

# **THE OTHER SIDE OF VIOLENCE**

by  
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These are the facts about who's getting beaten in the American family. If you're married, the chances are about one in three that your spouse will hit you one day.<sup>i</sup> In some cities, between 60 and 80 percent of all police calls involve family fights.<sup>ii</sup> Two million people have faced their spouse with a knife or gun in hand.<sup>iii</sup>

Facts have human faces. At 42-years-of-age, this is Pat's face: nose broken by a skateboard; cheek lacerated; a deep cut above sad, blue eyes.

Facts also have a voice. After 3 years of marriage, Pat's is filled with pain, anger and shame: "The hitting only happened when Chris was drinking. Then, there was no stopping. Even if I was holding our 2-year-old child, I'd get hit. My possessions were trashed, things were thrown at me. Every wall has a hole in it where Chris threw something at me and missed. "

When we think about spouse abuse, it usually comes down to a simple dynamic: Men hit women, period. And it's true that, by far, women are the main victims of the more than 6 million cases of serious familial abuse each year in America. But domestic violence doesn't always fit into such a neat package. Pat, who speaks so poignantly about years of victimization, is a man. Chris, his 40-year-old wife, is a husband batterer.

Battered husbands? For most of us, the whole notion seems a little ridiculous and hardly worth talking about. In virtually every article on spouse abuse the terms "batterer" and "husband" are used interchangeably, while "victim" means "wife." Look through psychology and medical journals of the last five years and you'll come up with two articles on battered males; you'll find ninety that focus on the battered female. In most family violence textbooks, husband-battering is either totally ignored, acknowledged with barely a footnote, or explained away as an act of self-defense. As one feminist writer notes, "Battered husbands appear in the (professional) literature almost strictly as ciphers in statistical accounts."<sup>iv</sup>

In all my years of training as marital therapist, in all the conferences on domestic violence I had attended, I can't remember anyone talking about men as victims of domestic violence. It wasn't until four years ago, during a men's therapy group I was leading, that the subject took on a reality to. One of the men in the group shared that when his wife lost her temper, she slugged him. We all laughed at the image. He went on to tell the group how his wife once knocked him over the head with his hockey stick. He was Canadian; it seemed funny. We laughed again. He told the group how he drove himself to the ER and how he lied to the doctor about his cut, saying he fell off a ladder while changing a lightbulb. We laughed even louder. But then something clicked for me. This wasn't a cartoon character sitting in front of me. His wounds didn't heal in the blink of an eye. This was a real man who had to go through the trauma of being beaten and having stitches put in his head. This was a battered husband.

Was he unique? Were there a hundred other men like him? A thousand? I had never thought of that question. I thought back to couples I had seen in therapy. Had I ever assessed for wife battering? Frequently. But had I ever asked a man if his wife hit him? Never. Had a man ever told me his wife beat him. I couldn't remember. But had I ever taken it seriously or done something about it. Not once. Did I have a list of resources for men? Did I know of any therapist who had groups for injured men? Were there any books on the subject I could give to men?

When I spoke to therapists and law enforcement officials, most could come up with one example of a battered man, but all dismissed--even derided--the importance of the subject. Assistant District Attorney Susan Breall of San Francisco expresses the majority opinion when

she says that "battered husbands represent only a very small percentage of all domestic violence cases." Casey Guinn, Head Deputy of San Diego City Attorney's Domestic Violence Unit, goes further. "Out of 15,000 domestic violence cases I've dealt with, I've seen only 5 or 6 men who were truly battered. And maybe 5 percent of the cases were incidents of mutual violence. "

But, while for law enforcement officials the actual numbers of battered men may be nothing more than a blip, therapists and sociologists who are interested in family dynamics wonder if these cases may be only the tip of an iceberg. Forty years ago, after all, incest was thought to be a one-in-a-million occurrence.<sup>v</sup> Twenty years ago the total number of incest victims was placed at only 5,000 a year.<sup>vi</sup> Today, an estimate of 250,000 young victims a year is considered conservative. Will this trend of widening perception hold true for domestically injured men? And even researchers who minimize the prevalence of battered husbands estimate that there may be 2 million men who are victims of domestic violence that could cause injury.<sup>vii</sup> Whatever the reasons for their injuries, whether they were inflicted out of self-defense or intentional malice, the numbers are remarkable. A thousand men would make up an anecdote. Two million constitute a sociological phenomenon.

Consider this: After Wisconsin passed a law requiring the arrest of perpetrators of domestic violence, the numbers of men referred to one counseling center increased 100 percent, to 9 per month; the number of women jumped from fewer than 3 per year to nearly 3 per month, an increase of more than 1,300 percent.<sup>viii</sup>

And consider this:

\* Some studies show that women are the initial aggressors in about half of all serious domestic fights,<sup>ix</sup> and that they are just as prone to commit domestic violence as men.<sup>x</sup>

\* Some researchers have found that when it comes to acts of violence, violent wives tend to engage in them even more than violent husbands.<sup>xi</sup> \* A survey of more than 2,000 husbands and wives found that about one in eight husbands had committed at least one violent act during a marital fight in the past year, and that *an equal number of wives had done the same.*<sup>xii</sup>

\* According to a 1967 report, about half of all domestic murders involve women killing their husbands.<sup>xiii</sup> According to FBI statistics, 15 percent of homicides are between husbands and wives. In relationships that are still intact, wives are the murderers in half these cases.<sup>xiv</sup>

\* In family slaying among urban white couples, thirty-eight percent of the murderers are the *wives*; among black couples, women are the killers in *50 percent of the cases.*<sup>xv</sup>

\* In a 1985 study of 884 university students, more men than women reported being victims of violence--18 percent to 14 percent--and fully ten percent of the married male students had sought medical intervention as a result of being battered by a wife.<sup>xvi</sup>

\* Nationwide, violence by women against men accounts for nearly ten percent of all reported assaults. (Violence by men against women accounts for 27 percent of reports)<sup>xvii</sup>

\* In California, women now make up 16.5 percent of domestic violence arrestees, up from 6 percent a decade ago.<sup>xviii</sup>

\* A review of 400 domestic disturbance police reports in one Texas city revealed that in more than 10 percent of the cases "women instigated the violence or were as violent as the men."<sup>xxix</sup>

\* A survey of emergency room patients found that 22 percent considered themselves victims of domestic violence, with the numbers of men and women being virtually equal.<sup>xx</sup>

### **A CONSPIRACY OF SILENCE**

What fuels the controversy about the prevalence, if not the very existence, of husband battering may be a matter of differing definitions. "When I think of battering," says Psychologist Herb Goldberg, author of *The Inner Male*, "I think of cowering, helplessness and repeated beatings. Men who are hit generally don't fit that description."<sup>xxxi</sup> Goldberg is expressing the most common rationale for not giving credence to reports of battered husbands: women aren't as strong as men so they can't cause as much damage. But there are two problems with this view. First, a hockey stick, a frying pan or a poker are great equalizers. Second, should the seriousness of an injury be a criteria for what constitutes battering?

When a 1985 National Institute of Mental Health study found that women are as physically abusive as men, some commentators dismissed it, noting the violence referred to is moderate--like pushing or shoving--rather than severe.<sup>xxii</sup> But would anyone turn away a woman's plea for help because her husband slapped her but didn't cause damage? If a man pushed a woman against a wall but caused no bruises, is she disqualified from claiming battering? Should a woman who is pushed be told to go back home, the aggression is only moderate? In other words, the index of injury acts as an unconscious filter. It is a built-in bias against battered men. It needs to be rethought. What we need is a broader sensitivity to what constitutes battering. Here's one working definition: anytime anyone is hit by a significant other in such a way as to cause damage to their body or sense of self-worth, that's battering.

Even with that definition, however, sorting out facts from sensationalism isn't easy. Female-initiated violence has become a taboo subject, surrounded with, as some researchers put it, "a conspiratorial silence?"<sup>xxiii</sup> It is a conspiracy often unintentionally entered into by women, men and treatment providers. "Women who are involved in domestic violence and come to the attention of the system understandably talk about being battered, not about doing the battering," says Warren Farrell, author of *Why Men Are the Way They Are* (Berkeley Paperback). "But there have been 14 dual-gender studies of domestic violence in the past 15 years, and in all of them, either women batter men as often as men batter women, or do it more often."

It's routine for psychologists and marriage counselors to ask women if they have been the victim of domestic violence, yet not one of the mental health professionals I interviewed for this article said that they ever ask the same of men. Even when confronted by clear evidence of violence, some clinicians and social workers would rather avoid the subject. So male victims, in particular, come up against what one writer called "institutionalized thought structures," that offers benign neglect in place of treatment.<sup>xxiv</sup> This neglect is a kind of secondary abuse<sup>xxv</sup> which only reaffirms the victims' inclination to deny their experience.<sup>xxvi</sup>

And deny it they do. "Our culture," writes Mike Lew, author of *Victims No Longer: Men Recovering from Incest and Other Sexual Child Abuse*, "provides no room for man

as victim. . . . When he experiences victimization, our culture expects him to 'deal with it like a man.' <sup>xxvii</sup>

Men, who are encultured to be "in control" of their families, see being battered as proof that they have failed as men, that they are worthless. Most would rather go on being battered than face the embarrassment of being a victim. "There is a lot of battering where the man is the victim," says Denise Frey, Director of Women's Resource Center in Oceanside, Ca. , and a vocal advocate for battered women, "but it's not easy for a man to talk about it to a bunch of macho policemen. " "Men are afraid to come forward," adds Lucille Boxell, Director of the YWCA's Men's Counseling Program in San Diego. "They're ashamed of what their peers will think of them, and how society in general will label them. " Cynthia Bernee, the YMCA's Clinical Director of Battered Women's Services says, "Men don't utilize community services,"

"The silence is part of a battered husband syndrome," says San Diego's Deputy District Attorney Victor Nunez, who recently prosecuted a woman for shooting her husband while he slept. (He'd been showing up at ER's for years with spouse-inflicted injuries.) Battered husband syndrome" is a controversial notion. People who see all battering as a reflection of cultural power imbalances say that a battered husband syndrome can't possibly exist. First of all, they claim, men are free to leave an abusive relationship, unlike battered women who are usually financially independent. And second of all, a woman stays in a battering relationship for the love of her children. But a study of more than 200 repeatedly battered-wives, found that only about 7 percent of them were financially dependent.<sup>xxviii</sup> And second, battered men, too, say they stay in relationships because of concern about their children's well-being or love for their spouse.<sup>xxix</sup>

Some feminist researchers wisely ask, what's love got to do with it? Battered women, they say, are like hostages. They form strong bonds with their abuser, see any act of kindness as a ray of hope, lose a sense of self, take the blame for the abuse, and don't trust people who are trying to help them.<sup>xxx</sup> It is a description that perfectly fits the battered men I've met. Those who have experienced the battered husband syndrome report that it is a toxic mixture of victim's guilt, rationalization, willingness to believe that the last incident of battering was truly the last, and a desire to protect the batterer from consequences that is so fervent it makes ordinary codependence look like indifference. Denying the existence of a battered husband syndrome is just one more way that abused men are disenfranchised from their need--and their right--to be helped.

"More and more men with this syndrome are coming to light," insists Nunez. "They don't want to talk about being beaten, and they don't want to press charges."

And as every battered husband knows, even in cases where they do talk about it, it's they who may be charged with the "crime" of striking back. One researcher reports several cases of husbands being charged with wife beating because they defended themselves.<sup>xxxi</sup> Farrell says that at all-male seminars, ninety-nine percent of men who have had violent altercations say that women hit them first. Pat, the man whose nose was broken by a skateboard, was held by police for four days because he pushed his wife in self-defense. He was released when she dropped the charges.

In St. Paul, MN, a man was arrested for beating his fiancé, Jeanne Chacon. Ms Chacon turned herself in for beating him and explained to the court that, while in the throes of a flashback memory, *she* had been the batterer. Prosecutors refused to drop charges against the man. Chacon, a lawyer, plans to defend him in court.<sup>xxxii</sup>

A counselor at Camp Pendelton, the Marine base in Oceanside, CA, told me of one case where a woman starting kicking her husband. He grabbed her arms and tried to calm her down. When he released her, she went to a purse, got out a switchblade, and gashed him. Because she had two bruises on her arm, however, he was arrested.

But it's not just fear of legal consequences that keeps 85 percent of men who are hit from striking back.<sup>xxxiii</sup> In *The Hazards of Being Male*, Herb Goldberg observes that men

learn very early in life that psychologically they will lose any confrontations with a female, because win or lose they will be labeled 'bullies. . . .' He is taught that the female is fragile and that he is her protector, never her opponent or competitor.<sup>xxxiv</sup>

"Battered husbands have been taught you never hit a woman, even in self defense," says Judy Gordon of the Trauma Intervention Programs (TIPS) in Carlsbad, Ca. For some men, this proscription against hitting women is so strong, their outrage can only be turned against themselves. A macho Army sergeant who could no longer put up with the humiliation of being beaten by his wife, one evening at dinner put a bullet through his head.<sup>xxxv</sup> A unique case? Male suicides outnumber females 3-to-1, and, as one psychiatrist told me, physically or emotionally abusive wives may be behind a measurable percentage of these deaths.

### VIEWS OF WOMEN

But there is a deeper reason for the conspiracy of silence. The whole subject of women who batter seems unnatural, unreal and downright unAmerican. After all, this is Mom we're talking about. Women's hands rock the cradle, they don't cradle a rock. Female icons stand guard over our Liberty and our Justice. In love songs and sitcoms, women are nurturing and virtuous. "A domineering a violent wife," say the authors of *Violent Men, Violent Couples*, "represents a parody of traditional patriarchal values." In our fondest collective memories, Mamma packs a lunch, not a gun. In real life, however, more than 15 million American women own guns, and you can now read about them in a magazine called *Women & Guns*.<sup>xxxvi</sup> (A reader's survey found that about half of the magazine's readers carried their guns all the time.)<sup>xxxvii</sup>

In Norman Rockwell homes, the little woman mends socks, she doesn't sock men. In real homes, however, husband battering may be what one researcher called the most under reported form of family violence.<sup>xxxviii</sup>

Some people think statements like this just can't be true. "We live in a patriarchy," counters the YWCA's Bernee. "Men have all the power, and battering is about power." Dr. Liane V. Davis of the University of Kansas writes that wife battering occurs "within a social context of male power and female oppression."<sup>xxxix</sup> If that is *the* social context, then husband battering is a problem crying to be ignored. Claiming--and proving--that women can also be *victimizers* is simply politically incorrect, and from a feminist perspective, any attention given to battered men is seen both as a distraction from the "real" issue of wife abuse, and as a competitor for limited public funds and support. "The fear among my colleagues," says Frey, "is that money spent on male victims will be taken away from women victims."

It's a fear that needs to be taken seriously. It needs to be kept in mind that the number one issue of adult domestic violence in America is battered women. A 1993 study of California emergency rooms found that perhaps one-fifth to one-third of women

asking for treatment are there because of battering.<sup>xi</sup> For some observers, however, trying to understand domestic violence while turning a blind eye to female-initiated violence just doesn't make sense. The California study made no mention, for instance, of how many men seek treatment for *their* domestic injuries, and in the past year I have met 3 men who needed stitches because of marital victimization.

Furthermore, the conspiratorial silence that protects female perpetrators may also be hurting female victims. Dr. Vallerie Coleman of Santa Monica found that nearly half of the 90 lesbian couples she recently studied reported repeated violent attacks by their female partners.<sup>xii</sup> A recent study from Seattle found that 6 percent of domestic violence cases involved women being beaten by women. So the question isn't, Are women ever violent to their partners?, but rather, How many and why?

### WHY WOMEN BATTER

"I never figured out why my wife used to hit me," says John. "Sometimes she just went crazy. Sometimes I thought she was trying to get me to hit back. Maybe her father was a violent man. Maybe she was trying to prove that all men were." Sociologists trying to understand the root causes of battering are engaged in a lively dialogue, but it's one that's scant on definitive conclusions. Theories of why some women batter span the gamut from the Matriarchal Syndrome, in which women see men as "misbehaving" little boys who occasionally need to have some sense knocked into them;<sup>xiii</sup> to psychoanalytic explanations: wives batter when some incident in a marriage causes their self-image to plummet, and they'd rather live with a bruised husband than a bruised ego.<sup>xiii</sup>

The act is, there is little research about female violence. Most studies of aggression focus on males. But a recent study out of the University of Michigan indicates that the popular culture is causing a primary change in how women see violence. L. Rowell Heusmann, the author of this study, found that the portrayal of violent, heroic women in TV and movies was causing young female viewers to become more physically aggressive, and the more violent they became as girls, the more violent they remained as women. "Girls get desensitized to violence just like boys," Huesmann found, "and when heroines' aggressive acts are portrayed positively, girls conclude it's a good way to solve problems."<sup>xiv</sup>

There's Violence as Payback. One therapist told me that in every case of spousal violence he has seen where the woman initiated the violence, the woman claims to have been battered as a child or an adult. And then there's Violence as Courtship, just one more way of staying together: When spousal tension becomes too great, give hubby a couple of lumps, then enjoy making up.

No matter what theory you go with, women who batter have several things in common. They're often possessive and given to bouts of unwarranted jealousy.<sup>xv</sup> They're highly stressed and have a need for dominance.<sup>xvi</sup> "The women we see in these cases," says TIPS' Gordon, "are domineering." If at first their abuse is confined to troublesome behavior--loud haranguing, ridiculing, interfering in or preventing friendships, having to know where the husband is at every moment of his day--once she crosses the threshold to violence, it may become a permanent way of dealing with her internal stresses. In this regard the violent female who is not held accountable is no different from her male counterpart "The woman who gets away with violence will repeat it," says Daniel J. Kugler, a psychologist based in Albany, Ca.

Batterers of either gender have little insight into their own behaviors. But because there is so little accountability for violent women--their actions are excused as cute or sexy, says Kugler--they easily believe their own simple justifications. "It's the only way I can get through to him," says one. "He treats me like dirt and he deserves to be hit," says another. "If he didn't yell at me I wouldn't hit him," claims a third. And, finally, "I was drunk."

## THE ROLE OF ALCOHOL

It's that last justification that pops up so frequently in domestic violence, whether by women against men, men against women, or parents against children. Indeed, for many observers, family violence is just one part of a larger problem: the epidemic of drug use, especially alcohol. Alcohol abuse permeates American families. Nearly twenty percent of us report growing up with a problem drinker, and more than 40 percent--about 75 million people--have had some alcoholism in their extended families. Ten percent of all American's say they've had a significant other with a drinking problem.<sup>xlvii</sup> And when it comes to abusive families, the statistics are still more startling. Two-thirds of abused children had at least one grandparent who was alcoholic or abused alcohol. In more than forty percent of cases where both child and spouse abuse occurred, one or both parents had been abused by an alcoholic parent.<sup>xlviii</sup> Child abuse is so closely related to alcoholism, some researchers feel that the incidence of child abuse could be used as an indicator of alcoholism in a population.<sup>xlix</sup>

Does alcohol cause violence? There are two camps of thought. Proponents of the alcohol-as-cause argue that alcohol acts as a disinhibitor, a "superego solvent." In this view, a couple of drinks can turn loose the beast in us all.

But newer research has found that moderate doses of alcohol do not inevitably lead to aggression. Provided a drinker has a "real opportunity to choose a nonaggressive response alternative," they are no more likely to be aggressive than a nondrinker.<sup>i</sup>

And anthropologists Craig Macandrew and Robert Edgerton wonder why alcohol leads to such strikingly different effects in different cultures and conclude that reactions to alcohol is a learned affair, and in our society we learn that alcohol causes aggression. In one controlled experiment, psychologist Alan Lang found that the most aggressive behavior came from people who thought they were drinking alcohol, whether or not they really were.<sup>ii</sup> At what age do we learn this connection? The belief that alcohol causes aggression is strong even among children as young as 12.<sup>iii</sup>

Drinkers also learn that because of alcohol they will not be held totally responsible for their behavior. "I didn't know what I was doing because I was drunk," is the most common excuse family counselors hear after violent incidents.

But is it true? Psychologist Morton Bard found that while about half of all men arrested for assaulting their wives claim to have been drinking at the time, fewer than 20 percent have enough alcohol in their blood-stream to render them legally intoxicated.<sup>iiii</sup>

But you don't have to be legally drunk to be "under the influence." The correlation between alcohol and drugs to battering is undeniable. And while most widely accepted figure seems to be that about 50 percent of battering males are under the influence of alcohol at the time of violence,<sup>liv</sup> one study of 230 men who had were charged with battering, found that more than 70 percent were under the influence of alcohol and/or

drugs and the time of violence.<sup>lv</sup> Overall, male batterers are three times more likely than nonbatterers to be alcohol abusers.<sup>lvi</sup>

There is some evidence that the same may be true of violent women. One study of 100 lesbians found that of the 40 who reported being in abusive relationships, two-thirds said that alcohol or drugs played a part,<sup>lvii</sup> a figure identical to what women in heterosexual relationships report.<sup>lviii</sup>

Until fairly recently, almost everything we know about alcohol's effect on mind and body has come from studies on males. But alcohol abuse is a growing problem among females, from preteens to geriatrics. Drinking patterns among young boys and girls are rapidly approaching parity.<sup>lix</sup> Three-fourths of all high school girls say they drink and the number of girls who drink alcohol is increasing more rapidly than the number of boys. At least a third of all members of AA are now women.

As for alcohol's role in husband battering, we can only speculate that it probably provokes violence in some wives. But like so many aspects of this unexplored subject, alcohol's true role remains cloaked in mystery.

### **BATTERERS LEARN VIOLENCE**

If most batterers are drunk when they're violent, they were stone sober kids when they learned to hit. All too frequently kids learn about violence by being victims of abuse, and all too frequently it's violent females who teach them. At present, the majority of child abuse reports in this country are filed against women.<sup>lx</sup> In California, women are reported as perpetrators of child abuse or neglect twice as often as men.<sup>lxi</sup>

Another way kids learn violence is by witnessing parents hitting each other. According to authors Richard Gelles and Murray Strauss when one spouse hits the others, children learn, at a impressionable age, that beating is part of loving and being loved; that violence is okay; that battering is a permissible way to deal with stress;<sup>lxii</sup> and that batterers get what they want. Kids--whether it's Sis or Jr. --identify with the power of the batterer--whether its dad or mom.

And children from both abusive and nonabusive families learn society's more subtle lessons about cross gender violence. "Go into a high school and mark down the number of times the kids hit each other," says Farrell. "You'll come up with a ratio of hitting that is about five girls hitting a boy for every one boy who hits a girl. When the boys hit the girls, almost invariably something is done about it. But when the girls hit the boys, almost invariably nothing is done about it. "When 32-year-old Randy was attacked by his wife, who had been drinking, he suffered a bite on his arm his deep enough to draw blood. He slapped her, and was so dismayed he had hit a woman, he called the police to turn himself in and spent two nights in jail.

"When I do public speaking," adds Ms. Frey, "and ask how many men have been taught it's never acceptable to hit women, the great majority raise their hand. When I ask how many women have been taught it's wrong to hit men, maybe one woman will respond, and she's been taught it's wrong to hit *anyone*."

### **WHAT CAN WE DO?**

Getting battered men to accept protection and empathy is often an uphill battle. Men are taught to grin and bear life, to accept what is done to their bodies, whether it's circumcision at birth--a matter, incidentally, decided almost entirely by mothers, according to one OBGYN surgeon--or conscription into the armed forces at maturity.

They are taught to reframe their abuses in ways that take the sting out of them. They hide the shame, and take the blame because it's the manly thing to do. In By Silence Betrayed, author John Crewdson writes,

When the Child and Family Service Agency of Knox County first ran an advertisement in the local newspaper asking to hear from men who had been sexually abused as children, it received just a few replies. But when the wording of the ad was changed from "sexual abuse" to "sexual experiences," more than a hundred men responded. Seventy-five percent of the respondents had sex with a grown women while they were children.<sup>lxiii</sup>

Battered husbands need to overcome a lifetime of role-assignments in order to begin the journey of healing change. The rules that every child of an alcoholic knows so well--don't talk, don't feel, don't reach out for help--as neurotic as they are, are the very cornerstone of the normal process of masculinization for every boy in America. Our restrictive concept of masculinity has become, for some men, a prison of abuse. But as the growing Men's Movement introduces more men to the lost world of feelings, things may change. One mental health professional at Camp Pendelton told me, "What I'm seeing is that more and more men are beginning to take a risk and say, yes, these things--incest, abuse, battering--are happening to me."

Treating battered men is a complicated affair. But the first step is obviously to admit that the problem does exist. One female marriage counselor insisted that a man who's been beat one or two times can't really be called battered in the classical sense. We need to see beyond such niceties of diction. We need to stop pretending that in our so-called patriarchy males can't be victims. Battered men are real. They are living in pain and in shame. Of course, some aren't living at all, anymore.

As the whole issue of battered men comes out of the closet we may find--as we have with incest, child abuse, and, indeed, wife battering--that the numbers are far greater than anyone has imagined. But, whether the numbers are "negligible," as some claim, or "significant," as others assert, don't men deserve the same kind of protection and empathy that we offer other victims of violence?

There are no easy answers to all the questions surrounding the issue of domestic violence. Feminist writers maintain that our social context has historically permitted, if not encouraged, wife beating. It may be that the present social context encourages--or at least accepts--increasing violence against men. In the film *War of the Roses*, when Kathleen Turner punches Michael Douglas in the face, audiences hoot with laughter. Is there a feeling among both sexes that somehow men deserve to be hit?

If there is, it's not difficult to see its roots. Characterizing men as selfish, insensitive, inherently vicious and genetically flawed is the only form of prejudice that is presently allowed among polite company, in glossy magazines and on afternoon tv shows. Male bashing is this generation's most virulent form of racism, and like other forms of 20th century racism, it often takes on a bizarre sexual tone. Florence Rush, in her book on the sexual abuse of children writes that men wink or turn away when they hear of children being abused. "They are amused by it. . . and allow adult-child sex to continue through a complex of mores which applauds male sexual aggression and denies a child's pain and humiliation, confusion and outrage."<sup>lxiv</sup> If Ms. Rush started her paragraph with the phrases "Jewish-American men, Italian-American men, and Afro-

American men wink when they hear of child abuse" would any publisher fail to see her claims for what they are?

Male bashing has become staple fair in the popular media. As one comedian put it, whenever I want to hate myself, all I have to do is watch Oprah for an hour.

Paper Moon graphics has introduced a line of greeting cards that show traditional housewives spouting anti-male slogans: "Geez, you'd think if they could put a man on the moon. . . they could put every man on the moon. "

Ann Landers thinks nothing of printing a letter in virtually every newspaper in the nation that states,

"What is wrong with men? Every day you read about men who beat up their wives and children, murder girlfriends, torture animals and commit atrocious crimes. Why don't our scientists do some serious studies to find out what is in the genetic makeup of males that makes them so vicious? Unfortunately, until we come up with some answers, we have to live with these bozos."

These are comments that may make some titter. They make others cringe. As Warren Farrell says, these attitudes have become like fluoride in water--we drink it without being aware of its presence. (It is of special irony that one day after the Landers letter appeared, the same paper carried the story of a 13-year-old girl who was arrested for breaking into homes and torturing and killing the house pets, and two days later it reported the case of a mother who had tortured and killed her young son. And what would the writer of the above letter think of these Abozos:

### **Baby Snatcher Gets Life for Murder**

A woman was sentenced to life in prison for killing a pregnant teenager, then cutting the 9-month fetus from her womb and kidnapping the child...[The woman] had proudly shown off a baby girl to family and friend, telling them she had given birth to the child...<sup>lxv</sup>)

The approval rating of men in general is so low, anything that denigrates them is easy to believe. Super Bowl Sunday of 1993 saw a spate of reports that incidents of violence would rise 40% during the game. Feminists advised women at risk not to stay alone with her spouse. When it was discovered that these reports and warnings were totally without basis, there were no retractions. After Susan Smith drowned her 2 young children by driving her car into a lake, the story she gave on national tv was that her children had been kidnapped at gunpoint by a man. A black man. Who doubted her story?

The portrayal of men as violent bozos stands in stark contradiction to the portrayal of woman as victims, even when the issue is hardly victimization. When Betty Broderick shots her ex-husband and his new wife as they peacefully sleep, some apologists saw it as the justifiable act of an emotionally abused woman. "I don't understand why she didn't do it years ago," said one writer. When data showed a 62 percent increase in girls charged with aggravated assault in Connecticut, sociologist

Cathleen Daly worried that debate on the subject might become "a way to make women look bad."<sup>lxvi</sup> When a female serial killer admitted to killing 7 men in Florida, Phyllis Chesler, author of Women and Madness, explained that, as a prostitute, after all, "she has been under attack all her life" and is therefore a victim of violence "who killed in self defense."<sup>lxvii</sup>

This disingenuous view of female-initiated violence permeates novels and movies, as well. When characters like Thelma and Louise go on a violent rampage, their behavior is understood as a reaction to years of victimization. But contortions of logic are often necessary to fit female violence into a reaction framework. When Olympic skater Tonya Harding was implicated in the attack on her rival, Nancy Kerrigan, author/activist Leonore Walker was quoted as saying, "I can conceptualize her as a woman who is being battered by her husband and (the attack on Kerrigan) was his attempt (to control Harding). It was not just Kerrigan's leg being smashed. I can just hear a batterer saying to Tonya Harding, 'If you don't do what I say I will smash your legs or your knees.'" Ms. Walker's somewhat mystical channeling, what she can "just hear," nicely shifts the blame from a woman to a man, no matter what the facts may be.<sup>lxviii</sup>

Since the role of victim has been preempted by women, men's violent behavior can only be explained as an inherent flaw--something to do with the Y chromosome thing--rather than a question of cultural programming. Male's victimization as children or adults by females is not generally considered as formative an experience as the victimization of females by males. Boys, after all, should be made of sterner stuff. What are we to make, however, of psychiatrist Alice Miller's assertion that studies of male rapists she has seen indicate that every one of them had been sexually molested "either directly or by the inappropriate use of enemas" by their mothers?

Those who suggest that violence is a male predisposition are faced with a dilemma. What can they make of the following news items, taken from one day's reporting in *The Los Angeles Times*?

- \* One woman is arrested for participating in the gangland execution of a Taco Bell employee.
- \* Another woman goes trial for killing a housemate to collect insurance money.
- \* Another woman is on trial for killing her ex-husband and his new wife.
- \* A 23-year-old woman bludgeons her husband to death, chops up his body, fries his hands and cooks his head, and disposes other parts of him down the garbage disposal.<sup>lxix</sup>

Are all these violent women so different from violent men? Is this merely what happens to women who suffer years of abuse, their most common defense? Then what are we to make of a *Newsweek* story of "two blond, blue-eyed, cherubic-looking twin sisters" who bit their cousin's penis until "it was nearly severed"?<sup>lxx</sup> Or of the two 17-year-old girls who tortured, slashed and strangled a 70-year-old woman?<sup>lxxi</sup>

"Has a guy ever hit on you," asks Ted, the cartoon husband of Sally Forth. "If you're a woman in the workplace, it's happened to you, Ted. " "Makes one real proud to be a male," a crestfallen Ted muses. Like so many men he represents, Ted is

absorbing--and transmitting--a shame-filled concept of maleness. If all women get harassed, the logic of prejudice goes, then all men must be guilty.

How are men and women expected to deal with all the disparaging and scornful images of manhood that dominate our media? Fred Hayward observed that male-bashing has become so ingrained in our culture that a survey of 1,000 commercials in 1987 found that when an ad called for a negative portrayal in a male-female interaction, the ignorant and incompetent one was a male an astonishing 100 percent of the time.

<sup>lxxii</sup> Boys growing up today, says Hayward, have never experienced anything but this age of blame and abuse.

To the extent that both sexes internalize these definitions of what a man is, they are bound to see themselves as brutish or guilt-ridden on the one hand, or avenging angels on the other. Isn't it reasonable to wonder if these stereotypes contribute to some men battering? For shame-based men, anger and aggression are often the only emotion and behavior they allow themselves. Having internalized his shame, the average man is reluctant to reveal himself. "In toxic shame the self becomes an object of its own contempt," writes John Bradshaw,<sup>lxxiii</sup> and, "there is no way you can share your inner self."<sup>lxxiv</sup> No wonder that psychologists like Robert Karen feel that shame is an important element in aggression, including wife beating.<sup>lxxv</sup> Might not shame lead to other men allowing themselves to be battered?

Lenore Walker has written that sexism is the swamp where violence breeds and thrives. It may also be a swamp where some violence sinks silently out of sight. Isn't it time to examine how sexism interferes with our understanding of the full range of violence in the American family? Battered husbands are a fact of life. They're already happening, they're just waiting to be seen. Women, in particular, know what it's like to be invisible. From 1932 to 1969 *The Journal of Marriage and the Family* did not mention domestic violence even once. Wife beating came to public awareness only as a result of the attention being given to child abuse,<sup>lxxvi</sup> and the first women's shelter in this country opened only 20 years ago.<sup>lxxvii</sup> The uncovering of any kind of abuse is usually a drawn out and always long overdue process.

The Women's movement wisely made domestic violence and the pandemic abuse of girls a coalescing element of its efforts to raise our consciousness of women's imbalanced position in society. There are equally important challenges, now, for the burgeoning Men's Movement.

\* \* \* \*

## SIDEBAR MATERIAL: **ARE YOU ABUSED?**

Many men are in abused relationships but don't know it. They think that every man is treated as badly as they are, that's what's happening to them must be "normal." Victim Services says that answering Yes to any of these questions indicates the possibility that your relationship is abusive.

Does your spouse or partner:

1. Criticize you constantly?
2. Overprotect you or show extreme jealousy.
3. Threaten to injure you, your children, your pets, your friends?
4. Prevent you from socializing with your family or friends?
5. Have angry outbursts?
6. Destroy your belongings?
7. Try to control your finances or make you answerable for every expenditure?
8. Try to control you or your children through manipulation or intimidation?
9. Hit you in any way?
10. Keep you from leaving the house when you want to?
11. Emotionally or physically force you to have sex?
12. Embarrass you or humiliate you in front of family or friends?

## SIDEBAR MATERIAL: **A CURTAIN OF SILENCE**

There were two stories of violence in the Los Angeles Times one February morning. One was of a young man who shot his father, himself and a police officer. The other was of a mother who doused her two young children with gasoline in the back seat of her car, set them on fire and walked away as they burned to death. The former story of the violent male made big headlines on the front page; the latter of the violent female was buried on page six.<sup>lxxviii</sup>

The effort to keep the subject of female-initiated violence politically correct can take astonishing turns. When Betty Broderick shoots her ex-husband and his new wife as they peacefully sleep, some apologists saw it as the justifiable act of an emotionally abused woman. "I don't understand why she didn't do it years ago," said one writer. When a female serial killer admitted to killing 7 men in Florida, Phyllis Chesler, author of *Women and Madness*, explained that, as a prostitute, after all, "she has been under attack all her life" and is therefore a *victim* of violence who killed in self defense.<sup>lxxix</sup> When data showed a 62 percent increase in girls charged with aggravated assault in Connecticut, sociologist Cathleen Daly worried that debate on the subject might become "a way to make women look bad."<sup>lxxx</sup>

## SIDEBAR MATERIAL: **THE NO-TALK RULE**

No aspect of family violence is more polarizing than that of battered husbands. It's a subject that invites both rabid denials and flagrant exaggerations. Drs. Richard J. Gelles and Murray A. Straus, authors of *Intimate Violence*, tell of their experience with this issue this way: "Perhaps the most unfortunate outcome of the wrangle over battered men is that

since the debate in the late 1970s, there has been virtually no additional research carried out on the topic. The furor among social scientists and in the public media has contaminated the entire topic. Consequently, we have refused every request for an interview or to appear on any talk show on this topic for fear of yet again being misquoted, miscast, or misrepresented. Other social scientists who witnessed the abuse heaped on our research group. . . have given the topic of battered men a wide berth. <sup>lxxxix</sup> One researcher said that he longer talks about the subject of battered male because after raising the issue 20 years ago, he received bomb and death threats. <sup>lxxxii</sup>

The no-talk rule applies to battered men themselves. Almost without exception, the battered husbands I have interviewed would rather go on taking their lumps rather than admit a woman is beating them. Men are trained to be in charge, or to appear to be in charge. There's a great deal of shame in man's marriage not working. I think in women's therapy groups you'll find more honest talk about the state of their marriages than in men's groups. Also, a beaten woman can find a great deal of peer support. A man who's beaten is ashamed of being judged by his peers. He thinks he'll be laughed at, or ridiculed. One man wrote in *The New York Times*: When I called the police to file a complaint against my former wife, the initial response was amused disbelief. When I finally convinced them my complaint was real, the response was--without missing a beat--so hit her back. The wounds that battered men endure are guarded by sentinels of denial, heroism and isolation. <sup>lxxxiii</sup> The one and only prime time tv movie on the subject of a battered husband was appropriately called *Men Don't Talk*.

#### SIDEBAR MATERIAL: **MEN DON'T LEAVE**

One oft-repeated myth of the gender differences in domestic violence is that battered women, unlike battered men, are forced to stay because of financial dependence. But in a recent study of more than 200 repeatedly battered-wives, only about 7 percent of the wives were financially dependent. <sup>lxxxiv</sup> So, why does anyone stay? Both husbands and wives explain it's because of concern about their children's well-being or love for their spouse, <sup>lxxxv</sup> but some researchers ask, what's love got to do with it? Cincinnati-based psychologist Edna Rawlings found that battered women were like hostages. They form strong bonds with their abuser, see any act of kindness as a ray of hope, lose a sense of self, take the blame for the abuse, and don't trust people who are trying to help them. <sup>lxxxvi</sup> It is a description that perfectly fits the battered men I interviewed.

#### SIDEBAR MATERIAL: **BIRDS OF A FEATHER**

Some studies show that, just as people are attracted to a similar level of self-esteem in their love choice, couples in which violence is part of their behavior may also be attracted to a partner whose level of hostility and dominance or submission is above the normal range. <sup>lxxxvii</sup> This may explain why so many people enter into a marriage even though they have already been beaten during their courtship. <sup>lxxxviii</sup>

In November of last year female students at Utah's Brigham Young University proposed a curfew on male students, so that the women could walk across campus without being attacked. Imagine if you're a male student at this university who has never attacked a woman--probably the majority, I would speculate--what it must feel like to be lumped together with social deviants. Would the good women of Provo propose a curfew on people earning less than \$50,000 a year, since they seem to commit most violent crimes? The average man, who neither rapes nor pillages, is now routinely scapegoated as surely as a Jew in Nazi Germany was or a black in South Africa is.

#### **SIDEBAR MATERIAL: CLEMENCY FOR KILLERS**

In late 1990, a few weeks before he was scheduled to leave office, Ohio's Governor Richard F. Celeste granted executive clemency to 26 battering women, including one on death row. The rationale behind his move was that their crimes were understandable in the light of their own victimization by men. In February, 1991, Maryland's governor William Schaefer granted clemency to 8 women who were guilty of battering or killing their spouses or boyfriends. While murder may be justified as a here-and-now necessity to save one's own life, these mass clemencies made no distinctions between necessary and cold-blooded acts. Women's groups applauded the governors' decisions, while lawmakers expressed grave concerns. The executive director of Ohio's Prosecuting Attorney Association said, "Our concern is that in the future we're going to get a lot of women claiming to be battered. In our view, it is not a proper defense for murder."<sup>xlxxxix</sup> To date, there is no known case of any man who has been granted clemency for killing a woman who was abusing him.

#### **SIDEBAR MATERIAL: FOR THE CLINICIAN**

No matter how a clinician goes about doing it, there are a few critical issues. First, assessment is important, especially where a wife is alcoholic or a drug abuser. I routinely ask if she has been violent. This is a fairly recent procedure for me, and most of the clinicians I've spoken with said that, while they always ask a woman if her alcoholic husband has been violent, they almost never ask when the situation is reversed. It's part of our collective denial and minimization of injury to men. I now always ask about violence to a man. If he answers yes, I assess for spouse abuse and child abuse. I also ask if he has struck back in self-defense or in retaliation.

Second, I ask if police have been involved. If they have, then there's probably been a long history of husband battering. Some studies find that battered wives, on average, have been beat thirty times or more before they call the police.<sup>xc</sup> Another study of women who received treatment at an ER found that more than 85 percent had been beaten at least one previous time.<sup>xcj</sup> My impression is that the same holds at least as true for men.

If police intervention has not already been part of the battering syndrome, I consider if such a step can be helpful. The conventional wisdom has been that police involvement

with male barterers is effective in preventing further violence because it sends a very strong message to the perpetrator that the abusive family system has been opened up and outside help will be used to intervene.<sup>xcii</sup> But newer studies, again with male offenders, indicate that arrest can lead to further attacks once the men are released. This has called into question the wisdom of recent laws passed by 15 states that call for mandatory arrests in all cases of domestic violence.<sup>xciii</sup> As usual, of course, there are no studies of how arrest affects female batterers.

In treating abused women we say they need to be empowered with the so-called masculine traits of assertion and self-worth. In treating abused men we need to see that they, too, need to be empowered, but with the so-called feminine traits: the power to see themselves as vulnerable and the power to accept understanding and help. Battered men also have to overcome a lifetime of role-assignment. They don't have to go on protecting their abusive wives. It's only when a man owns his experience--and when a battering wife sees the pain that her actions have caused and accepts the help she needs--that real and healing changes in the relationships may be possible.

In summation, understanding the man's experience in a alcoholic marriage is an important, even critical, component in any treatment plan. Assessing for violence against husbands, and addressing it directly, are areas that need new attention.

As a society we need to look at this other side of violence. Husband battering "is part of the hidden/ violence of American family life."<sup>xciv</sup>

#### **SIDEBAR MATERIAL: And men are experts at hiding pain?**

A 1984 study found that battering did not seem to affect a husband's self-esteem.<sup>xcv</sup> One defense for warding off a drop in self-esteem is violence: being either perpetrator or victim. According to Ismond Rosen, "Overt Violence in both assailant and victim may be the means of avoiding a more dangerous build-up of tension that threatens a break-up of the assailant's or the victim's self and may promote his/her self-cohesion. The provocativeness of the victim in the battered-wife syndrome may have a defensive function against object loss."<sup>xcvi</sup> I suggest that the same may be true of the "provocativeness" of the battered husband, whether it's engaging in affairs, or getting drunk, or whatever. This should not be taken as an attempt to "blame the victim." As two researchers recently wrote, "excluding character structure and its development from the study of domestic violence limits the understanding" of the process of return.<sup>xcvii</sup> In other words, character structure may be an explanation of the great relief we sometimes see in patients after an incident of domestic violence, just as it may explain, in terms of psychological dynamics, the "luring back to the roost" that is a common component of domestic violence, for both men and women. Focusing on the full interactive nature of some incidents of domestic violence (not all, to be sure) may also explain why so many people enter into a marriage even though they have already experienced violence during their courtship.<sup>xcviii</sup>

At Camp Pendelton: We see cases of battered husbands here, but no matter how badly he's beaten, he knows he'll always be in the wrong. The system doesn't recognize the fact that women can be the violent ones. If we go to a marine home and the wife had been beating her husband, we still take him out of the home. I saw one case where a man was covered with deep scratches on his face and neck. The only mark of the wife was bruises

on her are we he tried to hold her to protect himself. He was written up. Nothing was done about her.

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