

When victims of domestic violence fight back

Women who assault or kill their abusers often end up behind bars

Barbara Clinton, director, Center for Health Services, and Anita Linde, activities coordinator, International Services

The Facts

❖ Domestic violence is the leading cause of injury and death among U.S. women.

❖ Every 12 seconds in this country, a man beats up a woman.

❖ According to the FBI, 3,000 men murder their current or former wives or girlfriends every year.

❖ The American Medical Association calls domestic violence against women a "true epidemic."

Though many people are appalled by the pervasiveness and severity of domestic violence, few understand it. Unless you or someone you love has been involved in an abusive relationship, you may wonder, "Why does he do it?" and "Why does she stay?"

Why does he do it?

According to the U.S. Department of Justice, 95 percent of domestic assaults are perpetrated by current and former husbands and boyfriends who, at one time, professed to love the women they beat, rape, and kill. What accounts for such behavior? Two key factors emerge from research on family violence:

❖ It works. Both the threat of violence and actual assaults are highly effective means of control.

❖ He can get away with it. Battering men are rarely held accountable for their actions by friends, family, co-workers, church leaders, police officers or judges.

Why does she stay?

This is the most troubling question that surfaces in discussions of domestic violence. The simple answer is that, often, she does not stay: every year, thousands of women flee their abusers, seeking refuge with family members, friends, neighbors, and at local shelters. However, when women leave their violent mates, the risk of harm to themselves and their children increases. Statistically we know that abusive men become enraged and more dangerous when their families leave. This separation violence accounts for many of the deaths from domestic assaults each year.

There are other reasons why women remain in abusive relationships:

❖ Battered women who have suffered frequent, severe, random attacks believe, over time, that they are powerless. This sense of helplessness combines with profound fear to render the women literally incapable of escape.

❖ A successful departure rests on having somewhere safe to go and stay. Responsive law enforcement and criminal justice officials, women's shelters, child care, job training, and housing assistance for women fleeing abuse are not in place in most communities.

Some women respond violently to abuse

Given the prevalence and seriousness of battering in this country, it comes as no surprise that some women respond violently to their abusers. Throughout the U.S., some 1,040 women are currently incarcerated for having killed or assaulted their former victimizers. Advocacy groups in 20 states have launched executive clemency drives to free battered women from their prison cells. In Tennessee, the Coalition in Defense of Battered Women was formed in 1991 to determine whether battered women have been imprisoned, and if so, how they might find justice.

During its earliest days, the Coalition had received letters from women in prison for killing their abusers. Obviously, they could not attend meetings, so the Coalition decided to survey women in prison who allege that they committed crimes against men who had abused them. Through the Tennessee Task Force Against Domestic Violence, the Coalition sent postcards to all women in the Tennessee Women's Prison who had been convicted of a capital crime against a person who might have been her partner. If they believed their crimes were committed as a response to abuse, would they be willing to be interviewed?

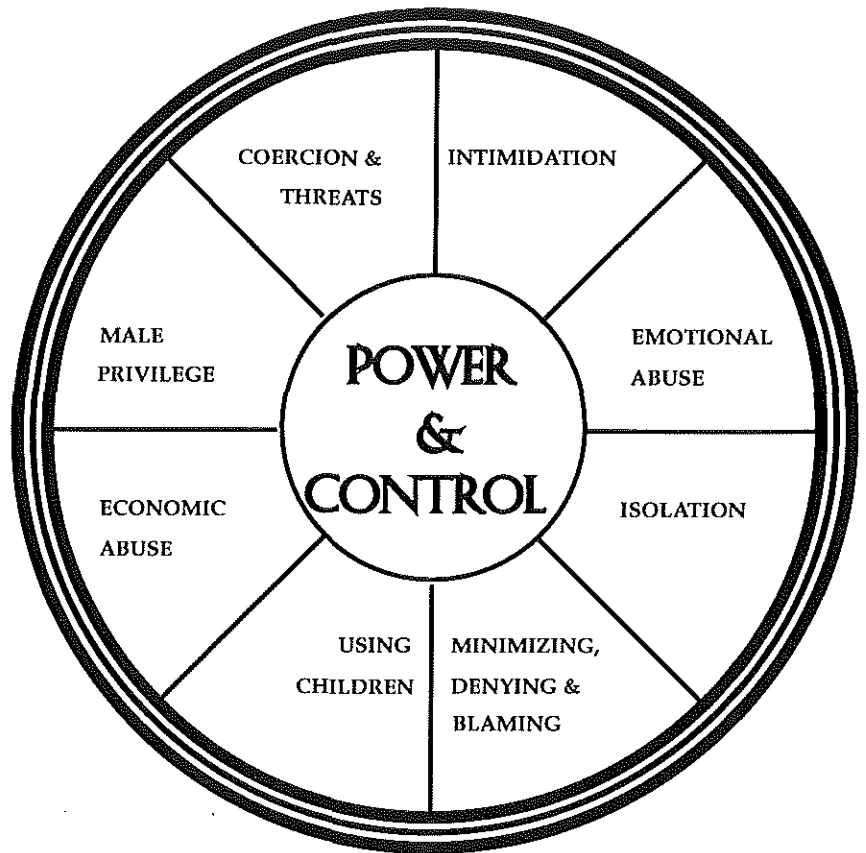
As a result of a *Women's VU* article about our plans, 20 students, staff, and faculty members volunteered to interview prisoners or analyze data. The complicated analysis of data was done

Some women fight violence with violence

—continued from page 1
by Clair Peterson.

After half of the interviews had been conducted, volunteer interviewers talked about what they learned. Most were shocked at the severity of abuse the women had suffered, and at hospitals' frequent failure to recognize and report abuse. They mentioned that definitions of "self-defense" don't take into account men's and women's different strength and body frame. They learned that some formerly battered women fear leaving prison because their past abuse left them with little self-esteem or confidence. The interviewers were surprised at prisoners' lack of information about the legal system, and noted that many of the women had been misadvised by their attorneys. The volunteers experienced a heightened recognition of domestic violence issues, and expected to increase their activism on the issue as a result.

Sixty interviews were conducted, and twenty-four of the women said they had responded to abuse by



Many domestic violence experts use the "Power and Control Wheel" to explain the multiple forces that govern abusive relationships

assaulting or killing their partner. While the number of interviews is too small to draw firm conclusions, the results provoke thought about the domestic violence cycle within relationships.

Women who claimed to have killed their abusers received sentences ranging from 15 years to life in prison. Few of the women had previous arrest records or appeared to be habitual criminals. Most had good relationships with their children, but were socially isolated. Those with the longest sentences were the least likely to have left their abusers during the relationship. The following factors make no difference in their efforts to get their sentences reduced:

- ❖ Extensive abuse over many years, as opposed to sporadic abuse.
- ❖ No previous arrest record.
- ❖ Seeking orders of protection, or initiating divorce proceedings.
- ❖ Asserting that their children had also suffered abuse.
- ❖ Pleading self-defense or claim-

ing battered women's syndrome as part of the defense.

Because battered women are not necessarily dangerous to society, justice requires that lengthy prison terms not be the inevitable outcome when they defend themselves. At present the Coalition is considering two options to promote justice for battered women defendants: promoting alternative sentencing using a community corrections model (instead of jail sentences) for battered women who kill or assault their abusers, and seeking executive clemency for battered women who are convicted and imprisoned.

The Coalition continues to meet bi-monthly at the Nashville Peace and Justice Center. A tremendous amount of work needs to be done and the Coalition is looking for leaders who can pursue the cause of battered women to its next logical step.

For more information or to volunteer, call the Scarritt-Bennett Center at 322-4176. ■

Women's VU

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Nancy A. Ransom, director

Judith Tefft Helfer, assistant director for programs and editor, *Women's VU*

Jennifer E. Smith, assistant editor, layout and design

Barbara Clarke, librarian

Gladys Holt, office manager

Cindy Brown, cartoonist

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Page 4 photo by Rebecca Fischer

“NEWS QUOTES”

Resources for health reform

If you think health reform is just for the poor, then you need to read *Women's Health Insurance Costs and Expenses*, a new report just issued by the Women's Research and Education Institute (WREI). The report focuses on health insurance coverage and expenditures for reproductive and preventive services among women of childbearing age (15-44). The findings make it clear that *all* women have a real stake in health reform, including those who now have private health insurance. According to this study, in 1993, 7.4 million women (more than twice the number of men) had out-of-pocket expenditures for health care services that exceeded 10 percent of their income. Nearly 5 million of these women *had* private coverage! The report also documents disparities in access to preventive services for women of color and poor women. The report is available for \$10 from WREI, 1700 18th St., NW, Suite 400, Washington DC 20009. (202) 328-7070.

Network News
March/April 1994

Women can once again boast a baseball team of their own

It is 102 degrees and humid on the field at Chain O' Lakes Stadium here. But several Silver Bullets baseball players patiently stand on the dia-

mond and take turns talking with the media. "Thank God for Coors Light," says 25-year-old Rachelle McCann, now a player for the first women's professional baseball team since the 1950s.

The Colorado Silver Bullets may have started out as a way of helping Coors Brewing Co. sell beer, but the team's commercial beginnings don't matter to anyone on the 24-woman roster. To them, the important fact is that this summer their team will play in 50 games against semi-pro, minor-league and over-30 teams of men and will travel from their spring training camp to Vancouver, British Columbia, and 48 spots in between.

It won't happen overnight. "We cannot teach these women enough in five or six weeks to take them to a major-league level," says Phil Niekro, the former Atlanta Braves pitcher who is managing the team.

Mr. Niekro hopes the team will encourage high schools and colleges to start women's baseball teams. "Right now, girls are buying baseball mitts instead of softball gloves because of this team," he says. "Maybe this is the start of a baseball program for women in this country."

Wall Street Journal
April 27, 1994

Women make strides, but men stay firmly in top company jobs

Thirty years after the Civil Rights Act barred sex discrimination in the workplace, the debate over women's progress in corporate America boils down to this:

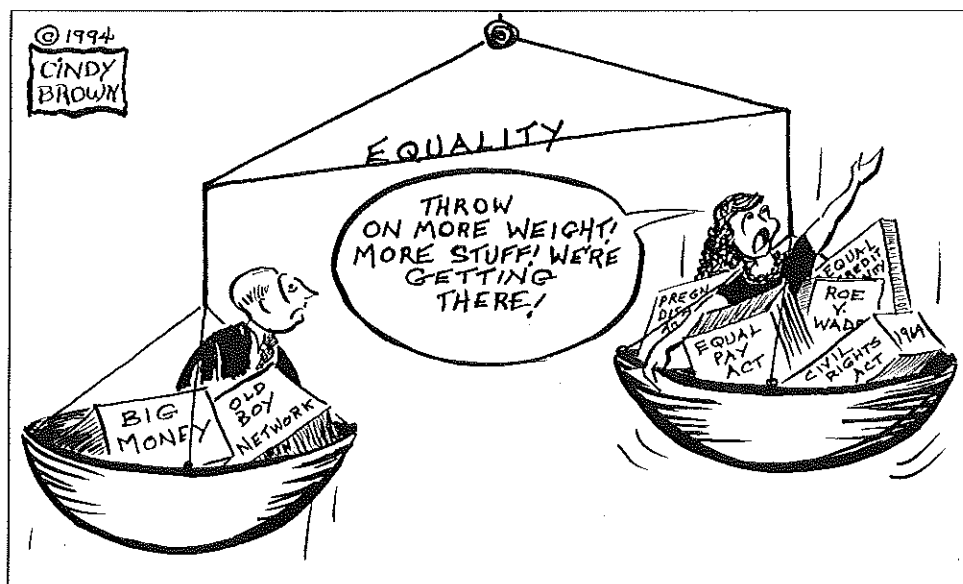
You've come a long way — maybe.

Women have moved into non-clerical white-collar jobs in droves, but women aren't matching these gains in management. A *Wall Street Journal* analysis shows that women still held less than a third of the managerial jobs in the 38,059 companies that reported to the EEOC in 1992.

At the vice presidential level, women make up an even smaller percentage — less than 5 percent in 1990 according to Catalyst, a nonprofit research group in New York that studies women in business.

Men continue to hold the bulk of management jobs and, unless growth rates change considerably, will continue to hold them for a long time. At the current pace, women will not achieve parity with male managers for another 20 to 30 years.

Wall Street Journal
March 29, 1994



Female-headed families face multiple problems

New book discusses the plight of single mothers

Lives on the Edge: Single Mothers and their Children in the Other America (University of Chicago Press, 1993) is by Valerie Polakow, a professor of educational psychology and early childhood education at Eastern Michigan University. Between 1989 and 1991 single mothers from diverse backgrounds in Michigan were interviewed for this book, and many selections from their oral histories are included.

Barbara Clarke,
Women's Center
Librarian



The poverty rate depends on the definition of poverty, but federal statistics indicate that one in four infants, one in five children and fifty percent of single mothers are poor. By the standards of other Western countries the poverty rate would be considerably higher.

Poverty is considered to be a private affair and children are punished because their parents are poor. Many Americans believe that some people deserve to be poor. "Poverty is a private affair — its causes are rooted in failed individuals, failed families, and moral degeneration rather than in a failed public economy and a discriminatory public policy."

Polakow discusses the financial, employment, housing and child care problems of the mothers, and devotes several chapters to the low expectations and bias their children frequently encounter in schools, preschools and Head Start programs. The lack of child support from fathers is a major cause of poverty. Many single mothers discover that they are better off when they receive welfare than when they work, as they lack the skills and edu-

cation to obtain jobs that have medical benefits and that pay enough to support their families. Many of these women also have difficulty finding affordable child care.

This country lacks the social insurance benefits available to single mothers in other industrialized nations. The writer includes some recommendations for improving the plight of female-headed families. Her suggestions include universal health care, child allowances, a national child care system, affordable housing and improved public schools.

Unequal Treatment: What You Don't Know About How Women Are Mistreated by the Medical Community (Simon & Schuster, 1994) is a new volume by Eileen Nechas and Denise Foley. The writers explain how women became invisible to the medical profession and they reluctantly came to the conclusion that "what is valuable to medicine is who is valuable to society, and that is white men."

The male body has been considered to be the norm, and "because women's bodies differed from men's, what was natural for women was seen as unnatural." Until very recently women were excluded from almost all medical research, and researchers assumed that what applies to men must also apply to women. The writers show how this assumption proved to be disastrous to women's health. Among the topics discussed are breast cancer, heart disease, medical educa-

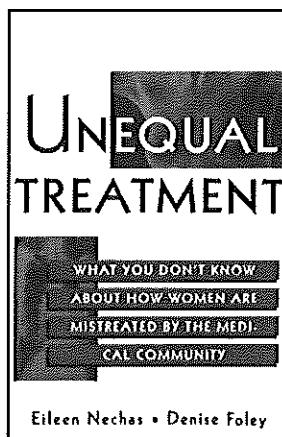
tion, battered women, aging, women with AIDS, psychology, maternal versus fetal rights and poor women.

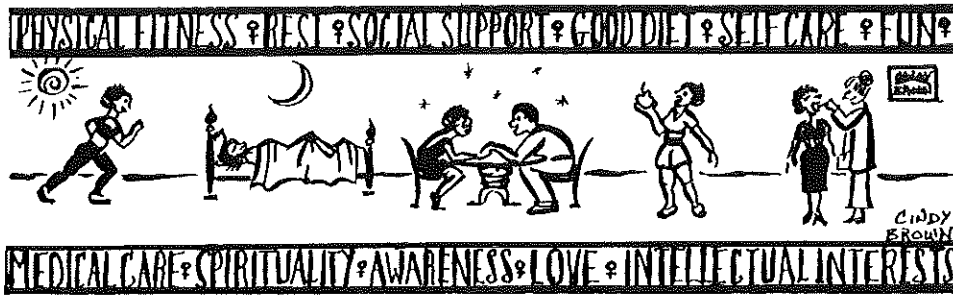
Some doctors still harass or molest female patients, and women medical students often are not taken seriously and face some hostility and harassment. Medical textbooks still depict the male body as the norm and women doctors face a glass ceiling.

During congressional hearings in June 1990 the public became aware of the extent to which women have been mistreated — often unwittingly — by the medical profession. Since then some progress has been made and some major studies of women's health have commenced. Women can bring about change. "Women have enormous unrealized power — as voters, as workers, as patients, as health care consumers. We need to vote with our ballots and vote with our feet, electing legislators who understand and are committed to the issue of women's health and choosing physicians who know how to practice women's health care."

Science and Sensibility: Gender and Scientific Enquiry, 1780-1945 (Basil Blackwell, 1991) is edited by Marina Benjamin. This is a study of women in science, of women as the subjects of scientific research, and of the relationship between gender and science. The contributors show the extent to which there has been a male bias in the principles, methods and aims of science.

The selections cover various aspects of the history of women and science in the United States, Europe and Great Britain. Included are chapters on women writers on science, women who made scientific instruments, male and female hysteria, women and sanitary reform, gender and science in Victorian England, and plant sexuality and Carl Linnaeus and Erasmus Darwin. ■





Women volunteers needed for AIDS research

Women are needed to participate in the AIDS vaccine studies at Vanderbilt. For over six years, the AIDS Vaccine Evaluation Unit at Vanderbilt has been involved in testing potential preventative vaccines for the National Institutes of Health. The vaccines contain no part of the actual virus. There is no way a person can become infected from the vaccine. People of all ages and walks of life are needed; however, there is a special need for women and minorities to be in the studies at this time. If you are interested in more information, please call 343-2437.

Not only is it demeaning, it just sounds plain silly

The following report appeared in the April 29 issue of *The Second Degree*, a publication of the Graduate Student Council:

During the course of the National Association for Graduate and Professional Students, Glynnys Mensing was able to attend a presentation on sexist language in academia as well as covering legislative issues. A selection of examples distributed by the speaker shows that the use of the generic "man" for all humans is not only implicitly sexist, but also may have some unintentionally funny results...

"Man, being a mammal, breast-feeds his young."

"A gynecologist was awarded a medical award for service to his fellowman."

"The individual's freedom to bear children should not be defined by his education, income, or race."

"A reference to studies of the development of the uterus in rats, guinea pigs, and men."

"Menstrual pain accounts for an enormous loss of manpower hours."

Stroke danger from arched necks is greater than previously thought

A year ago, a neurologist described five cases of serious neurological problems, including four strokes, in women aged 54 to 84 after shampoos in beauty parlors. As is common practice when beauticians shampoo hair or neutralize a permanent wave, the women's heads were tipped back over the edge of the sink.

Now, after a year of detailed studies of blood flow to the brain, the neurologist, Dr. Michael Weintraub, believes that the risk of stroke and lesser forms of brain damage when the neck is arched or twisted in extreme positions is much greater than he had originally believed.

The hazard, he says, is not limited to older people and extends well beyond those who visit beauty salons. Also at risk are young people born with a hidden malformation of a main artery leading to the brain. Damage from extreme neck positions can affect them if they undergo prolonged dental work, paint ceilings or do other work over their heads, are subjected to extreme chiropractic manipulations of the neck or are fitted with a breathing tube in surgery.

Each of these circumstances can place the neck in a position that greatly reduces blood flow through one or both of the vertebral arteries, Dr. Weintraub's studies have shown. The problem is especially likely to affect older people who have complicating factors like high blood pressure or diabetes, which make them more vulnerable to stroke.

When blood flow becomes sluggish, clots can form that are carried

into the brain when normal blood flow is restored. These clots can block circulation to part of the brain, causing a stroke. The elderly are especially at risk because major arteries tend to become clogged. Dr. Weintraub suggested that this might account for the disproportionate occurrence of strokes during sleep or just after awakening.

Dr. Weintraub is calling for doctors and potential patients to be alert to the warning signs of interrupted vertebral circulation, like dizziness or loss of balance when the neck is bent. He is also warning the elderly and anyone who already faces a higher than average risk of stroke to avoid extreme neck positions.

Dr. Weintraub and other experts suggest that elderly people and especially those of any age who have experienced dizziness or loss of balance when the neck is bent should avoid activities that demand extreme neck positions.

For example, hair can be washed with the head bent forward instead of back. The dental chair, instead of the patient's head, can be tilted way back. The anesthesiologist should be reminded to restore the patient's head to a normal position as soon as the tube is inserted.

People already at high risk for stroke — those who are obese, have high blood pressure, heart abnormalities, diabetes or smoke cigarettes — might consider wearing a cervical collar while sleeping.

Jane E. Brody
New York Times
May 4, 1994

Announcements

MESSAGE TO STUDENTS

To save the cost of returned newsletters due to address changes, we have elected to remove the names of graduating seniors and graduate students unless we receive a specific request confirming the subscription.

In order to remain on the mailing list, please send the subscription label below to the Cuninggim Center with the words "renewal '94/'95" on it.

MESSAGE TO PAID SUBSCRIBERS

We regretfully announce that the cost of subscriptions beginning with the September 1994 newsletter will be \$8 per year. This is the first increase in five years. Newsletters are sent free to all students and contributors. Faculty and staff subscriptions are free to a campus address. Multiple copies are available to departments.

NASHVILLE MOTHERS' CENTER

Centennial Medical Center Westside announces the first Mothers' Center in Tennessee. The Mothers' Center is a program where women/mothers, together with the professional community, can explore the experience of becoming and being mothers. June through December, meetings are held in the second floor classroom on the second Monday of each month at noon and on the fourth Monday at 7:00 pm. Yearly dues are \$15. More information is available at the Cuninggim Center or by calling Tonya McMulla at 342-1903.

WORKSHOP

Peggy Elam, Ph.D. and Dawne Kimbrell, Ph.D. present an overview of the sociocultural, physiological and psychological factors contributing to women's disordered eating and body image problems at "Eating & Body

Image Issues: Educational and Experimental Workshops for Women" on June 11 and July 16 for adults and July 23 for young women ages 14-18. Each workshop emphasizes strategies to foster healthy approaches to food, eating, and women's bodies. Cost is \$85. For information, call 327-8173.

CALL FOR PAPERS

A National Conference on Women's Issues will be held at Elon College on February 23-25, 1995. The conference topic is "Violence and Violation in Women's Lives: Myth, Metaphor, and Reality." Papers are being sought which explore violence and violations in women's lives from interdisciplinary, international, and cross-cultural perspectives. Please send abstracts to Chandana Chakrabarti/Seena Granowsky, 2201 Campus Box, Elon College, NC 27244-2020 by October 3. More information is available at the Cuninggim Center.



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Women's VU

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Margaret Cuninggim Women's Center

Vanderbilt University
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