

WOMEN

AND

MALE VIOLENCE

Susan Schechter

The Visions
and Struggles
of the
Battered Women's
Movement

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In loving memory of my sister, Betsy Schechter Hofmann, and in honor of the women who became like sisters and founded the shelter movement.

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Introduction

Between 1974 and 1980, projects to help battered women suddenly appeared in hundreds of towns and rural areas. With the forceful declaration, "We will not be beaten," women organized across the country. By 1982, the words "battered women's movement" had come to symbolize the conglomeration of organizations serving abused women and their children. Embodied in over 300 shelters, 48 state coalitions of service providers, a national grass-roots organization, and a multitude of social and legal reforms, the battered women's movement grew astronomically, transforming public consciousness and women's lives. Its zeal, dedication, achievements, and political dilemmas are the subject of this book.

I have spent six years as an activist and service provider in the movement whose efforts I am chronicling. As an early member of the Chicago Abused Women's Coalition in the days when there was still nowhere for most battered women to go and later as coordinator of the Park Slope Safe Homes Project in Brooklyn, I found my life and political views enriched, challenged, and deepened by the experiences I shared with battered women and other activists. Although by 1980 I was exhausted from helping too many people in too hostile an environment, I was eager to continue participating in the movement by writing about it.

Trained as a social worker but identifying as an activist, I first

dreamed of this book as a way to refute the sociological and psychological theories that were proliferating about battered women in the early and mid-1970s. Radical feminists and grassroots activists were deeply worried by these theories and the likelihood of professional encroachment into the movement. As I set out to topple theories of psychopathology and the intergenerational transmission of "family violence," refute the view that professionals knew more about battered women than grassroots activists, and develop a feminist analysis of wife beating, I soon realized that it was impossible to write about battered women separately from the movement that emerged to help them.

The shelter movement caused us all to see abused women in a new light. Before the growth of shelters, many people viewed battered women as passive, dependent, or aberrant. Shelters offered the supportive framework through which thousands of women turned "personal" problems into political ones, relieved themselves of self-blame, and called attention to the sexism that left millions of women violently victimized. Temporarily freed from threats of retaliation and danger, battered women in shelters could display their long-ignored energy, rage, and coping abilities and reveal their similarity to all women. Any theory of violence against women that failed to account for the extraordinary personal transformations that occur in shelters would distort the truth about battered women.

My vision of this book deepened as I began to interview former battered women and movement activists. As we discussed their organizing efforts, I grew increasingly concerned that the thousands of stories about the creation of shelters, hotlines, and coalitions would go unrecorded, especially as "founding mothers" left the movement. I decided to chronicle the grueling, often mundane tasks women undertook to start and sustain institutions in the face of hostility and with few resources. I wanted to capture the radical feminist, grassroots, and democratic spirit underlying most of the earliest movement efforts. As non-feminist professionals joined shelter staffs in larger numbers, I was afraid that the movement's inspiring history would disappear behind official institutional accounts written by later generations of experts.

In the two years that I have worked on this book, some of my worst fears have been confirmed. In the Foreword to *Sheltering Battered Women*, a national survey of battered women's refuges published in 1981, Nancy Humphreys, the president of the National Association of Social Workers, fails to mention the grassroots and feminist efforts that led to the creation of services for abused women.

Instead, she attributes the national recognition of battered women's plight to "society."

The battered woman is not a new problem. Rather, it is society's awareness of this problem that is new. Society's recent interest in, and sensitivity to, the issue of violence...has made it possible for the many victims to come forward and seek help.¹

The president of the National Association of Social Workers is wrong. "Society" did not recognize battered women; feminists and grassroots activists did. Nowhere in her introduction is this fact acknowledged, so, unwittingly, her statement rewrites the history of the battered women's movement.

Over the last several years, sociologists, government bureaucrats, and professionals have appreciated the importance of services for battered women. Yet at the same time they have transformed the issues and insights that feminists and grassroots women painstakingly raised. For example, by 1977 activists had forced the words "battered women" into public consciousness. Soon thereafter funders, researchers, and professionals began to proclaim a "spouse abuse problem;" in their false notion of equality, men were the victims of violence as frequently as women. This change from battered woman to battered spouse masked the radical political insights about male domination that feminists had forged. This renaming is one that the movement must fight so that battered women are not made invisible again.

My fears that the accomplishments of the battered women's movement would go unrecorded or be distorted increased as a reactionary government took office, intent on restoring the traditional male dominated family, slashing social welfare programs, and upwardly redistributing wealth. In a column entitled "Beating Up on the Family," Jo-Ann Gasper, President Reagan's Deputy Assistant Secretary for Social Services Policy at the Department of Health and Human Services, unashamedly stated that:

...the concept of domestic violence was so vague that it can mean "any form of 'belittling' or 'teasing' or 'failure to provide warmth' (whatever that may be—I guess if you don't set the electric blanket high enough in the winter)."²

The indifference to the pain and danger in women's lives and the trivializing of violence, mutilation, and death are shocking reminders of the plans of the current administration. Battered women's services can expect no assistance from this federal government, and

they will also face cutbacks from their states over the next several years. As of this writing, some shelters have already closed. Their short-lived victories remind us that an active feminist and progressive movement is necessary to save what we have won.

Seven years ago, battered women were not the "clients" that they are in some programs today, but rather participants in a joint struggle. A feminist movement had played a central role by providing new theoretical insights about violence against women, an ideology of sisterhood, and the inspiration and support that led thousands of women to work ceaselessly, often for no money. In writing this book, I wanted to applaud the energy that literally created a movement out of nothing.

In a very brief time span, activists built a practice that offered battered women meaningful help for the first time. They also started and maintained institutions, negotiated with the state, and accrued resources. They tried to maintain their visions, politics, and sanity as they dealt with constant crises, violence, and poverty in battered women's lives and sometimes in their own. Here I try to record all the levels of this work.

I hoped to capture the movement's roots partly so that women new to the struggle could understand their histories. With too much work, the first generation has often neglected to transmit its vision, politics, and leadership skills, and this has come back to haunt the movement.

This story is told from the perspective of a socialist feminist who is trying to show the striking accomplishments of a movement and at the same time detail the similarities, differences, and tensions within it. As I did research for this book, visiting shelters and coalitions and speaking at conferences, I learned that I knew less about the battered women's movement than I had originally thought. I discovered that the movement was much more diverse, complex, and rich than I had assumed. In many places feminist activists started the movement, but in other localities former battered women, neighborhood women, or professionals initiated it. Nationally, the movement was begun and sustained largely by feminist leadership, yet its base of support extends far beyond feminist networks. While I try to respectfully record these diverse contributions and the differences among the participants in the movement, I, like all others, am a biased observer. I want to take stands, provoke debate, and accord feminism its rightful place.

Although very limited in scope, non-feminist services have

traditionally existed for battered women. Some professional groups have also been aware of the existence of abused women for years. Religious organizations were sheltering battered women long before the movement mobilized in the 1970s. Closely allied with Al-Anon, programs like Rainbow Retreat in Phoenix and Haven House in Pasadena served battered women who were married to alcoholic men as early as the 1960s. Child abuse reformers and researchers had made the family an arena of public scrutiny, and by 1966 every state except Hawaii had passed a child abuse reporting law.³ However, none of these efforts catalyzed a movement on behalf of battered women. Only an environment in which women were organizing on their own behalf—a feminist political presence—could create and mobilize this new movement. No other explanation adequately accounts for the proliferation of services and reforms in the 1970s. Yet once a movement began, it spurred many groups with varied beliefs and political assumptions to help battered women.

This book is an attempt to provide an overview of the central achievements of and issues within battered women's services and organizing efforts. The first eight chapters examine the roots of the battered women's movement, the founding of shelters and coalitions, and the movement's reform efforts. Chapter nine offers a theory of violence against women in the family. Here I hope to provoke interest in one of the original feminist concerns that began the movement—why are women battered? By exploring the social conditions that maintain and perpetuate battering, I attempt to target ways in which the movement should organize to end the tormenting physical and psychological abuse of women. I hope that theory will help guide the movement's discussion of future practice and directions, the topic of the book's last four chapters.

The final chapters explore the current strategy dilemmas and problems that the feminist part of the movement faces. Just as I feel a responsibility to bolster and praise feminists, I also feel compelled to explore our shortcomings and political weaknesses. The book takes a critical look at issues that divide the movement internally, like racism and homophobia. While working on these later chapters, I was painfully aware that what I wrote could be used against activists or individual shelters. This is not my intention. Rather, I hope to strengthen the movement by encouraging discussion of critical issues.

Caught up in daily survival and the need to build institutions, activists have sometimes lost sight of the political visions that inspired the formation of a movement. In the final chapters of the

book, I argue that shelters need to view themselves simultaneously as services' and as movement organizations. Only by maintaining this tension will the spirit of progressive social change continue to inspire women and help mobilize them for the fight ahead to keep shelter doors open. This book offers a countervailing political ideology through which the radical spirit and experimentation of the movement can be sustained. Without an ideology and a practice based in the hope of liberation for all women, including those who face the greatest discrimination and have the fewest resources, a movement will flounder and move in more conservative directions.

The history of the movement that I preserve here is far from complete. It would take volumes to tell the stories of the hundreds of women's organizations that have emerged in the last few years. Moreover, some estimates suggest that religious, traditional grassroots, and professional social service organizations now provide at least 50% of the services available to battered women. These institutions are clearly underrepresented in this book. Further, my recounting is biased in favor of feminist activity in those states where women organized early. It is also molded by the fact that financial constraints kept me confined to the east coast and the midwest, although conferences and long distance phone calls provided a chance to talk with women from the far west and the south.

The experiences of the battered women's movement offer insights into the commonly chosen feminist organizing activities of fighting for reforms or providing services and illustrate many of the tasks and dilemmas common to what is labeled "single issue organizing." The strengths and weaknesses inherent in operating shelters, hotlines, and safe homes projects for battered women will sound familiar to those involved in rape crisis centers, women's health clinics, and displaced homemaker programs. Just as shelters helped battered women in grave danger, they also allowed feminists to start their own institutions, put forth their views, and gain legitimacy and respect from a much wider community. Yet maintaining large, expensive institutions took a heavy toll on the politics and spirit of many. The battered women's movement suggests some hopeful possibilities for building a movement where diverse groups of women work together at the same time that it illuminates the complexity and difficulty of such an undertaking.

The battered women's movement has never mobilized tens of thousands of people in large demonstrations. In this sense, it is different from other social movements. Yet it offers many valuable

lessons to progressive organizers. Small groups, often ten to thirty people, radically altered the treatment of battered women in their hometowns. Larger networks, bolstered by other feminist, neighborhood, and professional organizations, changed laws and public consciousness. It is clear that the small group organizing activity, so typical of the women's movement, has sometimes radically restructured the power dynamics between the sexes.

As an activist, I have spent the last several years, first part-time and later full-time, gathering information for this book, mainly from other activists. I have interviewed over seventy women and men formally and talked to hundreds more in workshops and meetings. Many activists read continuing drafts of the manuscript, and where I discuss a shelter or coalition in detail, at least one woman has read the section that pertains to her organization's work. Although this book is heavily biased by the stories of identifiable or public movement leaders and founders of programs, I also interviewed the staff and residents at several shelters where I stayed. I talked with board members, former battered women, and women who have left the movement both satisfied and dissatisfied. I tried to interview a diverse group of third world women as well as white women.

I feel an enormous debt to all those who have shared their insights, victories, and hurts so generously with me. Without their help, this book would have been far less, again reminding me of the richness that comes through collective participation. I hope that the book will spur a continuation of our many dialogues and a recognition that the ideas and participants within the movement continue to grow through their interactions with one another.

I write with the benefit of involvement in many of the events I describe and the weakness of being too close to them and sometimes too busy to absorb them. I am aware that my assessments may be premature at times, or may sometimes simplify a complicated reality. If the reader considers them as attempts to encourage dialogue about the movement's past choices and future directions, my intention will be understood. The shifting political realities of the early 1980s make an evaluation of the movement even more difficult and strategies more complicated to delineate.

As I wrote this book, it became increasingly clear that the choices a movement makes, especially in a time of limited radical political activity, are filled with contradictions and are tightly circumscribed by political and financial constraints. As a result of these insights, I have grown more generous toward the battered women's movement. I hope that other activists, exhausted by too

much work, frequent defeats, and financial cutbacks, will share my awe at the movement's accomplishments as well as my belief in the need for gentle yet pointed criticism.

Despite the large odds against the battered women's movement, its achievements have been highly significant. Whatever its shortcomings, the battered women's movement has fought to save women's lives in a way that attempts to respect the dignity and strength of all those involved. Activists and battered women have shown their courage, persistence, and ingenuity in multiple ways, and as a result they have changed many lives unalterably, including my own. I am deeply grateful to the women in this struggle.

PART I

Building a Movement

CHAPTER 1

Before the Movement: The Socially Induced Silence

The Hidden Violence in Women's Lives

Until recently, the millions of American women of all classes and races who are beaten annually had virtually nowhere to go. As late as 1976, New York City, with a population estimated at more than 8 million people, had 1000 beds for homeless men and 45 for homeless women.¹ In Minneapolis-St. Paul, there were only a few beds available before the first battered women's shelter opened in 1974.² A 1973 Los Angeles survey revealed 4000 beds for men and 30 for women and children—none of these 30 beds was for mothers with sons older than 4.³ In various states, social service or religious organizations provided minimal programs or temporary housing for displaced persons, "multi-problem" families, or the wives of alcoholics, but there was no category, "abused women."* Since 1975, the ongoing struggle of the battered women's movement has been to name the hidden and private violence in women's lives, declare it public, and provide safe havens and support.

As battered women's shelters opened in hundreds of towns

* In this book, abused or battered woman will be used interchangeably with battered wife. Because women who are not legally married are also beaten, the legal terms "wife" and "husband" will refer to married and non-married couples, unless specifically noted.

throughout the United States and women declared themselves sisters in a movement to end male violence, a seemingly obvious yet unprecedented challenge was hurled at centuries of male domination. In contrast to just one decade earlier, battered women are no longer invisible. Their stories, retold here, convey the experiences of generations of women. They also offer a painful glimpse into the lives of women, who, in 1982, are still abused and frequently find no help. Although violence against women has now been declared unacceptable, it endures pervasively. By 1981, the 5 New York City battered women's shelters, filled to capacity, turned away 85 out of every 100 callers asking for refuge.⁴

One woman shares with us a story that is horrifying because of the regularity with which women repeat it. Pronounced isolation, commitment to her marriage, and determination to cope mark her life as typical. Married in 1964, she ended her marriage in 1974, two years before the first shelter opened in her hometown.

Even before we were married, there was this feeling that he was right. No matter what he said. There was no violence; you just didn't get him mad.

When we were married, if I didn't agree with what he said, I'd get pushed or told, "You're not thinking right; sit down and think about it." I'd think, "Of course, he's right." When he started drinking the same thing would happen. If I disagreed with him or if I wanted to do something else, I'd get hit. You know, one Father's Day...he didn't want to go to my family. He said, "just tell them you're not going." I said, "I want to go." I got slapped in the face and he said, "now call them and say we're not going." So, of course, I called. I was very scared.

He pushed me and slapped me a lot; I was never badly beaten. Once he ripped two nightgowns off me. He ripped one off and pushed me into the hallway—naked. I got back into the apartment and he ripped off the next. I can't understand why the neighbors never said anything.

Usually, it didn't take much to get me in my place. You'd say to yourself, "I don't want this to continue." So I'd say, "I'm sorry; I made a mistake. I didn't mean to say that. You're right."

We were together ten years. In the beginning, I was pushed once a year. In the last five years, I was in a constant state of worry. My whole life revolved around him and keeping things quiet. I'd make the kids be quiet. I'd say to people, "Please don't call when he is home." I had one friend. I never wanted anyone in the house because I'd never know what he would say or do. When he went to work, everything had to be done. The shopping and the laundry had to be done when he wasn't there so that I could sit and listen to him when he got home. I was on automatic pilot those last five years. I would ask him to leave and get his own apartment and he would blow up. God forbid, I should mention separation or divorce.

I remember when we were first married I called my mother and she

said, "You're married now, you deal with it." I thought it was my fault. I considered it *my* problem. I was afraid everyone would say, "You didn't do a good job so that's what you get. You weren't a good wife." I believed that if I only did better, it would stop. My father never hit my mother. I just said, "I'm doing something wrong." I never thought his violence was right or wrong. I thought that he was crazy. But I also thought that this is where I have to be. I married this person. However he treated me I had to cope with it. My strength was in coping. No one ever knew. I did a good job. I was a really strong person. I was doing what I wanted and I did a good job in protecting myself. I look back and get angry at myself for staying, but I was in a crazy situation and I did a great job with what I had to work with.

I said "no more" when I got punched and had hair pulled out; there were big clumps in my hands. He threw chairs at me. I remember being on the floor screaming. It was a nightmare. It happened over a book we wrote. I say "we," but I wrote it and he took all the credit. I told him that I was rewriting it and he told me to leave, but the kids had to stay. I remember getting hysterical saying, "Where am I going to go? I have nowhere to go." His response was, "You stay here and do what I say," and he attacked.

I ran to my neighbor. She let me in which is amazing. He banged and screamed on her door until the police came twenty minutes later. The neighbor told him, "Get away from my door; you have no right banging on my door." But her daughter kept saying, "Let her out; she doesn't belong here; let her solve it." I knew he was going to kill me and she was literally pushing me out the door.

The police arrived and said, "Did anything happen?" The house was in pieces; chairs were broken everywhere, and my hair was out of my head, hanging on my shoulders, and the cop said, "It looks like nothing happened." Finally, they took him to the hospital.

I decided not to let him back in. He would come and cry and then he'd come and threaten. I couldn't take it. The terror brought me to that decision. I didn't want to please him anymore. You can only live so long being afraid. I was afraid for so many years but then to be terrified on top of that was too much. Up to that point I had the idea that I could control it. If he was yelling or hitting the kids, I could get in front of them and get hit. That was my control. If he started yelling, I could pick out the right thing to say and calm him down, and that was my control. But the last night there was nothing I could do to stop him. I couldn't control him anymore.

I never talked to anyone. I never thought that anyone else got hit. Nobody else had to hang up the phone when her husband came into the house. I was just very alone. There were no movies about battered women. This was my private responsibility. If I had knocked on a neighbor's door for help, it would be like saying, "Listen, I failed." I had the idea that I'm doing this for him. I'm coping; I'm controlling the amount of abuse I'm taking. I must be a good person. The importance I got was what I was doing for him.

When I locked him out, I got support from my family. I just said, "He tried to kill me." They were emotionally helpful. I was on the phone

constantly; I needed to ramble on and on. Financially they were great. Shoes and clothes would just appear.

At first, I was not scared about income; he was working and I was so happy without him. At first he gave us money. Then when I got a Family Court Protection and Support Order, he stopped giving money regularly. Sometimes I would get it and sometimes for weeks I would have no money. I went to welfare and I couldn't get welfare because the court order said I was getting enough money. Welfare said, "Court has to make him pay." They sent me back to court. In the meantime I had nothing. This went back and forth for a year between him and court. It took a year to get welfare.

We were so relieved. If we wanted to go for a walk at 8 p.m., we could go for a walk without having to report in and tell him where we were going. It was such a relief not to get hit. The financial thing...I love to cope. It's been a challenge to get through. I just wanted to be left alone.

But he sometimes still comes around. I call the police. If I hear a noise in the hall, I'm still jittery. I think I'll have this all my life. I'm afraid he'll hit me and be out of control. Thinking about it upsets my stomach.⁵

Brutality is not necessarily confined to hitting, pushing, and pulling out hair. Its extreme, yet not infrequent, forms often leave women severely scarred, physically and emotionally. Terror and intimidation, experienced by all battered women, reach unbearable proportions for some. In the next story, tragedy is faced alone while its cause lies deeply embedded in centuries of male domination. Mary McGuire was accused of trying to have her husband killed in 1976 after five years of abuse. In those years, institutions such as the police not only offered her no help but actually supported her husband's violence. They, not she, bear indictment, yet their actions seemed guileless and their role hidden until the battered women's movement uncovered their complicity in maintaining sexist violence.

I know the horrors of beatings; of being shot at and pistol whipped; of being tied up to watch while my grave was being dug; of having my husband hold a gun to my child's head demanding obedience and threatening to pull the trigger; of trying to prevent my 12 year old daughter from being raped by my husband, while Father laughs and states, "I am the king of this house and can do as I damn well please." I and my children have received many beatings. I have had cigarette burns on my arms, a broken nose, cracked chest and ribs, a concussion, and a cracked pelvic bone. My children were terrorized by their father's attempts to run over my 4 year old son, and by his act of beheading our pet horse. I tried separation but was brought back to the house at gun point. He has told me repeatedly that neither my children or myself would ever be free from him and that he would stop at nothing to destroy us.

And everytime I went to the authorities, they laughed at me stating that they, the law, would have to see my husband kill one of us before they could help. Intolerable isolation, extreme fear and a desperate need for help are realities in my life. Should any human being have to be subjected to this brutality? Where do the solutions to tragic domestic situations lie?

The general public needs to become aware of the problem...the other side of the story needs to be brought out. A woman who is faced with a physically brutal and psychologically tormenting situation actually has no where to go. If she goes to the law enforcement officials, she is usually told that she is the cause of her own problems and that the law is not responsible for settling domestic quarrels. What is the difference then whether she goes to the law or takes hers and her children's lives into her own hands?

At the present time there are a lot of women in correctional facilities because they just couldn't stand any more of this abuse. These women need help now and if they had been able to obtain help some time ago they probably would not have ended up as they have. I am one of those victims. I am now spending time at the OWCC because I had no where to turn. I had gone to the law many times and been turned away. I tried what I believed to be every possible solution but nothing worked. I finally took steps on my own to prevent my children and myself from being killed. I was charged with soliciting, the act of trying to hire someone to kill my husband, and while I serve my time—five years—in the State Penitentiary, my husband is still continuing to harass me and my family. Is it justice that I continue to be punished for my husband's abuse?

Where is the justice that this country is so proud of? Is it justice when the woman ends up in prison, taken from her children, while the man she has been tortured by is still running free?

There are many more stories than just mine. Other women are here on murder charges for either doing away with their husbands or obtaining help to do so. They also could not get anyone to help, so they took the law into their own hands. Sure, we all knew that it was morally or legally wrong but it meant our lives and our children's, or his.⁶

In the 1950s and 1960s, cases of women being killed by abusive husbands were rarely recognized for what they were. Headlines such as "Husband Goes Berserk and Shoots Estranged Wife" masked the reality, and we will never know how many battered women died. Although these are the most dramatic examples of the horror of battering, they reflect the brutal isolation, wasted lives, and private suffering endured by many.

In other cases, family members, friends, or professionals helped battered women change their lives. Or women left their husbands on their own, secretly and courageously planning minute and detailed escape plots. In still other situations, women stayed and made the

best of their impossible burdens.

Current estimates suggest that approximately two million women in the United States are battered annually.⁷ Yet in 1970, there were supposedly few abused women. As late as 1974, the term "battered woman" was not part of the vocabulary. Interviews make it clear that even the founders of battered women's programs were unaware of the magnitude of the problem they had uncovered.

When recognized, battered women and their abusers were labeled as deviant and considered psychiatric cases. Even today, many people do not comprehend the extent of the problem nor the quality of battered women's lives. Both supporters and detractors sometimes suggest that the movement exaggerates the amount of abuse. When activists speak about battered women, even sympathetic audiences continually scrutinize the victim's behavior, moral "failings," or "stupid" reactions, returning repeatedly to the question, "Why do these women stay?"

Examining who battered women are is a first step in understanding both their invisibility before the shelter movement and the judgmental reactions of contemporary observers. In spite of psychiatry's determined efforts to convince us otherwise, battered women are not all the same, nor do they fit into any one personality type; they are as varied as any random group of women in the population. This frightening fact helps explain the readiness with which we distance ourselves from battered women and label them as different.

Detailing and analyzing the violence in battered women's lives is another necessary step in unraveling societal attitudes, especially the tendency to blame the victims of abuse. Many women are beaten for years. Violence often begins or escalates during pregnancy, but it does not stop there. Most battered women experience various kinds of abuse. Slapping—which in itself is capable of badly breaking a jaw—pushing, and shoving are common, and violence often escalates into punching or kicking. An English study of 100 battered women reported the following injuries.

All women had the minimum of bruises caused by a fist, but 59 claimed that they had been kicked and 42 said a weapon had been used in the attack. In 8 cases a belt with a buckle had been used. Lacerations were present at some stage in 44 instances, usually healed at the time of interview but a scar could be shown. In 17 cases attacks had been made with a sharp instrument—knife, razor, or broken bottle. Burns and scalds occurred in 11 instances, usually due to the violence having taken place in the kitchen, with hot water or utensils being thrown or knocked over. Strangulation attempts were made in 19 cases;...⁸

Battered women are often subject to two other forms of abuse—rape and verbal assault. When asked, many women recount that they were forced to have sex with their husbands after a beating. Forced intercourse need not mean a gun was held to their heads; the fear of another beating is an adequate threat. Battered women consistently complain of degrading verbal abuse: "You are the dumbest woman I've ever met;" "You can't do anything right;" "How could I have ever married a pig like you!" Verbal assaults, like physical ones, may go on for hours in a relentless attack on a woman's sense of dignity and self worth and almost always include threats: "I'll cut your throat from one end to another;" "If you try to leave me, you're dead." In one study, all subjects thought they could be killed by their husbands.⁹

Although the details of the assaults are shocking, their meaning lies beyond the deadening statistics documenting the severity and frequency of violence. Violence signifies crossing a boundary in which violation and degradation, previously unacceptable in a loving relationship, are now used as tools of power and coercion. Battering is far more than a single event, even for the woman who is hit once, because it teaches a profound lesson about who controls a relationship and how that control will be exercised.

Battering, whether or not it is premeditated, is purposeful behavior. According to R. Emerson Dobash and Russell Dobash, "the use of physical force against wives should be seen as an attempt on the part of the husband to bring about a desired state of affairs."¹⁰ These authors elaborate on this in their excellent study, *Violence Against Wives*.

The altercations relate primarily to the husband's expectations regarding his wife's domestic work, his possessiveness and sexual jealousy, and allocation of the family resources....When a husband attacks his wife he is either chastising her for challenging his authority or for failing to live up to his expectations or attempting to discourage future unacceptable behavior.¹¹

Self-consciously exercised, violence temporarily brings a man what he wants—his wife acquiesces, placates him, or stops her demands. As a form of terrifying intimidation, violence signifies that the man's way will prevail even when the woman struggles against this imposition. Leaving her in a constantly vigilant state, violence forces a woman to worry about the time, place, or reason for the next attack. As trust is destroyed, life is never quite the same again. Because the basis for intimacy is trust, the entire nature of a