the answer, don't make something up." There's a lot of making things up, so... They're all brand new so it was just a matter of working through with them. "Okay, you can't just talk about the forms, you have to actually give them the forms. The victim's rights, you should've brought this with you. Don't- don't just, you know, look at the injuries, take pictures." And there are lots of technical things to go through, but it was really helpful to see whether or not people were paying attention and it was a good way to follow-up with them. And then we would do it again, 'cause we'd make them come here and then they'd have to testify about what they have done.

Tom points out his experience of victims being provided misinformation by responding officers who, instead of admitting they are unsure of laws and processes, make a guess at the answers, and fail to collect evidence and provide paperwork to victims. He elaborates that the loss of training days and the inability to see whether officers were paying attention and show them what a court appearance would be like based on their initial report.

Tom also laments the lack of expertise among detectives handling domestic violence cases, echoing Lt. Williams' earlier statement in Chapter Three. While he understands the argument for well-rounded officers, he sees it affecting the outcome of cases. The reduction of detectives on the Sexual and Domestic Violence unit also contributes to a lack of thorough investigations and follow-up. He elaborates:

[We] really try to impress upon among other things, is to be thorough. To know what you're walking into... the unfortunate thing we have right now, in- in Cedar Hills, is we have a real shortage of officers...I know it's kind of, uh, um, somewhat controversial topic. You know, beefing up the police department. But actually, it seems like the research suggested when you have fewer officers, the officers are over-taxed or overworked, they tend to make more mistakes. ...So, when you're short officers like that, things start getting cut. And so, you- what you see is we have a shortage of DV detectives. We used to have a pretty robust, uh, CID department with a lot of officers...there were at least three or four DV detectives on duty all the time. Now I think they have two or three detectives in the entire department, so, itself, it's just too many- too many. How can two or three people look through all the cases that they get and effectively investigate those with any sort of follow-up? So, it's just triage.

Not only does he express frustration at the lack of training, but he also states the shortage of detectives affects the quality of case investigations. He appreciates the detectives on staff and trusts them to do a good job and work well with him and his office. There are simply too few detectives in the unit to handle the caseload:

It was really great to have the expertise that those officers had. Um, and I can think of several of 'em right now that I'd feel comfortable with any one of them investigating any of these cases, but you don't, you just don't have them. And it's not to say the people who are there now aren't good at what they do, there's just not enough of 'em...and so it's one of those things, it's hard for people to understand who aren't as familiar with it, that actually when you have fewer officers, they make more mistakes, there's, there's things that get missed, they don't follow up on things, and that's not actually helpful for anyone.

Tom's experience with staffing shortages with the Sexual and Domestic Violence Unit has led to a lack of expertise and more mistakes. He feels comfortable working with detectives but sees that the reductions in personnel have naturally resulted in more difficulties down the line as cases move from police reports to prosecution.

Bill, who works with Safe Harbor to help victims through the TPO process and works in the shelter, has also noticed a shift in reports and responses over the pandemic. He notes, "We've definitely received, um, an increase in, in people reaching out. And some of it is the non-legal needs...The people who are struggling more with housing and that sort of thing."

He has also noticed a decrease in the quality of police responses, agreeing with Tom that accurate information isn't always provided, and sometimes completely wrong information is given. He specifically notes a lack of understanding of the seriousness of stalking behaviors, leading to an inability to bring those cases to prosecution:

Especially with those kind of stalking behaviors specifically. Um, I, I think ironically because of the distance, we've seen those stalking behaviors increase,

and that's always been kind of one of the hardest things to talk about with law enforcement- without some of those more concrete contacts. Um, and I, I definitely think we've seen it increase overall that did not make it to prosecution for one reason or another.

Bill shares similar perceptions as the other participants working with the justice system, that the quality of police reports has decreased, resulting in cases never making their way to prosecution. He also notes specifically stalking incidents, which may not leave hard evidence, are especially difficult to prosecute with officers who don't understand those behaviors.

Susan, who worked for Safe Harbor prior to coming to the Solicitor's office, was a legal advocate for the solicitor's office for many years. She points out that the pandemic aggravated many issues that were already difficult for the office to handle. She also points out that many barriers exist for victims and reporting:

I was hearing from a lot of people where in the before-times we would've been getting cases, but the police were not responding...There was one where he was violating consistently and the police were not necessarily responding positively...I said [to the victim], "Meet me at the Family Justice Center. Let's get a report on this now." She wanted to go up there by herself, and so I met her there. He's calling while we're in the parking lot, threatening to kill himself...We went inside and we went ahead and reported and stuff, but she had the ability to get to Cedar Hills. She had a friend who could watch her disabled child. She had all of these, you know? ...Her boss didn't fire her 'cause she was coming in late. Like, she had all of these things that lined up that most people don't have that line up for

them. And she had me willing and able say, "Yeah, I'm 10 minutes from there. I'll meet you there if it's scary. Let's go." ...[T]he stars certainly didn't align for the vast majority of the people who I spoke to who were concerned about violations throughout the pandemic. It was really frustrating to, you know... Our answer is, "Call the police and report it. It's, it's an arrestable offense." It's really frustrating to keep going to the police and no arrest happened.

Susan shows an understanding of how difficult it can be for many survivors to access services. This client had the ability to meet her when her abuser was harassing and threatening her. She could drive to the Family Justice Center, find childcare, and miss work. Susan admits this is often not the case for survivors of IPV. These less fortunate women, for whom the stars do not align, miss out on safety measures that cost them too much in the short term. While pandemic conditions added an extra layer of difficulty, these issues exist at all times. The problems victims face in terms of transportation, employment, and access to support create barriers for victims even under the typical circumstances before and after the pandemic.

### *Victim Cooperation*

Aside from needing accurate and detailed initial reports from law enforcement, prosecutors rely heavily on victim cooperation and testimony and witnesses to convince a jury that a crime was committed. Unfortunately, victims often recant or refuse to cooperate with the legal team, making it particularly difficult to prosecute offenders. The additional time between an initial arrest and a hearing has been extended by many months during the pandemic, meaning many victims had moved on before the trial happens. Tom explains:

I'm sure you know that most victims of domestic violence recant. They may not change the story but they, they at least don't want to prosecute the case. I would say it's probably three out of every four. And some of those individuals recant immediately. I mean as soon as someone, the handcuffs go on they start arguing with the officer, and saying, "I didn't want you to arrest him." And, and so, and, and, and from that moment on, we are the opposition to them. We are the enemy. We are the ones who are making their lives difficult. So, the longer something like this drags on, the more likely you are to have someone say, well, I haven't done, you know, so maybe it was 75 percent but if you wait a year after the incident, unless there was a subsequent incident, which certainly happens, you, you're just more, that numbers just going to keep going up....Even the people who might want to see them held accountable, aren't particularly interested in coming back to court anymore.

While victim cooperation is an issue at all times, the extended time it took to have hearings during the pandemic made this problem more acute. As time goes on, survivors are even less likely to be interested in prosecution.

Peyton, a small, soft-spoken brunette who has been working for four and a half years as the prosecutor of sexual and domestic violence cases, a position funded through VAWA grants, explains that there are good reasons why victims aren't interested in returning to court long after the incident has happened, noting that it might even be dangerous for the case to reunite the participants, which could lead to more volatility.

The situation we'll describe from the safety perspective of, they're completely separated. Do we want to bring them back into this room to have this trial, and

what does that look like for safety concerns for the victim and, things have kind of, been fine. She's moved. She's moved on. No interaction.

Peyton reiterates that putting survivors and offenders in the same room and rehashing what may be an incident from months prior can dredge up old grievances. Survivors who have moved on and seen an end to the violence don't necessarily want to revisit the past.

Others in the legal field agreed that placing the victim and offender back into the same space and bringing up the distant past could easily reignite old tensions that they had both moved past. Workers in this arena often feel the struggle between doing what might be best for the victim and what they believe is necessary to keep communities safe, by holding offenders accountable and, hopefully, sparing potential future victims the same trauma. Tom elaborates:

Obviously, we focus pretty heavily on the safety of the victim, but we also have to focus on holding the offender accountable. So just because the victim doesn't want to prosecute, whether it's in the best interest to the victim or not, we still have other issues that we have to consider...I've been doing this long enough to see the same defendant multiple victims- over the years. Um, I- we've had defendants who've had multiple victims at the same time. So, I mean, with- you know, different cases, but it's all active at the same time, and so we can- we can't just tell a person who comes in and says they don't want to prosecute anymore.

That... of course we'll do that, because... maybe we will, but maybe we have to be also concerned about the next victim.

Even with the knowledge that a particular victim might be better off without prosecution, and the associated problem of removing choice and self-direction from survivors of IPV,

attorneys are bound by duties to the community as well and sometimes act in ways they feel conflicted about in terms of the victims' individual positions. Not only does the office prosecute cases against the wishes of victims, but sometimes they prosecute cases they know they will lose to hold the offender accountable on some level. Tom recalls working with another attorney early on who said this had to be done to send a message.

She would say, "This is a case that I know you're gonna lose. You're gonna put this in front of the jury and they're gonna find this person not guilty, but you have to go and do that because it shows the offender that we're gonna, every time this happens, this is what we're gonna do. We're not gonna back down on this." And, um, as an attorney, uh- you- uh- initial reaction is to say, "Absolutely not!" Even if I know that the defendant is guilty and is responsible for this, I'm not gonna try a case that I know I'm gonna lose, why would I do that? Um, but there have definitely been circumstances where I agreed. We had to do that.

While it may seem like a waste of time and resources to go to the trouble of taking a losing case to court, the office finds it to be a valuable way of communicating that they take these cases seriously and are dedicated to bringing abusers to justice if at all possible.

### *Tension in the Criminal Justice System*

In addition to balancing victim and community safety concerns, attorneys and advocates with the solicitor's office struggle with recent reforms that result in the quick release of offenders from jail. They very much echo what I heard from police officers who felt frustrated to have offenders back on the streets within hours of a family violence arrest. While the prosecutors are not in favor of holding all offenders in custody for

extended periods, they feel it is especially dangerous to have family violence offenders released without enough time to ensure victim safety. Tom states his strong belief that family violence offenders need to be in custody and not out on bond.

I don't like when someone is on probation for a family violence offense, commits a new act, family violence, particularly against the same victim and gets to just walk into court to answer the probation violation. Uh, to me that's a dangerous situation. They need to be taken into custody. Now that doesn't mean they need to be held forever, but they need to be taken into custody.

Much like the police officers and detectives I spoke with, Tom also believes family violence is a much more nuanced issue and needs to be approached as the complex issue it is:

I firmly believe that those people should be taken into custody...and stay in custody until they see the state court judge they're on probation with. So, we have had some arguments and disagreements with various people about that. Uh, every time it comes up, I'm very adamant that we need to continue to do that. Uh, I'm also in, I'm in favor of criminal justice reform, but I do think that offenders of family violence have to be held accountable.

Tom is passionate about his stance that family violence offenders must have consequences for their crimes. Given that domestic violence offenders often return to the victim and inflict more damage, he firmly believes that they need to be kept in custody until they see a judge, rather than release within hours of their arrest. This provides another example of where disruptions occur. If decisions to release offenders happen out of sync with the efforts of police officers and attorneys, their jobs become more difficult.

Even when prosecution is successful and victims are able to leave their abuser, prosecutors fear they have not ended the cycle and sometimes express discouragement when they've done all they could and see continued violence. Tom remembers one particular case that he had thought went as well as could be expected but took a dramatic turn once the offender was released.

One of the cases we had, I mean, she had recanted. It was just, she just had a little cut on her lip. It was just a busted lip. He had slapped her in the face. It was a battery. Um, uh, and we really pressed hard, pressed forward with the case. He came in, pled guilty to it, even agreed to some confinement. In spite of the fact that she was recanting and said she'd made it up. And, uh, I think a week later, three days later, he nearly beat her to death in front of like 20 people at [her workplace]. She had been so badly beaten, I didn't know who she was, and she came and wanted to talk to us and asked, and, you know, obviously we sat down and talked to her and asked if we remembered her. And I didn't know who she was. I mean, I had just seen her the week before. And she told us who she was and then apologized to us for not being more cooperative with the case...[W]hat she had done was she had finally, about the week after he pled guilty, she had finally told him she had had enough that he needed to pack up his stuff and she wanted him out of the house when she got back from work that day. And so, obviously rather than do that, he went and met her as she was getting off of work to beat her up in front of her work.

This case is illustrative of the danger victims face and the unpredictability of domestic violence. In this case, the victim had ended the relationship, the abuser had lost control

over her and nearly killed her. This victim, like so many others, suffered the worst attack upon separating from her abuser. The cases can be discouraging and upsetting for prosecutors and legal advocates, particularly when they see their efforts have no impact on the offender. Tom again states the difficulty of handling these cases.

And yeah, but you look when... I mean, we, she and I spent days replaying what we had done, what we could have done differently. And, and then you start to wonder, you're like, "Well, do we make any difference at all?" I mean, we prosecuted him the way we thought was most appropriate, and he got convicted and he was under a sentence and all of this stuff, and, uh, didn't seem to have really any impact on him at all.

Prosecutors and advocates struggle with the reality that they can do their jobs, get penalties for abusers, and still fail to fully protect victims. These cases also show how actors within these institutions struggle with the inability to predict outcomes and the hazards of victims recanting. Like police officers, people within the judicial system try to balance their personal feelings, their duty to victims, and the needs of the community while feeling the constraints of systemic issues beyond their control, such as offenders staying too short a time in jail, and jury trials really coming down to whom the jury likes best.

### *Collaborating with Others*

Despite the challenges faced by legal advocates and attorneys, my participants were grateful for the collaborative relationships they had with other agencies. Typically, the Solicitor's office receives cases from the police department, reviews evidence, and works with detectives who investigate the case. The victim may work with Safe Harbor

or other partners outside of the legal system but can get help from the Family Law Clinic and Safe Harbor victim advocates regardless of what they choose. For the offender, the solicitor's office works closely with detectives to build a case. Often offenders enter into a plea bargain at their first hearing but if the case continues, prosecutors and detectives continue to discuss cases while legal advocates help victims navigate the process of filing TPOs or collaborating with prosecution. An important part of collaboration includes monthly meetings of the Domestic Violence Task Force where members can discuss issues they are running into or get advice on dealing with victims. Because of confidentiality, Safe Harbor and other nonprofits can't discuss specific cases, but can still offer advice and guidance in general. They may offer insight into a situation without explicitly sharing victim information. Prosecutors rely heavily on their partners to accurately frame cases in ways a jury will respond well to.

Another way agencies collaborate is through training. Safe Harbor provides training that many offices fail to receive when dealing with domestic violence cases and they work well with the police detectives and advocates working for Safe Harbor and those the court employs. Tom and Bill both expressed that the training they received through Safe Harbor assisted them with understanding the nuances of domestic violence and helps them serve victims better. Additionally, Peyton, and Tom when he was the sexual and domestic violence prosecutor, attend national conferences as part of the grant that funds the position. The ability to access and work alongside people from different agencies and different perspectives provides opportunities for sharing information and participating in discussions with others who may have more expertise in addressing IPV.

Because of the close working relationships people from various agencies have, through meeting regularly with the community-wide Domestic Violence Task Force, they feel well-equipped to provide victims with whatever services they might need. Safe Harbor holds a TPO clinic each week in the Solicitor's office to help victims with the process of filing for TPOs, and their legal advocates can discuss issues with them even if they are not working with prosecutors. The director of Safe Harbor has also co-written the bench book on domestic violence for judges in the state. Bill explains the benefit of having Safe Harbor collaborating with the court system:

The main part of where safe Harbor fits into this whole process is as they're facing these kinds of extra stressors, we can provide support, and that support can be regardless of which way they're leaning towards the prosecution. If they want...us to like help coordinate the prosecution, we can certainly do that, but we're also there if, if they don't want to support the prosecution.

My participants also thought the confidentiality they had with clients was an advantage, in that victims could talk to an advocate, either with the court or anyone at Safe Harbor, without having that information shared with the rest of the agencies. At the same time, because the agencies work together, they can help each other with issues that one sector may not have expertise on. Susan explains how she can refer victims away from the prosecutor's office if they are intimidated by it and have someone from the shelter speak to them instead:

I'm glad you don't need a shelter, but you might need Bill, you might need the kinda help that they can offer. And, just making sure that they understand that it's available to them and that they can go or not go, and if they choose to talk to

someone from Project Safe, I never have to know about it. And it makes it a lot easier because I'll ask questions, like, "Well what was going on before this...?" And people don't wanna tell me 'cause I work for the prosecutor, and it has been very difficult, and there were lots of incidents beforehand, but they know that we're gonna take that into account as we're prosecuting. But if they tell Bill all of that, it's none of my business.

Susan's understanding of the difficult choices that survivors make and their need to speak only to those they are comfortable with sounds much like Debbie, the detective who encourages victims to speak to Safe Harbor if they don't want to deal with law enforcement. Even with a solid coordinated response, Susan admits repeated failures of the system can leave victims feeling defeated. She says, "It's not that one person did the one thing that was so wrong. It's that a person who's in a violent relationship encounters so many roadblocks all of the time and misinformation and, and this and that and the other, and you get worn down. Uh, the system is as difficult for [the victim] sometimes as the abuse." This admission is telling in that actors within agencies can do their very best to help victims through the system, but acknowledge the system is flawed and can even be harmful.

In the end, service providers within the judicial system face the limits of the law itself and lack of resources in other departments as well. While they might prefer to keep family violence offenders behind bars, they are at the mercy of factors far beyond their control, such as the jail/prison system and the willingness of judges to revoke bonds. During the pandemic, this problem was exacerbated by the inability to hold trials and the limits of reasonable detention in misdemeanor offenses. Additionally, their ability to do

their job well rests on whether law enforcement did a thorough job reporting and investigating cases before they ever get to the courts. Cedar Hills is exceptional in the level of collaborative efforts, but providers still feel doubtful about their collective ability to ensure victim and community safety. Being that 93-98 percent of domestic violence cases end in a plea bargain (Bureau of Justice Statistics), the few that make it into a courtroom tend to be more severe cases of physical violence and many cases never make it to prosecution at all due to lack of evidence and police reports that either do not identify IPV or lack the detail that could lead to accountability within the justice system.

While Cedar Hills embodies a scenario with good collaboration and agencies that work together to keep all responders informed, they continue to encounter issues within the very institutions they participate in. Though prosecution may be one of the last steps in a domestic violence case, the ability of the courts to be successful rests on the quality of earlier stages. My participants expressed frustration with the way law enforcement was operating in recent years as well as having little influence over keeping offenders in custody, very similar to the concerns of detectives in the Sexual and Domestic Violence Unit. As such, it would be beneficial to improve communication between the Domestic Violence Task Force and other actors in the larger institutions so that they could be more informed and better understand the difficulties of these particular cases. Broader implications include the inescapable contradiction between serving the individual and serving the state, in which inevitably the state takes precedence. Within the ecological framework, the outsized influence of state laws and policies and the ruptures resulting from insufficient training in law enforcement and understaffing of the Sexual and

Domestic Violence Unit again raise concerns, along with difficulties presented when there are weak connections with judges and jail personnel.

## CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

In this final chapter, I discuss major themes that emerged in my study and the implications for how we can best improve responses to intimate partner violence. While this is one case study in one location, there is much that can be learned from the way this system works, and the ways that it doesn't. The setting of Cedar Hills may be exceptional regarding resources and cooperation, but the experiences of my participants still lend insight into common issues and ways that even a good collaborative model still fails to fully address IPV. There are no "typical" cases of intimate partner violence, but common elements are seen repeatedly in various settings. On top of this, there are limited ways that institutions can respond to IPV, which can lead to failures to support victims and hold abusers accountable. Large scale processes and state involvement in institutions constrain actors within the systems and can create barriers to safety. It has been increasingly apparent that breakdown in one part of the ecosystem creates difficulties for every other component.

Several themes arose in the course of this study that have implications for practice and understanding intimate partner violence in a wider context. First, the collaborative model of coordinated community responses (CCRs) is a useful tool for communities responding to violence, yet it misses certain elements or powers that lead to victims who fall through the cracks of the system. Secondly, cultural understandings of victimhood and violence are restrictive and lead victims to lose control over their own narratives

while other actors may not take them seriously. Cultural myths about proper victimhood and misunderstandings of domestic violence itself are persistent and damaging, along with a lack of understanding about the things that constitute violence that are currently built upon a patriarchal model of violence and how violence should be addressed. Third, failures of systems in the early phases of response lead to failures down the line. Since domestic violence is understood as a crime, and addressed by the criminal legal system, everyone who responds to it must be fully informed and aware of the behaviors, tactics, and cycles involved in intimate partner violence. I argue that it is essential to broaden the scope of agencies that are trained in the dynamics of domestic violence, training must be complete, and cultural definitions that limit who can be a victim and what constitutes violence are far too narrow and exclude important truths about the range of actions that fall under coercive control and how they affect victims of IPV. Finally, I discuss the implications for future research and ways that these themes can contribute to improvements in the way our institutions, and the people within them, respond to IPV.

#### *Improving the Collaborative Model*

Cedar Hills has a longstanding Domestic Violence Task Force that brings together the many agencies that work with victims of intimate partner violence and an active shelter providing information and training to partner agencies as well as the community in general. This makes the city better than many other areas at confronting IPV, yet service providers still struggle to reach all relevant sectors. My research provides evidence of how the exclusion of some actors from the overall network, particularly the police chief, judges, and criminal justice reformers, leads to difficulty in holding abusers accountable and keeping victims safe. Citizens are rightly concerned with reforming

many aspects of policing and criticize the inequalities reinforced through the bond system but are not necessarily in conversation with the teams that rely on working relationships with law enforcement to address serious public issues like domestic violence. The barriers presented by excluding these actors lead to obstacles for all involved, from the nonprofit sector to law enforcement officers handling domestic violence cases and prosecutors and advocates working to provide justice for victims. This does not mean these people need to be hyper-involved with the task force but does highlight the need for improved communication. Perhaps meeting with a representative of the task force periodically would help those at the top make decisions that facilitate better responses from those at the bottom. This remains, admittedly, a case of leading a horse to water; convincing anyone of the seriousness of first-responder training and the need for more nuanced approaches to domestic violence is subject to them being open to absorbing and acting on the information. Additionally, even receptive individuals never act fully independently, but are always at the mercy of state and federal restrictions. Without an understanding of the vital importance of patrol officers' responses to domestic violence calls and the meticulous collection of evidence in their reports, decision-makers will continue to risk victim and community safety by churning out officers onto the street as quickly as possible. This might look expedient on the front end but creates havoc down the line.

Because actors outside of the agencies included in the Domestic Violence Task Force make decisions that profoundly affect the safety of victims, difficulties arise as a result of entities remaining out of sync, a "disconnected series of arenas," rather than a unified whole (Pringle and Watson 1998:63). Some agencies are fully informed and

cooperating, but crucial others are not. Within the police department itself, those making decisions at the top are out of step with the detectives trying to respond to domestic violence in the best way possible. If actors in any agency that encounters cases of IPV lack knowledge of the dynamics of domestic abuse and why it should be approached differently, they will continue to dismiss concerns and fail to appreciate the nuances of this type of abuse. This is one way that patriarchal institutions continue to dismiss women's concerns when cultural assumptions are activated within police officers, judges, and juries (MacKinnon 1989). The interactional dynamics that result from misunderstanding recreate institutional patterns and reinforce the presence of cultural myths, discouraging victims and permitting offenders to continue their abuse.

*Who is a Victim? What is Violence? Understanding Trauma Responses and Coercive Control*

My research supports the need for new cultural narratives. Victims of intimate partner violence are plagued by misunderstandings of their worthiness and minimization of the dangers they face. These assumptions become embedded within the victims themselves, causing them to self-blame and excuse behavior from their abusers. Looking back to the victim narratives that began this dissertation, there are many examples of victims being misunderstood, blamed, and sometimes identified as perpetrators. These serve as just a few examples of how narratives about victims are mobilized and weaponized to keep them silent, deny their experiences, and turn inward for explanations for the abuse. Lack of validation from friends, family, police officers, and those in the legal system keeps victims isolated and ensures there will be little if any accountability for the abuser. Further, victims who don't live up to cultural assumptions about

victimization or lack the cultural capital to perform the role are at a disadvantage (Villalon 2010; Gengler 2012; Sweet 2019).

Without a trauma-informed approach from providers, victims who recant or otherwise do not cooperate with investigations can seem unreliable and untrustworthy. Those who fight back may be punished themselves because myths about victimization are so gendered. Abusers are thought to be aggressive, conveying their anger through physical assaults, while victims should be helpless and submissive. This is not at all what abuse looks like much of the time. Responders need to understand how the dynamics of coercive control as outlined by Stark (2009) work to manipulate and intimidate victims into inaction based on fear. My participants understood the covert ways that abusers control their victims—intimidation, threats, financial abuse, emotional and psychological abuse, and stalking, among others—but noted that patrol officers responding to domestic violence calls were often inexperienced and uninformed about these dynamics. These uninformed officers relied on deeply embedded cultural understandings of gender (Ridgeway 1997, 2011), recreating them in their interactions with victims and perpetrators. Additional difficulties arose from reduced staff in the Sexual and Domestic Violence Unit itself, as well as shifting experienced detectives to other areas, breaking up the continuity of knowledge and expertise about this form of violence. This practice serves to reduce any amount of institutional memory the unit might have retained (Lindblom, 1959; Corbett et al., 2003).

### *The Trouble with Training*

My findings reveal a serious issue in the way law enforcement approaches intimate partner violence, which limits the efficacy of other actors to do their jobs

successfully. Again and again in my study, training came up as a vitally important issue. My participants in nonprofit work, law enforcement, and legal services all received extensive training in patterns and responses to domestic violence, including lethality factors that may go unnoticed. Though Safe Harbor and the detectives in the Sexual and Domestic Violence Unit did their best to educate everyone in their orbit about the red flags and patterns of intimate partner violence, staffing shortages in the police department and high turnover had resulted in shorter and shorter training sessions. The lack of knowledge and trauma-informed responses among new officers has severely affected the ability to investigate and prosecute cases. This is a crucial insight and deserves greater attention. Detectives, attorneys, and advocates all pointed to a decrease in the quality of reports in recent years and wanted to see the return of more advanced training in domestic violence. Non-profit workers also noted that clients were experiencing difficulty with the first responding officer. Unfortunately, for victims, this can mean they hear false information from someone who they see as an authority and/or they are ignored or revictimized by the system itself. While actors involved with the Domestic Violence Task Force had extensive training, and patrol officers had opportunities to gain more training in domestic violence, many officers never receive intensive training and don't stay long enough to gain expertise. This points to the necessity of returning to more extensive training of new officers, a need for a full staff on the Sexual and Domestic Violence Unit, and the inclusion of more sectors in training. If people who make decisions about the fate of IPV cases do not understand IPV, the response is going to be severely jeopardized. When the police chief and administration cut back on officers and reduce training, they may be addressing resource issues, but they create barriers to safety

down the line. Likewise, releasing offenders to reduce crowding in the jails and in an effort to correct the inequality that the bond system creates, may leave victims at greater risk. These practices, along with others like mandatory arrest, need to be implemented with more discretion. However, without comprehensive training, individual officers and judges do not have the tools to exercise appropriate discretion, leading to a catastrophic cycle. It appears that, for cases involving law enforcement, the first link in the chain is broken.

Again, pernicious cultural myths and stereotypes about intimate partner violence refuse to die. Myths are widely held cultural beliefs that persist despite lacking empirical evidence to support them. Fitzgerald (2017) argues attitudes and beliefs about women have built up over centuries and become embedded in our cultural institutions in ways that “den[y] and rationalize systemic abuse of women” (484). Additionally, she argues that actors within institutions serve to maintain the system. Peters (2008) specifically finds denial and justification as major themes in myths about domestic violence. We don’t have to look far to see how these myths operate to empower men and cast women as unreliable, deceptive narrators. From the confirmation hearing of Clarence Thomas to that of Brett Kavanaugh, to Marie and Carla in this study, there are innumerable examples of women telling their stories only to be disbelieved and dismissed. Even when women’s stories are believed, they are minimized to the point of triviality, “Yeah, that may have happened, but it’s really no big deal if it did.” The dismissal of women’s voices within the very institutions that are charged with protecting them leads to large-scale institutional betrayal while also serving as a warning to its victims and other observers: You will not be taken seriously (Epstein and Goodman 2019).

In Cedar Hills, more experienced detectives have expertise, knowledge, and some power to respond to violence, but no control over the assumptions new officers come in with and are constrained on how much training they can offer new officers. Greater demands that result from reduced staffing mean they don't get to most effectively capitalize on their knowledge and skills. Not only does this serve to disrupt the stability of the ecological system, it serves as another example of how the state is disjointed—Cedar Hills has a dedicated unit in law enforcement to handle sexual and domestic violence, they exist within a system that serves as a great reservoir of available knowledge and expertise, there are attorneys designated just for these cases, yet when cuts are made, the staffing of this unit is reduced by three-quarters, and the training given to new officers pertaining to domestic violence is cut by two-thirds. This clearly shows a failure to prioritize victims of sexual and domestic violence and provides an example of the larger scale tendency of the state to discount women (Epstein and Goodman 2019), patriarchal models to retain power (MacKinnon 1989), and the persistence of gender inequality within institutions (Acker 2006, 2010).

#### *Future Directions*

Future research should expand on the study of coordinated responses in multiple settings and include many more victim narratives in order to capture their experience as they navigate systems. Comparative studies could also help to highlight contrasts between different ways of operating and lead to the addition of new insights into addressing intimate partner violence. We need many more studies to build on prior research that examined different components of coordinated community responses, to

bring these elements together and help us better understand the efforts of communities as an ecological model, examining how each agency works separately and together.

### *Implications for Practice*

It is of the utmost importance that police departments do better with training and responding to calls. Training should be extensive and extend to anyone responding to domestic violence. It is impractical to expect a single officer to be fully informed on all aspects of domestic violence situations, particularly those new on the job. It may help to have more resources available to them when responding to calls, with social workers and mental health professionals helping to assess scenes and interact with victims as well as offenders. Many more resources need to be dedicated to teams responding to domestic violence.

Scholars and activists should work to dismantle the narratives that drive interactions, attitudes, and institutional responses to IPV. Myths about victims and misunderstanding the ways that non-physical acts do harm continually reinforce systems that prevent victims of IPV from reaching safety, support, and validation. One way of doing this is by increasing awareness of trauma responses and the dynamics of coercive control. We should stop asking, “Why doesn’t she leave?” and rather ask, “Why is he doing that?” Initiatives in England and Wales have worked to criminalize coercive control, making it a criminal offense to repeatedly cause serious distress to an intimate partner that disrupts daily activities. While there are concerns about due process in the United States, Sheley (2021) suggests that the elements of coercive control can be categorized as fraud, linking these behaviors to already established criminal offenses. She suggests defining the crime as:

A person is guilty of the crime of coercive control when they:

- a) Continuously engage in a coercive pattern of behavior over a substantial period of time with the intent to deprive another person of their autonomy to make decisions and engage in conduct to which they otherwise have the right; and
- b) The two parties are spouses, intimate partners, or family members; and
- c) The pattern of behavior causes or creates a risk of nontrivial economic, physical, mental, or emotional harm to the coerced party (1387).

Sheley argues that these behaviors are not unlike the crime of blackmail, using fraudulent statements and threats to gain control over another party.

In addition to broadening our understanding of nonphysical acts of violence, we must develop new ways of responding to intimate partner violence that don't put victims at greater risk. While mandatory arrest policies seem like a necessity, not every victim is willing or able to end the relationship or leave after an incident of IPV. More research needs to be done on alternatives to arrest. Police departments and community organizations can also do more to follow up with victims and offenders to ensure continued access to resources. If an abuser knows there will be regular check-ins, he may be less likely to engage in violence. All of these suggestions clearly require substantial resources to accomplish; however, addressing IPV and its dangers on the front end with better training and a diversity of responders increases the likelihood that violent offenders will be held accountable, and victims will be provided the support they need regardless of whether they stay or go. Resources might be better used if they were shifted from funding aggressive, militarized policing to developing more helpful, preventive approaches that fit the needs of communities. Recent calls to "defund the police" are not totally

misplaced, but I'd argue "demilitarize the police" may be more apt. Funds would be better spent training officers to understand the dynamics of domestic violence (and better responses to crime in general) that would help address the root causes and best ways to prevent and respond to these crimes. As our system stands, victims encounter situations requiring a trained professional to show up and, hopefully, provide safety. We also do need people to investigate crimes and offenders should have consequences for their behavior, so eliminating those resources would leave a gap that, as of yet, can't be filled. The problems my participants faced were very much exacerbated by the reduction of personnel and training.

The findings from this study support the need for more attention to how organizations and institutions respond to intimate partner violence. By examining the ways that agencies work together in response and listening to the voices of those people working to address IPV, we can improve outcomes for victims/survivors. This study shows that collaboration among organizations is productive in many ways, from education and training to improving police and judicial responses. It also highlights the ways that institutions continue to fail victims of IPV. Examining those spaces where even "good" coordinated community responses neglect to support all victims or impede the progress of one another pinpoints the areas that still need to be addressed. Including more community agencies in discussions of IPV, improving training, and dedicating more resources to addressing this issue would go a long way to fill some of the gaps. Reimagining how we define victimhood to capture all the ways victims might present, understanding that their stories don't have to look like classic cases of domestic violence but rather, are messy and sometimes inconsistent, can help improve outreach and support

efforts and reduce the isolation and discouragement many victims experience. Likewise, educating providers and communities about the ways coercive control damages victims, instead of focusing solely on physical injury, would help victims be taken seriously when they suffer from psychological, emotional, financial, verbal, reproductive, and other forms of abuse.

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## APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW GUIDE

*For survivors of intimate partner violence*

1. Can you start off by telling me about yourself?
2. Can you tell me about your experience with partner violence? (Probe for feelings and examples)
  - a) What relationship did you have with the abuser?
  - b) How long did it last?
  - c) What type of abuse did you experience?
  - d) How long ago did this happen?
3. What was the process of separating from your abuser like?
  - a. When did you decide to leave the relationship? Was there an incident or moment that caused you to leave? What steps did you take to prepare to leave?
  - b. Did you get help from anyone in coming up with a plan?
4. How did your partner respond to you leaving?
  - a. Did this escalate the abuse?
  - b. Did they make threats?
5. Were you able to leave successfully the first time you tried? Why/why not?
  - a. How many attempts did you make to leave the relationship?
6. Where did you go when you left?
  - a. Did you get assistance from anyone or any organization to leave?
  - b. Did you have resources available to establish your own household?
7. What did you feel was the most difficult part of the decision to leave?

8. What was the most difficult practical aspect of trying to leave?
9. Where would you say you got the most help and support during your separation process?
10. What other sources of support were available to you?
11. Which organizations did you have to deal with in the process of separating?  
(Ask for specifics and examples for each. Any particularly helpful or unhelpful?)
  - a. Did you call the police?
  - b. Did you obtain a restraining order?
  - c. Did you file for divorce or custody of children?
  - d. Were child services involved?
  - e. Did you apply for social services?
  - f. Did you have a lawyer?
  - g. Did you have an advocate?
  - h. Did you attend counseling or a support group? How did you obtain those services?
  - i. Were there other organizations involved that I did not mention?
12. What was the most difficult part of dealing with organizations in the process of separation?
13. Did you feel like the people who you spoke to were understanding of your situation? Cared about your (and your children's) well-being and the outcome of your case? How did you get these impressions or what did they do to make you feel understood or not?
14. What would have made the process easier for you?

15. How well did you feel the different organizations worked together?
16. How were you treated throughout the process?
17. How would you characterize the outcome?
18. Are there things about you that you think made it more or less successful? Do you think your outcome would have been different if you were in a different social position (i.e., if you had more money, belonged to a different race, sexual orientation, if you had more documentation, etc.)
19. How would you define abuse in general? What might it consist of?
  - a. What about violence? What do you think of as violence?
20. Is there anything we haven't talked about that you would like to mention?

*For volunteers/staff/workers in organizations:*

1. To start off, why don't you tell me a little about yourself and how you got involved with this organization?
2. Why did you choose this organization?
  - a) What is your position within the organization?
  - b) Which services are you involved with?
  - c) How long have you been involved?
  - d) What kind of training did you receive?
3. How would you define abuse in general? What might it consist of?
  - a) What about violence? What do you think of as violence?
4. What have you found to be most surprising or interesting in your dealings with IPV?
  - a) Can you give an example?
  - b) What did you think of that? How did that make you feel?
5. Do you find that others generally understand or misunderstand the services you provide?
  - a) Can you give an example of a time when this happened? (if they are misunderstood)
6. How effective do you feel in your position?
  - a) Can you give an example of a time when you felt effective?
  - b) Can you give an example of a time when you did not feel effective?
  - c) How did those experiences make you feel?
  - d) What factors do you think influenced whether you were effective or not?

7. What are your thoughts on how services are delivered here? What works, what doesn't?
8. Is there anything you feel should be approached differently? If so, what?  
Have you experienced or seen any particular challenges in meeting the needs of a diverse population—by race, class, and/or sexuality?
9. Think back to when you first started working here. How would you characterize yourself and your attitude toward your work/victims? How is that different from how you feel now?
10. What other organizations do you typically work with? How does that process work? Can you walk me through how a case would normally go?  
(Probe for details on how particular differences might change the process)
11. Is there anything we haven't talked about that you would like to mention?

***Demographic Questions:***

What is your current gender identity?

How would you describe your sexual orientation?

What social class would you say you belong to?

What is your race/ethnicity?

What is your first language? Are you comfortable speaking in English?

What is your citizenship status? Where were you born? (if outside U.S.)

Are you employed? Full-time/part-time/temporary?

What is your current age?

What is your highest level of education?

Do you have children? What ages are they?

Is there anything else that you would like me to know?

## APPENDIX B: DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS OF INTERVIEWEES

<b>Interviewees Demographic Information</b>		
<b>Name</b>	<b>Demographics</b>	<b>Role</b>
Marie	26, white, female	Survivor
Amanda	49, white, female	Survivor
Carla	25, white, female	Survivor
Ashley	22, white, female	Survivor
Pam	35, white, female	Survivor
Marcus	Late 20s, Black, male	Law Enforcement officer
Sgt. Matthews	44, white, male	Law Enforcement officer
Lt. Williams	50s, white, male	Law Enforcement officer
Debbie	30s, white, female	Law Enforcement officer
Helen	50s, white, female	Shelter director
Sarah	30s, white, female	Shelter employee
Emma	22, white, female	Shelter intern
Michelle	27, white, female	Child Advocate, shelter
Valerie	25, Latina, female	Clinician for non-profit agency
Nadia	29, white, female	Shelter employee
Thomas	40s, white, male	Assistant Solicitor
Peyton	20s, white, female	Prosecutor, sexual and domestic violence
Susan	50s, white, female	Legal Victim Advocate, solicitor's office
Bill	30s, white, male	Legal Advocate, shelter

## APPENDIX C: METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

In the summer of 2008, I left a dangerous man. I was 33 years old, with a daughter who was almost 3 years old and only a degree and some graduate work in anthropology, not exactly a marketable skill. I called the local shelter, who told me they couldn't guarantee I would be able to bring my daughter with me. I could not leave without her. He had told me he wouldn't let me have her; he'd report that I had kidnapped her. I had spent two years knowing this moment was coming. After 9 years with this person, I looked at my toddler, and could not stand the thought of her learning this from me. I was extremely fortunate to have parents who had the means to help me get out. I lied to him. I said I just needed space. I needed to breathe, with no one looking over my shoulder, patrolling the house at all hours with guns. I knew I would never go back but believed not telling him that kept me and our daughter safe. I had the cultural capital to get out safely and still care for my child. What followed were two of the worst years of my life. Over and over, I encountered systemic failures.

When it was time to choose a dissertation project, I was ready to confront this issue. Throughout this dissertation, I have tried to keep my own positionality and experience with the research subject in mind. As participants shared their experiences with me, I would reach a point when I disclosed my own experiences as a survivor of intimate partner violence. This gave me a way to connect with survivors and communicate that this was not just another research project for me, that I was invested in

this and that, as a survivor, I really wanted our stories to mean something. I was asking about intimate details of their lives, so it seemed only fair that I be open and honest with my participants also.

With agency workers, I would also disclose my position later in the interviews, as they also needed to trust that I was not just some researcher out to benefit myself and not give back to survivors. Often researchers are regarded with some skepticism, here and then gone, taking without giving. My outsider-within status was important for putting participants at ease in many ways, and I often felt unsure about when or how much to disclose. I did not want to use my experience to manipulate anyone into talking, but I did find that it was a way to connect with other survivors and those who work with them.

I know I had a much different experience from the average survivor. I was unbelievably fortunate to have the support and the resources that I had at the time. I was an educated white woman with a stable, middle-class family of origin. I knew how to present myself to attorneys, social service personnel, and judges. I knew when I was being lied to by officers. I knew how to find correct information. I could afford a lawyer (well, my parents could) and a good therapist. I know my participants each have unique experiences and they are all different from my own. I did my best to consider each of their stories as only their own, and not color them through my own experiences, to see them from my own vantage point, but sought to honor their perspectives from their own positions. I did my best to let everyone tell their stories objectively without overlaying my experiences and my perspectives on top of them. Their experiences are not my own, but share so many similarities, like so many stories I have heard over the years.

We all write our own survival stories, all unique, but share many of the same themes, are traumatized by the same behaviors. I dealt with my own trauma every day of this research, sometimes I had to look away for a while, but that is my own. It is not their story. I hope I have been able to honor the stories of my participants—the survivors, the nonprofit workers, the police officers, the legal system employees—with truth, consideration, and empathy.