

For battered women who participate in social and police services designed to help them, a dominant cultural script has emerged that directs them to get away and stay away from their abusers. Using in-depth interview and participant-observation data, the author examines the strategies battered women employ to resist that script. Staying with an abuser, ignoring and lifting restraining orders, and refusing to call and cooperate with police were active, reasoned choices battered women made in response to an array of conditions including fear of and harassment by abuser, complex everyday-life contingencies, and emotional attachment to abuser. The battered women tried to use the dominant cultural script to get away and stay away, but found that the script was overly narrow and there was a lack of coordinated institutional support for their decisions. This study extends sociological perspectives on battered women by viewing them as a culture of resistance and focusing on strategies they employ to assert control and make choices relevant to their needs and interests.

AND I WENT BACK

Battered Women's Negotiation of Choice

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THE SOCIAL REPRODUCTION of inequality has long been of concern to social scientists. Traditional and contemporary writers offer explanations for how some groups become and remain subordinate while others continue to be powerful (Giddens 1984; MacLeod 1987; Willis 1977). Gender has become an important variable in such discussions, many of which assert that women are victims of social structural phenomena including patriarchy (Firestone 1974), capitalism (Hartmann 1981), and racism (Collins 1991; hooks 1984). Through an interpretive perspective, other authors reveal complexities in women's relationships to structures of domination and observe ways in

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which women are simultaneously subject to these structures and active agents who resist them. Research on reading romance novels (Radway 1983), viewing television (Press 1991), and attending Tupperware parties (Rapping 1980) has identified them as sources of resistance to, as well as support for, traditional femininity. These studies point to a cultural pattern in which women's resistance to structures of domination both empowers and further subordinates women. Adding to this growing literature on cultures of resistance, this article focuses on strategies employed by battered women who resist a dominant cultural script, assert short-term control, and return to an abusive partner.

Historically battered women have been pressured by clergy, family, therapists, and courts to stay with abusive partners (Gordon 1988; Johnson 1992; Schechter 1982). Emphasizing that violence is not the fault of battered women and that leaving abusive partners is ultimately the best course of action for most women (Dobash and Dobash 1992; Loseke 1992; Loseke and Cahill 1984), the Battered Women's Movement and other advocates have worked hard to educate the public, social-service providers, police, and courts about battered women. For battered women who participate in social and police services designed to help them, a dominant cultural script has emerged. Learned through interactions with providers of services, mass media, police, and friends and altered by the context, past experiences, and the immediate and future needs of individual women, this "new" script includes edicts like leave abuser, maintain restraining orders, and call and cooperate with the police.

The battered women in this research project tried to use the script and follow its edicts but found that the script was overly narrow and inadequate because of little coordinated institutional support. The social-service, law enforcement, and legal systems did not provide the assistance necessary for women to negotiate a successful resolution to their problems. The complexity and difficulties of individual battered women's lives were not acknowledged. As a result, battered women resisted the script by staying with their abuser, ignoring and lifting

restraining orders, and refusing to call or cooperate with police. This argument about battered women's resistance is an ironic, yet powerful, way to emphasize that these women were making active, reasoned choices by going against the cultural dictate to get away and stay away from their abusers. More important, these women were exercising as much agency as they could while operating within a system that did not provide enough safety and resources.

In this article I outline the strategies used and the conditions present when battered women resisted the dominant cultural script. Staying with or returning to an abusive partner, ignoring or lifting restraining orders, and refusing to call or cooperate with police comprised battered women's strategies of resistance. Contemporaneous with their resistance were conditions including harassment by and fear of partner, complex everyday-life contingencies, and emotional connections. In what follows I describe the methodology I employed in this project and present an analysis of battered women's resistance as they talk about their negotiation of choice through complex and difficult interactions with abusers and providers of services.

METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

In addition to interpretive studies of resistance, the cultural analysis of battered women's stories contained herein follows a rich history of symbolic interactionist perspectives that is grounded in an understanding of social life as continually negotiated, emergent, and reflexive. I integrate within these interpretive and symbolic interactionist perspectives a feminist perspective that requires that any cultural analysis of the meaning of battered women's experiences has to be mindful of the patriarchal social and historical context in which it occurs. Guided by these perspectives, my research design gives battered women a voice that has, historically, been denied to them. To do that, I began this project by using a process of ethnographic discovery to analyze battered women's experiences through their own accounts and stories, understanding that "the social scientist

can no longer maintain a comfortable distance from—or even reasonably define—‘subjects’ ” (Jules-Rosette 1978, 565).

Because I wanted to analyze battered women’s understandings of their experiences, I grounded this project in three sets of qualitative data. First, I was an advocate at a battered women’s shelter from August 1991 through August 1992. Second, I supplemented my participant observation with semistructured, in-depth interviews with sixteen battered women. All were White, ranged in age from twenty-two to forty-five years, and came from a variety of socioeconomic backgrounds and familial statuses. All but two had been residents at a battered women’s shelter for at least two days. I also collected data through informal conversational interviews with other battered women and battered women’s advocates whom I encountered throughout the duration of this project. The third part of the data was archival and consisted of twenty-five formal intake forms written by shelter advocates as well as twenty-three documents written by members of a court-mandated group for women convicted of domestic violence. These three data sets gave me a more complete picture of the battered women’s experiences than any single data set would have allowed (c.f. Berg 1995; Cicourel 1964; Denzin 1989).

RESISTANCE STRATEGY ONE: STAY WITH ABUSER

The overall goal of the cultural script for battered women is to leave and to stay away from their abusers. Prior studies indicate psychological (Walker 1984), social (Dobash and Dobash 1979; Martin 1981), interpersonal (Ferraro and Johnson 1983; Straus, Gelles, and Steinmetz 1980), and social-service (Gordon 1988; Hoff 1990) factors involved in battered women’s return to abusive partners. My study extends what we already know through an ethnographic analysis of battered women’s talk focusing on a myriad of immediate conditions present when battered women chose to stay with or return to abusive partners. Under these conditions battered women resisted the dominant cultural script by making active, reasoned choices to

take control of a situation characterized by narrowing choices and lack of institutional support.

Fear of and Harassment by Partner

When battered women talked about their choice to stay with or go back to abusive partners, verbal and emotional harassment by partners contributed to that choice. Battered women's talk had a resigned and bitter tone to it when they discussed staying with or going back to their partners. Many complied. Tammy, a twenty-eight-year-old, pregnant, high school graduate and mother of one, lived in a battered women's shelter at the time of the interview. Vicious physical brutalization characterized her relationship with her husband. In the quote to follow, she describes a series of events that prompted her to return to her abusive partner:

He [her husband] would get my phone number and he would call me and call me and I'd have to pay \$50 to get the number changed, and I'd tell the authorities, "Well, he called me and he called me," . . . They'd say, "Well, do you have proof or do you have it documented?" Well, how do you do that if you don't have a device on your phone that is gonna cost you. That's how he always got me to go back to him because he would just harass me until I would just be like "Fine, go meet him." And then I would blow it.

Tammy described how she would not talk to her abuser and did not want him to call, but he would find ways to get to her. This is a clear example of system failure. She did not get the support she needed to take control of the situation and stop the harassment.

Similarly, Laura reported returning to her husband after a period of separation and verbal harassment on his part. Laura, a thirty-six-year-old homemaker, mother of three, with a bachelor's degree, explained why she returned to her husband who was in the military and stationed in the south:

A week went by, and he called me up beggin' and pleadin' for me to come back to him. And I refused. I said, "No. I need time to think about it. I want three days." "No, no. I need you to come

back now. I can't stand bein' down here alone. I'll go nuts." And I said, "Well, if I come back to you, will you promise me you'll never do this again?" "Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah." So I went down there.

Laura, like Tammy, initially refused to see or be with her abuser but gave in to his pressure over time. She made her choice because she negotiated and extracted a promise from him.

Nancy, a thirty-one-year-old mother of one with some college education, mentioned a similar experience. She generalized that abusers manipulate women into feeling safe and believing they are wonderful guys, then they "suck you in."

It's all just manipulation. That's what they [abusers] do—they suck you back in, and they make you think that it's safe. They lull you into this safe place that you want to be in so badly that you kind of help to create the safe image, but it isn't safe at all. . . . I think they are the most wonderful guys in the whole world. To us they are. But those are the kind of guys who abuse their wives. It isn't just, you know, the big biker guy walking down the road and he's got a bad mouth and a bad attitude. Those aren't the guys that do it.

Nancy returned to a brutal husband several times after being "lulled into a safe place." Illustrating the complexity of a battering situation, Nancy described men who batter as outwardly wonderful guys who privately manipulate a safe image so that their partners will return to them.

Complex Everyday Life: Children and Finances

Battered women's stories also contained descriptions of complex everyday-life contingencies when they stayed with abusive partners. Children and financial issues surfaced repeatedly in battered women's talk about continuing to live with their abusers. From the tone and content of their talk, I heard a sense of abandonment of what they really wanted to do (which was to get away from their abuser) in order to do what was feasible given the immediate situation. Ellen, a forty-five-year-old

mother of two with some college education, explained that she went back to her abusive husband because of her son:

My husband came and threw all the stock certificates and the house payment book and all this stuff in the middle of my apartment floor and he told me he was leaving town and I could have it all and nobody is ever going to see him again. He'd even signed the stock certificates. So he left and I didn't react to him. About 4:00 he called and our son was just wailing in the background and he said just listen to what you've done to your son. And I said "Harold I didn't do it" and I hung up on him. A few minutes later here he came with John [their son]. And John stood there and begged me to come home. So I did.

Even after her husband threatened to leave town and never be seen again and later called her with her son "wailing" in the background, Ellen refused to go back. Nevertheless, when her son showed up at her door and "begged" her to come home, she did. Ellen's choice to return reflected her son as her priority.

Likewise, Sara revealed that her children were the reason she returned to her abuser. Sara, a twenty-nine-year-old mother of three with a high school education, described a little of the complexity of her everyday life while with her abusive husband:

I left one night and ran down to the police department, which is only about four blocks away, and they said they would get my kids back the next day if I would find a place to stay that night. So I did. The next day the police department came up to the house and Eddie [her husband] wouldn't let them have the kids. And the police guaranteed me that they would get my kids back. All they did was go up to the house say "Eddie, you know Sara is at the police department and she would like to have her kids," and he'd say "no." They turned around and walked away. So, you know, Monday morning came and I went back to the house.

Although the circumstances differed, Sara, like Ellen, returned to her abuser because he had the children and she wanted to be with them. Katie, a thirty-six-year-old mother of three with a high school education, commented that she went back home because of "finances, I had no place to go and no help. . . . I need to take care of my family." Like Sara and Ellen, Katie

stayed with her abusive husband due to complex everyday-life contingencies. Responsibility and care of children as well as financial needs were part of a complex and multifaceted everyday life for which battered women received little institutional support. These women chose to go back because they lacked viable alternatives.

Emotional Connection with Partner

Another contributing condition in battered women's stories about resisting the cultural script to leave their abusive partners was an emotional connection with them. This condition often made leaving problematic, and it is in this part of their stories that we hear a lot of pain. Battered women implemented the resistance strategy of staying with their partners when they still felt emotional connections to them. Quincie, an approximately forty-year-old mother of two with a college degree, talked about her love for Mack:

I just wanted us to be together. I just wanted it to be like it used to be. Getting away from him is a lot like starting to diet. You know, it's easy to decide that you're gonna diet. It is difficult to diet, and it's so . . . almost impossible to keep the weight off. And it is the same way to stay completely away from him, because I believe that I will never love anyone like I did him. . . . Never! There was just no way out. I just *had* to have him. I just had to have him, no matter what the cost was.

Quincie described her love for Mack like an addiction from which she could not get away. In the same way, Norma, a twenty-two-year-old woman who held a university presidential scholarship throughout her college career, explained that she never thought about leaving her abusive partner. She said, "I was devoted to this man." Because of her love for him, it took Norma a long time before she even contemplated leaving her abuser. Norma talked about her emotional commitment to her partner in a way similar to Quincie.

In the quote that follows, Laura comments on her choice to let her abusive partner out of jail and back into her life:

One time in particular I left him in there [in jail] for sixty days before I said that I wasn't afraid of him anymore. He would call me every day from jail and beg and say, "Oh, I'll be good to you," you know. But that was safe then. I said, "No, you can stay there." But then after awhile it would wear on me and my love for him, and I would think, "Oh, yeah." And I'd let him out.

Laura's talk revealed a couple of conditions that entered into her decision to release her husband. His constant "begging" and her love for him contributed to her decision to stay with him. These three women, Quincie, Norma, and Laura, felt emotionally tied to their partners and, as a result, chose to stay in abusive relationships.

Battered women resisted the overall goal of the cultural script to leave and stay away from their abusers under a variety of complex conditions and situations. Love for a partner, complex everyday lives, and verbal and emotional harassment all played a role in battered women's choices to stay with or go back to abusive partners. They were not dupes, they made choices. The resistance, at least initially, made the harassment stop, their everyday life easier, and brought the women together with their loved ones. Battered women tried to adapt a system meant to help them. However, the system offered little support.

RESISTANCE STRATEGY TWO: IGNORING AND LIFTING PARTNER'S RESTRAINING ORDERS

In addition to staying with an abusive partner, battered women resisted the dominant cultural script by ignoring and/or lifting restraining orders put on their abusive partners. Part of the cultural script for battered women is that they should be diligent about staying away from their partners, particularly partners under a restraining order. Most studies on battered women and restraining orders focus on the effectiveness of these policies to keep women safe (Adhikari, Reinhard, and Johnson 1993; Finn 1991). My work contributes to this literature through an in-depth analysis of battered women's accounts of the immediate conditions under which they ignored or lifted the

restraining orders on their partners. These conditions further illustrate the narrowing choices and negligible systemic support for battered women. Ignoring and lifting restraining orders on abusive partners were resistance strategies used to expand choices.

Fear of and Harassment by Partner

As in resistance strategy number one, verbal and emotional harassment contributed to battered women's choice to resist the dominant cultural script and ignore or lift their partners' restraining orders. When Tammy talked about ignoring a restraining order on her partner, she contended that he verbally and emotionally harassed her until she gave in. Ignoring the restraining order was particularly problematic for Tammy because social-service authorities had taken away her son and returned him only under the condition that she stay away from her husband.

At first I had no contact. I had my apartment, I had my car and everybody was real proud of me, I was proud of myself. Then, I got a letter from Hank [her husband]. He loves me, he thinks about me all the time. He's sorry for everything that happened. I was pissed. I call him and it turned into not what I expected. He wanted me to meet him and I said "No, no, no." Eventually I met him. In the meantime I had Brad [her son], and I'm really scared because I know that this is really *stupid*. If anybody finds out I'm gonna lose my kid.

Calling, asking for forgiveness, and persistence on the part of Tammy's husband set the stage for Tammy to feel guilty. Tammy's husband "bugged" her until she agreed to see him with a restraining order in effect, even though there was a threat of losing her son. She knew what she was doing was "stupid" but she opted to see him.

In another case, Sara's abusive husband acted similarly to Tammy's husband. After a month-long stay in a shelter, a restraining order was placed on her husband. Subsequently, he

called and harassed her, showed up at her house wanting to spend the night, and abused her at a local pub. Instead of calling the police or leaving the pub right away, Sara stayed and talked to her husband. Both Sara and Tammy experienced continued harassment and resisted the dominant cultural script for battered women to get away and stay away.

Complex Everyday Life: Children and Finances

Complex everyday-life problems also emerged from battered women's talk as conditions related to ignoring and lifting their partners' restraining orders. Battered women frequently talked about issues involving children and money. Resistance for some battered women bettered their situation. Kathy, a forty-two-year-old mother of three with some college experience, routinely let her husband, who was under a restraining order, into the house for visitations because it was easier for her than transporting the children to him. In the next quote, she refers to his restraining order when responding to a question about whether she was afraid of her abusive ex-husband:

No, I'm not afraid of him anymore 'cause I still have a restraining order against him, which he wanted me to get rid of, you know, because he does come over. I said, "No." You know, that's *my* protection, you know. And I asked my lawyer about it, too, and he said, "No, don't get rid of it."

Kathy's resistance strategy gave her more control over her immediate everyday life. She expanded her options.

Laurel's description of her resistance to the dominant script was quite similar to Kathy's. Laurel is a twenty-three-year-old dental assistant. She ended up in the hospital after a brutal attack by her husband that prompted the state to issue a restraining order.

Part of my husband getting out was that he'd have no contact with me or any of my family members. Well, I . . . I told him that he could come to my house and stuff. I had to go through the

state's attorney's office and get . . . write them a letter relieving them of any responsibility and stuff like that to get this no-contact order lifted.

Laurel was diligent about getting the restraining order lifted. She explained that her husband made good money, they had a really nice house, and "I didn't want my income to be lost and him to be put in jail." Her explanation illustrates an understanding of the dominant cultural script's mandate to stay away. When her husband got out of jail, she searched for, found, and told him to come home because she liked her lifestyle and did not want to change it. Her decision was quite calculated. Likewise, Quincie separated from her abusive partner, a restraining order was put on him, and then she ignored it when she needed her partner's help to move out and clean up their apartment. As illustrated by Laurel, Kathy, and Quincie, children, money, and homes were conditions in multifaceted life circumstances that contributed to their choices to resist the cultural script and ignore or lift restraining orders. These women expanded their options in a context of ever-narrowing choices within the dominant cultural script.

Emotional Connection with Partner

Although harassment and everyday-life contingencies dominated battered women's stories about restraining orders, positive emotional feelings for partners also played a role. Tammy explained that she would ignore her husband's restraining order when she missed him. In the same way, Quincie said she ignored a restraining order during the holidays because she missed her partner and because in her heart she never gave up loving him. Along with other conditions, positive emotional feelings for a partner added to a woman's choice to ignore or lift a restraining order.

Battered women employed a resistance strategy when they ignored or lifted restraining orders on their abusive partners. While being acutely aware that they had very few options, these women gained some control over their lives by trying to make the legal process apply to their situation.

RESISTANCE STRATEGY THREE: REFUSING TO CALL OR COOPERATE WITH THE POLICE

Police response constitutes an integral part of the safety net constructed to help battered women get away and stay away from an abuser. Police effectiveness in situations of domestic violence is a much debated topic in the literature on battered women. Several studies acknowledge sources of problems in police response to battered women. Officer's attitudes (Buzawa and Buzawa 1990; Ferraro 1989) and weak policies (Berk 1993; Buzawa and Buzawa 1993; Hirschel and Hutchinson 1991; Tift 1993) are aspects of police involvement that some authors argue impede effective police work in situations of domestic violence. Nevertheless, the dominant cultural script dictates to battered women that calling and cooperating with police are important and integral lines of defense that they should employ. Accounts of interactions with police officers offer us another way to see battered women wanting to make and making decisions for themselves, thereby taking some control over the immediate situation. While they were taking control, they resisted a system intended to keep them safe. The battered women learned that the system designed to help them carry out the script was not working.

Fear of and Harassment by Partner

As was the case in the resistance strategies of staying with a partner and ignoring and/or lifting partners' restraining orders, sometimes battered women would refuse to call or cooperate with the police out of fear of and/or harassment by their partners. In this strategy, the women were actually quite fearful of their abusers rather than merely harassed as they felt in the preceding two strategies. Abusive partners would oftentimes threaten the women with more abuse if they called or cooperated with the police. For example, Sara describes an incident in which she did not call the police during or after a physical assault by her husband which left her with a black eye and a cut on her head. After the assault, Sara left her house to go to a conve-

nience store to get bandages for her wound. She explained why she did not call the police or go to the hospital:

It was dark out at 10:00 but I wore sunglasses so nobody could know that I had a black eye and a cut. Within ten minutes I had to get the bandages and come back so he could do my eye. So I did that. I knew if I wasn't back there at that certain time, when I got back I would have got my ass kicked or face beaten or whatever but all I knew was that I had ten minutes.

Going to the hospital or the police station were apparent options for Sara; however, her fear of further abuse by her husband caused her to go to the store and return home promptly. So, too, Ellen reported that she was fearful of what her husband would do if she called the police. One time the police came and took her husband, dropped him off, and told him to stay away for 12 hours. Her husband returned promptly. After that she did not call the police for a long time because she "paid the price even double when he came back." Fear of future physical abuse prevented both Ellen and Sara from calling the police. This fear influenced some women's resistance to the cultural script to call and cooperate with the police. In this situation, they wisely decided it was safer not to call the police.

Complex Everyday Life: Police Difficulties

Accounts by battered women about refusing to call or cooperate with the police contained a multitude of themes. However, these themes differed from those in the previous two strategies because the women seldom talked about money or children as reasons for not calling or not cooperating with police. Their stories about their interactions with police revealed disappointment and often anger at how police treated them or handled a situation. Women overwhelmingly discussed police ineffectiveness and rudeness as the basis for decisions to resist the cultural script to call police. Although Tammy's brutal husband was eventually arrested, on two previous occasions police went

to their apartment and did not arrest him after he had assaulted her. Tammy's neighbors always called the police. Her unwillingness to do so was related to her perception that the police were ineffective and did not do anything.

Another variable in the complexity of everyday life related to the resistance strategy of refusing to call or cooperate with police was police officers' rudeness to the women. Veronica, a twenty-six-year-old college student and mother of two, told a story about a time the police came to her house. When the police arrested her husband, one officer told the other that "she should probably be the one going to jail, not him." Veronica did not cooperate with police because they were rude to her and she did not trust them to do their job. Moreover, Laurel said that the police were "too pushy" in trying to get information from her. She said, "Now that I look at it they did a pretty good job, but I was kinda angry at the time because they were trying to force me to tell them who did it to me." She would not cooperate with the police officers. Police ineffectiveness and rudeness were a part of these women's complex everyday lives that influenced their decisions not to call or cooperate with the police. Veronica, Tammy, and Laurel negatively experienced police response to domestic violence. Subsequently they elected not to call or cooperate with them because the police were rude and "it don't do no good to call the cops."

Emotional Connection with Partner

The final contributing variable in battered women's stories about resisting the cultural script to call and cooperate with the police in situations of domestic violence was their emotional attachments to their abusers. Wendy, in her early thirties with a high school education, did not cooperate with the police because they would take a long time to get there and her husband would have "passed out." At this point Wendy would just tell the officers to leave. She recalled a half dozen incidents in which she told officers that "everything is OK" after being assaulted.

Wendy also would tell her husband to run away when she would see the officers approaching the house when a neighbor called them. She said she did not cooperate with the police because she was "saving him" (her husband) and "could not survive without him."

Similarly, Laurel describes emotional commitment to her husband as keeping her from calling and cooperating with police. She did not cooperate with police, the state's attorney, or hospital staff because she did not want her husband to "get into trouble" and because "she could not live without him." Laurel said she "felt awful" about what her husband had to go through after his assault, which left her hospitalized. Consideration of emotional commitment was included in a woman's negotiation of choice about calling and cooperating with the police. They simply did not want their partners to get into trouble.

Fear of partner, complex everyday life, and emotional commitment to partners all influenced battered women's choice to refuse to call or cooperate with police. Resistance to the cultural script emerged from a whole array of conditions, the most prominent one being police ineffectiveness and rudeness. Although emotional commitment and fear of and harassment by partner influenced a decision not to call or cooperate with police, police ineffectiveness and rudeness were routinely discussed when battered women talked about resisting the cultural script to call and cooperate with police. Refusal to participate with officers was a logical preference for these battered women. The immediate results of their resistance were that they stayed safer, were not verbally or emotionally abused by police officers, and kept their partners out of trouble. Resistance meant that they got their partners back, which is what they wanted at the time. The dominant cultural script directs battered women to get away and stay away from their abusers. However, the women in this study expanded their options and returned to their abusers because of a lack of coordinated institutional support from the police.

CONCLUSION

An environment of a narrowing array of choices and lack of institutional support characterizes battered women's talk about the dominant cultural script that directs them to get away and stay away from an abusive partner. Revealed in their talk are three problematic dimensions of the script. First, the script is *premised* on an assumption that leaving and staying away from an abusive partner is always the best choice. "Experts" in domestic violence set the stage and provide the data for this premise (Loseke and Cahill 1984). In part, this assumption is grounded in the understanding that, once introduced into an intimate relationship, violence will likely increase in rate and severity. Although this is a pattern in some relationships, it does not apply to others and leaving can be particularly dangerous. Further, such an assumption does not take into consideration the combination of needs and interests of individual women. Consequently, women who feel it is in their best interest to stay are not given an array of choices for help because policies and programs for women who stay are rare. Second, the script is exclusively *directed* toward the victim; she has to leave and stay away. The script assumes that if her behavior changes, the violence toward her will stop. I believe more effective and appropriate policies could be directed toward changing the perpetrator's behavior. Get him to stop being violent. In this way the women would be able to continue to lead their lives and make their own choices instead of being pulled out of their milieu and pushed into a system that makes decisions for them while not providing effective support for those decisions. Third, the *content* of the script is too directive. Edicts like leave your partner, call the police, go to a shelter, and seek counseling and policies like mandatory arrest and prosecution create ways in which battered women lose control and choices. When helping battered women, providers of services need to take a contextual approach (Dutton 1996) in which many factors are taken into account before help and advice are provided. When the prem-

ise, direction, and content of the cultural script pushes battered women to get away and stay away, they experience a narrowing array of choices.

The dominant cultural script for battered women is meant to liberate them from violence but it is too narrow and lacks coordinated institutional response. The nature and difficulty of the decision-making process to leave an abuser needs to be incorporated into the script for battered women. Their choices reflect the complex priorities of their lives. When battered women need help negotiating through the process, the system should back them up. Policy makers need to recognize that battered women are exercising agency, acknowledge the lives and decisions of individual women, and provide coordinated institutional responses. It is only through an expanded script and coordinated institutional response that battered women can have a chance at real balance, real choices, and real control over their lives.

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