Religious Identity:
A Micro-Level Sociological Study of Faith, Religion, and Spirituality in the Lives of Women in a Domestic Violence Shelter

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Division of Religion, Drew University,
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Vivian Jacquette Rhoades
Drew University
Madison, New Jersey
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ABSTRACT

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Ph.D. Dissertation
Vivian Jacquette Rhoades

Graduate Division of Religion
Drew University

The purpose of this study is to examine the perceptions about and the role of faith and religion for women in a domestic violence shelter. The narratives of current and recent past residents of a domestic violence shelter will be examined to learn whether/ how their faith provided meaning and/ or other assistance for them during their stay at the shelter, and, conversely, what impact their time at the shelter had upon their faith and religious involvement.

The time spent living in a domestic violence shelter is a time of upheaval and change. One is cut off from, and often terrified of, one's life partner, and forced with the choice of whether to continue that significant relationship. Further, due to fear, lack of transportation, distance of the safe-house from one's own neighborhood, and assorted interpersonal "fall-out," one may also be substantially cut off from other significant sources of support, such as family, friends, co-workers, and religious community. At the same time, one finds oneself sharing a room with one's children in a house shared with several strangers and their children, having to negotiate numerous social institutions and rules – from the advocates and the safe-house itself, to the welfare system, the criminal justice system, and so on.

Using narrative methodology, this study applies the micro-level sociological perspective of Symbolic Interactionism to inquire about the religious identities of current and recent-past residents of a domestic violence shelter. Religious identity is approached as part of a "cultural tool kit" which is developed and maintained in coversation with significant others from early childhood and throughout life. Depending on their life experiences, victim-survivors demonstrate differing spiritual "tools" in their tool kit (institutional affiliation, personal spiritual practices, etc.) and differing abilities to use and adapt these tools in time of upheaval. Open-ended narratives, allowing each woman to tell her own life/ faith story, were analyzed to explore the themes about how domestic violence shelters and religious organizations could better meet the needs of victim-survivors. Five major themes were discovered in the narratives, and these are examined in the conclusion of this work.

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Introduction

Her room was small. High above the bed was a single window. The windowsill served as a shrine, filled with religious figurines: a sign that read "God is love," another that read simply "faith," an angel holding a sign that read "Jesus." On the opposite wall, atop her dresser, was a large Bible opened to her favorite verse – Psalm 118:6, "The LORD *is* on my side; I will not fear: what can man do unto me?" "Man" had done much to her, in fact – both in the person of her husband and in the various social institutions which had failed to help her. Yet in spite of a life filled with horrors beyond words, she told me that she "likes believing" that God is on her side.

Her faith was strong. She was not naïve or unaffected by her troubles, and she had certainly done all that one could do to try to make a good life for herself – no matter how many new beginnings it might take. Yet she knew she could not control everyone or everything, and she was resigned to all that God had in store for her – both the good and the bad. She advised me not to "argue" with God "when He got something in His head." She told me that there is a reason for everything that happens, and "not everything that happens *to* you is *for* you." She explained that sometimes things happen to allow a person to be an example to someone else. She said, "Everything is either a blessin' or a lesson."

She had come to the domestic violence shelter in search of yet another new beginning in her difficult life. When she signed the shelter's pre-defined safety plan, she added two items: "live in a small town where everyone knows you" and "pray."

Method of Research

The executive director of Transitions House invited me to do this study and facilitated the details, including recommending this study to Drew University's Institutional Review Board (I.R.B.). The research utilized a two-pronged approach of participant observation and personal interviews. A questionnaire was originally proposed, but was disallowed by the I.R.B.

Prior to the beginning of any interviews, the shelter director allowed me to become a participant observer both inside and outside of the shelter itself. Helping inside the shelter (facilitating a craft class and other duties) gave me an opportunity to meet many of the residents and learn the general routine of the shelter. This also gave the women an opportunity to become comfortable talking with me. Helping outside the shelter (doing promotional activities) helped me to gauge the community's awareness of and attitude toward the shelter. In the meantime, I also visited many area churches and local events in order to understand the community in which these women live and possibly worship.

After my period of participant observation, Transitions House provided a meeting space (following I.R.B. guidelines) where I could meet privately with individual residents participating in the study. When needed, the shelter staff also transported the residents to and from this meeting space. Transitions House served a gatekeeping function in that they determined which residents would be contacted about this study. Although it initially appeared that this might result in a sample of women who would only cast the shelter in its best light, I found that both the residents and staff who were interviewed

were quite upfront about both the positive and negative experiences they had with Transitions House.

I met with each of the participants individually for three or more sessions. I had previously met all but one of the participants during my participant observation period at the shelter, although one did not remember me. I explained that I was studying how their religious beliefs, practices, and affiliations affected their understanding of the violence that they experienced and their stay at the shelter, as well as how their experience of violence and stay at the shelter affected their religious beliefs, practices, and affiliations (cf. Sharp 2013). Each woman allowed me to record our conversations.

During the sessions, each woman was asked to narrate her own biography. I asked her to divide her biography into the "chapters" as she saw it, and to tell me about the people and events in each chapter. Due to university guidelines for this study, I was not permitted to do any type of questionnaire and was very limited in being able to ask direct questions. My role was to encourage each participant to share her perceptions about significant persons, self, God, and the major events of her life. I also asked her to discuss her stay at Transitions House – its significance for her, how/ if it changed her religious/ spiritual practices and beliefs, how her religious community (if any) perceived her shelter stay and what resources they provided to her, etc.

My approach to these participant-led conversations followed Nancy Ammerman's approach, of which she said, "I only asked enough questions to make sure that certain topics were covered" (Ammerman 1987, 13). Like Ammerman, I sought "understanding and richness of detail" (what Geertz referred to as "thick description") as opposed to quantitative testing and comparative data (13). I also followed David Heller's lead by

allowing participants to explain for themselves what was most important – to name and define the Ultimate in their own terms (Heller 1986, 13). As the women narrated their biographies according to the events that were significant to them, I asked them to include their relationships to their Ultimate and to religion and religious practices at each stage – recognizing, of course, that these narratives may be colored by their present understandings.

These conversations yielded extensive material about the lifelong religious identity development of each participant. Although this study is based on a very small sample, the richness of its depth helps to shed light on the role of faith and religion in the lives and development of particular survivors. Understanding the particular details of these lives in this exploratory study may provide clues for broader future studies into questions about when, for whom, and under what circumstances faith and religion may be helpful or harmful to victim-survivors.

Participant Data

Beginning with a pool of only recent residents, many of the possible participants were unavailable to participate. Some had moved too far away, while the whereabouts of others was unknown. Some were very ill or dealing with major life problems. Some had died. Some were not ready to discuss their stories publicly (like the traumatized Holocaust survivors after World War II). Those who remained from that initial pool were eager to tell their stories, believing that doing so could help themselves and others.

The four women participating in this study cover a wide variety of the spectrum of women who turn to domestic violence shelters. They ranged in age from twenty-four

to thirty-seven. All were white and heterosexual. Although not all of them considered themselves religious, the only religion they were "in dialog with" was Christianity. One woman was married, one widowed, one divorced (multiple times), and one never married. The number of living children of these women ranged from 0 to 4, although miscarriages, child deaths, and custody issues figure prominently into their stories.

Two of the women had some college education, one had a high school diploma earned through a vocational school, and one had earned a G.E.D. All of the women would probably be considered working class or lower, though some believed or tried to present themselves as higher. One woman dealt with depression and grief, one had many run-ins with the legal system, and two had severe mental issues. Two of the women received disability income (one due to physical problems, the other due to mental problems).

The types of violence encountered by these women varied, as did the age of onset and the nature of their participation in the violence (Johnson 2008). Two of the women experienced violence primarily as adults, although not without childhood precursors. One of these two women experienced what Michael Johnson called situational couple violence (mostly involving psychological abuse); the other of these two was involved in what he called mutual combat (both physical and psychological in nature). The remaining two women better fit the classical idea of the "pure victim." They experienced multiple forms of violence against them (perhaps mostly sexual in nature), never perpetrated the abuse (except for rare instances of fighting back), and the abuse began in early childhood.

Theoretical Perspectives

This work applies the Symbolic Interactionist study of religious identity (including the broader Meadian tradition within sociology) to the experiences of women who have recently lived in a domestic violence shelter. The purpose is to better understand the way in which particular women relate to their faith, religious institutions, their understandings of the violence they have encountered, and their experiences at the domestic violence shelter.

G. H. Mead and his successors provide the key theoretical understanding of identity formation by explaining it as playful, intersubjective, and ongoing. Peter Berger expands on Mead's ideas, provides details of the socialization process, and explains the three-moment dialectical process between self and society. Many of Berger's concepts are critical to this study, including "plausibility structure" and "alternation." Nancy Ammerman's Symbolic Interactionist twist to the "new paradigm" of the sociology of religion encourages the recognition of religion in the "everyday" – i.e., religious practices outside of religious institutions and religious performances in "secular" spaces (cf. Meredith McGuire's interest in nonofficial religion and Ann Swidler's concept of the cultural "tool kit").

Ethical Concerns

My study focuses on the narratives of four recent-past and current residents of a domestic violence shelter in a small, rural Midwestern town which I refer to as "Our Town." For reasons of confidentiality, I simply call the shelter "Transitions House" and

did not disclose information that can be used to identify its location. For this reason, I did not include local publications that I used in my bibliography.

For the same reason, pseudonyms have been used for the participants and others mentioned in their narratives. Since my concern was with the experiences of the actual shelter residents, I did not engage in the usual camouflage methods used by most researchers of intimate partner violence (IPV), such as combining several stories into one. However, I did not disclose details that would have made these people recognizable to readers of this work.

Because victims of domestic violence are a "protected group," my study was rigorously reviewed by the Drew University I.R.B. The executive director of the shelter (who invited this study) wrote to the I.R.B. in support of my proposal and was actively involved in planning the study itself. My previous work as a victims' advocate and trainer of victims' advocates made me familiar with all safety protocol for myself and the study participants.

Although the Drew I.R.B. initially required that the interviews take place at the shelter, the director and I provided over a dozen reasons why that was actually not the safest place. Upon learning of this, the I.R.B. agreed to defer to our expertise and allow the conversations to take place at locations provided or agreed to by the executive director which were to be decided on a case-by-case basis depending on the needs of each participant. The university did not allow a written questionnaire and only approved participant-led conversations with minimal input from me. All contact with participants was done through the shelter or in ways approved by the shelter to protect the safety of the participants and the researcher.

Participants signed consent forms before the start of our conversations and were regularly reminded that they could choose to withdraw from the study at any time. They were also informed of how they could contact the shelter and the local counseling agency if telling their stories brought up painful memories that they needed help to deal with. Participants also signed consent forms allowing conversations to be recorded, and each session began with a recorded message of the participant agreeing to be recorded on that day. Participants were assured that the interviews themselves (recorded and transcripts) would be secured by me and that no other person would be given access to them, although they also understood that extensive portions of those interviews would be published. They were also informed that there were no right or wrong answers, that I was only interested in their experiences and perceptions. With regard to religion, people with any religion or none were welcome to participate and were assured that no attempt would be made to "convert" them to any other belief system.

Early in the interviews, I became concerned with the competency of two of the participants. I checked with them and with the shelter regarding their fitness to participate and to see if a guardian also needed to agree. After receiving assurances that I could proceed, I took extra measures of protection with these two participants – reminding them at each session that they were free to withdraw at any time and how to contact help if needed.

At the end of the interview process, I asked each participant if there was anything that she wanted to change or delete from our conversations for any reason (fear of reprisal, regret for disclosing, misrepresenting any facts, etc.). Only one shelter employee asked me to leave out one item because she felt it would reflect poorly on her

employer. None of the shelter residents changed or retracted any of their statements. Participants were given debriefing information that reiterated most of the main points of the consent form – voluntary nature of the study, who to contact for help, who to contact with questions about the study, purpose of the study, and a list of literature on the subject. I also informed the participants that they should not take the debriefing form with them if they believed it would lead to a potentially unsafe situation for them.

Personal Location

I have worked in a domestic violence shelter as a victims' advocate and a trainer of other victims' advocates. Like contemporary IPV researchers, I *both* appreciate the feminist foundations to the domestic violence movement which brought attention to the problem of IPV and began the social reformations needed to combat the problem (changing laws, establishing shelters, etc.) *and* understand that even greater help may be offered if we take into account the agency and individual identities of victim-survivors (as opposed to the one-size-fits-all approaches that predominated in the early decades of the movement).

Like most Americans today, my own religious identity is complex and multi-faceted – though perhaps a little more complex than many because of the particular opportunities I have had to encounter many other faiths. In terms of heritage, I am descended from two Protestant denominations: Presbyterians and Friends. Beginning from an early age, I had the opportunity to attend religious services and/ or Sunday Schools from a wide variety of other religious groups. As my studies of religion expanded, I encountered an increasing number of denominations, world religions, and

some new religious movements. To a greater or lesser extent, the concepts and practices of many of these have been incorporated into my own religious identity.

Organization of the Study

My Dissertation Committee suggested that I gear my study to "the interested college professor," so that is what I have done. The organization of this project will proceed as follows. In the Part 1, I go into more detail about the methods of this study and about narrative methods in general. I will briefly introduce the four participants in this study and identify the three themes of their narratives.

In Part 2, I will introduce the micro-level sociological approach of the Meadian tradition, focusing on the interpersonal and "playful" nature of identity development. According to this tradition, identity or self is not something to be defined substantively, but exists in a *functional* and *ongoing process* in dialog with others (Mead 1934). Thus, ideas of self and society are deeply intertwined, learned through our playful interactions with those around us. Mead's ideas were borrowed and elaborated on by Herbert Blumer (Symbolic Interactionism), Erving Goffman (Dramaturgical Approach), and Peter Berger (Social Construction).

These micro-level sociological theories will be supplemented by other research and theories which further the Meadian tradition's idea of socialization and identity as a lifelong process of development in "conversation" with significant others. Together, these ideas extend into understanding the "legitimate" space for religion (as opposed to a secular viewpoint of its irrelevance or falsehood) and help us to understand the development and maintenance of religious identity. This will prepare us to examine how

particular women interact with the religious environment in which they exist – i.e., a micro-level approach to the sociology of religion.

In Part 3, I will present the context of this study: the shelter and its interaction with the community. Because identity formation occurs in conversation with one's environment, this serves as important background to understanding these women's narratives. I will explore the shelter as the new environment in which these women live and interact with staff and other residents.

Part 4 presents the case studies of the women themselves, focusing on the three themes that were identified in Part 1. The conclusion explores five concerns about the relationship between IPV, religion, and the shelter experience which arose from these case studies.

Part I

Methods

1

Methods

In the new preface to his second edition of *The Wounded Storyteller* (2013), Arthur W. Frank, professor of sociology at the University of Calgary, explains why writing about his own illness in *At the Will of the Body* (1991) did not totally assure him that he was not "crazy." He needed the narratives of other people. "That is the book's consistent message about why suffering needs stories," he wrote, "to tell one's own story, a person needs others' stories. We were all, I realized, wounded storytellers" (Frank 2013, xi).

Although my introduction briefly covered my methodology, it is important to spend some time explaining in detail to the interested college professor my method of research. The following sections explain the basis for the qualitative research method that I have chosen to share the stories of these remarkable women who are wounded storytellers – survivors of intimate partner violence (IPV). Scholars note that the interpretive/ qualitative approach to research and theory has produced "a quiet methodological revolution" and "the extent to which 'qualitative revolution' is taking over the social sciences and related professional fields is nothing short of amazing" (Denzin and Lincoln 2005, ix). Such narrative method aims to characterize how people experience the world, the ways they interact together, and the settings in which these interactions take place. Qualitative research has become increasingly important in

sociology, particularly in the micro-level sociological approach of Symbolic Interactionism.

Setting

My research takes place among women who have recently stayed at a domestic violence shelter in a small rural community in the Midwestern United States. The population of the town is about 11,000, while the population of the county is about 30,000 (U. S. Census Bureau 2012). According to census data, nearly everyone in the community is white. Most people have no post-secondary education, and the community is experiencing tough economic times.

Religion has played a central role in community life throughout the history of the county. The available statistics show that about 43% of the people in the county are affiliated with a local religious congregation (Association of Religon Data Archives 2000; Social Explorer 2009). I compiled a list of area churches, beginning with public sources of information (such as the phone book and the internet) and adding congregations that I discovered via alternative methods (such as word-of-mouth and simply going down each street). By my count, there are about 47-50 churches in (or very near) the town, besides the ones in the surrounding villages and countryside. Since about 97% of religiously affiliated residents of the county attend and/ or are members of Protestant Churches, I attended twenty-two of the Protestant churches that were within (or very near) the city limits as a participant observer. I was able to return for a second or third visit to some of these churches. This helped me to understand the complexity of the local culture (Holstein and Gubrium 2000).

The people of the town and of the churches I visited are quite active in fundraising and other activities that benefit the community. Some of the churches have some relationship to the local domestic violence shelter – displaying its literature, participating in the annual toiletry drive, inviting workers from the shelter to speak at the church, etc. There is little direct teaching within the church setting about intimate partner violence, but there are inklings of ways that the existing relationships could be deepened.

The local domestic violence shelter serves residents of the county described above and an adjoining county. It is located on a busy street in a residential neighborhood in the town described above. The precise location has to be kept secret in order to ensure the safety of the residents, but it is also the "worst kept secret in Our Town," according to the executive director. Like the community, the shelter is experiencing difficult economic times. Because of this, it currently operates with a skeleton staff and offers fewer services than it has been able to do in better economic times.

Filled to maximum capacity, including doubling-up of families in bedrooms and counting cribs, the shelter can house approximately twenty people. However, under ordinary circumstances, each family has one bedroom for itself, with all family members sharing that room. Bathrooms must be shared with one or two other families. The common areas of the household are a playroom, a living room, and a kitchen. Sometimes a one-car garage is available for a resident's use.

The shelter in this study is similar to other shelters in several ways – including the size, length of stay, and problems experienced by the residents (Lyon, Lane and Menard 2008). According to the only major study done on domestic violence shelters, the most common problem encountered in the shelter itself was conflict with the other residents in

the shelter (32%). Transportation (24%), lack of privacy (16%), and problems with shelter rules such as curfew, chores, monitoring, etc. (16%) were also problems identified by residents (Lyon, Lane and Menard 2008, 10-18; 83-106). Participants in my study identified some of these same issues as problems with this shelter.

Research Process and Access to the Shelter

The executive director of Transitions House invited me to do this study and facilitated the details, including recommending this study to Drew University's Institutional Review Board (I.R.B.). The research utilized a two-pronged approach of participant observation and personal interviews. Prior to the beginning of any interviews, the shelter director allowed me to become a participant observer both inside and outside of the shelter itself for a period of approximately one year.

Helping inside the shelter gave me an opportunity to meet many of the residents and learn the general routine of the shelter. My duties were numerous, including: handling crisis calls; spending time with residents and past residents (talking, watching TV, sharing meals, etc.); accompanying residents to court; facilitating a craft class; leading a job skills class (teaching how to write a resume, how to find work clothes on a budget, how to set goals, etc.); helping residents find a G.E.D. program and study for their diploma; counseling women on career and educational opportunities; processing donations; performing clerical work; performing intakes and move-outs; checking residents' chores; performing routine safety checks of the premises several times each day; carrying out lock-down procedures in emergencies (in ways not to alarm residents); training new staff members; sanitizing rooms between residents; cleaning employee-only areas (such as offices and bathroom) and outside areas; shopping for household goods;

arranging parties and luncheons for residents and past residents; providing overnight "sleep staff" duties; transporting residents to appointments (medical, financial, legal, etc.) and reporting back to the shelter about the results; helping the women fill out forms (for assistance, etc.); dispensing medication (and verifying that it was taken correctly); designing improved forms for various record-keeping tasks; encouraging residents in their progress and helping connect them to others who had experienced similar things (via events and classes scheduled, developing a book of residents' poetry, etc.); and transporting past residents to shelter activities. Spending this much time with the women also gave them an opportunity to become comfortable talking with me.

Helping outside the shelter helped me to gauge the community's awareness of and attitude toward the shelter. These duties were also numerous, including: speaking at local churches; taking campaign and/ or shelter literature to local businesses and churches; organizing domestic violence educational activities for community groups; networking with local groups and individuals who could help women with particular goals (youth activities, resume enhancement, volunteer work, crafts, etc.); creating an email list of community members and churches who wanted to receive regular updates about the shelter; working with area businesses to promote the sale of crafts made by shelter residents; planning a quarterly newsletter; assisting with a training event for law enforcement officers; working with law enforcement at the Visitation Center (operated by the shelter); and marching in parades. As has been suggested in numerous studies, my extensive interaction with the shelter and the community enhanced the research process (Loseke 1992; Nason-Clark 2000; Wendt 2008; Winkelmann 2004).

Certainly my cordial relationship with the executive director, the board of directors, the shelter workers, and the residents also facilitated the research process. I was considered to be like any other shelter worker – trusted with the intimate details of residents' lives and the work of the shelter. Everyone knew that I was there doing research, yet residents and staff were very open with me throughout the period of participant observation. By the time the participant observation phase of research ended and the formal interviews began, two participants remembered me, one who had met me did not remember me, and one had never met me until her first interview.

Process of Interviewing and Observation

The executive director of the domestic violence shelter invited this study and oversaw the details. She and another shelter employee reviewed recent shelter records to determine which residents were available to participate. The other shelter worker then contacted the residents being considered for this project to inquire who would be willing to discuss the project with me. All of those contacted by the shelter agreed to discuss the project, and the shelter made arrangements for me to discuss the project with each woman by phone or e-mail.

All of the women were excited about the project, believed it would be very helpful for those helping victim-survivors of intimate partner violence, and wished they could participate. Of these, four were both ready to tell their stories and commit to the multiple interview sessions that would be required due to the nature of this project (Charmaz 2002). Fortunately, these four women proved to be ideal for the nature of this study, representing the diversity of the women served by this shelter in numerous ways

(the type of violence experienced, the nature of their involvement in the violence, their ages, number of children, marital status, other problems they faced, etc.).

The domestic violence shelter provided a meeting space in a safe location. They also provided transportation for anyone who needed it. When the women arrived at the first interview session, I reviewed the project and the necessary paperwork with them. They signed the informed consent papers and the agreement to record sessions. I showed them around our meeting area, making sure they knew they could make use of anything they found there to help them with their narratives (e.g., paper, pens, crayons, colored pencils, domestic violence literature and checklists, etc.) or to simply be more comfortable (e.g., refrigerator, restroom, smoking area, etc.).

After this, we began the first interview/ conversation (lasting about an hour). Although all of our conversations were participant-led and informal (cf. Ammerman 1987), this one was the most formal so that I could make sure we laid certain groundwork. I began by asking each participant, "Who are you? How do you see yourself?" I invited her to answer as completely as she wished (e.g., a physical description, emotional description, a relational description, likes and dislikes, strengths, etc.) Next I asked her to tell me about her family of origin (e.g., number of people, how she described them, her place and role in the family, etc.). I also asked each one about how she would describe her current situation and background. Again, I invited her to answer as completely as she wished (occupation, current family situation, social class, etc.).

Next I asked each woman to think of her life as a story and consider where the major divisions or chapters would fall. I had her write out a very basic outline which

would serve as our guideline for the upcoming conversations. Some women took this opportunity to go into a great amount of detail about certain parts of their lives, giving me additional narrative data to compare later when they got to those "chapters" in subsequent interviews.

I then asked each woman about what she thought of as the Ultimate, allowing her to define and name it for herself (Heller 1986). I offered certain prompts in case anyone might be confused by what was meant, explaining that this could be God, Goddess, the Universe, a spiritual force, etc. All of the women indicated that they wanted to use the word "God" and masculine pronouns, though one used "God" and "Jesus" interchangeably. I then asked them what they thought of when they thought about God. As will be discussed in more detail later, two of the women chose to draw images and two did not (cf. Rizzuto 1979). When one woman had difficulty visualizing the image that corresponded to her verbal description, I showed her computer images of the words she had chosen. The God representation each woman described proved to be emblematic of the way in which she went on to describe the important themes of her life.

Finally, I concluded the first interview/ conversation by setting up a method of safe contact and an interview schedule that suited each participant – the timing, length, frequency, and number of expected interviews. The average number of interviews was five (including this first one), though the actual number was determined by the "chapters" she laid out and how long she wanted to talk during each session. All future sessions ran at least an hour, but some participants wanted to stay longer (even two or more hours) to cover more ground or to just have a person to listen to their stories.

The remaining conversations (four or so) were very informal – led by the participants as each described the "chapters" of her life to me. Since each woman had already provided her own outline to follow, little input was needed from me other than to be an engaged listener. As Kathy Charmaz (2002) writes, "The first question may suffice… if stories tumble out." If needed, I would chime in with questions about the significant people in her life; her relationship to God, church, religion, and/ or faith; or simply ask for clarification of what she was narrating. I asked open-ended questions to encourage her to continue to take the lead in her narration.

When each woman discussed her stay at the shelter, I did inquire about certain topics (if she had not already covered them) – e.g., what led her there and how long she stayed; how her personal faith related to her decision to go to the shelter; how significant the shelter stay was to her (e.g., a new "chapter"?); how others (including her faith community) viewed her stay there; how it impacted her religious practices and beliefs. Some of the participants made use of the domestic violence checklist in describing the violence she had experienced.

In the final interview/ conversation, I asked for any further clarifications; asked her about her religious affiliation, practices, beliefs, etc., today; asked whether, and in what context, she had heard domestic violence discussed within her religion; and asked about how she envisioned the relationship between domestic violence shelters and faith communities in the future. I then asked her for anything she would like to add, omit, or amend from her previous statements and went over the debriefing paperwork with her.

The open-ended, participant-led conversational technique which I used is optimal for this type of interpretative, qualitative research (see, e.g., Ammerman 1987; Charmaz

2002; Denzin and Lincoln 2005). Interviews were recorded and I typed up the transcripts. I also made notes about each woman's demeanor during all parts of the detailed interviews (D'Andrade 2005, 90-91; Gubrium and Holstein 2009, 89).

Small Sample Size

Questions regarding the small sample size of this study were discussed in the earliest stages of my prospectus development. Certainly, my intense exposure to context and the deep interaction with women and staff in preparation for these case studies helped immensely. Since I was attempting to look at an old problem in a new way, my advisors agreed that it made the most sense to seek more in-depth and detailed information from fewer people. In doing so, it had a better chance to allow participants to frame things the way they saw fit (as opposed to researcher's imposing categories). This is what lies behind Herbert Blumer's method of Symbolic Interactionism (Blumer 1969). This depth is beneficial in itself, and it also opens the way to formulating questions for larger studies later (cf. Riessman 1989; 1990). To approach a brand new type of study with a large sample size would necessitate using methods that might not get at the heart of the meanings that people studied have for themselves. So the smaller, more detailed study is both valuable for its depth *and* for its exploratory nature that may benefit future (larger) studies.

After the first draft of my prospectus, Dr. Donileen Loseke (a sociologist working in the tradition of Symbolic Interactionism) commented:

> Be aware that not all people agree that extremely small samples constitute adequate data upon which to base arguments.... A methodological adequate justification is that the topic is so contextualized that it is necessary to do an in-depth exploration (and one that doesn't implicitly diminish the value) is that a small number of interviews is necessary because you'll need an in-depth analysis in order to understand the

> complexity. Further, there is an inverse relationship between quantity of data and depth of data. The fewer interviews you have/use the more detailed and rich these interviews will need to be. If women will talk with you for hours (rather than minutes) you might be able to offer convincing data with a few cases (July 9, 2009).

My committee and the Prospectus Committee agreed, and the final version of the prospectus indicated that I would be writing the case studies of only three-to-five people. Dr. Roy D'Andrade acknowledges the debate over small samples, but suggests that when one explores cultural models it appears that there is shared agreement among informants, noting that this is much like some areas of biochemistry in which a universal process is discovered in the cells of five or six mice (D'Andrade 2005, 98-9). Dr. Roberto Franzosi, Trinity College, Oxford adds: "Much of the sociological debate between quantitative and qualitative approaches has centered on the issue of sample size – of the small "n" of ethnographic approaches." He suggests that it is time to study the particular (Franzosi 1998, 547-48).

Furthermore, numerous scholars have used small studies effectively. Catherine Kohler Riessman of Harvard Medical School and Smith College uses narrative analysis from three research interviews (1989). Shondrah Tarrezz Nash of Morehead State University has effective scholarly analysis in a number of journals using two or three detailed narrative interviews (Nash 2006; Nash and Hesterberg 2009). Norman Giesbrecht and Irene Sevcik have five women participating in their study (Giesbrecht and Sevcik 2000). Dr. Loseke's suggestion certainly had merit for both my study and others.

Narrative Method

Narrative is present in every society and in every age. It is simply with us, like the air we breathe. Narrative is the story. It is international and transcultural. Narrative

has become increasingly important in the field of sociology because all human groups and all classes of people have their narratives. It springs from the very foundation of humankind. The impulse to narrate naturally arises in most human situations. Case studies, such as the multiple interviews conducted with the IPV survivors in this dissertation, are packed with sociological information. As Donileen R. Loseke has emphasized, scholarship has shown that culture is multifaceted and personal identity narratives have created multiple thought communities and local cultures (Loseke 2012, 254). One must remember, however, that myth, legend, conversations, news items, and many other human creations also have narrative present. Narratives have value for many disciplines of scholarship (Kirkman 2002).

Narrative can do a lot. Catherine Kohler Riessman focused on the meaning of stressful life events from the narratives of two men and one woman who faced marital infidelity (Riessman 1989). Each has similar stories, but had different responses to the stress engendered by the situation they were in. Each story had a turning point. The way they defined the situation was reality for them. The question is, of course, why some individuals under intense stress develop health and mental problems, while others under similar situations remain healthy and resilient. Riessman points out, "Not only would quantitative methods have missed the important differences in meaning among the three stories, traditional qualitative methods might have, as well." Unfortunately, she regretted that she did not have a complete biography of the life of each individual, so she could not answer the question of where personal history fit in (749). Her later book *Divorce Talk* expanded this theme (cf. Rector 1999, 67 for similar positive statements on qualitative method as the best method for feminist research).

Narrative enhances the ability to analyze and make sense of a particular situation, because it reconstructs and interprets the past. Narrative analysis can give meaning to the human experience in the world. Close attention to the facts can lead to discovery of a concept or may verify other concepts, while discovering a complex cultural milieu (D'Andrade 2005; Gubrium and Holstein 2009, 197). To analyze narratives, one must establish the social context, pay close attention to the narrative (plot, emotions, major characters, etc.), discover the moral of the narrative from the viewpoint of the interviewer, and categorize the development of the characters in the narrative. While unraveling and analyzing the meaning of the narrative, one must try to avoid "moral evaluations" (Loseke 2012).

The modern textbook on this subject is Jaber F. Gubrium and James A. Holstein's Analyzing Narrative Reality (2009). The authors relate,

> Stories in society deploy a distinctive reality along with a preferred form of analysis. Because the reality in view is about both the substance of the stories and the activity of storytelling, it is imperative that in addition to what is said and recorded on any occasion, researchers go out into the world, observe and listen, and document everyday practices (15).

Using Herbert Blumer's (1969) argument that concepts are as much procedural as theoretical and following Erving Goffman and others, Professors Gubrium and Holstein consider the social organization of the story (Gubrium and Holstein 2009, 25). The work of the narrative, the environment of the narrative and the adequacy of the narrative cover many of the same points that have been expressed by other scholars in this methods chapter.

The question arises, "Do narratives have borders?" According to Gubrium and Holstein, the discernible topic (even if the topic is unclear) is a kind of border. This topic

develops in a particular way as the narrative unfolds, becoming a plot, and finally a theme develops. The authors emphasize,

> While it is possible for a story or storyteller to announce a theme, themes are usually identified by listeners or researchers as underlying patterns of meaning" (225-26).

In narrative analysis, the researcher must remember Kathy Charmaz's suggestion that "silences have meaning, too" and silence "signifies an absence – of words and/or perceivable emotions." Ascertaining the culture and context is crucial in such situations to determine the meaning or boundaries expressed and the sources of silence (Charmaz 2002, 303; cf. Fivush 2010; Frank 2010, 107).

As she discusses narratives of chronic illness, Charmaz reminds us all that narrative analysis must take into account the "self" of the interviewee and the essential attributes both lost and gained throughout the person's life.

Self

Narrative method is key to understanding the concept of the "self." Edward P. Wimberly declares that "narrative theory has emerged as an essential conceptual resource for understanding the development of the human personality" (Wimberly 1999, 174). Individuals attribute meaning to their everyday existence by creating frames of reference. These "centers of meaning" (images, symbols, stories, concepts, etc.) are "essential for human growth, development, and transformation." Arthur W. Frank adds that "a self is born in stories" (Frank 2013, 62).

The development of the "self" is theorized in a number of disciplines. Because a young child has no choice of significant others, sociologists Peter Berger and Thomas Luckman write that his or her "identification with them is quasi-automatic" (1966,

134). This means that the internalized world is the world for the child – "the only existent and only conceivable world." The task of primary socialization is complete when the child has internalized the roles and rules of society. This is where a "self" is usually formed (Wuthnow, et al. 1984, 45).

Berger follows the school of Symbolic Interactionism closely with regard to the "self," except that he emphasizes one point that they do not: the specific local, social context in which the formation of the "self" occurs – thus allowing for differences brought about by race, class, gender, etc. According to Berger, internalization is not merely a cognitive assent, but the participation of the full, conscious being, as a result from the affective connection to and identification with the primary caregivers (Berger 1963, 137). The individual now possesses "a self and a world" and is now a member of society. Socialization, however, is never a completed process. Just as the "self" was created concurrently with the "world," it is maintained through secondary socialization which involves the "acquisition of role-specific knowledge" (138). Threats to the "self" occur when the taken-for-grantedness of the world is challenged. A child's interactions with his or her early caregivers pave the way to subsequent understandings of self and others.

All of the women in my case studies are affected by violence and abuse. The question must be raised: How does violence and abuse affect this intersubjective process of developing and maintaining a self within a world? Dr. Carrie Doehring states, "In my pastoral ministry over the past twenty-five years, I have found that almost all careseekers are dealing with one or more of three issues: loss, violence, and healthy or unhealthy ways of coping with stress" (Doehring 2006, 65). Doehring demonstrates that people

have numerous coping mechanisms for stress – including substance abuse and addiction, as well as religion and spirituality. Doehring believes that the "narrative approach" to understanding the self is based on five assumptions:

1. The stories people tell and the ways in which they elaborate themes of loss, violence, and coping behaviors are highly personal and idiosyncratic.
2. People in crisis tell stories in order to make sense of what has happened to them.
3. The more the careseeker's story can become multilayered and complex enough to encompass the profound experiences of his or her suffering, the more the careseeker will be sustained and even transformed through that suffering.
4. The deeper the loss and the more life-threatening the violence, the less likely people will be able to return to the way their life was before the crisis. The stories they construct describing their past, present, and future will be irrevocably changed.
5. These stories are shaped by the stories they have heard in their families, communities, and culture, which may help them understand and cope with their suffering or make it worse. (2006, 67-69)

Carrie Doehring reminds the researcher that these narratives have many strands, even contradictory strands. "Constructivist psychologists highlight the capacity of individuals to construct idiosyncratic meanings out of suffering," she explains, "Social constructionist psychologists highlight the ways in which meanings are socially constructed." Rather than being diametrically opposed, these two perspectives when combined allow the researcher to come from different angles for better clarity (2006, 70).

With regard to self-narratives involving medical illness, Arthur Frank affirms that "one of the most difficult duties as human beings is to listen to the voices of those who suffer" (Frank 2013, 25). Later he explains that "ill people do not tell their stories so that medical workers can make decisions. Self-stories are told to make sense of a life that has reached some moral juncture" (161). According to Frank, a "sociology of witness" requires an "ethics of listening." Again, self is born in stories (cf. Charon 2006).

For Jessica Benjamin, the human being's dependence on others for a sense of self is the crux of the problem (Benjamin 1988). If one destroys the other, there is no one left to recognize one's being. On the other hand, the other can be destructive. The solution to this "paradox of recognition" is for it to continue as a constant tension. This tension begins with the mother-child relationship. In Dr. Benjamin's view, identification does not have to be alienating and narcissism does not have to be pathological. The self is neither wholly formed by external reality nor is it the sole creator of external reality.

Benjamin echoes D. W. Winnicott in her emphasis of "being with the other," an emphasis that allows for mutuality and difference. She writes:

> To transcend the experience of duality, so that both partners are equal, requires a notion of mutuality and sharing. In the intersubjective interaction both partners are active; it is not a reversible union of opposites (a doer and a done to). The identification with the other person occurs through the sharing of similar states, rather than through reversal. "Being with" breaks down the oppositions between powerless and helpless, active and passive; it counteracts the tendency to objectify and deny recognition to those weaker or different--to the other. It forms the basis of compassion, what Milan Kundera calls "co-feeling," the ability to share feelings and intensions without demanding control, to experience sameness without obliterating difference (Benjamin 1988, 48).

In child development, Benjamin believes in three phases, i.e. (1) the toddler's differentiation from the mother; (2) the child practicing, playing, and creating with transitional objects (cf. Winnicott); and (3) rapprochement, where the child has to reconcile grandiose ambitions with reality. The self cannot be located inside or outside the fiction of play, but on the boundary between the two, where the world of representations and the otherness of objects exchange places (Benjamin 1988, 41).

Benjamin insists that women are complicit in their own subordination. The perversion of love leads to domination or submission. She believes that women more

than men seek ideal love, and this search constitutes a form of masochism. She demonstrates that masculinity and femininity have taken on the roles of master and slave, corrupting erotic life and corrupting social institutions. *The Bonds of Love* is primarily about power.

Patterns of violence in childhood engender traumatization. When children are abused and neglected, they have difficulty in learning to regulate intense feelings. At times they act impulsively, overpowered by their feelings. At other times, they become emotionally numb. Some are ready to become violent themselves. Social class and financial status permeate their perceptions of social identity (Doehring, 151-153). As we shall see in the case studies, all of these trends are exhibited within the narratives of the interviewees. Certainly the self of each of these remarkable women has been violated and bruised. In Part 4, much of this interdisciplinary analytic scholarship (and more) will be applied in detail.

Sociology and Identity

Sociologists believe that there is a reciprocal relationship between self and society. Through individual actions, "self" influences society, creating groups and institutions. And, as we have seen, society influences self. Traditional Symbolic Interactionism viewed society as always in process and believed that the interactions of individuals served to reinforce or redefine social realities (Blumer 1969). Some modern sociological Symbolic Interactionist theorists emphasize social stability – patterned regularities that provide social structure, networks of exchange (Burke 1997; Stets and Burke 2000).

The individual (or "self") interacts within this complex, organized society and holds many different positions or roles in society. Thus, according to this sociological theory, the self is organized into multiple parts or "identities." One has an identity for each role she or he plays in society. These identities have meaning in the role-relationship with society. For example, "self" as a mother is an "identity." "Self" as a colleague is an identity. Note that within the societal framework, interaction is not between whole persons but rather aspects of the person in relation to a particular role. In addition, these identities are always related to a counter-identity, interaction with others. The mother interacts with the child. The colleague interacts with others at work in her group or institution. Human beings move in and out of these roles quite fluidly, but the social structure in which identities are embedded is relatively fixed. One plays out the roles given to him or her (Turner 1978; Ellestad and Stets 1998).

With regard to the narrative method using such sociological viewpoints, sociologist Robert H. Garot of John Jay College weaves narratives to illustrate that gang identity is a carefully coordinated role and that gangs (like any other group or institution) have rules of style and presentation that make up their identities (Garot 2010). Tara D. Opsal of the University of North Iowa uses this method to ascertain the strategies female parolees use to confront their stigmatized identities in the present and interpret their past and future in their own terms (Opsal 2011). Much like some of the women in my case studies, these women with a "felon identity" disassociate themselves from their past criminal, drug, and alcohol-using identities and recast their identities in the framework of "good mothers."

Organizational settings in the modern world create identities as well. In *Institutional Selves: Troubled Identities in a Postmodern World*, editors Jaber F. Gubrium and James A. Holstein combine a selection of experts to prove that large and small institutions, such as prisons, psychiatric hospitals, schools, job clinics, support groups, etc., produce new forms of identity in a process of construction from troubled identities, victims, and villains (Gubrium and Holstein 2009).

One can envision endless possibilities for generating social identities. Social conditions (such as the Internet, consumption, globalization, terrorism, etc.) and social categories (such as gender, race, ethnicity, social class, religion, etc.) affect identity possibilities. For example, to the sociologist, gender identity is socially learned behavior (in contrast to the biological sex, female or male). Gender expectations of parents and societal culture generally begin before birth and from the first day of the baby's life gender teachings and expectations take place. The process of gender socialization affects identities for each individual as they interact with the gender roles held (and imposed) by others. As we have seen and will see in the next section, this directly influences behavior.

A growing number of sociologists view gender from the micro-perspective on a day-to-day level. They focus on how gender roles are introduced by women and men. In the same fashion as other disciplines, these sociologists find gender identity to be helpful in outlining long-standing debates and questions concerning the individual, social roles, and society. Gender demonstrates a complex interplay between an individual's sense of self and his or her social identity (McMahon 1995; Loseke 2001; Stets and Burke 1996).

Researchers in this field insist that there is much more work to be done, but that such scholarly theoretical studies on identity remain active and productive. Many of these concepts and scholarly theorists will be brought to bear on the detailed analysis of my case studies in Part 4.

Object Relations Tradition and Trauma

I have concentrated on sociological approaches to this study and the method that is supported by a growing amount of sociological scholarship, while recognizing the debates and varying efforts to develop new methods in what Dr. Loseke has described as a sociological "contested terrain" (Loseke 2012, 254). However, I must briefly acquaint the interested college professor with the scholarly world of the Object Relations tradition of psychology. This historic tradition has direct influence on therapeutic strategies (some of which have been mentioned briefly above) and has its own interpretations of the concept of trauma that each of the women in my case studies experienced.

In psychoanalytical theory, Sigmund Freud's concept of the death drive (*Todestrieb*), where in an individual marches toward death and destruction, has provided fodder for numerous theories on trauma. While Freud insisted that the death drive was not essential to the life of the organism and that there were other drives, he posited that often victims of trauma reenacted their traumatic experiences. Dreams would continually bring the victims back to their trauma. Repressed experiences would seem to be happening in the present. Late in life in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920), Freud would posit the possibility of this death drive in opposition to the life drive to more fully explain human behavior. For Freud, self-destructive behavior was an expression of

energy created by the death drive and, when directed toward others, resulted in aggression and violence.

Melanie Klein believed that destructive feelings from Freud's theory of death drive had to be projected outside into another (in contrast to Freud's concept of repression). In Klein's theory of trauma, the external world often becomes hostile, filled with villains or idealized phantasy figures. In *The Psycho-Analysis of Children* (1932), Klein posits a life drive that attaches itself to pleasing others/ objects, while identifying sadism as a derivative of the death drive. Her belief that even young children are strongly influenced by the death drive did not provide a positive view of the human condition. She did, however, develop useful tools for dealing with severely troubled children.

Psychopathology for William Ronald Dodds Fairbairn was rooted in disturbances in relationship to others. Object dependence informed all stages of development. Object Relations theory for Fairbairn meant that emotional health was manifested in mutual, intimate connections to other people. In "W. R. D. Fairbairn and His Growing Significance for Current Psychoanalysis and Psychotherapy," James S. Grotstein points out that these principles of Fairbairn's are undergoing a positive reevaluation in psychotherapy and trauma (Grotstein 1998).

With regard to trauma, D. W. Winnicott insisted that he was never a fan of Freud's death drive, but rather stressed the surviving object. The same environmental qualities in trauma psychotherapy directly applied to the optimum context for childhood development, i.e., a safe, nurturing, consistent environment where warmth, sense of caring and being cared for, and understanding are central. With regard to IPV, if the

environment fosters the same dysfunctional systems the woman historically has experienced, the therapeutic process will be unsuccessful. Winnicott helps to explain how trauma, which is internally personal, can be understood on the social and political level (Alford 2012). Winnicott's growing appeal among psychotherapists is that he gives hope that an analyst can do creative work while exhibiting spontaneity and creativity.

One can see how this Object Relations tradition produced a set of related therapies that enhanced the feminist movement and the Civil Rights movement. For these movements, the personal is political, and personal and social identities are interdependent. The role of trauma and oppression becomes central, and the counseling relationship is egalitarian. Therapeutic strategies include empowerment, gender role analysis, gender role intervention, self-disclosure, assertiveness training, group work, social action, etc.

In *The Shadow of the Other: Intersubjectivity and Gender in Psychoanalysis*, Dr. Jessica Benjamin, professor in New York University's Postdoctoral Program in Psychotherapy and Psychoanalysis, explores the psychoanalytic theories of Object Relations and intersubjectivity and how they relate to psychoanalytic gender theory and to feminist theory (Benjamin 1998). Noting that Fairbairn tended to see identification as a defensive means of obscuring difference, while followers of Melanie Klein emphasized the constructive structuralizing aspects of identification, Benjamin combines them into two processes of identification: those that diminish distancing and objectification and those that deny difference. Her attempt is to integrate psychoanalytic theory, clinical experience, and feminist theory by "complimentary transference viewed through Marxist or Hegelian dialectics."

In Benjamin's model, polarities and dangerous anomalies can be transformed into a tolerable paradox that makes it possible to deconstruct hierarchies based on gender and power. Benjamin integrates some Freudian theory while distancing herself from some aspects of the classical Freudian position. In so doing, she locates her center in Object Relations theory and intersubjectivity at one end of the twentieth century and integrates the postmodern structural position at the opposite end of the century. In her integration, she ignores the fact that earlier modern psychoanalysts wrote that one had to be either in the drive psychology/ one person model or the relationship/ two person model (for example, Greenberg and Mitchell argue for one or the other position).

Benjamin is appreciative of Freud's theory of sexuality, but she updates Freud's theory in light of contemporary views (even accusing him of misdiagnosing the case of Anna O. and later questioning the classical Oedipus complex). While indebted to the feminist movement, she sees problems with the historic feminist view that recognition of another implies a belief in normative identity, which Benjamin believes may generate erroneous assumptions about the identity /subjectivity of the Other (sacrificing difference to recognition). Jessica Benjamin argues that mutual intersubjectivity is based on the perception of difference and sets up a dynamic paradox. One looks for the knowable in the other with which "self" one is familiar, yet one is confronted at the same time with the otherness of the person. Boys and girls retain their gender identity and tenuously identify with aspects of both early caregivers (no matter how ambiguous at times). This contributes to a more complex identity in each person's narrative of desire (note Harriet Kimble's review of *The Shadow of the Other*).

Jessica Benjamin is a modern feminist theorist of the Object Relations tradition who draws on a number of strands of psychoanalytic thought. She is a synthesizer of many threads of psychoanalysis. She views domination as a problem of relationships, not simply repression or coercion. It is a complex process of forming and shaping people who ultimately participate in their own domination. With regard to gender identity, she believes in a multiplicity of images of the baby and its mother, using a thinking process that refuses to be monistic and allows for competing ideas to be entertained simultaneously. She also believes in giving attention to the moments in the developmental process of the self, emphasizing the tension in the dialectical heritage rather than an opposition. In her book, *Like Subjects, Love Objects: Essays on Recognition and Sexual Differences* (1995), which is a critical review of her earlier book *The Bonds of Love* (1988), she clearly states that the psychoanalytic theorizing in America is filled with fads and cliques that are unnecessarily confrontational. Jessica Benjamin declares that the researcher must go beyond such binary applications.

Some sociologists openly oppose psychoanalytic theory and the interpretation of the Object Relations theorists both past and present. This constitutes an interdisciplinary "contested terrain" (in Dr. Loseke's words). For example, Yale sociologist Dr. Jeffrey C. Alexander asserts, "For an audience to be traumatized by an experience that they themselves do not directly share, symbolic extension and psychological identification are required." He points out that sometimes survivors of trauma are presented as a mass. They are not personalized through interviews or individualized through biographical sketches. This depersonalization makes it more difficult to identify the survivor's trauma (Alexander 2003, 30-31). Alexander cannot accept the Object

Relations tradition view that the personal is political, and that personal and social identities are interdependent.

According to Professor Alexander's view, it is through "psychoanalytic approaches that trauma has been translated... from an idea in ordinary language into an intellectual concept in the academic languages of diverse disciplines." This is what he calls the "naturalistic fallacy" of psychoanalytic thinking. "It is on the rejection of this naturalistic fallacy that my own approach rests," Dr. Alexander emphasizes, "first and foremost, I maintain that events do not, in and of themselves, create collective trauma" (91).

Mental Illness

Many, perhaps most, of the women who come to the domestic violence shelter are "multi-problem" cases – meaning that they may have legal, medical, mental, or other issues in addition to the domestic violence. This causes trauma from a number of areas. As I immersed myself in the context of the shelter and community, I soon learned that women who face only the single problem of IPV are less likely to come to the shelter in the first place because they are more likely to have other resources on which to rely. This, of course, raises the question of mental illness on the narrative analysis (I have already discussed medical illness with sociologists such as Kathy Charmaz and Arthur W. Frank). The college professor that is interested in this topic should be warned that mental illness is extremely complicated. Let us consider schizophrenia as an example.

With regard to religious identity of the schizophrenic, psychiatrist E. Fuller Torrey writes:

> People with schizophrenia, like other people, have a need to relate to a god or philosophical worldview that allows them to place themselves and their lives within a larger context. For individuals with schizophrenia this can be particularly problematical for many reasons. For one thing, the onset of the disease often occurs during the same period of life, when religious and philosophical beliefs are in great flux, thus making resolution extremely difficult. Another complicating factor is that many persons with this disease undergo intense heightened awareness or "peak experiences"… during the early stages of their illness and conclude that they have been specially chosen by God. When auditory hallucinations are experienced these usually reinforce such a belief. Still another impediment to resolution of religious concerns is the person's inability to think metaphorically and in symbols, which most formal and religious belief systems require. It is therefore not surprising that religious concerns continue to be important for many persons with the disease throughout the course of their illness. One recent study, in fact, reported that 30 percent of individuals with schizophrenia reported "an interest in their religiousness after the onset of illness." Delusions of a religious nature are extremely common, and can be found in almost half of all people with schizophrenia (Torrey 2006, 362-63).

Torrey adds that members of the clergy are as apt to be consulted by individuals with schizophrenia as are mental health professionals. Later in his book, Torrey explains that clergy and churches are crucial in educating the public and are "natural allies" (441).

Dr. Torrey emphasizes that "obsolete theories" about schizophrenia dominated the twentieth century, including "bad mothers," "bad families," and "bad cultures." He concludes,

> The strongest proponents of the bad mothering theory were psychoanalytic followers of Sigmund Freud. Freud himself knew practically nothing about schizophrenia.... Freud's lack of interest in schizophrenia did not dissuade his followers from applying his theories to the disease" (149-150).

According to Torrey, when Freud did confront this disease, he misdiagnosed the client as having "conflict over unconscious homosexuality." In fact, according to Torrey, most psychiatrists today misdiagnose schizophrenia!

The point is, when it comes to mental illness, even the professionals have varying views and make mistakes of interpretation. Therefore, in the dangerous terrain of "self," identity, trauma, and mental illness, does the researcher of narratives throw up her hands in defeat? Arthur W. Frank ends his book, *Letting Stories Breathe: A Socio-Narratology*, with the salient advice that "narrative analysis works within storied lives first to show how people are holding their own, and then to open up a range of stories available to guide their efforts." He declares, "Life is inherently dangerous, that danger including the companionship of stories, but the enrichment of that companionship outweighs the dangers" (Frank 2010, 160).

My Journey

Keeping in mind the value of narratives and the process for analyzing them, I sought to determine the connections between religious identity, violence, and the shelter in the experiences of my sample of IPV survivors. As stated earlier, I immersed myself in the context of the community and the shelter. I studied domestic violence literature and studies in sociology of religion. With regard to religious identity, I had to develop a framework for an area that lacked clear definition. I discovered that this everyday concept in my field of study has never been defined. In other words, what began as a project of applying the concept of religious identity to this particular situation grew into a project of attempting to define the concept as well. By analyzing what others in my field had already written regarding religious identity, I was able to identify numerous components that may comprise one's religious identity. Because religion may be more or less central to one's life and may be expressed in any combination of ways, religious

identity is a complex concept which itself includes multiple themes or components (see Part 2).

With this contextual background well in hand, I concentrated on the stories of my subjects – the women who entrusted me with detailed and personal narratives of their lives. Reading and re-reading the transcripts and the notes, I immersed myself in the complicated and fascinating lives of these remarkable individuals. Slowly, character attributes began to develop, and I was able to understand the plot, emotions, major characters, and developing identity from the perspective of my case study IPV survivors. Without offering moral evaluations, I sought to discover the trends and turning points in the life before me from the perspective of the interviewee. How do these women view the world? What specific values are being reflected in their viewpoints and transmitted to others? How does culture inform their behavior? (Loseke 2012)

I found Ann Swidler's concept of culture as a "tool kit" extremely helpful (Swidler 1986). From Swidler's perspective, the women I interviewed do not just live within a culture, but use elements of their culture to influence their behavior and direct their decision-making. They use "cultural equipment" to make sense of their world (cf. Milkie and Denny 2014). In this view, the women in my study were not passive but rather actively affected by culture. Culture in their lives could be constraining as well as enabling, affecting behavior and choices (cf. Alexander 2003). Each woman developed strategies of action in her life to solve different types of problems.

Understanding identity (including religious identity) means understanding a lifelong process that involves deep affective relationships, considerable time, and must

relate to experiences from one's earliest childhood socialization when identity was first being formed. Participants in my study showed that the shelter could not significantly impact their ideological beliefs (part of their identity) because those criteria were not met. The reasons varied (the stay was too short; they were not fully invested in the shelter program; they were not cut off from previous ties; they did not like the workers and/or other residents), but in each case the result was that the criteria for making this ideological shift did not exist.

Synopsis

Keeping in mind the narrative method and the vast amount of scholarly viewpoints ("contested terrain") that will be brought to bear on my detailed case studies in Part 4, let me briefly present these four remarkable women (Roxanne, Lexie, Shannon, and Ashley) and briefly consider three interlocking themes that arise from their self-narratives. These themes are:

1. Each woman developed a distinct cultural tool kit to cope with each aspect of her life.
2. Each woman developed some form of religious identity as part of her cultural tool kit.
3. Each woman has complex views of the shelter experience and the church.

Roxanne

Thirty-two year old Roxanne is a white working class mother of three daughters, who aspires to a more comfortable and stable life than she has had thus far. As Roxanne's detailed narrative unfolds, she acknowledges that "power" is an important theme in her life and, for much of this life, her quest for power was equated with

toughness. Race, drugs and criminal behavior are all part of the concept of toughness in her complex unfolding narrative.

Roxanne's chosen associates have been African-Americans, drug users, and "thugs" (as she puts it). She realizes that it is inaccurate to equate all of these, but nonetheless maintains that it is the best description of her crowd for most of her life. Prison, rather than her earlier shelter experience was one major turning point in her life, and she has been a Christian for less than a year. She dabbled in religion at various times in her life, but, according to her narrative, it was the prison experience which turned her quest for power to finding her power in God. Roxanne is now in the process of learning a new way of life which she believes will set her on a better course and she has surrounded herself with new friends, including a new boyfriend.

Since childhood, Roxanne's strong attachment figure has been her mother, but her home was unstable. Nevertheless, her mother took her in time and time again during her troubled life. Roxanne's identification with her mother makes her want to be a mother "to the world." The violence she encountered in her domestic relationships was "mutual combat," both physical and psychological in nature (Johnson 2008). She did not find the change she needed in her life at the shelter, because she admits that she was not fully invested in the shelter program. She has specific attitudes and views of both the shelter and the church. In some ways, Roxanne's narrative is like Sisyphus pushing the boulder up the hill pursuing a better life – a boulder that inevitably rolls back down.

Lexie

If Roxanne is Sisyphus trying to push the boulder up the hill, Lexie is a wheel stuck in a rut. A poor, disabled, thirty-seven year old mother, her narrative does not

allow for even temporary progress in her life. She did not have a strong attachment figure early in life and lived a very unstable existence. Lexie's life revolves around the perpetual need to live up to her mother's standards and win her approval, whether from her actual mother or from the "generalized other" of society (Mead 1934; cf. Benjamin 1998). Lexie also learned the reciprocal role of that painful game, imposing these same impossible standards on her husband Don who can never live up to Lexie's expectations. The violence between Don and Lexie was "situational couple violence" (Johnson 2008), where neither party is seeking to coerce or control the other. Rather, their arguments have a tendency to get out of control, resulting in unintended cruelty.

Due to her premature birth and ensuing medical problems, Lexie spent the first year of life in the hospital, cared for mainly by hospital personnel. When she was finally able to go home, she was cared for primarily by her mother who demonstrated little active involvement in her life. Plagued with multiple health problems and no unconditional love, Lexie did not develop healthy images of God, self, or society. Severely overweight, Lexie felt the trauma of her mother telling her she was ashamed of her.

Lexie has been an avid churchgoer during certain periods of her life, yet she believes that it is God's fault that her family struggles financially. Her perception is that people look down on her social class status. This shame extends to the one institution in which Lexie places some degree of faith – the church. As much a Lexie appreciates the things the church has done for her, it hurts her pride to keep asking for more help. She has no real hope for life in this world other than the daily struggle to get by. Most of her self-image revolves around her role as parent. For now, she asks for what she needs, but

what really motivates her and enhances her cultural tool kit is the hope of Heaven and being reunited with the few significant others in her narrative that matter most to her (two children that died). As for the shelter experience, she hated it.

Shannon

Thirty-one year old Shannon is the mother of four boys, but has custody of none. She is a multi-problem client of the domestic violence shelter, nervous and jittery, and describes herself as "quiet and shy." Indeed, her silences patterned the significant meanings and absence of perceivable emotions expressed in the work of Kathy Charmaz (2002). Neglected and abused from an early age in the most heinous ways, her narrative, silences, and context gives one the feeling that Shannon has little idea of what she really thought or even who she was. It was almost as if she had never developed a real "self." Her knowledge of other people was just as scanty, as were her ideas about God (like the other women in the case studies, she preferred to think of the Ultimate as "God" or "Him"). Shannon seemed to be amorphous like clouds or gel, indistinct from her surroundings – perhaps even acquiring the shape of her contextual container.

There have been many "containers" in Shannon's life as she has moved from one home to another, including five stays at domestic violence shelters (four of the five in the shelter I researched). Shannon is content with moving from one man to the next and plans to get a trailer with her latest boyfriend when he gets out of prison. She fits the classical idea of "pure victim," experiencing multiple forms of violence (mostly sexual in nature), never perpetrating the abuse (except for the rare instances of fighting back), and the abuse began in early childhood (Johnson 2008). Apparently, Shannon's mother was a prostitute and did little for her (cooked and babysat some, but in Shannon's words did not

"do anything"). Her dad used drugs (crack cocaine) while her mother tried to scratch up money for food. The five children, including Shannon, were locked in a room every night and allowed back out every day.

Shannon and her siblings were eventually removed from her parents' custody and placed in a series of foster homes. She says that most of the foster families she stayed with were "pretty nice" and one family took her to church. Shannon and her sister Shaina were moved repeatedly to new foster homes in order to try to find a family that would keep them both together. Eventually, Shannon's grandmother took in all five children. It was then that the children attended counseling. Shannon stated that they were able at this time to talk about their memories and work through old problems, putting them in the past.

Though this was a period of healing the old memories, new trauma was also inflicted on Shannon and her siblings. Her grandmother's fiancé, Phil, had a drinking problem and he abused the children when the grandmother was away at work. Phil engaged in full sexual intercourse with nine year old Shannon, which continued "every day until I was like seventeen."

There was little religious influence in Shannon's childhood and she did not acquire much of a cultural tool kit or the ability to use it (Swidler 1986). She did learn to accept mistreatment as a way of life and does wonder why God allowed her to be continually abused and raped (her God-image is ill-defined). She attended Catholic school, but picked up little in the way of religious training. She was a C and D student who "hated" school, and she dropped out at the age of seventeen. She briefly attended a church and used their self-help group to get off drugs, but when she lost her ride to

church, she did not try to find another. She feels that shelters do well in providing for her needs. She has no suggestions for improving the shelter experience. Shannon lacks goals and the desire to improve herself.

Ashley

In many ways, twenty-four year old Ashley is very much like Shannon. She was raped and physically beaten throughout her childhood, leading to deep trust issues and unhealthy adult relationships. She suffers from assorted mental health issues and is often quite childlike. Ashley enjoys playing with dolls and sometimes her speech even sounds childlike. On the other hand, Ashley is quite different from Shannon. She has no children or partner, and she still lives at home with her mother ("unfortunately" as she puts it). She describes herself as a "good person" who is "totally drained" mentally, because of the abuse and illness in her life. Her father is in prison for molesting her as a child. Unlike the other women interviewees, Ashley did not have numerous families. Instead, she had one extremely dysfunctional family.

Outwardly, Ashley appears to be quite religious due to her heavy involvement in activities at a number of churches. Even at the age of six, she had close contact with a ministerial couple in the Salvation Army (the Millers). They put her in touch with a local mental health agency, where she has been in counseling ever since. The Millers were probably the only people Ashley trusted at this young age of her life, and they tried to help her in many ways. According to Ashley's narrative they spent time talking with her, reading the Bible with her, and praying with her. Ashley became very attached to a baby doll the Millers gave her to help her through the pain. She named the doll Hannah and still sleeps with it. When Ashley was ten, the Millers transferred to another charge,

leaving Ashley with the advice to lean on God, to read the Bible, and to "call out to God" in prayer "cuz He's the only one that can help you." During her preteen years, Ashley was continually raped by her two brothers and their best friends.

Ashley did have some positive influences in her life. Five examples would be the ministerial couple, the Millers; her grandfather, who she at times seems to model her concept of God after; her friend Sarah; her mentor, Mama Lisa; and the youth pastor who set about the chain of events that took her to the shelter. She is also quite adept at utilizing the people and programs of many area churches to meet her practical needs. She is proud of her "senior soldier" membership status with the Salvation Army, as well as the mural she painted there. She attends a number of church-related functions at four different churches.

Nevertheless, Ashley has a somewhat bifurcated sense of self and God. On the one hand she does have some capacity to trust. Yet her trust did not stem the abuse she endured. Ashley has the idea of a God who could love her and welcome her but, in contrast, her enduring view is that of a God who looks on impotently, seeing her pain but unable to cross the chasm of her own inability to trust (like her grandfather who died unable to stem the abuse she endured). Lately, Ashley's private religious practice (home Bible study and prayer) has waned as her relationship with God has become more stressed. She sometimes sees God as unable to help. Yet Ashley continues to listen to Christian music and was deeply moved to the point of recommitting her life to Jesus after watching a religious video at the shelter. Her attachment to her doll, her teddy bear, to the meaningful people outside her immediate family, to her church affiliations, and to her interaction with the local mental health agency and the shelter, demonstrate that Ashley

managed to acquire some components of a religious identity and "self" preservation that became part of her cultural tool kit (Swidler 1986). Though she vacillates between trust and distrust, she shows a capacity to want to trust and for her narrative to be believed. Though she has two rather contradictory God representations (that will be analyzed in detail with scholarly support in Part 4), she demonstrates the spiritual imagination to create and struggle with these images. Church is central to her ability to deal with her life.

Conclusion

In the next part, I will present an overview of the micro-level sociological theories about the intersubjective development and maintenance of the religious identity. I will show that perceptions about the Ultimate are developed, maintained, and altered along with perceptions of self and others. This process begins in infancy and continues on through our lives in dialog with the significant persons around us. After presenting these theories, I will briefly discuss a few more aspects of the context of my study to attempt to further the knowledge and background of the college professor who is interested in my study. Finally, I will analyze the narratives of these four women using in detail the variety of scholars who have taken on the complicated aspects of "self," trauma, abuse, domestic violence, cultural tool kit, spiritual imagination, needs, perceptions, and ability to utilize religious/spiritual resources.

It is my hope that understanding the lifelong process of religious identity development will contribute to the dialog about the place of religion and spirituality in the lives of victim-survivors of intimate partner violence.

Part II

A Micro-Level Approach to Religious Identity

2

The Creation of Identity: An Intersubjective Approach

In this chapter, I will present sociological theories about the process of identity formation and change. The Meadian tradition within sociology provides a micro-level approach to the study of identity formation and maintenance. As opposed to macro-level sociological approaches which focus on the cohesion or conflict of roles within a social structure, the micro-level intersubjective approach helps us to understand the process of socialization and how specific individuals within society learn to negotiate a complicated and messy reality in their dealings with social institutions. In other words, I will try to discover what has made specific individuals into the persons they have become and how that has affected the way in which they are able to utilize religious resources.

Some key ideas by founders of this branch of sociological thought are included in this chapter. These theorists recognize identity as something that is constructed in a dialog with one's social surrounding. As identity is being developed, so is the way that the individual understands and relates to the world. This view of self as socially constructed will lay a foundation for understanding the development of religious identity. An understanding of how one develops a religious identity, how one constructs *meaning* about her environment and the things she experiences, will help service providers recognize the unique spiritual needs of individual clients.

I wish to draw the reader's attention to two ideas in particular which are found in the ideas of the following theorists, who are the founders and earliest thinkers of their

particular schools of thought within the broader Meadian tradition: (1) the primacy of society in the development and maintenance of a self, and (2) the importance of play, role-play, and the "game" in establishing a view of self and society. In the following chapters, I will develop these ideas to show that one's religious identity and perceptions are developed and maintained in like fashion and that there is a legitimate space wherein religion/ faith are located.

Sociological Perspectives of Self and Identity: The Meadian Tradition

G. H. Mead, a philosopher at the University of Chicago, was interested in the relationship between self and society. His influence is seen in the work of many sociologists and social psychologists. For Mead and his followers, society or the social environment has priority in the development of the individual's self or identity, rather than society being created by individuals. Identity or self is developed and maintained via a dialectical approach – an ongoing process of being and becoming in dialog with one's significant others.

George Herbert Mead (1863-1931)

Mead, a philosopher, considered himself a Behaviorist in terms of psychology. Yet Mead was not *simply* a Behaviorist; he was a "Social Behaviorist," that is, he believed that the social environment played a major role in the development of the self (Mead 1934). Behaviorism, as traditionally put forth, is about organisms facing a specific stimulus and reacting with a specific response. For Mead, between stimulus and response, humans experience *meaning*, that is, there is a conscious process of *thought* which is part of behavior, and therein lies the question of the origins of the self and of

society. People do not simply respond to a stimulus; rather, they anticipate what responses will be made and therefore adapt what stimuli they offer. This process of adaptation requires conscious thought and being able to take the role of the other person. This further assumes that there is a shared meaning of the stimulus between the persons involved in the action. Through shared meaning and anticipatory role-taking, Mead taught that society already exists *in the self*.

Thus Mead believed that selves are created by society, not vice versa as many supposed, yet once conscious selves exist, they contribute to the ongoing modifications within society. Mead described the social process of creating selves as coming about through a "conversation of gestures" (43). Gestures are stimuli for the response of others, but in order for them to be what Mead called "significant symbols" there must be meaning and intention within the gesture, and such meaning and intention therefore evokes a response within the original actor and allows for adaptation (46). There must exist a "universe of discourse" between the actors so that each will understand the meaning of the gesture (89-90). Language is an important instance of a significant symbol which carries meaning within the universe of discourse (78-79).

According to Mead, selves are developed through taking the role of others. Intelligence, he wrote, is simply a matter of resolving present problems by utilizing "both memory and foresight" (100). In other words, we have learned what to expect from others and use that in shaping our own behavior.

For Mead, selves do not exist at birth, but are learned through social relationships (135). "Consciousness is functional, not substantive;… it belongs to, or is characteristic of, the environment in which we find ourselves" (112). Similarly, Mead wrote, "The self

is not so much a substance as a process in which the conversation of gestures has been internalized within an organic form" (178). That is, one can only become a self, a subject, by first learning to see oneself as an object to oneself (138). Mead (1934) wrote that

> self-consciousness involves the individual's becoming an object to himself by taking the attitudes of other individuals toward himself within an organized setting of social relationships, and… unless the individual had thus become an object to himself he would not be self-conscious or have a self at all. (225)

This ability is acquired in childhood as the child plays by assuming the roles of others, that is, by practicing the stimuli and responses involved in the roles (150). The child first begins by practicing simple roles ("playing"). Mead thought that the religious rituals and pageants of adult "primitive people" were similar in nature to the play of children. In both cases, he believed, the lack of internal organization or control is aided by the introduction of "vague personalities that are about them and which affect them and on which they depend" – whether these are the parents or teachers of the child or the gods or heroes of the "primitive" (152-53). (In an upcoming chapter, we will see how other theorists liken religion to play, and relating to the Ultimate as a skill learned from our practice of relating to significant people.)

After a phase of practicing these simple roles ("playing"), the child begins to construct and internalize a picture of the whole, a gestalt. At this point the child understands the rules by which all players play "the game" (151). At this stage, children show an intense interest in rules, as therein are found the roles which people play in life (152).

It is at this stage that the child develops a sense of how the society as a conglomerate views things; that is, the child develops a sense of the "generalized other" (154). Mead describes the self as a combination of an "I" and a "me," where "me" represents the generalized attitudes of the society and "I" represents the actor choosing how to behave within that environment (173ff). "Social control" is about emphasizing the "me" over the "I" (210). Yet this social control should not be seen as an outside force which crushes the individual, but as constitutive of that very individuality (255). This is similar to an idea picked up on by Berger (below). In other words, what we believe that others expect of us becomes an integral part of who we become – the process of identity formation.

Herbert Blumer (1900-1987)

Upon the death of Mead, it was Herbert Blumer who picked up his mantle, continuing to teach courses at the University of Chicago and developing his thought into what came to be known as Symbolic Interactionism (Blumer 1969). According to Blumer, Symbolic Interactionism rests upon three premises:

> The first premise is that human beings act toward things on the basis of the meanings that the things have for them…. The second premise is that the meaning of such things is derived from, or arises out of, the social interaction that one has with one's fellows. The third premise is that the meanings are handled in, and modified through, an interpretive process used by the person in dealing with the things he encounters. (2)

Meaning *as it is understood by the social actors themselves* is central to Blumer's methodology. For Blumer, both psychology and sociology have a tendency to "bypass" or "swallow up" meanings by relegating them to derivatives of perception, cognition, intrapsychic organization, social roles, norms, group affiliations, etc. (3). Meaning has

tended to be seen as either external to the individual and inherent in the object (objective) or as internal to the self and relying solely on factors such as perception and intrapsychic processes (subjective). For Blumer, meaning exists between these two poles of subjectivity and objectivity, arising out of interaction with others (4; cf. Winnicott's concept of "transitional space"). Meanings are thus social products. Yet meanings are not static, but require a dynamic process of interpretation (5).

Blumer said that social interaction "is a process that *forms* human conduct" because people take into account the actions or likely future actions of others when deciding their own behavior (8). Non-symbolic interaction (Mead's "conversation of gestures") exists in simply responding to others. Symbolic interaction (Mead's "use of significant symbols") involves interpretation and meaning (8).

Objects are "anything that can be indicated,… pointed to or referred to," such as physical objects like a chair, social objects like a parent, and abstract objects like ideas (10). Blumer says that the "nature of an object… consists of the meaning that it has for the person for whom it is an object" (11). This will be different for different people, but through "mutual indications common objects emerge" – that is, a group of people will hold a common meaning for an object (11). Objects are social creations with no fixed status apart from the reproduction of meaning within a group; therefore, meanings can change over time (11-12). History is important in Blumer's thought. Meanings of objects occur within a context, an environment, a "world." Even when meanings change over time, they do so within their particular "world" (see, e.g., Blumer 1969, 11). Thus, we see that a religious symbol (such as a cross) may have different shades of meaning to different people, but the people of a given group draw their variations of meanings from a

common pool – a collective representation shared by the group (cf. Durkheim). Thus, we will come to see in a later chapter that one's religious heritage is a component of one's religious identity.

The human is an actor, a self who both responds and acts toward others *and toward him- or herself* through role-taking (12-13). Human action must be "constructed" based upon interpretation of meaning (15). Although people form habits and institutions, new situations continue to arise and even recurring situations, if they are to continue as before, must be formed anew by continuing to act in the habitual ways (17-18). Networks do not function automatically, but rather "because people at different points do something, and what they do is a result of how they define the situation in which they are called to act" (19). Each point in the network has its own localized meanings because of its own situated standpoint.

Blumer's theory explains why it is insufficient to understand religion as harmful in terms of its alleged subjugation of women as a class/ role. Women (even abused women) are not all the same and should not be "swallowed up" in such a role as if that was the only significant aspect of their identities (Anderson, Renner and Danis 2012, 1280). Women (including abused women) do not interact with their understandings of faith and religion in identical ways because they attribute the *meaning* of faith and religion differently. Ammerman explained that people have complex identities drawing upon multiple influences (1997). Her version of the "new paradigm," drawing upon Symbolic Interactionism, challenges us to discover religious identity as we look at the interactions between the women in this study as they interact with other people and institutions.

Erving Goffman (1922-1982)

Erving Goffman also received his training from the University of Chicago and is, therefore, closely related to the broader Meadian tradition and Symbolic Interactionism, yet he had a distinctive emphasis apart from these and did not consider himself a "member" of this school of thought.[1] What concerns us here is Goffman's work on how people present their identities in social situations, how they repair these identities when they have "lost face," and how they organize their experiences of social situations. These ideas become significant both in understanding the maintenance of the self in society and in understanding the place of the spiritual in the objective world.

Goffman is sometimes criticized for presenting all of society as a big con-game or hoax, but his point was that *everyone* at some time or in some ways tries to present a definition of self and/ or situation to others which is not the whole truth (if truth at all), and that even the minor, everyday "cons" could give great insight into the normal functioning of society (Adams and Sydie 2002a, 167-68). Like others in the Meadian tradition, Goffman was interested in the self that was *produced by* society, not a self which pre-dated society (169). The link between society and the individual was through ritual – "selves" being the modern sacred objects which must be treated with care, civility, and mutual protection. This idea, not major hoaxes or con-games, is what underlies his studies of social interactions involving "fronts" and "losing face."

Goffman's approach to studying people's presentation of themselves used the metaphor of the theater – the "dramaturgical approach" (Goffman 1959, xi). People, individually or as a "team," are seen here as "performers" or "actors" trying to *define* a

[1] Most listings I have found of Symbolic Interactionists include Goffman.

situation and identity which they desire another person or team (the "audience") to believe and, therefore, be accordingly guided in their actions. This is done through "impression management" (113). The successful scene will lead the audience to impute a particular sort of "self" to the actor, but this self is the product rather than the cause of the scene (252). Goffman divides the action into "front stage" and "back stage," in other words, the place where one performs for one's audience and the place where one can relax from this performance (107, 112). This does not imply that the performance is dishonest; people always ask the audience to believe their performance, but they may or may not believe it themselves (17). The show may actually be critical to sustaining one's image of oneself. In fact, one may be one's own audience as well as performer – two roles compressed into one person (80-81; cf. Kordsmeier and Sharp 2007).

There are exceptions to the division of life into front and back stage. One example Goffman gave was of the religious confession (Goffman 1959, 204). Here one confides one's sins rather publicly to people one would not normally let backstage. This is true to an extent, but it assumes facts not in evidence. I suspect that such confessionals take place most frequently either (a) in the situation where one is in one's own place of worship (or group therapy, etc.) and considers the others present more of a team than an audience and telling the narrative in the form expected by the community, or (b) in a situation of greater or lesser anonymity so that those hearing the confession are also not the audience but what Goffman calls "outsiders." I suspect that truly letting those who are really audience members (as opposed to team members or outsiders) in to one's backstage area is relatively rare. This may, however, be a matter of degree. Our

multiplicity of selves means that front and backstage get shuffled according to roles, level of intimacy, etc.

Our ability to act out a particular role comes from, as Mead said, our reciprocal knowing of others' roles and the game. Thus, when one is given a new role to play, he or she already knows (at least in part) how to play it because it already exists in one's "repertoire" (Goffman 1959, 72-73). An example given of this is in a religious context – a person portraying the correct god or spirit which has possessed him because he already has the knowledge of how that particular being would manifest itself when possessing a person (74). Along the same lines, conversion narratives are often patterned by the community. Goffman referred to such reciprocal knowledge again in his study of stigma, listing as evidence that we know how to play another's part: (a) the phenomenon of "passing," (b) therapeutic role-playing, and (c) humorous (often derogatory) role-playing (Goffman 1963, 133-34).

Impression management is not fool-proof. Impressions can be discredited or discreditable (4). The reality as portrayed is always fragile, so actors and teams must exercise "information control" (Goffman 1959, 141). Goffman distinguished between the actual attributes and categorization of the person as his or her "actual social identity" and the attributes and categorization attributed to the person as the "virtual social identity" (Goffman 1963, 2). The gap between these must be carefully managed or social identity will be spoiled. Gooren uses the concept of the spoiled identity as central to why people convert (2007). According to Gooren, people of all backgrounds and in all phases of life sometimes find that existing problems require new solutions, and sometimes this is a matter of religious change.

According to Goffman, the management of this social identity includes one's use of reference group; that is, one may feel oneself to be less than the dominant group if one accepts their standards, or one may redefine the situation and feel better than them or merely different from them (see, e.g., Goffman 1963, 5-6). Because of the myriad of possible stigmata, over the course of one's life span no one is really immune from having to manage the impression of the self in order to save face (133).

Another important idea of Goffman's is the frame. Frames are the way we exercise selective attention in order to view a particular definition of reality about situations and performers (Goffman 1974, 10-11). Goffman maintained that it was not enough to say, as did W. I. Thomas, "If men define situations as real, they are real in their consequences." All the world is *not* a stage – not even all the theater is. The theater has to have real parking lots and real coat-check rooms; it also has to have real insurance to cover the objects therein (1). Goffman was interested more in William James' "subversive phenomenological twist" on the question of reality: "*Under what circumstances do we think things are real?*" (2). This is his starting point for examining how we understand the multiple realities we experience – the organization of experience through framing.

Frames are not about social organization or social structure, but about how individuals organize their experience of reality (13). The concept of the frame is important to understanding the perception of the actor, as well as to establishing a valid place for religion in human experience (an idea to be covered in a later chapter).

The primary frameworks of a given social group, taken together, represent its cosmology or "framework of frameworks" (27). Many people encounter events which do

not seem to fit into their framework of frameworks, but they are resistant to changing it (28). Frameworks can help us understand different "types" of reality, particularly because the same actions can be "rekeyed" or transformed into a different meaning (43-44).

One of the keys that Goffman discusses is "playing." He lists nine "rules" of the key of playing (41-43).

1. The normal function of the act is not realized.
2. Some acts are exaggerated.
3. "The sequence of activity that serves as a pattern is neither followed faithfully nor completed fully."
4. There is much repetition.
5. All participants are free to choose to start, stop, or refuse to play.
6. "Frequent role-switching occurs during play…."
7. "The play seems to be independent of any external needs of the participants, often continuing longer than would the actual behavior it is patterned after."
8. "(S)olitary playfulness will give way to sociable playfulness when a usable other appears…."
9. The beginning and end of play are marked by signs.

The ideas of play and game are discussed among keys to transforming meaning and thereby shaping reality. There is "a continuum between playfulness… and both sports and games" (57). While the former is open-ended and purely for recreation, the latter are fixed by rules and "institutionalized." In an upcoming chapter, I will show a link between faith and play, and between religion and the game – in other words, examining the idea that faith/ religion is a separate key within one's frame of reality, not belonging to the objective world as such.

Rekeying does not change the primary framework, but rather reinforces it by giving the event a new meaning within that framework (81). Another way to understand

reality is in term of fabrications (83ff). Fabrications exist where one individual or team knows the reality of the situation while others are misled (84). Fabrications may be benign, exploitive, or illusory (87ff).

> (F)or those in on the deception, what is going on *is* a fabrication; for those contained, what is going on is *what* is being fabricated. The rim of the frame is a construction, but only the fabricators see it. (84)

The distinction is important to the present work because many academics and professionals have understood religion in terms of fabrication, while I would argue that it is better understood as a rekeying, using the concepts of play and game. This idea will be discussed further in the next chapter.

Peter L. Berger (1929-)

Peter Berger shared with Goffman the sense of the fragility of meaning in society and personal experience, as well as an interest in how people make sense of multiple realities. Along with Thomas Luckmann (Berger and Luckman 1966), Berger presented the first systematic treatment of Social Constructionism, the view that society is a human product. Their work explored the idea that knowledge itself is socially produced and humans are simultaneously producers and products of society, situated in their social locations.

Human beings experience multiple "realities," yet there is one reality which we experience as most real – "the reality of everyday life" (21). This is referred to as the paramount reality. Other realities are "finite provinces of meaning" or "enclaves" (cf. Goffman's "keys"). Berger believes that, while the sciences are good for studying what we think of as the paramount (or everyday) reality, science cannot enter into questions of

the truth of these finite provinces of meaning, such as religion. Religious experience has a tendency to relativize or invert the usual perception of realities – making the religious experience (a finite province of meaning) into the most real and making the everyday (which had been thought to be most real) seem less important.

This reality of everyday life is shared with others; it is intersubjective (20). It appears to be a world of "givens," a reality *sui generis* (as in Durkheim) which confronts the individual as separate from the self. Its givenness is coercive – individuals must reckon with the society in which they find themselves. Yet for most people most of the time, it is taken for granted as the only possible reality, thus obscuring its coerciveness. Berger contends that most people most of the time *want* to conform to their socially prescribed roles (Berger 1963, 93). This is due to socialization (see below).

Berger describes "three moments" in the dialectical process of how individuals and society create meaning, as individuals become both producers and products of society (Berger 1967, 4). The first two moments (externalization and objectivation) are what allow us to perceive the objective reality of society – i.e., that which carries the coercive givenness of the social situation. Berger defines these first two moments:

> Externalization is the ongoing outpouring of human being into the world, both in the physical and the mental activity of men. Objectivation is the attainment by the products of this activity (again both physical and mental) of a reality that confronts its original producers as a facticity external to and other than themselves. (4)

According to Berger, humans have a biological necessity to create society (Berger 1967, 4-7; Berger and Luckman 1966, 47-52). Other animals possess more instincts which program their actions to a large extent. They live in "closed worlds." Human relationship to the world is "characterized by world-openness" (Berger and Luckman

1966, 47). Though we have biological limitations, our actions are not firmly organized by instincts. Berger and Luckmann refer to human drives as "unspecialized and undirected," forcing us to create our ways of relating to the world and one another (48). While there are many ways of accomplishing the tasks of life, the givenness of the social order limits our choices and relieves us of the problem of reinventing the wheel, as it were, when it comes to satisfying our naturally undirected drives (such as eating and sexual activity).

Berger and Luckmann give the example of two isolated people trying to perform tasks. They observe one another's actions and respond to them with actions of their own. The actions of each, and of the two together, become "habitualized" over time (53). In this example, each of the people involved are externalizing activity. The habitualization and reciprocity involved create an institution (54). Although the original producers of the activity recognize its randomness, the need to transmit the knowledge to the next generation solidifies the actions and adds the dimension of "historicity" (58). At this point the externalizations become objectivations, i.e., they lose the *ad hoc* status and playful quality perceived by the first two individuals and attain their own reality (58).

The institution, or "objectivated reality," must be explained and justified to those who did not initially create it. This is the process of legitimation (61, 92ff). At this point, too, methods of social control are developed to deal with the issues of compliance and deviation (62, 113-16). Further, where actions are institutionalized, specific roles are developed to coordinate the behavior of individuals (65, 72-79). According to Berger and Luckmann, "Institutions are embodied in individual experience by means of roles…. The roles *represent* the institutional order" (74). Legitimation explains and integrates

both the institutional order and makes sense of the individual's life and role(s) within it (92-93).

Externalization, objectivation, and legitimation create and maintain the social order. The objective reality of society is created through the processes of externalization and objectivation. In so doing, institutions and roles are developed. This entire social order must be maintained by legitimation. It can only continue to exist as it is recognized by the individuals in the society. As Berger says, "all world views are the result of conspiracies" (Berger 1963, viii).

As indicated above, the dialectical process between individuals and society contains three ongoing and simultaneous "moments," according to Berger. The first two moments discussed – externalization and objectivation – demonstrate how society is produced by humans and then perceived by them as external to themselves. Berger calls the third moment of the process "internalization." He explains internalization and the three aspects of the dialectical process as follows:

> Internalization is the reappropriation by men of this same reality, transforming it once again from structures of the objective world into structures of the subjective consciousness. It is through externalization that society is a human product. It is through objectivation that society becomes a reality *sui generis*. It is through internalization that man is a product of society. (1967, 4)

Berger and Luckmann explain that individuals are not born members of society, but become so via socialization (Berger and Luckman 1966, 129). They say we are born with a "predisposition toward sociality" (129). The human child internalizes the social world through a process of socialization. Socialization can be divided into two parts – primary and secondary (Berger and Luckman 1966, 130). Primary socialization is the child's initial socialization, happening at a time when he or she is completely dependent

upon the care of others with whom the child did not choose the relationship. The dependent infant learns to identify with the "significant others," using Mead's terminology, who form the child's social circle and provide (or fail to provide) the necessary care. Berger and Luckmann call this a situation which is "highly charged emotionally" (131).

By identifying with others (discovering their "roles and attitudes" and applying them to the self), the child internalizes the social structure, its institutions, and the prescribed role expectations. In short, the child becomes a self at the same time as he or she becomes a member of society. Berger believes that this is why people generally *want* the roles which have been assigned to them. Society is a coercive reality imposed upon the individual, but that coercion is so real and so deeply ingrained in the formation of the individual, that society is not *merely* that which confronts the individual but also that which lives within (1963).

> For most of us the yoke of society seems easy to bear. Why? Certainly not because the power of society is less than we indicated…. Why then do we not suffer more from this power? The sociological answer to this question… [is] because most of the time we ourselves desire just that which society expects of us. We *want* to obey the rules. We *want* the parts that society has assigned to us. And this in turn is possible not because the power of society is less, but because it is much more than we have so far asserted. Society not only determines what we do but also what we are. (93)

Because the child has no choice of significant others, Berger and Luckmann say that his or her "identification with them is quasi-automatic" (Berger and Luckman 1966, 134). This means that the internalized world is *the* world for the child – "the only existent and only conceivable world" (134). It is a world of certainty, deeply entrenched in the consciousness of the person – even though later it may be weakened by

"disenchantments" (135). It is during this period of identification and internalization that the child learns language and categories, as well as "at least the rudiments of the legitimating apparatus; the child learns 'why' the programs are what they are" (135).

The task of *primary* socialization is complete when the child has internalized the roles and rules of society. This is where an "identity" or "self" is initially formed. Wuthnow, et al. (1984, 45) note that Berger follows the school of Symbolic Interactionism closely with regard to identity, except that he emphasizes one point that they do not: the specific, local, social context in which identity formation occurs – thus allowing for differences brought about by race, class, gender, etc. According to Berger, internalization is not merely a cognitive assent, but the participation of the full, conscious being, as a result from the affective connection to and identification with the primary caregivers (Berger 1963, 137). The individual now possesses "a self and a world" and is now a member of society. However, socialization is *never* a completed process.

Secondary socialization involves the "acquisition of role-specific knowledge, the roles being directly or indirectly rooted in the division of labor" (138). It involves the individual in learning many of the same *types* of things (terminology, symbols, legitimations, and so forth) as did primary socialization. However, it does not occur in the affectively charged situation of total dependence and does not necessarily involve identification with the instructor. Rather, it builds upon the primary socialization and does not generally pose a direct threat to it. The social world of the individual remains "the world" even though he or she is being initiated into a specific "sub-world" (say, a career path) within it. Secondary socialization does not occur as effortlessly as does primary socialization, and is frequently more cognitive in nature (144).

As mentioned above, socialization is never complete. Just as the self was created concurrently with the "world," this is also how it is maintained. Threats to the precarious self/ world come from both "marginal situations" and encounters with other worldviews. In either case, the taken-for-grantedness of the world is challenged. Berger says that the social world is maintained only in conversation with others – the "co-conspirators" who help create the "plausibility structures" of one's world and prevent one from meaninglessness or anomy (Berger 1963, viii; Berger 1967, 21-22; Berger and Luckman 1966, 154-55). While the individual remains in conversation with a social base of co-conspirators, a worldview is able to retain a certain degree of believability, which simultaneously provides order and meaning in the life of the individual.

Situations occur, however, where individuals do not remain (or do not exclusively remain) in their original meaning system. Berger believes that in a pluralistic, urban world, this is increasingly the case. "Alternation" is Berger's word for conversion to a different meaning system, but such a system does not have to be religious (Berger 1963, 51). He often uses the examples of Communism and psychoanalysis alongside religious examples. Berger explains that alternation is an experience of a changed consciousness regarding the social order which may happen suddenly or evolve gradually (Berger 1961a, 10). Alternation is a concern for the legitimators of a social order, as it makes the individual question the "taken-for-grantedness" of the social order. Berger says,

> Perhaps the most characteristic feature of this consciousness is an overwhelming sense of the precariousness of social existence. This sense is achieved in most cases by an experience or several experiences revealing society to be something radically different from what had previously been taken for granted…. (10)

Alternation involves a resocialization which may be similar to primary socialization (Berger and Luckman 1966, 157). One surrounds oneself with new co-conspirators who will support one in one's worldview and sometimes cuts off ties with previously significant persons. New terminology and legitimations may be learned, and the situation may involve a high level of emotional attachment to the new significant others. In this way, both a new world and a new identity are formed.

Socialization is never complete and never perfect. However, "successful socialization" occurs when there is "a high degree of symmetry beween objective and subjective reality (as well as identity, of course)" (163).

Berger's thought contains several important contributions to this study. His idea of finite provinces of meaning makes space for religion as a valid human experience. His explanation of the creation and legitimation of institutions applies to religious organizations, while his dialectical approach means that religious communites are continuously re-creating themselves (thus yesterday's patriarchal church may be more female-friendly today as new theologies, rituals, and so forth, evolve). His discussion of alternation and the plausibility structure are important to understanding the relationship of faith and beliefs to a significant community. Since some IPV theorists suggest that the messages of religion and of the domestic violence shelter present incompatible worldviews, and that the shelter might be or even should be a place of conversion ("alternation"), Berger's thought prepares the way to examine whether/ when this may be so (cf. Kroeger and Nason-Clark 2001; Loseke 1992).

Conclusion

The purpose of this study is to explore the dynamic, lifelong process of identity formation in order that we may better understand the ways in which victim-survivors of IPV utilize (or fail to utilize) the tools of religion and spirituality: personal faith, religious ritual and teachings, religious community, etc. Macro-level sociological approaches to the function of religion focus on what religion does with regards to society as a whole – providing the cohesion of society (in the Structural-Functionalist approach) or the legitimation of a hierarchy which subordinates some members to others (in the Conflict Theory approach). This study utilizes the micro-level sociological approach of the Meadian tradition in order to arrive at more nuanced understandings about how particular individuals interact with the religious structure within which they find themselves. The attempt here is to move beyond questions of whether religion is good or bad, and to ask instead questions about when, for whom, and under what circumstances religion might be helpful or harmful to victims of IPV.

The theorists examined in this chapter are the founders and earliest thinkers of their respective schools of thought within the broader Meadian tradition. These Meadian sociologists present for us a view of a self that is formed by society, in relationship to others, and continues to experience a sense of self in relation to others who reaffirm one's self and role-play within the "game" of society and its institutionalized worldview. A child's interactions with his or her early caregivers pave the way to subsequent understandings of self and others. Throughout life as the significant persons in one's "plausibility structure" change, understandings of self and others are also renegotiated.

In the next two chapters, I will draw upon the theories presented here and extensions of them in order to explore what is meant by "religious identity." In Chapter 3, I will explore the "legitimate" space for religion and faith – using Mead's ideas of play and game, Berger's idea of finite provinces of meaning, as well as Goffman's ideas of key, frame, and fabrication. These ideas help to move us beyond the idea that external, objective reality is all that there is and that religion must, therefore, be false. Yet the "spiritual imagination" is not a purely private matter, nor is it the sole component of religious identity – a topic that will be elaborated on in Chapter 4.

3

Beyond True and False:
The Imagi-Nation

In Chapter 2, I presented an overview of some of the founding theorists in the Meadian tradition of sociology. In this chapter, I will build on their ideas about the intersubjective nature of identity formation and about play and the game in order to suggest a "legitimate" space for religion. I will show that the overlapping realms of faith, religion, and spirituality involve interplay between the cultural and the personal. The "image" or "representation" of God will be discussed, which (as we will see) is one of the components of religious identity.

A Neutral Stance

As I begin this chapter, I wish to make it clear that this is not an apologetic for religion in general or for any particular religion. Questions about the nature or reality of the Ultimate are not the purview of the sciences. A particular sociologist (like anyone else) may or may not practice or believe in a particular religion, but while "wearing the hat" of the sociologist must restrict analysis to what can be detected by the sciences – in this case, human religiosity. As Peter Berger said, sociologists must engage in "methodological atheism" in our role as sociologists (Berger 1967). By this he meant that a researcher must "bracket off" his or her own worldview (religious, anti-religious, etc.) and seek to understand the subject(s) of the study "from within."

I would like to encourage the non-religious reader to consider a similarly neutral stance to this subject. Since God is not available as an empirically verifiable object, it follows that it is as much a statement of "faith" whether one says that there is or that there is not a God. What we are concerned with here are the interpersonal dynamics that lead a person to whichever "faith" she claims.

In fact, atheists, humanists, and other non-theists are more like religious believers than one might suppose: they construct identities within a significant group (which often provide everything from a collective narrative to social functions), have deeply held moral beliefs, and sometimes hold a particular text in high regard (J. M. Smith 2013). Atheists and humanists have even requested that the military provide them with chaplains who could counsel them and support them in their values and beliefs, equivalent to the work of theistic chaplains (Severson 2012). In fact, Otto Maduro often reminded his classes that the term "atheist" is always relative to a given culture. For instance, early Christians were called atheists because of their refusal to worship the Roman gods. Then and now, according to Maduro, "atheism" should not be confused with a lack of a sense of what is Ultimate.

Likewise, criticisms regarding the "images" of the Ultimate by organized religion should not necessarily be understood as anti-religious. The idea of relativity applies here as well, since often the critics of religion see themselves more as reformers of a given religious system or as simply reminding the masses (or even themselves) not to mistake religious imagery for the Ultimate itself. This latter idea is found in a famous prayer by the Hindu sage Shankara (788-820 C.E.):

> O Lord, pardon my three sins:
> I have in contemplation clothed in form Thee who are formless!

> I have in praise described Thee who are ineffable!
> And in visiting shrines I have ignored Thine omnipresence.

Likewise, the ancient Greek philosopher Xenophanes (c. 570-478 B.C.E.) criticized the anthropomorphic deities of his day, but did so not out of irreligion but rather in search of a greater Truth (cf. Tillich's concept of "God beyond God"). Xenophanes wrote:

> But mortals suppose that gods are born, wear their own clothes and have a voice and body. (frag. 14)
> Ethiopians say that their gods are snub-nosed and black; Thracians that theirs are blue-eyed and red-haired. (frag. 16)
> But if horses or oxen or lions had hands or could draw with their hands and accomplish such works as men, horses would draw the figures of the gods as similar to horses, and the oxen as similar to oxen, and they would make the bodies of the sort which each of them had. (frag. 15)

Certainly the idea that humans should worship the Ultimate itself rather than our images of it is also prominent in the Decalogue (Ex. 20; Deut. 5). Thus we see that long before Feuerbach (the "father of projection theories of religion") there were concerns *from within religious systems* that we not mistake ideas about the ultimate for the Ultimate itself.

I will discuss below the idea of the "image" of God and its relation to culture and to projections, but this does not mean that we should understand religion as "nothing but" projections. The idea of "nothing but" is itself a statement of faith about something that cannot be proven scientifically. My concern here, then, is neither to prove the existence or nonexistence of God, nor to claim superiority for either position or any institutions associated with either position. My concern is simply to understand the human behavior as people interact with their ideas about the Ultimate.

Faith, Spirituality, and Religion

It may seem odd to some readers that I use the terms "faith," "spirituality," and "religion" as if they refer to the same phenomenon. Certainly one could define them in ways that are distinct from one another, but not without speaking from a position of power which legitimates one for of religiosity/ faith over another. I would not presume to say that these terms are identical, but I would argue that the overlap between them is considerable – particularly when examining religious identity from a micro-level sociological perspective.

Using a commonsense definition, we would probably consider "faith" to be a personal matter of basic trust or belief. However, as I will show below, that basic trust comes from interactions with the social world (or at least, perceptions about those interactions). Further, the word "faith" sometimes also refers to systems of religion (e.g., the Jewish faith, the Christian faith, etc.) – a usage which should alert us to the idea that faith is not solely a personal matter.

A commonsense definition of "spirituality" might also lead us to think in personal matters – in this case more about personal rituals or feelings. Again, this usage could blind us to the idea that spirituality may be practiced in groups or learned in a group situation (such as the family or a church). It also might keep us from recognizing that creating a distinction between spirituality and religion may be a tool of dominance used by those in a privileged social position (official religion versus nonofficial religion, or powerful religions versus new religious movements or less powerful religions).

A commonsense definition of "religion" might make us think of the official institution or the group practices involved within such a system. Yet from ancient times

till today, it has also had a personal component regarding the commitment to a particular lifestyle – from the Medieval monk who, upon taking his vows, "entered religion" to the colloquial expression of today where a convert is referred to as "getting religion" (cf. R.E.M.'s 1991 hit song "Losing My Religion" which is said to come from a Southern expression meaning to lose one's temper or civility – i.e., a personal behavior). And again, to associate religion merely with the religious institution is to privilege official religion over nonofficial religion.

To a certain extent, then, I will use these three terms – faith, spirituality, and religion – according to their commonsense definitions, but I will not attempt to make them too clearly distinct from one another. Indeed, theologian Paul Tillich used the same definition for both faith and religion: "being grasped by an ultimate concern" (Brown 1965, 4). Since a micro-level sociological approach is concerned with the interactions between people and institutions, and since these terms have both social and personal components, it follows that a study on religious identity should concern itself with all three matters and with the overlap between them.

As noted in the previous chapter, Mead (1934) and Berger (1967; cf. Berger and Luckman 1966) were concerned with the socialization of the child. Mead said that the child developed an identity in relation to a social world. Ideas about self and other (and God, as will be shown below) come into being together as the child learns about society and its roles. Berger said that this happens as part of a lifelong dialectical process of relating self to society, beginning with the highly charged emotional situation of infantile dependency during primary socialization. While the young child is learning to relate to

his or her caregivers, he or she is also learning how/ whether to *trust* the imperfect beings who care for him/ her (Fowler 1981; Heller 1986).

This ability to trust (i.e., to have faith) is foundational to one's religious identity. Indeed, Berger sees the foundation of religious faith in the reassurances that a mother gives to her child crying in the night that "everything is in order, everything is all right" because the parent thereby affirms, constructs, and embodies a higher order (Berger 1970, 54-5). Faith is established in the order of the universe, embodied in the parent, before it takes on any specifically religious content (Berger 1970; Fowler 1981; Herman (1992) 1997; Tillich 1957).

Judith Herman explains that faith is an outgrowth of the basic trust learned during infancy in relationship to one's earliest caregivers. As the child grows, this basic trust develops into ideas about "law, justice, …fairness, …the order of the world, the individual's place in the community, and the human place in the natural order" ((1992) 1997, 54). This faith may or may not be religious or spiritual in nature, but refers to a person's basic comfort in and orientation to the world. Thus Herman affirms the relationship between faith and identity, as well as the precariousness of the self (cf. Berger and Goffman). Faith, whether or not religious in content, is that which centers the self in the world (Fowler 1981; Tillich 1957). Thus a foundational prerequisite for religious identity is one's "centering faith."

As the child matures, specifically religious content arises from the centering faith. Eventually, too, the child will be introduced to cultural ideas about the Ultimate and religion. Relating these personal and cultural ideas to one another involves a negotiation process that will be discussed below. Before moving on to that topic, now that I have

discussed the development of faith, I would like to finish this section with a few more words about spirituality and religion.

According to Nancy Ammerman, the idea that spirituality and religion are two different phenomena stems from the outdated notions of secularization theory (2013). In that schema, it was believed that religion became "privatized" in a zero-sum game: the number of people who consider themselves to be religious declines as the number of those who consider themselves to be spiritual increases (259). Sociological method has therefore dictated that subjects are polled using two separate measures – the degree to which they are religious and the degree to which they are spiritual. The two lists would then be cross-tabulated to learn how many people were religious, spiritual, both, or neither. The problem with the zero-sum approach, according to Ammerman, is that it gives no insight into what is meant by spirituality or how most people count themselves as both.

Ammerman's study, therefore, begins by not imposing such definitional boundaries. She analyzed the discourses of people (of varying religious affiliations or none, and with varying levels of attendance) as they discussed what spirituality meant to them. She found that discourses about spirituality centered on four themes: theism (regardless of the deity or deities involved); a sense of transcending the self (as in community service, appreciation of the arts, feeling connected to something greater than the self, etc.); ethical behavior; and belief/ belonging (i.e., affiliation with organized religion and/ or assent to its doctrine).

Although the breakdown by group affiliation showed some distinction between the first two categories (theism and a sense of transcending the self), the camps were *not*

mutually exclusive. Seventy-one percent of subjects used theistic elements in their discourses, whereas 57% referred to some form of transcendence of the self – thus there was overlap between these groups. Further, ethical discourses about spirituality were central across-the-board (272). The major difference arose in the belief/ belonging category – some people seeing it as essential to spirituality, while others seeing it as undermining spirituality (273).

From this data, Ammerman concluded that distinctions between religion and spirituality were *not* descriptive in nature, but rather political. In other words, the terms "spiritual" and "religious" are used to establish a false binary perception in order to establish the "right" and "wrong" way to be spiritual/ ethical/ religious. This brings us back to the idea stated earlier in this section – that there is considerable overlap between faith, spirituality, and religion, and that all of these are important components in understanding religious identity.

Religion and Faith as a Transcendent "Play" Space

The issue of a false binary is also to blame for the failure of some people in the modern world to be able to allow a "legitimate" space for religion/ faith. Sociologist Peter Berger says that religious experience has not disappeared, but it has suffered "*delegitimation*" (1974, 132). He is concerned that the "thin but very influential stratum of intellectuals" (for whom, secure in their ivory towers, secularization theory is a reality) has lost the theoretical apparatus necessary to apprehend religious phenomena (Berger 1974; 1980).

Without such requisite theoretical apparatus, it is easy to understand why some modern people would consider religion to be a fabrication. As explained by Goffman, fabrications may be various types – one of which he called "exploitive" (Goffman 1974, 87ff). Yet Goffman's description of a fabrication assumes that it is a conscious, active deception on the part of some person or group.

> (F)or those in on the deception, what is going on *is* a fabrication; for those contained, what is going on is *what* is being fabricated. The rim of the frame is a construction, but only the fabricators see it. (84)

But if religion is perceived as a fabrication by some in the modern world, who are the fabricators who can see the fabrication for the exploitive deception that it supposedly is? The founders of ancient religions are not available for interview, and surely at least some of the founders of new religious movements would be found to be "true believers" of what they teach. Since questions of ultimacy are not the purview of the sciences, disproving religion's truth-value is as impossible as proving it. Without getting into questions of what is ultimately true, we can discuss the reality that people and groups experience and the institutions, behaviors, and interactions that develop out of that reality – and it is in this sense that Durkheim said that all religions are true ((1912) 1995, 2).

In this section, I will try to restore a bit of the theoretical apparatus necessary to perceive religious or spiritual "reality." I begin with a story about a little girl named Susie whose mother raised her to believe only in logic, facts, and literalness as reality – no stories, no fairy tales, little emotion, indifference to music. The little girl, only seven years old, did not even know how to play with her friends. This is the story of the 1947 movie *Miracle on 34th Street*. In the movie, Susie's mother hires a man named Kris Kringle to play Santa Claus at Macy's for the Christmas season. While the movie does

not definitively answer whether there is truly a Santa Claus or not, it challenges viewers to realize (with the mother and daughter) the value of wonder, imagination, joy, and the spirit of play. In one early scene of the movie, Kris teaches Susie how to use her imagination (Seaton 1947):

> Kris: What sort of games do you play with the other children in the apartment building?
>
> Susie: I don't play much with them. They play silly games.
>
> Kris: They do?
>
> Susie: Like today, they were in the basement playing "zoo" and all of them were animals. When I came down, Homer – he was supposed to be the zookeeper – he said, "What kind of animal are you?" And I said, "I am not an animal. I'm a girl." And he said, "Only animals allowed here. Goodbye!" So I came upstairs.
>
> Kris: Why didn't you tell him you were a lion or a bear?
>
> Susie: Because I'm not a bear or a lion.
>
> Kris: (Laughs.) But the other children were only children and they were pretending to be animals.
>
> Susie: But that's what makes the game so silly.
>
> Kris: Oh, I don't think so. It sounds like a wonderful game to me. Of course, in order to play you've got to have an imagination. Do you know what the imagination is?
>
> Susie: Oh, sure, that's when you see things, but they're not really there.
>
> Kris: Well, that can be caused by other things too. No, to me the imagination is a place all by itself – a separate country. Now, you've heard of the French Nation, the British Nation – well, this is the Imagi-Nation. It's a wonderful place.

The challenge in this section, then, is not to conflate the "other things" that can cause one to see things that are not there (e.g., pathology, delusions) with the healthy spirit of imaginative play that gives rise to numerous cultural experiences (Berger 1963;

Berger and Luckman 1966; Goffman 1974; Neale 1969; Pruyser 1983; Ulanov 2001; Winnicott (1971) 2005). In fact, it is common within sociology to recognize that different social situations call upon different "rules" for playing the particular "game" of each setting. Pierre Bourdieu touches on this idea with his concept of "fields" (i.e., the various fields upon which assorted social games are played – each having its own type), but the idea of *play* and culture comes more from micro-level approaches to sociology outlined in Chapter 2.

In their book *The Social Construction of Reality* (1966), Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann describe the nature of the different realities we all experience. There is the "reality of everyday life," but there are also "enclaves" or "finite provinces of meaning" with their own rules and realities. Berger and Luckmann see a continuity between the reality experienced by children at play and the reality experienced by adults in various cultural activities.

> Compared to the reality of everyday life, other realities appear as finite provinces of meaning, enclaves within the paramount reality marked by circumscribed meanings and modes of experience. The paramount reality envelops them on all sides, as it were, and consciousness always returns to the paramount reality as from an excursion. This is evident from… the reality of dreams or that of theoretical thought. Similar "commutations" take place between the world of everyday life and the world of play, both the playing of children, even more sharply, of adults. The theater provides an excellent illustration of such playing on the part of adults. The transition between realities is marked by the rising and falling of the curtain. As the curtain rises, the spectator is "transported to another world," with its own meanings and an order that may or may not have much to do with the order of everyday life. As the curtain falls, the spectator "returns to reality," that is, to the paramount reality of everyday life by comparison with which the reality presented on the stage now appears tenuous and ephemeral, however vivid the presentation may have been a few moments previously. Aesthetic and religious experience is rich in producing transitions of this kind, inasmuch as art and religion are endemic producers of finite provinces of meaning. (25)

Berger and Luckmann go on to explain that it is a characteristic of finite provinces of meaning that people turn their attention away from the paramount reality in order to enter the enclave within which the finite reality *is* real (26). Finite provinces of meaning are characterized by their own sense of time, space, and order. What is experienced there is not easily translated into the linguistic terms available to us within the reality of everyday life.

> The theoretical physicist tells us that his concept of space cannot be conveyed linguistically, just as the artist does with regard to the meaning of his creations and the mystic with regard to his encounters with the divine. Yet all these – dreamer, physicist, artist, and mystic – *also* live in the reality of everyday life. Indeed, one of their important problems is to interpret the coexistence of this reality with the reality enclaves into which they have ventured. (26)

While one is absorbed within a reality enclave (whether child's play or adult's cultural play), the ordinary experience of time, space, and rules of order are suspended (Berger 1970; cf. Campbell and Moyers 1988; Winnicott (1971) 2005). Berger says:

> (P)lay sets up a separate universe of discourse with its own rules, which suspends, "for the duration," the rules and general assumptions of the "serious" world. One of the most important assumptions thus suspended is the time structure of ordinary social life. When one is playing, one is on a different time, no longer measured by the standard units of the larger society, but rather by the peculiar ones of the game in question. In the "serious" world it may be 11 A.M., on such and such a day, month, and year. But in the universe in which one is playing it may be the third round, the fourth act, the *allegro* movement, or the second kiss. In playing, one steps out of one time into another. (1970, 58)

In fact, it is from this suspension of ordinary time that Berger sees the human spirit as being able to experience "eternity." When play is joyful (which is its intention, according to Berger) one becomes *lost* in the play – lost to the sense of time outside of the realm of play (Berger 1970, 58; cf. Winnicott (1971) 2005, 240-41). This is a transcendence of self, as described in the section above on spirituality. Like faith, this

playful imagination may or may not have religious contents, yet a centering faith and a spiritual imagination are the pre-religious foundations upon which a religious identity *may* be built (cf. Berger 2004, 2). Indeed, Berger describes a conversation with an avowed atheist who admitted that his only doubt about his faith-stance arose when he listened to Beethoven's Ninth Symphony (2). Interestingly, the oft-repeated lyric of this choral symphony is translated "Joy, beautiful spark of the gods"!

Part of the importance of play to religious identity is found in the acquisition of roles – i.e., role-play. Berger explains the link between play and identity according to Mead's ideas about learning role reciprocity (Berger 1963):

> Probably the most penetrating theoretical account of this [socialization] process is the one given by Mead, in which the genesis of the self is interpreted as being one and the same event as the discovery of society. The child finds out who he is as he learns what society is. He learns to play roles properly belonging to him by learning, as Mead puts it, "to take the role of the other" – which, incidentally, is the crucial sociopsychological function of play, in which children masquerade with a variety of social roles and in doing so discover the significance of those being assigned to them. (99)

By learning reciprocal roles through play, children develop the repertoire of roles needed to function in society – both the roles they will play and the roles they can expect others to play in their interactions (Goffman 1959). As Mead explained, there is a movement from free play to imitation to games requiring reciprocal knowledge of roles and rules (Mead 1934). Thus, children will play "house," "store," "school," "cops and robbers," and so forth in order understand the particular social games they will be expected to understand as they grow – in other words, acquiring identity within society. Similar to Berger's finite provinces of meaning, Goffman understood the concepts of "play" and "game" as "keys" to understanding the nature of the reality of a situation

(Goffman 1974). Goffman wrote that there is "a continuum between playfulness… and both sports and games" (57). While the former is open-ended and purely for recreation, the latter are fixed by rules and "institutionalized." Thus when later the free play of the spiritual imagination mingles with organized religion (as will be discussed below), it acquires the rules, roles, props, narratives, and so forth involved in the religious "game."

But the acquisition of identity within society via role-play is not the only reason that play is important to religious identity. Children learn the roles and rules needed for different "fields" of social interaction via play, but it is the very *capacity to play* that is foundational for understanding the cultural world of adults. In other words, a child may learn the mechanics of the cultural world of art, music, or religion (the roles of the specialists, the use of the tools, the history and narratives of the field), but the appreciation, creativity, and insight into these fields requires the ability to imagine, to see beyond the literal, to actually enter the finite province of meaning. Thus it is the capacity to play, to imagine, that bridges the basic trust (what I have called a "centering faith") learned by the infant with the cultural pursuits of adults (Winnicott (1971) 2005).

According to D. W. Winnicott, the capacity for play and imagination begins with the child's ability to symbolize the caregiver via a "transitional object." As the growing child attempts to replace dependence on the caregiver with greater self-reliance, he or she creates some means of comfort which is simultaneously internal and external: the transitional object (see his 1951 "Transitional Objects and Transitional Phenomena in Winnicott 1958, 229-42). The transitional object is an external object (like a blanket or teddy bear) which is endowed with special meaning from the child and is the foundation of creativity. Thus it exists in an intermediate area (neither purely external nor purely

internal to the child), to which we are all complicit in that we never ask the child whether the object belongs to internal or external reality (239-40). It is important in that it is a *symbol* for the comforting caregiver. According to Winnicott,

> Its not being the breast (or the mother) is as important as the fact that it stands for the breast (or the mother). When symbolism is employed the infant is already distinguishing between fantasy and fact, between inner objects and external objects, between primary creativity and perception. (233)

Winnicott referred to this ability to symbolize as "illusion," but not in a pejorative sense. He believed that the role of this illusion is important in the infant's early reality-testing, but continues to be important in the older child's play as well as in the adult's cultural activities such as art and religion (230-33). For instance, Winnicott says that for the Catholic the wafer in the Eucharist *is* the body of Christ, while for the Protestant it is a *reminder*. Nevertheless, for both, it is a *symbol* (see his 1951 "Transitional Objects and Transitional Phenomena" in Winnicott 1958, 234; cf. Winnicott [1971] 2005, xv).

The child's interest in the object simply widens with age so that the internal objects which animate external reality become spread out over all of culture (Winnicott 1958, 232). Just as Berger said that the task of socialization is never complete and that the conversation between individual and society must continue in order for the person to exist within a plausibility structure, Winnicott's 1951 "Transitional Objects and Transitional Phenomena" (in Winnicott 1958) states,

> It is assumed here that the task of reality-acceptance is never completed, that no human being is free from the strain of relating inner and outer reality, and that relief from the strain is provided by an intermediate area of experience which is not challenged (arts, religion, etc.)…. This intermediate area is in direct continuity with the play area of the small child who is 'lost' in play. (240-41)

The lostness in play creates a transitional space for creativity which is akin to Berger's finite province of meaning. Winnicott summarizes the nature of play by explaining that it is experienced in concentration and preoccupation, a "near-withdrawal state," is neither strictly inner or outer, uses external objects in the service of inner reality, and is based upon trust encountered in the potential space wherein the baby is dependent and the mother is adaptive (Winnicott (1971) 2005, 69). He considers the nature of play precarious because it exists between the internal and external worlds (70; cf. Berger's "precarious" nature of the socially constructed world).

Winnicott ([1971] 2005, 133) saw "'cultural experience' as an extension of the idea of transitional phenomena and of play…." By culture, he meant an "inherited tradition" of a "common pool" to which people contribute and from which they draw "*if we have somewhere to put what we find*" (133, italics in original). By this latter statement he meant that there must be some way of "recording" cultural information so that it can be transmitted to subsequent generations. For Winnicott, originality, inventiveness, and creativity exist only in connection with a cultural tradition (134). This is the potential space (135) and is akin to the interaction with society described by Berger and by Blumer.

But how does this relate to faith and religion? This point begins with a development of Winnicott's idea of the transitional sphere. Paul Pruyser has argued for amending the literalistic view of "two worlds" (inner and outer, autistic and realistic, as expressed by Freud) into three (1983). The middle ground between the realistic world of sensory data and the purely private world is the "illusionistic world" (cf. Ulanov 2001). It is in this middle ground that we may suppose the multiple realities recognized by

sociologists exist (e.g., Bourdieu's fields, Blumer's keys, or Berger's finite provinces of meaning). Pruyser provides the following chart to illustrate the three worlds (1983, 64):

Autistic World	**Illusionistic World**	**Realistic World**
Untutored fantasy	Tutored fantasy	Sense perception
Omnipotent thinking	Adventurous thinking	Reality testing
Utter whimsicality	Orderly imagination	Hard undeniable facts
Free associations	Inspired connections	Logical connections
Ineffable images	Verbalizable images	Look-and-see referents
Hallucinatory entities or events	Imaginative entities or events	Actual entities or events
Private needs	Cultural needs	Factual needs
Symptoms	Symbols	Signs, indices
Dreaming	Playing	Working
Sterility	Creativeness	Resourcefulness
Internal object (imago)	Transcendent objects prefigured by the child's transitional object	External objects

Pruyser's argument is that not only is there a third world between the realistic and the autistic ones, but that it is much larger than one would suspect. His use of "illusion" lacks any pejorative connotation, and instead traces back both etymologically and psychologically to the experience of play. This same lack of the pejorative usage is also found in Rizzuto (1979) and Neale (1969) – cf. Bourdieu's concept of *illusio*. All of them discuss the positive value of "illusion" in opposition to Freud's position (e.g., Neale 1969, 52). Indeed, Neale's aim is to show that play is not merely a diversion from work – in fact, that it should not be defined in terms of work at all, but is an important human activity in its own right (21).

Expanding upon Winnicott's idea for the safe space of play developing between persons, Pruyser attempts to show how playfulness and "tutored fantasy" exist in the cultural world of the arts, religion, and even science. His point is that there is some kind

of truth besides the physical world of sensory data, and society/ culture provides us with the maps to these truths in the play space-time allowed for each cultural game. In other words, this third world allows for a legitimate space for the personal experience of faith and its institutionalization in the cultural game of religion.

It is particularly interesting that Pruyser includes science among the cultural games, explaining that the accepted pursuit of knowledge follows particular rules and uses particular jargon just as do other cultural games. By including science, he opens the way to understanding this middle ground as larger still, including not only the "soft" cultural games such as the arts, but also the "hard" (i.e., "serious") cultural games such as law and war. If believers of the two worlds can dismiss religion by pointing to its lack of sensory data ("What does God look like?"), believers of the three worlds can counter "What does justice look like? What does knowledge look like? What does love look like? What does victory look like?" One then comes face-to-face with the proposition that such hard-to-define intangibles are nonetheless worthwhile pursuits, thus potentially legitimating the religious game. It also allows for the idea that there is legitimacy in all the "games" of culture – thereby explaining why many people have no difficulty believing in both religion and science. Likewise, Goffman would allow that many cultural games can be played as long as they all fit into the overarching framework of frameworks (cf. Meissner 1984).

Thus the "legitimate" space for religion is not found in a literal, binary view of truth versus falseness, but within the creative capacity of the human – a "spiritual imagination" founded upon the basic trust of the infant as he or she grows and learns to create symbols and to play in preparation for the adult stage of roles, culture, identity, and

less extreme dependence on a caregiver. Again, this is not to say that any given religion or religion in general is or is not "true" since these are not questions available to science, but merely to explain the place of and capacity for religion/ faith within the human person.

The Image of God

Religious identity begins with two pre-religious components which may or may not acquire religious contents: a centering faith and an imagination. I have used the phrase "spiritual imagination" already in anticipation of this section, where we will see that the development of an idea of the Ultimate (or God image, or God representation) soon follows these earliest capacities. As I will show below, one's God representation is developed within this creative imagination via projections of perceptions about one's caregivers or wished-for attributes of caregivers. Everyone develops a God representation, but not everyone's idea of God is positive, helpful, or even "usable." As I stated above, atheism is relative to something – that is, there is a particular idea of God that the atheist rejects (and generally some other version of Truth that he/ she accepts). Thus the God image is really the first component of a true "religious identity" (with the centering faith and spiritual imagination as the proto-components or prerequisites for religious identity).

As stated earlier in this chapter, to say that religious images are projections is not the same as saying that religion is "nothing but" a projection. Ann Bedford Ulanov writes of the dismissive spirit of those who will not play the religion game, reducing another's "God-image to 'nothing but…'" or attacking the paradoxical logic of

theological propositions, e.g., a virgin mother or one God in three persons (Ulanov 2001, 15). She says that such an attitude is not in the playful spirit of the transitional space where religion can be valued.

The transitional space, of course, was Winnicott's concept wherein he explained the human capacity for the use of symbols. According to Winnicott's schema, the infant "creates" the mother. "Create" here does not suggest that the actual object does not exist: the child gets hungry and imagines the mother or the breast filling that need. The appearance of the actual mother or breast to satisfy the child's hunger gives the child the sense of omnipotence (which will later be mitigated), but the activity of "creating" through imagination is what allows for symbolism and play. Since the mother (or caregiver) actually does exist, the point is that the subjective side is being emphasized for its own agency – i.e., that knowing comes about by discovery, that we relate to and through the images we create of the other (cf. Rizzuto 1979, 72-73). Ana-Maria Rizzuto says that such creativity belongs to a complex system of relating, memory, and anticipation (74-75), similar to Blumer's emphasis on memory and anticipation in symbolic interaction in human relationships, including with oneself.

Likewise, when we speak of the God image, we cannot say that simply because it is a projection that God does not exist. That remains an open question since God is not a sensory object. Peter Berger explained this possibility (1967):

> (S)ociological theory (and, indeed, any other theory moving within the framework of empirical disciplines) will always view religion *sub specie temporis*, thus of necessity leaving open the question whether and how it might *also* be viewed *sub specie aeternitatis*. Thus sociological theory must, by its own logic, view religion as a human projection, and by the same logic can have nothing to say about the possibility that this projection may refer to something other than the being of its projector. In other words, to say that religion is a human projection does not logically

> preclude the possibility that the projected meanings may have an ultimate status independent of man. Indeed, if a religious view of the world is posited, the anthropological ground of these projections may itself be the reflection of a reality that *includes* both world and man, so that man's ejaculations of meaning into the universe ultimately point to an all-embracing meaning in which he himself is grounded. (180, italics in original; cf. Berger 1970, 45ff.)

Whether or not our projected ideas about God have a counterpart in Ultimate Truth, the projections themselves can be studied for the insight that they provide into human behavior and perception. But how should these be studied? Nancy Ammerman has critiqued the use of quantitative methods for studying religious behavior (Ammerman 1997) and for studying spirituality (Ammerman 2013). In both cases, she discovered that false binaries were being imposed that blind us to the complexity and nuance that micro-level analysis can provide. The same issue appears to hold true regarding the study of God images. While researching this topic I had no trouble locating sources within sociology or other fields that considered God images an important component of religious identity and conducted studies of how these images related to various other social concerns (parenting, politics, etc.), yet virtually every study I found used quantitative methods. In other words, they are simply not designed to evoke meaning and detail in the way that qualitative methods are. Quantitative methods impose the researcher's meaning and force the research subject to choose from possibilities that may not really reflect his or her understanding of the matter.

According to Peter Berger, one of the most severe "deformations" of sociology is what he calls "methodological fetishism" – his term for the "dominance of [quantitative] methods over [meaningful, detailed] content" (Berger 2002, 28).

> In order for data to be analyzed statistically, they must be produced by means of a standardized questionnaire. This means, inevitably, that people

> are asked to reply to a limited number of typically simple questions. Sometimes this works; sometimes it does not. Take the example of the sociology of religion. One can get useful data by asking people how often they have gone to church in the last four weeks (leave aside the fact that, as has been shown, they sometimes lie about this). But then such questionnaires try to cover beliefs as well as behavior, and there the meaning of the replies is much less clear. Even such a seemingly simple question as "Do you believe in God?" will be interpreted by respondents in so many different ways that their replies are hard to analyze, let alone capable of helping a researcher construct something like, say, an index of orthodoxy. This does not mean that the intentions behind these replies could not be clarified; it only means that survey research is not a good way of doing so. (28)

So while there are a number of studies that try to address the issue of the God image held by people, very few provide rich detail. Instead they deal with limited (often binary) choices: Was mother or father more influential in the development of the God image? Is God seen as maternal or paternal (nurturing versus authoritarian)? Is the God image composed more of perceptions about the actual parent or the wished-for parent? Complexity is introduced into these studies by correlating two variables, such as whether one's political viewpoint is best described as *x* or *y* depending on whether one's God image is more *a* or *b*.

Yet even those who perform such complex quantitative studies recognize their limitations. For instance, Paul Froese and Christopher Bader point out the false binary that is imposed when respondents are asked to place their image of God on a continuum between "judge" and "lover" (Froese and Bader 2008, 710). For the person who feels that "God judges *because* he loves," this would be a nonsensical opposition. Likewise, Richard Lawrence found that the God Image Inventory (GII, a complex God image instrument) and the God Image Scale (GIS, a smaller version of the GII) are efficient to use in that they are objective measures that can look for standardized response types

among large numbers of respondents and require little interpretation on the part of the researcher (Lawrence 1997). Yet this efficiency inherently means a loss of richness of data. Lawrence believes that these scales are best used in a preliminary way in order to identify issues that should be followed up on in a more personalized way. The main example he gave was in premarital counseling, where the problematic issues discovered would then be discussed in detail in the counseling sessions (221).

Further, the use of standardized quantitative scales to measure God images inherently imposes the meanings of the researcher into the questions. An example given by Berger regards Japan – a society that is full of religious movements, but this would not be effectively captured by questions asking about a belief in God (Berger 2002). Similarly, Lawrence found that the GII and GIS lacked validity for non-Christians (Lawrence 1997) – something that I would imagine should be obvious from questions like "God doesn't feel very personal to me" used in that instrument (225).

I would contend, therefore, that a micro-level sociological approach to religious identity requires the development of qualitative methods to study subjects' God images – something akin to the projective-type studies done by David Heller (1986) and Ana-Maria Rizzuto (1979). This would be consistent with Symbolic Interactionism's interest in studying the ways in which individuals interact with other individuals and with social institutions. Indeed, the Meadian tradition tells us that ideas of self and society are developed together, and God image studies tell us that the image of God is developed as a part of this same process. For instance, Andrew Greeley wrote:

> (T)he central religious symbol is God. One's picture of God is in fact, a metaphorical narrative of God's relationship with the world and the self as part of that world. (cited in Froese and Bader 2008)

Yet even to denote the Ultimate as "God" is an imposition on the part of the researcher. David Heller made a point of avoiding such bias by asking his research subjects about what mattered most to them (Heller 1986, 13). Therefore, the first step in his protocol was "naming the deity."

> At the outset of our meeting, it was essential to establish a common language with each child. I did not want to impose my terminology, yet some means of common discourse was needed…. I explained that while I was indeed interested in their ideas about the whole world, I wanted them to say what was most important in the world *for them*. (13)

In theological jargon, then, what Heller attempted to do was to identify what Tillich called the "ultimate concern" of each individual person (Brown 1965). Only after that did Heller engage his subjects in a number of projective techniques (drawings, stories, etc.) to uncover the rich imagery of their God representations.

So what does the Ultimate "look like"? This, of course, depends on the way in which one's social world has impacted one's self-identity. As Symbolic Interactionism has shown, all meaning is developed and maintained within a context. Ana-Maria Rizzuto believes that projection theorists of religion were correct in stating that one's idea of God (by whatever name) is created from one's early experiences with one's caregivers, but she adds that the actual idea of God is much more complex and dynamic than projection theorists had supposed (1979).

First of all, according to Rizzuto, we are dealing with *perceptions* of the parents or caregivers by the child – not the *actual* parents. Second, because of the effect of splitting, these perceptions can include wished-for traits as well as actual or felt ones. Heller notes that the God representation may also include traits that we fear we might *potentially* experience from caregivers (1986). Third, the selection of persons who can

go into the creation of the God representation goes beyond just the father or just the mother; it may include grandparents, siblings, or any other persons who were significant to the young child (Rizzuto 1979; cf. Heller 1986). So a complex of persons, perceptions, wishes, fears, and projections are already at work in the young child's mind, at play in the transitional space, to create a personal image of God long before the completion of what psychologists call the Oedipal stage, which Rizzuto believes somewhat solidifies the core of the God image in the child's mind (Rizzuto 1979, 44).

Around this time, if not sooner, a child is introduced to cultural God images as found in the institutionalized religion of his or her parents, or if they are not religious, of the greater culture. The personal God image already in place, Rizzuto says that all children arrive at the "house of God" with their "pet" God under their arms (8). The pet God was developed within the smaller play space of the family; this new God of institutionalized religion moves the child from the more-or-less free play of spirituality to the formal cultural game of religion. This latter God is a result of secondary process thinking and may be more or less compatible with the personal God image (Meissner 1984, 17; Rizzuto 1979, 47).

David Heller's study showed that children sometimes struggle with trying to reconcile the God of their spontaneous spiritual imagination with the God of organized religion or even the God representations derived from other social institutions (1986, 131ff). Yet Heller also found that many cultural ideas (not just from religious socialization, but also from gender and other socialization processes) also found their way into the God images of his subjects – reaffirming what Berger said about the power of socialization being even greater than we often realize (1963).

As a demonstration of the effect of religious socialization on the God image, Heller discovered that Jewish children's concept of God involves a strong sense of history, with links to their own ancestors and stories of God's acts in history (Heller 1986, 18ff). Catholic children saw God as intimately involved in family life and in holding the family together (25ff). Hindu children had a great capacity for simultaneously seeing God as both a transcendent, abstract force and as imminent – personified in the spiritual persons known to them (35ff).

Heller discovered that gender socialization also affected the God image, noting that boys were adamant that God had to be depicted by masculine traits, whereas girls' images of God demonstrated surface masculinity (e.g., by the pronouns used, by the "look" of the figure drawn, etc.) but seemed androgynous just under that surface (65ff). Girls' descriptions of God and interactions with God had qualities that seemed to Heller to be both stereotypically masculine and feminine, and girls felt freer to admit that God might be female, both male and female, or neither male nor female (73-74). Boys, regardless of age or religious background, showed tremendous anxiety about and resistance to the possibility of imagining God as anything other than male (65). One wonders if he would discover these same results so many years later.

Rizzuto is adamant that the phenomenon of non-belief is not a matter of maturity, but results from the dynamics between these two ideas of God (the spontaneous and the institutional) and what each would mean to the psychological health of the particular person in question (1979, 47). According to Rizzuto, the personal representation of God and the societal one (of "official" religion) may be integrated at odds with one another. However, "once formed, that complex representation cannot be made to disappear; it can

only be repressed, transformed, or used" (90). Rizzuto's study revealed four types of relating to one's God representation:

> 1. "people having a God whose existence they do not question and with whom they have a significant relation" (93)
>
> 2. "those wondering whether or not to believe in a God they are not sure exists" (109)
>
> 3. "those who are amazed, angered, or quietly surprised to see others deeply invested in a God who does not interest them" (130)
>
> 4. "those who struggle with a demanding, harsh God they would like to get rid of if they were not convinced of his existence and power" (149)

No one, Rizzuto says, fails to develop a representation of God; the question is whether or not it is a usable image. This may help account for the large numbers of people today who consider themselves to be "spiritual but not religious." Although Ammerman's (2013) study found that "spiritual" and "religious" often go together, Rizzuto's observation may help to explain those instances when they do not – i.e., that such persons have formed some sort of usable God image for their own spirituality, but have failed to find its counterpart within institutionally-defined images.

McDargh (1983) agrees that this personal God representation exists within everyone, regardless of our relationship with it. He says,

> (R)egardless of our formal religious or irreligious designation we carry on a lively relationship with our own very private, very personal images of God. It is a relationship that might be sporadic, not always conscious or consistent, and often more deeply ambivalent than our self-professed creeds would give evidence of…. (5)

McDargh lists four factors involved in the origin and development of God representations which can affect whether the image is usable:

> (1) the vicissitudes of the early relationship with the adults which potentially offered the psychic material available for the representation of

> God; (2) the circumstances of religious instruction and the child's first introduction to the notion of God; (3) the images of God available in the family and in the religious or popular culture at large; and (4) whether the processive elaboration, reworking, and revisioning of an individual's object representation of God has evolved simultaneously with the individual's self-representation in such a way as to make it accessible for the integrative process of faith. Yet even where the object representation of God may not be available for the activity of faith, either because it is too terrifying, too unreliable, loaded with too ambivalent affect, or because it has remained an unevolved and underdeveloped childhood companion that cannot be related to under most circumstances of adult life, even then an examination of that representation discloses much of what is central to the individual's struggle of faith. The God which an individual cannot believe in, trust in, rely upon, may often be as revealing of the vicissitudes of faith as that God which can be consciously affirmed. (116)

Rizzuto states that her major difference with Freud is with his static view of the God image as a "representational fossil" (1979, 46). Although she believes that the core image is formed in early childhood (i.e., during primary socialization), those for whom this image is a usable transitional object will continue to modify it. Rizzuto believes that "the God representation is more than the cornerstone upon which it has been built" and that "if one is willing to accept that a mature relation with one's parents is possible, then a mature relation with the God representation should also be possible" (46). In other words, for those who maintain a relationship to their idea of God, this idea will be revised periodically, just as are our ideas of other intangibles like love, justice, and knowledge. Thus, due to cognitive abilities and personal struggles, the age of a person will have an influence on his or her image of God (Fowler 1981; Heller 1986; Rizzuto 1979).

Finally, there is a relationship between one's image of God and one's image of self. Just as the theorists in Chapter 2 explained that one's view of self comes into being through interaction with society (initially the significant caregivers), this early interaction is also the foundation for the God image. Heller determined that children's own

personality traits and needs were reflected in their God images (Heller 1986). For instance, a lonely only child might see God as a "congenial spirit" who serves as an imaginary playmate. A child whose family is emotionally distant may see God as distant and unknowable. A child whose father (or parents) is powerful, but not cruel or dictatorial, may see God like a good and powerful king and use that image to draw out his or her own capacity for benevolent power and agency – demonstrating that the child may use the God image as inspiration of traits to aspire to. Lawrence also says that images of God and self are related, precisely because the God image is a transitional object – formed out of the relationship between self and caregivers (Lawrence 1997).

Conclusion

This chapter built upon the theorists of the Meadian tradition (presented in Chapter 2) in order to establish some fundamental ideas about religious identity. I showed that there is a large overlap between the ideas of faith, religion, and spirituality since these are all developed and maintained through dialog between self and society. I then discussed the prerequisites to the development of a religious identity: a centering faith and a spiritual imagination (the capacity to play and to create). I suggested that since we cannot empirically evaluate the contents of religious belief, we should focus on the capacities and behaviors associated with faith and creative imagination. In this regard, we should recognize that there are numerous cultural "games" (including art, science, and religion), each with its own "finite province of meaning."

Building upon the foundation of a centering faith and a spiritual imagination, I explained that a child develops an idea of the Ultimate, or God image – a transitional

object that is neither purely internal nor external. The core image is developed via complex projections (perceptions, fears, wishes, aspirations, etc.) of significant early relationships. Thus we see that God, self, and society are discovered together within the individual as part of the primary socialization process. The spontaneous God image of the child will eventually meet the God of institutionalized religion. If these two images are compatible, the free play of the imagination may then develop into a capacity to play the religious "game" of the culture – including all of its rules and roles. The God image (usable, unusable, repressed, doubted, hated, etc.) thus becomes the first real component of religious identity – a cornerstone upon which other components may be built. In the next chapter, I will discuss other components of a religious identity and how these components change or develop throughout life.

4

Religious Identity

In Chapters 2 and 3, I have been working toward an explanation of what religious identity is. I showed that ideas about God, self, and society arise and develop within a relational context of one's significant caregivers. Within those early relationships, the infant begins to trust and to imagine – i.e., to develop the centering faith and spiritual imagination that eventually allows for the development of an idea about the Ultimate. The child begins to develop an image of what matters most – referred to in scholarship as the God image or God representation (regardless of whether or not the image is theistic, masculine, etc.). At some point, the child is exposed to formal images of God from culture and/ or from institutionalized religion. When the "spontaneous" or "pet" God of the child's free spiritual imagination meets the formal God of the culture's "religious game," the child must somehow manage the distinction (e.g., through adaptation or repression). As the individual matures, he or she continues the ongoing reflexive process of understanding God, self, and society. In this chapter, I will discuss the components of religious identity that may develop via this ongoing dialog and how religious identity may change for an individual.

Identities and Salience

The study of identity is complex and can be approached from multiple levels, such as personal, cultural, organizational, and institutional (Ammerman 1994;

Ammerman 1997; Ammerman 2003; Loseke 2007). My focus in this work is on *personal* religious identity. In the upcoming case studies, the women will explain some of their contextual history so that we may come to understand how they developed their religious identities with their particular contexts.

In sociological literature, identity may be seen as a synonym for the self or an aspect of the self, particularly within the Symbolic Interactionist/ Meadian tradition (Greil and Davidman 2007, 549). Peter Callero distinguishes between the terms "self" and "identity" by referring to the self as the process and identity as the product of that process (Callero 2003). Such a distinction, however, may imperil the notion of the *ongoing reflexivity* involved in the production of an identity.

In order to avoid a concept of identity as being predetermined by society, it is important to recall that we interact within social structures and via patterned behaviors, but we also show agency in doing so (Ammerman 2003; Callero 2003; Giddens 1991; Greil and Davidman 2007; Holstein and Gubrium 2000). Both the individual and the institutions are changed or reestablished due to this ongoing dynamic. Discussions about agency and structure trace back to Mead's concept of the "I" and the "me" (Ammerman 2003; Callero 2003; Greil and Davidman 2007). Societal structures, including varying degrees of power and disempowerment, are real, yet culture also provides us with the "tool kit" to enact strategies and behaviors within our embedded social locations (Swidler 1986; cf. Ammerman 2003). The self or identity, then, which came into being along with a perception of society uses the tools provided by the society to change or confirm both self and society. Among these cultural tools used in identity-building are the components of religious identity.

According to Arthur Greil and Lynn Davidman, "the bulk of scholarly writing on religion and identity relies… on the symbolic interactionist conception of identity" (Greil and Davidman 2007, 551). They explicitly include Berger, Goffman, and Mead in their framing of this discussion – i.e., the Meadian tradition in general, not merely Blumer's Symbolic Interactionism (549). Greil and Davidman explain that

> the symbolic interactionist tradition is… concerned with accounting for the content of identity and with describing the identity construction process. Fundamental to the symbolic interactionist concept of the self are the twin notions of the social nature of the self and the reflexivity of the self. (551)

This reflexive nature of identity (or self) is key to understanding that identity is not a fixed *thing* that one can possess (Craib 1998; cf. Callero 2003). This raises an issue for some theorists as to whether identity is something that is relatively stable or constantly in flux, yet it turns out that this is also a false binary (Greil and Davidman 2007). As Ian Craib (1998) puts it:

> However many times I rewrite and erase my identities, it is I who does it, not you or my grandmother or anybody else. I am – at least – an identity with several identities. (7)

This idea of oneness and manyness is part of the Meadian tradition as discussed in Chapter 2 with the ideas of play, role-play, finite provinces of meaning, and so forth. The idea that we have multiple identities was borrowed from William James, who wrote, "a man has as many social selves as there are individuals who recognize him and carry an image of him in their minds" (cited in Greil and Davidman 2007). Sociologists have studied the multiplicity of identities both in terms of the multiple *roles* that we play (student, daughter, wife, etc.) and the multiple *categories* that we belong to (woman, Baptist, African American, etc.). Ammerman points out that "all identities are

'intersectional,' that we are always many things at once" (Ammerman 2003, 212). Adding to this the idea that our identities can change over time (say by becoming a parent or converting to a different religious group), and the multiplicity of identities can become exceedingly complex.

Sociologists explain that individuals construct a core sense of identity by internally structuring our multiple identities. Sheldon Stryker explains that "identity salience" involves the rank in hierarchy of one part of self over another (Stryker 1980, 60-61). More recently the trend has been to view this not so much as a hierarchical ranking, but as the degree to which the spheres of our various identities (roles and categories) overlap in our internal structuring and external performance.

With regard to identity salience and religion, Greil and Davidman referred to a study where it was determined that religion was more salient for clergy than for laity, thus relating role to salience (Greil and Davidman 2007). They did not, however, explain whether the chicken or egg came first – i.e., was religion more important to clergy because of their investment in it, or was their investment in it the reason that it was more important? Here I think it is important to bear in mind the *ongoing reflexive* nature of identity building and maintenance as opposed to assuming a direction for causation or correlation.

An example of this ongoing reflexive view of religious identity is found in Nancy Ammerman's study of Christian fundamentalists, where she found that committed members were more likely to have the church and its activities as a major part of their lives – regular attendance, jobs and duties within the church and in the community on behalf of the church, and close friendships within the church (Ammerman 1987). These

close relationships within the church supported the worldview and practices of each friend in the relationship – e.g., they prayed together, they shared common assumptions and meanings about life and events, they witnessed to others together, etc. Ammerman found that the moderately committed members were "less likely to have friends in the church, are less likely to have church jobs, and therefore come less often" (109-10). This is not just a one-directional movement, however; it is the overlap in the different parts of their lives that strengthens and reconfirms the identity of the committed church member – by doing they become, and by becoming they do.

When there is a great deal of overlap of identity spheres or where one identity directs and informs the other identities, there is said to be a "master identity" (also known as "master status"). According to the old notion of secularization theory, religion was supposed to either become increasingly privatized and individualized (as in what Bellah called "Sheilaism" – where a person invents his or her own private religion) or else it was to become so fully differentiated from other social structures as to become just one identity divorced from others (Ammerman 1987, 1-3). Yet the idea that religion can be a master identity helps explain why it persists as influential for so many people today (Armato and Marsiglio 2002; Hammond 1988). For instance, Armato and Marsiglio found that the image of a "godly man" as explained by Promise Keepers could become a master identity that informed men's other identities – e.g., husband, worker, etc. (Armato and Marsiglio 2002).

The idea of a master identity is similar to Goffman's framework of frameworks, wherein a person understands various situations within his or her particular frames yet all of these frames are held together by an overarching frame. Thus when discussing

religious identity, it is often the case that one's religious identity may be strongly correlated to other identities – e.g., race or immigrant status.

For instance, numerous studies have shown that immigrants to the United States attend religious services more frequently than they did in their country of origin (see, e.g., Hammond 1988; Warner 1993). Numerous reasons for this trend have been proposed (e.g., seeking ties to the people and traditions of the old country; the act of immigrating as inviting a theological narrative; seeking people who have already experienced immigration whose experience and resources can help the new immigrant fit in; and even the act of attending religious services as itself a way of fitting into American society).

Likewise, race has been correlated to religious identity since the early days of sociology – beginning with the work of W. E. B. Du Bois (Zuckerman 2000). Du Bois was interested in how the particular experience of African Americans shaped a particular type of religious institution to meet the needs of its congregation. Looking at the past and then-present situations of African Americans, Du Bois was able to discern that black churches provided much more than spirituality to their congregations. According to Zuckerman (2000):

> In *The Philadelphia Negro* Du Bois argued that the black church "is, to be sure, a social institution first, and religious afterwards"…. Though Du Bois acknowledged the spiritual aspects of black religious institutions, he stressed their social aspects above all else. (14)

Du Bois and those who followed him in studying religion among African Americans portray an idea of a strong overlap between racial and religious identities. Thus, identity theorists would predict that religion would be a central part of African American identity, perhaps even a master identity. And indeed, studies of the use of religion among IPV survivors have found that faith, religion, and religious communities

are especially important to African American IPV survivors (e.g., Gillum, Sullivan and Bybee 2006; Potter 2007; Watlington and Murphy 2006).

Religious identity, then, may be central to one's identity, it may be one differentiated part of identity divorced from other parts, or it may be relatively private and subjective. The particular experiences of an individual within early significant relationships, the cultural categories within which the individual shapes other identities, and the way in which the personal God image is reconciled (or not) with the cultural one will help to direct how religious identity is experienced for each individual. All of this is part of the ongoing dialectical process which shapes the self along with ideas of God and society.

Locating Religious Identity

What exactly is religious identity? The term is used regularly by sociologists of religion, but there seems to be no definition of the term. It is not to be found in sociological dictionaries and encyclopedias – not even in the *Encyclopedia of Religion and Society*! Even the entries for "identity" in these sources are relatively brief and generally based upon psychologist Erik Erikson's work – despite Greil and Davidman's observation that most sociological work on identity is founded in Symbolic Interactionism. Nancy Ammerman observed that the abundance of literature on the subject fails to define or provide significant theory about what is intended – that it merely proceeds from a standpoint of "we know it when we see it" (Ammerman 2003; cf. Greil and Davidman 2007).

The difficulty in producing a sociological definition of religious identity seems to stem from at least two related problems. First, sociology has not yet established what religion is. Should we define religion substantively or functionally? Is it diffuse in the entire culture or located within a specific institution? Does nonofficial religion (such as home-based religious observances) count equally with official religion? Many sociologists of religion have noted that the very act of defining religion is a tool of domination (Maduro 2002). It has been the province of elites to decide what counts as religion, and sociologists have only recently begun to recognize their complicity in this enterprise. Meredith McGuire (2002) explains:

> Most sociology and historiography has assumed that, at least since the beginning of Christendom, there has been a radical disjunction between official and popular forms of religion. This disjunction was taken for granted largely because, at the time of the early development of sociology, the official religious organizations had successfully achieved politically legitimated cultural dominance throughout Europe and North America. Social scientists merely accepted the official (i.e., Protestant, Catholic, and later, Jewish) groups' definitions of religion's boundaries as "given"…. Failing to question the *social construction* of those boundaries, the social sciences inadvertently supported official religions' definition of their practices and beliefs as "pure" and linked with the "sacred"…. The residual category, "popular religion," came to be defined as a tainted or impure form of religion…. (113, italics in original).

Indeed, the unexamined assumption of secularization theory originates in the unexamined definition of religion. In other words, if religion is defined in accordance with the standards of the societal elites overseeing that system, and if membership in those officially-recognized groups declines, then it is easy to see why one might think that religion is on the decline. But if one observes that there are both other religious groups on the increase and religiosity apart from religious groups, then secularization theory cannot stand.

McGuire squarely blames sociologists for their failure to question the content of religion and for ignoring the "concrete historical process in which certain social groups used their power and authority to privilege certain forms of religious practice over others" – i.e., for failing to recognize that "*the very definition of religion is a social construction*" (114, italics in original).

Second, but not unrelated, sociologists are beginning to realize that the discipline of sociology has not yet reached a level of maturity in its *own* individuation process. In other words, it has not fully resolved the split of the sciences from the domination of the Church. Daniele Hervieu-Leger (2000) explains:

> What is at issue for sociology is whether it is able to conceive itself…. (B)efore becoming one subject among others, religion was the adversary; and in the struggle for the secular autonomy of knowledge the common consciousness of the scientific community took shape across the differences, particularly with regard to social theory, which divide scientists. And it is by reference to this struggle that the legitimacy of the scientific quest is still secured…. Western science defines itself in terms of its historical rift with religion, and this is the abiding context in which the sociology of religion is obliged to define its own aspirations. (16-17)

Sociology has been slow in coming to terms with the sociological study of religion, the definition of religion, and the debunking of the secularization myth. Until we do, we may not see an actual definition of religious identity. Yet we can look at the trend in how this term is applied.

The website for the Association of Religon Data Archives contains one of the two definitions of religious identity that I found. It says simply, "How each respondent identifies themselves religiously." Several examples of past polls are given, with the religious identity variables indicated on each. Each one referred to the respondent's

affiliation in a religious group – certainly reflecting the attitude criticized by McGuire above regarding the sociological acceptance of official definitions of religion.

Elsewhere the website explains that the polling questions *used to* ask respondents which of the predetermined categories explained their affiliation, while now the question remains open so that respondents can explain their own affiliation in their own terms. This seems to be a step in the right direction, but it is still equating religious identity with affiliation. Nevertheless, the polling questions also ask about many other religious variables – frequency of attendance, specific beliefs (and the strength of these), images of God, frequency of prayer, view of the world and of human nature, belief in God, number of hours spent watching religious TV, frequency of Bible reading, and much, much more. Although the A.R.D.A. does not identify these things as "religious identity," such questions could serve as clues as to what sociologists mean when they discuss religious identity.

Indeed, an examination of the sociological literature bears out such a depiction. Older sociology of religion literature does seem to equate religious identity with affiliation, membership, or at least orientation (e.g., fundamentalist, Evangelical, Pentecostal, mainline, etc.). This was problematic, however, as it was difficult to categorize seekers, switchers, people with multiple affiliations, and so forth.

Next came literature that questioned *how to be* whatever affiliation was being studied – e.g., how to be Catholic in the modern world, and so forth. This involved a "renegotion" of what the religion meant to the individual – like Winnicott's mention of a "common pool" to which people contribute and from which they draw "*if we have somewhere to put what we find*" (Winnicott (1971) 2005, 133). Sometimes it was a

matter of negotiating seemingly contradictory identities – such as how to be both gay and Evangelical (Thumma 1991).

Focusing on the "how" question inevitably led to a new trend: seeking the "how" of religion without necessarily equating it with affiliation. Thus, the most recent literature on religious identity, while still leaving it undefined, is taking note of the nonofficial (McGuire 2002) and the everyday practices of religion (Ammerman 1987; Ammerman 1994; Ammerman 1997; Ammerman 2003) and recognizing *that* as religious identity.

For instance, Zuckerman's volume on Du Bois contains several pages in the introduction entitled "The Religious Identity of W. E. B. Du Bois." Nowhere does Zuckerman mention membership in a church, although he does discuss some of the churches that impacted Du Bois significantly. Instead, Zuckerman discusses the images of God found in Du Bois' writings, his view of humanity as "brothers in Christ," his attendance of social events held by churches, his use of religious imagery and metaphors in his writings, his ideas about the relationship between church and state, his criticisms of religion, and his "long and meandering" journey of "religious identity" (Zuckerman 2000). Again, I would suggest that these are clues as to what sociologists of religion mean by religious identity.

Further clues might be discovered in Ammerman's 2013 study of the four themes she found in what people mean by spirituality: theism (regardless of the deity or deities involved); a sense of transcending the self (as in community service, appreciation of the arts, feeling connected to something greater than the self, etc.); ethical behavior; and belief/ belonging (i.e., affiliation with organized religion and/ or assent to its doctrine).

Recall that ethical behavior was a meaning given across the board (regardless of group affiliation), while belief/ belonging was either very important or not important at all depending on group affiliation. Elsewhere, Ammerman discusses the ways in which religion is observable in everyday life and in so-called non-religious spheres – e.g., religion as a motivation for volunteer work or for political action, religious discussions among coworkers and in other secular spaces, etc. (Ammerman 1994; Ammerman 1997).

Taken together, then, we get a picture of religious identity as something that may be more or less salient depending on its relationship to other identities, and that involves numerous components which will vary in importance to each individual. Like other types of identity (cultural identity, ethnic identity, etc.), religious identity involves relating one's self-concept to the larger social group within which one exists. As a reflexive process, it has to do with the acquisition of a "tool kit" provided by the culture (Swidler 1986), the ability to use those "tools" in one's own spiritual life, the performance of an identity (for self and others), etc.

Religious identity is not universal, but involves a personal negotiation with historical and cultural factors. Religious identity is not just about disembodied beliefs, as it may involve many physical acts, rituals, foods, expressions, etc. Religious identity is neither static nor simply a matter of one criterion (such as church membership). Rather, it involves the complex, dynamic relationship among many factors.

Recalling that Greil and Davidman explained that "the symbolic interactionist tradition is… concerned with accounting for the content of identity and with describing the identity construction process" (Greil and Davidman 2007, 551), I would like to suggest some of content that I have noticed in sociological discussions of religious

identities – i.e., the components that are the building blocks of this construction process. These components include such things as:

- a general faith stance (religious or not) in one's worldview (i.e., a centering faith)
- the use of a spiritual imagination and ability to relate to one's God representation
- religious heritage (i.e., the chain of memory)
- past and present affiliations/ memberships
- attendance at worship, educational, and/ or social events held by a religious organization
- the ability to utilize the practical resources from a community of faith
- the ability to utilize the spiritual resources of a faith tradition (Scripture, heroes of the faith as role-models, etc.)
- the personal use of the religious community's symbols and rituals (e.g., prayer)
- outward expressions of faith (jewelry, clothing, bumper stickers, etc.) – also including modifications of the body (tattoos, extension of life lines, etc.)
- consumption of religious media (publications, radio and TV broadcasts, web-based and social media, etc.)
- values and ethics relating to one's view of the Ultimate and/ or religious tradition
- relationships established with like-minded persons; fellowship
- use of sacred time, space, or objects (official, nonofficial, and/ or spontaneous)
- religiously-motivated volunteer work or political action

This list is not intended to be comprehensive, but suggestive of the components sociologists of religion discuss as "religious identity." It is these types of things that became clear to me as the women in the upcoming chapters told their own narratives. For example, long before Roxanne began to participate in any church, she sent her children to a church-run preschool because she felt that this would give them a stronger

ethical foundation than a secular one (which would, in turn, give them a better life than she had had), and she collected figurines of angels (only later attributing this to a perceived need for a guardian angel to watch over her). For Lexie, her renewed religious interests were linked to the death of her baby: she regularly wore a cross necklace containing some of his ashes, and she began attending church and trying to live a more "Christian" life (ethically) so that she would someday see her baby again in Heaven. These are examples of the performance of religious identity in their lives.

Change of Religious Identity: Growth and Conversion

Religious identity is a lifelong process involving the changing and reconfirming of ideas about God, self, and society. This ongoing process happens in dialog with society – particularly with significant others.

In the previous chapter, I mentioned Ana-Maria Rizzuto's claim that one's ideas about God and relationship with God can mature (if the God representation is usable) – just as can happen with one's parents. If one's relationship with God and ideas about God are capable of changing and maturing, how does this happen? In this section, I discuss the two possible ways of change. One way that faith changes could be imagined as existing on a vertical axis – a developmental viewpoint of the spiritual maturity of the individual. Another way that faith changes could be imagined as existing on a horizontal axis – a lateral move (which Berger called "alternation") going from one frame of meaning-making to another frame of meaning-making (to borrow Goffman's term).

Sociologists and anthropologists of religion have long known that religion helps individuals transition from one stage of life to another via rites of passage. Rites of

passage are ceremonial rituals marking transitions in life wherein the society recognizes the transition being made by an individual (McGuire 2002) – thus part of the dialog between self and society recognized by the Meadian tradition. The transition is often associated with age and/ or role – leaving behind a former state and taking on a new one. Although the ceremonial rites take place at a specific point in time, they recognize an ongoing process of leaving behind what the person was and becoming what the person will be (McGuire 2002).

Common times for rites of passage are birth, adolescence, marriage, and death – but these are by no means the only possible ones. For instance, although there is some debate about the actual number of *samskaras* (ceremonial rites of passage for Hindus), ten of the sixteen most-recognized take place before the child is old enough to attend school. These include things like taking the first solid food, receiving the first haircut, etc. Such a system recognizes the rapidly changing developmental world of the preschool child – changes that require a new understanding of self and world.

Psychological approaches to religious identity give us a glimpse into the intrapsychic happenings in faith development. James Fowler has shown how the predictable crises of developmental life result in transformations of our understanding of faith (Fowler 1981). Borrowing from developmental psychology, he lists six stages of faith (plus an infantile pre-faith stage which I discussed in the previous chapter). This developmental model would represent the vertical movement of the maturation of faith, though Fowler insists that this maturation may be stunted at any point depending on the mastery of psychological challenges presented at each stage.

According to Fowler, institutionalized religions (at least in this society) tend to discourage people from developing their faith beyond the confines of the institutionally-defined ideas of God and faith (what he calls Stage 3 faith, in which we focus on the institutionalized religious game). Those who do push beyond this stage leave the playful naiveté of this Stage 3 "Synthetic-Conventional Faith" in favor of a Stage 4 "Individuative-Reflective Faith" (perhaps another way of understanding "spiritual but not religious" people). In this stage, the illusion of the religious game is broken, precisely because it is recognized to be a game. As theologian Paul Tillich said, a symbol that is recognized to be a symbol is a broken symbol (Tillich 1951). This, too, makes reference to the playful, tentative way in which religious truth should be approached. According to Fowler, however, the playful spirit can be relearned by those who push on to subsequent stages of faith by entering a "second naiveté."

Though Fowler's primary focus is on the vertical changes of faith (i.e., maturation), he also recognizes possibilities for "lateral" faith transitions. This refers to change in the *contents* of faith, as opposed to the maturing of faith – i.e., conversion (Fowler 1981, 285-86). Rizzuto understands conversion as something that happens when a new life experience and its social context resonate with the previously repressed aspects of one's God image (Rizzuto 1979, 51). The new social structure is felt to provide a more ego-syntonic representation of God for the converted individual (cf. McDargh 1983, 131-32).

Conversions to a new worldview involve a change in self and in what Mead referred to as one's "universe of discourse" (Snow and Machalek 1984, 170).

> (I)nasmuch as conversion involves radical change, the universe of discourse is *the* relevant concept. Viewed in this light, conversion

> concerns not only a change in values, beliefs, and identities, but more fundamentally and significantly, it entails the displacement of one universe of discourse by another or the ascendance of a formerly peripheral universe of discourse to the status of a primary authority. (170, italics added)

Snow and Machalek explain that there are many possible ways for a conversion to occur. They are usually gradual, though more often are popularly imagined as sudden as in the story of St. Paul's Damascus Road experience (170). The changes could be fairly minor (i.e., without a drastic reworking of worldview), but are often thought of as involving radical personal change. The idea of the radical personal change dates back to at least biblical times and is reflected in the ancient words used to express conversion – such as the Hebrew *shub* and Greek *epistrephein*, *strephein*, and *metanoia* (169). Conversions may be of the consolidative type, where two previous and contradictory identities/ worldviews are able to be combined (such as Thumma's gay Evangelicals). Or conversions may be of the regenerative type, wherein religious contents do not change but commitment level intensifies (possibly reflecting the move from a peripheral or differentiated identity to a master identity). According to Snow and Machalek, even when the contents of faith are not significantly changed, as in the regenerative or consolidative types, one's view of self and society (identity and universe of discourse) are altered (Snow and Machalek 1984, 170-71).

> What is at issue is not whether the universe of discourse is entirely new, but whether it has shifted from periphery to center. When such a shift occurs, the corresponding change in consciousness is likely to be as radical in its effects as if the universe of discourse were entirely new. (171)

Here we see the changes involving perceptions of God, self, and society as a form of socialization (or resocialization) akin to early socialization processes (described in

Chapter 2) – a dialectical process between the individual and the significant others. Roger Straus thus describes conversion as simultaneously a personal and a collective accomplishment, as well as an ongoing act of each (R. A. Straus 1979). Kilbourne and Richardson describe it this way (Kilbourne and Richardson 1988):

> (R)eligious conversion is not an occurrence… which will occur independent of human experience. The process of religious conversion as well as the attribution of its cause(s) cannot be understood apart from actor and audience perspectives. Converts need the social standards of some reference group… against which to measure themselves…. They need to know how to talk like a convert…, how to behave like a convert…, and how to look like a convert…. Conversion can be meaningfully understood, then, only within a social context and appears to always involve some choice of perspective by both the convert and the observer.
>
> The best way to conceptualize conversion, therefore, is as a form of socialization…. The process by which individuals learn the appropriate roles, norms, and status assignments of a group; they inculcate the values, beliefs, and world view of a group…; and they acquire a new social identity(s) based upon their group membership or group affiliation…. (15)

Peter Berger contends that a change in worldview and self does not need to be religious in content, thus he prefers the term "alternation" to "conversion." Alternation is a process involving the transformation of the self within a group that aids and recognizes this new identity (Berger 1963, 103). Berger and Luckmann describe the process like this (Berger and Luckman 1966):

> Alternation requires processes of re-socialization. These processes resemble primary socialization, because they have radically to reassign reality accents and, consequently, must replicate to a considerable degree the strong affective identification with the socializing personnel that was characteristic of childhood. They are different from primary socialization because they do not start *ex nihilo*, and as a result must cope with a problem of dismantling, disintegrating the preceding nomic structure of subjective reality. How can this be done?
>
> A "recipe" for successful alternation has to include both social and conceptual conditions, the social, of course, serving as the matrix of the conceptual. The most important social condition is the availability of an

> effective plausibility structure, that is, a social base serving as the "laboratory" of transformation. This plausibility structure will be mediated to the individual by means of significant others, with whom he must establish strongly affective identification. No radical transformation of subjective reality (including, of course, identity) is possible without such identification, which inevitably replicates childhood experiences of emotional dependency on significant others. These significant others are the guides into the new reality. They represent the plausibility structure in the roles they play *vis-à-vis* the individual (roles that are typically defined explicitly in terms of their re-socializing function), and they mediate the new world to the individual. (157)

This strong affective identification is critical to transforming ideas about self and society. Accordingly, Snow and Machalek say that "it is not surprising that conversion is unlikely, especially for nonseekers, in the absence of strong affective ties" (Snow and Machalek 1984, 183). Where the worldview change is radical and contradictory to the previous one, affiliation into a new group is accompanied by disaffiliation from another group. Whether it is a natural process of becoming closer to the members of one's new group or a requirement of the new group itself, social and emotional ties are weakened or severed with one's previous associates outside the group (Greil and Davidman 2007, 558-59; McGuire 2002, 81-82).

It should be remembered here that views of God, self, and society are part of an ongoing lifelong process. What Berger called "world building" requires "world maintenance" (Berger 1967; cf. Ammerman 1987; McGuire 2002; Snow and Machalek 1984). Religious identity can be confirmed as one maintains the significant aspects of it (see the suggested list earlier in this chapter – such things as membership, use of symbols and rituals, fellowship with like-minded persons, etc.) But religious identity can also continue to change. There can be further maturation of faith and/ or further conversions. There can be changes in commitment level – moves from periphery to center (becoming a

master identity) or from center to periphery ("backsliding"). There can be consolidations or differentiations of various parts of identity. Thus there are many possibilities for change.

Psychological Theories of Religious Development

In the midst of my sociological approach to the formation of religious identity, I must pause for a moment to reflect on the popular psychological theories of religious development. In the Methods chapter, I presented a background in the variety of approaches to self and identity. It was, however, Jean Piaget who first postulated in the early twentieth century that identity development occurred in a sequence of stages related to age. A Swiss psychologist with a background in natural history and philosophy, Piaget was interested in the education of children and investigated the working of a child's mind. In the 1920s he formulated a theory of cognitive development which, by the 1950s, was well known among European psychologists. (It did not become popular in the United States until the 1960s and 1970s.) In his book, *The Origins of Intelligence in Children*, Piaget postulated that concepts are developed in a sequence of stages; and through the process of development and experience, stages of cognitive development are specified and can be viewed by the psychoanalyst (Piaget 1952). Although he wrote in a number of disciplines, Jean Piaget never covered religious development.

Dr. James Fowler in his book, *Stages of Faith: The Psychology of Human Development and the Quest for Meaning*, based his developmental model of faith consciousness on Piaget's cognitive stage development theory, paralleling the first four stages of Piaget with his own stages (young childhood through young

adulthood). Fowler's stages have been used by quantitative and qualitative psychologists alike. They are as follows:

> Stage 0 "Primal or Undifferentiated Faith" (birth to 2 years) comprises the early learning of the safety of the environment (safe and secure versus neglect and abuse). The transition to Stage 1 begins when the toddler integrates thought and language in a process that leads to use of symbols in speech and play.
>
> Stage 1 "Intuitive-Projective Faith" (ages 3-7) where religion is learned mainly through experiences, stories and images enhanced by the people and institutions the child comes in contact with. Moral emotions are awakened.
>
> Stage 2 "Mythic-Literal Faith" coincides with a child's elementary school years. At this stage, faith takes the form of story, drama, or myth. As a more concrete-operational thinking is developing, the child begins to separate the real from fantasy.
>
> Stage 3 "Synthetic-Conventional Faith" begins to form in early adolescence. There is a hunger for a personal relationship with God, where the child feels God can love her. Significant others can foster this view, and the adolescent faith begins to synthesize values. For many adults, this period of adolescence is historically a fixed equilibrium for faith and meaning.
>
> Stage 4 "Individuative-Reflective Faith" (usually mid-twenties to late thirties) is a time of struggle, where the individual recognizes her identity and differentiates her worldview from that of the others. Any commitment of faith that she makes has to be critically evaluated and then consciously committed to. There is an openness to new faith concepts, but also a keen awareness of any conflicts with one's own belief system.
>
> Stage 5 "Conjunctive Faith" (mid-life crisis) is a period that Fowler defined as when an adult reintegrates the elements of faith from childhood faith. The individual integrates the opposites and paradoxes in his or her life. Symbols must be reunited with conceptual meanings. Multidimensional and independent truths are formulated.
>
> Stage 6 "Universalizing Faith" is very uncommon. It is akin to the eastern concept of enlightenment. In this stage of faith, an individual is grounded in a oneness with the power of being or God. Others are treated as part of a universal community, deserving of love and justice.

Fowler's *Stages of Faith* had an important impact on the academic world as religion began to be validated as a viable identity for modern scholarship. Interestingly, more traditional Christian educators grasped on to the theory and used it. Fundamentalist-Evangelicals Norman Wakefield and Robert E. Clark in "Children and Their Theological Concepts" (Wakefield and Clark 1986) used it extensively, as did Les L. Steel in "Developmental Psychology and Spiritual Development" (Steele 1986). Catholic psychotherapist and priest, Daniel A. Helminiak worked with it in his book *Spiritual Development* (Helminiak 1987). On seminary campuses throughout the United States, Fowler's stages were taught and elaborated upon.

In the main field of psychoanalytic theory, however, a second wave of cognitive developmental psychoanalysts ushered in a major revision. These scholars rejected global stages that characterize any one age or all of a child's thinking. In the 1990s cognitive developmental scholars replaced the view of stages with the view that religious cognitive growth is best explained as part of the general growth of understanding of the mind, agency, mental-physical causality and related concepts (Boyer 1994; Boyer and Walker 2000).

Another recent revision in psychological cognitive developmental theory is the view that children and adults may not be altogether different in their thinking. These psychoanalytical scholars believe that magical thinking and rational thinking, "ordinary reality" and "extraordinary reality" and other thought processes that presumably compete may actually coexist in the minds of children and adults (Subbotsky 1993; Woolley 1997). Dr. Jacqueline D. Woolley writes that "children's minds are not inherently one way or another – not inherently magical nor inherently rational" (Woolley 2000, 126-27).

In her recent study "Does God Make It Real? Children's Belief in Religious Stories from the Judeo-Christian Tradition" (with coauthor Victoria C. Vaden), Woolley found that children who used God as an explanation in religious stories had a higher belief than they had toward nonreligious stories. She also found that religious story familiarity and family religiosity also affected children's responses. The conclusion in this journal article was that God's involvement in a story influenced a child's belief in the reality of characters and events in that story (Vaden and Woolley 2011).

Dr. Jacqueline D. Woolley, Professor of Psychology at the University of Texas at Austin, researches children's understandings of reality, which can relate directly to the traumatized childhood and beliefs of the remarkable women in my case studies. Dr. Woolley insists that her scholarly endeavor and that of other psychoanalytical cognitive developmental scholars has a long history that both intrigues and perplexes. With a grant from the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (Grant Number HD030300), Dr. Woolley assesses the effects of age characteristics of individual children, internal consistency of stimulus, and effect of the environment on the child. To teach children to think critically about new information, she believes researchers and educators must understand first and foremost how children identify and separate real from unreal (Ma and Woolley 2013; Woolley, Ma and Lopez-Mobilia 2011).

With regard to the narrative method and qualitative techniques, the academic work and career of Dr. Robert Coles is also very helpful. In his book *The Spiritual Life of Children* (1990), Dr. Coles questions: "How does one learn from children what they think about God and the devil, heaven and hell; learn about their faith and their skepticism with respect to faith?" He continues about method:

> To repeat, I am a clinician, a physician trained in pediatrics and psychoanalytically informed child psychiatry. I have never formulated or handed out a questionnaire. I have no "survey research" to offer, nor am I interested in making general psychological statements without reference to idiosyncrasies and exceptions. (22)

"I do, though, rely upon certain assumptions about children," he explains, "that we as human beings possess awareness or consciousness, and that, through language, we try to understand the world around us and to convey what we have learned to others" (22).

The author of over eighty books and 1300 articles, Dr. Coles understands children who have to deal with fear and trauma. He counseled Ruby Bridges, one of the first African American children to desegregate a public elementary school in New Orleans. Ruby and her family were targeted daily with public protests, intimidation and death threats. That led to his first book, *Children of Crisis: A Study of Courage and Fear* (1967) and, ultimately, to a series of books documenting how children and their families deal with changes. In 1973, he won a Pulitzer Prize as the series of five books progressed and the Presidential Medal of Freedom in 1998 for his overall contributions. A world traveler, he began teaching at Harvard Medical School, eventually becoming Professor of Psychiatry and Medical Humanities in 1977.

In *The Spiritual Life of Children*, Dr. Coles relates the young person's religious culture through hundreds of narratives and thousands of interviews. Religious identity as part of the cultural tool kit for these children becomes abundantly clear in all of its complexity as the children discuss their experience with God and spirituality, and express their understanding of ultimate meaning in their lives. An odd mixture of their own terminology with some of the prescribed thoughts of the adults and institutions in their

contextual world flows throughout these narratives. The depth of their thought and feeling is surprising as they talk about the nature of God, the devil, heaven and hell, faith and skepticism, and the way things work in their religious world.

I could not help but compare the in depth discussions of the Ultimate with the memories of the views in childhood of the women in my case studies as Coles' children and young people contemplated their spiritual life in the midst of poverty, fear and trauma. However, as one girl of thirteen cautioned Dr. Coles: "It's not important where you think the soul is; it's what you're looking for with it, that's important." He pursued this point by asking her what *she* was "looking for with it." She had no trouble answering him: "I guess for some clues about what this life is all about" (Coles 1990, 301-02).

Is the Shelter Stay a Time of "Alternation"?

Some IPV literature constructs religion as the ideological opponent of the feminist or woman-centered message that IPV experts wish to impart to victim-survivors. The corollary of this is that some of the literature on IPV describes the experience of renegotiating one's identity at the domestic violence shelter as akin to a "conversion" experience (see below) – or in Berger's terminology, an "alternation" since the contents of the new worldview are not religious. These sources indicate that the time in a shelter, particularly the first few days when one is largely sequestered from the world in order to experience safety and even emotional breakdown without outside influence, could also be spun as an opportunity for reconditioning or resocializing.

Carol Winkelmann describes the shelter experience in terms which sound like alternation (Winkelmann 2004). She says,

> In order to heal herself and have a chance at a life without male violence, a battered woman must learn from staff and other residents new ways to think and speak about herself, her life, and her current crisis. (41)

Donileen Loseke's description of what a woman goes through in a shelter is also reminiscent of alternation (Loseke 1992). For several reasons (safety, keeping away outside influences who might encourage the victim to leave the shelter, and/ or having time to relax and get in touch with her feelings), women entering the shelter environment are generally shielded from outside contact for the first few days of their stay (61). They are expected to become involved in the shelter community (61) and to talk about only three topics: "How bad life had been with the partner, how good life would be without him, and how to achieve this better life" (99).

The reader may notice that what is being suggested in that description is that the victim-survivor is expected to disaffiliate with those who were previously significant in her life while simultaneously immersing herself in a new social world – just as happens in a religious conversion process (described above). Indeed, Loseke herself notes that this pattern is in conformity with Berger and Luckmann's description of identity formation, which

> requires that a person who is to be transformed must be isolated from others who might reconfirm the old identity;… a new "plausibility structure" to replace old ways of making sense of the self and experience;… [and] a strong affective identification with persons representing the new identity. (100)

Yet Loseke discovered that victims of IPV resisted characterizations by IPV "experts" with regard to themselves, their situations, and their abusers if those

characterizations did not resonate with their own ideas of these (Loseke 1992; cf. Lamb 1999; Ronai 1999; Winkelmann 2004). They wanted to define themselves – not have their identities "swallowed up" (as Blumer expressed it) in a "class" of people whose only commonality was their experience of intimate partner violence. Because of this, IPV researchers have recently begun to study the way in which their own characterizations of this "class" of people has itself been a tool of domination used to revictimize survivors.

With regard to the place of religion for these women, it is therefore important to take seriously these women's own perceptions of God, self, and others – to understand how they came to be, how they can be utilized and built upon for dealing with abuse, and under what circumstances they would even consider the shelter community as significant in the process of renegotiating identity and rebuilding the self. If the ideal-type shelter experience is supposed to be a type of alternation, then we would expect that the "converts" would be those who spend significant time and investment of self at the shelter, developing strong affective ties to the women there, and who disaffiliate from their previous life, significant others, and plausibility structures. But is this actually what happens – particularly from the shelter residents' point of view?

Kroeger and Nason-Clark recognize that this perceived conflict between religion and IPV education is also sometimes a concern that religious people have about encouraging victims to go to a shelter – a fear that the reeducation they receive there may conflict with their religious teachings (2001). Kroeger and Nason-Clark encourage those with such concerns to go ahead and encourage the victim to go to the shelter in order to receive the help and safety that such agencies offer, while *themselves* being available to

bring messages of God's love for the victim (123). Their approach hints at the idea that the choice between accepting religion and accepting a woman-centered approach to IPV may not be as binary as is sometimes alleged.

It is also important to keep in mind both the "vertical" and "horizontal" shifts which may occur in religious identity. This is something that is missing from Susan Rose's comparison of the narratives of trauma recovery and religious conversion (2002). Rose shows that these are similar processes in that both types of narratives speak to the need to reintegrate one's experience, to frame it, to supply meaning and hope (36-37). Apparently accepting the false binary between the feminist message and religion, however, Rose believes that the difference between trauma narratives and conversion narratives is that "conversion narratives tend to validate dominant, patriarchal narratives, while trauma narratives challenge them" (59).

I see this as incomplete. Rose is assuming that there is only a single type of change occurring and that there is no overlap between the change of religious belief and of recovering from trauma. By "conversion narratives," she is referring to a purely lateral type of conversion, whereas by "trauma narratives" she is referring to a maturing of one's perception. As I explained above, religious identity can change either vertically or laterally, as well as in a variety of possible combinations (cf. Fowler 1981).

Because identity is such a complex phenomenon, even *if/ when* the woman-centered teachings of the domestic violence shelter and the religious teachings from a woman's community of faith are in conflict (which is not necessarily the case), the particular victim-survivor may be capable of incorporating both of these systems into her

identity. Nancy Ammerman observed that people do not just try to build a coherent ideology to make sense of life, but they try to make a life (Ammerman 1997).

> We should… *expect* logical contradictions among the individual's various religious beliefs and practices. We human beings are much more capable of living with seeming incongruity than most sociologists and theologians are ever willing to admit. If we focus on how people *make a life*, rather than on how they *make sense*, we may find the practical coherence that transcends the apparent ideological incoherence. Religious practices – both actions and rhetorics – are organized, but we will not discover that organization without paying attention to what people are doing, where, and with whom. (207)

Finally, because of our multiplicities of identities, a particular woman may locate religion and feminism almost anywhere on the continuum of compatible to incompatible, and may find either or both more or less salient (central or peripheral and/ or differentiated to her identity).

Bringing together these ideas (the complexity and multi-directionality of change, the questionable role of ideology, and the multiplicities of identities), we see that Rose's binary depiction is overly simplistic. Numerous possible relationships exist between religion and feminist IPV messages, depending on the particular woman. Even in a scenario where religion and IPV education *are* felt to be in tension, lateral alternation to an opposing ideology is not even the only possible resolution. Another possibility could be a "vertical" movement – a maturing which allows for the acceptance of the multiplicity of our identities, including our beliefs about gender roles and about spirituality. If one can construct an identity based on being both Evangelical and gay (Thumma 1991), why not an identity that incorporates one's religious understandings with one's understandings of gender and power? Indeed, Giesbrecht and Sevcik's study

demonstrates the development of new, positive God images in women recovering from abuse (Giesbrecht and Seveik 2000).

In Pamela Cooper-White's second edition, she confesses that her earlier work had been too simplistic and linear – and that as such, it presented constructions that could tend to revictimize the abused woman (Cooper-White 2012). She writes:

> I have come to the conviction that our subjectivity – our selfhood, or sense of self – is not unitary or monolithic, but multiple, fluid, and contingent upon our relationships with family and friends, circles of community, and wider culture. In this broadened sense of ourselves as multiple and fluid, we might do well to remember that many of us are (or may become) victims, survivors, as well as many *other* identities across the lifespan. (13)

Just as Loseke (1992) described the identity of "victim" as one that might be accepted or rejected, Cooper-White describes the identity of "victim" as an identity that may be central or peripheral – and that this "location" is not static, but is part of the fluidity of identity (Cooper-White 2012, 14ff; cf. Anderson, Renner and Danis 2012, 1280).

If we want to understand how shelter residents themselves understand religion and any changes they experience during the shelter stay (with regard to religion and to messages about gender and power), we need to listen to their own stories. We need to see how significant the shelter community is, how religion is utilized, and how each woman negotiates her multiple identities in the communities that are significant to her.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have explored the components of religious identity and the ways in which it may change. Some components (say, church attendance) may be more

important to one person, while other components (say, volunteer work in the community) may be more important to another. Religious identity may change through normal maturational processes or through conversion – that is, vertically, horizontally, or both. Religion may be a central part of a person's identity (a master identity), or it may be peripheral or differentiated – and even this location (or salience factor) is itself fluid.

I believe the theories presented in Part 2 of this work equip us with ideas (such as God representation, plausibility structure, and religious identity) which can help answer these questions as we examine the biographies, communities, and perceptions of the women who participated in this study. It becomes important to consider *who* the significant others are in the lives of these women – from the earliest relationship with caregivers to the perceived significance of the religious and shelter communities later in life. According to the theories presented here, it is reasonable to expect a renegotiation of identity *only* within a community that one finds significant.

A micro-level analysis that sees identity (including religious identity) as an ongoing and multi-faceted process explains that is possible that a particular woman might accept or reject either or both messages – those from the shelter and those from her religious community. She might see them as conflicting and accept only one; she may accept both as differentiated peripheral parts of her identity; she may consolidate both into her central identity through some sort of negotiation of what each means to her; she may reject both as not speaking to her situation; or she may accept one or both for a time but then not continue in the confirming and commitment work required to maintain these as parts of identity.

In the next chapter, I will examine the shelter which provides the context of this study, as well as its interaction with the community. This is important to this study because it the community where the women I interviewed live and within which they negotiate their identities. After presenting this social context, I will present the narratives of the women themselves to learn about their perceptions of the significance of the shelter and of the religious communities to them.

Part III

The Context

5

The Shelter Experience and Community Interaction

The setting of my case studies is fully explained in Chapter 1. However, in order to better understand the narratives of the women in the case studies, it will help the interested college professor to understand what life is like at the shelter, the process of coming there (including mountains of paperwork which overwhelm many residents), and the interactions between the shelter and the community in which it is situated. The women in my case studies refer to these factors. I have also included a short section on other shelters in the United States in order to show how this shelter compares with other shelters.

Coming to the Shelter

The journey to the shelter usually begins with a phone call to the crisis hotline. Sometimes the call is not from the victim. It may be a referral from the hospital staff or law enforcement who is present with the victim after an incident. Sometimes the call comes from a concerned friend or relative.

The hotline is staffed 24/7, usually by the staff member(s) on duty at the shelter. This can be quite a juggling act. Often there is only one staff member on duty at a time, so it is not always easy to meet the needs of up to nineteen residents, callers in crisis, errands or duties for the shelter, and even one's personal needs like state-mandated breaks. For the staff, the crisis call is also the beginning of a mountain of paperwork.

The first thing the staff person does is to try to learn the first name of the caller, a phone number where she can be *safely* reached (in case they are accidently disconnected or in case of a need to call her back with further information), and whether she is someplace safe so they can talk *right now*. (In fact, the staff often already knows more than the caller realizes. If the staffer answers the call in the office, she can see a first and last name and phone number on the caller ID. Of course, this is not always the caller's own information, but usually it is.) Meanwhile, the staff person writes this and any other information on a crisis call form. This form asks for a great deal of specific information,[2] so the staffer must balance listening to the caller tell her story with trying to fill in all the requested data.

If caller says that she does need emergency housing at the shelter and the staff person thinks that the caller qualifies for the housing, the staffer then calls the executive director and relays the pertinent information. The executive director makes the decision about admitting the person, weighing a number of factors such as the caller's current situation, whether she was a resident in the past (and if she "burned any bridges" then), the space available, etc. The staff member then calls back to inform the caller of the decision. If medical attention is needed, a visit to the hospital precedes the trip to the shelter. If there are injuries to document, this is done by the hospital staff and/ or law enforcement.

If the caller is going to live at the shelter, arrangements are made to get her there. If she already knows the shelter location and has a ride, she can come right over. If not,

[2] The information requested includes specific information about the abuser's habits (e.g., whether he has weapons, whether he views pornography) and about the types of abuse he has inflicted on her. Abuse types are listed in three columns, with very specific behaviors outlined under the headings of either physical, sexual, or mental/ emotional abuse.

they arrange a place to meet. If she has a vehicle, they arrange to meet somewhere (such as the police station parking lot) so she can follow the staff member back to the shelter. Sometimes, the staff member must go directly to the victim's house to pick her up – but only if it is safe (like if the abuser is away or the police are already there). Flexibility is crucial in shelter work, so there are other possibilities when the need arises.

The shelter is surrounded by an extensive system of security cameras. Inside, the computerized system announces to anyone in the office that someone is on the premises, and at which location. The new resident is usually initially taken in through the office door (rather than the residence door), which the accompanying employee opens via electronic keypad.[3]

Upon crossing the threshold, the "victim" becomes a "survivor," according to the shelter director. This is, of course, the identity change ascribed to the new resident by the shelter staff. Whether the resident herself accepts either or both of these identities, or how centrally she locates them in her multiplicity of identities, is another matter.

The first thing one sees upon entering the main office is a jigsaw puzzle hanging on the wall. It pictures Jesus embracing someone, welcoming the individual into Heaven. The victim (or survivor, as she is now considered) is offered a soft drink or bottled water and asked to sit at the conference table. A box of tissues is nearby.

Just off of the main office are the offices of the shelter manager and the executive director. The director's office has a quote from the Bible hanging on the wall stating that

[3] Some shelters have an additional policy in order to prevent bedbugs from inadvertently being brought into the house. The new resident and her children are brought into a separate area, such as a garage, and made to strip. All of their clothes are then treated in the dryer to make sure they are free of bedbugs. Since the shelter I studied has recently experienced a bedbug infestation, one worker shared with me that she is concerned that they may need to implement this policy in the future. She also fears that it may influence their acceptance of clothing donations. As this infestation is quite recent, I have no information from the director or the board regarding whether any such changes may be implemented at the shelter.

God is the "potter" and urging us (the "clay") not to question his design for us. Another framed verse on the wall (from Deuteronomy) is about rejoicing in everything the Lord has made. On her desk is a small display stand of Bible verses on cards.

Buffering the main office from the residence is the outer office. On a bulletin board in the outer office hang three crosses and an angel. On a desk are several Christian inspirational sayings.

If there are children with the new resident, they are given a teddy bear or shown to the playroom. A large picture of Jesus also hangs in the playroom (a very prominent location in the residential part of the shelter). The resident and the crisis worker sit together at the conference table in the main office (or near the playroom in the residence, if needed for the children) and begin a mountain of paperwork.

The first thing that is needed is a driver's license. This is required in order to prove that the woman stayed there. This proof is essential for funding and statistics, and the director likes to get it right away since some women decide to leave in the middle of their first night at the shelter. Of course, some people may not have a driver's license and some may not have been able to bring it if their flight to the shelter was hasty. If that happens, they try to obtain it (or some sort of identification) as soon as possible – and thus begins the unending dance of trying to meet the needs of people in crisis and simultaneously meet the requirements of overseeing agencies.

If the woman is traumatized or if it is late, they do only the emergency intake – perhaps a dozen or so pages of the mountain that must be completed. One crisis worker described this process:

> We do emergency intake… if they come in the middle of the night or if they've been really traumatized. We just want, like, an ID if they have it.

> We would like to know any medical conditions, and we need emergency contacts. Like if the house were to burn down, or they were to slip into a coma, or anything – an emergency – happened, we'd want at least two people to call and say, "Look, this is what's goin' on. We've got 'em wherever." You know, if they're in the hospital or whatever happens. So we do want the kids' birthdates. We want the abuser's name, description, so we know what he…. We want everybody in the house to be safe, so we want [information about] the abuser. We want to know if he has tattoos. We want to know if he has a goatee, glasses, what. We want to know this guy. And we want to know where he lives, where he works, where he hangs out. We want to know what he drives. We want to know any medications anybody's on. We want to make sure they have any refills they need. We want to make sure, basically, that they're safe and that they're as healthy as can be expected at that time. We want to know if they have any appointments scheduled.

The crisis worker and the new resident sit and fill out papers – sometimes crying, sometimes trying to cope with children's needs. They get down all the basics – name, address, phone number, Social Security number, work information, birthdates, medical information (including medications), etc., of the woman, the children, and the abuser. The forms also ask about the abuser's relationship to the woman (married, cohabitating, etc.), his relationship to the children (whether they are his or not), and considerable detail about the abuser himself.

For the next few days, all shelter staff will be on a heightened level of vigilance in case the abuser or his known cohorts try to come to the shelter. In some cases, this extra vigilance seems unnecessary. He may not know that she is at the shelter or where the shelter is. In some cases, he also wants the time to cool off and is *glad* she is at the shelter. However, it is just as likely that the usual added-vigilance is too little. Sometimes it is necessary to notify the police of a situation and request frequent drive-bys and/ or to put the residence itself on "lockdown." Shelter workers have to weigh the risk of what may happen against the panic these additional measures may create in

residents and their children. In order to reduce anxiety and panic among the residents, there is often much more going on behind the scenes than residents themselves know about.

The driver's license is photocopied, appointment calendars are updated, all medicines are collected and secured in an office, and the emergency evacuation information sheet for staff members is updated to reflect the latest additions. In order to protect everyone, residents are not allowed to keep any medicines on their person or in their rooms except things designed to work in an emergency (such as a rescue inhaler for asthma). In those situations, one cannot count on being able to get to the secured medications quickly – especially if the staff member had to go off-site for some purpose and is not even available. Residents needing medications that fall into this category are given special instructions about keeping them away from other residents. Near the end of the period of my interviews, the shelter revised their medication policy by allowing residents to keep their own medications. This remains a controversial move, as will be shown in the stories of the women I interviewed.

If it is not late at night and if the resident is not unduly traumatized, they move on to the rest of the forms in the intake binder (which must be completed as soon as possible, at least within a few days). Many of these forms are about the obligations of the resident. One form explains that she must not disclose the location of the shelter. She may not take pictures or make recordings there, lest anyone or any details in these betray the shelter's location.[4] Another form explains that she must not bring drugs, alcohol, or

[4] While it seems self-evident that no one would want to jeopardize the shelter's work and the safety of others by disclosing the location, the number of women who return to their abusers makes this a concern. Letting him in on the secret can be a test of her loyalty to him when she later tries to get back into his good graces.

weapons onto the premises or allow her children to do so. Another form explains house rules, curfews, mandated bedtimes for children, and chores. It explains that she will receive emergency housing free for thirty days, as well as outlining the process, cost, and expectations involved in being invited to stay for an additional sixty days of transitional housing. There is a form which explains that she must not publicly recognize anyone she knows from the shelter – residents, employees, or volunteers. One could say, "What happens at the shelter stays at the shelter." The last form she is given is to be filled out on her own during the first few days. It is her "journey" form and is designed to help staff members get to know her needs as an individual.

> We give them a paper to take on their own to fill out their journey to [the shelter] – um, you know, what life was like for them growing up. Do they come from divorced parents? Do they, um, were they successful in school? Were they an average student? Were they delayed? Were they on an I.E.P.?[5] ….It just gives us a better picture of what we're dealing with and how to handle that, you know, because it makes a difference if they grew up with a mom that had three husbands and six paramours. You know what I mean. That's going to affect their outlook or their experience – life experience. You see, I think a lot of 'em think it's normal to be in an abusive relationship because that's how they grew up, that's what they know. So they really – the first time he yelled at her or the first time he hit her was no big deal 'cause that's what they grew up knowing. So it's very beneficial to know that. How many abusive relationships have they been in? You know, were they a victim of incest? Were they a victim of rape? You know, what we're dealing with.

Once all of the forms in the intake binder are signed, the process of getting settled begins. The new resident is given a laundry basket with toiletries for herself and her children – shampoo, conditioner, body wash, toothbrushes, toothpaste, and deodorant. Additional items, like disposable razors, are not standardly issued at intake, but may be available later if needed and if it is deemed that they pose no threat to anyone's safety. If

[5] An Individualized Education Program (I.E.P.) is a document mandated by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act to help schools work with the unique learning styles of children.

there are special items needed, such as bottles, diapers, and other baby supplies, those are also given. All of these items are theirs to keep, even if they should move out the next day. Towels, washcloths, bedding, and side-rails for beds remain the property of the shelter, although each resident may keep an afghan crocheted for her by the women of Evangelical Friends Church. The woman is shown to the bedroom that she and her children will share. (Unless the shelter is exceedingly full, no one else will share that room with them.) Most rooms have inspirational posters on the walls. She is given her room key and allowed a few minutes to settle in.

When she reappears, the new resident is asked about the sorts of foods she and her children will eat. From the food pantry, she is given pasta, rice, "helpers," spaghetti sauce, cereal, soup, canned fruits and vegetables, and whatever else has come from the food bank this month – perhaps tuna, canned ham, or a boxed pizza kit. Baby foods are also available, if needed. From the deep-freeze, she is given whatever meats are available (usually at least chicken, hamburger, and hot dogs) and whatever breads or bakery items the church ladies have donated. Then a grocery list is made for any fresh foods she might need – such as milk, margarine, and produce. Within the first 24 hours of her arrival, an employee will go shopping for the items on her grocery list. Each family receives about $30 worth of groceries from this shopping trip. It is carefully prioritized and is not to include soft drinks or other "junk food."

In the meantime, it is essential to make sure the new resident is able to eat something as soon as needed – particularly since many of the foods are frozen and it may already be well past mealtime. At this point, a current resident often comes to her aid and offers her something from a meal she is preparing for her own family. Another possible

solution is to keep a few frozen dinners or frozen pizzas around, saved for just such a time. Sometimes the new resident is more than ready to sit down and eat, and sometimes her children will give her no peace until they do, but other times it takes considerable encouragement from staff and other residents to get her to take a bite.

At the shelter, each family has a cupboard with their own dishes and silverware – color-coded so everyone knows whose is whose. They are also given their own space in a refrigerator, using assigned shelves. (On one of the refrigerators in the residence is a saying about Jesus.) This system of cupboards and refrigerator shelves is explained to her, and she is given time to eat her meal. Often the staff member remains in the kitchen with the new resident and her family during the meal so that they can begin to bond, now that much of the "business" talk is done, but this depends on the needs of the resident and whether other residents are also trying to get to know her.

After dinner, the resident is given a tour of the house. She is shown where the chore chart is, but told that she will not be given chores for about a week. She is shown the library area which contains a *lot* of Bibles– many stacks *each* of complete Bibles, New Testaments, and New Testaments with Psalms. There are also a number of Christian (and secular) books, including the popular Christian *Left Behind* series.[6] She is shown the TV areas, bathrooms, backyard, etc., and informed about any rules regarding their use.

At some point during the first 24 hours, the resident is given her own access code to the residence door. However, she is strongly encouraged to stay in the house – and keep her children in – for the first few days. She is told that this time is needed for peace,

[6] This sixteen-volume fictional series, written from a dispensationalist view of the End Times, details the lives of characters who are converted to Christianity after the Rapture but before the Tribulation.

for healing, for safety, for being available for appointments (to which the staff escorts her), and for allowing time for legal decisions to be finalized – such as establishing her custody of the children and serving the abuser with a temporary protection order. One staff member explains:

> If the kids go to school, that might not be possible for a while until custody is established, because the problem is the kids are… whoever has 'em. You know, like if the abuser gets the kid from school, there's nothing she can do till she goes to court. Sometimes the kids need that time to heal, too, because they've just been grasped from their life, thrown into a shelter… that they just have no idea what's going on or why. Or they've seen Mom be beaten, choked. Or they've been caught in the crossfire themself.

Temporary custody may be established quickly, or it may take a week or so. The shelter workers also advise the woman not to go out until the abuser has been served with a protection order, and then to understand "that's just a piece of paper." It is no guarantee that he will not hurt her.

The tasks that need to be accomplished within the first 1-3 days of the shelter stay seem innumerable. Shelter workers have to balance the victim's need to rest and recover with the obligation to accomplish certain tasks within a legal or practical window. For instance, injuries must be documented before they have ceased to be apparent. In addition, state law requires the victim to press charges within 24 hours of the attack. Although there should be a mandatory arrest if police were on-site, one advocate for victims says it does not always work that way in the real world. The victim needs to write a statement for the police, which she may find very difficult. The shelter worker cannot "put words in her mouth," but can help her to say what it is she wants to say in her statement. An initial visit is also scheduled with Crime Victims Services. All of this –

police, hospital, and possibly Crime Victims Services – should take place within the first 24 hours.

Within the first day or two, shelter workers and police try to take a woman to her home to retrieve her belongings – clothing, documents, medications, etc. If needed, she may also receive a $15 voucher for clothing from the Salvation Army's thrift store.

Another immediate task, perhaps delayed till the second or third day if there is too much going on, is to apply for food stamps. Food stamps are handled through the county welfare office, which also deals with children's health insurance, child support, child abuse, disability benefits, etc. The welfare office is in a county building on Main Street – a street comprised largely of the county courthouse, other county office buildings, and attorneys' offices. This is the same building where she will go for help from other agencies – Crime Victims Services, an agency to help with resume-writing and job-seeking, an agency to help with certain practical services (such as vouchers for clothing and sometimes rent), Children's Services, G.E.D. services, vocational rehabilitation services, etc. In other words, this is a building where victims and victims' advocates will spend a great deal of time. The waiting room displays posters advertising various assistance programs offered through other agencies, a S.T.D. clinic, a "most wanted" poster of men who owe massive amounts of back child support, a poster encouraging paternity tests, and lots of brochures – including two on domestic violence.

The first step to obtaining food stamps is to go to the window and request an application packet. As if the paperwork at the shelter had not been enough to overwhelm an already traumatized woman, she opens this packet to find: one information page, a 64-page booklet about Medicaid, a 16-page booklet about your rights from the state

welfare office, three brochures (Medicare, Medicaid, and a children's health program), a return mail envelope, another information page (front and back), a six-page request for assistance form, a four-page "application attachment," a three-page "appraisal" form with two other one-page forms attached, another six-page explanation of rights and responsibilities, a page showing what forms of identification are required "by order of Homeland Security," an assessment form for the children's health program and pregnancy services, seven other forms (each on a single sheet, but some front and back), and finally a 28-page program guide from the state welfare department. The woman is told to fill these out and return to schedule an appointment.

Once this massive amount of paperwork has been completed and returned, the normal waiting time for an appointment at the welfare office is one month, but the case of a woman living in a domestic violence shelter is expedited – although not necessarily simple. If it is a new application with no problems, she receives food stamps immediately. If she is already on food stamps, but her abuser has the card, she will still get them. If she is excluded from food stamps due to previous infractions, she cannot get them. If she is a college student, she cannot receive food stamps (because she is eligible for student loans), but she may be allowed to receive them if she is the primary caretaker of a child under the age of twelve. If the child is older, the child may get food stamps even though the mother is disqualified for being a student. The cases of victims of domestic violence who do not live in the shelter are not expedited; they will have to wait a month for an appointment.

By the time all of these things are accomplished, it is usually time to schedule and attend appointments with doctors and mental health counselors, to fill prescriptions, and

to attend preliminary court sessions – all this during the first few days of "rest" and "healing"! Because victims may only stay a maximum of ninety days at the shelter, workers believe they should waste no time in setting these women up with good supports and role-models right away. They may also need to be prescribed medications to relieve anxiety or help them sleep as they try to cope with everything. Shelter workers attend medical appointments with residents so that they are aware of any issues, instructions, and medications. A resident may refuse to allow the shelter worker to go into the exam with her, but she is encouraged to allow it. As stated above, all medications must be secured in the shelter office. Residents must request these from staff of their own volition. Shelter workers make careful note of what is taken, when, how much, and even check to see that it is swallowed[7] – but they do not personally dispense the medications.

The new resident is encouraged not to make phone calls during the first few days. The workers' concern is that the abuser will discover that she is at the shelter, or that someone may try to change her mind and convince her to return home. If the woman is concerned that someone will worry that she just "disappeared," she is told, "It's okay. The police know you're here." A few years ago, it was not *too* difficult to enforce this no-contact policy – in part because there was only one phone line available for residents to use. Now, most women entering the shelter have their own cell phones; talking and texting goes on non-stop.[8] The ubiquity of cell phones may, therefore, lessen the sense of isolation from one's previous plausibility structures – possibly to the chagrin of shelter

[7] Possession and selling of drugs (including prescription medications) are major problems at the shelter, which means that workers need to be as certain as possible that all medications are turned in and then that dispensed drugs are not "cheeked" in order to sell later.

[8] A major cell phone company also donates cell phones to the residents (if they do not already have them), although these are not given out until the resident begins to go out of the shelter. If she is not in danger, it may not be given out until she moves out of the shelter.

workers who wish to use this initial phase to allow victim-survivors to "break" from their old worlds and learn a new way of life.

Life at the shelter

Emergency housing is allowed at the shelter for up to thirty days (barring any major violations of shelter rules) and is free of charge. A victim-survivor may then apply to stay for another thirty days of transitional housing at low cost, and this may be repeated again for a total maximum stay of ninety days. Acceptance for transitional housing is not automatic, nor is its extension. Residents must be seen to be in compliance with shelter rules and be showing progress toward the goals laid out in their individualized case plans.

As described above, the first day is extremely hectic, and the pace does not truly settle down for at least a couple more days. Still, shelter workers are aware that the victim-survivor has just been through a major crisis and relocation, and they do what they can to allow her some peace and some rest. Residents' reactions vary considerably – from one extreme of wanting to go out and "hang out" with their friends on the very first night (and resenting curfews and restrictions) to the opposite extreme of lying in bed or on the couch for several days (refusing to get up even to attend to their children's needs) and every point on the continuum in between these extremes.

During the first week, the new resident begins to settle into the pace of the shelter. There are a lot of rules to know and observe – signing out and giving very specific information when she leaves the shelter, curfews to observe and bedtimes for children (based on age), signing for her mail, and so forth. She may be interested in getting to

know the other women living at the shelter; more likely, they are interested in getting to know *her* (she may or may not be ready to "come out of her shell").

Sometimes there are conflicts from the start – jealousies, different family routines, crying babies at night, different ideas of fairness, and/ or different standards of cleanliness.[9] For instance, one woman may have never learned how to keep things clean and think she is doing a good job, while another is accustomed to being beaten if the home is not spotless. Putting these two together can create some interesting dynamics. Sometimes the residents of the shelter have a history (not necessarily a good one) and now those dynamics are part of shelter life. For instance, there have been situations where two residents were the "exes" of the same man – perhaps he left one for the other, or cheated on one with the other. There have been instances of a mother and her adult daughter each ending up in the shelter at the same time because they are each in an abusive relationship – but their relationship with one another may itself be quite dysfunctional.

Sometimes residents of the shelter do become friends. The shelter used to try to protect the residents from liabilities that other residents might cause them. They were not allowed to share their food at mealtime. They were not allowed to ask another resident

[9] Shelter workers try to make sure that residents keep the home clean. However, they face the problems that any home could face (such as the occasional rodent) as well as the problems that can run amok in a group living situation (such as lice – a problem which is not uncommon for them). Recently, there was an infestation of bedbugs. One shelter worker said, "It even happens at the best hotels." Even so, staff said that this problem cost the shelter thousands of dollars for treatment, purchase of new mattresses, etc. Until the problem was 100% resolved, they were unable to accept any new residents. When they received a call about someone in need of emergency shelter, they worked to secure her a placement at another facility, but not every victim was willing and able to relocate to another county. Just as my interviews were ending, the shelter reopened. (The exterminator said this reaction was quite exaggerated, but I assume that management wanted to "play it safe." The shelter is extremely concerned with safety in all situations, but they also want to provide a home that is comfortable and feels like home. They take appearances quite seriously, as well, because they do not want people to have a negative impression of the shelter. A negative public image would affect both their ability to help those in need and the donations they receive to do so.)

for a ride somewhere, or even ride along if they were going to the same place. More recently, the shelter staffers decided to allow the women to decide these things for themselves. This is part of a larger trend regarding debate in the field as to whether it is better to protect the vulnerable (victim) or encourage personal agency (survivor). It is certainly true that some residents will, if allowed, "prey upon" others, but the shelter hopes that they can teach a woman to look out for herself rather than stand guard over her.

After the first few days of seclusion, if it is deemed that the new resident is not in great danger, she will be able to go out some – on her own, with other residents, or perhaps even with old friends if they are close enough to connect (or have transportation). Under no circumstances is the victim-survivor allowed to spend a night away from the shelter during the first thirty days. After this, overnight passes may be issued at the director's discretion.

In those first few days, there are also "moving" details to handle – particularly getting a change of address form for the post office. If the resident is new to the area, she may even decide to get a library card and register to vote. There are probably follow-up appointments with doctors, police, and various agencies.

Each woman is responsible for keeping her own bedroom clean and for picking up after her children. She is to do her own cooking and clean up her own messes in the kitchen. She is to do her own laundry. She also shares the responsibility of keeping her bathroom clean (since it is shared with one or two other families). After about a week, the victim-survivor will also be assigned a share of the household chores. The number of common rooms of the residence is divided by the number of current residents, resulting

in the number of rooms that each is responsible to clean on a daily basis. The list is revised once a week (in order to have a fair rotation of chores) or whenever someone moves in or out. Residents are never assigned outdoor chores, although they can use these as a way to work off demerits. Under no circumstances are any chores to be assigned to the children (even older ones), and sometimes women get in trouble with staff for delegating their own chores to their older children.

The first thirty days of residence is a time for healing. Staff members use this time to try to build rapport between themselves and the victim-survivor. They try to find things she likes to do to help get her mind off of what has happened to her – reading, cooking, walking, crafts, etc. They take each day one day at a time, or maybe one minute at a time, and just try to get through. Although the workers are busy with numerous duties (even more now with the smaller staff due to budgetary cutbacks),[10] one of their main responsibilities is to simply spend time with the residents – watching TV together or smoking cigarettes[11] on the deck outside. These are opportunities for bonding.

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[10] Staff responsibilities are numerous. These include keeping detailed records and statistics for grants (although it is the director who writes the actual grants); updating numerous records about each individual client (and her children) for official purposes (such as court) and for the purposes of keeping other staff updated of changes and concerns (which are also relayed as part of a verbal shift change); facilitating house groups (from things like crafts to parenting skills to domestic violence education); attending training in victim advocacy; leading trainings for other community groups (such as for law enforcement); community outreach projects; attending court, medical appointments, and certain other appointments with the client; handling crisis hotline calls, including making referrals and pick-ups; shopping; assisting with job and parenting skills; getting supplies and medications from the office for residents on request; diffusing in-house crises; cleaning of offices and outside; daily chore checks of residents' duties; frequent perimeter checks of the house and property; food bank orders and pick-ups; special cleaning and treatment of living areas when a problem arises (such as lice – in which case the workers also must pick the nits from residents' hair); prepping rooms and forms at move-in and move-out times; etc. Yet with all this, it is important that workers spend time with each resident just "hanging out" and bonding – building the trust that is needed to try to get to know and help the survivor.

[11] Smoking is actually a very important part of the lives of shelter residents. Although the shelter director (a non-smoker) considers smoking to be both dangerous and expensive, and she hopes that they will someday quit, quitting is almost never a priority during the victim-survivor's stay at the shelter. The director believes that it helps keep residents calm and gives them something to do (an oral fixation). Since

During this time, shelter employees are also trying to best understand what the victim-survivor needs in order to heal and to achieve success and independence. A case worker will help develop an individualized case plan for each resident and will meet with her regularly to assess her progress toward her goals (sometimes jointly with the director, if a serious matter needs to be addressed). If the resident is in need of outside resources, such as mental health counseling, these services are arranged.

Classes are sometimes offered at the shelter. These generally involve some sort of education about, or peer-to-peer discussion of, domestic violence. There seems to be some debate as to whether these classes are allowed to be "required," although shelter employees certainly believe the classes are crucial to a woman's recovery. However, the regular weekly classes have not been held for a few years due to staffing issues. The closest thing they have had for some time is the occasional guest lecture by a Christian mental health counselor. Due to this situation, domestic violence education is now virtually non-existent at the shelter I studied. Like parenting skills, it has been relegated to simply what can be explained or modeled in the random interactions between staff and residents.

From time to time there are specialty classes offered at the shelter – things like learning a craft or learning how to get a job, but even these things are sporadic. Employees do try to help women to develop resumes, practice mock interviews, and

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many of the staffers are smokers, this is a shared activity that allows for bonding – so much so that staffers who do not smoke are at somewhat of a disadvantage.

The director also acknowledges that lack of money and addiction to smoking can lead to other problems. She often tells the story of reviewing security footage from an incident that happened in the middle of the night. On the camera, she saw that one resident was so desperate for a smoke that she was rifling through the ash bucket for a cigarette butt. The director and the desperate resident were both aware that some of those butts belonged to another resident who had hepatitis C, which is highly infectious, but that did not seem to matter in the desperation of the moment.

acquire appropriate clothing for a job search. Residents who do not already have a job are actively discouraged from seeking one during the initial thirty day period when they are supposed to rest from the cares and pressures of the world. After that, however, it may be part of their case plan to put in a certain number of job applications each week.

Some residents resent having to live at the shelter. They feel oppressed by the house rules or by the requirements for progress. They often leave or are evicted for some violation before much time has passed. Other residents are experienced at milking the system for all they can – moving from shelter to shelter, living on their own only long enough to get into trouble that will allow them back into a shelter, bragging that six different churches or agencies bought Christmas presents for their families, etc. They comply with the rules so they can stay there. Shelter workers are not naïve about this type of resident, but try to use the time they have with the residents to model better values in hopes that they may "plant a seed" in their hearts that they will someday aspire to more.

A few residents actually appreciate the opportunity they have been given, and a few at least appreciate that the shelter is better than some places they have heard about or resided. For instance, one woman told me about a domestic violence shelter where she had lived. The details were confusing, but it was someplace in another county and she said it was "run by nuns." At that shelter, they had a group dining situation. No one had or prepared their own food; it was prepared for them and served at a specific time. The kitchen was completely off-limits except during specified hours. The instance that had deeply angered this woman was that her new baby wanted a bottle at 10:00 p.m., but she was told the kitchen was closed and she could do nothing but let the infant scream until

morning. This woman appreciated the flexibility she encountered at the shelter I studied in comparison to this other one that she had experienced.

One employee told me that the shelter in a particular nearby county is also not as good as the shelter I studied, and that residents could not have their cars there. Another employee described a situation when she had to transport a resident to a shelter just across the state line (as a transfer to that shelter):

> It was gut-wrenching. We get there, and the shelter's not like ours. Ours is like the bed and breakfast, you know. I mean, we have everything. Cable TV. [Residents] have their own rooms. We have a great play yard, fenced in. Security systems to take care of them. [This other shelter] was not like that…. We walked in, and they share bedrooms [several families to one room]. And I was upset about that. Then they said, "Put your food in the refrigerator. And, by the way, anything in the house is a free-for-all. Anybody here can eat it." See, [at the shelter] we have cupboards where their food is their food. The refrigerator spots are theirs. Um, and ours is much more family-friendly. And it's not the "shelter." It makes a huge difference. And then I found out there was no fenced yard for the kids to play in. I bawled. I cried all the way back….

None of the people I interviewed mentioned the experience of religion at other area domestic violence shelters. The shelter observed by Winkelmann (2004) specifically sought to keep the shelter [or at least its common areas] as a religion-free zone, even going so far as to attempt to prevent women from bringing Bibles into common areas and not accepting donations from religious groups.

Obviously, the shelter I studied has a different approach. Religious symbols and artwork are ubiquitous, as are Bible verses, Bibles, and inspirational posters and literature. One employee spends part of her shift watching religious programs on TV. The executive director pounces upon any "opening" she is given to discuss religion with residents – which usually results in her inviting them to church with her (out of the county). Several employees have openly expressed the wish that they could speak more

freely on religious matters with residents, while others believe religion needs to be kept separate from the shelter experience. This was a matter of considerable conflict between the director and one of her former shelter managers. The manager is a Christian and regularly attends church, but believes that there needs to be a clear separation between the shelter and religion. Some shelter employees also want that separation because they are not religious.

The shelter has encouraged the involvement of churches in their endeavors. Employees speak at church functions. Churches make frequent donations to the shelter. During the annual toiletry drive, nearly all contributions come through churches and the items donated are more numerous, more expensive, and in better condition overall than items donated through the few other participating organizations. Church women's groups bring used bedding, kitchenware, and furniture to give to women as they move out. They crochet afghans for residents, teach them crafts, and even bring the leftovers from church potlucks and funeral dinners.

From time to time, the shelter has tried to make arrangements for transportation to local churches, but this has not worked out in any lasting way. They are not allowed to pay on-duty staff to take residents to church. Church leaders complain about off-duty staff bringing residents because they feel it interferes with the employee's own chance to be off work and to worship. Even when the shelter has tried to find a way to offer transportation to churches, there has been a complaint from any board member who was upset that her own church was not on the list of churches selected. They have also tried using church transportation, but this means disclosing the shelter's location to the church bus drivers and trying to get them to be patient when newly-single mothers were late,

grouchy, or unable to attend at the last minute. For now, a resident who is not church-affiliated already (at someplace close enough to continue to attend) will probably not be able to begin attending church during her shelter stay unless she actively seeks it on her own or accepts the director's invitation to attend her out-of-county church. Attending on their own really does not happen (even if they have had an invitation) because many shelter residents have a fear of venturing into new, unfamiliar situations.

Leaving the shelter happens in as many ways as entering the shelter. Most women move out by choice – perhaps within hours, perhaps at the ninety day limit. In rare instances, there may be a reason that a resident is allowed to stay a little longer. Some women feel they are ill-prepared to live on their own and end up going back to the abuser, although the shelter does everything they can to help prevent this from happening. Sometimes a woman has better connections (family, job possibilities, etc.) in another area and is transferred to a shelter in that area. Sometimes a woman returns to her own home because the abuser is gone. Sometimes she is able to move to the homeless shelter.

Many, perhaps most, of the women who come to the shelter are "multi-problem" cases – meaning that they may have legal, medical, mental, or other issues in addition to the domestic violence. According to shelter staff, women who face only the single problem of IPV are less likely to come to the shelter in the first place because they are more likely to have other resources on which to rely. Sometimes the nature of these additional problems determines where they go when they move out (and how voluntary it is when they do so) – a prison, an assisted living facility, etc. I have seen police arrive at the shelter with an arrest warrant for a resident (on unrelated charges) and take her away

in handcuffs. Another time, a woman overdosed on prescription drugs purchased from another resident; everyone involved was evicted and that woman was in the hospital for a time.

Wherever the survivor moves, the shelter employees do their best to get her started out right and stay in touch with her needs. If she is starting a new household from scratch, they try to provide her with furniture, dishes, linens, etc. – items which usually come from church donations. If she does not have a cell phone (either her own or one that was already given her by the shelter), she is provided with one. They work on a move-out packet of material together, which includes giving her information about how to reach the shelter and other local agencies, and the types of ongoing help she can request from each of these. She may be invited back for crafts or other lessons. She may be included in referrals given by the shelter – such as Angel Tree information for churches at Christmas. She may drop in just to update the staff on what is going on in her life. If she needs emergency supplies (like food or diapers), the shelter tries to help with these. If she needs emergency shelter from abuse again, she may request that. Although there are women who are never heard from again, the shelter tries to stay in touch with and continue to help anyone who is willing – even if they left on "bad terms."[12]

[12] Even staying in touch can present difficulties. Former residents may change their phone numbers, run out of minutes, or cancel their service. Shelter workers may only call from a number that blocks caller ID in order to protect the privacy of the ex-resident (in case the abuser is still in her life or in case anyone else would happen to see who the call came from) – but often abused women are wary about answering calls from a blocked number.

If the call then goes into voicemail (assuming it is enabled), then the shelter worker has to still find ways to protect the woman's privacy (since the abuser may be able to access her voicemail). One cannot just say, "I'm calling from the shelter." It helps if the victim personally knows the caller, in which case a first name might help (if it is not too common), but worker turnover is frequent so this may not accomplish what it needs to.

Domestic Violence Shelters in the United States

While numerous studies (such as this one) have focused on particular elements in the lives of residents of domestic violence shelters, very few studies have been done on the shelters themselves. The only sizable exception to this is the Department of Justice study by Eleanor Lyon, Shannon Lane, and Anne Menard – a study covering 215 shelters in eight states (Lyon, Lane and Menard 2008). The authors stated that there were *no* other studies comparable in size with which to compare their research. According to Lyon, et al.:

> The present study addresses a large gap in current knowledge. While there are currently an estimated 1,949 domestic violence programs across the United States, the literature lacks a multi-state study with a large enough sample size to be able to describe shelter experiences of survivors of domestic violence, document the range of services provided, and present nuanced comparative analyses that examine shelter residents with different demographic characteristics and from various geographic regions. (3)

The authors of this sizable study aimed for a large and diverse sample of IPV survivors and shelter programs. In a six-month period, 3,410 residents in 215 domestic violence shelters provided data (an incredible 81% of the shelters in eight diverse states). The researchers asked shelter residents to complete a written survey upon entering the shelter and another survey when they left the shelter. The surveys were translated into eleven different languages and inquired about 38 different needs. The entrance survey concentrated on initial impressions and concerns, and the exit survey inquired about difficulties the shelter residents experienced as well as the support and respect the IPV survivor received (Lyon, Lane and Menard 2008, 4-5; 27-41).

The domestic violence shelters averaged 16.5 full-time staff and fifteen volunteers per month – considerably larger, on average, than the shelter I studied. The average

capacity of the shelters was 25 beds. During the past year, the shelters had housed, on average, 130 adults plus 114 children. The shelters serving higher population areas had much larger capacity and more funding to support their endeavors.

The median duration of a maximum-time shelter stay was sixty days, although 18% had a maximum stay of thirty days. These time limits could sometimes be extended under unusual circumstances. As stated above, the shelter I studied allows for thirty days of emergency housing plus two additional thirty-day renewals (by application) for women who are actively working toward goals involved in transition. Thus the maximum stay at the shelter I studied is ninety days, although they also allow for additional extensions under unusual circumstances.

The most common needs of the shelter residents surveyed by Lyon, et al., were safety (85%), affordable housing (83%), and learning about their options (80%). Residents overwhelmingly reported that they were made to feel welcome (95%). A quarter of the residents surveyed by Lyon, et al., had only learned about the shelter shortly before moving there, and almost half (46%) had never stayed in a shelter before (Lyon, Lane and Menard 2008, 6-10; 43-49).

Most of the residents served were women (99.6%), but a small percentage of abused men were also served by the shelters. Men were usually given hotel vouchers or stayed in safe homes; they did not stay at the shelter. The policy at the shelter I studied was similar, though fluid. When I first encountered the shelter, I was told that abused men could receive hotel vouchers. Later I was told that they did not serve abused men. The shelter I studied is the only domestic violence shelter in its region that allows teenage boys to be in residence with their mothers.

According to Lyon, et al., the most common problem encountered in the shelter itself was conflict with the other residents in the shelter (32%) – which I discussed above with regard to the shelter I studied and will also be seen in some of the upcoming case studies. Transportation (24%), lack of privacy (16%), and problems with shelter rules such as curfew, chores, monitoring, etc. (16%) were also problems identified by residents (Lyon, Lane and Menard 2008, 10-18; 83-106). Similar issues were mentioned regarding the shelter I studied (above) and by the women in the upcoming case studies.

The study by Lyon, et al., did not focus on religion, but it did ask one question (using a four-point Likert Scale) about whether residents felt their religious views were respected. Of the total respondents, 74% strongly agreed and 22% agreed. Among men only, 60% agreed strongly and 40% agreed. Unfortunately, no further details regarding specific interactions about religion were included in this survey.

The study clearly implies that domestic violence shelters serve a critical need for women who have experienced abuse and that those who work in the shelter need further training to respond effectively to the needs of and conflicts among residents.

Community Interaction

Numerous social agencies exist in the community I studied to help the residents of the town and the county. There is a county hospital, although it has a limited number of services. The community residents have to go to larger cities to find most types of specialists. Most people go to one of a very few general practitioners (if they can be accepted); the poorer residents (including the shelter residents) go to a clinic where they are seen by a nurse practitioner.

There are a handful of private mental health counselors (none of them with doctorates), although the only people I met who used any mental health facilities all used a local sliding-scale county mental health agency. None of the clients I spoke with felt that they received proper mental health care at this agency, but they could not afford anything else. They complained that counselors (who are actually social workers) did nothing to help them through their problems, and the two part-time psychiatrists "don't do anything except prescribe a bunch of drugs. They never listen to you." The Disability Advocate from the welfare agency told me that the psychiatrists are overworked, but that they listen more than their unstable clients think. (Again, notice the labeling done by those who have the power to speak.) There is no inpatient mental health facility in the community. The only psychiatric hospital wards are located about an hour's drive to the east or west, although in a small town in a neighboring county there is a group home for mental patients who do not need to be on lock-down.

The community also has a senior center, a women's homeless shelter, several A.A. meetings (which are held in the local churches or at the county mental health agency), one N.A. meeting (with a reputation of being a place to "score" drugs rather than recover from them), a Crisis Pregnancy Center (which is very pro-life in orientation and receives great support from the local religious community), a welfare agency, agencies for children's needs (like child support enforcement), a Head Start program, a United Way agency, and so forth. There are five preschools in the community, two of which are run by churches. There is a summer program for children, with a day camp, local outings, and meals – often at no cost to parents. Children who live at the domestic violence shelter usually go to this summer program during the day, if they are the right

ages. There is a job connection program to help people prepare resumes, learn interview skills, and discover job openings. There is an agency that can help with certain needs of the poor (clothing vouchers from one of the thrift stores, a one-time rent payment, etc.), although that agency was recently found to be mismanaged and is undergoing a time of transition.

There is, of course, the domestic violence shelter, which was discussed above. Until recently there was also a visitation center for supervised visitations of children and also for visitation exchanges of children whose separated/ divorced parents who cannot get along so that they do not come into contact with one another. This agency was run as a subdivision of the domestic violence shelter, but has now been disbanded due to funding cuts. The shelter director is hoping to start it up again using a volunteer staff, which she hopes to recruit primarily through the local churches. The visitation center was open to anyone (upon approval), but was court-mandated for some people. The shelter also provides other services to the community, such as parenting classes taught at the hospital. The parenting classes are free and open to anyone, but are court-mandated for some people.

While researching the community and the shelter, I also spent considerable time studying the churches (as described in Chapter 1). Although I observed a great deal about gender roles in the churches and discovered numerous ways in which the churches interact with the shelter, there was almost no mention of IPV itself during the Sunday morning worship service at any of the area churches.

The lack of specific information about partner violence during the Sunday morning service is an enormous missed opportunity for the churches of the community.

After all, the Sunday morning service is certainly the first and usually the most likely time when a person goes to church. It is the best chance, therefore, for a person to learn about the beliefs and services offered by the church. On the other hand, we should not assume that what is heard from the pulpit on Sunday morning is the extent of assistance offered by the church. As pointed out by Nancy Nason-Clark, churches, small groups within churches, and religiously-inclined individuals are often active in helping victims of IPV (Nason-Clark 1997; cf. Ammerman's examples of "everyday" religion and religious performances in "secular" spaces).

First of all, several of the churches had bulletin boards or tables with announcements or brochures for church or community agencies offering help for various problems. At six of the twenty-two churches I visited, this included information on the domestic violence shelter. The Lutheran Church (Missouri Synod) had a great deal of literature from a group called Lutherans for Life, one of which was a pamphlet encouraging men to use their *power* in ways that respect women and not in ways that hurt them. Churches gladly accepted the literature I distributed about the shelter, and most also participated in the annual toiletry drive for the shelter. The pastor of the Friends meeting offered to take posters to his church and to the ministerial association. Looking at the posters, he commented, "You'd think if anyone will stand against violence, it should be the churches." He then gave me information about the ministerial association and told me to call him if I ever needed to put anything on the association's agenda.

At some of the churches I visited, the information about the shelter was outdated or there was only one brochure left. Because I myself distributed literature to some churches as part of a publicity project, the number of churches displaying literature about

the shelter may have grown. It is also possible that there was information available in places not immediately apparent to me as a visitor. One of the churches with information about the shelter also had brochures from the visitation center (a subsidiary of the shelter which had just closed during my period of research).

I noticed that in one of the church bulletins (at an Evangelical church), there was an announcement about the toiletry drive – but the announcement did not get the name of the shelter quite right. The name confusion happened another time, when the pastor of the Evangelical Friends Church announced that the director would be speaking at the evening service.

Churches in the community regularly organized various community service projects. Residents of the domestic violence shelter are specifically invited to several of these events – such as the free garage sales, car repair services, and church dinners. Residents are also specifically invited to attend women's groups and craft groups organized by the local churches. Church women also come to the shelter to teach crafts or throw Christmas parties. They frequently bring donations of leftovers from church dinners, funeral dinners, rummage sales, as well as day-old baked goods.

The domestic violence shelter is often invited to participate in church services *other than* the Sunday morning service. The Lutheran Church (E.L.C.A.) invited shelter staff to do a program for youth during Stalking Awareness Month. On Good Friday, a Methodist church hosted a community service (a cooperative effort among the churches of the community). The executive director was asked to speak during the offertory, and the money collected was then donated to the shelter. At an Evangelical church, the director was invited to speak to a women's group.

Shelter workers were also invited to speak at the Sunday evening service at the Evangelical Friends Church. Strangely, this did not get Sunday morning publicity equal to other events in the church. Numerous announcements were listed in the bulletin. All but one of these was also projected onto the large screen, and several were announced verbally. The only one that was not projected (nor announced verbally) was the announcement that the executive director of the shelter would be speaking to the women's group later in the week. The pastor later announced this at the Sunday morning service, although he never got the (real) name of the shelter quite right. He was very positive and asked for the church's support at the event. However, at one point he said of the victims, "*They* believe their situation at home is somehow unsafe." Despite this critical-sounding comment, the event was well attended. Many people made donations of cash or goods, accepted literature about the shelter services, and/ or signed up for future call lists or newsletters.

As I visited churches, I was often asked what I did for a living. Not wanting to disclose my role as a researcher while I was still in the preliminary stage of exploring the community, I answered that I worked with the local domestic violence shelter. At one small church, the women I was speaking to were very pleased to hear this. One replied, "Oh, that's such important work you do there." The women at the Lutheran Church (Missouri Synod) were very impressed. They seemed very compassionate when this subject arose. One woman said, "God bless you! I wouldn't have the patience for that!" At a small non-denominational church, I was speaking with a woman whose face changed dramatically when I mentioned the shelter. When she could finally speak, she said, "That must be quite a challenge."

Several people affiliated with the domestic violence shelter attend churches in the community. This includes staff (past and present), residents (past and present), and board members, in addition to family members of each of these groups.

Churches and church people have been very important to the domestic violence shelter. In these more difficult economic times, the shelter is experiencing massive budget cuts. One shelter worker says, "It's getting to the point where the shelter needs to rely more and more on the churches."

Conclusion

In this chapter, I presented the shelter itself – from the call to the crisis hotline to the brutal facts of group living for ninety days. At the shelter, religious symbols, literature, etc., are ubiquitous. The shelter director and many of the workers consider their advocacy work as a form of ministry. They relish opportunities to "witness" to residents, just as they look for "teachable moments" regarding other lessons (like parenting skills) which they wish to impart.

But how do the victim-survivors themselves respond to this situation? I have shown that religious identity is shaped in conversation with one's environment – from the earliest caregivers to later significant others. When residents arrive at the shelter, they are not blank slates. They bring with them their own perceptions of God, self, and others that were shaped by their experiences and the significant people in their lives. They bring along their own "tool kit" with their relative abilities to utilize a spiritual imagination, centering faith, and ties to a religious community.

With that in mind, I now turn to Part 4, where I will present the narratives of these four remarkable women (Roxanne, Lexie, Shannon, and Ashley) and consider three interlocking themes that arise from their self-narratives. These themes are:

1. Each woman developed a distinct cultural tool kit to cope with each aspect of her life.

2. Each woman developed some form of religious identity as part of her cultural tool kit.

3. Each woman has complex views of the shelter experience and the church.

Part IV

The Results:

Case Studies and Conclusions

6

Roxanne

In the Methods chapter, the interested college professor was introduced to Roxanne and a brief overview of her life. As I analyzed her detailed interviews and demeanor, it was apparent the Roxanne's primary early caregiver was her mother, and she developed a close bond with her mother that has lasted her whole life. The product of the second marriage for both of her parents, Roxanne was born after the death of one of her mother's daughters, and her mother appeared to dote on her, never really disciplining her due to their close bond. Roxanne's father was a drug addict and in prison during her young life, never really in the picture of her socialization until the age of fifteen. Her mother's parents also were significant others during Roxanne's childhood. The Meadian sociologists that I covered in Chapter 2 are very clear that one's earliest caregivers provide the initial form of dialog with society. For Roxanne as a toddler, her "universe of discourse" was her mother (Mead 1934, 89-90; Berger and Luckman 1966, 131; cf. Benjamin 1988, 13-15, for the Object Relations perspective on this bond).

When she was five, Roxanne's parents divorced. Roxanne moved with her mother and sisters to her grandparents' home. Soon Roxanne's mother began dating a man who Roxanne would soon consider "Dad" – the third husband of her mother. Roxanne completely accepted her stepfather and entered into one of the best periods of her life. Roxanne developed "cultural equipment" (Swidler 1986) in this new family (which began in her first grade year and lasting to the age of twelve). Her life was good,

and she developed strategies of action that affected her perceptions throughout her life. Her mother and stepfather were caring, giving individuals, who even founded a charity. They both worked (two jobs each), had a nice sized home, and enough money for amusement and recreation. Roxanne played sports, did well in school, and developed a social circle of middle class friends.

Through her elementary school years, Roxanne appears to have achieved equilibrium in her life. She was aware of her social status, adapted to her environment and, from all appearances, was content. Her stepfather had two sons; her mother three daughters, so it was a big family of which she was a part. She does admit to starting fights with one of her step-brothers, for which she was never punished. As for violence, however, she never viewed it between her parents, grandparents, social circle, etc.

It was a great shock, therefore, when her mother and stepfather ("Dad" – a man she adored) divorced. There was no warning – no indication of problems between them. She just remembers that she, her mother, and her sisters "moved out one day." She never spoke to her stepfather or step-brothers again. Her equilibrium was broken; her cultural tool kit in disarray. She struggled to cope. Her sense of loss was massive. "That's when my life went downhill," Roxanne recalls, "I think that was the only real family I had and then it just devastated me when, like, they just forgot about us."

All of the analytical literature, both sociological and psychological, confirm the impact of that divorce on a young person. Jean Piaget writes that the young person seeks to restore balance with her environment and feels impelled to construct new modes of knowing and acting to meet the new challenges facing her (Piaget 1952). Jessica

Benjamin reiterates how the child has to reconcile grandiose ambitions with reality (Benjamin 1988, 41). Peter Berger acknowledges that threats to the "self" occur when the taken-for-grantedness of the child's world is challenged (Berger 1963, 137-38). Carrie Doehring bluntly summarizes: "Loss is the most common source of human suffering" (Doehring 2006, 70).

Roxanne suffered many of the types of loss that Doehring categorizes, i.e., "material loss," "relational loss," "intrapsychic loss," "role loss," and "systemic loss." She experienced material loss because Roxanne, her mother, and sisters moved frequently and were not able to afford to live in the home they had so happily inhabited with her step-family. Relational loss ended the possibility of intimacy with "Dad" and her step-brothers. She experienced intrapsychic loss in that the dream life Roxanne had imagined was shattered. Role loss was demonstrated in that Roxanne's social setting, social status, and friendships were dismantled. Most societal friendships had revolved around the now vanished stepfather and his multitude of acquaintances. This led to massive "systemic loss" in family systems and community (Doehring, 74-76).

Perhaps Roxanne's own words during a two-hour long interview session sum up her feelings of loss of power over the situation. Perhaps her own words underscore why "power" became the focus of Roxanne's life. She shared:

> I was just out of my whole mind, you know, I lost my whole family, so I was just out of control. And then my mom was working third shift. And [I] got in with the wrong crowd, you know, um, cuz it was kinda like when my mom and my step-dad divorced, our [social] class went down. You know what I mean? So we're not middle class livin' in the big yellow house on Walnut Street anymore. So, you know, you get knocked down a class..... I don't think [my old friends'] parents would let them come to our house because, I mean, or let us hang out cuz my mom wasn't with [my step-dad] anymore. It was just devastating. So I got in with the

> crowd that accepted me regardless and they just weren't the best crowd of people to hang around in.

Roxanne began drinking heavily with her new society of "juvenile delinquents." Developing alternative strategies in her cultural tool kit to cope with her sense of loss, she began stealing her mother's car and driving without a license. In her own words, she became a "thug" to grasp power, even garnering an assault charge. Ironically, she still did well in school, manipulating the teachers (as she put it) as she manipulated society as a whole. Her mother never disciplined her, but realized that Roxanne was out of control. Still not old enough for a license, one night Roxanne stole two different cars. The judge sentenced her to time in the local Children's Home to try to reform her, teach her "family skills," and "help me get my head back right." She did receive counseling, but claims she manipulated the counselors, telling them "what they wanted to hear." Nevertheless, she ceased drinking and smoking marijuana and hung with some "nice girls" on the volleyball team.

The administration of the Children's Home accused Roxanne of "getting high" when she was not, and she felt this broke her spirit. She stopped trying to get anything out of their program. After nine months at the Children's Home, Roxanne went back to her old lifestyle and to her mother who still could not control her. For the first time in her life, her grades suffered. She was only fifteen years old.

Soon, Roxanne's mother had to send her to live with her biological father, a man she barely knew. He was married to his fourth wife and was even deeper into drugs. Roxanne was now deeply involved in a drug-abusing family and a drug culture. Ironically, all members of her family worked and taught her the importance of hard work and earning a living. Roxanne was smart and understood implicitly how to

read and manipulate people to get what she wanted; but she lacked any long-term goal except for the need for attention and acceptance. When she could meet this need in a positive way, through school work (she graduated a year early) or job, she did so. But in her needier times, she relied on the lifestyle of "thuggery" she had added to her "strategies of action" and "cultural tool kit" – i.e., crime, drugs, etc. She wanted control; she had to have "power." She met a series of men, had a daughter, and entered (with new friends) the world of clubbing and promiscuity. Within her new plausibility structure, she began to use cocaine, which soon evolved into the use of crack. She was convicted of her first felony (forgery) and put on probation. The court ordered drug testing.

It is at this time period of her life that she met her partner and mutual abuser, Joel. Roxanne got pregnant almost right away with her second daughter (the only child which is biologically Joel's) and says that is the reason she and Joel stayed together. They moved in with her mother and, almost immediately, their relationship turned abusive. Roxanne claims that she was still on a power trip and treated Joel as though he did not deserve her. A drug addict and heavy drinker himself, Joel "just turned bitter" and became abusive to the point of choking her one night when he was drunk. The police were called, and Joel went to jail for domestic violence.

The violence Roxanne encountered in her domestic relationship with Joel was "mutual combat" – a term applied by Michael P. Johnson to both partners being violent – in this case, both physical and psychological terrorism (Johnson 2008, 12). Certainly the thirst for power in Roxanne's life led to her side of the equation. Johnson emphasizes that the researcher of intimate partner violence (IPV) must ask the right question once the violence is detected or admitted. One of the key questions is whether the psychological

and physical abuse "was enacted in the general context of power and control" (13). Jessica Benjamin notes that this process of domination is complex and begins forming and shaping a young woman from the toddler years of mother and child – a thinking process that refuses to be monistic (Benjamin 1998). Carrie Doehring would recognize that Roxanne had all three issues that researchers encounter, i.e., loss, violence, and coping with stress – in this case unhealthy substance abuse and addiction. In fact, Jerry P. Flanzer would point out that alcohol and other drugs are key causal agents of violence (Flanzer 2005). And, from personal experience, Linda G. Mills would explain that alcohol and drugs can turn even friends into abusers (Mills 2008, 7-9).

Likewise, Meadian sociologists that I covered in detail in Chapter 2 would recognize the elements of "self" and "identity" that characterized Roxanne's life as she tried to "play the game" of life in the midst of loss and feelings of powerlessness. Peter Berger, for example, would recognize how Roxanne's near ideal elementary school "self" and "world" were crushed and forced her into secondary socialization ("acquisition of role-specific knowledge," Berger 1963, 138) of thuggery and crime to regain "power." Object Relations theorists covered in the Methods chapter would recognize the deep trauma of Roxanne's experience and how personal experiences can be understood and evaluated on the social level (Alford 2012). Cultural sociologists would recognize the distinct cultural tool kit that Roxanne devised to cope with each aspect of her life (Swidler 1986), and the "cultural equipment" and "strategies of action" she used to make sense of her world (Milkie and Denny 2014). Roxanne's situation affected her behavior, choices, proclivities, etc., and at times, her culture became both constraining as well as enabling (Alexander 2003).

In late January of 2005, Roxanne received an income tax refund which she and Joel decided to use to buy crack and resell it to make money. Arrested, Roxanne was convicted of her second felony (possession with intent to traffic) and sent to a rehabilitation center for five and a half months. She had been an enabler to Joel, "mothering" him in much the same way her mother took care of her. Joel broke off their relationship and found another woman to mother him while Roxanne was incarcerated. Through the work release at the rehabilitation center, Roxanne hooked up briefly with a "born drug dealer," and while at a bar drinking with him was arrested for parole violation. She was sent to prison, only to find out she was carrying the drug dealer's child (Roxanne's third daughter).

Joel also landed in prison (for robbery during his involvement in a meth ring). Upon his release, he found newly-released Roxanne and her three children staying with her mother. Joel joined her when he got out of prison to try to make a "family" once again. Roxanne took care of Joel and the children while working in the office at a food processing plant. Their domestic relationship remained rocky, with frequent breakups during which they had "flings" with other partners – five volatile years of both physical and psychological abuse.

Roxanne says that she does not understand how all of this violence came to be in her life. None of her previous relationships had been violent. Her parents and stepparents had not been violent, nor were they psychologically abusive. Nothing in her background had prepared her for a situation of intimate partner violence. The only violence she recalls as a child was her own – that she sought attention as a child by being "mean" or "bullying" others. Yet something in her relationship with Joel brought out the

worst in both of them. Joel started throwing the first punches and, while at the courthouse over such an incident in September of 2009, Roxanne was taken back to the director's office of Crime Victims Services. The domestic violence shelter was called and Roxanne entered the shelter with her children the next day ("just because...I thought I'd had enough by then").

IPV literature is clear that there comes a time in the abusive relationship where the stress is so great that change is not only needed but required (Walker 1979; Loseke 1992; Nason-Clark 1997). For example, Karolyn Senter and Karen Caldwell write that women initially have high hopes for their relationships even when the abuse escalates "until certain undeniable events provoked the women into action" (Senter and Caldwell 2002, 548). Roxanne's positive image of "mothering" (learned in relationship to her own mother) caused her to realize that the escalating violence in the home was not good for her children – a crucial factor in her response to the advocate's suggestion about moving into the shelter. Roxanne was able to relax in the environment of the shelter, especially because it finally gave her kids a chance to relax.

Roxanne's experience and view of the shelter will be discussed and analyzed in a later section of this chapter. For now, I will just briefly mention that she was evicted from the shelter for possessing and distributing drugs to other residents (who were also evicted). Roxanne and her three children moved back in with Roxanne's mother.

Growing Religious Identity during a Turbulent Life

As one analyzes the role of religion in Roxanne's life, one must remember that according to the sociological school of Symbolic Interactionism, the "self" interacts

within a complex organized society and holds many different positions or roles in society. According to this sociological theory, the "self" is organized into multiple parts or "identities." One has an identity for each role an individual plays in society. These identities have meaning in the role relationship. As we have seen for Roxanne, "self" as a "daughter" was one "identity." Self as a "thug" was another identity. Note that within the societal framework, interaction is not between whole persons but aspects of the person in relation to a particular role. In addition, these identities are always related to a counter-identity, interaction with others (Blumer 1969; Burke 1997; Ellestad and Stets 1998; Stets and Burke 2000; Turner 1978).

As I read and reread the detailed narrative of Roxanne's complex life, the emergence of her religious identity and the religious social structure she came into contact with during her lifetime is quite apparent. Though she cannot pinpoint the exact moment she learned about God, she maintains that a certain awareness about God had been present for as long as she could recall. She related:

> I mean, I think, I always knew about God. You know what I mean? I don't ever recall getting that "ah" moment where "Oh! That's God!" You know what I mean?... Like I don't ever recall the first time I ever knew about God or found out about God.

Roxanne's religious heritage was both Catholic and Methodist, but there was little active religious involvement in her own home. Her mother had been raised Catholic, so when Roxanne visited her grandparents frequently as a young child, she attended Catholic Church with that side of the family. Roxanne remembers prayer before meals at her mother's parents' home. Her mother always wore a cross, but had apparently not held on to her Catholic heritage. There were no religious discussions in Roxanne's home or among the family. Her stepfather took the family to the Methodist Church during the

beginning of their family life but, again, there were no religious discussions or symbols in the midst of this "ideal" family life. In fact, the family stopped attending church after a short while with no explanation. Roxanne does remember trying to learn the books of the Bible at the Methodist Church and being in church plays, but not much more. She attended public schools, although her mother had attended Catholic schools.

James Fowler would suggest that the frequent visits to the grandparents Catholic Church, prayer before meals, and the infrequent time at the Methodist Church (from ages three to seven) gave Roxanne the God-awareness, the "intuitive-projective faith" (Fowler 1981, Chapter 16). Moral awareness would also be part of this, including her mother and stepfather's charitable activities. Without significant others fostering these views, however, the second stage of "mythic-literal faith" had little material to foster story, drama, or myth in Roxanne's elementary years (Fowler 1981, Chapter 17). Certainly, the "drug culture" of her early adolescence does not appear to lead her to a hunger for a relationship with God – i.e., does not lead to Stage 3 "Synthetic-Conventional Faith" (Fowler 1981, Chapter 18). Rather, as David Heller explains: "The small children tend to maintain a positive and soft-mannered sense of deity, frequently associating God with play and fun" (Heller 1986, 40-41). Heller finds this "strikingly natural" rather than simplistic. Ana-Maria Rizzuto adds that "it seems correct to postulate that the sense of self is in fact in dialectical interaction with a God-representation that has become essential to the maintenance of the sense of being oneself" (Rizzuto 1979, 50-51). Roxanne just "knew" God existed.

Roxanne does not remember toys or dolls that could be considered transitional objects in D. W. Winnicott's sense of attribution of personality (Winnicott 1971, 1-

34). Of course, the mother object is strong – first as a symbol of union and then close relationship as "other" (Winnicott 1958, 130-31; Benjamin 1998, 47). Roxanne did have an orange and white cat named George. She grew up with George and describes him as "the boss." He was *her* cat – no one else's. He clawed at things, but not at her. George only hugged Roxanne, and he gave her gifts of birds and mice that he killed. Roxanne explained:

> We got George, I think, when I was a baby. So George grew up with me. He was the best cat ever. Um, he would hug you and, um, like it was just pretty much a tomcat. It'd come in and out, and like it would fight animals, and like it got its eye like pushed back so like you couldn't see the front of the eye. It was the back of the eye. I mean, it was the most beat up cat ever, but we had that cat a long time.

George the beloved cat died during Roxanne's ideal family life while she was in elementary school. In terms of her own self-awareness, she describes herself often as a "tomboy" and, later, "thug," every bit as tough as George the cat.

While at the court-mandated Children's Home (which she says was *not* a faith-based organization), Roxanne was required to go to church and youth group at the Evangelical Friends Church. She recalls that she enjoyed this, but only because it was a chance to socialize. She remembers playing games, singing, and "hanging out" – and that was better than being stuck at Children's Home with nothing to do. She does not remember learning anything about God there.

Later, as an adult, when pregnant Roxanne was arrested drinking in the bar with her then-boyfriend (the drug dealer) and sent to prison for violating her parole, she did attend church. She notes that it did not impact her in any major way. Her "bunkie" at the unit for expectant mothers was an African American woman who was deeply religious. Roxanne related:

> She tried to teach me about God and all that kind of stuff, so, I just really wasn't, I mean, I believed you know, all that kind of stuff, but I just wasn't in to it... I didn't take it serious.

God existed, but was not central to her life. Nevertheless, this stay in prison brought the stark realization that she needed to change the course of her life and try to make things up to her children.

Although "power" had been Roxanne's ultimate concern – her God representation (without specifically religious contents), the concept of "mothering the world" came from her mother's historic constancy and provided Roxanne with a centering faith. (The concept of centering faith was described in Chapter 3 and in the works of Berger, Fowler, Herman, and Tillich.) In this sense, Roxanne's wish to trade her "felon identity" for the role identity of "good mother" is much like the women on parole in Tara D. Opsal's research (Opsal 2011).

Joel came back to this "mothering" on Roxanne's part. In the midst of an abusive domestic relationship, Roxanne provided the financial base for the family and held the purse-strings in a reversal of traditional gender identity roles. While in the office at the food processing plant, she worked closely every day with an African American man who was a devoted Jehovah's Witness. He convinced Roxanne to go to a Jehovah Witness Bible study at his house. Roxanne never attended services at the Kingdom Hall of Jehovah's Witnesses, but said: "But, uh, we talked about it a lot and he got me really curious.... He answered a lot of the questions I've had and he was very knowledgeable of the Bible." Note that Roxanne did have questions about religion that were perhaps engendered by her "bunkie" in prison and life itself.

Roxanne also firmly disagreed with some of the theology of the Jehovah's Witnesses. "Jehovah Witnesses don't believe that there's a Hell," she stated frankly, "I do." Such disagreements, however, would not have kept Roxanne from joining these "knowledgeable" religious people – but "motherhood" did. Roxanne could not bear to take away Christmas and birthdays from her children (holidays Jehovah Witnesses considered pagan). Nevertheless, they were very convincing, and Roxanne was impressed. She had tried to read the Bible (mostly while in prison) and always started at Genesis ("So, I think, I read, like, the first part of Genesis probably a hundred times in my life"). Then she would give up and turn to romance novels to cure her boredom. But, her encounter with her coworker was the beginning of an awakening within her.

> [It was] kinda scary. You know what I mean? Cuz I got a real taste of what religion was about and I got to know deep stuff that I, you know, didn't ever really think to pay attention to before.

Roxanne believes the awakening had to do with the proximity of the coworker, rather than the chaos at home. As she recalls, the violence at home did not prompt her to seek out religion in any way. Religion was just there in the person of her coworker. By this point in her life, Roxanne sensed that if she got closer to Christianity, it would improve her life.

After the shelter experience, Roxanne and Joel eventually got back together. They even tried to go to church (see next section), but soon she was back to dealing drugs to try to "mother" Joel in his drug dependence. Arrested yet again, Roxanne was indicted and sent to the county jail. While there, Roxanne tried religion again. She gratefully appreciated the visits from her pastor at the Friend's meeting. She also attended church services at the jail ministry run by the Church of the Nazarene. The

woman who led this ministry was deeply involved with the domestic violence shelter. "So I was tryin' to get it together while I was in jail," Roxanne declared, "You know that was the start of me and religion, I would say."

Roxanne had no expectation that she would get out of jail because she had been placed under a $150,000 bond. Joel and Roxanne decided to get married so that he could bring the children to visit her – a chance to hug and kiss her beloved girls. Roxanne was taken from the county jail to the courthouse on a Friday morning wearing a red jumpsuit and shackles to be married to Joel. "Well, don't you know," she chuckles at the irony, "I got bonded out that afternoon, so I didn't have to freaking do all that." She was released on bond after six weeks on the very day of a wedding she had not really wanted.

Out on bond, Roxanne decided to attend the Church of the Nazarene which had helped her while she was in jail. Joel attended twice with Roxanne and the children, but was sick from withdrawal and searching for drugs, "trashing the house," as they prepared to head to church the third time. Joel did not want them to go to church. The children really liked the church and wanted to go, as did Roxanne. As she drove out the driveway, Roxanne and her daughters witnessed Joel hang himself. "I just kept driving, called the sheriff," Roxanne sobbed, "I was ready for him to die. I was done. I was emotionally *done*. I was just ready for it all to be over, so I just kept driving."

Three days after watching Joel kill himself, Roxanne was indicted on the trafficking charges and sent to a different jail in a neighboring county. She was trying to make funeral arrangements and "be with my grieving children," but the court would not allow her any more freedom. She was taken to this other jail, a stricter jail, with the expectation of serving seven to ten years at the state women's prison. She was escorted

back to town for Joel's funeral, which was performed by the pastor from the Friend's meeting. Separated from her children, she wept, "It was the worst time of my whole life." The children went to stay with Roxanne's mother.

In the midst of this tumultuous period of her life, the time in this stricter jail marked a turning point in Roxanne's religious experience.

> Over there's when I *really* got into religion. They had the *best* prison ministry over there, er jail ministry.... I was searching for something to get me through [all the crises I had just experienced]. And then I just figured "why not?" And you know, it can only bring better things into my life and more happiness and peace.

In the field of psychoanalytical theory, cognitive developmentalists such as Pascal Boyer and Sarah Walker would recognize Roxanne's religious cognitive growth as part of her general growth of understanding of the mind, agency, mental-physical causality, and related concepts (Boyer 1994; Boyer and Walker 2004). The factors in her life dictated that there must be change. Her "mothering" concept led directly to wanting a better life for her children – a better life than she had had. Agents of change with more information and exuding religious experience (her "bunkie" and her Jehovah's Witness coworker) gave her cause to pause in her thinking about religion. Jacqueline Woolley would add that Roxanne's childhood belief in God's existence as reality could permeate adult thinking as "extraordinary reality" (Woolley 1997). Robert Coles would note that Roxanne had turned to religion with the childlike yearning to know "what this life is all about" (Coles 1990, 302).

For James W. Fowler, Roxanne's turn to religion was indicative of the thirty year old's transformation of patterns of life and focus of energy. He writes: "Conversion is a significant recentering of one's previous conscious images of value and power, and the

conscious adoption of a new set of master stories in the commitment to reshape one's life in a new community of interpretation and action" (Fowler 1981, 281-82). Fowler concludes: "Conversion, understood in this way, can occur in any of the faith stages or in any of the transitions between them" (282). In Chapter 4, I discussed the concept of "lateral" faith transitions, the change of *contents* of faith as opposed to the maturing of faith. Fowler allows for this, and it appears to be what happened to Roxanne (Fowler 1981, 285-86).

A New Life

A local independent congregation provided the ministry at the stricter, out-of-county jail. The pastoral couple came to the jail twice a week – once a week for a mid-week Bible study and once a week for the worship service, although the latter was alternated between the pastors and some congregants. After the Bible study, the pastors would stay in the interview room of the jail, making themselves available for anyone who wanted to speak with them individually. Roxanne says that they were "just really *there* for you."

> They were great people. It was great. We sang 'n just [she sighed] – the lady was just so powerful. And that's why I started to read the Joyce Meyer books 'n started actually reading the Bible where I should have started reading it to get me to understand, you know. [I] started the New Testament and the Gospels, and then get (*sic*) me, you know, curious of what are they talkin' about – lemme go read back in the Old Testament so I know what Moses did, and Job, and you know, all that kinda stuff. So eventually I got all there…. Like, the pastor, Allison, like, her son died of an overdose. You know what I mean? So she had been in that life. You know what I mean? And yeah, she wasn't on the drugs, but her son was…. [sobbing] They're really loving people over there. And there's no way I woulda made it without God in my life through that whole mess.

It was this kind of nonjudgmental spirit of compassion that Roxanne had wanted to see in her own pastor, but had not. It changed her life. She says she was always trying to be a better person and wanted a better life for herself and her three daughters. She was distressed that she kept falling back into old habits and problems, until finally she

> just came to the conclusion that I couldn't get there without God. You know what I mean? Like, you know, I had good intentions to be a better person, but getting there without God was just impossible, and I came to that conclusion…. So I just grasped onto that, and to God. And, you know, nobody else knew. I knew He knew…. [I knew God was real] because I felt strong. And I just emotionally, when I would read the Bible or read those books, you know, for some reason my mind was grasping it now. You know, I understood it better. I had a yearning to know more. You know, I wanted to know everything. You know. When I talked to Him, I felt like He was listening.

She says she had tried to pray in the past, but did not know what to do or why she was doing it. "I didn't know the power of prayer then…. I never thanked Him before." Even with all the problems she was facing, Roxanne says she learned to be grateful to God.

> You know, everything happened for a reason. But it took me a while to get to that point, but I did. You know, after I had to learn to forgive myself, 'n be forgiven, 'n you know, after I read, you know, a couple of the books that I read, I mean, they were just life changing for me. And [I] realized this is the only way to live. This is the only way I can really have complete happiness 'n *peace* in my life after everything that I've done.

> She began to cry again, so hard she could barely speak these words:

> Cuz I've done a lot of bad things. And I was a bad person. And I put my kids through so much that just was unnecessary that no kid should have to freaking go through.

Roxanne made some new friends at the jail, including one woman who was sent to the state women's prison with her when she was transferred there. She made friends with some people in prison, to whom she now writes letters. These women also

converted to Christianity in prison. Roxanne's new faith was being supported by a new plausibility structure – the community of others who were significant to her.

I asked how the jail ministry helped her to understand or cope with Joel's suicide, but she said that she focused her energies on building a better foundation for the present and the future, believing that the past would eventually make sense of itself.

> You know, I didn't really focus on that when I was in the [jail]…. I just wanted them to teach me about God…. I knew it would get to [dealing with the past], if I'd do what I'm supposed to do, and get right with God, and know the principles, and you know, it would all come together…. And then in the meantime, while I'm learning about God and reading all that, you know, that's in my head, my God-conscience talking to me and telling me why it happened, what happened, forgive yourself, you know.

Roxanne read twenty-seven faith-based self-help books, mostly from the prison library. Referring to religion in prison, she said, "It wasn't really, like, the ministries and stuff that really changed me. It was the books I read that changed me."

> Like this past year, you know, it's kind of nice that I got to be in prison and have nothing else to do but read the Bible or, you know, I read twenty-seven faith-based self-help books while I was gone. Anything from Joyce Meyer to Joel Osteen to John Baker, um, Rick Warren, um [their books are all at the prison]. They have the best church services in the world. They have a chaplain there at the [prison] and then they have an assistant chaplain who, her Bible studies were amazing. But then, every Sunday a different church comes in from outside…. But like the music that they have and just the different variety of people and just the different aspects was amazing. Major, major eye-opening experiences.

Singing and dancing at the church service provided a fun escape from the hard life at prison, but it was the icing on the cake for Roxanne. She attributes the real change in herself to the faith-based self-help books and the Bible.

Roxanne cannot point to a particular moment that changed her or when exactly she became a Christian, but saw it as a gradual process. Her perception of the world and of her situation changed; she began to see God at work in her life.

> But you know, you get to prison and they have, like, the *best* church service and ministries and Bible studies that you could ever imagine. And just all the people that you see with hope and, you know, all the blessings that were coming my way – I *knew* there had to be a God! You know, I knew He was working for me. I knew I was finally doin' the right thing. And that's why I was getting blessing after blessing after blessing.

As an example, she explained how her lengthy multi-year sentence at the state women's prison worked out to be less than a year. The circumstances were such that it seemed miraculous to her, and she attributes this to God. She also got a much better work assignment than she should have received in her circumstances, which she also attributes to God.

Roxanne was released from prison on parole in January of 2012 – only ten months after her arrest the previous March. She is now living with her mother and children again. She is grateful to her mother for all she has done for her over the years. "She is the best mom ever. And we get along great. Yeah, she's like my best friend. So it definitely works."

Roxanne has a whole new set of friends now. She no longer associates with anyone from her past, saying that the only people she knew before were "my dope clients or Joel's junkie friends." She had not wanted to bring "normal people" into that lifestyle, but now these are the ones with whom she wants to associate. There are no people her age at the small Friends meeting where she is again attending, however, so her new friends have not really come from that source. She chose to go back there because she felt that they "stuck by" her during her incarceration.

> Because that church stuck by me the whole time. My pastor would come see me in [jail]. And, like, another lady would write me. And another lady would send me cards. And all kinds of good stuff. They are the most non-judgmental church I think there is around here.

Roxanne has a new boyfriend now – a man she had dated when they were both fourteen. He is also newly-released from jail, struggling with drug issues, and a new Christian. Roxanne says, "Cuz I won't be with anybody who's not [a Christian]." Roxanne's new boyfriend is attending the Friends meeting with her, but is no happier with it than Joel had been, so they are considering looking for a new church. She was recently asked to teach Sunday School there, but declined since she expects to leave soon. Yet she also says that she is considered a member there (because there is nothing formal involved in that) and is looking forward to being baptized.[13] She thinks she was probably baptized Methodist as a child, but wants to be baptized again now that she is older, understands the meaning, and will remember the event. Currently she attends the worship service on Sundays and a Thursday evening Bible study at the home of the pastor. She has only missed one Sunday at church (during their move to a new home) and felt so guilty about it that she cannot imagine ever skipping church again.

Roxanne says that she is completely drug-free now and wants to help others overcome their problems (with drugs or anything else that has control of their lives). She and others from various churches are starting an interdenominational recovery program. "I'm on the Addictions Task Force and I regularly go to church. And we're doing that Christian recovery program and all that kind of good stuff." The task force only meets "at [a particular fast-food franchise] because it's the only place in town that plays

[13] Traditionally, Friends do not baptize with water because it is seen as redundant for someone who has already been baptized by the Spirit. In contemporary Friends meetings, local congregations are allowed to baptize if they so choose – and the one in Our Town does so. Roxanne had not known that this was not a traditional Quaker practice (nor that Friends and Quakers refer to the same denomination). When I explained this to her, she commented, "So, like, didn't they read in the Bible?" I explained that they *did* read the Bible and came to a different interpretation than many other Christian groups. She was surprised by all this and admitted she did not know why there were so many different Christian denominations or how they all came to be.

Christian music." They do not want to create divisions by meeting at any specific church "because some church people are like that," but the task force is specifically Christian. The program is Celebrate Recovery, a faith-based recovery program begun by John Baker of Saddleback Church in Lake Forest, California.

> But it's not *only* for drug addicts. It's for any hurt, hang-up, or habit. And it's based on, okay, like, N.A.'s got the Twelve Steps. Well, John Baker decided to find in the Bible what verses pertain to those Twelve Steps. And then he also integrated these eight healing choices that are based on the Beatitudes.

Roxanne worked through this program herself while in prison and is excited to start it up in Our Town. Each person in the program needs a confessor – someone he or she can fully trust. One has to admit his or her faults, write apology letters, etc., unless the apology would create additional pain. The confessor is essential. "You just can't keep it between yourself and God." She thinks this program is superior to A.A. and N.A. (which she has tried) because it is specifically Christian.

> I know A.A. and N.A. work for people that want it to work, but *I personally believe* that people just need God in their life to get it all together, to actually be happy, and live a fulfilled life…. *We* don't believe that there is any other higher power than God.

Roxanne marked her one year anniversary of being drug-free during the course of our interviews. When I asked her what God had done for her, she replied,

> Everything. He's made me strong. He's made me happy. He's made me know that I can forgive myself for everything. He's everything now. You know what I mean? Like, I could never turn my back on Him again. I've come too far to get to that point. You know what I mean? I could just never wake up one day and be like, "Pssshh, screw church." He got me this time, you know? I'm not going anywhere, you know? I'm still not perfect, but I'm a lot darn better than I used to be and that is only by Him cuz I don't know how I survived the past year. And to be strong and, you know, I know I went to prison to help some of the people I helped. You know, there's women [that I met in prison] that says, you know, "If you don't think you ever do anything for the rest of your life, just know you've

> changed my life." …And I never thought I'd be the one to go and talk to people about God, or to *want* to do that…. I have to now; it's just a given.

I asked Roxanne about making peace with the past and how the things she has experienced impact her today.

> Oh, I have made peace. I mean, I had ten months locked-up time to make peace. You know, all you do is focus on "How do I make this right?" 'n "How do I make myself feel right?" …I'm okay with everything that happened. And, you know, I am angry *still*…. [She broke into tears again.] When my kids lay down at night 'n they talk about missing their daddy, it just pisses me off. Like, how *dare* you do something *so* selfish? You know, when I have to go get one of his sweaters so my daughter can cuddle up with it 'n get a picture because my six year old says she's forgetting what he looks like. You know, [it] *sucks*! But, you know, as far as ever blaming myself or ever feeling that way or any kind of guilt, I don't and I won't because it *was not* my fault…. I tried everything for seven years to try to make that man's life better. You know, I wasn't the nicest person, and you know, I learned a lot from that. Like, I'll never act like I acted with him because I prob'ly killed his soul. You know? Because he killed *my* soul.

Roxanne says there are things she misses about Joel, and things she does not miss, but insists that overall she's "okay with it" now – except for what it has done to her children. When other kids ask why they do not have a dad, she empathizes with the "humiliation" she believes they feel. She worries that his suicide also diminishes the children's self-esteem – that they will be "demeaned" by it and believe that they were not "special enough" or "important enough" for him to stay and live.

From the sociological point of view, Roxanne did experience what Peter Berger termed as "alternation" during her prison stay, though not during her shelter stay (see Chapter 4 regarding alternation). This historic term is viewed today in the words of Dr. Bruce Karlenzig in the *Encyclopedia of Religion and Society* that Peter Berger "coined this term to describe the near total transformation of identity resulting from the internalization of a different meaning system" (Karlenzig 1998). Karlenzig also explains

that "alternation may be more commonplace in modern pluralistic societies, where individuals are exposed to a broad range of meaning systems through social and geographical mobility." Carrie Doehring sums up the struggle Roxanne faces in her new life with "power" placed in God (Doehring 2006):

> The web of life is intertwined with the web of evil. The challenge for people of faith is that it can be difficult to distinguish whether they are using or experiencing power in a way that enhances the web of life or in a way that destroys it. (128)

Roxanne's Views of the Shelter Experience and the Church

When Roxanne entered the shelter, she had "advantages" that many shelter residents did not have. She could wait a day to plan and prepare to enter the shelter, and she had transportation to get around town and to take her children to their friends' homes. She was not cut off from her old circle of friends and family. She had a cell phone and kept in touch with her abuser, Joel (against the wishes of shelter staff). Roxanne herself believes she was better off than the other shelter residents and that her children were more balanced. Roxanne freely admits that she never really tuned in to the program of the shelter and never really experienced the common bond that is sometimes spoken of shelter residents due to the sharing of the experience of abuse (Walker 1979, 198).

Roxanne did not consider herself "religious" while at the shelter. The director of the shelter is a Pentecostal Christian who invited Roxanne to go to church with her, had a library of Bibles and religious books for the residents, and had decorated the office and residence with religious symbols. Roxanne even engaged in a conversation with other women in the shelter about Jesus not being born on December 25th (which she had

learned from her Jehovah's Witness coworker), but she could not recall any of this during her interviews with me.

Ironically, Roxanne had enrolled her two younger daughters in a Christian preschool because, as she sobbed, "I just *knew* that people's lives are better when they're Christian." She also collected angels in the hope that there was a guardian angel watching over her. Like most women in domestic violence shelters, this was a chaotic period in her life. There was much to do and children to take care of – there was "mothering" of other residents as well. (The interested college professor was introduced to the complicated entrance procedures and life at the shelter in Chapter 5.)

Literature on domestic violence shelters and their residents tries to impart the chaos of this period in the life of a battered woman and her children. "The stress of poverty and violence takes its toll," Carol Winkelmann writes of the shelter experience, "shelter workers are coping with multiple serious stresses" (Winkelmann 2004, 34). Winkelmann also notes the "dilapidation" of the shelters, because most are struggling for funds (30). Donileen Loseke points out that the shelter she researched "most often was understaffed and there could be little filtering of potential employees through tests of their understanding of wife abuse or the battered woman" (Loseke 1992, 66). Eleanor Lyon, Shannon Lane and Anne Menard's massive study covering 215 shelters and eight states emphasizes the need for more training among staff and the lack of funding that contributes to problems most shelters face. Despite the undertrained, underpaid staff with high rates of turnover, Roxanne expected the shelter workers to behave professionally. In particular, she was upset that shelter workers often shared their

own personal problems with residents. What may have been an attempt to bond was interpreted as an extra burden on residents who already had loads too heavy to bear.

In the midst of the chaotic activity, however, there are periods of relaxation that the battered woman experiences (Walker 1979, 198-204; Williamson 1988). Roxanne was able at times to relax in the environment of the shelter because her children were able to relax. "I mean, it was comfortable there," she affirms, "I don't know if it was anything that they [the shelter workers] did but, you know, the kids could play, 'n jus' no screaming, yelling." Roxanne did not like curfew and that the shelter workers had "more control over my life than I wanted them to." In Lyon, Lane and Menard's large study, 16% of the residents reported problems with shelter rules, such as curfews, chores, monitoring, etc. (Lyon, Lane and Menard 2008, 10-18; 83-106).

Although the large study by Lyon, et al., did not focus on religion, it did ask one question (using a four-point Likert Scale) about whether residents of these domestic violence shelters felt their religious views were respected. Of the total respondents, 74% strongly agreed and 22% agreed. Roxanne suggests that her shelter could better meet residents' needs by having someone come in to lead a Bible study group once a week (like her prison did). She stressed that this should be completely optional and no one should be pressured to attend. This Bible study in Roxanne's view should not be sponsored by the shelter, but should be an option for the residents. She insists that she would not have been offended if a religious shelter worker had invited her to church (which happened, though she does not remember the invitation). She acknowledges that this probably needs to extend to all religious groups as well.

Friction with the Shelter

Some time should be spent to inform the interested college professor exactly how Roxanne was evicted from the shelter. Although she says she was not using any drugs during her shelter stay, she did end up in trouble over drug use. Shelter residents are required to turn in all prescription drugs to the office, where they are locked up until needed.

Roxanne had obtained a prescription for Vicodin[14] (legitimately for her neck pain), but she did not turn in the medication to the office as required. She took some of the pills as needed ("very little"), but intended to sell the remainder, which is why she had not turned them in to the office. She sold some of the pills to another resident (Tasha). She says she also gave a couple pills to yet another resident (Tammy) because Tammy had no money. Tasha then overdosed on Xanax, which Roxanne says she does not know how Tasha obtained.

> So the next day, Phyllis [the executive director of the shelter] decided to bring in the [police] dogs. So they found [the Vicodin] in my drawer.

They also found one Vicodin tablet in Tammy's dresser drawer. This whole incident led to Roxanne, Tammy, and Tasha all being evicted from the shelter, along with all their children, leaving only one other family remaining in residence. Looking back on the incident, Roxanne had this to say:

> I mean, I understand why they did that. Of course, it's a liability. You know what I mean? I completely understand.

[14] Vicodin is a combination of acetaminophen, which is a mild pain reliever, and hydrocodone, which is a narcotic (opiate). Vicodin is prescribed for moderate to severe pain.

However, Roxanne also indicated that she saw the incident as a violation of her privacy.[15]

> Well, okay, I think they should've just went (*sic*) through [Tasha's] room. Why did we all have to suffer for what she did [by overdosing]?

Roxanne said that in a shared housing situation in the "real world," only the part of the home used by the person "in trouble" could be searched. She said she was given no choice about having her room searched and felt she had no rights as a shelter resident.

> We were outside smokin' a cigarette, and then we come back inside, and they pretty much told us "sit down, [you're] not allowed to go upstairs." [The kids were] right there with us.

The police and staff did not ask for permission to search, but just had everyone sit on the couches in the living room. When the search turned up the drugs, "the police did nothing," but the residents in violation were sent to speak with the shelter director. "I knew we were getting' in trouble." Phyllis told them that she was "very disappointed," and had to evict them due to shelter regulations. They had to pack their belongings and leave immediately. Roxanne immediately called her mother to ask permission to move back in with her.

Roxanne says the situation was "a little devastating, but it kinda all worked out for the best" because her mother's boyfriend had decided to let them move back in. He

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[15] This issue about police and privacy has come up other times at this shelter. Although the shelter seeks to maintain a safe environment for everyone, residents (even those who are not abusing drugs) do not appreciate these searches for a variety of reasons. The most dramatic incident that I observed was when a resident panicked because the police presence at the shelter (for another drug search) meant that they were now aware of her whereabouts and had her "in their system." That resident claimed that her abusive husband was a high-level official who would, therefore, be able to track her down. Some shelter workers doubted this claim (not to mention the resident's sanity), but one worker who had direct access to law enforcement resources (because of her other job) was able to verify enough of her story to make her narrative and concerns entirely plausible. The resident lapsed into a deep depression, scarcely coming out of her room for a week, and then suddenly fled the shelter the following weekend when staff coverage was minimal. Shortly thereafter, another resident discovered another reason to fear being "in the police system" when they discovered an outstanding warrant for her arrest in another county and arrived suddenly at the shelter one night to take her away.

said that the chaos of the shelter (particularly Tasha's overdose on the previous night) was not helpful toward the goal of achieving less stressful lives.

After her eviction from the shelter, Roxanne says she was still welcomed by shelter staff to various functions they sponsored. She knows that Phyllis was "disappointed" in her, but says that no one treated her worse in any way. She was a little surprised by this. Overall, Roxanne thought that the shelter staff had offered them a positive experience.

> Um, they made us feel comfortable. And, you know, they provided the food and, you know, for the most part. Um, they just made us comfortable and safe. And my kids felt safe…. The kids just had fun and they were relaxed. And you know, the shelter has a lot of stuff for the kids to do. You know, they have the games and a lot of toys….

View of the Church

Psychiatrist E. Fuller Torrey states that there are 344,000 churches, synagogues, and mosques in the United States, and that the clergy persons who staff these institutions are often the first people consulted with regard to mental illness or IPV (cf. Nason-Clark 1997, 63-75). Torrey affirms that "the clergy are natural allies" (Torrey 2006, 441). As we have seen from Roxanne's narrative, women of the church were active in prison ministries *and* they are active in domestic violence shelters (I have covered such involvement in Chapter 5). Nancy Nason-Clark (1997) explains about conservative church women and shelters:

> Are churchwomen and transition house workers partners or antagonists? At first glance, conservative churchwomen eager to uphold the virtues of happy family living and transition house workers eager to ensure that women have complete control over their lives and destinies seem to be on an ideological collision course. Yet, they agree on the primacy of safety, the need for practical support, and the importance of a

> healing journey if a woman victim of abuse is to become a survivor. Where they part paths is on the role of forgiveness, the possibility of reform and renewal in an abusive man's life, and the desirability of "till death us do part." It is incorrect, however, to postulate that churchwomen encourage other women to return to abusive environments where their safety and self-esteem cannot be assured. Moreover, while churchwomen are reluctant to see any marriage end, our data reveal that as a group they are supportive of women who leave abusive husbands, even while they recognize how difficult and emotionally painful that process can be for an abused wife (127-28).

Roxanne's ministerial couple coming to the stricter jail is an example of the positive impact such clergy can have on a battered and ravaged woman. This couple had a son that had a problem with drugs, so these ministers could empathize fully with Roxanne's underlying issues regarding substance abuse and addiction.

On the other hand, some clergy still need to be educated about IPV and the various issues surrounding it. Directly after Roxanne's shelter experience, with nowhere else to turn for help, Roxanne and Joel made the decision to go to church. A friend recommended that they attend the Friends meeting. Roxanne and Joel attended together, but neither found the support they needed from the pastor.

Roxanne complained during our interviews that this pastor was so busy with the church and his secular job that he required congregants to handle his responsibilities. He even wanted Roxanne to do his secretarial work for his secular job. And when Roxanne and Joel went to this pastor's home to talk about their problems, he did not appear to be sensitive. He did not understand the problem of addiction. Rather, this pastor badgered Joel for going to a bar to get a drink, but knew very little (if any) about Joel's more serious addictions (his use of heroin, for example, during this time period). Roxanne said, "Well, like the pastor was really mean about it – pretty much calling him a frickin'

loser." Joel shut down, did not want more "counseling," and would not go back to church.

The interested college professor will realize that this is the same church delineated in the narrative earlier in this chapter where Roxanne emphasized that the congregants "stuck by me the whole time" [in prison]. So, this was and is *her pastor*! One would hope that this pastor became more alert and educated due to Joel's suicide and Roxanne's Celebrate Recovery group in his church – though from Roxanne's comments about the relationship between the pastor and her latest boyfriend, this appears not to be the case. A great amount of IPV literature underscores that this educational process is what needs to happen to clergy (Nason-Clark 1997, 70-79; Cooper-White 2012, 197-201; Winkelmann 2004, 152-153; cf. Walker 1979, 22-23). Instead of attending the vibrant independent church she came to know in the stricter jail, with the educated and sensitive ministerial couple, Roxanne chose her small Friends meeting worshipping with the congregants that "stuck by" her.

On a follow-up visit to the town where this study was conducted, I observed Roxanne and her three daughters marching proudly in a community parade with the congregants of this Friends meeting. Roxanne's Celebrate Recovery group (which she had always planned to move from church to church in the community) marched in the same parade with another church group.

7

Lexie

In the Methods chapter, I introduced a short summary of the life of Lexie. Lexie was the fourth child born into a family with a history (on her mother's side) of premature births and premature deaths. Her mother's first two babies each died within an hour or so of their births. The third baby, Lexie's older brother, was premature and had to stay in the hospital four months. Lexie was born only 25 weeks into her mother's fourth pregnancy and weighed only one pound fourteen ounces. She was life-flighted to a large city hospital and not expected to live. Although her family was not religious, Lexie was given Last Rites (her grandparents were Catholic, but only attended church on Christmas and Easter).

Lexie remained in the hospital nine months, where oxygen had to be pumped into her lungs by hand 24 hours a day. Shortly after she was released, Lexie stopped breathing. Using CPR, her mother was able to revive Lexie in the car as her father drove them back to the hospital, where Lexie remained for another two months. She finally went to live at home two weeks before her first birthday. Her primary caregivers during that first year were the hospital's aides and nurses.

Lexie's mother was promiscuous and paid little attention to Lexie. Her father was a "pervert" (as Lexie put it) who at times could get violent with Lexie's mother. Both parents went through a series of numerous marriages and divorces during Lexie's childhood and teenage years. Although both parents worked, they were in low-paying

jobs. Lexie was raised in poverty – a poverty in which she has remained her whole life. Rejected emotionally by her mother and sexually harassed by her father, Lexie suffered from the mistreatment of various step-parents as well. Her parents told her she was an "accident" and her mother told her that she was "ashamed" of her.

Peter Berger would recognize that young Lexie had a family structure that was a threat to the formation of her "self" and her "world" (Berger 1963, 137-38). Jessica Benjamin would analyze that Lexie identified tenuously with both of her parents and their ambiguity toward her well-being. This affected her narrative of desire throughout her whole life (Benjamin 1998). W. R. D. Fairbairn would concur that emotional health is manifested in mutual intimate connections with other people, connections young Lexie did not have with her parents or other relatives (Grotstein 1998). Herbert Blumer would stress that this lack of social interaction would directly affect Lexie's interpretive process concerning other people and the world (Blumer 1969, 1-19). All would agree with D. W. Winnicott that the lack of a safe, nurturing, consistent environment of a warm and caring family eluded Lexie and would hinder effective counseling throughout her life (Winnicott (1971) 2005).

Carrie Doehring emphasizes that when children are neglected, they have difficultly learning to regulate intense feelings. At times, they act impulsively, overpowered by their feelings; at other times, they become emotionally numb. Doehring would also recognize that Lexie's social class and extreme poverty would permeate her perception of social identity (Doehring 2006, 151-53). Throughout her interviews with me, thirty-seven year old Lexie's view of self and society was driven by perceptions of blame and inadequacy. Never having had a strong attachment figure in childhood,

Lexie's life revolves around the perpetual need to live up to her mother's standards and win her approval – whether from her actual mother or from the "generalized other" of society (Mead 1934). Lexie declared that "people are not peaceful. People cause drama. People cause hurt." Lexie is weary from the battle raging within her – needing, yet angry with those she needs (cf. Fairbairn). Carrie Doehring concludes: "People in crisis often reexperience the family dynamics that occurred during childhood.... They may, for example, reexperience the helplessness and vulnerability they felt as a child or adolescent...." (Doehring 2006, 106).

It is important to note that as a child Lexie put together a cultural tool kit and strategy of action that brought her through some lonely days (Swidler 1986). Her father's second wife (for four years) was nice to Lexie and, with her brother, they all enjoyed camping and going to the beach on weekends. From the age of three, Lexie would play in the sand and drink in the peacefulness of the beach. As an adult, whenever Lexie became stressed, her strategy of action was to think of the sand and a beach – an island of peace and tranquility (cf. Alexander 2003, 154).

In addition to her emotional problems mentioned earlier, Lexie has also been plagued with multiple health problems throughout her life. Born prematurely, her underdeveloped lungs make her prone to pneumonia. She suffers from Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (C.O.P.D.) which, in her case, leads to chronic bronchitis and emphysema. Premature birth also led to a heart defect and blood pressure problems. At only 5'2" Lexie had had a lifetime struggle with weight, a combination of genetics and depression from rejection (she weighed as much as 508 pounds at one time). Her most significant health problem is cerebral palsy, which affects her left

side. Her left hand is weak and usually clenched at her side. This causes balance issues for Lexie. (As she put it, "Supposed to walk with a cane... refuse to do so just because I don't want to be more of an outcast.") Lexie walks with difficulty.

> I walk funny – and I know I do. It's walking on my toes and stuff like that. Um, do you know how many times I heard [from my mother], "Put your feet down. Walk right. Quit embarrassing me" when I was a kid? I couldn't help it.

Lexie does not like to be thought of as "handicapped." She wants to be seen as "normal," she "tries harder to be the normal person" – that is, "normal" is the public performance she tries to portray (cf. Goffman).

Lexie's narrative falls into the category of what Arthur W. Frank terms "The Chaos Narrative" (Frank 2013, Chapter 5). Frank writes that "the chaos narrative tells how easily any of us could be sucked under by suffering" and chaos stories "are also hard to hear because they are too threatening." In fact, as Dr. Frank affirms: "The teller of chaos stories is, preeminently, the wounded story teller" (Frank 2013, 97-98). When it comes to illness, stories such as Lexie's narrative of pain and suffering "show how quickly the props that other stories depend on can be kicked away." He bluntly concludes: "The limitation is that chaos is no way to live" (114).

In my synopsis of my case studies in the Methods chapter, I phrased it this way: "If Roxanne is Sisyphus trying to push the boulder up the hill, Lexie is a wheel stuck in a rut." Frank writes in the afterword of his book: "Illness almost inevitably involves shame" (Frank 2013, 214). This would certainly go along with Lexie's entire life process as a search for acceptance. Pamela Cooper-White further explains: "In anxiety and depression, one faces a traumatic state in the future (anxiety) or tries to deal with it in the present/past (depression)" (Cooper-White 2012, 234).

As a teenager, Lexie started getting into “trouble” (although her idea of “trouble” is tame compared to Roxanne’s downward spiral). Lexie says she was a bit of a “bad girl” during her teen years. She lost her virginity to her boyfriend when they were both sixteen (her boyfriend had “been intimate” with his previous girlfriend as well). This is relevant, because Lexie has told her husband that if this former boyfriend showed up and wanted her, she would leave and join him.

Lexie met Don, her husband, as a teenager – just six months after her breakup with the love of her life (above). She was a junior in high school; Don was twenty years old. They were married three months after they met. Since she was only seventeen, her mother had to go to the courthouse to give her permission. True to form, Lexie’s mother signed the papers, said “See ya; have a nice life,” and never saw her daughter again for nine years! During the courthouse wedding, Lexie made sure the judge left the word “obey” out of the vows.

Don had already finished high school and worked at McDonald’s approximately thirty hours a week (eventually, he would work at Walmart). Lexie finished her final year of high school and graduated with honors in 1993. Although they were poverty-stricken, she felt a sense of pride in that she was a high school girl with a husband, living on their own in an apartment. She wanted to be a mother immediately as well, but had extreme difficulty conceiving. She went to college part-time from 1995 to 1999, receiving her associate’s degree in Criminal Justice. Even after twenty years of marriage, she says Don is still a child, wanting to be mothered. Throughout her narrative of their marital relationship, Lexie characterized Don as a child who needed her to take care of him, rather than as an adult that could love her.

Don and Lexie's marital relationship was volatile. Don had a temper that would build up and finally explode in yelling and name-calling. Lexie would usually just cry. One time early in their marriage, Don shoved Lexie. She shoved back, and he never tried it again. Even after her eventual weight loss, Lexie outweighed Don by forty pounds. Lexie did, however, leave Don periodically during the early years of their marriage. Their breakups were usually short, ranging from about two weeks to two months.

The violence between Don and Lexie was what Michael P. Johnson has termed "situational couple violence." According to Johnson, this is the most common type of partner violence where neither party is seeking to coerce or control the other. Rather, their arguments have a tendency to get out of control, resulting in unintended cruelty. Situationally-provoked violence can be life-threatening and can be a chronic problem in a relationship (Johnson 2008, 11; 60-71). In fact, in 1996 (about four years into their marriage), Don did injure Lexie by throwing a fork at her that hit her just above the eye. The scar is still visible. Lexie did not call the police or seek medical help, so the incident was never officially reported. This failure to seek help is common and is the reason why it is so difficult to get accurate statistics on IPV (cf. Walker 1979, 31-35; Pagelow and Johnson 1988, 2-3; Loseke 1992, 28; Nason-Clark 1997, 9-13; Kroeger and Nason-Clark 2001, 14-17).

Lexie's father called the domestic violence shelter's executive director whom he had known for decades and who knew Lexie since she was a little girl. The director came to get Lexie and took her to the shelter. Lexie, however, could not even start the paperwork. She called Don and talked to him for an hour. Then she left the shelter and

went back to the abuse, explaining that the shelter situation "was just overwhelming cuz I really wanted my marriage to work." This would not be the last time Lexie was in the very same shelter, and her next stay would be longer (Lexie's reaction is not uncommon. Cf. Walker 1979, 93; Nason-Clark 1997, 41-47; Winkelmann 2004, 68; Mills 2008, 27-28; 41-42).

Religious Identity in the Life of Lexie

Lexie's idea of God is impersonal, and her relationship with "Him" is tenuous.[16] Ana-Maria Rizzuto suggests that the prevalent use of the God representation without a *personal* representation can be related to a "narcissistic rage experienced with the mother." Rizzuto explains that there are two predominant traumas "among the cumulative traumas" which interfere with both "normal development" as well as with the ability to continue the elaboration of a personal image of God. One trauma is "the mother's limited ability to respond to the child's need for recognition, admiration, and self-aggrandizement." The second trauma is "poor health" (Rizzuto 1979, 111). This insight is certainly relevant in analyzing Lexie's struggling relationship with God. Although she cannot yet fully feel accepted by God, she nonetheless finds herself turning to Him again and again for comfort in the face of her difficult life. "He's my safe-haven."

When I asked what she thought of when she thinks of God, Lexie reached for the paper and colored pencils on the desk where she sat. She drew a picture of a "tropical island" with a tree (possibly coconut, she says), surrounded by "quiet waters." The sun is

[16] Like others in my study, Lexie referred to God using masculine pronouns. Unlike the others, though, she insisted that this was merely for linguistic convenience. For Lexie, God is neither male nor female.

shining brightly. Lexie imagines herself under the tree or playing in the sand – "just chillin'." God is not any particular element in the picture, but is the entire peaceful environment. The parallel is striking: the image and "strategy of action" three year old Lexie added to her cultural tool kit long ago to cope with her stressful life now evolved into a part of her religious identity and image of God. Lexie explained in our detailed interview:

> That's where I go in my thoughts and prayers is to this, like, peaceful island type [of] thing, if that makes sense... I can even see it in my head.... In this picture, though, you don't have any stress. You don't have bill collectors. You don't have husbands treatin' you like shit.... 'N you kinda get comfort in knowing that everything's gonna get taken care of.

Lexie was first introduced to organized religion at the age of ten. There was absolutely no religious practice in Lexie's family, but her mother wanted the children out of the house as much as possible so she could get on with her life. So Lexie's mother signed the children up for Vacation Bible School at the local Church of God. This began Lexie's life with the institutional church. She began regularly attending the Church of God and loved being at their church camp during the Summer. Lexie personally prayed "all the time" for guidance about "what to do" and which family to live with. Lexie emphasized:

> That's my only saving grace – going to church, being in Youth for Christ. That's the only thing that kept me sane.... That's a tough time period for me because obviously hearing from your mother that they are ashamed of you because you are gaining weight because you hit puberty and, frankly, I'm not sure that even depression didn't play into that because I didn't know what to do, you know.

At age twelve, Lexie was nearing her adult height of 5'2" and already weighed 180 pounds. At the age of thirteen, Lexie was baptized during a church service.

Lexie decided to move in with her father, which made attending the Church of God six miles away more difficult. She did attend when she was at her mother's on alternate weekends. Her religious life, however, continued for the next few years through a religious mentor, "Mama Trish," who lived one block from Lexie's father. Mama Trish was sixteen years older than Lexie and helped run the local Youth for Christ program at Lexie's school. Lexie thinks of her as an "older sister" or "mother."

When Lexie was fifteen, each of her parents' current marriages were falling apart. Life was filled with turmoil. Lexie blamed God and stopped going to church. "I really didn't feel like it [going to church] cuz I just – I felt like life sucked so bad that obviously God had something to do with it." This is the time period Lexie started getting into "trouble" and was a bit of a "bad girl," as stated in the previous section. This is the time period Lexie married her husband Don.

Don's mother, Rose, did not go to church much, but Lexie says she did believe in God. Rose had gone to First Baptist and took the children when they were growing up, but never enforced their attendance. Don rarely attended church even as a child. Rose, however, prayed every night, wore crosses, read the Bible, and had religious symbols (such as pictures of Christ) all through the home. In contrast, Lexie and Don had no religious items in their home and had no religious practices. Lexie loved Rose, however, and finally felt like she had a real "mother." Rose cared for Lexie like her own child and became her advocate during Don's abusive tantrums.

Poverty, an early marriage, disability, and emotional baggage had spun a web of problems from which Lexie could not seem to escape. Don was concerned with money problems and Lexie's inability to keep a livable home. Lexie felt Don should help more

at home, particularly since she could not work at an outside job due to her disability. The whole situation kept her reliving the pain she felt as a child from her mother's impossible standards and her father's relentless attempts to make her his housekeeper and "slave."

Lexie believed that she could be vindicated, at least in part, if she could become a mother. Motherhood would mean someone loved and needed her. But a series of miscarriages and a stillborn daughter only deepened her misery. Lexie's relationship with God declined to pure hatred. Lexie prayed, but her prayers were angry and spiteful. "I actually said, 'I hate you for putting me through this.'" This is when her weight ballooned to 508 pounds and she had to have gastric bypass surgery to keep her alive. Still mad at God, she found herself praying prayers of desperation to get her through each day. "I think a little bit of me relented because I actually lived through the surgery," she acknowledged, "and relied on God to make it through the devastation of the surgery."

James Fowler (using the paradigm created by Erik Erikson) asserts that "the child who is made to feel that he or she is identical with that which others find shameful in his or her behavior or way of being may preserve the integrity of the nascent self by asserting a kind of shameless willfulness" (Fowler 1981, 259). With a total of fourteen miscarriages (some of multiple fetuses) and one stillborn child, Lexie exhibited what Carrie Doehring characterizes as "intrapsychic loss," loss of an ideal that was associated with motherhood and the child to be. "The ending of a pregnancy, for example," Doehring shares, "can include the loss of whatever images were formed of the child-to-be. The loss is of a 'dream child' that exists within the pregnant woman's inner world." This was compounded by "functional loss" related to Lexie's physical

disabilities that led to the difficulty with pregnancy and, ultimately, led to intrapsychic loss (Doehring 2006, 75). Doehring emphasizes that it is the caregiver's goal to ascertain "to what extent do people experience the fullness and complexity of God's presence with them?" With regard to Lexie, Doehring would ask: "Do her prayers for miraculous recovery hold in tension her denial and acceptance" of her condition (Doehring 2006, 111-12). In 2004, after twelve years of trying to become a mother, Lexie says she "just gave in" and had "a reckoning moment – acceptance" that she would never become a mother.

A year later, her son Cameron was born. Don and his mother, Rose, were in the delivery room with Lexie and in the video Lexie can be heard clearly asking in tears, "Do we get to take this one home?" Her mother-in-law answered, "Yes, this one's coming home, Dear." Cameron was seven pounds seven ounces and 21 inches long. Lexie acknowledges that she did not feel any more accepted by society, but the gift of her son Cameron made her finally believe that maybe – *just maybe* – she had been accepted by God.

Cameron was not without health problems. He suffered from conditions that would lead to asthma, O.D.D., and A.D.H.D. Eighteen months later in January of 2007, Lexie gave birth to a daughter, Maya. Maya suffers from cerebral palsy and asthma. Another son, Josh, was born in September 2008. The doctor told Lexie that Josh had a genetic marker for cystic fibrosis. "When she said that, I just bawled because I knew he was going to die." Anger at God welled up once again. "As far as my relationship with God, I was like '*Why* would you give me this child to tell me that I'm going to lose said child?'"

Lexie did suffer loss upon loss. Her mother-in-law, Rose, whom she was so close to died two months after Josh's birth. Don became angrier with Lexie, with more outbursts after the death of his mother. Baby Josh died a year later. In the months following Josh's death, Lexie's home became a shrine to Josh, with pictures, urn with ashes, two crosses to be worn containing small amounts of Josh's ashes, a website dedicated to Josh (which includes a slideshow of photos Lexie assembled for his funeral), etc. Lexie decided that she needed religion after all – religion had to be part of her cultural tool kit (Swidler 1986). Although she did make peace with God, that was not itself her goal. Rather, making peace with God was the means to an end. Lexie's driving motivation in life became to see her son Josh again (and her stillborn daughter). The only way to do that was to get right with God so she could get to Heaven and be reunited with her babies. Thirty-seven year old Lexie explained:

> I guess I look at it this way – that I know from my time back in the day going to church that the only way I'm ever going to see my son again is to turn my life around.... Because I know from being a teen, and going to church, and getting baptized – I *know* where you need to be. I *do*. And if you ain't there, *sayonara*! You know? ...Because I knew if I ever wanted to see my son.... Right after he died, I knew. Because babies go to Heaven. They get a free ticket, you know?

This began Lexie's relationship with a variety of churches as institutions of hope on the journey to Heaven.

Using D. W. Winnicott's work as a basis, W. W. Meissner, S.J., M.D., in his book *Psychoanalysis and Religious Experience* (1984) goes into great detail to elaborate concepts that formulate Lexie's religious identity and goals of this identity, including prayer, belief in babies going to Heaven, the church as an institution to facilitate the entry into Heaven, and the child and teen experiences that led to adult beliefs. In his section

"The Place of Illusion in Cultural Experience" (173-77), Dr. Meissner would suggest that Lexie approaches her problem of reaching Heaven to be with her departed children "by locating cultural experiences specifically in the potential space that arises between the experiencing individual and [her] environment." According to Dr. Meissner, Lexie's capacity to create and use the potential solution is determined by her "very early life experiences" and her "personal psychic reality" (175).

Dr. Ana-Maria Rizzuto would add: "Reality, on the other hand, can take for the experiencing individual all the shapes that [her] psychic defenses need to attribute to it, to make it bearable." According to Rizzuto, "All religions provide official or private rites of passage to facilitate the resolution of critical moments." Rizzuto concludes, "By making God or the gods active participants in the process, ritual provides a new opportunity for the reshaping of the God representation and the individual's relation to it" (Rizzuto 1979, 181; cf. Meissner 1984, 177).

Attitudes Toward the Church and the Shelter

"Nothing can prepare any of us to be helpers in a true emergency, and yet, in another sense, everything prepares us," Pamela Cooper-White counsels ministers when confronting abuse and domestic violence. "There is a point at which all we have learned and studied, all we have developed at the level of theory give way to intuition – and the guidance of the Spirit" (Cooper-White 2012, 201). When Lexie decided to give the church a chance, she found two caring congregations ready to welcome her.

The first was a Pentecostal congregation whose part-time pastor worked with Don at Walmart. When I visited congregations to ascertain the setting of the church in Lexie's

town, this was the only congregation in the shelter town where I heard IPV mentioned during a Sunday morning service. With great sensitivity, the pastor of this small congregation was able to expose Lexie and Don's marital problems, impressing on Don that although he had lost a son, he must not lose his entire family due to his anger. When the church members realized that Lexie was struggling to understand the words of the Bible, they bought her a Bible aimed at older children and teens. Full of Bible stories and practical applications about what God wants and does not want, this Bible was understandable for Lexie and she was thrilled to read it.

Lexie liked this tiny church, the members and the pastor, but never felt it was the right fit for her family (her landlord attended there and was not a nice person). She wanted a bigger church, so that there were more children for her children to play with. Lexie also believed that a church needs to be large enough to have assets to help people in need. Lexie's family then lapsed into thirteen months with no church attendance. Don's mental abuse of Lexie increased, and Lexie's spiritual life consisted mainly of prayers to get through the day.

As her marital problems escalated and the family fell deeper in debt, Lexie approached approximately ten larger churches for help with finances and food. She found, however, that the larger churches had a policy of helping only their own congregants. The last church on her list was a small country Methodist church with just over one hundred members. Lexie had friends who attended there, and this little church had come to their assistance after Josh's death. With fear and trepidation, Lexie asked the church for $2000 to help them pay months of overdue rent. She was amazed when the church members gave her family $4000 a couple of weeks later. Because of this

generosity and sacrifice, Lexie decided that the family should attend church there. Lexie elaborated:

> How could you *not* be a part of that church that cares about a couple and a small family that we are – [how could you not] attempt to be a part of their [church] family. I had a epitome (*sic*) I guess. But I looked at it this way. Church hurt me. Been through hurt of different churches, you know – not being accepted like.... Didn't know whether I wanted to. But after having seen the love that they have poured out for people they don't *even know*, how can you *not* at least try? How can you *not* attempt – how can you *not* listen to that, er, it's – I call it an "urging" of "just try it."

This congregation had had Lexie and her family on their prayer list since Don's mother's death. Members instantly recognized their names from the prayer list and welcomed them into their fellowship.

Lexie hoped that church attendance would make a difference in her marriage, but Don's rage seemed to grow. He got rough with Cameron, and Children's Protective Services got involved. Lexie and the children ended up in a homeless shelter because the domestic violence shelter was full. The homeless shelter was short on funds and could not pay for heat. When Lexie's country church offered to give the homeless shelter money to repair the boiler, the administration would not accept church funds. Fortunately, another call to the domestic violence shelter resulted in room opening up for Lexie and her children. Her detailed narrative of the domestic violence shelter experience is illuminating as well as cautionary.

Lexie's Shelter Experience

Lexie and the children entered the shelter through the office door. The children were taken into the playroom to play. Someone turned on the TV for them, and they

were impressed that they got a TV just for the children to use.[17] They had not had live TV at the homeless shelter, just DVDS to play over and over. The children also got excited when they saw the jungle gym outside. This was Lexie's first impression of the shelter – that it was an inviting place for her children.

Lexie went back to the office to do the intake paperwork. She did not seem to know that this was a violation of shelter policy since the children were out of her sight. Typically when there are children around, intake is done at the kitchen table – in full view of the playroom. After all the criticism Lexie had received at the homeless shelter because of her children, she was relieved that they could be out of her sight for a while.

Lexie immediately told the staff that she always intended to go back to Don.

> My ultimate goal is to be back with my husband. It's not to be separated, not for divorce, none of that. My ultimate goal is I wanna go home.

Lexie said that the staff supported her in this goal because it was what she wanted. She appreciated that they respected her goals and choices, though they still cautioned her. "Some of 'em kinda wondered if it was the best thing for us – cuz if he can't get his anger in check."

Lexie was given a tour of the house. She noticed that the kitchen had been redecorated since she had been there briefly years before. She was struck by the size of the house and was overwhelmed by the tour. Lexie and her children stayed in the bedroom just off the playroom. This room has a twin bed and a set of bunk beds. Lexie said the shelter gave her a sense of "home" right away. It was relaxed (cf. Walker 1979,

[17] There are two TVs in the common areas of the house – one in the living room and one in the playroom. Of course, anyone might use either, but it is most common for adults to watch the one in the living room and children to watch the one in the playroom.

198). Lexie recalls the first time her family prayed before a meal – the evening they arrived at the shelter.

> It's just something I realized we had to be thankful for the food that we do have, even though it might be few and far between, not much on the table, but you know, at least it's somethin' to eat 'n we should be grateful for it.

Lexie said it was her idea to pray that night. The other residents and the weekend staffer were in the kitchen, so she apologized to them and said that praying was something she needed to do. The staffer told her not to apologize for praying. The children had never prayed with their mother before, though they had been exposed to it at a few family events, but they did not question when Lexie decided they would pray. She says they have prayed at every meal since then "without fail." The prayers before meals are done as a family, and Cameron has recently decided he wants to do the talking sometimes.

It was while at the shelter that Lexie began reading her Bible every night before bed. She could not get her children to settle down in the room for their early curfew, so she just started going to the bedroom with them – giving her ample opportunity to read before falling asleep. Because of all these things, Lexie says her *personal* religious practices actually increased during her stay at the shelter.

Lexie had many complaints about the shelter, however. Some of these could be categorized as complaints about the difficulties of group living, others about problems resulting from the massive budget cuts that took place during her stay, and still others had to do with staff being unconcerned with her special needs. For example, Lexie was upset that the shelter staff required her to do chores that she was medically forbidden to do.

She says she told them about her restrictions, but was always told, "You have to do your part."[18]

Lexie also believes the staff of the shelter disregarded her family's needs for their medications. She understood that some medicines need to be locked up and she understood that some people are mentally unstable, so she understood the medication policy in theory. But many of her family's medications were emergency-based (such as their rescue inhalers) and no provision was made for this. She offered to keep these on her person at all times – which actually *is* the shelter policy, but she was not allowed to do this for some reason.

By this point, the lack of funding also had the shelter down to a skeleton staff. There was only one person on duty in the evenings, and Lexie said that staffer frequently called off. Because of this, Lexie had no access to any medications (scheduled or emergency) from 4 p.m. to 11 p.m. many days – by which time she had fallen asleep. When she told the executive director that she had missed her evening dose of heart medicine for several days, the director told Lexie that she needed to plan ahead and take that dose before the day staff left. Lexie said that she would have done that, but she had no idea which days the evening staffer would call off, and the day staff did not tell her when it happened, so she was caught by surprise every time. Lexie says that this is a serious issue that the shelter needs to address – perhaps allowing each resident to have a lock-box in her room. She said that this disregard of their needs could have led to the loss of life.

[18] Similar complaints were discovered by Lyon, Lane, and Menard in their study of 215 shelters in eight states (Lyon, Lane and Menard 2008).

Budget cuts also affected Lexie's ability to get around. When the shelter's budget was slashed, there was no more money for gasoline for the agency van.

> I fought to go to the grocery because at one point they lost their funding and we couldn't even leave to use the van…. The only times they ever took us anywhere is if Maya missed the [school] bus, and that happened a couple times…. It does impact, cuz when we initially got there they were very gracious and were able to get me like a week's worth of groceries. As soon as they lost their funding… and found out [the visitation center] was closing, the whole thing got all flipped upside down. Nobody had any money for nothing. We couldn't do anything…. We couldn't even get the necessities for the household because there was no money.

Disabled and unable to drive, estranged from most of her relatives (including some additional ones since her separation), massive budget cuts at the shelter ending the little transportation they would have otherwise offered, Mama Rose no longer alive to be her comfort and support, lack of babysitting options – all of these things led to Lexie being largely housebound during the months she lived at the shelter. However, Lexie was not entirely without a support system. She still had people who took her to her church on Sundays (but not the mid-week Bible study, since there was no babysitting). She also started a home-based business which could be run mostly through catalogs and internet, and a friend would take her to the occasional party she hosted for her business. Still, her circle of associates changed drastically as a result of her shelter stay, with the staff becoming her most frequent contacts.

Lexie was also deeply affected by budget cuts when the visitation center closed. Because Lexie had included the children in the Civil Protection Order against Don, he could only see the children during supervised visits three times per week at the visitation center. This was difficult to arrange because the shelter could not afford to transport the

children there. Then the visitation center itself closed, making visits between Don and the children virtually impossible.[19]

Lexie did not make any close connections with the women who stayed at the shelter with her. In fact, she would rather they had not become part of her life. While she was living at the shelter, Lexie helped the two other women who were living there. One needed a down payment for a car, and Lexie connected her with her church. She bought the other one a pack of cigarettes *one time*. Months later, both of those women continue to beg for money from Lexie – which is the only time they contact her at all. "[They] only go to me when they need sumpin'…. I hate bein' used…. You help a person once, doesn't mean every time."

Lexie described shelter life in the following manner:

> Crazy. One word: crazy. [She sighs.] It's hard living with other people – especially the ones you don't know. Um, I had a routine with my children – got shot to shit when I moved in there.

She did not like that the shelter enforced the children's bedtimes, and in order to keep the children settled down it meant that she had to be in the room much earlier than she was ready. (This in turn meant that she fell asleep long before the night staffer arrived, often resulting in her missed medication.) Lexie also found it difficult for "multiple families to cook decent meals" since the shelter has only one stove. Sometimes they resolved this by having communal meals – each woman taking a turn at cooking for the entire household. There was also a the bedbug infestation at the shelter during Lexie's stay.

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[19] Carol Winkelmann found the same conditions and lack of funds in the shelter she researched (Winkelmann 2004, 30).

Lexie also says that chores are not assigned or graded fairly. She saw some people skip their chores and get "signed off," while she worked hard and still was graded harshly. Lexie was not imagining this. I witnessed it myself many times at the shelter. And since much of her childhood and marital pain surrounds the issue of household chores, I suspect that this was personally quite difficult for her.

Another crisis occurred when an unattended five year old girl entered Lexie's room and took Josh's urn off the dresser and out into the house. Lexie and her family shared a bedroom on the first floor, just off the playroom. Although residents are not allowed in one another's rooms, it does happen sometimes – usually by people who ignore the rule or unattended children who do not understand the rule.

> I'll never forget when the one girl's daughter opened my son['s urn]. Mmm-hmmm. Yeah. I was pickin' up bone fragments of my child off the floor in the toy room – bawlin' my eyeballs out. Cuz she couldn't stay outta my room. Yeah. I heard this blood-curdling "Mom! Come quick!" from Cameron and he comes runnin' into the… bathroom…. He's like, "No, you have to come *now*!" I'm like, "What is goin' on?" He goes, "Josh!" I'm like, "What about Josh? He's on the… dresser." Cuz I had him on the dresser, you know. "No, Taylor got him and he's opened all over the floor of the toy room." I'm like, "Oh, my God!" …And all I got from her mom was, "Well, she didn't know what it was." …And tried to blame it on my daughter…. I've had that [urn] for 2 ½ years. My daughter *knows* it's my son and *knows* not to mess with him…. I was, like, heartbroken, bawlin' my eyes out, pickin' up pieces of my son.

Shockingly, even this story was not the most traumatic thing that happened to Lexie during her stay at the shelter. Lexie had many complaints about the shelter and many times she did not get along well with staff, but she had still been grateful for the place to stay and the help they had given her in obtaining social services. Although there is a ninety day limit on housing, Lexie had just applied for an extension (which she expected to get) because she had saved up almost enough money from her home-based

business to get her own apartment. But before any of this could happen, an argument with a staffer drove her away from the shelter.

Lexie said that she got along with most staff most of the time, except for the evening worker Angie. Lexie says that Angie had previously worked as a nurse and E.M.T. Since Lexie was always living with doubt about whether she could have done more to save Josh, she showed Angie his medical file. Angie told her there was nothing more she could have done. This was before they started to not get along.

Lexie said that Angie seemed to resent her work at the shelter and even referred to herself as a "glorified babysitter." Lexie wanted someone there in the evenings to talk with, especially after all the other residents moved out, but she says Angie made herself unavailable when she showed up at all. Lexie saw her many times doing personal things at work, and tattled on her to the executive director.

Besides not being available to talk, it was Angie who kept calling off work and causing Lexie and her children to miss their medications. Lexie says that Angie was actively ignoring her because she was punishing her for tattling to the director. One evening an argument erupted between them and Angie claimed that she had previously lied to make Lexie feel good, but in reality Lexie had killed her son. Lexie was furious. She tried to resolve the issue with the executive director, but said that staff always protects staff (cf. Goffman).[20]

At that point, Lexie discussed the situation with her pastor. He encouraged her to give her marriage one last try – if for no other reason than to be able to tell herself she had done so. He was livid about what Angie had said to Lexie. He told her that she had

[20] Donileen Loseke documents the problem with such shelter staff members (Loseke 1992, 66-68).

been *abused at the domestic violence shelter*. Previously Lexie's church had offered help to anyone at the shelter, but they have withdrawn their support because Angie is still employed there. The church lost faith in the shelter to protect the abused.

Angie's cruel remark was not the only reason Lexie went back to Don. The children missed being with their father and Lexie's beliefs were drawing her back. She sensed that she needed to go back once to see if anything had really changed. "Because I knew God would want me to try every avenue." Lexie said that her beliefs did not *force* her to stay with Don, however. She knows that God would honor her decision to divorce him if she had decided to do so. She had the support of her pastor and her church, and says she would have stayed away even without their support if that's what she felt she need to do. But Lexie had no fear for anyone's safety at home; she just wanted the yelling to stop. She decided it was worth one more try.

During the course of our interviews, Lexie was considering returning to the shelter. She and Don were still not getting along well and she wanted to leave him. Angie was on medical leave, so Lexie considered the shelter a viable option. As our interviews came to a close, Angie returned to work and Lexie said the shelter was no longer an option for her. She feels betrayed by the shelter. She says that no matter how desperate for help, she would never go there again or recommend it to anyone else as long as Angie works there.

> I will never – I will be homeless before I ever go back there. They let her come back and that's it. I'm done. I will *never* go back. Never. I don't care. He could be beatin' me every day of the week and I'm not goin'.

8

Two Stories

According to the Meadian tradition in sociology, the sense of self is formed in relationship to one's early caregivers, and it continues to develop in relationship to significant persons in one's life (see Chapter 2). Ideas about society and the Ultimate also develop and change through this same ongoing dialog (see Chapters 3 and 4). Religious identity is a complex phenomenon which is part of this ongoing dialog. Religion or faith for a given individual may be central or peripheral to the identity, and the salient components of the religious identity vary by person and over time as a person experiences other life changes such as age, role, and/ or new affiliations with new significant others (see Chapter 4). Such components are derived from not only institutionalized or official religion, but also "everyday" or nonofficial religion (e.g., Ammerman 1994; Ammerman 1997; McGuire 2002). Thus the components of religious identity may provide a "tool kit" for dealing with life (Swidler 1986).

I have been applying a micro-level sociological analysis of religious identity to the narratives of victim-survivors in order to try to move beyond the binary question of whether religion is "good" or "bad" for victims of IPV, and instead ask *when, for whom,* and *in what ways* religion or spirituality may help or fail to help. In each case, I have examined the development of the self in relation to others and what this means to each person's ideas about the Ultimate. I have also inquired about the changes to religious

identity that may have occurred as a result of IPV and/ or the stay at the domestic violence shelter.

In Chapter 6, I presented the story of Roxanne, whose early life and close relationship with her mother helped her eventually to develop a close relationship with God. The loss of her beloved step-father shaped Roxanne's God into the strength and power that she yearned to rely on. Her struggles in life caused me to compare her to Sisyphus perpetually pushing the boulder uphill, but Roxanne's strong inner self (and the faith she eventually found) have given her the ability to keep pushing that boulder and to make progress at times. The shelter director often said that Roxanne "had a lot more going for her" than most residents.

In Chapter 7, I presented the story of Lexie, a disabled woman who has never felt accepted or loved. I compared Lexie to a wheel stuck in a rut. She tries to get out of that rut, but the spinning only brings her back around to the same unresolved issues – internal struggles she seems doomed to repeat in all of her relationships. Her mother's perfectionism has been internalized by Lexie in two ways: in her own ache to be loved without having to be perfect and in her projection of impossible standards onto those she loves. Lexie's relationship with God is somewhat tentative. On the one hand she blames Him for all the hardships which she has faced, while on the other hand she recognizes that she desperately needs the comfort and peace that might be found in God.

I previously stated that most of the clients who stay at the shelter are considered "multi-problem." They are the people who have no resources to go anywhere else. They are abused, but they are also suffering in other ways. Nearly everyone I met at the shelter suffers from some form of mental illness. Indeed, the prevalence of mental illness among

the abused is one of the reasons why it was so difficult for early advocates to get people to accept the reality of intimate partner violence. Advocates had to battle the stigma that prevented society from taking seriously the stories of abuse told by these "crazy" people. One way advocates combatted this idea was to explain that the mental illness is often the *result* of abusive treatment. This is, no doubt, often the case. Another explanation, of course, is that abusers are often opportunistic in that they tend to abuse the most vulnerable members of society, those who are more easily victimized: children, the elderly, the severely infirm, and the mentally ill (Walker 1979, 233-40; Walker 1988; Winkelmann 2004, 34-35; Johnson 2008, 41-43; Cooper-White 2012, 28-45). In this chapter, I present the stories of two of the shelter's "multi-problem" residents – Shannon and Ashley.

The Story of Shannon

Shannon's amorphous self is likely explained from her earliest childhood, when she had little chance at developing an individual identity and little security in which to try. Neglected and abused, Shannon was moved from home to home and found little opportunity to bond with any trustworthy adult. Shannon was the eldest child in a family with no religious background. Her father had "problems with" alcohol and crack. He has been incarcerated several times for assorted reasons. Her mother was the eldest child, was raised Catholic and became pregnant with Shannon when she was seventeen. Both parents finished high school and later married, having a family that resulted in five children.

Shannon has blocked out much of her early childhood because of the abuse she suffered. Her parents argued a great deal, but she does not remember any abusive behavior between her parents. Her father was never home, and her mother "didn't really clean house or anything." In fact, Shannon's mother appears to have been a prostitute. Shannon relates early parental abuse:

> My dad was using drugs [crack] and my Mom was trying to get money for food. And my dad used to lock us in our room at night by tyin' a string from the doorknob to the banister. And my mom left us alone when she was out lookin' for money for food 'n stuff, in the house. So I remember trying to make bottles for my youngest brother because he was screaming and cryin' [and I remember] trying to change his diaper 'n stuff. But I was too little. I didn't know what to do, so.

Being locked in their room every night terrified young Shannon. "I remember tryin' to get up, get out, 'n screamin' 'n hollarin', 'n nobody would answer me." I asked what she did if she needed something during the night (such as having a tummy-ache or needing to use the bathroom). Shannon replied matter-of-factly: "I couldn't do anything."

Once when she was locked in her room, Shannon climbed out onto the roof. Someone saw her and notified the police. Upon seeing the condition of the home, the police took all five children away. It appears Shannon's father was in jail at the time, so her mother must have locked them in the room. Shannon's mother and father got a divorce. Shannon and one of her sisters ended up at her paternal grandmother's home for a year or two. Then she and her brothers and sisters moved back in with their father, who had been released from jail and regained custody of the children.

The children lived with Shannon's father for a year or two. He worked for a taxicab service, remarried briefly and had another daughter. But Shannon and her

siblings all ended up in foster care when her father was sent to prison for felony check fraud. Their mother was living with "one of her boyfriends" and did not have room for them. Shannon says that most of the foster families were "pretty nice," but Shannon and her sister were moved repeatedly to new foster homes to find a family that would keep them both together. Eventually, Shannon's grandmother took in all five children.

Shannon's mother took the children to counseling. Shannon stated that they were able at this time to talk about their memories and work through old problems, putting them in the past. Though this was a period of healing old memories, new trauma was also inflicted on Shannon and her siblings. Her grandmother's fiancé Phil had a drinking problem, and he abused the children when the grandmother was away at work. Phil engaged in full sexual intercourse with nine year old Shannon, which continued "every day until I was like seventeen."

Shannon's troubled childhood gave her little opportunity to develop a real sense of identity (cf. Berger 1963; Blumer 1969; Winnicott (1971) 2005; Benjamin 1998; Grotstein 1998. Refer to my section, "Object Relations Tradition and Trauma" in Chapter 1). The horrible parental neglect and abuse in the earliest of her years led her to become (in Carrie Doehring's words) "emotionally numb." Instead of developing a cultural tool kit (Swidler 1986), Shannon blocked out as much as she could. Nevertheless, with regard to Phil's sexual abuse, she remembers much more than some sexually abused children. For example, one could compare Pamela Cooper-White's account of Myla, who was raped by her college professor father and neglected by her mother, who was also raped in childhood (Cooper-White 2012, 168-70). Myla had to piece together her history during psychiatric counseling during adulthood. However,

Shannon's early life had been so traumatic that mistreatment seems "normal" to her. She finds it impossible to differentiate between good and bad treatment, or between bad and worse treatment (cf. Osthoff and Maguigan 2005).

This inability to fathom normalcy carried into Shannon's domestic and marital relationships. Shannon met Stuart when she was twenty, while working in a factory in a larger town. Stuart was thirty-six, had been divorced twice, and had custody of a daughter. He also had been physically and sexually abused by his stepfather (though Shannon stated that she and Stuart never discussed abuse). Stuart was the first person Shannon was seriously involved with, and she found him to be a "nice guy." Shannon became pregnant with her first son, and the couple married. A second son was soon on the way. Shannon and Stuart were not emotionally close, and their relationship deteriorated. "Me 'n Stuart started fighting and arguing all the time, 'n just decided we was gonna get a divorce, so we separated." Shannon elaborated:

> Well, when we were married, we both had a problem with drugs.... We was drinkin' one night. My son came in the kitchen... laid his hand on the oven door, got burnt. They got taken, put in Children's Services' custody, 'n... he [Stuart] was growing marijuana at the time [for his personal use]. I ended up turnin' him in for that. And both of us went to jail. And I took off outta state afterwards cuz I didn't wanna... they said they was gonna give him custody of the kids. I couldn't handle it, so I just left the state.

It was about this time that Shannon started dating a man she had known from school. The man was "on the lam" and convinced Shannon to flee with him. They headed to a Southern state, but split up. Shannon then started a relationship with another man and became pregnant by him. Shannon missed her sons and decided to move closer to them. She ended up returning to Stuart, though she was pregnant with the Southern man's baby. At first, Stuart said it was alright for Shannon's baby to be part of their

family, but when Stuart found his daughter from a previous marriage was also pregnant, Shannon had to give up her baby son for adoption. Stuart and Shannon remarried in the Spring of 2007, but the marriage lasted only two months.

Stuart told Shannon that she was having visual and auditory hallucinations. Shannon believed him and checked in to the only local inpatient psychiatric facility in the area, a Catholic hospital. At that point she was diagnosed with bipolar disorder and anxiety. Unfortunately, "anxiety" is a common misdiagnosis made by area psychiatrists (cf. Torrey 2006). Years later an expert on schizophrenia at a major state psychiatric institution would affirm that Shannon had developed schizophrenia.

Shannon did not want to go back with Stuart. She lived briefly with her father, but Stuart harassed her so extensively that she was forced to enter a domestic violence shelter for a short time. Then she moved in with Nick, a "friend" in the shelter town. Nick was on drugs and was violently abusive with Shannon. Her narrative about Nick explains what happened:

> I was with a guy [from the shelter town], and he was on drugs real bad – taking pills and I didn't know it. 'N drinkin'.... He ended up trying to hit me 'n tried to lock me in a closet. And I ran to one of the neighbors for help, and then he broke into their house.... I went over to another friend 'o mine's house. He tried to get in 'n there. 'N he pushed my head up against a glass door... 'n I had a bump on the back of my head from it.

When the police responded to the call about Nick, Shannon went to Crime Victims Services. She was placed once again in the domestic violence shelter. One of the shelter workers went to court with Shannon, and Nick was sentenced to six months in the county jail.

Shannon had another marriage to a controlling man, who fathered her fourth son. Toward the end of their marriage, Shannon once again lived at the shelter. After that, she

was in another relationship with a violent boyfriend. The boyfriend gave her two black eyes. In all, Shannon's relationships have resulted in five stays thus far at domestic violence shelters, four of these stays in the shelter I researched.

Michael P. Johnson classifies the type of violence Shannon experienced as "intimate terrorism." The perpetrator "uses violence in the service of general control" over his partner (Johnson 2008, 5-7; 48-51). Even when Stuart or others pushed Shannon, she did not push back. Her survival technique was to walk away and ignore the perpetrator. She actually views this act of ignoring as an attempt on her part to be an act of active control of the situation. Of course, violent perpetrators lash out at such reactions (cf. Dutton and Bodnarchuk 2005). According to Jerry Flanzer, alcohol and drugs are key causal agents of violence as Shannon's detailed narrative elaborates (cf. Flanzer 2005). Considering Shannon's parental lockup, one can only imagine how Nick's trying to lock her in a closet must have felt. Shannon's own drug use is also a direct reaction to the abuse she has experienced throughout life (cf. Mills 2008, 61).

The Church and the Shelter in Shannon's Experience

There was little religious influence in Shannon's childhood: a church visit with her mother, a few more times with a deeply religious foster family, Vacation Bible School one week out of one summer – none of which made any lasting impression on Shannon in terms of ideas about God (though she recalled enjoying a church cookout). There were no family religious rituals such as prayer and Bible study, though she sometimes tried to do these on her own. Shannon attended a Catholic high school, but was not allowed to attend church with her classmates after she did not take First

Communion. She "hated" the Catholic high school and quit at the age of seventeen (later getting her GED). If, as Rizzuto (1979) contends, everyone has a God image, Shannon's was certainly not a usable one. It is as amorphous as her idea of self. James Fowler explains, "Whether we become nonbelievers, agnostics or atheists, we are concerned with how to put our lives together and with what will make life worth living. Moreover, we look for something to love that loves us, something to value that gives us value, something to honor and respect that has the power to sustain our being" (Fowler 1981, 5).

Shannon sought for this love and respect in many ways. She tried marriage, motherhood, serial relationships, and drugs – all to no avail. She has been in and out of domestic violence shelters and psychiatric hospitals (including a two weeks stay at the state mental hospital in October 2011). She has formed no permanent relationships. Her relationship with the church is the same.

For example, after being discharged from the area Catholic hospital psychiatric facility, Shannon lived briefly with her father – until his next incarceration. He attended a Baptist church in the shelter town. This church had a drug program that helped Shannon "get off of marijuana." She also attended N.A. and A.A. meetings. Shannon attended this church almost every week and regularly attended their self-help groups, but she did not participate in any Bible study groups or church social functions. She struggles to even explain what the church service was like. She never joined the Baptist church, but was baptized one Sunday morning in 2007. Shannon explained: "Just cuz I wanted to get baptized. And I was goin' to church, so I decided to get baptized."

Preferring to refer to the Ultimate as "God," Shannon cannot explain what God is like. The only two words that come to her mind are "Church" and "Heaven." Shannon

seems to be *limited* in the basic prerequisites for a religious identity, i.e., a centering faith and a spiritual imagination. When she lost her ride to church, she did not try to reestablish contact.

Shannon's stays at domestic violence shelters did not change her in any way. The shelters served their purpose: providing for her needs at the time she needed them. Her answer was the same for virtually everything I asked her about the shelter, religious symbols in the shelter, suggestions about the shelter, etc. "Yeah, they're alright." One shelter staff member believed that she had been a "role model" for Shannon. However, when I asked Shannon what the shelter had done to improve he life and/ or help her to be a better person, she replied, "Nothing."

Shannon tries periodically to regain custody of her children, but as we ended our interviews, she did not have custody of any of her children. She has another boyfriend. They are planning to get a trailer together as soon as he gets out of prison.

The Story of Ashley

In many ways twenty-four year old Ashley is very much like Shannon. She was raped and physically beaten throughout her childhood, leading to deep trust issues and unhealthy adult relationships. She suffers from assorted mental health issues and is often quite childlike. Ashley enjoys playing with dolls and sometimes her speech even sounds childlike. On the other hand, Ashley is quite different from Shannon. She has no children or partner, and she still lives at home with her mother ("unfortunately" as she puts it). She describes herself as a "good person" who is "totally drained" mentally, because of the abuse and illness in her life. Her father is in prison for molesting her as a

child. Unlike the other women interviewees, Ashley did not have numerous families. Instead, she has one extremely dysfunctional family.

Ashley's mother became pregnant at the age of twenty-five and remained single, living with her parents, as she raised the boy. In her later twenties she met Ashley's father, five years younger than she. They married and had two children together – another boy and then Ashley. Ashley was totally unplanned and unwanted. Both parents have problems with rage. Ashley explained during our detailed interviews:

> [My father's] a person I don't want to be around. He was very angry – especially when he was drunk, he got worse. He drunk a lot 'n everything. And if he didn't have his beer or cigarettes, watch out! He was very abusive. Like, he would beat on me. And the thing is he *never* hit the boys. *Never*. The boys got away with everything, but me – if I did one thing wrong. Like, I was in the middle of potty training and I had an accident in my pants and [my father] hit me for it.... Mom's like that too, now. If Mom don't have her cigarettes, she's snappy. She's very mean. She doesn't drink, but she smokes.... When she don't have her cigarettes, everybody better go hide.

Ashley sees herself as the family scapegoat. Not only is she blamed for the abuse that happened to her, but for every misfortune suffered by anyone in her family. "My role is getting' blamed for everything in my family. If something goes wrong, it's my fault." Though she objectively knows that she is not to blame (and actively protests the characterization), Ashley has internalized an immense sense of guilt. She was raped by her father from the age of three until she was six, when her father was incarcerated for raping her. At the age of six, her sixteen year old half-brother and his best friend raped her as well. A couple years later, her own brother and his best friend joined in. Even Ashley's adult babysitters (her mother worked) were violent and sexually abusive toward her.

These horrible incidents were certainly disruptive in the development of Ashley's self and identity (cf. Berger 1963; Blumer 1969; Winnicott (1971) 2005; Benjamin 1998; Grotstein 1998). The trauma she endured as a young child is unfathomable (note discussion in my section "Object Relations Tradition and Trauma" in Chapter 1). Ashley did, however, put together a cultural tool kit that contained religion and spirituality to help her contend with trauma, abuse, and disruption in her life. She also had significant others to strengthen her as she coped with the unimaginable.

Religion and the Church in Ashley's Experience

Ashley's mother had the children dedicated at church. Ashley does not recall what church they attended in those days, but knows that she rode a church bus to get there. One day when she was only three, the church bus showed up at her house and she got on it without her family knowing. Police, friends, and relatives searched for her, but eventually Ashley returned on the church bus. She had not intended to "run away," but just wanted to go to church to have something to do. To this day, Ashley still "runs away" to church when she needs something to do and can get a ride there. Church and religion are a definite part of Ashley's cultural tool kit and strategy of action (Swidler 1986).

Ashley was also attached to her maternal grandfather, who read stories to her and took her for ice cream. She started to tell her grandfather about her father raping her, but her mother interrupted to discredit Ashley's "stories." Her grandfather tried his best to intervene, but was unable to help her. Still, Ashley has fond memories of this grandfather, with whom she felt safe and secure. Interestingly, part of her God-image is

of this grandfather: protection, safety, reading to children; "Let the children come to me" (cf. Coles 1990, 98-128).

Ashley's family started going to church at the Salvation Army when she was six years of age. This is where she met the Millers, the ministerial team at the Salvation Army. She said:

> I really attached to them right away. It's like I looked to Major Miller... like a father-figure. And to Mrs. Miller, I looked to her like a mother-figure. Cuz my mom – she's there, but she's not there.

Ashley told the Millers about her father's sexual abuse. They insisted her mother take her to the hospital. The F.B.I. was called and arrested Ashley's father. She had to testify against him in court, which was another trauma for Ashley to endure. The Millers set up counseling for Ashley at the local mental health agency, "And I been going there since talking about everything." Another tool was added to Ashley's cultural tool kit.

According to Carrie Doehring, these pastoral caregivers acted properly, both theologically and legally. Doehring wrote about "seven moments" in pastoral care that the careseeker must move "back and forth among them":

1. Listening emphatically to the careseeker's story.
2. Examining the helpful and unhelpful ways in which one's own story is engaged.
3. Establishing the contract of care by reviewing whether there are or may be limits to the confidentiality of the pastoral care conversation, psychological needs that may result in sexual misconduct, conflicting dual roles, limits to the caregivers expertise, and limits to the caregiver's availability.
4. Assessing psychological issues to do with loss, violence, and ways of coping with the resulting stress, and proposing initial strategies for healing.
5. Assessing the strengths and liabilities of the careseeker's cultural, community, and family systems, as well as close relationship.
6. Reflecting theologically and proposing theological norms.
7. Developing strategies for seeking healing and justice.

These points are so important that Doehring organized the chapters of her book according to them (Doehring 2006, 10; cf. Kelly 1988).

After her grandfather passed away, the Millers were probably the only people Ashley trusted at this young age of her life, and they tried to help her in many ways. According to Ashley's narrative they spent time talking with her, reading the Bible with her, and praying with her. Ashley became very attached to a baby doll the Millers gave her to help her through the pain (see Winnicott (1971) 2005). She named the doll Hannah and still sleeps with it. When Ashley was ten, the Millers transferred to another charge, leaving Ashley with the advice to lean on God, to read the Bible, and to "call out to God" in prayer "cuz He's the only one that can help you."

James Fowler would recognize the importance of the church, her grandfather, and later the Millers, during the "Intuitive-Projective Faith" Ashley developed from age three to seven. Religion during this time period is learned through experiences, stories and images enhanced by the people and institutions the child comes in contact with. During Ashley's elementary years (with a strong religious couple as the Millers), Ashley could enter the "Mythic-Literal Faith," which takes the form of story, drama, or myth ("Let the little children come to me"). The child begins to separate the real from the fantasy. But Fowler would also recognize that Ashley continued to be beaten and raped during this time period, first by her father and then by her brothers and their friends. "The danger in this [intuitive-projective] stage arises from the possible 'possession' of the child's imagination by unrestrained images of terror and destructiveness," James Fowler warns (Fowler 1981, 134). This certainly would continue in her preteen years.

Thus, Ashley has developed a somewhat bifurcated sense of self and God. On the one hand she does have some capacity to trust. Yet her trust did not stem the abuse she endured. Ashley has the idea of a God who could love her and welcome her but, in contrast, her enduring view is that of a God who looks on impotently, seeing her pain but unable to cross the chasm of her own inability to trust (like her grandfather who died, unable to stem the abuse she endured).

When Ashely was twelve, she became pregnant with her brother's baby (she lost the child before birth). Through her elementary years few school authorities suspected the sexual and physical abuse Ashely endured at the hands of her brother and his friends. When they did suspect what was happening to her, Ashley's mother told them nothing was happening (cf. Finkelhor 2005). A school counselor, however, got involved and called the police. Ashley's brother was sent away and the abuse from her family largely ended for the time being.

Unfortunately, Ashley's boyfriends through high school and after picked up the sexual and physical abuse that her family had initiated. By the time of our interviews, Ashley's personal faith and spiritual practice had been on the decline for over a decade. Ashley told me she used to follow the Miller's advice about praying and reading the Bible, but after all the abuse she suffered Ashley eventually "gave up on God."

> Right now it's like He doesn't even matter. [I'm] mad, angry, upset. I blame Him for putting me in this family. And as I get older, I blame Him for more of the abuse continuing. It's like why would He put me in a family that would do this? Why me? Why this person? Why that person? It's like, why couldn't I have a childhood?

Nancy Nason-Clark acknowledges: "For the religious victim, abuse strikes at the heart of one's selfhood, self-concept, and sense of sacred self" (Nason-Clark 1997, 14).

Ashley's Shelter Experience

When Ashley was about twenty, her half-brother left his wife (for a time) and came back to live with Ashley's mother. When the mother was away, he raped Ashley as he had in the past. This time, however, Ashley told her youth pastor and "church people." Ashley's youth pastor called the police. (Refer to Doehring 2006, Chapter 4 on pastoral responsibility; cf. Fortune 1988a). The police took her to the mental health agency, and a counselor there told her about the domestic violence shelter.

Two of the victims' advocates from the shelter met Ashley at the mental health agency and accompanied her to the house to get her belongings – along with police escorts. "The cops hadda hold my mom back cuz she was throwin' things and swingin' her arms trying to hit me." (Cf. Dutton and Bodnarchuk 2005 for this pattern displayed by an abuser). Ashley found the intake paperwork at the shelter "confusing" (refer to my discussion in Chapter 5). Ashley appreciated the shelter staff and their concern for her welfare. She also was very glad that the shelter took her medications from her and kept them locked in the office. Ashley is sure she would have attempted an overdose if she had had unlimited access to her medications. The family drama and abuse had been overwhelming, but her mother was not through.

The next day, Ashley went to her usual group at the mental health agency. Her mother knew her schedule and entered the building, screaming, and staging a scene. "There is enormous resistance," Pamela Cooper-White explains about resistance to abuse victims' claims among family members, "to fear the truth is to realize it is happening everywhere," even "in our homes" (Cooper-White 2012, 170). Ashley locked

herself in the restroom. One of the caseworkers got Ashley out of the restroom, but Ashley's mother tried to hit Ashley. It took two caseworkers to restrain her mother. A caseworker took Ashley to the back office (behind locked doors) and talked with her for a while to calm her down, and then Ashley went to her group. Afterward, with her mother in the waiting room, the agency's driver snuck Ashley out to the back door and had her hide at the back of the van so he could take her back to the domestic violence shelter. Her mother waited all day in the waiting room for Ashley to emerge. At closing time, Ashley's mother had to be forced out of the building.[21]

Ashley enjoyed her time at the domestic violence shelter. She liked the staff and said they were very helpful in getting her to appointments, providing literature, helping her get food stamps. and just spending time with her. When Ashley first went to the shelter, there was another resident with four children. Ashley liked helping care for the baby. After the resident left, Ashley was the only resident for a time. She liked being the only resident, because the staff had time to play card games with her. Ashley elaborated in her detailed narrative: "It's kind of awesome. I liked it. I wish I could a moved in there 'n never left. It was a place I felt safe at that I know nuthin' could happen." Unlike Roxanne and Lexie (for whom the stay at the shelter was an insignificant blip on the course of life), Ashley sees the period of her shelter stay as a VERY significant period of her life.

> It actually was really important. It made me feel safer. It made me feel like I belonged. I had a place to stay. I had a place that I *wasn't* stressed out and... feel like I'm not welcome (cf. Lyon, Lane and Menard 2008; Walker 1979, 190-204).

[21] In evaluating the mental health agency response, refer to William Spenser's chapter "Self-Presentation and Organizational Processing in a Human Service Agency" (Spenser 2001).

When our interviews began, Ashley had just become involved with Celebrate Recovery – the group that Roxanne was helping to start at the Friend's meeting. Ashley also attends a Bible study at another church, though she did not recall the name of that church. All told, Ashley attends functions at four churches most weeks, allowing her to get out of her mother's house four to six days per week. Nevertheless, Ashley had to return home to her abusive family, a family situation she literally dreaded. She feared her father would be paroled and knew her mother planned to welcome him home. Ashley stated that her numerous suicide attempts meant that she must always have a living situation where she is supervised, and her mother's control over her disability money made her feel unable to leave home.[22]

A month or two after our interviews, I learned that Ashley had been sent to live briefly in a group home, ending up in another group home (whereabouts unknown).

Conclusion to Shannon's and Ashley's Stories

It is probably no coincidence that the two study participants who were victims of the most one-sided abuse and from the earliest ages were also the ones with the weakest general faith orientation to the world. Faith in God, self, and others was not established during their formative years and has left them both with diminished spiritual resources as adults. Neither Shannon nor Ashley has a strong personal faith in God, but both sensed that God did not approve of abuse. Each had trouble seeing herself from God's point of view, but no trouble identifying what God thought of her abusers.

[22] Compare this to Chapter 7 on "Family Discord" in Walker 1979.

Conclusion

In this study, I have approached questions of faith as a matter of religious "play" and spiritual imagination. I have considered religious and spiritual resources to be "tools" that victim-survivors may use for coping or resistance (cf. Swidler 1986). I inquired as to which "tools" were in each survivor's "tool kit" and how they became adept as using them (or failed to do so). I tried to move beyond the questions of either/ or in order to learn *when*, *how*, *under what circumstances*, and *for whom* religion or faith might be helpful or harmful.

To explore these complex matters, I listened to the detailed biographical narratives of victim-survivors in order to learn how their religious identity developed and changed throughout the "chapters" of their lives. I explained that religious identity is an ongoing process which begins in infancy and early childhood as the child develops a sense of self and others (see Chapter 2). Ideas about the Ultimate develop from these early perceptions (see Chapter 3). As one's experience of the world grows and different people become significant, understandings of God, self, and others are renegotiated in a lifelong ongoing process (see Chapter 4). Religious identity is not static, but is a dynamic and interactive activity. I also explored the domestic violence shelter and its relationship to the community in order to shed light on the contexts of the narratives of the women in this study (see Chapter 5).

Individual experiences in life will determine whether ideas about the Ultimate and/ or ties to a religious community will develop in a way to provide useful spiritual and

religious resources. In other words, when asked about what the relationship between religion and domestic violence is, I would not expect there to be one right answer for all victim-survivors – or even one right answer for a particular survivor throughout all stages of her life. Her personal experience is paramount when considering the usefulness of religion and faith for her situation. In my study, none of the abusers used religion itself as a weapon to harm their partners. In fact, the heart of the matter was in discovering to what extent religion and/ or faith was even relevant to their lives. Other survivors may have very different experiences than this.

The women in this study spoke at length about the relationship between the domestic violence shelter, the victim of abuse residing in the shelter, and faith/ religion. After concluding these interviews, I grouped their comments and observations about this relationship into five categories. I now explore these categories, posing each as a question which the various narratives help to answer.

"How do early relationships equip abuse victims to resist, escape, or otherwise handle violent relationships?"

Roxanne's mother was the anchor in the unpredictable storm of Roxanne's life. Roxanne strongly identified with her mother and tried to become a mother to those around her. On the one hand, this self-imagery kept her in an abusive relationship because she believed she could "mother" her partner. On the other hand, when Roxanne did begin to make changes in her life (after her partner's suicide and her subsequent turn to religion) her mothering impulse helped her to start a Christian-based support group for others who were struggling with their own problems.

Roxanne's personal image of God is one of power – the power she missed when her step-father left home. In her personal walk with God, she now finds her own

empowerment through relying on God's power. Still, it seems that her mother's unconditional love provided the centering faith and spiritual imagination which eventually enabled her to accept the powerful resources of her faith in God.

Lexie never had a strong attachment figure. Her families and caregivers were constantly in flux, and she never felt accepted by her mother (who was, at least theoretically, her main caregiver). Lexie's life revolves around the perpetual need to live up to her mother's standards – whether those of her actual mother or diffused across the spectrum of God, self, and society. Lexie internalized her mother's impossible standards both by accepting blame and projecting it onto those around her. Unlike Roxanne, Lexie has not developed a spiritual imagination sufficient to integrate her life into a meaningful whole. She is weary of the battle raging within her – always needy, yet always angry with those she needs – including God. Lexie is aware that God does not approve of abuse and felt "justified" in leaving her husband. She eventually decided that it would be even better if she gave her husband Don one last chance – which apparently would make her even *more* justified before God if Don did not prove himself worthy of that chance.

Lexie's most positive and useful image of God is an *impersonal* one. Lexie sees people as the cause of the pain and turbulence in her world, so for Lexie God is best imaged as a quiet beach scene with no one around. The beach scene was inspired by one of the few happy memories from her childhood – the family outings with her father and the only wife he really loved (*not* Lexie's mother). Because God is seen as impersonal, gender imagery is irrelevant in Lexie's worldview (despite the fact that she uses masculine pronouns for convenience when referring to God). God is the source of the

peace Lexie finds – away from her turbulent world. She believes that her son is better off now that he is away from this world and with God.

Throughout our conversations, Shannon was never able to convey much at all in the way of a sense of self, others, or God. She had no stable caregiver in her life, and those who were supposed to care for her failed miserably at the task. Shannon was neglected and abused from childhood. She has no sense of what is "normal" and what is "abuse." She is shy about expressing herself, and seems to have few opinions at all. She has purposely repressed most of the memories of her past. She has suffered problems with drugs and mental illness. She was not even given a unique name. For any or all of these reasons, Shannon's sense of God, self, and others is little more than a "blur." There is neither a strong God representation to support or challenge her, nor a strong self to receive any such help.

Shannon has no religious items, no favorite Bible verses or stories, no heroes of the faith, and no connection to any religious community. Shannon seems unable to understand the cultural "game" of religion. She lacks spiritual imagination beyond anything more than reciting "Our Father" before bedtime and a vague belief in Heaven and Hell. Shannon's faith lacks the curiosity to even ask God about her abuse, much less blame Him for it. Like all of the participants in this study, Shannon does not believe that God condones abuse, but she does not see it as her place to withhold forgiveness from the abusive men who need God's help. More than any of the other women I spoke with, Shannon's sense of religion, faith, and/ or God does not provide any motivation for any sort of change in her situation.

Ashley's most positive image of God is consciously modeled on her grandfather – the only person who made her feel valued as a child. He listened to her, spent time with her, told her stories, and most importantly, he believed her. When Ashley thinks of Jesus welcoming her as he welcomed the children, she sees herself sitting and listening to him tell her stories – just as her grandfather did. Though this helps Ashley believe in a loving, welcoming God, it does not give her a sense of strength or the faith that comes from the security of commitment. Ashley's grandfather could not stop the abuse, could not confront his own daughter who denied that it was happening, and died before she mustered the courage to tell him about the additional abusers who hurt her. Her most positive idea of God is welcoming and loving, but her more enduring image of God is that of a God who looks on impotently – seeing her pain but unable to cross the chasm of her own inability to trust. God's perceived gender did not matter to Ashley, since men and women were both responsible for her suffering. Just as her early "caregivers" denied her the opportunity to establish a centering faith, Ashley's idea of God has thus far been unable to help her escape or cope with her abuse.

Why is it that Roxanne and Lexie eventually found *something* in their God representations that inspired or helped them, while Shannon and Ashley have not? One possibility is that Shannon and Ashley are younger and have just not yet found that inspiration, but perhaps someday they will. After all, Roxanne and Lexie did not fully turn to faith until fairly recently, and Lexie still struggles with blaming God for her suffering.

Another possibility is that the nature of the abuse was different. In fact, it was different in at least three ways. First, it was different in the nature of the abusive acts

themselves. Shannon and Ashley were the only ones in this study who had been abused sexually.

A second way the abuse was different was that Shannon and Ashley were more clearly identifiable as the *victims* in their situations – i.e. that they were in the most unequal situations. Using Johnson's typology, Roxanne engaged in mutual combat with Joel; they each tried to coerce and control the other. Lexie engaged in situational couple violence with Don; neither tried to abuse the other, but their arguments sometimes escalated out of control. In either case, there was no sense of gross inequality between the partners. Shannon and Ashley, however, were clearly involved in situations of intimate terrorism – the type of abuse where one person tries to coerce and control the innocent other. Shannon and Ashley were obviously victims in the classical feminist interpretation of abuse.

Finally, Shannon and Ashley were at the shelter because of abuse that had occurred recently, but each had been abused since early childhood. If abuse happens early in a child's socialization, it seems entirely plausible that such a child may be less able to develop an idea of God or centering faith of some sort that can prove helpful to them throughout life. Indeed, in a personal communication (dated September 7, 2007), Carol Winkelmann remarked to me that a social worker in her area suspected that it was primarily the women who were abused earliest in life who tended to blame God for their abuse. Winkelmann did not pursue that theory in her work, and my study is too small to make this type of generalization, but is it possible that there is a correlation between early abuse and the inability to develop a useful God representation or centering faith?

"What spiritual and/ or practical tools do religious communities offer abuse victims? Under what circumstances might a victim be able to utilize those tools?"

For Roxanne, finding religion did not come easily. She spent her life searching for a foundation and for the power she sensed she was missing. She had some brushes with religion, but it did not really become a central part of her identity – at least not for some time. Roxanne did not attend any church functions where her daughters went to preschool. She did not remember the deep religious conversations or faith-based posters at the shelter. She collected angels in the hope that she was being watched over. She made some attempts to pray and read the Bible, but felt she did not know how. She had not yet learned the cultural "game" of religion or developed a spiritual imagination. Eventually Roxanne tried church, but resented the pastor's abuse of his power (trying to get her to do his work) and his insensitivity to Joel's addiction issues.

It was not until Roxanne hit bottom and lost everything that she was open to religious resources. At that point, she met church people who came to her and spent time with her in the jail. She was particularly touched by a pastor who had lost her son to a drug overdose because Roxanne felt that this was a person who understood her lifestyle and would not judge her. She appreciated the time that the volunteers in the jail ministry made available to her just to talk. Moving on from county jail to the state women's prison, Roxanne greatly enjoyed the ministries and the chaplain there. She also found tremendous help and empowerment from the Christian self-help books she read during her incarceration. Roxanne found new appreciation for her own church back in her hometown when they stuck by her by visiting and sending cards.

Ultimately, Roxanne did find hope in religion – in the people who stood by her nonjudgmentally, in the joyous worship services, in the self-help books, in the story of Job and his sufferings, and in her favorite Bible verse (Romans 8:28) which assures her that there is a greater purpose behind all she has been through and helped her to integrate her life experiences into a meaningful whole. All of these became important components in Roxanne's religious identity. One wonders whether Roxanne had to lose everything first to appreciate what the church had to offer her or whether that same nonjudgmental attitude could have helped her while she was still going through all the turbulence.

Lexie wrestles with her image of God and her relationship with the church. On the one hand, she blames God for putting her in the family He did and for making her poor and unable to get ahead financially in life. On the other hand, she knows that God will provide for her needs and comfort her in her problems. Indeed, her church has provided large amounts of money during her times of need. Though she is grateful for this help, she also resents that she needs it at all. The shame that she feels about accepting the church's help causes the wheel of her emotions to spin back to blaming God for her problems.

Lexie felt supported by her pastor and her congregation when she left Don. They agreed that Don's anger was out of control and that this was a situation of abuse which "justified" her leaving. While she was away from Don, the church provided her with food and with transportation to church. The pastor offered couples counseling to Lexie and Don, though Lexie did not avail herself of this while the C.P.O. was in place against her husband. When Lexie eventually returned to Don, the congregation supported her in this as well.

Shannon has never turned to a church for help with abusive situations in her life, although she once turned to the church briefly when she needed help getting off drugs. For a short time, she attended the church where an addiction recovery group was held. She was even baptized there. Yet Shannon did not really get involved with this congregation. As soon as it was inconvenient to go (due to her second stay at the shelter and losing her transportation when her father was incarcerated), Shannon ceased all involvement with the church. The congregation relocated to a new campus a few blocks away, and Shannon never sought it out. She told me several times she did not know where it had moved, but seemed to show little interest when I offered to tell her or asked the shelter staff to show her.

Would Shannon's congregation have been there for her if she had been more involved with that community or more proactive in making known her needs? It is hard to be sure. I had only visited that congregation once. The visiting pastor said during the sermon that it is God's will for marriages to stay together – and that when they do not, it is because *someone* is not doing what they are supposed to. That statement leaves much room for interpretation. With no further explanation, it might be seen as either the condemnation of the abusive man or the condemnation of the wife who leaves the abusive man. Which one are we meant to believe is not doing what he or she should? And furthermore, did the visiting pastor's view reflect that of the congregation? This congregation does sponsor the addiction recovery group, so they are not blind to helping people they see as being in need. And when I approached the senior pastor about a toiletry drive held by the shelter, he offered to put out a basket. It brought in very little, but it came at a time when his congregation was involved in other drives as well. All in

all, I cannot say for sure whether this congregation would have offered more help to Shannon if she had been able to ask for and receive it.

Although Ashley's early caregivers had not enabled her to develop an idea of God that could help her through her abuse, she did find useful resources from numerous faith communities. At the age of three, she discovered that she could run away to church to escape an unpleasant home life. At six, she disclosed her abuse to a pastoral couple who ensured that she got medical help (leading to legal intervention) and psychological help, in addition to the spiritual help they themselves offered her. They also gave her a doll which helped Ashley to accomplish several psychological tasks and symbolized the very love of the pastors for her. As an adult, it was again pastoral involvement that got Ashley the intervention she needed, ultimately leading her to the domestic violence shelter. Over the years, Ashley's involvement with churches has grown to the point that she is at *some* church nearly every day. God may be distant for Ashley, but the religious community is her lifeline.

The degree to which religious communities have helped these women has varied, as have the forms of this help. Some of the things offered by religious communities include education, prayer, transportation, friendship, referrals, theodicies and interpretations, Scripture verses and stories, heroes of the faith, support groups, personal and shelter donations, and, of course, Ashley's doll.

Despite the variety of experiences, I think there is something important underlying each of these stories – the relative ability of the congregations to make the women feel open and receptive to the help they could offer. The women were open to help from the congregations when they felt understood, accepted, and believed. Roxanne

responded to the minister who had lost her son to a drug overdose because she felt she would not be judged. She also found a real appreciation for the various jail and prison ministries and for the church people who sent her cards while she was in prison – even when she had not particularly liked them before this. Lexie looked around some, but settled on the church that had repeatedly given her huge sums of money. This was not merely self-serving, because she still struggles with the shame when she accepts their money and because it was the welcome that she received that won her over – when she learned that everyone there knew her name and saw it on the weekly prayer list in the church bulletin before she had ever set foot in the door. Shannon had few ties to anything, but she was able to benefit for a while from the addiction recovery group at a church. Ashley, on the other hand, depends on all of the churches she attends for friendship, for intervention, and just for a way to pass each day someplace pleasant. For her, church is the place she can always turn to and always feel safe – the earliest and most constant source of help for her.

"How does the experience of abuse or the stay at the shelter alter the beliefs or spiritual practices of the victim-survivor?"

Roxanne was looking for some sort of foundation in her life before she ever came to the shelter, and she continued to search after leaving there. She was involved in a situation of mutual combat with her partner, complicated by problems with drugs. However, at the time she came to the shelter, she was not involved in any regular spiritual or religious practices and this remained unchanged while she was there. Therefore, there was no significant change in her personal faith or religious attendance while she was at the shelter. Her life proceeded down the same path of looking for something, but it was not until later that she found what she felt she had been missing.

Lexie had been religious as a child, but had only recently become involved with a church again shortly before her stay at the shelter. As with Roxanne, the abusive situation she was in was *not* the prime motivator for religion/ faith. As with Roxanne, loss was the issue – but Lexie's great loss had happened before going to the shelter, so she had already been in the process of turning to faith/ religion. Lexie's great religious motivator was to earn her way to Heaven so she could be reunited with her son.

Lexie did experience changes in her personal practices and church attendance while she was at the shelter. On the one hand, lack of babysitting prevented her from attending the mid-week Bible study that she previously attended. On the other hand, the church made sure that she had regular transportation to weekly Sunday services. It was also during her shelter stay that she took up the practices of reading her Bible every night and of praying at meals and at bedtime. Lexie's stay at the shelter ended badly, with her concluding that the shelter itself was a place of abuse. This inadvertently pushed her back to the church and to God.

Shannon's neglect and abuse began so early in her life that it is hard to say that it *changed* her spiritual beliefs or practices. For Shannon, religion and faith had very little meaning from the start and that did not change significantly through the years – neither from the continued abuse nor from her several brief stays at the shelter. Though she was somewhat isolated at the shelter, she was not in the habit of attending church, so this did not change. She prays "Our Father" before bedtime each night and continued to do so at the shelter, but this is the extent of Shannon's religious practice.

If Ashley had been attending *only* the Salvation Army when she stayed at the shelter, she probably would have experienced a great loss during the time that this was

not an option. She could not attend that church because of her mother's presence. Luckily for Ashley, she has no shortage of religious communities. Once her transportation problem was resolved, she could attend church functions as much as she wished.

Ashley's personal faith and practices changed little while she stayed at the shelter. She enjoyed her Christian music and brought it with her. She did not pray or read the Bible, and this did not change. The only change in her personal spiritual walk was when the shelter director arranged for Ashley to watch a religious movie and then prayed with her into the night afterward. Ashley says she wanted this and that it was right for her at the time to recommit her life to Jesus, but any change was temporary. When Ashley returned home, Jesus remained at the shelter.

Unlike many of the shelters described in domestic violence literature, the shelter I studied is not biased against religion. On the contrary, several staff members are there because they believe they were called by God to that ministry. Because they fear church-state complications, and the possible loss of funding, they try to be cautious when it comes to promoting religion – but many workers welcome the opportunity to evangelize when they can. None of the participants in this study felt that shelter workers overstepped their boundaries or pressured them about religion. If religion did not interest them, they seemed oblivious to its presence there. If it did interest them, they welcomed it.

> *"How significant is the shelter community as a new plausibility structure through which the victim-survivor develops a new narrative of identity?"*

For Roxanne, the shelter community seemed to make no difference in her narrative of God, self, and other because she maintained the ties to all of her previous

significant others. She had a car and a cell phone, so she was able to see and be in touch with her friends and family. And although the shelter staff disapproved, Roxanne spoke to her partner daily on her cell phone. Since she was not in any way isolated from her previous lifestyle and significant persons, she had no reason to involve herself overly much in the shelter community – certainly not to the extent of creating a new plausibility structure within which she could reimage herself. For Roxanne, that did not happen until she was incarcerated.

Lexie appreciated the respite afforded her by her time at the shelter, but it did not become a significant community for her. Although she was somewhat isolated from her usual contacts, she did not bond well with the other residents and (at least some of) the staff. In fact, she said that she would rather that these residents had not become part of her life because she felt "used" by them. Later, when she perceived that the shelter officially took sides with a worker who had been cruel to her, Lexie turned her back on the shelter community and told her church about the incident so that they would do the same. She admitted that there had been things that she liked at the time and that she was glad that her husband had to attend anger management classes while they were apart, but looking back (after the event with the shelter worker) she believed that the ultimate lesson to be learned from the shelter experience was that she was better off at home.

Shannon was fairly isolated during her several stays at the shelter, but she never stayed long enough to become a part of a community. While Roxanne and Lexie just needed a respite and therefore do not feel that the shelter community had much impact on them, Shannon feels that the shelter is an important part of her life. It is important, however, in that it as a place she can go to leave one abusive situation before moving on

to the next one. It is a stopover. She never stays long enough to get to know anyone or be influenced by role-models, teachings, or friendships. The shelter *as a place* is important to her, but it is insignificant *as a community* and therefore cannot create for her a new plausibility structure by which she can renegotiate an identity (e.g., Berger and Luckman 1966).

Of the four women presented here, Ashley may have been the most likely to have accepted the shelter community as significant others, but it was not to the point of causing her to rethink her identity and beliefs. For much of her stay Ashley was the only resident, so she did not develop deep ties to other residents. Further, Ashley was able to maintain many of her ties to the outside world, meaning that there was no radical change in her social circle. The night of prayer made its impression on her, but only for the duration of her stay. Ashley made no mention of *anything* the shelter staff tried to teach her or model for her. If there was anything, she either already knew it or did not receive it. Ashley was happy to add another place to her short list of places she feels safe, but she seems to have left there as basically the same person she had always been.

The literature on intimate partner violence often depicts the shelter as a place where women will be radically changed as a result of the experience of woman-centered community and feminist ideas (e.g., Loseke 1992; Winkelmann 2004). Loseke has shown that, in fact, women often resist the characterizations of themselves, their situations, and their abusers (Loseke 1992). Winkelmann portrays the contempt felt by some residents when advocates set themselves up as experts in defining the women's lives for them (Winkelmann 2004). My study should be humbling to those who think the shelter can significantly change the women to the point of effecting something like an

alternation and new identity. For these participants, the shelter was not a significant community and did not alter their perceptions of self, others, or their situation. For them, the shelter was little more than a free motel – an insignificant blip in the scheme of life. They were all glad it was there, particularly Shannon and Ashley, but it was not life-altering in any way. Each woman returned to the same or similar situation as she had left. One advocate from the domestic violence shelter, aware that she could not truly change lives, told me that she tries to believe that her work may have some value – even if it is in small increments or not yet manifest till further down the road.

> I look at it like if I make one positive in their lives, if they take one thing away that they've learned from me, then I've done a good job. I give it my all, and what they take from it is up to them, not me. I can't control that…. I've learned to do what I can do. I can't fix them. I can't. It's out of my control.

> *"How do shelter residents envision a working relationship between shelters and religious communities that would support their needs?"*

Roxanne did not see herself as religious at the time of her shelter stay, but she had been searching for *something* already at that point in her life. Looking back, she thinks that it would have been good for the shelter to have offered some opportunities for spiritual development. She stressed that it should be optional, but says that she does not believe it would be offensive to offer such things as rides to church, visits from a clergyperson, or a group Bible study. She said that the shelter staff do not need to take on these extra tasks or even necessarily be religious themselves, but they could have a chaplain on call to provide the spiritual resources to those who desire it.

Roxanne also stated that she has never heard the topic of abuse addressed in a religious setting, and she thinks that it should be. She wants clergy to be aware that there are people in their congregations who are hurting and who need to be given the

information *and* the spiritual tools to address the problems they face. She believes that abuse touches the lives of more people than anyone knows and that the church has the untapped potential to bring a great deal of help to the situation. She suggests that clergy preach a sermon or part of a sermon about abuse from time to time so that *everyone* can benefit from the lesson *anonymously* (since many people would not voluntarily attend a special class dealing with the topic of abuse).

Lexie stayed at the shelter at the time when the shelter lost much of its funding. She believes that the churches should have picked up the slack so that the shelter could continue uninterrupted services to its clients. She also believes that the shelter should have reached out to ask for this help.

Lexie also made suggestions for clergy support in spiritual matters at the shelter – suggestions nearly identical to those made by Roxanne. She believes that the shelter should be more proactive in suggesting that a client speak to a clergyperson. She also believes that there should be voluntary Bible studies offered at the shelter for those who are interested.

Shannon had no ideas about the shelter making any changes or improvements. This is not surprising given her "blurry" sense of God, self, and others. She lacks the vision to see how things might be. She is glad that the shelter is there when she needs it, but never stays long enough to get much out of the experience. She is not involved with organized religion and did not even notice the religious symbols located all around the shelter. She also had no ideas about improvements needed in religious communities.

Like Shannon, Ashley had no suggestions for improvement – no vision of anything better. She did not witness any evidence of shelter and church working together, but thought that each did their own task well.

Of all the women participating in this study, Shannon and Ashley were the most appreciative of the shelter's services, the least able to envision ways to improve it, the least able to utilize a spiritual imagination, the ones who were abused earliest in life, and the ones who were most clearly the victims in one-sided situations of abuse. Perhaps further study can reveal the cause(s) of these correlations. Roxanne and Lexie, using a more developed imagination, were able to suggest many ways in which the shelter and the religious communities could work together. Although they wanted spiritual services to be optional for residents, they did want the option of having those services in the shelter.

Some Final Notes

This was a very detailed small study, which I believe is important in that it helps us to understand the dynamic process of identity and meaning-making. It opens the door to understanding when religious communities or ideas about the Ultimate might be helpful to women in abusive situations.

This study suggests ways in which advocates may better help their residents by connecting those who can benefit from religious and/ or spiritual resources with the people who can provide them. Advocates need to be more proactive in enlisting the help of the religious communities and having clergy on call for prayer, Bible study, and spiritual support. This study also suggests that the shelter community may not have as much significance as previously believed as a new plausibility structure which transforms

ideas and identities. It is, therefore, important that advocates educate and enlist the help of communities other than the shelter which could be significant communities for some women, so that they, too, may help to equip victim-survivors with the tools needed to resist and deal with abusive situations.

The study suggests that religious communities are successful in reaching people when they show acceptance and help provide for the needs of people, yet none of these women had heard much (if any) discussion in their churches about abuse. Clergy and religious leaders need to be proactive in making sure that victims of abuse understand that their needs matter to the religious communities. They need to get involved in a shelter ministry, providing transportation to services and/ or bringing spiritual and practical resources to the shelter. Religious teachers and clergy may be better able to help abuse victims if they can build on the most positive aspects of the victims' ideas about the Ultimate and begin to transform the childhood images that create resistance to positive God images.

Although it is difficult to make broad generalizations about the relationship between religion and intimate partner violence based on one small study, the value of this study is that it highlights the diversity of women's experiences, needs, and perceptions. Victim-survivors of intimate partner violence do not arrive at the shelter as blank slates or as passive subjects needing to be "reconditioned." Instead, they are active meaning-makers who bring with them a variety of experiences, perceptions, tools, and abilities. These would include such things as the relative strength or absence of an idea of the Ultimate that can help them, the relative strength or absence of a personal centering faith, the relative strength or absence of ties to a religious community, the particular spiritual

and practical resources offered by that community, and the messages and language regarding gender and abuse that is found within that community. Not only are the personal experiences of each woman different, but so are the communities within which they live and make meaning.

More research is needed at the local level, both in the United States and internationally, in order to improve our understanding of the questions asked in this study. How would religion, faith, and religious communities influence or be influenced by the experiences of victim-survivors from different backgrounds – women of other races or ethnicities, women in larger cities, women in the Bible Belt or in more secular areas, women from other religious backgrounds, and women living in other nations?

More research is also needed as to whether or how different types of abuse and/ or abuse at an earlier age affects the ability to develop ideas about the Ultimate which can assist (or hinder) women who are trying to effectively deal with violence in their lives. It is my hope that this small but detailed work will open the doors to this further research, and also help victims' advocates and religious communities to more effectively help survivors of intimate partner violence.

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