
Three Women

Contemporary research suggests that Black women experience violence to a greater degree than other women, that they are more vulnerable to control by the state, and that they make up the largest percentage of women on welfare, although not the highest number. This percentage is in relation to the total number of Black women in the general population, for they do not comprise the largest number of women receiving assistance. Further concentrations of Black women on welfare are geographically specific in cities like New York, and they are at much greater risk of nonlethal,¹ intimate violence. Black women's reported rates of intimate partner violence are 35 percent higher than White females' reported rates, and Rennison and Welchans (2000) found that Black women report intimate partner violence at a rate 22 percent higher than women of other races/ethnicities.

We know that there are more reports of victimization for Black women than for White women, and we know that Black women are overrepresented among those who are poor, so it is crucial to explore the particularized experience of violence, race, and poverty. Interestingly, few studies examining the intersection of welfare and domestic abuse specifically incorporate race, which constitutes an important part of this ethnography given that data on violence and poverty point to the level of Black women's victimization.

Since women use welfare for a multitude of reasons, including as an immediate strategy to deal with domestic

violence, this chapter is concerned with how three women, two Black and one White, utilized welfare in order to separate from their abusers. I should clearly state that while violence may not be the *main reason* that women use welfare, it is one of many and an important mediating factor that *helps* women extricate themselves from violent situations and in forming new households. And, although welfare critics view Black women on welfare as lazy cheats, they have neither met Black women like Sherita or Clemmie, nor imagined White women like Jocelyn, whose stories are retold below.

Sherita

When we first met in the summer of 1998, Sherita's nose was broken and one eye was stitched up. She had been attempting to leave a battering relationship since early 1998 and was the first Black woman at Angel House who legitimized my presence, and encouraged other Black women to talk to me. We laughed, took long walks, and shopped for food for nearly two years. Sherita shared the details of her life with me because she said she wanted people to understand the constraints of picking up the pieces after having left a battering relationship in the midst of welfare reform.

Sherita comes from a working-class family and was raised in New York City with her brothers Mike and Andre. Her father was a factory worker and her mother a homemaker. She had a "good childhood, was well fed, well clothed and really didn't want for anything."

When she was in her early teens Sherita's parents divorced, and her mother struggled to make ends meet as a single parent with little financial assistance from her ex-husband. Consequently Sherita's mother was on welfare for a total of 3 years, which Sherita said meant her mother endured three years of being looked down upon. Sherita finds this both ironic and amusing, because her mother presently works for the New York State Department of Social Services as a social worker.

Sherita completed high school and went to community college for one year. Although she had been looking forward to attending a four-year college along with her friends, her mother and grandmother did not want her far from home. Instead at age 19 she dated and married her best friend's brother, Lawrence. The first 17 years of the marriage were fine. Sherita worked as an administrative assistant for a small company, and even though Lawrence sometimes drank and gambled, they had money in the bank and a "very nicely furnished apartment." Sherita neither drank nor gambled; she was family-oriented and really wanted to maintain a positive home environment. She loved Lawrence, and the two of them were wrapped in a cocoon of family activities, having dinner with their families on weekends and making annual sojourns down South every summer for Lawrence's family reunions.

Things soured during the last two years of their marriage when Lawrence began staying out all night and spending money recklessly. They fought, and while he was not physically abusive, his irresponsibility grated on Sherita's nerves. She was not interested in "going down"—she had worked too hard. In 1997 Sherita ended the marriage: "I had finally had it with my drunken, gambling husband. I realized he was not going to grow up after 19 years of being together. I left him knowing it would be hard and knowing that I would be alone, which is something I never was. I started my new life in a new location."

The new location turned out to be the town of Valencia in River Valley County, near Laneville, where her brother Mike had moved several years before, after his marriage to Elena. She lived with Mike and his wife for a few months, planning to leave after saving some money. Almost immediately Sherita was hired in a long-term temporary position at Zytron Corporation, as an administrative assistant with no health benefits. She drove to the office each day and took her lunch to save money. Things went well for several months, and then for reasons Sherita still does not understand, Mike's wife, Elena, began to make her feel very unwelcome. Elena's coldness and

Mike's unwillingness to mediate drove a deep wedge between Mike and Elena, and Sherita. The wedge was so deep that after her car broke down and she was unable to get it repaired, Sherita refused to ask Mike or Elena for any assistance, sensing her request would be turned down.

Zytron was a 25-minute drive from the house, but Mike never offered to give her a lift, leaving Sherita to rely on public transportation. The limited bus system in River Valley County meant that by the time Sherita got off from work there were no buses going back to Valencia. However, a friendship forged with a woman on the job was Sherita's saving grace, allowing her get to and from work. Although Sherita asked little of her brother and his wife, tension continued to mount: "I would come home at night, hungry after a hard day's work. There would be Elena in the kitchen cleaning the oven or mopping the floor, at like 11:00 p.m. She was going out of her way to make me unwelcome. That's why I moved into a rooming house. That's where I met Joey."

After moving to the rooming house in early 1998, Sherita met Joey. They were drawn to each other, she said, out of loneliness. Joey was on medical leave from his job with the commuter railroad and did little to pass the time. At first they just kept each other company, and over time Joey convinced Sherita to live with him in his room so that they could save money together. But shortly after the move, Joey began to use cocaine. Things grew worse when Sherita was no longer able to depend upon the woman who drove her to and from work, and she resigned from her job. Being unemployed and living with a drug user frightened Sherita, particularly as Joey increasingly threatened her and became physically abusive.

In need of emergency assistance, Sherita went to the River Valley County Department of Social Services located in Laneville, about 20 minutes from Valencia. Her goal was to access their job placement services, secure food stamps, housing, and cash assistance so she could leave Joey. Sherita filed for food stamps, but was told it would take several weeks to approve her application. A job counselor sent her on several interviews, at jobs that did not pay a living wage, nor did they

draw upon her administrative assistant skills. However, Sherita's stick-to-itiveness paid off, and she landed another temporary job as a secretary. This job, like many in River Valley, was located in an area with an inadequate transportation system, but she was able to get to work on the weekdays. What she could not do was get to work on the weekend, and when she was called in to work one Sunday, Sherita was unable to get to the office and was fired. Because she had been fired, which her caseworker assumed was her fault, Sherita was told she would not be able to access assistance for three months.

I couldn't get to the job because of transportation reasons. When I went back to RVCDS to get emergency funds, they said I wasn't eligible because I refused to work. But that was not true. I couldn't work. The job called for me to work on Sunday and they needed me on Sunday, but I couldn't get there. RVCDS sanctioned me for 90 days, so I couldn't get any food stamps or nothing.

In addition to not receiving benefits, Sherita experienced an escalation in Joey's drug use and threatening behavior.

I noticed things he would do like go into the bathroom and stay there. Or if I gave him what little money I had, I wondered "why isn't there any food?" He couldn't hide it no more. He would give me money to hold and before the night was out, he would want the money back. He belittled me a lot, saying stuff like 'I'm the one giving you a place to stay.' Or, one minute we could be talking like you and I right now, sitting across from each other. He'd be getting high; he'd be calm, cool and collected. And then he would snap. I might go into the bathroom and he'd follow me, close the door and next thing I know I'm on the floor. He'd be holding on to my neck screamin' at me 'WHOSE TAKIN' CARE OF YOU?' I had to get out of the apartment.

The next month she moved out of their shared room and went to live with her neighbors; she also returned to social services and revised her application, this time checking off the box indicating she was a victim of domestic violence. The new welfare law had an amendment, the Family Violence Option, which should have facilitated Sherita's ability to access services. In spite of this protective measure, she was not flagged as being a victim of domestic violence by the caseworker and was denied assistance due to having been fired:

I go back to RVCDS and see this worker [a different one than the one she had seen before]. I forget her name. She started off by being nice to me. But when we got to her office she turned on me. She said to me 'So you can't keep a job?' [She was referring to the job that Sherita had lost]. I said to her, 'It must be that file, it's all wrong.' I said to her, 'If we're going to talk about that, I might as well leave.' I knew the sanction and the job thing was in that file. But I'm more than that file.

We never talked about why I was there or that I checked the box saying I was in a violent relationship. I mean I had checked the box on the form and she just didn't pick up on it. All we talked about was the job I was let go from. So I had to tell her I was homeless living in some people's apartment in order to get some emergency help.

Because she was homeless, the caseworker sent Sherita to the RVCDS housing counselor, who put her up in a motel and helped her locate a place to live. But given that she was sanctioned, Sherita was ineligible for cash benefits, food stamps, or housing cost assistance. With no job and only abbreviated assistance from RVCDS, locating an apartment was meaningless because there was no way to pay the rent. Of her own volition Sherita found a job that she could get to by bus, working as a cashier at a discount store making \$120 a week before taxes. The pay was not much, but it was all she could get. Her

plan was to wait until the sanction from Social Services was lifted—two more months. When the time came, she would reapply for housing assistance. Until then, Sherita continued to stay at her neighbors' apartment and hoped Joey would not bother her, which of course he did.

After the 3-month sanction period ended, in July of 1998, Sherita again went to RVCDS for emergency assistance. This time she was given a budget of \$350 for an apartment, and was provided with rental listings from which she found a place to live. Social Services had to approve the apartment before permitting her to move in, and it was just a matter of a week or so before she could do so. In that time, Joey beat Sherita, as she explained, "almost beyond recognition." If only they had provided assistance before, she may not have been beaten.

Sherita came to the shelter seeking safety and discovered she had to file for benefits again, since in New York State, shelters are paid a per diem rate for each resident through reimbursement from the Department of Social Services. This time, she went with a shelter advocate who informed the same caseworker Sherita had most recently seen that Sherita had previously checked the box for domestic violence on her application. The caseworker said Sherita had not done so. But when she looked down at the application, she realized she had overlooked the notation. The caseworker looked scared, according to Sherita, and apologized profusely. As Sherita later told me, "I think I could have sued them for what happened. There is a woman on site at RVCDS especially for that [the Domestic Violence Liaison] and I never got to see her." The caseworker's apology was too late. Sherita's nose was broken, and one eye was swollen shut. Joey had punched Sherita in the mouth, dislodged several of her teeth and split her lip. On her shelter intake form was the following notation: "*She has injuries from the beating that will need further attention.*" The attention required was, in fact, surgery.

With her application approved Sherita received Medicaid, a housing stipend, food stamps, and cash benefits through Safety Net funding, the program for single adults without children. However, the apartment that had been found was now

gone, and Sherita searched and found another for \$500 into which she moved in November of 1998, 3 months after arriving at the shelter. Sherita initiated her relationship with Social Services for two overlapping reasons: lack of resources and the need to get away from Joey. With a job that paid so little, there was no way for her to secure an apartment. Sherita had been at risk of bodily harm, and, in her estimation, only welfare could help save her life.

Clemmie

Clemmie is a 38-year-old African-American woman who prior to coming to Angel House lived in an apartment in New York City with her four children; two daughters, Shawnice, 19, and Lena, 18; and two sons, James and Henry, who are 15 and 9, respectively.

A few days after we met at the shelter, right around Thanksgiving I was asked to pick Clemmie up at a train station. She had to come into New York City to access her cash and food stamps electronically from the New York City Department of Human Resources. After three attempts, we found a place that would dispense her benefits, and I then offered to drive Clemmie and Shawnice back up to the shelter. Although it was cold, it was a beautiful fall day, a good day for a relaxing drive with a woman on the run. Clemmie seemed relieved she would not have to go back to Laneville on the train. It was too open, and she feared seeing someone she knew. Shawnice settled in the back seat, pulled her coat over her head and fell asleep. This ride began a one-and-a-half-year relationship during which Clemmie shared her life story with me.

Clemmie grew up in a family of five children. She and her siblings Doreatha, Jake, Sonia, and Angie, all lived with their mother. When Clemmie was 16, her mother became ill and sent the kids to live with Clemmie's eldest sister, Doreatha, who became a "mother" to Clemmie and her siblings. Doreatha, who worked in the finance industry, was financially

stable and moved her brothers and sisters into her home on Long Island, where they all lived comfortably. Because Clemmie was such a responsible young woman, she was elevated to the role of coparent. She was the only person with house keys—none of the others were given a set of keys; they all had to organize their arrival at home according to Clemmie's schedule. Yet no one ever had to worry; when Clemmie said she would be home, she'd be there. Very little that would qualify as exciting happened in the three years Clemmie lived with Doreatha. But at age 19, Clemmie became pregnant and not wanting to burden Doreatha, moved to a Section 8 apartment, where she lived for 19 years until she was forced to leave due to violence.

Clemmie's first three children all have the same father, Allan, with whom she had a long-term relationship. Eventually they grew apart, and Clemmie met someone else, Tony, who is the father of her youngest son, Henry. Although no longer with either man, Clemmie negotiated regular visits between her children and their fathers. Allan saw Shawnice, Lena, and James regularly. Tony, Henry's father, was not as reliable but did visit occasionally. Without a full-time partner, Clemmie did an excellent job raising her children, taking them on day trips and exposing them to cultural events. Clemmie instilled the importance of education in her children, spending considerable time working with them on their homework and fostering their interests. The children were very bright, including Shawnice, who had had dropped out of high school only because she was bored. Lena, an exceptionally bright young woman, had been awarded a full scholarship to an elite high school and then went on to receive a full scholarship to a private university. James was also an "A" student, and Henry was a gifted child, although challenged by asthma. It was Henry's asthma that precipitated Clemmie applying for social services. She had worked in construction and in retail sales, but Henry's day-care provider kept calling her away from work because of asthma attacks. Knowing that she would be fired as a result of missing too many work days, she left her job and applied for social services. This was fine with her because she could care

for the kids herself and keep them “on the right track.” They were all independent, well-adjusted, and were close to Clemmie’s siblings, whom they visited every weekend. By most accounts, one might say her children’s successes challenge stereotypical ideas about poor women and bad Black mothers.

Clemmie was the center of her children’s life and they, hers. But as the children grew older, they did not need her as much as they once did, and Clemmie felt something was missing in her life. This was her explanation as to why she became involved with an abusive man. She wanted to be with someone who needed her, a man whose name she never mentioned the entire time we knew each other. She only referred to him as her “batterer” or, “he.” As we drove back to Laneville, Clemmie told me how she came to the shelter. In a soft voice she said:

I’ve known him for quite some time, almost 12 years. We had been friends and we saw each other around the way. We started hanging out together about a year ago. In the beginning he was very nice. He would invite me over and we would go to the movies. He would get tickets for my boys to go to basketball games. But within the last three months, he’s been really obsessive, yelling at me in the street, pushing me.

Clemmie was terribly afraid that “he” would harm her or her children. He was abusive in front of her children’s friends. One evening he held a gun to Clemmie’s head taunting Shawnice’s friends, asking if they wanted to see him blow her head off. But more than her own safety, she feared the threats he made to her family and friends:

I told my family about him, and everybody was afraid of what he was going to do. He scared my children. So it got to the point that when he would come over and ring my bell, I’d put on my clothes, meet him downstairs and tell him I was just on the way to his house and we would leave. That way he wouldn’t do

anything in front of the kids. He started checking up on me, calling my “mother’s” house to make sure I was there. He couldn’t call me at home ‘cause he never knew I had a phone. Whenever he would come over, I would hide the phone, so he never knew. He’s got friends who work for Social Services. He always knew when I got my food stamps or my check and would come over asking for money. His friend would tell him. That’s why I had to use my benefit card someplace else, so he wouldn’t be able to trace me. That’s why I needed you to pick me up so he wouldn’t know where I was living by where I used my card.

The more Clemmie tried to get out of the relationship, the more violent he became. She visited friends for long periods, so “he” could not find her. One of her sisters had to move, so that “he” wouldn’t continue to harass her about where Clemmie was. Other family members, including her “mother,” told her not to call “until this whole thing got straight,” and her younger sister Angie, who lived in the same neighborhood as “he” did, put up a pretense of hating Clemmie, aligning herself with him so he wouldn’t hurt Angie or her children.

Clemmie and the children came to Angel House in the fall of 1998 because “he” had asked her to sell some drugs, and she refused. Her refusal sparked a violent tirade. To keep distance between the two of them, she decided not to answer any knocks on the door.

A couple of nights after he asked me to sell, me and all the kids were at home and he come banging on the door. I told the kids to be quiet so he wouldn’t know we were there. He was screaming at the door for me to let him in and he was trying to break it down. Finally the building security called the police and they came to take him away. When they did, he was yelling ‘Bitch I’m gonna kill you and your kids.’ I called Victims Services, a number my sister gave me. They told me there was room up here, [at Angel

House] so we got on the train with no money. I had to ask the conductor to let us on for free and we came up here in the middle of the night.

Clemmie's story contradicts the public identity of welfare mothers. While many are portrayed as lazy, Clemmie worked throughout her children's formative years and only first accessed welfare as a way to care for her sick son. But also her ability to stay home and raise her children the way she saw fit contributed to their achievements, in her eyes. Her continued need for welfare was specifically in relation to the abuse, and she now needed support in order to establish a safe home.

Jocelyn

Jocelyn is a middle-class White woman, who came to the shelter after an "accident" involving Gus, her husband of one year. We sat outside on a beautiful fall day, as Jocelyn told me what happened to her and how she ended up at the shelter.

I was born in a small town in Virginia. The house I grew up in had a lot of land surrounding it which is the reason I love nature. As a child I spent quite a bit of time catching caterpillars and watching their transformations; I was mesmerized. I loved nature and the outdoors so much. I also loved to ride horses. There was such a sense of freedom riding horses that I begged my parents to let me take lessons at the stables near our house.

It was at the stables that she met her first husband and the father of her two children, Joshua, age 20, and Jenny, age 13. The other thing Jocelyn loved to do was paint. "I love to draw nature scenes, leaves, trees and flowers. She [her daughter] doesn't paint as much I did. I was really good at it, but I probably won't be able to do it anymore, with all this nerve damage." Jocelyn looked sad as she reflected on how the

injuries she had sustained would limit her life. If only she had not left Virginia, had not moved to River Valley, New York, she might not have met Gus.

In early July, Jocelyn was in a “motorcycle accident,” at least that is what she told me when I did her intake. The “accident” involved Gus, Jocelyn’s husband, who walked away with a scratch on his arm, while she ended up in the hospital with her jaw wired shut, head trauma, dilated eyes, a broken arm and jaw, nerve damage, and seizures.

One reason no one at the shelter really believed there had been a motorcycle accident was that hospital personnel, in collaboration with another battered women’s program telephoned the Angel House hotline on Jocelyn’s behalf to see if there was any room available for her. When we said yes, Jocelyn’s hospital discharge was conducted in secrecy; she had to be sneaked out of the hospital because Gus had been stalking Jocelyn during her recovery. Many of us at the shelter believed that he stalked her as a form of intimidation to prevent Jocelyn from telling anyone the truth; that Gus had beaten her and that was the reason she ended up in the hospital. Although Jocelyn did not give me access to her medical report, I believe that there is a difference between the type of injury associated with a beating than those associated with road rash.

Gus was a police officer whom Jocelyn had known for a year before they married. He was charming and handsome, she said. Gus wanted Jocelyn to be a homemaker, but Jocelyn had other plans. Although Jocelyn had graduated from high school, she decided to go back to school and earn a college degree. She asked Gus to pay for her classes, which she did not think would be a problem. After all, he made about \$50,000–\$60,000 (with overtime) a year and owned the house they lived in, which was almost paid off. Gus refused.

Jocelyn wanted to attend school so badly that she took a job cleaning homes to earn the money. Around this same period, Gus began to be very intimidating, illustrating the response that abusers often have when women exert their autonomy. Through wired teeth, Jocelyn told me how Gus increasingly frightened her, yelling if she looked at him, for

example. Or, at other times, she said “If he didn’t like what I cooked, he would squeeze my face so hard my jaws would ache.” Sometimes Jocelyn, Jenny, and Gus were all watching television, and Gus would just ball up his fist, and shake it in Jocelyn’s face. Gus often grabbed Jocelyn so hard that the imprint of his hands would cause bruising on her arm.

Gus’s abuse was not limited to Jocelyn. On several occasions he pinned Jenny up against the wall by holding her arms above her head. He also directed random outbursts toward Jenny that frightened her so much she no longer brought her friends over to the house. After each incident, Gus would say he did not remember doing anything to either Jocelyn or Jenny. Jocelyn decided it was time for them to leave the house before things got any worse. Shortly after that decision was made, the “motorcycle accident” occurred.

Completing Jocelyn’s intake included making a copy of her identification. She asked me to look in her wallet for her license, which I did. As I pulled it out, she said, “I used to look good. That photo was taken a year ago.” It was startling how different Jocelyn looked sitting in front of me, than how she appeared in the photograph. The license photograph showed a smiling, cheerful woman. But sitting before me, at that moment she appeared much older than her 37 years with circles under her eyes and a drawn in face, a shadow of a person; Jocelyn had been slowly beaten down.

Jocelyn had no source of income, now that she was no longer living with Gus and was unable to work. She was not eligible for unemployment because she had been working off the books cleaning houses. Jocelyn needed welfare because she had no source of income, although on paper as Gus’s wife, she might be considered middle-class. She told me that when she applied to RVCDS, she was treated with disdain. “They treated me like a leper because I am not considered poor. I am. I don’t have anything right now. I hate them for treating me so badly.” Jocelyn felt that she challenged the perception of who was supposed to be getting social services, because she was a middle-class White woman. Caseworkers seemed silently offended that she betrayed the privilege of whiteness

by having to apply for assistance. Despite the fact that her caseworker seemed disillusioned that a woman like Jocelyn would have to apply for assistance, she processed the application and directed her to see Yvonne, the Domestic Violence Liaison. Yvonne exempted Jocelyn from having to work for two months, so she could heal. This was quite a different outcome from Sherita's treatment, who also needed to heal, but was never directed to the Domestic Violence Liaison. Also, an appointment was made for Jocelyn to meet with the RVCDS housing specialist, and an apartment was found just outside of Laneville in a predominantly White neighborhood within 30 days of her being admitted to the shelter. Whereas Jocelyn was at the shelter for about 1 month before she secured housing, most of the Black women stayed a full 90 days, the maximum amount of time allotted for shelter stay.



Sherita, Clemmie, and Jocelyn are three women who were in no way abusing the welfare system. Collectively their experiences show that they were neither lazy nor unmotivated. In fact their stories point to two important ways that welfare helped women. On the one hand, it served as unemployment compensation for women at the low end of the labor market, as in Sherita and Jocelyn's case. On the other hand, it facilitated being able to stay home with children, which often leads to better social outcomes, as was the case with Clemmie. Their needs and reasons for using welfare were very similar to the women whose biographies are provided below. The differences between them, however, and their entanglements with the welfare bureaucracy and the struggle to find and create homes are complicated by race.

Biographical Sketches

Sherita, Clemmie, and Jocelyn are three of the women I met at Angel House shelter for battered women. Biographical

sketches of all 22 women formally interviewed are presented below, but these capsule summaries represent very condensed versions of much longer life histories. Contained in these abbreviated translations, we see some of the shocking details that defined these women's engagement with the social welfare system. While these women do not represent all battered women, the distinctiveness of their experiences can provide insight into battered women's needs, as they tried to establish different lives from the ones they had.

Throughout this book are the names of other women, including community residents and professionals like community-based and institutional personnel, but here I only provide biographical sketches of the battered women living at the shelter from whom I collected substantial data, since this book is primarily about their experiences. Those who are discussed at length in subsequent chapters are noted here with an asterisk. Some of the women I spoke with are not discussed in detail or even referred to, and there are other women I met whose biographies are not included, but to whom I refer in the book. However, I want to emphasize the importance of each woman's experience, and that all of the women and people I interviewed contributed to my understanding of the issues raised.

Angela is originally from Spain. She is 35 and was married to a nuclear physicist. The household income was over \$75,000 per year. She has one son Elmo, 13, and one daughter Eugenia, age 16, from two other relationships. She has never received public assistance and at the time I interviewed her, she still was not getting assistance. Angela and her husband met during his vacation in her native Spain. He pursued her and ultimately convinced her to move to the United States with her children and marry him. He isolated Angela and would not allow her to work. She left him after he exposed himself to her daughter.

*Clemmie** is a 38-year-old African-American woman with four children. Her daughters Shawnice and Lena are 19 and 18, respectively. Her two sons, James and Henry are 15 and 9, respectively. Clemmie became involved with a man who threat-

ened her constantly and alienated her from her family, forcing her to flee to River Valley County.

Drita is a 60-year-old woman from Eastern Europe. She has five adult children and many grandchildren. She left her husband because he had beaten her for almost 40 years. She does not speak English very well, and although she is a legal permanent resident, has had tremendous difficulty in securing any type of benefits.

*Elizabeth**, who is 39, was born in Jamaica. She has dual citizenship in the United States and Great Britain. She has two children by her husband, whom she met in college. She has been separated from him for almost four years because he was abusive. She went on public assistance after the birth of her youngest child who, at birth, was hospitalized for almost a month. This same child seems to have learning disabilities as well as severe asthma.

*Gloria** is a 40-year-old African-American woman who has several children. She has had an alcohol abuse problem for much of her life and had been at the battered women's shelter several times before I met her there. She was beaten and thrown out of an apartment she shared with a boyfriend.

*Iliana** is 32 years old. Iliana is an Afro-Latina, born in the Dominican Republic. She came to the United States at the age of 18. Iliana has three children and had just given birth to the third child when we met. The father of the two oldest children was emotionally and verbally abusive to her, so she left him. The father of her third child also "showed signs of being abusive," so she ended their relationship.

Jennifer is a single African-American, 23-year-old woman who graduated from high school and now works in children's services. Jennifer grew up with both her parents and a sister. Although her father was strict and her parents separated when she was 11, Jennifer says she has a good relationship with both of them. Jennifer has been living on her own since she was 18. She had been with her boyfriend for just about a year when she came to the shelter. Jennifer was very independent and did not need him for money, which she believes, is the reason that he beat her.

*Joanne** is a 28-year-old African-American mother. She has one child, a boy named JD, 5 years old, and is pregnant with her second child. Joanne grew up in a middle-class home. Her father was a minister, and her mother, a homemaker. She was sexually and physically abused by her father and was placed in a group home at age 15. At 18 Joanne attended community college, where she met the father of her children. When they first met, he was very good to her and only later in the relationship did he become abusive and jealous.

*Jocelyn** is a 36-year-old White woman who grew up in Virginia. She has two children, one 20, and the other 13. Her husband, Gus, who is not the father of her children, constantly made threatening remarks to her and the youngest daughter who lived with them. Jocelyn feared for her life, as her husband became increasingly abusive.

Joelle is a 20-year-old, African-American woman, originally from Madison, Wisconsin. As a child, Joelle was adopted and experienced sexual assault five days per week from the age of 5 to 8. "It was always in the house, a cousin, an adopted sibling—someone." Joelle graduated from high school, and went on to college, but left due to financial constraints. Joelle came to Laneville and met a guy who beat her almost all the time.

*Josie** is a young, White woman in her 20s with one daughter, Shaneva. Shaneva's father, Luke, had promised to marry Josie, but the wedding never took place. Josie left Luke because he was trying to control her every move and had begun to hit her.

Khadija is a 19-year-old, Muslim woman born to parents who immigrated from India. Her parents are very strict and try to keep a tight rein on Khadija, who attends college. They sometimes follow her to and from school to try and prevent her from seeing the young African-American man she is dating. Her parents despise him and sometimes severely punish her when Khadija does not act according to their wishes. Khadija came to the shelter because of the violence her parents perpetrate against her.

*Leslie** is a 19-year-old, pregnant, African-American woman. She has an estranged relationship with her mother who used to beat her, but came to the shelter because her

boyfriend became abusive shortly after she found out she was pregnant.

Linda is a 19-year-old Black woman from the Caribbean, with one son. She is estranged from her family because they abused her. Linda was never able to access social services because of her immigrant status. Her parents and her boyfriend battered her. While at the shelter, she was depressed and had gynecological health problems that made it very difficult to do any kind of planning for her departure from the shelter.

Martha is a 19-year-old, African-American woman who lived most of her life in foster care during which time she was sexually abused. She arrived in Laneville from Chicago with a young man, Andre, she had met while there. Andre turned out to be a drug dealer and used her to sell drugs from the motel they lived in. One night they were stopped by police officers, after which Andre beat her. She left him just after the beating.

Michelle is a 22-year-old mother of one. She is Black/Hispanic and grew up in Brooklyn in a working-class family. Although her father used drugs, her mother kept the family financially solvent. Growing up, Michelle recalls being on social services only for a short period, when her father was unemployed for about a year. The father of Michelle's child, Al, was a drug dealer and user. On at least one occasion she cooperated with the police to have Al arrested.

*Sherita** is a single, African-American, 38-year-old woman. She grew up living with her mother, stepfather, and two brothers. Sherita was married at age 19 and left her husband after 19 years due to his gambling and drinking problem. Her batterer is someone she met after she moved to Laneville. She began using social services shortly after he started beating her.

*Solange** is a 42-year-old African-American mother of 2 children. She takes pride in the fact that she was able to complete college and has worked in the social services field for most of her adult life. Solange's husband is economically dependent upon her because he is functionally illiterate and cannot hold a job. She believes he beats her because of his own sense of inadequacy and has caused her to seek shelter at least five times.

Susan is a 36-year-old White woman with 6 children. She has worked primarily in the service industry at fast-food restaurants. Susan is illiterate, probably due to a learning disability that was never diagnosed. Her lack of literacy skills has limited her employment options to those that do not require her to read. Susan has been in and out of shelters since 1992 and recently crossed state lines to get away from her abuser. Susan has been very engaged with social service systems for most of her adult life ranging from child welfare agencies, the Division of Youth and Family Services, criminal court, family courts, and housing authorities.

*Trudi** is in her 30s. She came to the United States from Ghana. She has one birth daughter and an “adopted” daughter, whom she and her husband Sam brought with them when they left Ghana. The husband has transformed the nature of his relationship with the “adopted” daughter so that she now is treated as a co-wife. Trudi is on social services while she is attending school to finish her Bachelor’s degree in computer programming. Her husband has a full scholarship to a private college as well.

Wenny is a 42-year-old Chinese immigrant. She and her husband, who are legal permanent residents, have done well for themselves since immigrating, raising two children and owning a business. He recently began to threaten her and brandished a gun several times in front of the children. She went to court to secure an order of protection. While there, she saw some business clients (including the judge) and was devastated.

Yvonne is from South America. She is 37 and has two children, both of whom were born in the United States. At the time of our interview, her immigrant status was unclear. Yvonne’s husband grossly mistreated the older child, who was not his, by locking him in closets and suspending him upside down when he misbehaved.



Of the 22 women I spent time with over nearly 2 years, 13 were Black, 4 White, 3 Latina, 1 Asian, and 1 was Indian. The

racial/ethnic breakdown of the overall shelter population was different than the study participants because I wanted to learn more about Black women's experiences. So, whereas 41% of the shelter residents were White, 33% were Black; 18% Latina, 2% Asian, and 7% identified as other, the breakdown of study participants is 18% White; 59% Black; 14% Latina, 5% Asian, and 5% identified as Other. Also, the average shelter resident had less than 12 years of education, but the average study participant had a high school diploma, some college, or vocational training.

Besides the inverted Black/White demographic, all other characteristics of the study participants and the general shelter population were comparable. The average study participant was between 30 and 39 years old and Black. Most of the women were single with children, and at the time of shelter entry most had household incomes of less than \$9,999. Similarly, among the larger shelter population the average shelter resident was also between the ages of 30 and 39, and had a household income of less than \$9,999.²



This ethnography amplifies Black women's experiences with comparisons made to White women. Black women are the focus of this book because much of what we understand about Black women who are battered is in terms of their use of public organizations (i.e. law enforcement and social services), and how racism factors into their hesitancy about reporting their victimization or reaching out to helping institutions (Powdermaker 1939; Websdale 2001; Garfield 2004). As you read on, you will see that after the women leave abusive relationships and are living in a shelter, they attempt to reestablish their lives. Their use of government assistance is crucial given that they live in a community that has undergone economic changes, especially shifts in labor as a result of deindustrialization. What becomes clear is that for these women, welfare reform's singular referent to "self-sufficiency," so narrowly defined in terms of attachment to work, brushes over the complexities of how communities are marked by the disappearance

of jobs and the restructuring of labor markets, which exacerbate hierarchies, particularly racial ones. In many ways women are revictimized by welfare reform programs and policy within the context of economic restructuring, after having had the courage to leave their abusers.