

81-7-19DA

WIFEBEATING



By **Betsy Warrior**

SECOND EDITION
APRIL, 1976

The following excerpts were taken from the Houseworker's Handbook, a pamphlet which deals with the social, political and economic implications of woman's role as houseworker. The Houseworker's Handbook can be obtained for \$1.50 by writing to:

*Houseworker's Handbook
c/o Leghorn & Warrior
46 Pleasant St.
Cambridge, Mass. 02139*

Betsy Warrior is interested in hearing from people about efforts against wife-beating.

—Pat is in her mid-twenties, pretty, intelligent, articulate, and six months pregnant. She is also blind in one eye. Her husband is kind and considerate five days a week. On Friday and Saturday nights, he goes drinking and beats her. Pat's blindness is a result of one of those beatings.

—May is also pregnant. The man she lives with had locked her and her small daughter in the bedroom every morning before he left for work. He took away their clothes and wired the door handle with electricity in case May and the child considered escaping naked into the street. He also beat her every night when he came home for "screwing dozens of men" he was convinced were with her in the room.

—Myrtle isn't pregnant, nor will she ever be. Her uterus was removed after she contracted venereal disease for the fourth time from her battering husband. The hospital had finally told her, this time, what the recurring gynecological problem was. They hadn't before, because they didn't think it was "their place" to inform her of the nature of the disease.

—Sharon was beaten badly enough by her husband to need hospital treatment on 27 occasions. She didn't bother about the straightforward black eyes and cut lips, but she remembers the time he split her head open with his boot, and the occasion he tried to strangle her with a telephone wire, but the details become a little vague because she passed out. .

Hundreds of such cases have been dealt with over the past two years by Women's Aid, a voluntary organization in London. . .

Before the new coat of paint had dried on the cracked walls of the center, the first woman and her children arrived. They came, not for immediate advice, but for refuge. . . It was like the first small break in the dam, and the floodgates opened. As word got around, battered women continued to arrive. They came first from Chiswick area, then from all over London, and finally, from all over the country.

Letters poured in. "My husband's been beating me for twenty [or twenty-five or thirty] years. He'd kill me if he knew I'd written to you — he's a prominent barrister [or company director

or college lecturer], and everyone else thinks he's a wonderful man — that's why I've never mentioned it to anyone before." There was no point in mentioning it before because no one wanted to know — not the police, not the welfare people, not the neighbors, no one.

"It astonishes me," says Erin Pizzey, "how women who've been beaten for years manage to hide the fact even from people very close to them. For one thing, the skilled wife-beater doesn't usually go for the places that show — he goes for the breasts, the stomach, the base of the spine. If a man does beat his wife's face in a deliberate attempt to disfigure her, then she just stays in the house until the bruises have faded. The sense of shame, among middle-class women in particular, is still very strong."

Rosemary is a schoolteacher from Windsor. "I felt so bitterly ashamed the first time my husband hit me. I thought being hit was terribly slummy — the sort of thing workingclass men do on a Friday night after they've had a few drinks; the sort of thing that just didn't happen to people like me!"

But it does happen to people like Rosemary all the time. They arrive at Women's Aid, physically battered, emotionally stunned. . ."

". . .the more crushed a woman becomes, the more aggressive her husband becomes, and the more convinced he is that he is inviolate, above the law."

". . .If the wife brings charges for assault, the case may not come up in court for three or four months, during which time the wife almost invariably has to live at home with her husband — the man she's taking to court but on whom she is financially dependent."

". . .at the center they sleep with half a dozen other women on mattresses on the floor. Their children are in the next room, also on floor mattresses. The sense of relief at being away from the constant fear of violence is overwhelming. One night last summer, there were 30 women and children sleeping head to tail, like sardines in a can, in the four small rooms. . ."

"When a woman arrives and finds a roomful of women who have all been through exactly what she's been through, she realizes that she isn't the only woman in the world whose husband beats her, and that perhaps she isn't as unlovable, as inadequate, as culpable as she's come to believe."

"A center in every city in every country would help more, but it's like putting a Band-Aid on a cancer. What's really needed is legal and societal recognition of the problem. Perhaps the awareness among the victims themselves that they are not alone is a first step."

Gay Search
"London: Battered Wives"
Ms. June, 1974



THE POLITICS OF WIFEBEATING

PUBLIC APATHY AND CRIMES AGAINST WOMEN:

The "problem" of wife beating has never existed in the United States, except until very recently. Before now, wife beating was an occurrence that apparently merited no public recognition, aroused no shocked indignation at the plight of the victim nor called for any attempt to probe its social causes.

The *fact* of wife beating has always existed: behind closed domestic doors, on police blotters, as grounds in a divorce case or as part of the statistics in crime reports.*

Though wife beating is thought by legal experts to be one of the least reported crimes there is, the calls that police departments do receive for domestic trouble constitute a very large percentage of their total calls. In Atlanta for instance, 60% of all calls received on the night shift are reporting domestic disputes — indicating more trouble in this area than any other crime category. In Boston, calls average about 45 a day or 18,000 a year.** The F.B.I. believes that 10 times more rapes are committed than are ever reported, and that the incidents of wife beating are even more numerous and less often reported.***

While most other crimes are considered to be social problems and given a great deal of attention and study, wife beating has continued "unnoticed" because of public attitudes toward woman's role in the family as well as in society.

As in the instance of rape, wife assault is usually thought of as a crime that is victim precipitated, an "aggravated" assault. Also, as in rape, the victims are solely women. Although the similarities between rape and wife assault don't end here, there are some important differences between the two crimes that result in less public concern over wife beating than rape.

*At Boston City Hospital approximately 70% of the assault victims received at emergency are *women who have been attacked in the home*. Where the assailant is specified in these cases, it's usually a husband or lover. In many cases though, no assailant is identified but because these attacks take place in the home, and because of the victims descriptions of the attacks (i.e. head slammed against the wall, attacked with a screwdriver, attacked with a crowbar (!) multiple fractures, etc.) one can probably assume that the assailant was also a husband or lover as in the specified cases.

***Newsweek* July '74.

****Ladies' Home Journal*, June '74 "Wife-Beating" by Karen Durbin. *Cosmopolitan*, Sept. '74, "Rape: The Most Savage Carnal Knowledge," Shirley Silverberg. In N.Y.C. alone 3,735 rapes were reported in 1973.

WIFE BEATING AND RAPE

The rape victim can be almost any woman: the student, child, career woman, someone else's wife, almost any woman — except for the wife of the rapist. No woman can charge her husband with rape. Intercourse with his wife is considered his conjugal right, whether forced or voluntary. Though rape isn't wife beating, it gives some indication of the weaker position a wife is in vis-a-vis her husband, than the woman who isn't the wife of her attacker.

While in cases of rape and wife beating the public shows little concern, the victim herself is very concerned about the experience she's been subjected to. In rape cases this concern is sometimes shared by those who are closest to her, usually her family. For the beaten wife though, the person who is supposedly closest to her is the one who has perpetrated the injury on her. In a situation like this, the victim has very little reason to expect more sympathetic treatment from strangers than from one who has taken vows to "love and cherish" her.

Probably the attitude that is most responsible for the wife beaters' immunity from legal action is the tacit assumption in the public mind (and sometimes in the victim's mind) that a man's wife is his property to do with as he pleases.* Though this attitude holds true in a general sense for all women being subordinate to all men (as rape proves), in the husband/wife relationship it's assumed to a greater degree.

Frequently, when a wife who has been beaten does call in the police, it's as a last desperate remedy when she fears for her life. The response of the police is usually to treat such a situation as comic or trifling. There is rarely an arrest made or any

*"Laborite M.P. Jack Ashley, who recently won compensation for the maimed 'thalidomide babies' of a decade ago, is pushing for local sanctuaries and better legal protection for abused women — and psychiatric treatment for their husbands. As a first step, Ashley wants the authorities, who have no accurate statistics on wife-thrashing, to require doctors, social workers and police to report all such battery cases. 'Some men think they own their wives,' Ashley told *Newsweek's* Lorraine Kisly last week. 'It's a hangover from the old attitude that women are chattels.'" *Newsweek*, July 9, 1973.

encouragement for the wife to press charges.* The police seem to identify with the husband, and treat him in a chiding but sympathetic manner. There are even some policemen who also beat their wives.

A further factor that renders wife beating harder to deal with than rape is that the victim of wife assault is often economically dependent on her assailant. Woman's position in the family as unpaid laborer is a status that most women are encouraged to attain. This is accomplished both by positive reinforcement, through the myth that wifehood is the only appropriate arena for woman to exercise her best abilities to the fullest, and by the negative reinforcement of closing most other options to her and discouraging her from pursuing an independent life. Consequently, most women devote all their time to two occupations: home maintenance and child-rearing, for which they are neither paid nor guaranteed an income in the event that they should, by choice or otherwise, suddenly find themselves without the financial support of their husbands.

Besides economic dependence, there may also be psychological/emotional ties (not to mention children) that have developed over time in which the wife was subjected to such treatment as would make her doubt her own worth, integrity and right to live without the threat of violence. These factors that are involved in wife assault but aren't part of the picture of rape render wife beating more resistant to social cure of a reformist or superficial nature.

The women that are being physically abused by their husbands are just the women that the woman's movement finds hardest to reach. Only a loosening of the family ties for these women will permit them contact with other alternatives for their lives. Women's economic dependence on males must be abolished and the family structure itself must be changed to effect any real and permanent improvement for women in these situations (which is to say a majority of women—though all aren't physically abused).

*In 85% of the cases of domestic homicide, the police were summoned at least once before the killing occurred. In 50% of the cases, the police were called 5 times or more before the actual murder took place. *Kansas Police Department Study 1970-1971*. "Do Women Make Men Violent?" by Letty Cottin Pogrebin, *Ms.* Nov. '74.

THE SANCTUARY OF THE FAMILY: THE CASE OF JANET M.

To understand just how social attitudes toward women and wife beating work out in real life, we need only look at the lives of women in these situations. The emotional damage and wasted years incurred by these attitudes then become dismally apparent.

Janet M. got married very young — to a man also in his teens. When he first hit her, she was angry and afraid, but thought her husband's temper would change for the better after they were married longer. Coming from a typical working class background she was accustomed to seeing a certain amount of male hostility and aggressiveness expressed openly in physical violence toward women.* She tended to take this for granted as a humiliating but logical outcome for women, of men's greater physical power and social importance. She found her situation extremely difficult at times, but not shocking or abnormal.

When her husband's behavior was at it's worst she would often think of leaving him, but after the storm had passed and the immediate danger was over she looked at other alternatives and found them equally untenable. The prospect of going back to her

*From recent studies it appears as if almost as much wife beating goes on in the middle class as in the working class. But there are certain differences, I believe, that would make the percentage lower in the middle class. For one, the higher up a man is on the social scale, the more subordinates there are beneath him on whom he can vent his hostility and aggression without fear of retribution. For the working class man, aggression on other persons than his wife might meet with swift retaliation. Also, because of more crowded living conditions in working class homes and neighborhoods, family violence isn't so easily hidden as in more spacious environments. And what we see enough of, we tend to become accustomed to, and accept as a matter of course.

Statistically speaking, it must be much rarer for middle-class wife-beating to ever be included in crime figures. While the poor often have no resort in trouble other than to call the police, the better off financially turn to marriage counselors and psychologists. Their cases seldom bring in the police, go to court or wind up in the statistics. Wanting to save face and protect one's position usually figures more importantly in the middle-class mind both as a deterrent and to cover it up when it has occurred.

An example is the recent instance of Congressman Wilbur Mills, Chairman of the Ways and Means Committee for 17 years. The Congressman, in a car with four other people, was stopped by the police at 2 in the morning. The woman he was with had two black eyes and was hysterical. She jumped into a nearby tidal basin and one of the police jumped in after her and fished her out. "Then, with conspicuous discretion, the police took the woman to the hospital, drove everyone else home and wrote a report of the incident that omitted all names." *Newsweek*, Oct. '74. Though this woman wasn't Mills' wife, the incident does give a pretty strong indication of how "important" people are treated in a woman-beating case. No assault charge that I know of was ever filed against Mills. Note also the treatment of Martha Mitchell.

family she found more unpleasant than her marriage, and being underage she could legally be brought back by either her husband or father if she tried to live an existence independent of either of them. Economics wasn't an important factor at this time in her staying as she usually worked and had no children; though her income would have barely afforded the most meager existence. A stronger factor was the inertia her marriage already exerted on her. She was socialized (as most of us) to believe that wives and husbands should try to stick together for better or worse. Almost as often, her attitude was the fatalistic one of "I've made my bed now I must lie in it", which closely reflects society's view of her predicament — a view that mistakenly suggests women have a wide range of choices, but prefer marriage over all others.

Janet M. became pregnant and her first child was born dead. Though she had been beaten when she was pregnant, she attributed the stillbirth to being overworked and underfed. After Janet had her second child, live and healthy, she began to take her situation more seriously and less fatalistically, as another human life was now also involved. After two years of marriage, when her child was only a few months old, for the first time Janet sought help. She called the police when she was beaten.

When the police arrived, their manner toward her husband was friendly, even jovial, but toward her — hostile. Their questions were addressed to her in a belligerent and intimidating manner.

"All right, what's the complaint?"

"My husband beat me."

"Well, let's see the bruises." After seeing the marks, they offered the opinion, "That's not much." Then they added in an even more intimidating tone, "Well, what do you intend to do now?"

Janet began to feel puzzled at their hostility, and not knowing the procedure for filing a complaint replied, "Leave him I guess." At this, the police looked at each other and at Janet's husband, and smirked. "And how are you going to support yourself?"

"I'll get a job."

"You have a child don't you? Who's going to take care of your kid? You know your child will be taken away from you if you

can't take care of it?" Husband smirks. Police leave. And it will be a long time before Janet calls them again.*

Janet became depressed, nervous and fearful all the time. She often felt suicidal or that she was losing her sanity. The situation became more unbearable to her the more she thought of her child's future. But just because she had a child, economic independence seemed unattainable to her now.

As the years passed, Janet always thought of leaving her husband. She started out on various plans of escape that never panned out. She took a job to save money to leave, but made such poor pay that it hardly covered the nursery fee. When her baby was sick, she had to stay out of work but still pay the nursery costs, which meant she lost money. Her son was very unhappy in nursery school, and her husband seemed to suspect what was on her mind and made life even harder for her. After a few weeks, on the verge of a nervous breakdown, Janet quit her job.

Another time, she looked for an apartment for herself and the baby, but didn't have enough money to rent one and didn't think she was eligible for welfare. At one point she decided to take karate to be able to fight back when her husband hit her. But when she went to observe a class, she was too intimidated by its all male composition to sign up. (This was a few years before women started joining karate classes or running them).

Janet did succeed in taking a step which was unusual for a woman in her economic position. She looked for psychiatric help and managed to get some through a clinic charging on basis of income. Since she felt as if she were falling apart emotionally, she believed that if she could only get her head together and have someone to encourage her, she'd find the right way to escape her hell. But she received no encouragement to leave her husband, no understanding and least of all any help. Clutching at straws, she continued to go, week after week, year after year. (We will examine some of the attitudes of psychiatry in regard to wife abuse later to see why they hurt more than help.)

*"The police are not even called in many cases, E.J. Goodman said, because the women involved are either ashamed to admit what has happened or they are afraid that they will get a worse beating if they do, or they know that the police will do everything possible to discourage them from filing a complaint. There are cases in which policemen really identify with the perpetrator, and they feel that the wife is the property of the husband and if he needs to punch her around a little to teach her a lesson he's entitled to do it." *New York Times*, Oct. 21, '74 *Wife Beaters: Few of Them Ever Appear Before a Court of Law* — by J.C. Barden.

A friend of Janet's obtained a legal separation from her husband and got on welfare. Seeing that it was possible for her friend to get welfare, Janet began to think of this solution for herself again. She made some inquiries at the welfare department and was given a very cold reception. Referred from one person to another, at the end of her interview she knew only one thing for sure; that she was not eligible until she was no longer with her husband and had a legal separation. Inquiring at legal aid, she found that she couldn't get a separation either, as long as she was still living with her husband.*

When things got bad between her and her husband again, she asked him if he would leave. His refusal was adamant, making it clear that if he could help it she'd never be able to leave him. Janet didn't feel as if she and her child could just walk out in the street with no prospect of a roof over their heads and not knowing where their next meal would come from.

Finally, one day after Janet had been severely beaten by her husband, a friend called on her, was shocked at her condition and offered her a place to stay until she was able to find another. Janet gratefully accepted. Seeing this as an opportunity to establish her living apart from her husband, Janet lost no time in swearing out a complaint for assault and obtaining a doctor's report on her injuries. She put a few clothes in a bag for herself and the child and left, closing the door with finality on her seven year marriage.

*"Broken noses, broken ankles and beatings during pregnancy are relatively common — and not only in laboring families but in the homes of professional men as well. In providing legal remedies, lawyers often move too slowly. 'The worse case we've heard of,' reports Betty Knightly, a lawyer for Woman's Aid, 'is a woman who went to a solicitor for an injunction. He told her it would take awhile. Next day she was found beaten to death.' Many women who want to leave their husbands are advised that there is no place to go, since British law provides aid only for wives expelled from the home. Says one young wife who found a haven at Chiswick: "My husband broke my nose and knocked out my front teeth. The welfare told me that because I wanted to leave of my own accord, there was nothing they could do." *Newsweek* — July 9, 1973.

CATCH 22 — SOCIETY'S HELPING HAND?

Janet's case illustrates some of the problems women in her situation commonly have. In comparison to other women Janet was lucky in having a friend who was willing to take her and her child in for a couple of weeks until they could make other arrangements. Many women never get this chance or feel that they can't impose in this way on relatives or friends. Often, after having left their husbands, conditions are so discouraging that they give up and go back.

It's apparent that there's a great need for publicly funded houses to be set up to offer women a refuge from impossible marital and family situations until they can find their own way again in society. These women will be economic and social prisoners of their tormentors until some avenue of escape is opened to them.

After leaving her husband there were new problems for Janet to face. The friend she stayed with lived in two rooms with her husband so it was imperative that Janet find her own apartment as quickly as possible. She also had her complaint to bring to court and the welfare department to contend with. After her years of marriage she was in no condition to grapple with any of these problems, but her determination never to go back with her husband saw her through.

She found an apartment, forced the money from welfare to pay the rent, continued to press her charge and got a conviction in court. The only sentence her husband received was a couple of months probation and a recommendation to see a psychiatrist assigned by the court. But Janet now had the grounds for a legal separation and obtained one.

While she was struggling with these problems Janet was constantly being harassed by her husband's threats and pleas to go back with him. He succeeded in finding her new address and telephone number and frequently called her or came to her house. Alternately, he would threaten to kill her or say he couldn't live without her. The first time he came to her house, Janet called the police to get rid of him, but they did nothing and left him sitting on her doorstep.*

*"RENEWED ASSAULT: 'During the period,' Miss Fields said, as she told of the case (a woman who left her battering husband and is waiting for a divorce), 'Maria's husband entered her new apartment forcibly five times and beat her in front of the children each time. On the fifth occasion, the police arrested the

Janet's husband also called her friends to ask them to intercede for a reunion, then finally he called the welfare department. He told them that he wanted his wife taken off welfare immediately, that he had mended his ways and that she was no angel anyway. He was willing to fully support his wife so she had no reason to swell the welfare rolls any longer. This news was eagerly received at the welfare department where marriage was sacred and every penny was doled out as if it came from the supervisor's own pocket.

When Janet was urgently called to the welfare department she had no idea of her husband's recent contact with them. She was taken to the supervisor's office, and for an hour was interrogated and threatened that she must go back with her husband or be taken off welfare. Terrified, Janet held her ground and ultimately the welfare department was unable to carry out its threat.

In other cases, this isn't always the outcome. Janet's friend, whose discovery of her eligibility for welfare had given Janet incentive to apply for herself, later became too discouraged in her efforts with the welfare department, the harassment of her husband and struggling on her own. She finally went back with her husband — under even worse conditions.

Many women who do find the determination to leave their marriages meet in society obstacles too formidable to struggle against successfully, through no fault of their own. The attitudes of welfare departments, landlords, courts, police, prospective employers and psychiatrists all create an almost insurmountable barrier for a woman trying to leave this type of situation. Many landlords laughed in Janet's face when she tried to get an apartment and said she was on welfare. The court ordered her husband to pay some child support, but when he discontinued after a few weeks the order was never enforced.* Though Janet's husband was remanded to psychiatric help, he discontinued after a few visits—which probably didn't make much difference one way or the other in light of the attitudes held by psychiatrists.

husband.' The assault charges against him were dropped after he agreed in court not to bother his former wife again. The apparent reluctance of the police to take punitive action — they waited in Maria's case, until several reported beatings had taken place — seems to support the charges made by many wives and lawyers." *New York Times*, Oct. 21, 74 "Wife Beaters: Few of Them Ever Appear Before a Court of Law"—by J.C. Barden.

*In 90% of all child support cases the husband discontinues payment before the child is self-supporting.

MIND POLICE & PSYCHOLOGICAL BATTERING

To give us an idea just what the attitudes of psychiatry are on wife beating, we can look to an article in the popular press.* Under the heading of "Psychiatry" in *Time Magazine*, we're treated to enlightenment on the subject of "Wife Beaters and Their Wives." The article gives an account of the "findings" of three Massachusetts psychiatrists who dealt with 37 cases of wife beating referred to them by the courts. Among other things, the psychiatrists found the battering husbands to be "mother's boys", though they don't say why. (We could have guessed it; that evil, omnipotent mother again! Is there anything she's not responsible for?) In Janet's case, as in many others, her husband couldn't be considered a "mother's boy". In fact, he didn't have much respect for his mother. He appeared pretty "well-adjusted" in a macho way, to the rest of the world by taking all his anger out on his wife.

The "Time" article goes on to say that some of the traits found in the wives were: "aggressive, efficient, masculine and sexually frigid". One begins to wonder if the psychiatrists ever interviewed the wives. Certainly in Janet's case, she wasn't assigned to the court psychiatrist. Maybe the Drs. took the husband's word on their wives' characters. In any event, from the description the wives sound like pretty strong women, hardly the type to let themselves be pushed around! And if they were beaten, it's hard to see how these traits would survive. But then, maybe one can sympathize with a husband who beats a wife exhibiting these traits. From my observation the beaten wife seems to display an intimidated, fearful and unsure manner, more than any other. In saying "sexually frigid", the Drs. don't surmise if being beaten by her husband might dampen a wife's sexual ardor, nor do they define what they mean by "sexually frigid". We can only guess that they mean the traditional psychiatric view of inability to achieve "vaginal orgasm".

The article goes on to say, "The wife, whose father had also been a wife beater, would resist. The ensuing fight had, however, helpful overtones. 'The period of violent behavior by the husband', the doctors observed, 'served to release him momentarily from his anxiety about his ineffectiveness as a man, while

*This study is also found in the Archives of General Psychiatry. *Time*, Sept. 25, 1964.

giving his wife apparent masochistic gratification and helping probably to deal with the guilt arising from the intense hostility expressed in her controlling, castrating behavior."

Ah, so this is what's really happening! One would think, by the fact that these cases wound up in court that the wives were unaware of the "helpful overtones" in the situation and wanted it stopped. Also if the wife resisted her husband's sexual advances and beating, it seems as if she's unaware that she's refusing food for her masochistic nature—as the astute doctors know. In the case of the husband it appears that if you beat your wife you needn't feel anxious about being a man — you've temporarily proved it!

The article goes on to report, "But the doctors conclude that the battlers seemed to need 'a frequent alternation of passive and aggressive roles to achieve a working equilibrium' and seldom change their ways until a third party horns in. The third party is usually a teen-age son with protective feelings toward his mother and a less than friendly attitude toward Dad. What with the size of teen-agers these days, the fight often gets so furious that Mom finally begins to worry that someone may get hurt. Then she calls the cops."

Well, Mom finally begins to worry that *someone* may get hurt! Apparently, Mom herself is no one. As in Janet's case, the wife is more worried about the damage to her child, than to herself. Society has convinced her that she's no one, therefore worthy of no consideration. Maybe her child isn't either and it's the husband who needs protection now. If his masculine ego was damaged in this confrontation it would be a blow to all husband's egos — as the doctors so clearly see.*

Now we begin to get some chilling idea of why Janet M. wasn't aided by the psychiatric "help" she tried so hard to find. We also get some idea of how women are mentally murdered and made invisible by a male supremacist ideology that ignores or runs

*Some doctors also beat their wives as we see from this case: "The police simply do not understand the total terror you're in," said the former wife of the doctor, "And they will do nothing. If you have a husband of stature they feel that his reputation is more important than your health." *New York Times*, Oct. 21 1974. "Wife Beaters: Few of Them Ever Appear Before a Court of Law," by J.C. Barden.

counter to women's most vital interests, physically, psychologically and economically. Is it any wonder that we have no publicly funded houses set up to offer refuge to battered wives?

Though the woman's movement has fought and opposed much of this ideology, it hasn't yet succeeded in halting the propaganda that these mind-butchers disseminate. These attitudes run deep and strong through all our social institutions, enforcing the power relations that maim and cripple millions of women both mentally and physically. As social mind-control, the impact of these "social" workers (psychologists, police and social workers) is both subtle and tremendous in behalf of male domination.



"Why you lit-tle bitch !"

HERITAGE OF VIOLENCE

Does it take a certain amount of deception for a husband to appear to be at peace with the world at large while subjecting that member of society who is closest to him to systematic or sporadic terror that may frequently lapse from threat to outright physical violence? Only sometimes. At other times deception isn't at all necessary. It all depends on the social context in which these acts of violence are carried out.

As an indication of how all-pervading these pernicious attitudes toward women are, we can note a man in the news this year. The Former Prime Minister of Japan, Sato, was recently awarded the Nobel Prize For Peace. A few years ago, Sato was accused publicly by his wife, of wife beating. It caused some stir in the press at the time, but of course no charges were ever preferred. Yes Virginia, that's right, he won the Nobel Prize for *Peace* this year.*

In many countries laws exist specifically against wife beating. Apparently, if there were only laws against unspecified assault many men would take for granted the lawfulness of wife beating.

To understand the physical treatment women receive everywhere today as a matter of course, we should look to the past for its antecedents.

Many societies, in many ages, have tolerated high and constant degrees of physical abuse to women. These instances have ranged from physical privation to outright murder. Though physical privations culturally imposed on women may seem petty or trivial taken singly, their cumulative effect on woman's



"I warned you they really don't like being dragged and conked on the head."



concept of self-worth is of great importance. The common feature of all these customs is a disregard for woman's well being, health and especially her capacity to feel pain.

These are the details of woman's conditioning, the under-current that runs like a thread through all women's lives. Violence that we're accustomed, but not resigned to creates the background upon which greater atrocities against women are acted out. This current of hostility and violence sometimes flares up in larger proportions, illuminating the attitudes that sustain the everyday violence done to women.

During the Middle Ages, violence against women was wholesale and sanctioned by the law. Over the span of a few centuries the murder of nine million women was accomplished and justified by calling them "witches". Today with the collusion of religion thousands of women die yearly from illegal abortions.

As the period of "witch" killings receded, the attitudes that fostered it continued to be expressed (though with less public display and mass action tactics) in rapes, wife beatings and crimes of passion or honor, etc. As the hollow superstitions of traditional religions began to lose some of their thrall over the minds of humanity, new social usages arose to rationalize the continued ill treatment of women.

Religion has played a large part in defining women's role in society. The working class is still influenced to a large degree by the Church. Over time though, the justification of women's role and justification for men's inhumanity to women has been influenced by psychiatry and the development of Freudian psychology.

According to the new theory male violence was still not a problem but simply answered the needs of "woman's innate masochism", therefore it was the natural mode of relating between the sexes. Though the roots of this behavior lie much deeper than Freud in the origins of male supremacy, it's tolerated and sustained by the attitudes of psychiatry. Woman's "innate masochism" is the flimsy pretext used to excuse male violence towards her and it's worked well (as well as religious dogma) for the purpose of keeping social control over a subordinate class.*

Another example of man's violence to women is in medicine. Today many thousands of unnecessary hysterectomies are being performed on women annually.** These operations are part of a pattern of man's brutal attitude of disregard for woman's physical integrity and ability to feel pain. Medical procedures used on women are also motivated by economic gain or by the desire to obtain a relatively powerless subject for dangerous medical experimentation. The dangers of birth control chemicals and devices, lobotomies, and the denial of legal abortions are all part

*"Women are like the masses in wanting to be mastered and ruled." *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, S. Freud, 1905. See also Appendix B.

**"Dr. Osler Peterson of Harvard Medical School surveyed records for several thousand pelvic operations done in New England and found that in about half the cases, a normal uterus had been removed. The excuse given by some doctors, says Peterson, is that such surgery shortens the menopause." *Newsweek*, Dec. 23, 1974.



*"I'm going to specialize in gynecology.
That's where it's at."*

of this pattern.* One can only understand the prevalence of wife beating and woman's frequent inability to escape her situation by understanding the social, political and economic forces woman is enmeshed in.

* "... we believe that for many families violence which brings about a miscarriage is a more acceptable way of terminating an unwanted pregnancy than is abortion. On one hand we know that there is still considerable controversy over the moral and legal aspects of abortion, even after the Supreme Court ruling of 1972 which for all intents and purposes legalized abortion. On the other hand, research on violence indicates violence is typical of family relations and is often normative in family life. Consequently, violence which terminates a pregnancy may be more acceptable socially, morally, and even legally than is an abortion." from *The Family Coordinator*, June '75, "Violence and Pregnancy: A Note on the Extent of the Problem and Needed Services, by Richard J. Gelles, Ph.D., Dept. of Sociology and Anthropology, University of Rhode Island, Kingston, Rhode Island 02881. I might also add that abortion induced by beating is much cheaper than a medical abortion.

CONCLUSION:

Many people would like to think of wife beating as an expression of the personal problems of "sick" individuals. They would not only apply this theory to the one doing the beating, but also to his victim. This attitude insures the continuation of the problem, and as we have seen, psychiatrists are among the theory's foremost defenders. (This helps to explain why the victims of these beatings wind up in mental hospitals more frequently than their assailants.) No doubt the individuals who do the beating are sick, but their sickness isn't of a personal or individual nature. It's a social and political sickness that psychiatrists, etc. are also afflicted with.

When "mental illness" finds its expression so often in similar behavior patterns, we have to assume that the behavior is tolerated or even approved and reinforced in some way by the culture that sustains it.

This is clearly seen in other instances. For example, in Germany when the Nazis held power, millions of Jews were killed. It's clear the Nazis were sick men, but because they held political power, the expression of their sickness was political and went unchallenged and unpunished — instead their culture encouraged this behavior. In Germany, when a Jew became mentally ill he didn't start shoving other Germans in gas ovens. German society wouldn't have tolerated it as it tolerated this behavior for non-Jewish Germans. Neither do women who are "mentally ill" commonly embark on a behavior pattern of husband-beating and raping men to alleviate their frustrations.

The lynching of Blacks in the South is also the same kind of political crime. Though its perpetrators are considered by most standards to be sick, their sickness was one that never afflicted southern Blacks and it's easy to see why.

Sexism, like racism and anti-semitism, is a political philosophy that wife beating is but one expression of. This behavior can't be dismissed as a personal deviation because of its prevalence now, historically and cross culturally (see appendix). Only when wife beating is recognized as the political crime that it is, will we be able to take effective steps against it.

As most cultures are male supremacist, the problem (for women) of wife beating is part of most cultures. Laws against

wife beating aren't the solution to this problem, they only indicate some awareness that it exists. As with rape, the laws are on the books but the conditions that breed this violence continue unchecked. We can hope for no thorough solution nor permanent end to crimes against women, except through the eradication of all aspects of male privilege and domination. Until that time comes, immediate steps must be taken to insure the physical safety and survival of women for whom the death of male supremacy will otherwise come too late. The only short-term solution that is possible is the establishment of houses that could serve as refuges and sanctuaries from the torture chamber the family represents for our battered sisters. Because of the public attitude of apathy — which connotes tacit acceptance of crimes against women — we can't look to social agencies to set up such refuges but must find ways of establishing them ourselves.

Lately some attention has been given to this problem and more wife beatings are being reported. Some people think that this means that there has been an increased incidence of the crime. Rather, I think that because of a general change of consciousness brought about by the women's movement, women feel less resigned to accepting the ravages of male supremacy and are trying, no matter how hopeless their situations once seemed, to fight against them. But unless they are given more tangible help their new-found feelings of worth will slowly and painfully be beaten out of them.

APPENDIX A: A REFUGE HOUSE FOR WOMEN

Interval House — Glasgow, Scotland

Interval House, the name given to the group, opened its doors two months ago. It is a three bedroom, kitchen and bathroom, corporation flat in an old tenement property. . .

At one stage we had ten women and thirty-one children in it, and they were sleeping everywhere except in the bath. Because of the demand we have applied for at least three more houses. . .

Eventually we would like to keep it open twenty-four hours, because there are many women and girls who drift around Glasgow at night with nowhere to go. . .

The home is run by the women who come to it for refuge. They decide who to take in although they usually take anyone in when they have room. The only rule imposed is no men, but nobody ever quibbles with this as they are usually relieved to get away from their men and into a place where they feel safe. One woman came in with strangulation marks, two had badly bruised faces and another had a fractured jaw. All perpetrated on them by their lovers.

There are very few places you can go in Glasgow with children, especially if you leave your husband. The family is still the sacred cow here. Unfortunately, when you have made the decision to leave home (or in most cases have been forced out of it) the battle really begins. Almost ninety percent of the housing in Glasgow is corporation owned. The Housing Department tenancy policy openly discriminates against women. . .

The man can still occupy the home even though his wife and children have been forced by his conduct to leave. He may be charged with wife assault, but usually the courts are lenient or will fine him a small amount. So he can occupy a house while the women and children have to walk the streets, or seek accomodation in a hostel or like institution. . .

Most private landlords won't take a woman on her own with children, especially if she's on welfare. So much for a society that purports to be concerned about the welfare of children. . .

Maura Butterly

Interval House

April 15, 1974

APPENDIX B: EXAMPLES OF PHYSICAL VIOLENCE TO WOMEN IN OTHER CULTURES

In many cultures women are allowed to eat only after the men have finished and in most cultures women are expected to eat less than men. * One wonders what long-range effect these eating customs have had on women's smaller physical stature. Sexual privation has also been a rule (with few exceptions) for women historically and cross-culturally. Some cultures go as far as performing clitoridectomies on women as a matter of course. Besides varying degrees of nutritional and sexual privation, social custom has at times imposed on women: bound feet, corsetted torsoes, pointed shoes, etc.

Only within the past few decades have the French dropped from the Napoleonic code, "Women, like walnut trees, should be beaten every day." In Northern Africa, the expression, "Women and camels need to be beaten," is still used. Within the past two years Scotland and Iran have made it unlawful to beat your wife, and Italy, within the past eight years, has made it a serious offense to kill a wife, sister or mother in upholding male honor.**

Religion has often played a large part in reinforcing these brutal attitudes toward women. "Mortification of the flesh" has usually been deemed by religions to be more appropriate to the female than the male sex. Whether in sacrificing virgins to an insatiable God or by the injunction, "Thou shalt bring forth children in suffering and pain," the message to women has been clear, "Suffer and be still!" In woman's role of wife and mother the component of pain and suffering has been a large one in the eyes of the church and the church often was, and is, the only social arbiter. In the case of child-birth the Catholic Church saw

*"There are specific social and individual mores which lead to nutritional deficiency in women. Food distribution within the family arises from deliberate self-privation by women because they believe that the earning members (and male children who are potential earning members) are more valuable than those who do domestic work and child rearing, which they consider devoid of economic value." Dr. Kalpana Bardhan, Indian Council of Social Science Research—"Indian Women Face Greatest Risks in Famine; Men Would Get Fed First," *Boston Globe*, May 26, 1974; Wm. Drummond, *Los Angeles Times*.

** (In Algeria) "A peasant could murder his wife in 1967 and feel quite within his rights if he claimed she was unfaithful." *Women, Resistance and Revolution* by Sheila Rowbotham.

fit to withhold anesthetic from women in labor, long after its discovery, apparently so women could fill the high quota of pain due their sex. And over the ages, religions have constantly admonished woman to stay with her husband, no matter how cruelly he treated her.



APPENDIX C. PSYCHOLOGICAL EXCUSES FOR VIOLENCE TO WOMEN

While the intellectually pretentious refer to woman's "weak ego," "sexual immaturity", "innate masochism", etc. to justify their treatment of her, the less sophisticated simply state, "A wife needs a good beating once in a while." or "Any woman that cheats on me is gonna get killed." The former explanations are usually found in books while the latter sentiments are often expressed in real life "Authorities" (i.e., police, social workers, psychiatrists, doctors, priests, etc.) may state different reasons for not raising an outcry over the brutal treatment of women but their differences are more apparent than real.

"Masochism" was only one aspect of the new mysticism supporting woman's oppression. In other areas woman's needs met with similar brutality. Woman's sexuality was newly defined (with total disregard of any physical evidence) as completely harmonious and complementary to male sexual functioning; therefore, as having its only healthy fulfillment in a vaginal sexuality that gave man greatest pleasure while her own anatomically based mode of clitoral sexuality was labelled as "immature" and "sick". To enforce this male interpretation of female sexuality often more was needed than the psychological coercion of "scientific" propaganda. In cases where a woman's natural sexuality somehow survived the social perversions — if she was being treated by a psychiatrist — a clitoridectomy was frequently recommended to cure her of her stubborn clitoral fixation. At the turn of this century thousands of clitoridectomies were being performed under the guise of therapy. The women who consented to this operation in which their bodies and psyches were mutilated were convinced of its necessity to their well-being and even paid for it. As in many cases, when psychological controls don't avail, physical methods of control are resorted to. Some societies still perform clitoridectomies on women today but their acknowledged reasons for doing so are: to keep wives sexually faithful—probably the same reason as in all other cases but minus the additionally damaging hypocritical rationalizations.

Published by
New England Free Press
60 Union Square
Somerville, Mass. 02143

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