

SOUND OF SILENCE BREAKING:
TOWARD A METATHEORY OF
WIFE ABUSE

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By

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A Thesis

Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies
in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements
for the Degree
Master of Arts

McMaster University

December, 1981

MASTER OF ARTS (1981)
(Sociology)

McMASTER UNIVERSITY
Hamilton, Ontario

TITLE: The Sound of Silence Breaking:
 Toward a Metatheory of Wife Abuse

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NUMBER OF PAGES: x, 253

Abstract

This work represents an attempt to understand wife abuse. In an extensive review, the literature is grouped into three general divisions, depending on the attributed locus of causality: individual, family, or a broader social system. Criticisms fall into one of three general orientations, i.e. methodological, ideological or contextual.

Wife abuse, a widespread phenomenon with a high degree of historical and contemporary legitimacy, is conceptualized in terms of violence directed against women qua women and against women qua wives. In the former context, the existential construct of Woman-as-Other focuses on the dominance/subordination relations that exist between husbands and wives/men and women. It is argued that these are maintained through actual, threatened or implicit violence which keeps women subservient to and/or dependent on men. Literature dealing with the dehumanization inherent in war atrocities illuminates the processes whereby women are victimized by men.

The wife's role as domestic labourer is the central focus for the examination of violence against women qua wives. It is argued that (actual or potential) wife abuse, insofar as it is perceived as legitimate, supports the acceptance by the population of the legitimacy of force as the underpinning of the authority of the State. Further, wife abuse is seen as one aspect of the husband's expectations of the wife's role as tension manager. The combination of the fiscal crisis of the State together with the logical consistency of wife abuse with the needs of capital, paves the way towards a reprivatization of the phe-

nomenon.

The theory requires empirical verification. Investigation is needed into the relationship between women's economic power and men's physical use of force. Measures are required for identifying and studying psychological abuse. A comprehensive historical and cross-cultural investigation is recommended.

Acknowledgements

This thesis has been a product of both my academic training and my personal history: insofar as the former has thrown certain experiences in the latter into sharp relief, the production process has been painful. I am also very aware of the women who are the "front lines" in the day-to-day confrontation with wife abuse - most important of whom are, of course, the victims themselves. While this work was in process, the Hamilton newspaper carried a report of a woman who, having previously charged her husband with assault causing bodily harm, was subsequently beaten to death. Her husband has been charged. While this work cannot affect that woman, it is to be hoped that the continued investigation of the topic at both the theoretical and empirical levels will eventually lead to an alleviation of some of the pain battered women must endure.

Many people have been helpful and supportive over the past months, and I am grateful for their assistance and their presence. In particular, I appreciate the efforts of my supervisor, Professor Vivienne Walters, who constantly challenged me to push my thinking beyond the stage at which I might have been content to rest. Her perceptive comments and encouragement are in large measure what motivated me to continue in the "difficult" periods. Professor Meg Luxton's interest in and concern for both the process and product

of my work was invaluable. I am also indebted to Professor Carl Cuneo for his detailed and constructive criticism and the trouble he took to help me meet a largely self-imposed deadline.

Professor Rebecca Dobash of the University of Stirling kindly read and offered comments on an early draft of Chapter 6. I have written many letters to other researchers in the field and have consistently received prompt, detailed and helpful replies. Particular mention here must be made of Professor Constance Backhouse, Linda MacLeod and Betsy Warrior.

The stimulation and support I gain from my friends Berkeley Kaite and Bula Bhadra has been a very special perquisite of the past months, and integral to the production of this thesis. I am grateful to my father, whose example has more than once given me courage to risk new ventures and new ideas. To Colin Cramm, who has been a constant source of support and a shoulder to cry on, I can only say, "thank you".

Finally, it is to Andrea Schwartz that this work is dedicated.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

When the conception of change is beyond the limits of the possible, there are no words to articulate discontent so it is sometimes held not to exist. This mistaken belief arises because we can only grasp silence in the moment in which it is breaking. The sound of silence breaking makes us understand what we could not hear before.

Wife abuse - a crime that takes place for the most part behind closed doors and with the tacit acceptance of many - was until recently - occasionally heard but not discussed. Today, however, in the face of post facto evidence (the battered women themselves) and the activities of the - largely - feminist activists and researchers who are focussing on the problem, private abuse has been forced on public attention.² However, the recognition of a phenomenon as fact does not determine the terms in which it is explained.

Over twenty years ago, C. Wright Mills suggested a formulation which is relevant today: a phenomenon can be understood as a "personal trouble" or a "public issue", i.e. as something which can be explained from within the locus of the private milieu or, alternatively, as something which must be understood as a public matter and hence as something which is inherently political.³ While feminists have explicitly sought to extrapolate from personal experience to the level of the political, mainstream social science has been loathe

to make this leap, often under the explicit dictum of "value neutrality".

When one attempts to explore the explanations offered for the abuse of wives at the hands of their husbands, it becomes apparent that a continuum exists which ranges from purely personal to extremely political analyses. The ways in which the phenomenon of wife abuse has been problematized are interesting in their own right: is it seen as a natural manifestation of masculine aggression? a rightful expression of male domination in families? an outgrowth of familial conflict which happens to follow the male/female dimension? a piece in a massive social system? a physical statement of individual and cultural misogyny? It would be possible to explore these orientations in their social and historical specificity as a discrete research project..

The purpose of this work, however, is to seek an understanding of wife abuse in contemporary western society. Thus, it is essential to understand what has gone before and to use such categories as emerge out of the analyses to help bring order to the field. Such categorization, however, is not seen as an end, but rather as a means. Thus, this thesis traces the development of wife abuse from a personal trouble to a public issue, as a conceptual tool to facilitate the development of an adequate theoretical framework within which the phenomenon can be understood.

The Definition of Wife Abuse

For the purposes of this research, wife abuse is defined as forceful physical and/or psychological behaviour by a man, which results

in the repeated abrogation of the rights or wishes of the woman to whom he is married, or with whom he lives and/or has a "love" relationship, and which on more than one occasion causes the same woman physical and/or psychological injury or pain.⁴

This definition is deliberately broad, in that it is not sufficient to delimit wife abuse in terms of numbers of stitches required, bruises incurred or calls to the police. Women are abused in a variety of ways, not all of which are immediately visible. For example, the man who belittles his wife to the point that she feels she has no ability to have an impact on her environment, or who repeatedly undermines her self confidence until she develops agoraphobia, has abused her, although this might not be quantifiable except in a gross manner and on a post facto basis.

The definition refers to the "rights or wishes of the woman". Wife abuse, as it is conceptualized here, forms a constellation which truncates the woman's existence. Her rights (and her wishes) are historically and culturally specific, though I would argue that everyone has the moral right to be free from physical abuse. However, locking a woman out of her home because she came home late would represent an abrogation of the rights of the contemporary Canadian woman and, as part of a constellation of behaviours which include the infliction of pain and/or injury, would, by this definition, be a form of wife abuse. It is not possible to have wife abuse without the abrogation of the rights or wishes of the woman; it is, however, possible to have the abrogation of her rights or wishes without abuse. By including the clause about rights, one is able to identify as abusive

situations wherein women do not necessarily acknowledge injury or recognize pain. Thus, this could serve as an indicator of abusive situations wherein no other indicators are visible. This proviso also acknowledges that there is more than physical injury and pain involved in wife abuse.

Further, the definition is not restricted to those who share a legal marital relationship - wife abuse is understood as encompassing those who live together "without benefit of clergy" and can also be extended to those heterosexual couples who are "going together" or who consider themselves as committed to one another but live separately. Key here is the male/female relationship which, in contemporary western society, is usually established along at least tacit lines of male dominance and female subordination, but which need not be legitimated by matrimony. Violence in homosexual relationships would be included insofar as the couple took traditional heterosexual marital roles to structure their interaction. While throughout the work, abusive situations will be assumed to occur within the confines of the family, this should be understood as a way of dealing with a particular dominance/subordination hierarchy, which is most clearly identified in the familial milieu.

A final qualifier in my definition as offered, is the restriction to "on more than one occasion". The purpose of this restriction is to exclude the genuine accident. Thus, the man who accidentally strikes his wife with a ladder which he is carrying does not necessarily commit wife abuse. However, it is acknowledged that one abusive incident can be sufficient to establish dominance and this is covered

by the extension of my definition to the psychological as well as the physical realm. Thus, if the husband hits his wife with the ladder, he does not necessarily commit wife abuse. However, if he later threatens the woman with a repetition of the event, or if he behaves in such a way that she believes it might re-occur, the incident would become part of a pattern of abuse.

It is recognized that, for certain empirical studies, a more quantifiable definition could be required. However, in that the concern here is the development of a general theoretical understanding of wife abuse, it is argued that the broad definition is essential.

The Scope of the Problem

Because wife abuse does happen within the confines of the family and/or the private relationship of a heterosexual couple, much of what occurs does not come to public attention. Therefore, figures which offer estimates of the incidence of the phenomenon are at best questionable. Estimates are based on numbers of women who contact transition houses, on police and emergency room data, and on results of research projects, but they tend to be hedged with the recognition that the norms of privacy surrounding the nuclear family, together with the tacit acceptance of wife abuse as a mode of familial interaction, severely truncate the validity of the statistics.

Using crude measures, Linda MacLeod estimated that every year one in ten Canadian women who are married or in a relationship with a live-in lover are battered.⁵ However, even if one sticks to "hard

facts", it is noteworthy that in 1978 alone almost 20,000 divorce applications (of 71,714) in Canada included physical cruelty in their grounds, and in the same year between forty and fifty thousand women in Canada suffered sufficient physical and mental abuse to seek outside help in the form of divorce proceedings or aid from a transition house.⁶

Lenore Walker, a psychologist, estimates that one out of every two women will be in a battering relationship at some point in her life, if we allow a broad definition of battering which includes both physical and psychological abuse.⁷

There is a debate in the literature as to whether or not wife abuse is the most prevalent form of violence in families.⁸ However, it is widely acknowledged that women are being abused. Some examples from more limited populations will help make this real:

- * Women's Habitat in Etobicoke, Ontario, opened in November, 1978, and was filled to capacity within one week, mainly with assaulted women and their children.⁹
- * A survey of social, medical and legal services in Thunder Bay, Ontario, found that in a city of about 119,000 people the number of assaulted women who sought help in 1978 was 902.¹⁰
- * In a nationally representative sample of 1,146 American couples, Gelles determined that one in six couples had at least one violent episode during 1975, and 28% had experienced a violent episode at least once in their marriage.¹¹

- * "Of all female victims of homicide in Canada between 1961-74 60% are killed in the context of a domestic relationship; this is more than double the proportion (26.8%) of male victims", according to Statistics Canada.¹²
- * Of the female victims of homicide in Canada in 1979 who were killed by a man with whom they had a domestic relationship, 37.6% (47) were either beaten or strangled to death.¹³
- * Of 107 reported murders in immediate families in Canada in 1975, the wife was killed by the husband in 49 cases, but the husband was killed by the wife in only eight.¹⁴
- * One researcher has noted that ten to thirty percent of all police calls in Canada pertain to family disputes (second only to motor vehicle accidents), and estimated that there were 50,000 battered wives living in Metropolitan Toronto alone in 1980. Wifebeating, according to Benjamin Schlesinger, is "a common national pastime".¹⁵

Wife battering is frequently severe. In addition to bruises, one researcher noted of an American sample of 100 battered women:

Forty-four had also received lacerations of which 17 were due to attack with a sharp instrument such as a bottle, knife or razor. Twenty-six had received fractures of nose, teeth or ribs and eight had fractures of other bones, ranging from fingers and arms to jaw and skull. Two had their jaws dislocated and two others had similar injuries to the shoulder. There was evidence of retinal damage in two women and one had epilepsy as a result of her injuries.

In 19 cases there were allegations that strangulation attempts had been made. Burns and scalds occurred in eleven and bites in seven cases. All claimed that kicking was a regular feature. In 42 cases, a weapon was used, usually the first available object, but in 15 cases this was the same object each time, eight being a belt with a buckle.¹⁶

Walker reported that the most common broken bones were in the arms of women who had raised their arms to defend themselves.¹⁷ In Scotland, Dobash and Dobash reported that nearly 80% of the 109 women they interviewed reported consulting a doctor at least once during their marriage for injuries resulting from attacks, while many noted that they had required but were prevented by their husbands from seeking medical attention.¹⁸ Dobash and Dobash noted:

The women we interviewed . . . suffered serious woundings, innumerable bloodied noses, fractured teeth and bones, concussions, miscarriages and severe internal injuries that often resulted in permanent scars, disfigurement and sometimes persistent poor health.

Physical injuries are often coupled with serious emotional distress. Many women are chronically emotionally upset and/or depressed about the attacks and the prospects of the next one. For some women the emotional distress is so severe that medication and even hospitalization become necessary.¹⁹

While there are few data documenting cases of psychological abuse per se, it is reasonable to assume that this is a concomitant of the physical dimension. Further, as Walker observes, based on her research with (primarily middle class) American women:

Most of the women describe incidents involving psychological humiliation and verbal harassment as their worst battering experiences, whether or not they had been physically abused. Furthermore, the threat of physical violence was always present: each believed the batterer was capable of killing her or himself.²⁰

Wife abuse is real; wife abuse is severe. How can we understand it?

Towards a Metatheory of Wife Abuse: Methodology and Outline

When an extensive review was made of the literature, I perceived a variety of approaches to the phenomenon of wife abuse, ranging from its being perceived as a personal trouble to its presentation as a political issue. Material was located through an extensive library search conducted between January and April of 1981, with additional material being incorporated as it came to hand or was drawn to my attention during the subsequent months.

The criterion for inclusion in the analysis lay in the requirement that the book or article address, either explicitly or implicitly, the cause of wife abuse in contemporary Western society. Canadian, British and American material was reviewed. Because my focus was on seeking an understanding of the phenomenon of wife abuse, I devoted little attention to literature specifically oriented towards "service delivery", i.e. material prepared for and/or by social workers or others concerned solely with the direct implementation of therapy or aid for battered women.²¹ Also considered as beyond the boundaries of this work was the literature which critiques the legislation in various jurisdictions²² or discusses various methods of police intervention in domestic dispute.²³ Each of these neglected areas would make an excellent focus for a comprehensive analysis of its conceptualization of the problem and the subsequent effect on service delivery and intervention.

Implicit in my analysis was the conviction that the situation of women at both the individual and the societal levels can only be understood by considering a broad context. Wife abuse is violence directed against women both as females and as wives. In order to

understand that violence, both dimensions must be considered. Thus, I have consistently evaluated the literature according to whether it reflected an awareness of the broader context in which wife abuse is embedded, including the domination/subordination hierarchy which characterizes male/female relationships in contemporary Canadian society and the social and economic factors which affect and/or determine the structure and location of the family unit in the same milieu.

I have divided the literature so that it presents a progression from a level in which the smallest possible unit of analysis (the individual's psychology or physiology) is considered, through to the level of the family as a multi-member interacting unit, to systemic analyses which incorporate a broader range of factors, i.e. which situate wife abuse within a broader social, political or economic framework. Because their analysis occupies half this work, it is important to discuss in more detail the three levels at which I have located the perspectives under review.

(a) The Individual as Locus of Analysis: This level includes theories which ultimately locate the "cause" or explanation of wife abuse in terms of individual biology or psychopathology. In general the individual is both the beginning and the end of the analysis, i.e. neither the biology nor the psychopathology is understood as conditioned by broader social or cultural features. Thus, if a husband beat his wife, the phenomenon would be explained by either his "natural male aggression" or mental instability (often the woman's). Aggression would not, for example, be seen as a result of displaced frustrations generated in the workplace. While, as will be noted in what follows, a number of pers-

pectives have implicit biological or psychological roots, only those which make explicitly individualistic analyses are included in this section.

(b) The Family as an Interacting Unit: This level understands wife abuse as one aspect of familial interaction. The boundaries of the family are either ignored or are considered to be relatively impermeable, such that behaviours within the family can be understood without going outside for explanations. In their more sophisticated manifestations,²⁴ analyses at this level do acknowledge the interplay of familial and societal forces, but the emphasis is on the primacy of the former within the latter.

(c) Explanations Which Situate Wife Abuse within a Broader Social, Political and/or Economic System: While families are acknowledged as the (usual) site of wife abuse, explanations which fall into this level acknowledge the importance of structural variables and, in contrast to the former level, emphasize the primacy of social, cultural and/or economic rather than familial forces in an understanding of wife abuse. Where families are considered, their boundaries are viewed as permeable.

Throughout the work, I have assumed an interrelationship between social research and political issues. As Dobash and Dobash note:

Inherent in every piece of social research are messages about the nature of the phenomenon and the individuals under study. Some of these messages reiterate and support the status quo while others challenge it and offer alternatives constituting fundamental change.²⁵

This is perhaps especially salient in the investigation of wife abuse, where studies have tended to be particularly oriented to the amelioration, resolution or removal of this "social problem".²⁶ Part of the organizational logic of my analysis stems from an assessment of the level on which the solutions of the various theoretical approaches are articulated - i.e. the level of the individual, the family unit or the broader social system. Thus, one question I ask of the literature is, "What policy implications or 'solutions' to the problem of wife abuse follow from this theory?"

It is acknowledged that there is a degree of arbitrariness in the location of a given perspective within one of these three levels. However, in cases where a choice was required, the question, "What causes wife abuse?" was asked of the perspective and the most fundamental answer taken as a guide. While it would be possible to argue that "perspective A" might be better located in another level, I would suggest that this neglects the key point, i.e. that most explanations for wife abuse tend to be either reductionistic, or at the other extreme, represent a form of abstracted empiricism which fails to offer concrete guidelines for the understanding (let alone the amelioration) of a social problem.

In terms of the organization of the work, Part One deals with the existing body of literature on wife abuse, divided into the three levels which have been identified. Chapter Two presents a review of those theories which posit the individual as locus of analysis. Specifically, I discuss biological bases for aggression as offered in the works

of ethologists and sociobiologists such as Lorenz and Wilson, and explanations which suggest that wife abuse is the result of individual psychopathology.

Chapter Three deals with the family as an interacting unit, specifically with functionalist, conflict and social learning theories as applied to wife abuse. By "functionalist" theories, I refer to the work of sociologist Talcott Parsons and his followers who, while dealing at the level of "society" and viewing the family as an interactive small group, will be argued to be forced by the logic of their own analysis to look at wife abuse in terms that are ultimately psychological. Under the rubric of "conflict" theories, I discuss the concept of violence as a cathartic experience wherein repressed aggression is released within the familial environment, and the notion of violence as the "ultimate resource" brought to bear when all other resources have been exhausted. Two specific examples are discussed as representative of the application of social learning theory to the phenomenon of wife abuse: the "cycle of violence" theory offered by Suzanne Steinmetz and Lorene Walker's conceptualization of the predicament of the abused wife as one of "learned helplessness".

In Chapter Four, "systemic" explanations of wife abuse are divided into subcategories. The first, the subculture of violence hypothesis, suggests that wife abuse is a cultural product. In "general systems theory", Murray Straus and his colleagues present wife abuse as one element of the closed system of the human condition in contemporary western society. Feminist theories, operating out of an awareness of women's oppression, variously attribute the explanation for

wife abuse to a sexist and/or misogynist social and political system, and political economic analyses (the final category isolated) locate the phenomenon in terms of the division of labour.

Part Two represents an attempt to move beyond these categories towards an alternative theoretical formulation, largely informed by feminist and political economic analyses. I reiterate the fact that it is violence against women/wives that is under consideration and argue that certain factors have more relevance than others. By focusing on the woman who is being abused, an analysis is developed which situates an understanding of wife abuse within the two dimensions of the phenomenon: violence against women and violence against wives: Woman-as-Other as an object of violence and wives as domestic laborers in the same capacity. In other words, I suggest that the same empirical phenomenon, i.e. the abuse of a woman by her husband, must be understood both in the context of violence against women qua women and violence against women qua wives. In the former context, wife abuse must be considered in its historical specificity: when a husband abuses his wife, is he doing something that is culturally legitimated? To what extent is male violence against women a prevalent feature of the social formation? In the latter context, wife abuse in contemporary western society must be understood as that manifestation of domestic violence which is the most systematic, severe and structurally supported.

In order to assess both contexts, I argue that wife abuse today is best understood in terms of three threads, the first of which addresses the context of violence against women qua women, the second and third the context of violence against women qua wives. In Chapter

Five I discuss the first context by adopting Simone de Beauvoir's conceptualization of Woman-as-Other²⁷ and arguing that the internal logic of this construct illuminates the processes whereby men render women both logical and appropriate victims of violence. This ideological formulation, however, has no meaning unless it is read in a particular historical juncture, and it is this imperative which links this thread with the more explicitly materialist conceptualizations around the role of women in contemporary families which are the foci of Chapter Six.²⁸

In Chapter Six, the second and third threads focus on the sexual divisions of labour as they are articulated in terms of women's role in the contemporary western family - and this entails a discussion of her responsibilities as domestic labourer, suggesting wife abuse can be understood as attempted control over the woman's labour process and product. Further, in her capacity as "tension manager" within the family, abuse is argued to be one manifestation of both male and societal tension, for which the wife is the "appropriate" focus.

Chapter Seven, the concluding chapter of the thesis, presents a summary and discussion of the arguments, hypothesizes about the future of wife abuse as a social problem, and offers suggestions for further research.

Significance of This Work

The significance of this analysis is two-fold. In the first place, although a number of scholars have presented partial reviews of the literature on wife abuse,²⁹ and although researchers have tended

to present a more or less extensive review before proceeding to their own findings and conclusions,³⁰ there has not to date been a thorough review and critique of the North American and British material.

This thesis attempts to fill this gap.

Secondly, theoretical work in the area of wife abuse has been thin. This work represents an attempt to articulate a theoretical formulation which offers a means of understanding the phenomenon both in the context of violence against women and of women as wives-and-mothers in their families. Although the insights about Woman-as-Other or women as domestic labourers are not new, the systematic presentation of the dualistic approach to the phenomenon has not been offered to this point. In that I contend it is vital to consider both the victimization of women qua women and of women qua wives, understanding this dialectic is an essential precondition to the realistic explanation of wife abuse. It is my hope that this work will stimulate debate which will move towards this synthesis.

Ultimately, this work has been possible because of the effort of those who are beginning to penetrate the taboo around wife abuse. My intent is to contribute to the understanding of that which could not be heard before. This thesis is an attempt to articulate the sound of silence breaking.

Footnotes to Chapter One

1 S. Rowbotham, Woman's Consciousness, Man's World (Harmondsworth, 1973), 29-30.

2 R. E. and R. P. Dobash, Violence Against Wives: A Case Against the Patriarchy (New York, 1979), 13.

3 C. W. Mills, The Sociological Imagination (London, 1959), especially p. 9.

4 The concept of "intention" has been deliberately omitted from the definition, although at first glance it might seem useful to consider wife abuse from the standpoint of whether or not the man intended to do harm. Focussing on the man's intention would have several consequences: in that it could only be identified through post facto interviews with the men themselves, opportunity would be provided for the man to reinterpret his actions in the light of their consequences and would allow the researcher to omit instances where the "abuse" arose as a consequence of differential male/female power but was taken as a matter of course by the man. Focussing on "intention" would make an already complex subject more difficult to conceptualize and/or operationalize. However, this is an area to which more research attention should be directed.

5 L. MacLeod, Wife Abuse in Canada: The Vicious Circle (Ottawa, 1980), 21.

6 MacLeod, p. 20.

7 L. Walker, The Battered Woman (New York, 1979).

8 Dobash and Dobash, Violence; cf. S. Steinmetz, "Wifebeating, Husband Beating - A Comparison of the Use of Physical Violence Between Spouses to Resolve Marital Fights", pp 63-72 in M. Roy (ed.) Battered Women: A Psychosociological Study of Domestic Violence (New York, 1977). See also Chapter Three of this work.

9 Support Services for Assaulted Women, Wife Assault in Canada (Toronto, 1980).

10 Support Services for Assaulted Women,

11 R. Gelles, "Research Findings and Implications from a National Study on Domestic Violence", pp 26-43 in V. D'Oyley (ed.) Domestic Violence: Issues and Dynamics (Toronto, 1978), 32..

- 12 Statistics Canada, Homicide in Canada: A Statistical Synopsis (Ottawa, 1976).
- 13 Statistics Canada, Homicide Statistics (Ottawa, 1980).
- 14 MacLeod, p. 10.
- 15 B. Schlesinger, 'Abused Wives: Canada's Silent Screemers', Canada's Mental Health 28:2 (1980), 18-20.
- 16 J. J. Gayford, 1978, cited in MacLeod, p. 10.
- 17 Walker, 1979.
- 18 Dobash and Dobash, Violence Against Wives, 110-112.
- 19 Dobash and Dobash, p. 111.
- 20 Walker, p. xv. A theoretical understanding of wife abuse must incorporate both the physical and the psychological levels. However, with this must go the acknowledgement that much of the material to be considered accounts for only the former. What are required are studies which will reflect the broader scope. Until such time as these are available, however, we must work with data that are available and bear their limitations in mind. Perhaps a fruitful area would be the extension of wife abuse research into the study of women who have been identified as having "psychiatric disorders", notably those who take tranquillizers or who "abuse" alcohol. Recent feminist research on pornography such as that undertaken by Susan Griffin discusses the implications of having pornography in the home and suggests this may lead to women having feelings of self-devaluation and confusion as well as a possible connection between woman battering and the reading of violent pornography by men. These insights offer possible areas for fruitful research.
- 21 J. G. Higgins, 'Social Services for Abused Wives', Social Casework 59:5 (1978), 266-71, is an example.
- 22 M. J. Cook, 'Battered Wives and the Law', Law Society Gazette 73:6 (1976), 123ff; S. E. Eisenberg and P. Micklow, 'The Assaulted Wife: 'Catch 22' Revisited', Women's Rights Law Reporter 5:3-4 (1976); D. Owens, 'Battered Wives: Some Social and Legal Problems', British Journal of Law and Society 2 (1975), 201-211, provide examples of this type of critique.
- 23 See, for example, J. M. Driscoll et al., 'Training Police in Family Crisis Intervention', Journal of Applied Behavioural Sciences 9:0, 62-68; J. Epstein, 'Police Intervention in Family Violence' in V. D'Oyley, Domestic Violence, (1978); P. Jaffe et al., 'The Responsibility of the Police in Domes-

tic Violence" in V. D'Oyley, Domestic Violence (1978). A forthcoming M.A. thesis by Kim Lister of the McMaster Sociology Department will focus on this area.

- 24 The work of Suzanne Steinmetz and Lenore Walker are examples.
- 25 R. E. Dobash and R. P. Dobash, "Social Science and Social Action: The Case of Wife Beating", Journal of Family Issues (December, 1981, forthcoming). I am indebted to Rebecca Dobash for making this available to me in manuscript form. This also applies to many of the other papers by Rebecca and Russell Dobash, in that they were kindly made available to me by the authors.
- 26 M. D. Fields and R. M. Kirschner, "Battered Women are Still in Need", Victimology 3:1-2 (1977-78), 216-221, offer a discussion of the policy effects of Suzanne Steinmetz's research on battered husbands. See also Dobash and Dobash, Violence Against Wives, 1979; Gelles, 1978; J. R. Lion, "Clinical Aspects of Wifebattering" in M. Roy, Battered Women, 1977; MacLeod, 1980; E. Pizzey, Scream Silently or the Neighbours Will Hear (London, 1974); J. Sprey, "The Family as a System in Conflict", Journal of Marriage and the Family 31 (1969), 699-706; M. Straus, "A Sociological Perspective on the Causes of Family Violence", in M. R. Green (ed.) Violence and the Family (Boulder, Colorado, 1980) and R. N. Whitehurst, "Alternative Family Structures and Violence-Reduction" in Steinmetz and Straus (eds.) Violence in the Family (New York, 1974), for examples of recommendations arising from a variety of theoretical and empirical analyses. See also Dobash and Dobash, "Social Science and Social Action" (1981) for a discussion of the need for "action oriented" rather than "ivory-tower" research. At this point it should also be acknowledged that my work is informed by a personal bias which holds that physical violence is an absolutely inappropriate form of human interaction, except in cases of physical self defense.
- 27 Simone de Beauvoir, The Second Sex (New York, 1961).
- 28 The understanding of materialism which informs this work is drawn from the writings of Kuhn and Wolpe, where they argue:

As far as an analysis of the position of women is concerned, the materialist would locate that position in terms of the relations of production and reproduction in various moments in history. In doing this, one of its central concerns would be with the determinate character of the sexual division of labour and the implications of this for power relations between men and women at different conjunctures.

(A. Kuhn and A. M. Wolpe, "Feminism and Materialism", in Kuhn and Wolpe, Feminism and Materialism: Women and Modes of Production (London, 1978), 7.)

29

See, for example, M. H. Lystad, "Violence at Home: A Review of the Literature", American Journal of Orthopsychiatry 45:3 (1975), 328-345; J. J. Sweet and P. A. Resnick, "Maltreatment of Children", Journal of Social Issues 35:2 (1979), 40-59.

30

See, for example, Suzanne Steinmetz, The Cycle of Violence (New York, 1977) and Dobash and Dobash, Violence Against Wives (1979).

PART ONE:

A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

CHAPTER TWO

EXPLANATIONS OF WIFE ABUSE

WHICH POSIT THE INDIVIDUAL AS LOCUS OF ANALYSIS:

"WHO KNOWS WHAT EVIL LURKS..."

Introduction

"Who knows what evil lurks in the hearts of men . . .
the Shadow knows . . . " 1

This chapter reviews theories which seek out the "evil in the hearts of men" - specifically, explanations of wife abuse which look to the individual as the locus within which answers can be located. In the first part, theories predicated on the biological bases of aggression are explored. In this "original sin" approach, reference to wife abuse tend to be implicit rather than explicit, although occasional direct references to the phenomenon are encountered.² As will be argued, the implications of theories which suggest that male violence (and concomitantly, female passivity) is biologically ordained are that the gender hierarchy and its ultimate basis in violence, is also biologically determined. "Solutions" logically take the form of legal and/or moral constraints, counsel to female stoicism, surgical manipulation or genetic engineering. Ultimately, however, arguments rooted in biology are seen to be "red herrings" which negate the systematic nature of wife abuse except insofar as they invest the

aggression with an aura of inevitability.

The second part of the chapter moves from genes to psyche, to investigate explanations of wife abuse which are rooted in individual psychopathology, usually of the victimized woman. Women are seen to be blamed either as neurotic precipitators of the violence directed against them or as emasculative mothers of violent men. The religious metaphor is repeated here also, as psychodynamic theories which blame the victim of wife abuse are argued to be articulated in the form of a moral judgement - in her failing in her job as (docile, compliant) wife, the woman has suffered a moral lapse. She has sinned against the institution of male dominance as articulated in the family. And in the religion of psychiatry, the sinner must atone for her own sins.

In general, it will be concluded that both biologically-based explanations of male violence and psychodynamic theories of wife abuse reinforce the male/female dominance hierarchy and serve as a justification of the phenomenon they purport to explicate.

Theories Predicated on the Biological Bases
of Aggression: The Mark of Cain . . .

In a world in which hostility and aggression seem to be a part of every man's nature, in which individual and group violence seem to constitute the incontrovertible evidence of the mark of Cain that every man carries within him, it is very gratifying to be told that this is indeed so.³

Bearing in mind the focus of this work - seeking an explanation for and understanding of wife abuse - the most basic level of explanation is the biological. If it can be shown that humans are aggressive by instinct, and especially if it can be proven that males are by nature aggressive and females passive (or at the very least that males are more aggressive than females), a biological basis for gender hierarchy rooted in sex-linked aggression can be posited. If men are by nature "aggressive", wife abuse becomes an extreme case of "doing what comes naturally", and the suggestions for intervention which would arise out of this could include legal and moral constraints on the men or injunctions of passivity and/or stoicism for the women.⁴

The material reviewed in this section deals with the debate over the biological nature of gender-linked aggression and its implications for wife abuse. While much of the material deals with wife abuse only implicitly, I contend this is a key section which, given contemporary emphases in the area, deserves detailed consideration.

Studies of animal aggression are, in biologically-based theories, generalized to humans through evolutionary reasoning.⁵ Those who support this theory, currently articulated as "sociobiology" but

reminiscent in many ways of the early "social Darwinism"⁶ vary in the degree to which they claim that humans are analogous to other species in their behaviour and the sophistication with which they frame their arguments. Wilson, the "father" of sociobiology in its current incarnation, claims that he has gone beyond ideology, value judgements, and the like in the interpretation of human behaviour and reached that which is essential - the animal that is human.

In its most pristine form, sociobiology argues that aggression is innate to humans, just as it is to other species, in that it maximizes our evolutionary potential. Stating that aggression is an instinct, Lorenz argues:

. . . it helps just as much as any other [instinct] to ensure the survival of the individual and the species.⁷

Aggression, in humans as in other animals, is generally conceived as rooted in two innate forms of behaviour: hierarchy and territoriality.⁸ Hierarchy develops because it is optimal for group survival; territoriality for the same reason. Behind this is the understanding that the "behaviour patterns of all living systems are adaptive in an evolutionary sense".⁹ Van den Berghe states the position clearly:

. . . there is no question that we are biologically predisposed to be aggressive. The theory that man is by nature gentle and is made nasty through a vicious social system is wrong. If anything, the reverse is true: through life in society we sometimes learn to suppress the most damaging aspects of our aggressiveness.¹⁰

The linkage of aggressiveness with hierarchy and territoriality leads to the observation of what Van den Berghe terms the "sex-linked" nature of aggression. This observation is not unique:

Male sexuality, because of the primitive necessity of pursuit and penetration, does contain an important element of aggressiveness; an element which is both recognized, and responded to by the female who yields and submits.¹¹

So says Anthony Storr. Freedman makes a similar statement:

It is apparently imperative for the male to feel superior to the female - or at least unafraid - for continuously successful copulations, and it may well be for this reason that males everywhere tend to demean women.¹²

Human males are biologically predisposed, to a greater extent than human females, towards aggression, according to the biologically-based explanations. Dominance hierarchies are inherent in human organization. Males dominate females, as a consequence of their greater aggressiveness. Males are biologically destined to dominate females, and rightly so:

. . . for the male to be relatively more dominant and the female less so makes both for the stability of the family and also for sexual happiness between the couple.¹³

Van den Berghe makes a more elementary point:

The biological basis of the age and sex hierarchy within the family is . . . obvious: sheer brute strength is by far the best single predictor of who is dominant over whom.¹⁴

The realization of the possibility of violence in human (especially male) behaviour can be averted through moral constraints,¹⁵ socialization,¹⁶ medical intervention in the form of drugs or surgery,¹⁷ or, in the case of wives, accommodation to the husband's wishes.¹⁸ The possibility of violence can, however, only be eliminated through Draconian measures.

Biological reductionism can be criticized on a number of grounds -- there appears to be a hot debate waging on the subject.¹⁹

In its more simplistic formulations, the tautology inherent in the logic is clear. For example, Van den Berghe argues that male aggressiveness is the cause of male aggression:

If males were not biologically more predisposed toward aggression, would it not be an extraordinary coincidence that they turn out to be that way not only in all human societies, but in the vast majority of primate and other mammalian species as well.²⁰

It is questionable indeed whether or not men are more aggressive than women in "all human societies."²¹ Van den Berghe also ignores the aggressive behaviour of female animals, generally in defense of their young - defending (it could be argued from within the logic of sociobiology itself) their position in the hierarchy and the territory which is under their jurisdiction. The fact that this logically consistent explanation does not appear provides justification for the charge of "sexism" to be levied against sociobiology, a paradigm which claims to represent value neutrality and objectivity.

However, more fundamentally, it is debatable whether human behaviour can be reduced to its biological bases. Peter and Petryszak, presenting a "biosocial" rather than a "sociobiological" perspective, suggest that human behaviour is an "emergent product of nature, culture and the environment".²² Rose phrases a similar point somewhat differently:

. . . it is the biological and social nature of humanity to transform itself, reach beyond itself constantly: what seems fixed or constant is so only in the historical moment which itself is always in flux.²³

Aggression may be essential for survival, but destructiveness and violence need not be.²⁴

Lorenz, Wilson et al. have been castigated for presenting a simplistic view of biology, misrepresenting the facts, and stretching

them to fit the human paradigm.²⁵ Certainly comparative biological evidence is ambiguous, especially in the area of sex-role behaviour.²⁶ Arguing for a model in which human behaviour is understood as learned, Montague criticizes biologically-deterministic models on the basis of their legitimizing functions:

. . . for those who are ready to grasp at . . . biological explanations of human aggression it provides relief for that heavy burden of guilt most individuals carry about with them for being as they are.²⁷

Surely this could not be more true than in contemporary North American society where one researcher claims that one woman in two will live in a battering relationship at some point in her life,²⁸ and where a persuasive argument suggests that wife abuse is masculine behaviour writ large.²⁹ Ball Rokeach, discussing the various means by which violence is legitimized, notes that a strong justification will exert pressure towards legitimization of actions which may otherwise be perceived as illegitimate.³⁰ When violence, and particularly male violence against women, is justified on the basis of biology, such actions can be explained away as both "inevitable" and "right".

That this theme is not missing from the biological literature is seen in Storr, where he presents as an example the stereotypic cartoon of a caveman dragging a woman off by the hair. When we view this, Storr suggests, we have:

[a] deep feeling that the cartoon of the ape man with the club has something right about it, or at least carries no shameful connotation.³¹

Sociobiological arguments are profoundly ahistorical. A fight between two apes several million years ago is equated to two

humans fighting in 1981. Humans are a product of their biology, of the process of natural selection and evolution, but the role of culture as a factor in that evolution is ignored or negated. Sociobiological arguments also conflate contemporary happenings so that an aggressive man is an aggressive man is an aggressive man. As Rose has noted,³² wifebeating is conflated with aggressive behaviour on, say, a picket line and both become something that can be understood in terms of, for example, an aggression centre in the brain which has the potentiality for surgical manipulation and "correction". Surgical manipulation and genetic engineering are logical extensions of sociobiology.

Often based on specious or inadequate evidence, value laden and deterministic, arguments based on biological reductionism are nevertheless given wide credence in the scientific community. That they take what is and argue to what might have been is obscured in absolutist statements and vague analogies.³³ Reactions to biological determinism are strong, especially from those committed to the primacy of culture as a basis for understanding human behaviour and to the role of the individual and the human group as active participant(s) in the creation of their own history.

The material at this point is offered in the literature as a virulent debate with each side bludgeoning the other with evidence.³⁴ The arguments which can be extrapolated from the context of "biosociology" seem to be promising - human beings are social animals, and weight must be given to both aspects of this designation, in historically specific contexts. Petryszak noted that "the irrelevance of biological factors as determinants of human behavior has not been

proved yet."³⁵ As Armstrong and Armstrong observe:

There is a complex and continual interaction between hereditary and environmental factors. Traits are not simply innate or learned since various structural and social pressures inhibit or enhance basic biological responses, at least from the moment of birth.³⁶

However, although all the evidence may not be in (and who could tell at which point this would be), the inevitability of (male) violence appears to have a very shaky foundation:

[T]he fact that the capacity for violence is [I would add, 'or may be'] biologically rooted does not mean that the expression of violence is inevitable.³⁷

In the end result, therefore, the debate about the biological bases of aggression is seen as a "red herring" in the investigation of wife abuse. The question should not be, "Do husbands beat their wives because it is part of their biological nature?", but rather, "Why is it that women are the victims of male violence which is often articulated in a form which is perceived as legitimate in the eyes of the wider society?" Since the concern here is with the understanding of wife abuse, a phenomenon which occurs in culturally specific contexts, monolithic, reductionistic explanations can be understood as dismissing rather than explaining these specificities. The focus on the possible biological basis of this behaviour negates/draws attention away from its corporate nature except to invest the aggression with an aura of inevitability.

Wife abuse as an extension of innate male aggression is the ultimate formulation of the normalcy of the phenomenon. This is in diametric opposition to the explanations reviewed in the following section, wherein we leave the genes and venture into the psyche to look at explanations of wife abuse rooted in individual psychopathology.

Explanations Rooted in Individual Psychopathology:

Damaged Children

Erin Pizzey, founder of Chiswick Family Refuge in Britain, herself a battered child, roots wife abuse in the participants' experiences as "damaged children".³⁸ Women who come to her houses have been victimized by their abusive mothers and, as adults, seek out violent men and are often themselves violence-prone, according to Pizzey. Male batterers, she argues, were also "damaged children" who need love, understanding and therapy if their violent behaviour is to be modified. While Pizzey posits a "cycle of violence",³⁹ her emphasis is on psychopathology which arises through early childhood mistreatment. Pizzey's observations have been termed "sensational reading but . . . unsubstantiated conjecture".⁴⁰ However, her 1974 book, Scream Quietly or the Neighbours Will Hear, has presented the phenomenon of wife abuse in popularized form. Her work, both as author and activist, has given her a place as a recognized authority, albeit a controversial one, on the subject of wife abuse.⁴¹

More relevant here, however, is the fact that Pizzey's perspective of wife abuse as a product of mutually interacting pathologies is echoed in much of the social scientific literature on wife abuse, though with primary concentration on the pathology of the woman. Women are understood either as precipitating the actual violent incident or generating its underlying causes:

. . . the psychoanalytic idea that violence is a manifestation of individual pathology created by an imbalance in male dominance and female submission and developed

through inadequate mothering implies that women (first as mothers, then as wives) are the primary source of violence, including that which is directed at them.⁴²

Seeking an understanding of this phenomenon within the logic of the psychoanalytic problematic necessitates addressing the Freudian concept of female masochism, in that it is the victimization of women that is the focus of investigation.⁴³ According to Freud, masochism is an integral part of femininity, as a result of the woman's resolution of her Oedipal complex in favour of passive, genital (i.e. vaginal) sexuality. Although Mitchell assures the reader that 'masochism 'feminine' in whichever sex it occurs'⁴⁴ It is only for the woman that it is integral to her successful maturation. Mitchell describes the phenomenon:

'Masochism' - pleasure in pain - which is the turning against the self of the wish for the satisfaction of a drive, typifies the feminine predicament. It expresses the wish to submit to castration, copulation or childbirth and to get erotic pleasure out of painful experiences.⁴⁵

De Beauvoir, discussing women's position from an existentialist perspective, admits:

It is true, then, that woman is more liable than man to the masochistic temptation; her erotic position as passive object leads her to play at passivity . . .⁴⁶

It is this model of women as inherently masochistic, abstracted from her culturally-constructed passivity, which is applied to the understanding of women in wife abuse situations. Let us consider several applications.

Snell et al. interviewed twelve middle class American women who, with their husbands, had been referred to a psychiatric clinic as a result of the wives' having laid charges for assault and battery. The women were chosen for the study because the men were "resistive to psychiatric contact, tending to deny that problems existed in their marriage which required outside help", whereas the wives (who, after all, had been victims of assault) had "insight" and were able to recognize the existence of problems.⁴⁷ In one case, Snell and his colleagues concluded:

. . . we see the husband's aggressive behaviour as filling masochistic needs of the wife and to be necessary for the wife's (and the couple's) equilibrium.⁴⁸

This "equilibrium" was restored by treating the woman to bring her to the point where she could "allow" her adolescent son (whose intervention had been the precipitating factor for the laying of charges) to leave home, "thus re-establishing the working relationship", i.e. the violent dyad.⁴⁹

Two versions of the theory can be located. In the first, the woman's neuroses require that she pick an abusive mate as complement.⁵⁰ Here it is interesting to note that at least one researcher applies the psychopathology model selectively, explaining the women's "personality problems" in terms of "neurotic needs" and those of the men in the context of what will be discussed subsequently as the social learning paradigm:

It cannot be stressed enough that the degree to which there was chaos in the man's early life, and lack of exposure to any collaborative living between parents, is a major element in promoting the tendency to assault.⁵⁴

The second version of the explanation which posits wife abuse as functional for the marital dyad suggests that women's neurotic traits disturb the "equilibrium of traditional family roles", so that violence is necessary to right the balance. Dr. Haka-Ikse cites the example of the "aggressive domineering wife" who accepts episodic violence as a result of her guilt at usurping the man's "masculine role".⁵² We are reminded here of the sociobiological arguments which include the suggestion that women who "hag" "often unconsciously demand that which [they] most fear . . . ", i.e. male dominance, as a result of their biologically-based need for security.⁵³ Cherchez la femme . . .

In those explanations which centre on male psychopathology there is a tendency to blame women also, either as collaborator⁵⁴ or as mothers of violent men:

. . . boys who grow up in families headed by a female are more likely to be violent; or boys who have grown up in circumstances where father-figure identification is difficult.⁵⁵

In an extreme version of this position, Rader argued that dominant mothers represented "repressive, defeating authority", emasculating their sons. Violence was thus rooted in the "psychological disfigurement of emasculation".⁵⁶

There are a number of problems in explanations of wife abuse which are rooted in individual psychopathology. As the example drawn from the work of Snell et al. demonstrated, and as Sweet and Resnick noted in a review of the literature,⁵⁷ psychodynamic theories are often based on case histories with little empirical evidence to support their conclusions. Clinical evidence is generalized to the whole population.⁵⁸

The high incidence of battering suggests that explanations rooted in psychopathology are inadequate, whether the pathology is attributed to the male or to the female. Commenting on the argument that violence is a necessary complement to female neuroses, Walker noted:

Pairing up with a batter must be considered purely accidental if one out of two women will be battered in their lifetimes.⁵⁹

The psychodynamic theories are further called into question by the high level of social acceptance which is granted milder forms of wife abuse. In a survey based on a representative national sample of adult Americans (n = 1176), Stark and McEvoy determined that between 16% and 25% approved of a husband slapping his wife "on appropriate occasions" - a high percentage if what is being approved is "psychopathology".⁶⁰

In addition to the methodological problems and the inadequacy of the emphasis on psychopathology in the face of the empirical evidence, one can levy the assessment of "tautology" against explanations of wife abuse which seek answers in damaged psyches. As Marsden has noted, proponents of the psychopathology school cite the cause as pathology, the only evidence for which is the violence itself.⁶¹ This assessment is supported by researchers who have determined that battering often occurs in marriages which have long periods of tranquility between incidents and in cases where the batterers are held in high esteem in their community and/or appear to have "ideal" marriages.⁶² In neither case would individual psychopathology be perceived by outsiders as publicly disruptive or as an ongoing factor in the lives of the couple. Only when an abusive incident occurs can the label "pathological" be applied. However, when this

occurs, circumstantial evidence may be reinterpreted in the light of this labelling process. Researchers who seek to support explanations of wife abuse rooted in individual psychopathology take the phenomenon of wife abuse and present what could be argued to be effects as causal:

. . . what men describe as aggressive in females, women often see as asserting their personal integrity; what men automatically see as masculinity in females, women sense as their own competence. What some men may see as frigidity, appears to women to be a natural lack of sexual responsiveness to their violent husbands. And what men see as masochism, women report as the sense of being trapped inside their marriages.⁶³

Clearly, the imputation of individual psychopathology is not a straightforward matter.

For the pervasiveness and persistence of the psychiatric explanations to be comprehensible, it is helpful to consider the role of the psychiatric model in general. According to Smith:

Psychiatry . . . deals with problems of fit between the terms . . . [women] are given to think and become conscious of their world, and the actualities of their experience . . . It tells women as well as men to treat those feelings and behaviours which don't make sense in terms of the [societally prescribed] role as pathological.⁶⁴

When the woman's marriage does not coincide with the loving ideal, when the woman herself does not fit or conform to the traditional wifely ideal of submissiveness and docility, then the medical model deals with the "problems of fit" by defining the woman and her behaviour as pathological. The implication of the medical model is that there is a treatment or remedy available through some form of medicine. It is consistent that battered women are often treated with tranquillizers,⁶⁵ counselled to accommodate to their husbands in the interests of "self protection",⁶⁶ or to accept the violence as

intrinsic to the marriage and family unit.⁶⁷ The treatment emphasis is away from the violent man and on the victimized woman.⁶⁸

In terms of policy implications, explanations which are rooted in individual psychopathology are negative. Neither housing, police protection, nor financial or legal assistance are believed useful or deserved.

If battered women seek violence, then we do not need to provide housing, police protection and other forms of assistance, or to be concerned about the lack of resources or the negative response to women seeking help because the problem is of their own making and continued through their own efforts . . . The logic is clear, if it is the victim who is to blame, and she is the source both of the violence directed at her and that learned by her children, then she and her children should be removed from society and treated by the very profession which blames her, psychiatry.⁶⁹

Policies which draw on victim-blaming psychodynamic theories are rooted in a moral judgement - in failing in her job as a wife, the woman has suffered a moral lapse. She has sinned against the institution of male dominance as articulated in the family. And in the religion of psychiatric practice, the sinner must atone for her own sins. Cherchez la femme . . .

Psychodynamic theories of wife abuse provide reinforcement for the male/female dominance hierarchy and serve as a justification of the phenomenon they purport to explicate.⁷⁰ They often harken implicitly to biological bases, in which male aggression is innate, often unproblematically so. At best they are descriptive rather than explanatory; at worst they are ideological bulwarks of a system of social control.

Conclusion

Whether rooted in the genes or the psyche, explanations articulated solely at the level of the individual are bounded by the parameters which truncate the monad's existence. Beyond this, wider social and political factors are ignored or reduced to a scope which can be explicated within individualistic terms of reference. When the issue at hand is wife abuse, individualistic explanations either accept the phenomenon as a manifestation of the bestial nature of man or an artifact of psychopathology. Interestingly enough, it is often the woman's "pathology" which is viewed as causal, or her behaviour as a "provocatrice" which is understood as instigating the abuse.

Wife abuse, within these perspectives, is interpreted in various ways, the majority of which result in a "blame-the-victim" orientation, exonerating, justifying, or legitimating the abusive behaviour. This is perhaps not surprising in a tradition of investigation which views males as the legitimate actors and females as reactors/ illegitimate actors, but it does not suffice when one enters a mode of investigation which refuses to accept blindly that women seek out their own victimization or that "that which is, is right".⁷¹ These ideological preconceptions, which have informed the individualistic orientations reviewed to this point, provide an inadequate basis for the examination of the complex phenomenon that is wife abuse.

It is an awareness of the limitations of the individualistic orientation which informs the studies which are reviewed in the next chapter, wherein explanations of wife abuse rooted in the family as an interacting unit are offered.

Footnotes to Chapter Two

1 Introduction to 1940's radio mystery drama.

2 A. Storr, Human Aggression (Middlesex, England, 1970), 95.

3 A. Montague, "Introduction" in A. Montague (ed.) Man and Aggression (London, 1968), xii.

4 The notion of an underlying biological basis of aggression, particularly male aggression, is implicit in many of the more "social" theories which will be considered subsequently. For example, the concept of violence as an "ultimate resource" (e.g. the work of William Goode reviewed in Chapter Three of this work) suggests that humans have an instinctive prioritizing system which atavistically locates physical violence - rather than, say, skill in logical argument, at the pinnacle of the resource hierarchy. In this theoretical formulation, at least implicitly, might is the ultimate right.

Similarly, catharsis theory (e.g. the work of Bettelheim, reviewed in Chapter Three) locates violence in the impulses which originate in the Freudian Id, which can be considered from one perspective to be an extension of the individual's innate biological makeup. Social learning theories (Chapter Four) implicitly suggest that, for the human, violence is innately more attractive than pacifism in that it is violence rather than horror of violence that is transmitted. These implicit biological justifications which can be teased out of some of the theoretical explanations which are more directly concerned with wife abuse, make it imperative that the issue of biological determinism and wife abuse be considered at some length at this point.

While a thorough critique of the wife abuse literature from the perspective of its biological roots is not the major focus of this thesis, the reader is referred to Petryszak, "The Biosociology of the Social Self", The Sociological Quarterly 20 (1979), 291-303 for an example of this type of work, wherein the author looks at Pragmatic and Symbolic Interactionist theorists and attempts to tease out the biological roots of their arguments. Petryszak concludes that "the current sociological practice of separating man's [sic] biological and social nature may be rightfully questioned, and ought to be reassessed" (p. 301). This type of analysis would be eminently useful for an exploration of areas in women's studies which is, almost by definition, an interdisciplinary field.

R. Ardrey, The Territorial Imperative (New York, 1966); K. Lorenz, On Aggression (New York, 1966); D. Morris, The Naked Ape (New York, 1967); P. L. Van den Berghe, Man in Society: A Biosocial View (New York, 1975); E. O. Wilson, Sociobiology: The New Synthesis (Cambridge, 1975).

R. N. Johnson, Aggression in Man and Animals. (Philadelphia, 1972), 57-8.

Lorenz, p. x.

Lorenz, 1966. These claims have been popularized in the works of Ardrey, 1966 and Morris, 1967.

K. Peter and N. Petryszak, "Sociobiology versus Biosociology", in A. Montague (ed.) Sociobiology Examined (New York, 1980), p. 40.

Van den Berghe, p. 45.

Storr, pp 89-90.

D. G. Freedman, Human Sociobiology: A Holistic Approach (New York, 1979), 74. The title of his work is ironic. Freedman offers cross-cultural evidence from Navajo, Druze and Mayan tribes and from a middle class population from Kansas City, U.S.A., that women during their childbearing years were passive, relating to their husbands' egos. Only in their post childbearing years did women become more assertive while men at the same time became more passive and caring. Freedman suggests this reflects the "evolutionary imperative", and is related to levels of testosterone in the individuals. No mention is made of the relative levels of economic dependency of males and females throughout the familial life cycle, or the dependency of their children - points on which a culture-based argument could rest.

Storr, p. 88.

Van den Berghe, p. 67.

Lorenz, 1966.

J. H. Crook, "The Nature and Function of Territorial Aggression", in A. Montague, Man and Aggression, 1968.

Discussed in Johnson, 1972.

Lorenz, 1966. See also R. N. Whitehurst, "Violence in Husband-Wife Interaction", in S. Steinmetz and M. Straus (eds.) Violence in the Family (New York, 1974), 81.

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- 23 S. Rose, "It's Only Human Nature: The Sociobiologist's Fairyland", in A. Montague (ed.) Sociobiology Examined (New York, 1980), 170..
- 24 Storr, Human Destructiveness, p. 20.
- 25 See the arguments put forward by the contributors to Montague, Man and Aggression, 1968.
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- 31 Storr, Human Aggression, p. 86.
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- 64 D. E. Smith, "Women and Psychiatry", in D. Smith and S. J. David (eds.) Women Look at Psychiatry (Vancouver, 1975), 75.
- 65 See Lion, 1977 for recommendation; Dobash and Dobash, "With Friends Like These . . ." (1978) for critique.
- 66 Hanks and Rosenbaum, 1977; Shainess, 1977 offer examples of this type of counselling.
- 67 Snell et al., 1964 provide a clear-cut example of acceptance.
- 68 See, for example, the work of Dr. J. J. Gayford (1976) who developed a typology of ten types of battered wives: "Down-trodden Dorothy", "Well-meaning Wendy", "Tortured Tina", "Laura the Long-Suffering One", "Fanny the Flirt", "Go-Go Gloria", "Violent Violet", "Alcoholic Anna", "Neurotic Nora", and "Pseudo-battered Sally". One will note that he does not include reference to "Brutal Bruce", "Peter the Puncher", or "Vicious Victor".
- 69 Dobash and Dobash, "If You Prick Me . . .", p. 28; see also Wasoff, Dobash and Dobash, 1979.
- 70 For a development of this point and a radical feminist critique of the concept of female masochism as patriarchal social control, see Betsy Warrior, Wifebeating (Somerville, Mass.), 1976
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CHAPTER THREE

EXPLANATIONS OF WIFE ABUSE WHICH DEAL
WITH THE FAMILY AS AN INTERACTING UNIT:

"A LOT OF ABRASIVE CONTACT. . . "

Introduction

There were ten of us kids, and even though for that town we lived in a big house, it certainly wasn't large enough for all of us. So there was a lot of abrasive contact all the time.¹

Having considered explanations for wife abuse which seek their meaning in the biology or psychopathology of the actors, we turn now to those which deal with the family as an interacting unit, a place where there is "a lot of abrasive contact". Here we deal with those analyses which hold as an underlying premise the concept that the family as an interacting unit tends to have primacy over the individual or the cultural or economic environment in determining or conditioning the behaviour of its members. The category is far from monolithic, and various researchers weight factors differently. However, this general premise holds for all.

Specifically, I will consider functionalist, "conflict" and social learning theories. The work of the functionalist sociologist Talcott Parsons and his followers, as it applies to wife abuse, is outlined. Briefly, since conflict is dysfunctional in terms of the harmonious maintenance and operation of the family, functionalist

analysis tends to ignore it or to attribute it to individual psychopathology. On the other hand, from the perspective of conflict theorists, familial conflict is conceived as "functional", "desirable", "necessary", or at least inevitable within the domestic unit. The issue here becomes conflict management, to contain the violence and transmute the manifestations of conflict into socially acceptable forms. For some theorists, violence in its milder forms is cathartic; for others it is an ultimate resource expended only when all others have been exhausted. We will see that these formulations tend to deal with the appearance rather than the underlying reality of the abusive situation, but that there are definite insights to be obtained from them.

Social learning theory will be considered from the perspective of Suzanne Steinmetz, who argues that wife abuse is one manifestation of the greater problem of domestic violence, all of which can be understood as learned and generationally-transmitted behaviour. Alternatively, Lorene Walker presents the case from the viewpoint of the battered woman, attempting to bring social learning theory to bear on the question of "why women stay" in abusive relationships. Walker's conceptualization of women as exhibiting a form of "learned helplessness" will be seen to be extremely valuable in understanding this behaviour, although many of the insights are implicit rather than explicit in her work.

We look, therefore, first at functionalist, then at conflict and finally at social learning theories and their implications for developing an understanding of wife abuse.

Parsonian Functionalism

The image one has of Talcott Parsons' work is of grand theories articulated at the level of the "society". Functionalism has been called "the only way to approach sociology" and, in fact, in colloquial usage the appellation "sociological" often refers to a functionalist analysis. What will be argued here, however, is that functionalist logic left Parsons and his followers no place to go but into the individual psyche for an understanding of wife abuse. The contradiction between the (functional) well-oiled nuclear family and the (dysfunctional) fact of domestic violence was problematic in Parsons' formulation. Freudian psychology provided an answer which is ultimately compatible with the functionalist analysis.

According to the functionalist view, the contemporary nuclear family provides a haven from the hostile environment of the outside world. This "function of the family" represents, according to Parsons, the specialization of the family as a result of increasing differentiation in contemporary society. Skolnick explains:

Parsons and his students saw the nuclear family stripped down to its basic psychological functions as an effective supplier of security for family members as well as the producer of new recruits to industrial society.²

According to Parsons and his colleagues, role differentiation has also occurred within the contemporary nuclear family. The man, who represents the family in the public (work) sphere, fulfills the "instrumental" role; the woman, whose primary role is in the private (home) sphere as wife and mother, fulfills the "emotional/expressive"

role, based on the biological division by which women are the sole bearers of (and by extension assumed to be the logical rearers of) children. The woman is totally dependent on her husband:

The urban woman's fundamental status is that of her husband's wife, the mother of his children, and traditionally the person responsible for a complex of activities in connection with the management of the household, care of children, etc. . . which may be considered a kind of 'pseudo' occupation.³

The man's role is strictly job-oriented. Zelditch, a student of Parsons, elaborates:

. . . the American male, by definition, must 'provide' for his family. He is responsible for the support of his family. His primary area of performance is the occupational role, in which his status fundamentally inheres; and his primary function in the family is to supply an income, to be the breadwinner. There is simply something wrong with the American adult male who doesn't have a 'job'. American women, on the other hand, tend to hold jobs before they are married and to quit when 'the day' comes; or to continue in jobs of a lower status than their husbands. And not only is the mother the focus of emotional support for the American middle-class child, but much more exclusively so than in most societies . . . The more expressive type of male, as a matter of fact, is regarded as 'effeminate'.⁴

It is the responsibility of the woman to make the man "feel good" when he returns from work. This role differentiation is complementary and facilitates the harmonious operation of the family, a necessary institution for the smooth functioning of society.

Because the family is understood as a system in equilibrium, or striving towards equilibrium, violence, insofar as it is disruptive to the family unit, is dysfunctional, i.e. militates against the survival of the unit. Domestic violence, when it does occur, could be read as a signal that the equilibrium was in danger.⁵ However, because the family as an institution does exist and continues to sur-

vive, violence must be minimal within the boundaries of the nuclear family.

The implications of this presumed non-occurrence of domestic violence for social science research were explored by O'Brien.⁶ He reviewed all issues of the Journal of Marriage and the Family from 1939-1969, seeking articles whose titles contained the word 'violence'. Although he found a number of articles which dealt with conflict and conflict resolution, he was unable to locate a single title which explicitly mentioned violence in the family. O'Brien concluded that either domestic violence did not exist during the period or - more reasonably - it was not perceived as a 'social problem'.

Parsons' dealings with the phenomenon of domestic violence involved an attempt at explanation in terms of the 'clandestine masculine ideal' of violence in western culture. Men are reared to expect to be violent; fighting is expected behaviour on the part of little boys.⁷ Tobey, on the basis of case histories of convicted men, reached a similar conclusion:

. . . violence is not merely a response to frustration but is felt by the perpetrator to be required by the demands of the male role.⁸

Inherent in this understanding is a commitment on the part of the perpetrator to a double standard in terms of male and female roles, as shown in this statement by a prison inmate who was interviewed by Tobey:

If a man fools around, some people will admire him . . . Let a woman do it? What is she? She's a fuckin' whore.⁹

The 'John Wayne' image and other macho cultural ideals such as Humphrey

Bogart and Mike Hammer, dictate violence as the norm for male/female relations, and individual men, attempting to repudiate their maternal attachment, adopt this cultural ideal.

The link between cultural ideals and maternal attachment is elaborated by Parsons as follows. The structure of the modern nuclear family generated problems for boys in terms of their masculine identification:

. . . the father does not work in the home and his son is not able to observe his work or to participate in it from an early age. Furthermore, many of the masculine functions are of a relatively abstract and intangible character, such that their meaning must remain almost wholly inaccessible to a child. This leaves the boy without a tangible meaningful model to emulate and without the possibility of a gradual initiation into the activities of the adult male role.¹⁰

Faced with absentee fathers and omnipresent mothers, male aggressiveness is interpreted as a reflection of men's unconscious need to repudiate their natural identification with their mothers, coupled with the absence of masculine role models. Thus, violence within the nuclear family is either presumed to be virtually non-existent, or to be the consequence of the problematic nature of the contemporary nuclear family as it is experienced by the unfortunate male, i.e. his warped/damaged psyche.¹¹

Lasch, claiming to go far beyond Parsons by returning to Freud's original formulation, argues:

The decline of the father's participation in family life makes [the resolution of the male's Oedipus complex] . . . difficult or impossible . . . the absence, remoteness, or inaccessibility of the father does not mean that the child has no ideas about him; it only means that those ideas will seldom be tested against everyday

experience. The child imagines a remote, vindictive father and comes to see the world as starkly divided between power and impotence. He reduces all questions of justice and morality to questions of strength.¹²

The violence arises, therefore, in interaction between the nuclear family and the male psyche. While the warping effects of the male/female role differentiation are the primary "cause", this is explicitly filtered through the male psyche.¹³

The functionalist understanding of domestic violence is ethnocentric and ahistorical, in that it neglects the evidence which demonstrates that wife abuse is neither spatially specific to the United States, nor temporally specific to modern western society.¹⁴ It is also fraught with middle class biases in that the American middle class family formed the model which Parsons began analyzing.¹⁵ Further, the absentee father and housewife mother is a middle class phenomenon, or at least was likely to be so in the period when Parsons was writing. The view of domestic violence as essentially non-existent may also be a function of this class bias - in the middle class, domestic violence has a low profile even today.¹⁶

The functionalist view, as elucidated by Parsons et al., is fraught with contradiction. The phenomenon is described in terms of the social structure - clandestine masculine ideals, isolated nuclear families, differentiated roles - but is, in the end result, explained in terms of individual psychopathology - the warped psyche of the individual male. While the location of masculine aggression in the Oedipal crisis is suggestive, the conclusion that violent men are behaving according to cultural expectations provides a

rationalization or justification for violence, rather than an explanation.

Apparently sociological, Parsonian Functionalism is forced into psychological reductionism when it comes to analyzing the apparent anomaly of wife abuse. The reductionist approach is necessitated by the logic of Parsonian functionalist analysis regarding the family: it contains the assumption that if a social need exists, it must be satisfied, since societies are neatly organized and balanced social systems. There is a need in contemporary society for a "haven"; ergo, the family provides the haven. Deviation from the pattern can only be accounted for in terms of individual psychopathology.

Conflict Theories as Explanations of Wife Abuse:

"When in Doubt, Fight . . . "

The basic statement on the family as a system in conflict was developed by Jetse Sprey:

. . . the family process per se is conceived of as a continuous confrontation between participants with conflicting - though not necessarily opposing - interests in their shared fate.¹⁷

In a more recent formulation of the conflict perspective, Foss distinguished between "conflict of interest" and "hostility" - the former representing the objective situation and the latter the subjective feeling of opposition between two or more parties.¹⁸ When conflicts of interests are defined by the participants as illegitimate, they tend to lead to hostility. Whether or not hostility is actualized as violence or aggression will depend on the level of hostility experienced. In other words, family members are subject to ambiguity: their objective situation tends to generate conflict of interests, a consequence of the high frequency of interaction and the high percentage of the total personality that is involved in family relationships. These conflicts of interests may in turn be experienced through hostility. However, at the same time, the high degree of investment the participants have in their situation (i.e. their family) will simultaneously lead to the suppression of hostility.

Conflict, which Foss defines as action or behaviour strategies of opposition,¹⁹ may be either "instrumental" - task oriented, problem-

solving - or "expressive" - "letting off steam", "blowing one's top".

Violence is a consequence of insufficient "instrumental" conflict:

. . . it is the absence of specifically instrumental conflict in families that leads to a high level of interpersonal violence and aggression.²⁰

Violence, one would assume, is a logical outcome of living in families, according to the conflict perspective - unless one possesses adequate conflict resolution skills. This would appear to be an assumption which underlies a great deal of popular psychology, if one considers the proliferation of "problem solving skills" courses offered to parents, couples and individuals at community colleges and human relations institutes such as the Gestalt Institute in Toronto or Human Services Community in Guelph.

The conflict perspective makes a valuable contribution to family sociology, reminding us that conflict and violence can be understood in terms other than those of the psychopathologists.²¹

However, while the conflict perspective moves from the individual to the interactive family unit, the underlying orientation is predominantly psychological. Families exist in an economic and cultural vacuum. Power inequalities in the family (such as those which occur along gender and age lines) are subsumed under the relatively neutral concept of "conflict of interests". While this may be a useful strategy for social work practitioners who are dealing with non-violent families or couples, it would seem to offer little in the way of help for the injured and demoralized battered woman or the abusive man who, as will be recalled from the work of Snell et al.,²² perceives his marriage to be "okay as is". Further, the conflict-of-

interests paradigm is based on a commitment to the primacy of the family. Solutions to battering situations are sought in and through the interactions of the marital dyad without seriously calling the validity of the dyad itself into existence. This familistic perspective obscures its inherently ideological formulation under the rhetoric of the behavioural sciences and inhibits, rather than fosters, meaningful critique of the social and cultural roots of wife abuse.

In order to better understand the strengths and the weaknesses of the conflict perspective, two models are analyzed. First, "catharsis" models are presented in which violence is seen as the necessary escape of pent-up instinctual energies. Second, resource theory in which violence is seen as the "ultimate resource" which is brought to bear in the daily negotiations of everyday life, is discussed.

Violence as Catharsis: Let It All Hang Out

The catharsis model was outlined by Bettelheim, based on the assumption that aggression is inherent in human nature:

. . . we force each person to suppress his violent tendencies till they build up to a pitch where he can no longer deny or control them . . . Whether or not we will use violence or avoid it depends entirely on what alternative solutions are known to a person facing a problem.²³

Something is going to come out; without adequate problem-solving skills, this "something" is likely to be violence. While this sounds significantly like the biological theories discussed earlier, Bettelheim adheres to the Freudian conception of the "Id" as a source of unconscious tendencies towards violence and anarchy, rather than drawing on a genetic model for his justification. Neither is the

discussion - at least as it is applied to wife abuse - restricted to the framework of individual psychopathology. In its application to wife abuse, catharsis is seen as the explosion of tensions which have built up within the marital dyad. Repression, not abuse, would be the pathological response.

The importance of this theory - which ultimately argues that violence will need an outlet in whatever situation - for familial violence, and for wife abuse in particular, is two-fold:

(a) The family, as will be argued in Chapter Six, is the location in which people are supposed to be able to "be themselves", where they can bring and work through tensions which arise in the outside world. Thus, it is to be expected that the family presents an arena for the cathartic experience.

(b) The catharsis argument has been advanced by theorists and therapists to rationalize violent episodes between spouses. In line with the impetus to achieve "intimacy" which was popular in the 1960's, "getting it all out" was a prevalent theme in popular psychology. Bach and Wyden, writing in 1968, argued that verbal conflict was "constructive and highly desirable", and favoured "constructive fighting".²⁴ Other practitioners encountered by the author at the time recommended battering one's spouse with foam rubber baseball bats, nylon stockings stuffed with rags, or even raw eggs, as a means of working through one's anger and hostility. While there may be some validity to the notion of "clearing the air", some of this advice is silly. At worst, it is dangerous.

There is considerable evidence which refutes the value of

the notion of catharsis vis-à-vis human violence. Steinmetz notes that clinical evidence indicates that children expressed more aggression after a cathartic experience than did the controls who played peacefully.²⁵ Perhaps more telling is the evidence mustered by Steinmetz and Straus to counter what they consider the "catharsis myth".²⁶ They cite studies which have concluded that vicariously experienced violence led to an increase in aggressive fantasy,²⁷ and to increased frequency of aggressive acts.²⁸ Steinmetz and Straus also suggest that exposure to violence may lead to an acceptance of violence as a norm, and concomitantly to an extension of the parameters for future behaviour, rather than dampening a tendency towards violence.²⁹

Megaree, attempting to summarize the conflicting literature on catharsis in a report by the National Commission on the Causes and Prevention of Violence in the United States in 1969, concludes that:

Over a long period of time, the problem is complicated by the fact that: (a) subsequent stimuli, or the individual's own reminiscences, can rearouse the instigation despite catharsis; and (b) while the catharsis may lower instigation, it may also lower inhibitions even more, so that the individual will have an even greater propensity for aggressive behaviour after the catharsis than he did prior to it.³⁰

It is equally possible to argue from the Freudian position (on which the original catharsis argument was based) that a so-called cathartic experience would generate a release of Id-based instincts which was in itself pleasurable and would become a future end-in-itself, i.e. repeated aggression and violence.

Walker relates the difference between short and long term effects to the phenomenon of wife abuse. She suggests there may be

a cycle wherein there is a period of build-up, a period of violence (catharsis) and a subsequent period of quiescence.³¹ Thus catharsis may form part of an ongoing cycle, Walker suggests, which in the long run perpetuates rather than alleviates the abusive behaviour. Clearly, even within its own logic, the catharsis explanation is problematic.

Further, from the perspective of those attempting to understand wife abuse, the catharsis argument lacks an attempt to apply the model from the position of the victim, i.e. the battered or abused wife. Even if we concede that the man's letting off steam may in fact reduce the level of conflict within the marital dyad, it is difficult to see within the catharsis perspective what effects this will have on the subsequent relationship. Presumably, we should assume that, aggression vented and tension reduced, the couple returns to a relatively peaceful existence, to "business-as-usual". This completely ignores the implications of violence on the distribution of power within the marital relationship. More fundamentally, it is difficult to see how, unless one posits implicitly the myth of female masochism, male aggression against the woman could result in a cathartic experience for both parties.

In short, while the "catharsis myth", as Steinmetz and Straus note, is congruent with the appearance of domestic violence as the climax of repressed conflict,³² the myth takes the result as desirable and provides a justification for the existing pattern of violence. It fails to deal with the issues of power which underlie the conflict. This is the focus of resource theory, to be considered now.

Resource Theory and Violence:

What To Do When Your Back's to the Wall

William Goode³³ argued that force is one of four major sets of resources possessed by everyone, the other three being "economic" and "prestige" resources and "likability". Violence is a resource which may be used to achieve desired ends, but which will only be employed as a last resort as individuals calculate costs and benefits and generally opt for other means of conflict resolution. Violence, or the threat thereof, is conceived as one element in a rationally calculated system of social exchange.

For Goode, force exists in the family and is legitimated by community and law because it is functional for the maintenance of the status quo that this be the case. Force underpins the social order, creating a "relatively stable, unchallenged set of understandings, behaviours and imbalance of influence or dominance."³⁴

If, for example, no husband were able to use his own force or that of family members, relatives, neighbours, or the community to press his children toward obedience at any age, to eject from his house a man who is courting his wife, to threaten his wife for welcoming flirtations or going on dates with another, to press her to stay in the domicile he has chosen, to persuade her not to abandon the children when she would like to go off alone, to take care of the home and children, to avoid running up bankrupting bills with their creditors, it is easy to see that the substantial part of the structural strength of the family would be undermined.³⁵

For Goode, the use of personal or structural force by a man against his wife, which he depicts as a countervailing pressure against the explosive tendencies apparently inherent in the nuclear family (a

conclusion Goode does not explicitly draw from his work, but one which makes his analysis very different from those considered under the rubric of "functionalism" per se), is functional to the preservation of the family. This acceptance of the male/female hierarchy with its underpinning of force, offers tacit legitimation for wife abuse.

The husband, like the State, has a monopoly on legitimate force - but for the good of all. Goode reassures the reader, however, "Ordinarily, force is not visible . . . unless some family member rejects part of the structure."³⁶ Battered wives cause their own problems by attempting to upset the functional, structural order - quot erat demonstrandum.

Other resource theorists are less clear in their articulation of the appropriateness of unchallenged male dominance in marriage. Prescott and Letko, for example, attempt to link external sources of stress with resources within the marriage:

In the home, and inside the marriage, economic and work related experiences may affect spouse relations . . . men who feel declining ability to control their careers may see the marriage as the main area of control which they must maintain.³⁷

It is not just that violence is the last resort within marriage, but that marriage is the last frontier on which the man can exercise the element of choice in terms of his behaviour such that he can be assured that his choice can influence the balance in a cost/benefit analysis. This is a valuable insight, which has received insufficient attention from resource theorists.

Violence, in the eyes of resource theorists, is the ultimate resource. A battered woman interviewed by Prescott and Letko agreed;

stating that by using violence, 'my husband has the power to call a halt to fighting that I don't have.'³⁸ Allen and Straus attempted to test hypotheses relating to the concept of violence as the ultimate resource, using computer analyses of data on wives' and husbands' power, resources and use of violence during a period of one year.³⁹ Although their data were determined by means of a questionnaire administered to the university-student children of the couples in question, and although their sample was in no way representative, Allen and Straus asserted that, in working class families, violence did appear to be correlated with low resources. For working class husbands, 'male power [tends to be] associated with violence only when the husband lacks validating resources'', state Allen and Straus.⁴⁰

Although Allen and Straus's work is visually impressive, being full of tables and coefficients, a close reading shows that more than their methodology is problematic. If, as they assert, there is a relationship between violence and low resources in working class families, one would expect a negative correlation between the use of violence and personal resources. This was not found, i.e. there was no mention of low use of violence being correlated with high personal resources. Nor were any correlations found between resources and violence for middle class families. Allen and Straus hypothesize the reason why the 'ultimate resource theory' does not apply to middle class people thusly:

. . . because of the weakening of male-dominance norms in the middle class, a challenge to a husband's superior authority may be less of a threat to the identity and masculinity of middle class husbands than of the working

class husbands. Middle class husbands may be able to adapt to what they formerly paid lip service, and still retain their self esteem. If this is the case, husbands in the middle class have less need to defend an ascribed position of authority.⁴¹

It is also suggested that middle class individuals may have a greater vested interest in avoiding the negative side effects of using violence.

What Allen and Straus do not consider is the notion that middle class families may have devised more subtle tactics of dealing with authority relationships, may have more sophisticated physical and/or psychological assets to facilitate the concealment of violence, that abuse may take other than physical forms, that middle class children may have greater inhibitions about revealing parental violence in classroom questionnaires, or that adolescents (who from personal observation are seldom home, especially in middle class families) may not be particularly astute observers of some forms of interaction, e.g. that which occurs in the parental bedroom.

In short, Allen and Straus's claims for the ultimate resource theory appear to be overenthusiastic, given their data.

It is interesting to look at another example of the data used by resource theorists to generate conclusions. O'Brien interviewed one spouse from each of 150 families (his sample was comprised of approximately equal numbers of husbands and wives), all of whom were in the pre-divorce stage.⁴² Of the 150 families, he identified 25 as "violence-prone" and 125 as "non-violence-prone". O'Brien concluded that male violence was most common where the man had lower status

than his wife (what O'Brien termed "status inconsistency"). Men felt frustrated, he concluded, because they could not fulfill their culturally prescribed role. This led to violence. Let us consider his data:

Table 1: A Summary of the Results obtained by O'Brien in his Study of Violence-Prone and Non-Violence-Prone American Couples

	<u>Violence-Prone Group</u>		<u>Non-Violence-Prone Group</u>	
	<u>n = 25</u>		<u>n = 125</u>	
	<u>%</u>	<u>n</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>n</u>
Husband seriously dissatisfied with job	44%	11	27%	34
Husband started but dropped high school or college	44%	11	18%	22
Husband's income was a major source of conflict	84%	21	24%	30
Husband's education lower than woman's	56%	14	14%	17
Husband's occupational status lower than his father-in-law's	37%	9	28%	36

(Note: These data were abstracted from the text of O'Brien's article, where they were not presented in tabular form)

These data must be treated with caution due to the non-representative nature of O'Brien's sample. These people were in the pre-divorce stage of their marriage, a stage in which it is to be expected that conflicts would escalate and one in which the adversarial nature of the divorce process itself exacerbates interpersonal conflict. Also, given the high degree of emotion which characterizes this phase of people's

lives, self-reports must be considered questionable at best.

While O'Brien is to be commended for including both women and men in his sample, his questions (Table 1) are notable in that they all deal with the husband. Further, although he explains violence in terms of "culturally prescribed roles" and "status inconsistency", i.e. the disjunction between norms of male superiority and actual status as experienced in the marital dyad, only two of the five criteria address status inconsistency within the couple - and one of those ('husband's occupational status lower than his father-in-law's') assumes the woman has no occupational status of her own. While it is interesting that the 'husband's income was a major source of conflict' in 84% (n = 21) of the 'violence-prone-group', O'Brien's data do not show on what basis the conflict emerged. In other words, his data would be consistent with an argument, to be proffered in Chapter 6, that domestic violence can be understood in part as conflict over the women's domestic labour - if the conflict over the man's income in O'Brien's study turned out to be conflict over how the woman would dispose of the income in what will be argued to be her "job" of consumption management. Finally, there is no mention of whether or not the woman's income is a source of conflict

Rather than problems over fulfilling culturally-prescribed roles within the family unit, it is equally plausible that problems generated in the work place, e.g. lack of control, frustration at lack of progression, wages, concern (for managers and/or owners) over changes in tax laws or profit margin - might be displaced onto the marital relationship. In this case the cultural norms surrounding

the family as the arena wherein tensions are managed, together with the husband/wife hierarchy, would legitimate the family as the locus of violence directed against the woman.

O'Brien, and resource theorists in general, appear to stop short of any viable explanation, taking the surface of the phenomenon as the reality. In this way, their work provides ready ammunition for those who would justify the status quo which, it is argued, is the legitimate application of male violence against women in the home.

In an extension of resource theory logic both O'Brien and Whitehurst⁴⁸ suggest that changes which lead to legal and physical equality between women and men may lead to increases in wife abuse (and, presumably, violence against women in general) in the short run as men attempt to maintain their superior position. Changes which are occurring as a result of the impetus of the Women's Liberation Movement are introducing, so these authors claim, a conflict between egalitarian social structure and male-superiority norms, and until the conflict is resolved, increased violence will be the result. This argument supports the common sense (popular) notion that wife abuse is a contemporary phenomenon, ignoring masses of data which testify to its long and dishonourable history.⁴⁴ It ignores research which indicates that the husband's use of force is high at both ends of the power scale (i.e. whether the wife OR the husband possesses high amounts of power relative to the other spouse).⁴⁵ The husband, according to this research, would appear to use force both to support his own power - i.e. force as the underpinning of power - and to

shore up his waning power. Speaking in the gender-neutral language which characterizes their work, Straus et al. suggest:

It seems that violence is used by the most powerful family member as a means of legitimizing his or her dominant position. On the other hand, less powerful members of the family tend to rely on violence as a reaction to their own lack of participation in the family decision-making process.⁴⁶

This reaction, they suggest, may not be directed against the powerholder in the family, but may continue down the "chain of command" in the family hierarchy, ending with the youngest child kicking the cat! "Family members," suggest Straus et al., "resort to physical coercion when they have power over family decision-making but have few resources to bring to bear to legitimize their position."⁴⁷

What emerges out of these pieces of information is a picture of a relationship between resources and power in the family which is extremely complex. By abstracting violence from other resources, there has been a tendency within resource theory to attribute an ultimacy to potential or real violence and aggression which tends to negate the importance of other resources which impact on human interaction. If, for example, we return to Goode's original formulation which stated that force was a resource in company with "economic resources", "prestige resources" and "likability", we can readily see that it is overly simplistic to abstract one from the other. Surely one's personal charm (for example) would be linked with one's prestige, as would the degree to which one's attempted use of force would be considered legitimate. Underlying other resources would be one's economic resources - as the ultimate determinant of one's prestige and the legitimacy with which one could hope to attempt forceful inter-

action, if not one's very "likability".

Blumberg offers clues which may be fruitful in examining the connections between economic resources and domestic violence. In a 61-society pilot sample drawn from the Human Relations Area Files, she determined that women's economic power tends to be a check on the male use of physical force: "where women's economic control is high, male resort to wife beating tends to be low."⁴⁸ This requires further research.

Resource theory deals with interpersonal interactions largely without reference to external social or cultural factors. The task in attempting to understand wife abuse lies in retaining the useful insights which arise from an analysis of resource theory - the perception by the participants of violence as an ultimate resource; the problems which may arise when an individual male's arena for autonomous activity is restricted to his family (which may or may not function in such a way as to allow this activity); the possibility that force may both underpin authority and shore up waning authority - these must be retained as we attempt to formulate an alternative theoretical perspective.

Summary: There are insights to be gained from looking at wife abuse within the context of power and resources in the marital relationship, which is one aspect of the school known as "conflict theory". In general, as has been noted, conflict theory deals with the family as a system in conflict, and suggests that the learning of problem-

solving skills or conflict resolution tactics can avoid violence.

While violence would continue to be the ultimate resource, the augmentation of the individual's resource pool would militate against his or her use of this tactic. The skills and resources are best learned in a familial context, according to this view, so that the conflict resolution potential of the unit is maximized.

While it may well be that the family in contemporary capitalist society is a logical locus of violence, or at least conflict, the focus of conflict theory is such that it lays upon the family the task of "cleaning up the mess" which is generated by a social structure. Increasing emphasis on familial responsibility could be expected to serve as an effective deflector from perceiving problems at the structural level. In many ways, this problem is continued in the next general orientation which is considered, that of social learning theorists.

III

Social Learning Theory and Wife Abuse:'He Learned It at His Mother's Knee'

Within the social learning perspective, there are two major streams of research dealing with wife abuse. The first, arising primarily from the work of Suzanne Steinmetz,⁴⁹ deals with what she terms the "cycle of violence" - the transmission across generations of learned patterns of violent behaviour. The second stream is characterized by the work of Lenore Walker,⁵⁰ who applies the concept of "learned helplessness" to battered wives. We will look at these two separately, illustrating their findings with reference to other material as appropriate.

Social learning theory reasons from the premise that violence is learned behaviour. Following an implicitly behaviourist model, that behaviour which is seen as legitimate and which is perceived as successful is likely to be repeated. Humans are, in effect, conditioned to be violent.

The Cycle of Violence: 'As American as Apple Pie'

Steinmetz was interested in studying the conflict resolution methods utilized by families. Using in-depth interviews, questionnaires, telephone interviews and self-administered daily conflict-recording sheets, she obtained data from 57 intact American families. Her conclusions illustrate what she terms a "cycle of violence" and can be summarized as follows:

- (a) all families experience conflict;
- (b) family conflicts and methods of resolution vary according to their position in the family life cycle;
- (c) consistent patterns for resolving conflicts within families exist - i.e. between spouses, between parents and children, between siblings;
- (d) these patterns persist over three generations.⁵¹

According to Steinmetz:

. . . the more an individual is exposed to violence both as an observer and as a victim during childhood, the more likely an individual is to be violent as an adult.⁵²

In other words, it is at our parents' knees that we learn conflict resolution techniques, including violence. Abuse leads to abuse.

Steinmetz began with the suggestion that:

. . . the level of societal aggression as reflected in violent crime rates may be an indicator of the level of intrafamilial aggression. This may be because the level of societal aggression, in a small but important way, reflects the societal attitude toward the appropriateness of using physical force to resolve interpersonal conflicts.⁵³

Her conclusion, arising from the conceptualization of violence as behaviour learned in childhood, suggests that "removing the sanction for using physical force on family members might be a first step in reducing other physically violent acts."⁵⁴ For Steinmetz, the prescription is: clean up the family to clean up society.

Steinmetz acknowledges that what is needed to clarify some of the ambiguities of the research is information regarding violent adults who have come from both violent and non-violent homes, as well as information about children from violent homes to determine whether or not they all grow up to become violent.⁵⁵ Common sense would seem to indicate that not all abusive adults have histories of violence.

Nothing has been offered in the research to demonstrate that those who are abused as children or who witness abuse as children do not empathize with the victim rather than with the abuser. Their sense of empathy and compassion for the battered individual could lead them to eschew rather than to adopt either violence as a method or the victim role for themselves. This illustrates one fundamental problem in the social learning approach: it tends to take the violence as a self-contained phenomenon which is passed on in a Pavlovian manner from generation to generation, rather like a behavioural "congenital defect".

However, if we grant that some violent behaviour may be learned in childhood, Steinmetz's work - which is taken here as representative of much of the work done by social learning theorists concerned with domestic violence - is subject to other criticism, specifically in the areas of methodology and epistemology.

Methodology: Steinmetz acknowledges that her stratified quota sample has limitations, in that it excludes Blacks, and included only those with listed telephone numbers who agreed to participate in the research project. The population from which she drew her sample - a single county in Delaware - has questionable generalizability in that it appears from the demographic profile Steinmetz offers to be comprised of white, upper middle class Americans. Further, only 9% of her interviews had male participants.

In terms of research design, a major problem lies in the focus on the self-definition of conflictual issues by the families

being studied. Rather than studying the actual methods of conflict resolution, Steinmetz is in fact investigating the definition of conflict held by the participants, in which violence is located at one end of a continuum. A suggestion of the problems which this methodology may mask is found in the lack of congruence between husbands' and wives' reports of physical abuse in the marital dyad, wherein there was a "slight tendency of the wife to play down her husband's physical aggression (or the husband to see himself as more physically aggressive than his wife does)."⁵⁶ When one recalls the refusal of the men in Snell et al.'s study to see wife abuse as problematic⁵⁷ (or looks at the work by Dobash and Dobash which will be considered later, where men are reported to consistently have refused to accept that wife abuse was NOT a valid form of behaviour),⁵⁸ Steinmetz's methodology can be considered as open to criticism.

Epistemology: It is in terms of the epistemological underpinnings of Steinmetz's work that she has been most severely criticized.⁵⁹ Steinmetz's conclusion that family conflict resolution is a process of negotiation may be accurate, but she fails to recognize the structural differences between the situations of various members. Conflict resolution and physical violence become things which (at least potentially) occur in each and every familial dyad with equal force and equivalent dynamics - a perspective which McGrath refers to as one in which violence is "as American as apple pie."⁶⁰ Thus, Steinmetz states that men may do more damage because they tend to be bigger and stronger than their wives, but women are as likely to attempt to use physical violence as are men.⁶¹ Although acknowledging that

services for battered women are "our greatest need", Steinmetz argues strongly that the issue is one of "spouse abuse" in a context of family violence.

Violence by women against men is simply more invisible than that against women, she argues:

The greatest economic resources of most men may enable them to use the services of private lawyers whether they are battered or the batterer . . . However, emergency room and police data . . . show a larger proportion of males as victims.⁶²

Straus et al. reiterate Steinmetz's argument:

It is important that we should not be misdirected by 'the politics of social problems,' which focus attention on issues such as wife abuse and child abuse . . . the problem is one of family violence.⁶³

The work of Murray Straus will be considered in more detail in Chapter Four in the section dealing with General Systems Theory. However, in that he is a colleague of Suzanne Steinmetz, and in that their understanding of the way in which wife abuse is played out in the family is similar, it is instructive at this point to consider the data base on which he bases his conclusion that the issue is "family violence" rather than (e.g.) wife abuse.

As is the case in much of the research on wife abuse, Straus and his colleagues deal with physical violence only,⁶⁴ possibly because of their emphasis on that which is quantifiable. In a study based on a nationally representative sample of 2,143 American couples, Straus determined that 3.8% experienced one or more incidents of wife abuse and 4.6% experienced one or more incidents of husband abuse during a year.⁶⁵ In reaching this conclusion, Straus conflated five

'conflict tactics' into a 'Wife Beating Index' (so named although he used it to refer to both wife's abuse of husbands and husbands' abuse of wives):

1. kicking, biting, hitting with fist;
2. hit or tried to hit with something;
3. beat up;
4. threatened with knife or gun;
5. used knife or gun.

The only 'real male/female difference' was found in Category 2 - 'hit or tried to hit with something', where the median for males was 2.0 incidents per year and, for females, 3.8.⁶⁶ With Steinmetz, Straus acknowledges that, because of the difference between the average man and the average woman in terms of size and strength, a single wife-beating incident may establish or maintain male dominance in the family system.⁶⁷ However, Straus's scale - at least hypothetically - conflates such diverse occurrences as a 100-pound woman attempting to hit a 250-pound man with her open hand, into the same category as a male Viet Nam War veteran attacking his untrained wife with a knife. Ignored are the physical, interpersonal and social differences which allow us to make sense of the events.⁶⁸ Ignored also is the fact that an incident where a man hit a woman with his fist, or beat her up, and she retaliated by trying to hit him with a lamp, would be conceived as incidents of both wife and husband abuse according to this schema.⁶⁹ Such is the danger of a multivariate approach which stops at correlations, rather than seeking understanding.

Dobash and Dobash disagree with the conclusion that the issue is one of 'spouse abuse'.⁷⁰ They reviewed all the violent and non-violent offenses reported to police departments in Edinburgh and Glasgow in 1974 (n = approximately 34,000). Of the cases which could

be termed "violent - family", 75.8% were deemed to be cases of wife assault and 1.1% of husband assault (791 as opposed to 12). Only 0.6% (n = 6) of the cases were categorized as "mutual assault". More broadly, Dobash and Dobash uncovered the fact that, "In every type of relationship, marital, parental, or sibling, the assaults followed the same pattern: males attacked females."⁷¹

Summarizing the contemporary literature on homicides and assaults, Dobash and Dobash noted that the home is a frequent location for these crimes. They also concluded:

. . . the most likely female victims are wives of offenders. The [findings]. . . provide irrefutable evidence that severe recurring violence between adults in the home is most often directed at wives.⁷²

Canadian data support this interpretation. Statistics Canada reported that, for the period 1961-1974:

Of all female victims, 60% are killed in the context of a domestic relationship; this is more than double the proportion (26.8%) of male victims. These family-situated killings of women are proportionately highest for 40-49-year-old females.⁷³

In 1979, the most recent year for which Canadian data are available, Statistics Canada indicates that, for all people aged twenty and over who were killed in a domestic setting (n = 153), 62.7% were female. (It is notable that for homicide victims 19 and under, only 45.3% were female.) While the most prevalent method of killing both male and female victims was shooting (34.8% of male victims, 32.8% of female victims), the second most prevalent form for male victims was stabbing (23.9%) while the second place for female victims was occupied by beating (22.4%) and the third by strangling (15.2%). In total in 1979, 22 men were beaten or

strangled to death by assailants with whom they had a domestic relationship (not necessarily a woman); 47 women had the same unfortunate experience.⁷⁴

We do not have Canadian data on emergency room statistics which would allow us further evaluation of Steinmetz's conclusion that men are the larger proportion of victims in terms of a Canadian context, nor are physicians required to report cases of spouse abuse to the State as is the case with child abuse. However, insofar as police data (Steinmetz's other category) are concerned, a study in the Hamilton-Wentworth region of Ontario based on 1974-75 data determined that women were the victims in 95% of family dispute calls.⁷⁵ The weight of the evidence appears overwhelming.

The conclusion of Dobash and Dobash appears to reflect the data:

. . . there is no systematic evidence showing a pattern of severe, persistent and intimidating violence against husbands that would warrant the use of terms such as beaten or battered. As such, the results of the researches of Straus and his colleagues may tell us more about the response of women to their husbands' violence (and about the problems of abstract measurement and scaling) than they do about any persistent or severe pattern of husband-beating.⁷⁶

Regardless of this conclusion, the multivariate conceptualization of the problem, together with a concern to avoid "sexism" in terminology, leads some researchers to use the term "spouse abuse" rather than wife abuse. Byles who, as has been noted, determined that the victims in 95% of the reported cases of domestic violence in a six-month period in Hamilton-Wentworth region of Ontario were female, consistently refers to "spouse abuse" as the issue. It is argued here that the issue is not one of sexist language. As Dobash and

Dobash argue:

. . . neutral, or equalitarian, terms . . . imply that each marital partner is equally likely to play the part of the perpetrator or victim in a violent episode, that the frequency and severity of the physical force used by each is similar; and that the social meaning and consequences of these acts are the same. None of this is true. In the case of marital violence, it is the husband who is most likely to be the perpetrator and his wife the victim.⁷⁸

How the issue is defined both reflects the underlying premises of the researcher and also affects the conclusions and recommendations for action which are drawn. Steinmetz, whose work is the focus of this section, is concerned with the level of violence in society. She looks to the family as the cradle of society.⁷⁹ In Britain, where Dobash and Dobash did their research, the initial concern was with the battered women per se; research has been action-oriented, geared towards alleviating their condition rather than towards general concern over society at large. In light of this, it is perhaps understandable that there are more shelters per 1,000 women in Britain than in either the United States or Canada.⁸⁰

While it is conceivable that this difference in orientation may reflect different levels of violence in the United States and Great Britain, further research is required to substantiate this, especially in view of the recent upsurge of violence in the latter country. However, when one looks at abused women, considering the phenomenon as a sub-type of family violence serves to deflect attention from this reality. Programmes for aiding women disappear;⁸¹ commissions emphasize child-rearing practices;⁸² battering during pregnancy is understood as pre-natal child abuse;⁸³ Women who are battered, bruised and bleeding are blurred under the homogeneous mask of the

violent family. While Straus et al. are undoubtedly correct when they argue that 'we should not be misdirected by 'the politics of social problems''⁸⁴ It is equally important that we not allow apparent objectivity and gender neutrality to obscure the reality of abused women. Lystad, in a review of the literature, concluded:

. . . the occurrence of adult violence in the home usually involves males as aggressors towards females.⁸⁵

The evidence weighs against Suzanne Steinmetz.

Aside from the 'numbers game', Steinmetz's conclusions regarding egalitarian distribution of marital violence in terms of learned behaviour appear overly simplified when one considers some of the other research in the area. For example, Gelles' data appear to call her conclusion into question.⁸⁶ Based on a sample of 66 couples, he argued that women who had observed conjugal violence in their families of orientation were likely to be victims of marital violence in their families of procreation.⁸⁷ However, when one extracts his figures from his text, another interpretation suggests itself:

Table 2: Tabulation of Gelles' findings regarding women, violence in family of procreation and violence in family of orientation.

	Women who <u>had</u> observed conjugal violence in families of orientation	Women who <u>had not</u> ob- served conjugal violence in families of orientation	
Women were <u>victims</u> of marital violence	8 (67%)	25 (46%)	33
Women were <u>not</u> victims of marital violence	4 (33%)	29 (54%)	33
	12 (100%)	54 (100%)	66

When one notes that only about 24% of the women who were abused had prior acquaintance with this form of marital "conflict resolution" (8/33) and 12% of those who were not victims had observed violence as children (4/33), Gelles' findings are suggestive at best.

On the other hand, support for Gelles' argument that women who witness violence as children grow up to be victims, can be found in the work of Parker and Schumacher. They interviewed twenty battered and thirty non-battered women closely matched for race, age, number of children, years of wife's education, years of marriage and amount of parental arguing in the nuclear family of origin.⁸⁸ Their findings included a significant relationship between the wife's mother having been a victim and the wife herself now being a victim of battering. Parker and Schumacher suggest that this may indicate a vertical transmission of violence in families, which would offer some support for Steinmetz's "cycle of violence", through from the victim's rather than the aggressor's corner. It is necessary to note, however, that Parker and Schumacher deal with the victim role, adopting a perspective which treats the victim as the causal factor, rather than dealing with the violence per se.

The difference between Gelles, Parker and Schumacher and Steinmetz appears to be the latter's consideration of women in the role of actors rather than solely as re-actors. This is a valuable emphasis. However, when it obscures empirical reality, it can only be viewed as unfortunate.

According to Steinmetz:

. . . the conflict-resolution methods most likely to be repeated would be those deliberate acts that are considered to be legitimate behavior by society (or at least perceived as such by the respondents); are aimed at changing another's behavior (instrumental); and are perceived⁸⁹ to be successful by the individuals participating.

Following Steinmetz's own argument, it would appear that people learn to behave violently when such violence is successful. Picking up on the argument that women learn to be victims, within the social learning framework we would argue, therefore, that being a victim appears to be successful - there is more than a hint of the "Total Woman" concept here!

As in resource theory, Steinmetz's analysis carries the implicit message that individuals rationally select those modes of behaviour which will maximize their gains and minimize their losses, although within the parameters dictated by the societal construction of legitimacy. This framework does not negate the occurrence of violence as an expression of rage, but suggests that - unless it appears to be successful in terms of achieving desired ends - such violence is not likely to be repeated to become part of one's "problem-solving repertoire".

If the observation of violence in the family of origin tends to teach men to become violent, whereas the same process of observation can be correlated with women becoming victims in their family of procreation, surely more is operating than a Pavlovian type of conditioning towards violent behaviour. In an addendum to the second printing of her book, Cycle of Violence, Steinmetz acknowledges that the plight of the battered woman is one of "learned helplessness"

and emotional dependency, which suggests the work of Lenore Walker (to be considered in the next section of this Chapter).⁹⁰

The addendum to Steinmetz's book suggests that this learning vis-à-vis the man's behaviour in the wife abuse situation will take place insofar as he manages to totally intimidate her and gain control, in a process she suggests is "similar to the brainwashing techniques used during religious and political conversions".⁹¹ While this is in all likelihood an accurate assessment of the process as it is experienced by women, to attribute this to deliberate behaviour on the part of the man suggests a diabolical intent which is belied by the extensiveness of wife abuse. For wife abuse and the process of dehumanization which the abused woman undergoes to be explicable, it is necessary to set the entire phenomenon in its social, historic and economic context. It is this that Steinmetz with her "violence is as American as apple pie" approach ultimately fails to accomplish.

Learned Helplessness: No Visible Means of Escape

Lenore Walker differs from Steinmetz in that her focus is on the victim of wife abuse rather than on "family violence". Walker's concern is with the question, "why do women stay?", thus addressing the myth of female masochism. A psychologist, her work is based on a self-selected sample of battered women, about which she says:

I believe it will only be through listening to what battered women say that we will be able to understand

what happens to a battered woman, how she is victimized, and how we can help a society change so that this horrible crime can no longer be perpetrated upon women.⁹²

Whereas for Steinmetz, wife abuse is a physically-manifested case of conflict between family members, for Walker, it is a specific case of violence against women,⁹³ including both physical and psychological manifestations. While physical abuse can be measured according to objective medical standards (frequency, number of stitches required, bruises, etc.), psychological abuse must, according to Walker, be measured by both the frequency and the subjective impact on the woman. Physical abuse is always accompanied by some measure of psychological abuse, Walker argues, and in this she finds clues as to why women remain in abusive situations.

Following Seligman's research on laboratory animals in which the animals were conditioned with random electric shocks to passivity and submissiveness, Walker generalizes this to humans and supports her hypothesis with empirical evidence from her interviews with battered women.⁹⁴ She suggests that battered women develop a sense of "learned helplessness":

Repeated batterings, like electrical shocks, diminish the woman's motivation to respond. She becomes passive. Secondly, her cognitive ability to perceive success is changed. She does not believe her response will result in a favorable outcome, whether or not it might. Next, having generalized her helplessness, the battered woman does not believe anything she does will alter any outcome, not just the specific situation that has occurred . . . She cannot think of alternatives . . . Finally, her sense of emotional well-being becomes precarious.⁹⁵

Generalizing again from the experiments on laboratory animals, Walker suggests that the condition of learned helplessness can be stopped by extracting women from the abusive situation (e.g. by

placing them or having them place themselves in refuges) and "revers[ing] a negative cognitive set."⁹⁶ In other words, learned helplessness can be unlearned in a supportive environment.

Walker's work is valuable in that she provides a powerful vehicle for refuting the myth of female masochism. Her training as a clinical psychologist leads her to conclude that professional help is necessary in the form of therapy for the female victim, to end the battering relationship. In this she is in sharp opposition to those who argue either that women must take responsibility for themselves or that the focus should be on changing the man's abusive behaviour.

Like the studies which root explanations for wife abuse in individual psychopathology, Walker's solution appears to individualize the problem and locate the responsibility for change with the woman.⁹⁷ Her generalization from animal research, her emphasis on therapeutic help and her discussion of the problem of wife abuse in terms of the woman's psychology have opened her to the criticism of blaming the victim for being victimized:

[Walker's own research suggests that] factors such as the woman's economic position, the age and number of her children, the availability of a safe place of refuge, contribute more to why the woman stays . . . than does 'learned helplessness'.⁹⁸

This criticism appears to be based on a superficial reading of Walker (or perhaps a reading of her preliminary findings rather than those presented in her book). Walker illustrates five areas in which coercive techniques (her criteria for battering) operate. These five areas (physical abuse, sexual abuse, economic deprivation, family discord and social battering) provide ample scope for

inclusion of sociological variables, as will be noted in the following overview.

(a) Physical Abuse: "It usually takes physical abuse before a woman will admit to herself that she is being battered," claims Walker.⁹⁹ However, even then, as a psychological survival technique, she may deny the reality of what is happening. Walker notes that much battering takes place during pregnancy,¹⁰⁰ and suggests that the child may represent a threat to the dependent man.

(b) Sexual Abuse: Walker's chapter is unfortunately sensationalistic, reading rather like a "letters" column in a pornographic magazine than a serious investigation of a social phenomenon. This section does call attention to the relationship between sex and violence in society. Walker points out that there is an anti-woman bias in both sexual violence and violence in general,¹⁰¹ thus reminding one that wife abuse must be considered in terms of violence against women in the broader context (e.g. pornography, rape, incest). This context will be addressed in Chapter Five of this work.

Walker notes that, for the women in her sample, sex is intermittently very satisfying. In that intermittent learning is considered within social learning theory to be the strongest reinforcer of behaviour, Walker suggests this may contribute to the women staying in the relationship.¹⁰² This, of course, assumes the woman stays for positive (free will) reasons rather than negative (lack of options) ones.

Walker stresses that sexual jealousy is "almost universally

present" in the battering relationship.¹⁰³ This supports popular ideology that women are often beaten because of their (real or perceived) promiscuous tendencies. However, Walker's respondents also express their own jealous feelings about their husbands' "escapades". As Walker's methodology causes her to impute feelings to the abusive men as understood through the perceptions of their victims, one must approach her findings in this area with caution. One must question whether sexual jealousy is a cause or a justification for abuse - it would perhaps be more pertinent to analyze Walker's data from the position of the woman as, by law, the sexual possession of the man.

(c) Economic Deprivation: Walker's work makes an important contribution to the understanding of wife abuse, in that she deals mainly with middle class women, thus countering the myth that violence against wives is a lower class phenomenon. She determined that even those women with their own inherited or earned monetary resources felt that their husbands controlled their money.¹⁰⁴ Economic deprivation can thus be both physical and psychological. Women face the reality that they may be unable to support themselves and their children if they leave the relationship - but the crucial finding emerging from Walker's study is that this fear need not be objectively valid to be powerful. Women's learned helplessness is generalized to the economic sphere.

Walker concludes that "economic deprivation ceases to be a coercive technique only when women accept their right to economic

freedom."¹⁰⁵ While it would be easy to dismiss this as a "bourgeois argument" which neglects the reality of working class women's economic handicaps and the relative disadvantage of middle and upper class women vis-à-vis their male "class-mates", it can also be understood as prefiguring a societal change wherein women would be able to refuse to be subjected to economic coercion by an individual man. To adopt Walker's learning theory perspective for the moment, this could be carried further to suggest that the refusal to submit could be generalized to the sphere of the wider social formation - and here the concept contains profoundly revolutionary seeds. There is no question that Walker's formulation is inherently idealistic; however, in that she is discussing the subjective side of the objective reality of women's economic subjugation, her insights in this area are valuable.

(d) Family Discord: In this fourth area of coercion, Walker refers to the disjunction between the ideology of marriage as inevitable and forever, and the reality of the abusive situation. She notes that families have "violence quotients" below which the violence is perceived as legitimate, is seen as desirable or at least deserved. She reminds one of Goode's discussion of the social control aspects inherent in the threat of violence, referring to the climate of fear which exists in violent marriages:

Violence as a discipline does not cause a permanent change in the way someone will behave unless the victim believes that the possibility of violence is always present.¹⁰⁶

Families thus may continue with the fear of violence as a subterranean current which dictates the contours of the dominance hierarchy and determines the behaviour of various members. What Walker does not emphasize sufficiently is the extent to which this hierarchy may form a part of the ideology of marriage for one, if not both, the partners.¹⁰⁷

(e) Social Battering: Walker emphasizes the effectiveness of the social isolation which characterizes battering relationships. Both the structural isolation of the privatized family and the moral isolation induced by the humiliation the woman experiences as a result of her sense of failure as a wife/mother whose job it was to make her man happy, increase the woman's sense of helplessness.¹⁰⁸ Walker suggests that women in this situation may suffer from chronic illness and stress-induced psychophysiological disease which effectively ensure a release from battering as long as men have control over decisions about their care.¹⁰⁹ In other words, the battering ceases when the woman abrogates all control over her own person, in favour of the man. While this suggestion of manipulation for secondary gains may be irritating to feminists, a parallel can be drawn with the hysteria of Victorian bourgeois women who, Ehrenreich and English suggest, may have used this "illness" as a means of gaining some, albeit limited, control over their lives.¹¹⁰

Walker's conception of learned helplessness has elements which could be taken beyond the psychological dimension to explain why women stay in abusive relationships. The five dimensions of coercion just examined - physical, sexual, economic, familial and social -

offer a valuable augmentation of our conceptualization of wife abuse, although Walker's use of the dimensions does tend to remain in the realm of the psychological.¹¹¹

When considering the family, Walker locates the overall cause of wife battering "not [with] the family as an institution, but rather the demise of the extended family and the rise of the nuclear family unit."¹¹² She argues that the extended family would have offered support for women and suggests that perhaps smaller community support systems could substitute.¹¹³ In a similar vein, Varma attributes domestic violence to the deterioration of family life:

It is only logical to conclude that wife abuse is . . . quite uncommon in [simpler societies where extended family relationships prevail] because in more extended family arrangements, the wife's family would not allow it . . . It is the patriarchal nature of the nuclear family which guarantees that violence, kindled by the frustrations of urban and suburban life, will be directed towards the more oppressed and less legally protected family members - women and children.¹¹⁴

Unfortunately, cross-cultural research prohibits our acceptance of such nostalgic interpretations for, as Masumura notes in a study of 86 primitive societies world-wide, ". . . in most societies, wife abuse, whether homicidal or not, does not call forth revenge by the wife's kin."¹¹⁵

In reaching her conclusions about the "patriarchal nature of the nuclear family" and its connections to wife abuse, Walker has accepted an ahistorical conceptualization of wife abuse. Her attribution of structural blame for wife abuse to the deterioration of the extended family assumes that the nuclear family is the locus and sole support of male dominance. It ignores the fact that

wife abuse has a long history, predating the nuclear family by many generations, and ignores contemporary cross-cultural research. Macro-level explanation is not one of Walker's strengths.¹¹⁶

Thus, in addition to methodological weaknesses, Walker's work is flawed by its inaccurate understanding of history and by a tendency towards psychological reductionism. Her conclusion that being a victim can be unlearned if the woman experiences success and has the opportunity to "regain some of her individual power"¹¹⁷ can be seen as an attempt to psychologize an objectively powerless situation. However, once these criticisms have been made, three strong, positive statements must be offered:

1. Walker deals with middle class women, thus providing important evidence for the argument that wife abuse crosses class lines.
2. She offers a theory of "learned helplessness" which offers the promise for understanding some of the mechanisms by which the male/female dominance/submission relationships are maintained. There is just as much danger in reducing these to solely structural phenomena as there is in an overly psychological approach. Walker's formulation offers the beginnings of an integrated analysis in terms of wife abuse.
3. She makes the explicitly feminist point that woman battering is a part of the wider spectrum of violence against women. Rather than conflate violence against women in families under a general heading of "conflict" or argue that it is

one aspect of a more general situation of familial disorder, Walker brings the abused woman front and centre.

Summary

Both the more general "social learning" approach as represented by Suzanne Steinmetz, and the specific articulation thereof found in the work of Lorene Walker, locate the causes or at least the perpetuation of wife abuse within the family as an interacting unit. Like "conflict theories", they have the positive value of moving beyond an explanation that is rooted in individual psychopathology. However, as has been noted, there is a tendency to give inadequate consideration to the location of the family in the wider society. It is this latter emphasis that is focused upon in the final section of this literature review.

Conclusion

There are underlying similarities in the functionalist, conflict and social learning paradigms which have been outlined in this Chapter. Despite the seeming disjuncture between functionalism which regards familial conflict as dysfunctional and/or non-existent and conflict and social learning theories where conflict is acknowledged as an inherent part of contemporary familial interaction, one basic parallel must be drawn. Insofar as conflict management is seen to be a teachable and desirable skill in the conflict and social learning paradigms, there is a tacit acceptance of the viability of the nuclear family and a recognition that equilibrium is, in fact, a desirable condition. Change is something to be managed and contained within the parameters of contemporary theories of conflict management. In other words, the goal is the re-establishing of familial equilibrium (on a societal if not on an individual level), rather than an acknowledgement that conflict may be a manifestation of serious contradictions in contemporary families. At base, therefore, apparently critical theories can be argued to be supportive of the status quo and as such fundamentally conservative. It is perhaps not surprising that these theories (conflict and social learning) represent the most widely supported in North American social scientific explorations of the wife abuse phenomenon.

However, in the course of this review, several valuable insights have been identified. First and foremost, both conflict and social learning theories serve to focus attention on factors which cannot be reduced to individual psychopathology or biology.

Catharsis theory highlights the appearance of domestic violence as the explosion of repressed conflict, whereas resource theory emphasizes that from the perspective of the participants, violence may indeed appear as the ultimate resource and can function by threat as well as by act. From the discussion of resource theory, came the reminder that marriage is the last bastion within which individual men can expect to articulate free choice - an insight which may illuminate the apparent intractability of wife abuse.

Social learning theory is valuable in that it goes beyond the concept of violence as innate. However, in general it ignores the specific mechanisms by which male dominance is articulated and legitimated, and the connections between this dominance and the economic, social and political systems. From the perspective of the subjective experience of the battered woman, the concept of "learned helplessness" would appear to offer a fruitful area for further research in terms of why women stay in abusive relationships. Further, the five dimensions of coercive relationships suggested by Lenore Walker offer the basis for a framework for future empirical studies of the wife abuse phenomenon. The "cycle of violence" concept formulated by Suzanne Steinmetz, despite its tendency to explain family violence in terms of family violence, will be argued in Chapter Six to provide valuable groundwork for a more adequate theoretical formulation of wife abuse.

In the following Chapter the focus of investigation shifts from the family to a broader conceptualization in which wife abuse is ultimately understood in terms of the wider social system.

Footnotes to Chapter Three

1 L. Breslow-Rubin, Worlds of Pain: Life in the Working Class Family (New York, 1976), 35. This statement was made by a male ironworker whom Breslow-Rubin interviewed.

2 A. Skolnick, The Intimate Environment: Exploring Marriage and the Family (Boston, 1978), 133.

3 T. Parsons, 'Age and Sex in the Social Structure of the U.S.', American Sociological Review 7 (October, 1942), 609.

4 M. Zelditch, 1955, cited in H. M. Hodges, Jr. Conflict and Consensus (New York, 1974), 271; emphasis in original.

5 See, for example, L. A. Coser, 'Some Social Functions of Violence', Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science 364 (March, 1966), 8-18.

6 J. E. O'Brien, 'Violence in Divorce Prone Families', Journal of Marriage and the Family 33 (1971), 692-698.

7 T. Parsons, 'Certain Primary Sources and Patterns of Aggression in the Social Structure of the Western World', Psychiatry 10 (May, 1947), 167-181; R. Stark and J. McEvoy III, 'Middle Class Violence', Psychology Today (November 4, 1970), 52-54, 110-112.

8 J. Toby, 'Violence and the Masculine Ideal: Some Qualitative Data,' Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science 364 (March, 1966), 22.

9 Toby, p. 27.

10 Parsons, 'Age and Sex . . . ', p. 613.

11 See, for example, Toby, 1966.

12 C. Lasch, Haven in a Heartless World: The Family Beseiged (New York, Basic Books), 124.

13 One must recall that, for Parsons et al., the male/female role differentiation is functional for the survival of the family. One must assume therefore that the concomitant warping of the male psyche is also "functional" in that it prepares him for his role as instrumental, 'masculine' leader.

- 14 T. Davidson, 'Wifebeating: A Recurring Phenomenon Throughout History', in M. Roy, Battered Women . . . (New York, 1977); R. E. Dobash and R. P. Dobash, 'Wives: The 'Appropriate' Victims of Marital Violence', Victimology 2:3-4 (1978), 426-442; Dobash and Dobash, Violence Against Wives (1979).
- 15 When the analysis is extended to "lower class families", there is less difficulty accounting for male violence in functionalist terms. For example, to Coser (1966, p. 11), male violence within the "American lower class family" can be understood as compensation for "inadequate rewards in the occupational world at large." Violence, therefore, has as one of its social functions, the means to achievement when all legitimate channels of opportunity are barred. The family in this view is serving as a locus for the management of tensions generated in the outside world, a point which is accepted and developed later in this thesis (Chapter Six).
- 16 L. Walker, 'Battered Women and Learned Helplessness', Victimology 2:3-4 (1978), pp 525-534.
- 17 J. Sprey, 'The Family as a System in Conflict', Journal of Marriage and the Family 31 (1969), 700.
- 18 J. Foss, 'The Paradoxical Nature of Family Relationships and Family Conflict', in M. Straus and G. Hotaling (eds.) The Social Causes of Husband-Wife Violence (Minneapolis, 1980), 116.
- 19 Foss, p. 123.
- 20 Foss, p. 134.
- 21 As will be noted later in this analysis, many of the insights deal with an understanding of the specific wife battering situation or the understanding of the patterns of familial setting as one in which conflict is inherent.
- 22 Snell et al., 1964.
- 23 B. Bettelheim, 'Children Should Learn About Violence', in S. Steinmetz and M. Straus (eds.) Violence in the Family (New York, 1974), 300-301. The Bettelheim article is a reprint of a 1967 publication.
- 24 G. R. Bach and P. Wyden, 'Why Intimates Must Fight', in Steinmetz and Straus, 1974. See especially pp. 98 and 100.
- 25 S. K. Steinmetz, The Cycle of Violence (New York, 1977), 24.

- 26 S. K. Steinmetz and M. A. Straus, "Intra-Family Violence",
in S. Steinmetz and M. Straus, Violence in the Family,
1974.
- 27 Berkowitz, 1974, cited in Steinmetz and Straus, 1974.
- 28 Bandura, Ross and Ross, 1961, cited in Steinmetz and Straus,
1974. See also A. Bandura, Aggression - A Social Learning
Analysis (Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1973), cited in Steinmetz,
Cycle of Violence, 1977.
- 29 Steinmetz and Straus, 1974.
- 30 E. Megargee, "A Critical Review of Theories of Violence", in
D. V. Mulvihill and M. M. Tumin (eds.) Crimes of Violence
13 (Washington, D.C., 1969), 1074.
- 31 Walker, The Battered Woman, 1979, 55-70.
- 32 Steinmetz and Straus, 1974, p. 15.
- 33 W. Goode, "Force and Violence in the Family", in Steinmetz and
Straus, Violence . . . (1974).
- 34 Goode, "Force and Violence . . . ", p. 28.
- 35 Goode, p. 30, emphasis added.
- 36 Goode, p. 41.
- 37 S. Prescott and C. Letko, "Battered Women: A Social Psycho-
logical Perspective", in Roy, Battered Women . . . (1977), 74.
- 38 Prescott and Letko, p. 94.
- 39 C. M. Allen and M. A. Straus, "Resources, Power and Husband-
Wife Violence", in M. A. Straus and G. T. Hotaling, The Social
Causes . . . (1980). The variability of the concept "resources"
is one of the noteworthy aspects of the various applications
of resource theory. Here Allen and Straus deal in terms of
education, income and occupation.
- 40 Allen and Straus, p. 203.
- 41 Allen and Straus, pp 204-5.
- 42 O'Brien, "Violence . . . ", 1974.
- 43 R. N. Whitehurst, "Violence in Husband-Wife Interaction",
in Steinmetz and Straus, Violence . . . (1974).

- 44 For discussion of the history of wife abuse from various perspectives, see Davidson, "Wifebeating . . .", 1977; Dobash and Dobash, Violence Against Wives, 1979; R. P. Dobash and R. E. Dobash, "Community Response to Violence Against Wives: Charivari, Abstract Justice and Patriarchy", Social Problems (1981); M. May, "Violence in the Family: An Historical Perspective" in J. P. Martin, Violence and the Family (Chichester, 1978); N. Tomes, "A Torrent of Abuse: Crimes of Violence Between Working Class Men and Women in London, 1840-1875", Journal of Social History 11:3 (1978), 328-345.
- 45 M. Straus, "A General Systems Theory Approach to a Theory of Violence Between Family Members", Social Science Information 12:3 (1973), 105-125; D. Marsden, "Sociological Perspectives on Family Violence", in J. P. Martin (ed.) Violence and the Family (Chichester, 1978).
- 46 M. A. Straus et al., Behind Closed Doors: Violence in the American Family (Garden City, 1980), 193.
- 47 Straus et al., 1980, p. 193.
- 48 R. L. Blumberg, Stratification: Socioeconomic and Sexual Inequality (Dubuque, 1978), 24.
- 49 See especially Steinmetz, The Cycle of Violence, 1977.
- 50 Walker, The Battered Woman, 1979.
- 51 Steinmetz, Cycle of Violence, p. vi.
- 52 Steinmetz, Cycle of Violence, p. 105.
- 53 Steinmetz, Cycle of Violence, p. 30.
- 54 Steinmetz, Cycle of Violence, p. 119.
- 55 S. K. Steinmetz, "Wifebeating, Husband Beating - A Comparison of the Use of Physical Violence Between Spouses to Resolve Marital Fights", in M. Roy, Battered Women . . . (New York, 1977).
- 56 Steinmetz, Cycle of Violence, pp 93-95. The comparison between questionnaire and interview data which would make this lack of congruence apparent was made in only 22% of the same for "methodological reasons".
- 57 Snell et al., 1964.
- 58 Dobash and Dobash, Violence Against Wives, 1979.
- 59 See R. E. Dobash and R. P. Dobash, "Wifebeating - Still a Common Form of Marital Violence", Social Work Today (1977), 14-17;

Fields and Kirschner, "Battered Women are Still in Need . . . ", 1978; Fleming, Stopping Wife Abuse, 1979; C. McGrath, 'The Crisis of Domestic Order', Socialist Review 43, 9:1 (1979), 11-30. I am indebted to Rebecca Dobash for drawing her 1977 article to my attention.

60 McGrath, 1979.

61 Steinmetz, Cycle of Violence, 1977, p. 88; see also her articles, 'Wifebeating, Husband Beating . . . ', 1977; 'Services to Battered Women: Our Greatest Need. A Reply to Field and Kirchner [sic]', Victimology 3:1-2 (1978), 222-226.

62 Steinmetz, 'Services to Battered Women . . . ', p. 224.

63 Straus et al., Behind Closed Doors . . ., p. 12.

64 For examples of this perspective which emphasizes the quantifiable to the exclusion of broader manifestations of abuse, see R. J. Gelles, 'Abused Wives: Why Do They Stay?', Journal of Marriage and the Family 38:4 (1976), 659-668; G. T. Hotaling and M. A. Straus, 'Culture, Social Organization and Irony in the Study of Family Violence', in Straus and Hotaling, The Social Causes . . . (1980); Straus et al., Behind Closed Doors . . . (1980); Steinmetz, The Cycle of Violence (1977); Steinmetz, 'Wifebeating, Husband Beating . . . ' (1977).

65 M. A. Straus, 'A Sociological Perspective on the Prevention of Wife Beating', in Straus and Hotaling, The Social Causes (1980). This study is also reported in Straus et al., Behind Closed Doors . . . (1980).

66 Straus, 'A Sociological Perspective . . . ', p. 28. The reader is not told if 'real' means statistically significant.

67 Straus, 'A Sociological Perspective . . . ', p. 30.

68 Dobash and Dobash, Violence Against Wives, p. 9.

69 Dobash and Dobash, 'Social Science and Social Action . . . ', p. 17.

70 Dobash and Dobash, 'Wives: The 'Appropriate Victims'. . . ', p. 437.

71 Dobash and Dobash, 'Wives: The 'Appropriate Victims'. . . ', p. 438.

- 72 Dobash and Dobash, Violence Against Wives, p. 19. Dobash and Dobash based their conclusions on the studies of homicide by MacDonald (1911 - England and Wales 1885-1905); Von Hentig (1948 - Germany, 1930s); Wolfgang (1958 - Philadelphia 1950's); Gibson and Klein (1969 - England and Wales 1957-68); Gibson (1975 - England and Wales 1967-71); Moran (1971 - Boston 1962-66); Voss and Hepburn (1965 - Chicago 1965). They further reviewed the work on assault by McClintock (1963 - England and Wales 1950 and 1960); by the American researchers Ennis (1967), Lvinger (1966), O'Brien (1971) and Whitehurst (1971) and of the Home Intervention Team Project in Hamilton, Ontario, Canada (1976).

Reports based on police data are subject to the limitations of these data, i.e. a selection process may in fact be at work where women are more likely to report abuse than are men, because of norms surrounding the masculine role. However, evidence from those cases where women commit homicide indicates that they most often do so in self defense or after a long period in which they have been frequent victims of abuse at the hands of the man they murder.

- 73 Statistics Canada, Homicide in Canada: A Statistical Synopsis (Ottawa, 1976).

- 74 Statistics Canada, Homicide Statistics, 1979 (Ottawa, 1980).

- 75 J. A. Byles, "Family Violence - Some Facts and Gaps: A Statistical Overview", in V. R. D'Oyley (ed.) Domestic Violence . . . (Toronto, 1978); Byles, "Family Violence in Hamilton", Canada's Mental Health 28:1 (March, 1980), 4-6. See B. MacEachern et al., Family Violence in Hamilton (Revisited) (Hamilton, 1980) for a report on a follow-up to Byles' study and an account of an unsuccessful attempt to gather data from emergency departments of local hospitals.

- 76 Dobash and Dobash, "Social Science . . .", pp 17-18.

- 77 Byles, "Family Violence . . .", 1980.

- 78 Dobash and Dobash, Violence Against Wives . . ., pp 11-12. See also R. E. Dobash, "When Non-Sexist Language is Sexist" in B. Warrior, Working on Wife Abuse (1981) for a clear presentation of the position argued here.

- 79 Steinmetz, The Cycle of Violence, p. 41. Insofar as Steinmetz is concerned with features of the society at large that increase violence in the family (see pp 39-40 of her book), she looks to changes in the family as the initial cite of intervention in the cycle:

. . . the first step in reducing the excessive use of violence in all segments of our society might

be to replace aggressive and abusive family interactions with more human, effective modes of interaction. Since much criminal behavior is also linked to inadequate socialization, society at large, as well as the immediate family unit, might benefit (Cycle of Violence, p. 41).

- 80 Dobash and Dobash, Violence Against Wives, comment on this difference in orientation.
- 81 See Fields and Kirschner for an example of this (1978).
- 82 Standing Committee on Health and Welfare, Child at Risk (Ottawa, 1980).
- 83 R. J. Gelles, 'Research Findings and Implications from a National Study on Domestic Violence', in V. D'Oyley, Domestic Violence. . . (1978); Child at Risk (1980).
- 84 Straus et al., Behind Closed Doors . . ., p. 12. Emphasis added.
- 85 M. H. Lystad, 'Violence at Home: A Review of the Literature', American Journal of Orthopsychiatry 45:3 (1975), 332.
- 86 R. J. Gelles, 'No Place to Go: The Social Dynamics of Marital Violence', in Roy, Battered Women . . . (1977); Gelles, 'Research Findings . . .', 1978.
- 87 Gelles, 'No Place to Go . . .', p. 60.
- 88 B. Parker and D. N. Schumacher, 'The Battered Wife Syndrome and Violence in the Nuclear Family of Origin: A Controlled Pilot Study', American Journal of Public Health 67:8 (1977), 760.
- 89 Steinmetz, The Cycle of Violence, p. 26.
- 90 Steinmetz, The Cycle of Violence, p. xix.
- 91 Steinmetz, The Cycle of Violence, p. xix.
- 92 Walker, The Battered Woman, p. xii. Walker states that she "collected over 120 detailed stories" and "listened to fragments of over 300 more", as well as interviewing "dozens of helpers" over a period of a year.
- 93 Walker, The Battered Woman, p. 15; see also Walker, "Battered Women . . .", p. 526.

- 94 Armstrong and Armstrong, in The Double Ghetto . . . (1978), p. 94, criticize research which extrapolates from animal research:

Research on other species may suggest hypotheses for further study of human behaviour, but generalizations about people based on animal studies require an unjustified leap of faith.

What is argued here is that Walker's research with battered women constitutes the testing of the "learned helplessness" hypothesis which she appropriated from Seligman's research on laboratory animals. In this way, her analysis is different from those theorists who were criticized as biological determinists in Chapter One.

- 95 Walker, The Battered Woman, pp 49-50; see also P. G. Ball and E. Wyman, "Battered Wives and Powerlessness: What Can Counsellors Do?" Victimology 2:3-4 (1978), 545-552; Steinmetz, The Cycle of Violence, p. xix; Walker, "Battered Women . . ." (1978).
- 96 Walker, The Battered Woman, p. 52.
- 97 Walker does, however, isolate a "cycle of battering" which includes the buildup of tension, the release and the period of calm between blow-ups. It is immediately after the "release", i.e. immediately after the battering incident, that the aggressor feels most sorry, and it is at this point that Walker suggests intervention into the man's behaviour could be successful. Perhaps here there is a key for change which would not make the woman responsible, although it too individualizes the problem.
- 98 R. E. Dobash and R. P. Dobash, "Patriarchy and Violence Against Wives", from Open University text, Great Britain (1980), 31-32. I wish to thank Rebecca Dobash for providing me with this article.
- 99 Walker, The Battered Woman, p. 80.
- 100 Gelles, "No Place to Go . . .", 1977.
- 101 Walker, The Battered Woman, p. 108.
- 102 Walker, The Battered Woman, p. 108.
- 103 Walker, The Battered Woman, p. 114.
- 104 Walker, The Battered Woman, p. 125.
- 105 Walker, The Battered Woman, p. 140.

- 106 Walker, The Battered Woman, p. 148.
- 107 For discussions of this aspect of marriage, see Dobash and Dobash, Violence Against Wives, pp 75-96; R. E. Dobash, "The Negotiation of Daily Life and the 'Provocation' of Violence: A Patriarchal Concept in Support of the Wife Beater" (1978); Dobash and Dobash, "Patriarchy and Violence against Wives" (1980); Breslow-Rubin, Worlds of Pain (1976). J. Bernard's formulation of "two realities" within marriage is also relevant here - see The Future of Marriage (New York, 1972).
- 108 Walker, The Battered Woman, pp 169ff.
- 109 Walker, The Battered Woman, p. 180.
- 110 B. Ehrenreich and D. English, Complaints and Disorders: The Sexual Politics of Sickness (Old Westbury, N.Y., 1975).
- 111 Walker's work reminds one of Juliet Mitchell's formulation of "women's estate" (Woman's Estate, New York, 1971) in which she suggested that women were oppressed along four dimensions: economic, sexual, reproductive and in the area of socialization of children. Each of these areas must change, she argued, before women would be "liberated". While Mitchell's conceptualization can be criticized as being overly simplified, it does provide a useful organizing framework for considering data. It is suggested that Walker's five dimensions of wife abuse could serve the same purpose.
- 112 Walker, The Battered Woman, p. 252.
- 113 See Whitehurst, "Alternative Family Structures . . ." for similar conclusions.
- 114 M. Varma, "Battered Women, Battered Children", in M. Roy, Battered Women . . . (New York, 1977), 269.
- 115 W. T. Masumura, "Wife Abuse and Other Forms of Aggression", Victimology 4:1 (1979), 55.
- 116 Walker's ahistoricity is remarkable in that she begins her book by unquestioning acceptance of Davidson's account of the existence of a pre-historical, non-hierarchically-oriented matriarchy ("Wifebeating: A Recurring Phenomenon . . .", 1977).
- 117 Walker, "Battered Women . . .", p. 531.

CHAPTER FOUR
EXPLANATIONS OF WIFE ABUSE WHICH CAN
BROADLY BE TERMED 'SYSTEMIC':
TAKING A WIDER VIEW

Introduction

In this chapter, theoretical perspectives on wife abuse which take a more generalized or wider view than those which have been considered, are reviewed. Although their scope has resulted in their inclusion in this chapter, the theories which follow represent divergent viewpoints. The first to be discussed, the "subculture of violence" hypothesis, looks to shared cultural norms which legitimate the violence and suggests that both perpetrator and victim share unproblematic acceptance of these norms. It is argued herein that this perspective could serve to not only obscure wife abuse in the middle and upper classes, but as it would be applied to wife abuse, would make questionable assumptions about the congruity of male and female world views.

The second section deals with General Systems theory, which can be termed a multivariate approach to wife abuse. Attempting to consider all possible correlates of the phenomenon is an advance over monocausal explanations, but it results in an approach which is descriptive in the extreme.

The third section in this Chapter presents explicitly feminist theories, of which two sets of research are presented. Linda MacLeod's work on wife abuse in Canada represents one of the few Canadian works on the subject and also an example of thinking which contends that solutions can be obtained through reform of existing social and economic structures. Although MacLeod raises key questions, her idealist formulation prevents her from dealing with them adequately. Ultimately, it is argued, MacLeod's structural location within the social and economic hierarchy (the report was prepared under Canadian government auspices), leads her to speak "about" or "at" rather than "on behalf of" or "with" the women who are experiencing battering. However, these criticisms do not negate the value of her work as a vital contribution to the Canadian literature, her succinct review of the battered woman's legal options, or her contribution to the refutation of the myth of female masochism in her assertion that women stay in battering relationships both because they have no place to go and because normalizing the relationship can be understood as part of their job as wives.

Dobash and Dobash, the theorists whose work forms the focus of the following part of the Chapter, see their own thinking as "socialist feminist".¹ Their work is among the most comprehensive available. Dobash and Dobash attempt to integrate historical analysis and examination of specific contemporary phenomena within the wider social and cultural setting, concentrating on wife abuse as a specific form of violence. Wife abuse, they argue, is the most

prevalent, systematic and legitimate form of violence between adults in the family, and should be conceptualized as an extension of male domination. While Dobash and Dobash are criticized as having an overly simplistic concept of the social formation, particular in the areas of class, status and ideology, and while their conceptualization of "the patriarchy" is certainly problematic, there is no question that their work is illuminating and valuable.

While Dobash and Dobash posit separate spheres - family, politics, economics and religion - none of which appears to be determinant - those analyses incorporated in the final section of this chapter are based on an understanding of the economic sphere as determinant. Specifically, Luxton's work on domestic labour, in which she refers to wife abuse as one aspect of women's role as tension manager in the family, is considered.

The Subculture of Violence Hypothesis:"That's Just the Way They Are ..."

One of the most common myths about wife abuse is that it is strictly a "lower class phenomenon", in which both parties cooperate. The woman, according to this myth, both expects and enjoys the beatings.² While these myths are not supported by data, it is common to hear people attempting to justify them by reference to sociological theories about shared cultural norms. While I was unable to locate any evidence that the social scientific literature makes this application, it is worthwhile looking at the "subculture of violence" hypothesis to see if such application is valid.

By looking to shared cultural norms which legitimate the violence, the "subculture of violence" hypothesis is argued to provide a framework whereby it would be possible to attribute wife abuse to systemic causes:

A carrier and user of violence will not be burdened by conscious guilt, then, not only because he generally is not attacking the representatives of the non-violent culture, but also because the recipient of his violence shares in the same subculture.³

If this is applied to wife abuse, one is reminded of Pizzey's⁴ conviction that people who engage in wife abuse are generally violent types, of the conviction of some battered women that they "deserved it",⁵ of the fact that men on occasion beat their wives in front of their (the men's) friends,⁶ and of complaints by police that women often attack them when they attempt to interfere.⁷ Most important,

the "subculture of violence" hypothesis supports the stereotype of wife abuse as a working class phenomenon.⁸

In addition to the work of Walker on middle class women, which was reviewed in the preceding Chapter, it is important to recall the findings of Stark and McEvoy where 20% of a representative national sample of adult Americans approved of a husband slapping his wife "on appropriate occasions".⁹ The percentage ranged from 16% of those who had grade eight education or less, to 25% of those who were college educated. Seventy percent of the sample believed that it is "good" for boys to have fist fights as they grow up. Physical violence or the acceptance thereof, Stark and McEvoy concluded, was equally common in all educational and income levels.

While it is not the intention of this thesis to evaluate the "subculture of violence" hypothesis on a general level, nor to assess its validity in terms of explaining more restricted forms of male-male violence, there are problems when one attempts to use it to focus on wife abuse. In the first place, the "subculture of violence" hypothesis ignores the fact that men and women have different world views and, by virtue of being raised according to their gender roles, would not have identical experience with the violence which the hypothesis claims is the norm. This has been supported by the work of Breslow-Rubin¹⁰ who suggests that working class men and women have different premarital expectations, by Bernard¹¹ who determined that there were "his" and "her" interpretations of the marriage itself, and, more pertinent to this investigation, by Do-

bash and Dobash¹² whose study of wife abuse revealed the differing expectations that men and women bring to and have of their marriages.

Also inherent in the "subculture of violence" formulation is the assumption that "everyone is bashing everyone else" - the "carrier and user of violence", as Wolfgang terms him, would not feel guilty because everyone shared, and presumably acted upon, the same norms. This breaks down when it comes to wife abuse because, as was demonstrated in the preceding Chapter, the issue is the persistent abuse of women by men, rather than mutual or reciprocal assault. Finally, the "subculture of violence" hypothesis assumes a homogeneity within the subculture which is belied by the existence of the male/female dominance/subordination hierarchy.

From an interventionist perspective, the focus on a subculture of violence has several implications. It draws attention away from the victim - who, in any case, is assumed to be complicit - and from the abuse per se, and locates attention at the level of the hypothetical entity, the "subculture". Action would take assimilationist and acculturationist colouration as the logic of the theory suggests that integration into the wider culture is the way to eliminate the violent behaviour. Insofar as wife abuse is a pervasive phenomenon, such an approach cannot be expected to be successful. As McGrath notes:

. . . the clearest lesson in [this area of the] literature is that the daily lives of the poor are more open to public scrutiny and intervention than are the 'private' experiences of the upper and middle classes'.¹³

The simplicity of the "subculture of violence" hypothesis is noteworthy, however, in contrast with the General Systems Theory which follows.

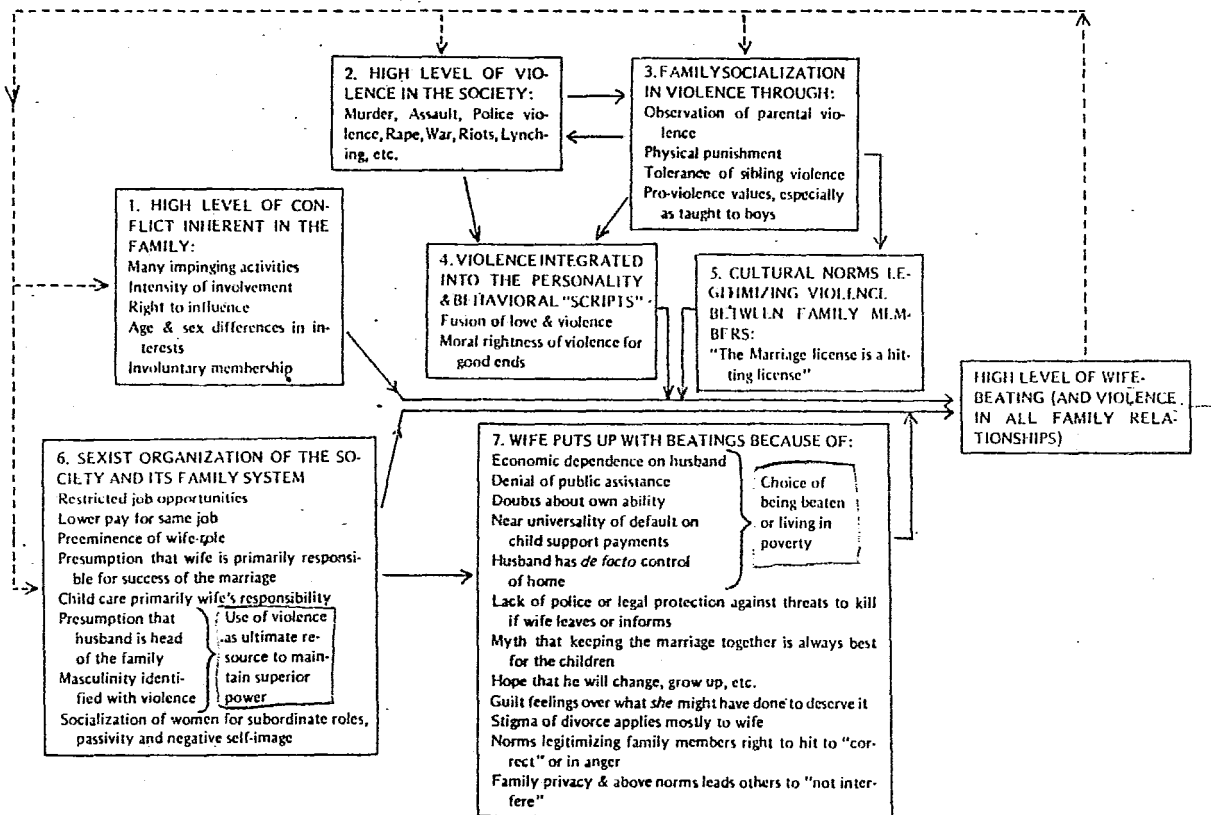
II

General Systems Theory:Covering All Bases

This approach, most clearly presented in the work of Murray Straus, considers violence to be "a systemic product rather than a product of individual behaviour pathology".¹⁴ Although his later work does not emphasize this finding, Straus initially suggested that male violence against women was more prevalent in marriages in which wives were dominant in decision making. Based on a survey of high school graduates' perceptions of violence within their families and what one pair of critics has termed a "quasi-experimental study of a few families",¹⁵ Straus argued that this "deviant authority structure" leads to violence.

In the broad tradition of systems analysis, the goal of General Systems Theory is to identify a causal chain with appropriate feedback mechanisms, such that the entire system can be represented by a flow chart. This method can potentially transform data on wife abuse to a form amenable to multivariate analyses such as those which can be performed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) computer package. In the flow chart presented as Figure 1 (p. 108), Straus illustrates (but does not prioritize) some of the factors which he contends account for a high incidence of wife beating in American Society: conflict inherent in the family; violence in society; family socialization; personality traits; cultural norms; sexism; wife's acceptance of beatings. Note that

Figure 1: Flow chart illustrating some of the factors accounting for high incidence of wife beating (solid lines) and positive feedback loops maintaining the system (dashed lines)



Source: M. A. Straus, "A Sociological Perspective on the Prevention of Wife Beating", in Straus and Hotaling, The Social Causes of Husband-Wife Violence (Minneapolis, 1980).

it is a closed system, which combines structural and cultural features. In this type of model, there is the assumption that all the variables have not been identified, with the ultimate aim being to account as completely as possible for the variance in the dependent variable (high level of wife beating and familial violence).¹⁶

Causes of wife abuse which are identified using the General Systems approach vary in sophistication. For example, in a study based on a non-representative sample of 80 families, Gelles suggests five "causes" of wife abuse during pregnancy: male sexual frustration; strains arising from family transition; prenatal child abuse; biochemical changes in the wife leading to her feeling depressed or irritable, and the woman's increased defenselessness during pregnancy.¹⁷ Straus, in a more complex model, suggests nine "causes" which, while they correctly emphasize the role of sexual inequality, tend to deal more with why women stay in violent relationships or to suggest ways in which women's behaviour may trigger the man's abusive behaviour.¹⁸

While the General Systems approach is a definite advance over monocausal explanations, Straus's commitment to quantification leads him on occasion to seemingly specious distinctions. In particular, one should note his distinction between violence which is "instrumental" as compared to that which is "expressive".¹⁹ According to Hotaling and Straus, force which is used explicitly for social control purposes is defined as "instrumental"; that which is used to "let off steam" is "expressive". What is neglected in an attempt to parcel out "instrumental" and "expressive" violence are

the implications of any sort of force for the power hierarchy in the family, specifically for the male/female dominance/subordination relationship. Whether the man hits his wife because he is angry with his boss or hits her because he wishes to stop her from going out, the ramifications in terms of power and control may be the same.

What is important is whether or not the violence is perceived as legitimate or illegitimate - a second set of distinctions posed by Hotaling and Straus.²⁰ Legitimate violence - that which is congruent with what Hotaling and Straus term "cultural laws" - may be either instrumental or expressive. In attempting to understand wife abuse, it is particularly important to focus on its legitimacy in a given historical context and to seek out contradictions between the formal (legal) legitimacy and the informal (cultural/normative) status accorded the phenomenon.

However, it is the very "thoroughness" of the General Systems Theory which suggests a more telling criticism. Straus's General Systems model posits a theory of multicausality, but it does so at a level of abstraction which distances the researcher from the phenomenon under investigation. From this "Gods-eye-view", a plethora of "causes" are identified. This is reminiscent of the "abstracted empiricism" criticized by Leacock:

. . . in the pragmatic atmosphere of United States science, the tendency is to accept quantified analysis, not as suggesting clues about significant relationships to be analyzed, but as of itself indicating cause and effect relationships . . . The upshot is to perpetuate the world of social myth in which we perform live, to measure it, test it, analyze it, 'discover' it - without ever lifting the veil and looking at it! 21

Dobash and Dobash apply a similar insight to the General Systems work on domestic violence:

When one examines Straus's model or any other systems model, one sees that it is preeminently a metaphysical argument in the sense that an analysis lacking in substantive content is an analysis of relationships between abstractions and is little more than relationships between words.²²

The legacy of logical positivism and the concomitant tendency to construct generalized theoretical models leaves people, and particularly the lived experience of the women that have been characterized as battered, bruised and bleeding, out of the analysis.²³ Social change, if it occurs at all, proceeds cautiously. As C. Wright Mills observed, this tendency is logically consistent with a theory of "pluralistic causation":

If everything is caused by innumerable 'factors', then we had best be very careful in any practical actions we undertake. We must deal with many details, and so it is advisable to proceed to reform this little piece and see what happens, before we reform that little piece too. And surely we had better not be dogmatic and set forth too large a plan of action: We must enter the all-interacting flux with a tolerant awareness that we may well not yet know, and perhaps will never know, all the multiple causes at work.²⁴

As Mills notes, this orientation is "quite serviceable to a liberal politics of 'piecemeal reform'"; it is, however, unlikely to substantially ameliorate the condition of battered women.

This tendency is inherent in Straus's work. For example, in an attempt to draw policy implications from his work, Straus outlined twenty-one suggestions for change, all of which he argued would be required before wife abuse could be eliminated. In brief,

he calls for the elimination of sexism, sex role stereotyping and gender hierarchies in the family, the work force and the criminal justice system. He advocates change in both the norms and the practices surrounding the use of violence in the family and in society in general, including the media and the government. He states the need for policies which would foster the extended family, for the establishment of daycare centres and for the establishment of full employment and guaranteed incomes. His final "policy implication" suggests a reduction in "the extent to which society evaluates people on the basis of their economic achievements and . . . the occupational and economic competition this entails." He concludes, ". . . a realistic approach recognizes that there is no one place to start."²⁵ Many of these "implications" are naive, or at best utopian, failing to recognize the complexities of issues such as sex-role stereotyping, male/female job inequality, and the evaluation of individuals on the basis of economic achievements.

The degree to which the General Systems Theory stops short of any meaningful explanation of wife abuse is exemplified in the work of Hotaling and Straus. They claim to have identified four "ironies" in the phenomenon of domestic violence:

- (1) Cultural norms that legitimate/encourage violence between family members are instrumental in maintaining the family system, but at the same time these norms perpetuate violence as integral to family life.
- (2) Both intimacy and violence are facilitated by certain social organizational features of family life.
- (3) The change to an egalitarian structure in the family appears to lead both to the destruction of sexist organization and to higher rates of violence.

- (4) The suppression of conflict may increase rather than decrease violence.²⁶

In other words, there are problems inherent in the contemporary nuclear family which appear to facilitate the occurrence of intrafamilial violence. As starting points for questions about the relationship between violence and social control, about the family as a coercive institution, about contradictory tensions towards intimacy and violence in the privatized family, and about the degree to which contemporary changes actually reflect "the destruction of the sexist organization of the family",²⁷ these "ironies" are valuable. For the systems theorist, however, they are "incongruities", "patternings", rather than question marks. For those who are interested in understanding rather than describing wife abuse, this is only a beginning.

While the General Systems Theory is perhaps the most abstract of those explanations of wife abuse which focus on the level of the social system, it must not be assumed that it represents the pinnacle in terms of explanatory potential. Arising out of the contemporary Women's Movement has come both an academic and a political tradition of asking questions which arise out of the lived experience of the woman.²⁸ This tradition has informed the works which are included in the next section, broadly termed "Feminist Theories".

III

Feminist Theories: Sisterhood is Powerful

Works which are considered under the rubric of "feminist" in this thesis fulfill two criteria:

- (1) Their focus is on the battered woman first and foremost, coupled with an attempt to construct the explanation of wife abuse from the woman's perspective rather than from that of the battering male or masculinist perspectives in society.
- (2) Their explanation situates wife abuse in the context of women's position in society and recognizes that change requires societal rather than individualistic restructuring.²⁹

Within the feminist framework fall a variety of formulations which can be roughly categorized according to whether solutions are perceived as attainable through reform or through basic structural change.³⁰

Linda MacLeod's work for the Canadian Advisory Council on the Status of Women is taken as representative of the first and that of Rebecca Dobash and Russell Dobash of the second orientation.

Towards Reform: Linda MacLeod and the Canadian Advisory
Council on the Status of Women

Linda MacLeod, working under the auspices of the CACSW, studied data from transition houses, hostels and battered women in Canada. MacLeod clearly situates wife abuse in a systemic context:

. . . the roots of wife battering are nourished by: the acceptance of the husband's total authority in the family, the belief that the wife's proper place is to obey and serve her husband, to be hardworking and all enduring, the resulting immunity of the family to the rules and laws which apply to the wider society and the general societal condoning of wife battering within the privacy of the family home. The incidence of wife battering is affected by the wife's economic dependence and . . . wife battering can be used to reinforce the woman's economic dependence.³¹

MacLeod offers valuable reinforcement for those who would argue against the myth of female masochism. Although she draws on secondary sources, the data bear reiterating. MacLeod argues that women stay in a battering relationship because they have nowhere to go, lack any real options, receive little support from family, friends, social service agencies or police, and are often economically dependent on the battering man. MacLeod also raises a further important point: "normalizing" the violence, i.e. staying in the battering relationship, can be understood as an extension of women's role in the home - "to preserve for the outside world an image of the family as peaceful and self contained."³² That this insight may be valuable in coming to terms not only with why women stay in battering relationships, but also in attempting to construct an explanation for the apparent legitimacy of domestic violence, is a point which will be developed in Chapter Six.

MacLeod's work was prepared under the auspices of the Canadian government. Funding restrictions forced her to rely on telephone interviews and mailed questionnaires, and her research was further complicated by the lack of standardization in the records kept by the 73 transition houses across Canada in 1979. However, in attempting to study battered women in Canada, she entered a field where it

is widely acknowledged that little useful work has been done.³³ While it is possible that Wife Battering in Canada may sit on a shelf,³⁴ MacLeod's work makes it impossible for anyone to argue convincingly that wife abuse does not exist in Canada.

While MacLeod argues that both wife battering and the structural supports it enjoys are part of "an institutionalized, accepted means of control",³⁵ the judgement that Armstrong and Armstrong levied at other Canadian work on women applies here: "Ideas come first; structures, relationships and organizations follow."³⁶ While the incidence of wife battering may be affected by structural factors such as the wife's economic dependence, the ideological acceptance of the male/female hierarchy within the family is the ultimate nurturant factor of the "roots of wife battering", according to MacLeod.

MacLeod's idealism structures her recommendations for change. First, more hostels are required - obviously a pressing problem as, according to her data:

About half the female population [of Canada] does not have ready access to a transition house or hostel which accepts women who are battered.³⁷

This is rescue work, and does not attack the underlying causes of wife abuse, no matter how vital it may be to the welfare of the affected individuals. MacLeod presents the legal options confronting battered women and makes recommendation for changes in laws, changes which would increase the seriousness with which wife abuse is viewed in the court and in society, and changes which would reflect the interests of the battered women, their children and the abusive men

in the legal procedures rather than, as is the present case, the needs of the legal system per se. Her suggestions for "long range prevention" take the form of "programs which will help promote the economic independence of women" (through equal pay for work of equal value legislation, improved pensions and fringe benefits, child care, flexible hours), education and research.³⁸

While there are certainly immediate benefits to be obtained from implementing reforms - specifically more stringent laws and more hostels³⁹ - these do not deal with the underlying questions: why does violence take place in the family and why is violence so often directed at the wife. MacLeod raises these questions;⁴⁰ her answers locate the causes in the "acceptance" of male authority, "beliefs" about women's subservience and the "resulting immunity" of the family - ultimately an idealist formulation. As Armstrong and Armstrong note about idealist explanations in general, this type of formulation fails to explain the source of ideas or to situate them historically to illuminate their change and variation.⁴¹ MacLeod's work is well-intentioned, but represents an example of the type criticized by Dobash and Dobash, and by Pahl, in that she suggests policies which are supportive of battered women and acknowledge the need for change, but do not challenge the underlying problems.⁴²

While MacLeod's work has definite value for those attempting to explore the issue of wife abuse in a Canadian context, the idealism which informs her analysis ultimately impedes development of an adequate theoretical basis. Speaking from within and in the language of the social and economic hierarchy, MacLeod tends to speak "about"

or "at" rather than "on behalf of" or "with" the women who are experiencing an "invisible" issue as a personal and a social problem. This distance reflects the fact that the lived experience of the abused woman is not necessarily the issue with which the State is concerned. Language itself can be troublesome when an issue, such as wife abuse, is being identified as a social problem, in that language which talks "about" or "at" is paradigmatic of a paternalistic schema in which subjects become supplicants.

Speaking of the limitations on a revolutionary movement which are imposed by the structure of language, Rowbotham makes a comment which is pertinent to the study of wife abuse:

. . . the language of theory - removed language - only expresses a reality experienced by the oppressors. It speaks only for their world, from their point of view. Ultimately a revolutionary movement has to break the hold of the dominant group over theory, it has to structure its own connections.⁴³

It is towards this structuring of connections in relation to abused wives that the remainder of the theorists included in this section appear to strive.

Rebecca Dobash and Russell Dobash:

Putting Things Into Context

Perhaps the most comprehensive work on wife abuse is that of Rebecca Dobash and Russell Dobash, who attempt to integrate historical analysis and examination of specific contemporary phenomena within the wider social and cultural setting, concentrating on wife abuse as a specific form of violence. Wife abuse, they argue, is

the most prevalent, systematic and legitimate form of violence between adults in the family, and should be conceptualized as "the extension of domination and control of husbands over wives."⁴⁴ Through in-depth interviews with 109 battered women as well as hostel workers, medical and paramedical personnel; analysis of 33,724 court and police records from Edinburgh and Glasgow in 1974; and detailed historical presentations,⁴⁵ Dobash and Dobash build their case against male domination in the family:

. . . the essence of the patriarchal family and the hierarchal relationship between husband and wife . . . continues to be the foundation of male supremacy and of the subordination of women in society and in marriage; thus, it forms the foundation of wife beating.⁴⁶

Their work points to the male/female dominance/subordination hierarchy within the family as both the foundation of wife beating and the locus for change:

The way to begin to dramatically reduce the number of marriages likely to become violent is to work on the submission, isolation and devalued status of women in society and to change the hierarchical family that characterizes Western society.⁴⁷

Dobash and Dobash do not make the mistake of "radical feminists" of positing the subjugation of women as an ahistorical constant,⁴⁸ or blaming men in a straightforward manner.⁴⁹ Nor do they err in the direction followed by MacLeod, calling for amelioratory legislation as an end in itself. For Dobash and Dobash, wife abuse must be seen in its historical specificity, and legislation must be understood as conditioned by structural and ideological constraints. However, Dobash and Dobash consciously attempt to combat the shortcomings of previous or contemporary researchers by adopting what they term the "con-

text specific method":

The essence of the context specific approach is that the social world can be understood only by exploring human behavior in the settings in which it occurs.⁵⁰

Thus, their interviews explore both the first, worst and last act of physical violence experienced by the 109 battered women, together with the history and biography of the individuals involved as well as an exploration of the non-violent aspects of their relationships. Integral to their methodology also is historical presentation and an attempt to integrate their findings into a wider social setting. Dobash and Dobash readily acknowledge that their methodology renders their data of limited generalizability because they did not have a statistically-based random sample of all battered women. However, they argue that this 'means that generalization from this research cannot be based on inferential statistics,'⁵¹ but that this does not seriously limit the value of their work. As they note, defining the universe of battered women is virtually impossible, and thus statistical analyses to determine the overall incidence in society may well be inappropriate unless what is being investigated is a vague concept like self-reported "family conflict".

Dobash and Dobash integrate historical and cultural analyses with their empirical data and thus do not place total emphasis on their statistical findings for their conclusions about wife abuse. Their use of figures is consistently with reference to their own research (a characteristic not always shared by their more empirically-minded colleagues, as reviewed in this and the preceding Chapter). However, this does not alter the fact that figures tend to be used -

by others if not be the researchers - out of context, and one must certainly question the validity of any inferences drawn from a sample of working class women who elected to seek help in a women's shelter.

Perhaps a more important flaw in Dobash and Dobash's data arises from the fact that, although they claim to approach an understanding of wife abuse, they have not interviewed any abusive men. They argue:

. . . we think that women are capable of reporting accurately the circumstances surrounding violent episodes, their feelings and responses to these events, and the feelings and responses of their husbands.⁵²

Whether or not anyone can accurately report the feelings of another individual, or provide an interpretation of his or her responses, is debatable. Whether or not a woman who has been repeatedly battered by a man can interpret his feelings and responses is certainly questionable. While Dobash and Dobash present an admirable analysis of wife abuse from the perspective of the woman, this shortcoming in their data should be taken seriously and an attempt made to rectify it if a more comprehensive analysis is to be developed. While it is crucial for women to understand the nature of their oppression, some understanding must be gained of and by the oppressors (men) also. Rowbotham noted, "the language of [mainstream] theory . . . only expresses a reality experienced by the oppressors"⁵³ - but surely, if social change is to be achieved, both sets of experience must be related dialectically. It is, after all, the abusive behaviour of the men which must ultimately change!

With this in mind, however, the analysis of contemporary material presented by Dobash and Dobash is both interesting and comprehensive, in terms of a presentation from the perspective of the battered woman. They tackle such issues as whether or not it is women who do the beating (concluding that in the overwhelming majority of cases it is not;⁵⁴ female masochism (which they term a myth which justifies non-intervention in cases of wife abuse);⁵⁵ and women's provocation of violence (which is used as a justification for abuse).⁵⁶ In their interview data, Dobash and Dobash present a picture of what might be termed "the social construction of the wife" - the truncation of the woman's options, autonomy, decision-making powers and mobility, at the same time as the husband's (at least within the confines of the marriage and from the perspective of the woman) either remain constant or increase. Men and women have two different sets of expectations vis-à-vis the marriage, but in the "patriarchal family" the man has control over the definition which is applied. The woman must negotiate:

A woman's objections to her husband's behaviour or the requests or demands she made of him were likely to be defined by him as unimportant, inappropriate or as challenges to his authority, and the outcome of such differences was less likely to be his acquiescence or reluctant submission to her wishes and attempts to control him . . . as a rejection of the legitimacy of her plea or complaint and/or a denial of her right to attempt to encroach upon his authority.⁵⁷

The woman must negotiate over the allocation of money, free time and mobility. The man has the final authority and, if the woman does not

respect this or challenges ('nags'), her behaviour is seen by the man as illegitimate and in need of chastisement. This discipline is legitimated by:

. . . ambivalent institutional responses which do little to reduce the incidence of such attacks and implicitly support the abusive husband by failing to question the patriarchal nature of the marital relationship.⁵⁸

From their research, Dobash and Dobash conclude that over half of all the violent incidents arose from:

. . . disputes regarding the husband's possessiveness or sexual jealousy; and his expectations concerning the woman's domestic work. Arguments about domestic work were often about the timing of meals and the type of food served. Many men expected that a meal should be served to them immediately upon their arrival home, at all hours of the day or night, and that the woman should always be there to do so. If the woman was not quick enough or she was reluctant to prepare a meal in the middle of the night, or reheat one which had been ready at the usual dinner time, the man saw this as both a failure of her wifely duty to serve him and a challenge to his authority over her.⁵⁹

However, Dobash and Dobash caution:

It is not so much the seemingly trivial matters of a greasy egg or cheese sandwich as it is the husband's authority and his evaluation of and demands upon his wife that are the factors leading to violence.⁶⁰

This male authority is part-and-parcel of cherished cultural values and ideals, according to Dobash and Dobash; should it stretch to violence there is no violation of these ideals.

The second major source of conflict leading to assaults was the husbands' possessiveness, i.e. their jealousy over the woman's interaction with other men (even repairmen) on a day-to-day basis, and their restrictions of the women's mobility in terms of going to the store or out for the evening.⁶¹ Dobash and Dobash note that this

restriction is "coloured by ideals about the appropriate spheres for husbands and wives and by the hierarchy of marital authority" as well as male expectations around the woman's responsibility as primary caregiver for children.⁶²

The third source of conflict identified by Dobash and Dobash was money, usually instances where the woman was perceived as challenging male authority to control the family wage packet:

When a woman continues to negotiate with her husband about the use of money after he has made up his mind or persists in criticizing his use or misuse of their funds, she may find that he views this as an unacceptable challenge to his authority and stops the negotiation by force.⁶³

It is the moral obligation of the woman to obey her husband. If she fails to do so, Dobash and Dobash claim, she is an "appropriate victim" of violence.

Dealing with the issue of why women stay in violent relationships, Dobash and Dobash concur with MacLeod's conclusion that it is because of lack of alternatives:

Women do not accept or seek violence; then endure it because of the position of women in the family and the wider society, because of few viable means of escape from or alternatives to marriage and because of unhelpful responses from outsiders.⁶⁴

For Dobash and Dobash, the short-term solution is an adequate supply of "safe houses" or hostels which operate with a clear commitment to the priorities of the battered woman rather than to the integrity of the family unit. This would be complemented by "second stage housing" which would allow women to re-start their lives once the crisis situation has passed. In fact, as Dobash and Dobash point out, the tendency to see hostels as an extension of the social services network leads

to an orientation towards counselling, drug therapy and/or familial rehabilitation.⁶⁵ This criticism is extended to the impact of the State in general, and is explained in a frankly functionalist manner:

The agencies of the state, both legal and social, do not intervene in husbands' attempts to control their wives or they do so ineffectively because the exploitation and oppression of women in the home serves the purposes of the State and the prevailing economic order. The structure of the system is such that women must be controlled. How better to achieve this than on a one-to-one basis in the privacy of the home?⁶⁶

The tautology in this argument (women are isolated and controlled in the home because it is necessary that women be isolated and controlled) suggests that there may be other problems to be found in the bases of Dobash and Dobash's arguments, problems which it is argued can be located in their understanding of history.

It must be noted, however that Dobash and Dobash distinguish clearly between these "short-term" solutions and long-term goals:

The way to begin to dramatically reduce the number of marriages likely to become violent is to work on the subordination, isolation, and devalued status of women in society and to change the hierarchical family that characterizes Western society.⁶⁷

What is required is an overall integration of the social, the economic and the political levels of individuals' lives. This is a constant theme in the work of Dobash and Dobash:

The achievement of short-term goals should not become an end in itself and imply a termination of action but should be part of an unfolding new social order in which violence toward women would cease to be actively taught and institutionally supported and would truly become a deviant and abhorrent act.⁶⁸

In that a major element of the analyses of Dobash and Dobash consist of a historical presentation of wife abuse, and in that it

has been suggested that problems can be identified within this area of their work, it is to this that we now turn.

History According to

Dobash and Dobash

Central to Dobash and Dobash's analysis

is the point⁶⁹ that traditional patriarchal authority in the sense used by Weber, prevails in the family. Therefore men, by virtue of their ascribed status, control both the existing hierarchy, the access to positions within it, and the legitimate means of change/challenge.⁷⁰

The patriarchal hierarchy in the family does not exist in isolation but reinforces and is reinforced by "the church, the economic order and the state".⁷¹ In contemporary Western society, according to

Dobash and Dobash:

. . . the essence of the patriarchal family and of the hierarchical relationship between husband and wife . . . continues to be the foundation of male supremacy and of the subordination of women in society and in marriage.⁷²

In reaching this conclusion, Dobash and Dobash present a history of wife abuse in Western society. Unfortunately, their work is marred in that they fail to make the cultural and geographic boundaries of their work sufficiently clear. Thus, they make statements such as:

In reality, women rarely had an identity apart from that given them as wives, mothers, and daughters, and departure from that identity was discouraged or punished,⁷³

offered without qualification as to temporal, spatial or cultural restrictions which could alter or condition this observation. However, since Dobash and Dobash begin their historical work with St. Augustine, the

Roman Empire and early Christianity, proceed rapidly to the "close of the Middle Ages" in England and France, and move on to the nineteenth century in England and the United States, it is clearly contemporary Western society to which they refer. This delimitation is not problematic in and of itself, but the lack of clear enunciation of their parameters is regrettable.

Tracing the roots of wife beating (in contemporary Western society) to the patriarchal laws and ideologies of the Roman Empire and early Christianity, Dobash and Dobash return to the three inter-related structures which they argue impact on and are impacted upon by the family: the State, the economic order and the Church. In the period of early capitalism, Dobash and Dobash argue, these three structures each experienced significant changes, all of which facilitated the increasing subjugation of the wife by her husband.

Politically, the emergence of the State over against the feudal households meant that a new locus of socialization into patterns of obedience and deference were required. The patriarchal nuclear family filled this role and the authority of the husband within this family was strengthened in tandem with the strengthening of the authority of the State in the political milieu:

This was meant to displace power and loyalty inward toward the smaller, less powerful nuclear family and outward toward the crown while at the same time continuing to encourage hierarchal beliefs and patterns of organization. For although the large fortified households posed a threat to the state, the patterns of authority and deference within them were believed to be the very patterns of mind and habit necessary to achieve obedience and allegiance to the state⁷⁴

In the "economic order", the shift of the locus of production from the home to the factory, inherent in early capitalism, led to the devaluation of domestic (i.e. women's) work and the privatization and isolation of the woman in the home. This, Dobash and Dobash suggest, resulted in the husband's increasing mediation for the wife in the public sphere. Finally, in the area of religion, Dobash and Dobash note that the emergence of Protestantism was accompanied by a sanctification of marriage and married love with the concomitant strengthening of the husband's authority over his wife.⁷⁵ The woman's obedience to her husband was to be internalized as a moral duty rather than something which needed to be enforced by physical chastisement. However, as Dobash and Dobash point out, flogging was in the same period seen as an acceptable means of controlling the powerless, and thus there was a high level of community acceptance of wife beating as one manifestation of this means of social control.⁷⁶

Thus, Dobash and Dobash conclude, speaking of the state of legislation relative to women's rights and wife beating which was enacted in Britain and the United States in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries:

The legal, political, and economic institutions were committed to, benefited from, and reinforced the patriarchal structure and ideology. It would have been inconceivable for them to have supported any other form of family relations. All institutions were organized along these lines and people were socialized into the supporting ideology, which emphasized authority, obedience, service, and hard work and rested firmly on the ideals of love, dedication and loyalty. These ideals, and their accompanying practices formed the foundations of the subordination and control of women.⁷⁷

The above passage reflects the overly simplified conception of the social formation which informs the work of Dobash and Dobash. Not only do they fail to specify what they mean by "ideology" - which appears to be a free-floating social control device which functions in support of a broadly-conceived status quo - but they seem to assume a monolithic social structure which does not recognize any variations in class or status.

This inadequacy is paralleled in another absence in their work - specifically, a definition of what Dobash and Dobash mean by "the patriarchy". Flaws such as the broad brush strokes with which they paint history may be a part of the problem which arises from use of the concept of "patriarchy", as Michèle Barrett notes:

A general problem with the concept of patriarchy is that not only is it by and large resistant to exploration within a particular mode of production, but it is redolent of a universal and trans-historical oppression. So, to use the concept is frequently to invoke a generality of male domination without being able to specify historical limits, changes or differences.⁷⁸

While the work of Dobash and Dobash illustrates this point, they do not appear to acknowledge this. While Dobash and Dobash state that "the patriarchy" is composed of two elements, structure and ideology,⁷⁹ they present an analysis in which the family, in its patriarchal form, is functional for political/economic/religious institutions and at the same time these institutions are functional for "the patriarchy". Their argument is in this way a closed circle, in that they do not appear to ask, "functional for whom". They stop, as do many of the other analyses of wife abuse, at the level of appearances, and do

not take seriously the observation made by Karl Marx to which they claim indebtedness - i.e. that a historical analysis 'would be superfluous if the outward (immediate) appearance of things coincided with their essence.'⁸⁰

According to Dobash and Dobash, traditional patriarchal authority prevails in the family and all other social institutions.⁸¹ Industry may be organized along dehumanized (rational-legal) lines, but social institutions - by which one assumes they mean those organizations which are formed by and in the interests of humans - exist along the lines of an earlier model. To put it another way, it would appear that Dobash and Dobash support the claim that the family is a quasi-feudal institution.⁸² While this may be useful in terms of analyzing the authority relationships as they are experienced in families, the model requires that one posit, as Dobash and Dobash attempt to do, semi-autonomous familial, political, economic and religious spheres, none of which is determinant. This model ultimately isolates "the family" from the rest of the social formation and inhibits analysis of the complex relationships which exist. This familial isolation replicates at the level of theory the private/public split which is historically specific to capitalist society.

Dobash and Dobash hint that they believe that the economic sphere may in fact ultimately be determinant in that they argue that the devalued status of women and the hierarchical structure of the family must be changed if wife abuse is to be overcome. This must be accomplished, they note, by overcoming the split between

the family and society, between the home and the work place, between men and women:

The struggle against wife beating must be oriented both to the immediate needs of women now suffering from violence and to more fundamental changes in the position of women . . . [But how can this occur] within an economic structure that benefits from a patriarchal family system in which domestic work is devalued and women are isolated and relegated actually and symbolically to the role of reproducers of labour.⁸³

This, indeed, is a key question that Dobash and Dobash pose, but do not address. It is also the focus of investigation within the work that is considered in the next section, i.e. explicitly political economic analyses.

IV

Political Economic Explanations of Wife Abuse

Thinking in terms of a political economic explanation of wife abuse, it is tempting to suggest that the phenomenon represents a displacement of economic frustrations and pressures such as those generated by unemployment,⁸⁴ or those which are part and parcel of the day-to-day life of certain segments of the working class⁸⁵ may precipitate wife abuse. In fact, this suggestion can be implied from Marx's writings:

The most cowardly, unresisting people become implacable as soon as they can exercise their absolute parental authority. The abuse of this authority is, as it were, a crude compensation for all the submissiveness and dependence to which they abase themselves willy-nilly in bourgeois society.⁸⁶

However, this takes for granted the authoritarian nature of the husband's relationship with his wife. It leaves unanswered the question of what it is that leads to the abuse of women in the family (or in situations which have been argued to parallel women's position in the family) rather than to (e.g.) widespread social unrest, sabotage, or strikes. It also ignores evidence presented by Walker and others⁸⁷ that wife abuse is a phenomenon which occurs in all social classes and which can be shown to have a lengthy history.

However, a key aspect which has surfaced in many areas of the literature on wife abuse is the relevance of women's real⁸⁸ or experienced⁸⁹ economic and/or legal⁹⁰ subordination to men in the family and society. Blumberg suggested from her preliminary work

on cross-cultural data that this connection may indeed be valid, in that she observed an inverse relationship between wife abuse and women's economic independence.⁹¹ Support also can be drawn from the results of Gelles' study of violence and pregnancy where he suggested that wife abuse during pregnancy may reflect the man's response to the woman's increased dependency and his concomitant increase in responsibility.⁹²

Looking at working class families, Luxton puts the issue of domestic violence in an explicitly political economic framework which takes women's economic dependence into account:

At work men are powerless, so in their leisure time they want to have a feeling that they control their own lives. Because they are responsible for the household's subsistence, men often feel that they have the right to control the arrangements of the household and the people who live there. As the wage earner, the man is the wage owner. He is the property owner in the family; his power is rooted in real property relations. This property prerogative is the basis of the unequal relations in the family.

Structured into household relations therefore is a 'petty tyranny' which allows the man to dominate his wife and children.⁹³

Luxton notes that such male domination is connected to the relationship between domestic labour and wage labour as well as societal norms of male superiority. Luxton goes on to observe that male workers often displace their work-related anger onto their wives, and that absorbing these tensions is part of the woman's job as domestic labourer (a point which is elaborated in Chapter Six of this work).

While Luxton's observations are insightful, they deal with only one aspect of wife abuse - the woman's role as a domestic labourer in the working class household in contemporary Canada.⁹⁴ This is

the logical thrust of a mode of analysis in which the economic context is the starting point. Wife abuse, as has been suggested, has a long history and crosses class boundaries. To frame a discussion in terms of the domestic labour of the contemporary working class woman in Canada cannot fully illuminate the issue.

Key questions relate to the nature of the family, its changes, and the changing role of the woman therein. Edholm et al. have identified male violence directed towards women as a social control mechanism and suggest that it must be understood in the context of the organization of production and human reproduction in a given society at a given point in time:

[W]here women's freedom and autonomy is strictly circumscribed, the incidence of male violence against them should be seen as a repressive mechanism to quell signs of revolt, whereas in other types of society in which some juridical autonomy is granted to women, male violence can be interpreted as an open manifestation of conflict of interest between men and women.⁹⁵

This emphasizes the need to study the phenomenon in its historical specificity. For example, a study of wife abuse in Canada during the period of the early nineteenth century to the present, to compare changes in the law and ideology surrounding women and women's roles in the family, the legitimacy of and actual occurrence of male violence against women, would be of great value.

Other than Luxton's work, little attention has been given to wife abuse from the perspective of the roles played by the family in society. MacLeod⁹⁶ noted that the post facto normalization of violence is part of women's role in the family. The point does not appear to have been made to date that the family (as reproducer of labour

power) possesses an important role in reproducing the legitimacy of force as an underpinning of authority (this will be developed further in Chapter 6 of this work). In this regard it can be further argued that the family (as locus of tension management) is at the same time the appropriate locus of violence and the wife (as tension manager) the appropriate victim. This area needs theoretical and empirical development.

Conclusion

Chapter Four has reviewed explanations of wife abuse which locate the cause of the phenomenon in a broad, "systemic" context. The subculture of violence hypothesis, in which wife abuse is considered as part of the normative fabric of a particular subcultural milieu was reviewed and found wanting in the face of empirical data. General Systems Theory, a multivariate approach to the study of domestic violence, was argued to represent an abstracted empirical approach with descriptive but limited explanatory potential. Feminist theories as exemplified by the reformist work of Linda MacLeod and the more sophisticated challenges of Rebecca and Russell Dobash, were reviewed. MacLeod's work was found wanting in that her idealist orientation caused her to fall short of viable solutions. The work of Dobash and Dobash, while representing the most comprehensive analysis of wife abuse to date, suffers from epistemological weaknesses which make it more suggestive than conclusive. Tantalizing insights emerged from the somewhat sketchy work that has been done on wife

abuse from a political economic perspective.

The conclusion to be drawn from this material is that a broader, more systemic approach to wife abuse is a decided improvement over explanations which operate solely at the level of the individual or the family. Setting wife abuse in its social and historic context illuminates the phenomenon and allows it to be understood in the wider context of male domination and women's social and economic subordination. While it must not be forgotten that any discussion of wife abuse deals with personal tragedies, familial disruption and injuries, it is necessary that a comprehensive theoretical formulation be developed within which the phenomenon can be understood, if more than "band-aid therapy" is to be applied in both individual and general situations.

In the formulation of such a theoretical understanding, the pervasiveness of wife abuse must not be neglected, nor its apparent ahistoricity. I argue that a dual approach must be followed at this stage of the analysis. Specifically, wife abuse must be understood as a pervasive and often legitimate phenomenon in which men physically and/or psychologically batter women. In other words, wife abuse must be situated in the wider context of violence against women, of women/Woman as the appropriate victim. Secondly, wife abuse must be seen as a product of the dominance/submission hierarchy in the family, the woman's economic and/or psychological dependence therein, and her familial and societal role as domestic labourer in contemporary Western society. It is to the explication of these themes that the balance of this work is devoted.

Footnotes to Chapter Four

- 1 Rebecca Dobash, personal communication.
- 2 Support Services for Assaulted Women, 'Wife Abuse in Canada - a Fact Sheet', 1980; S. E. Small, 'Wife Assault: An Overview of the Problem in Canada', 1980.
- 3 M. E. Wolfgang, 'A Preface to Violence', Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Sciences 364 (March, 1966), 7.
- 4 Pizzey, Scream Silently . . . , 1974.
- 5 Walker, The Battered Woman, p. 170.
- 6 Dobash and Dobash, Violence Against Wives, p. 172.
- 7 Epstein, 'Police Intervention. . . ', p. 80.
- 8 F. A. Allodi, 'Socio-cultural and Psychiatric Aspects of the Battered Wife Syndrome', 1980.
- 9 Stark and McEvoy, 'Middle Class Violence', 1970.
- 10 Breslow-Rubin, Worlds of Pain, 1976.
- 11 Bernard, Future of Marriage, 1972.
- 12 See, for example, Dobash and Dobash, Violence Against Wives, pp 75-93.
- 13 McGrath, 'The Crisis of Domestic Order', p. 17.
- 14 Straus, 'A General Systems Theory Approach . . . ', p. 105.
- 15 Dobash and Dobash, Violence Against Wives, p. 23.
- 16 Straus, 'A General Systems Theory Approach . . . ', pp 108-9; 'Sexual Inequality and Wife Beating', in Straus and Hotaling, The Social Causes of Husband-Wife Violence, p. 26 - offer two examples of Straus's tendency to prepare flow charts to present his model of reality.
- 17 R. J. Gelles, 'Violence and Pregnancy: A Note on the Extent of the Problem and Needed Services', Family Coordinator (1975), pp 81-86.

- 18 Straus, "A Sociological Perspective", 1980. His nine "causes" are: defense of (waning) male authority; compulsive masculinity; economic constraints and discrimination; burdens of child care; myth of the inadequacy of the single parent household; pre-eminence of the wife role for women; women's negative self image, especially as it regards achievement; women's de facto role as children; masculinist orientation of the criminal justice system.
- 19 Hotaling and Straus, "Culture, Social Organization and Irony . . . ", p. 13. The instrumental/expressive dichotomy is also present in the work of Suzanne Steinmetz, whose work was reviewed in Chapter Three.
- 20 Hotaling and Straus, p. 12.
- 21 E. B. Leacock, "Introduction" to F. Engels, The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State (New York, 1972), 59-60.
- 22 Dobash and Dobash, Violence Against Wives, p. 25.
- 23 Dobash and Dobash, "Social Science and Social Action . . . ", 1981.
- 24 C. W. Mills, The Sociological Imagination (London, 1959), 85-86.
- 25 Straus, "A Sociological Perspective. . . ", pp 229-231.
- 26 Hotaling and Straus, pp 12-20.
- 27 Hotaling and Straus, p. 18.
- 28 D. Smith, "An Analysis of Ideological Structures and How Women are Excluded: Considerations for Academic Women", Canadian Review of Sociology and Anthropology 12:4, Part I (1975), 353-369.
- 29 Thus, Lenore Walker's work, although informed first and foremost by the testimony of battered women, is not included in this section because of her ultimate reliance on individualistic, albeit contextually-situated solutions.
- 30 This resembles the distinction between "liberal" and "radical" feminism as identified by Mitchell (Woman's Estate, 1971). The liberal/radical distinction is rooted in differing understandings of the necessary means to achieve social equality for women and men. Liberal feminists, according to Mitchell,

believe that "social equality can be achieved in a democratic capitalist country without a revolution; 'radical feminists' believe that it can be achieved nowhere without the feminist revolution being paramount". (Mitchell, p. 61). Because in everyday usage "radical feminist" has been equated with strident feminist separatism, this terminology is not employed here. As Rebecca Dobash has pointed out in a personal communication, labels such as "liberal" and "radical" tend to result in a pigeon-holing of perspectives which may lead to an underestimation of their complexity or to the assumption that "if one knows this and this about a view", then "this, and this, and this" will automatically follow.

- 31 Linda MacLeod, Wife Battering in Canada: The Vicious Circle (Ottawa, 1980), 28. Emphasis added.
- 32 MacLeod, p. 32.
- 33 For a selection of work on wife abuse in Canada, see Allodi, "Socio-cultural and Psychological Aspects . . . ", 1980; Byles, "Family Violence . . . ", 1980; MacEachern et al., Family Violence in Hamilton, 1980; Schlesinger, "Abused Wives . . . ", 1980; Small, "Wife Assault . . . ", 1980; Support Services for Assault Women, "Wife Assault in Canada. . . ", 1980 and "Wife Assault - The Silent Crime" (n.d.); J. Orr, The Support Services Network for Battered Women in the Hamilton Area (Hamilton, Ontario, 1980). A publication which came to my attention too late to be incorporated into this thesis, but which reports on a particular research problem in Vancouver B.C. is J. Barnsley et al., "Battered and Blamed" - A Report on Wife Assault from the Perspective of Battered Women (Vancouver, 1980).
- 34 MacLeod, 1980. It is interesting that little, if any, official notice appears to have been taken of her report and MacLeod, according to a personal communication, is "frustrated" at being unable to continue research in an area where she perceives much work to be done. At this time, however, the Standing Committee on Health and Welfare and Social Affairs is in the process of investigating the issue of domestic violence. According to a personal communication from Audrey O'Brien, Clerk of the Committee, their mandate is: ". . . to examine, inquire into and report from time to time appropriate measures for the prevention, identification and treatment of abused persons involved in intra-family violence and, in particular . . . to address the issue of battered wives and dependents". The proceedings and report of this Committee should be of special interest to researchers in the area of wife abuse.
- 35 MacLeod, p. 29
- 36 Armstrong and Armstrong, The Double Ghetto, p. 112.

- 37 MacLeod, p. 17
- 38 MacLeod, pp 65-66.
- 39 See, for example Byles, "Family Violence. . .", 1980; MacEachern, 1980; Orr, 1980, for commentary on the situation in Hamilton, Ontario.
- 40 MacLeod, p. 26.
- 41 Armstrong and Armstrong, p. 133.
- 42 Dobash and Dobash, "Love, Honour and Obey: Institutional Ideologies and the Struggle for Battered Women", Contemporary Crises (1977), 403-415; J. Pahl, "Refuges for Battered Women: Social Provision or Social Movement?" Journal of Voluntary Action Research 8(1979), 25-35. I am again indebted to Rebecca Dobash for drawing these to my attention.
- 43 Rowbotham, Women's Consciousness . . ., p. 33.
- 44 Dobash and Dobash, Violence Against Wives, p. 15.
- 45 Dobash and Dobash's book summarizes these data. For specific discussion of the interview data, see "Patriarchy and Violence Against Wives", 1980; "If You Prick Me . . .", 1979. For discussion of the court and police data, see also "Patriarchy and Violence Against Wives", 1980 as well as R. E. Dobash, "The Relationship Between Violence Directed at Women and Violence Directed at Children in the Family Setting", House of Commons, App. 38 (Gr. Britain, 1977). Historical data are presented in R. E. Dobash, "The Negotiation of Daily Life . . .", 1978 and Dobash and Dobash, "Wives: The 'Appropriate Victims' of Marital Violence", 1978.
- 46 Dobash and Dobash, Violence Against Wives, p. 45.
- 47 Dobash and Dobash, Violence Against Wives, p. 241.
- 48 For examples of an explicitly "radical feminist" perspective see the classic work by S. Firestone, The Dialectic of Sex (New York, 1970) and B. Warrior, Wifebeating (Somerville, Mass., 1976). In this body of literature wife beating is seen in simple terms of male domination, something that has existed throughout time.
- 49 See G. Errington, "Family Violence: Is It a Women's Problem?", a speech which can be obtained from Support Services for Assaulted Women (n.d.); J. Hanmer and D. Leonard, "Men and Culture: The Sociological Intelligentsia and the Main-

tenance of Male Domination; or Superman Meets the Invisible Woman", Resources for Feminist Research IX-3 (1980).

- 50 Dobash and Dobash, Violence Against Wives, p. 30.
- 51 Dobash and Dobash, Violence Against Wives, p. 259. It should also be noted that Dobash and Dobash interviewed predominantly Scottish women, from working class families, with some from middle income and/or English families. They identified no variation by income or nationality in their findings.
- 52 Dobash and Dobash, Violence Against Wives, p. 260.
- 53 Rowbotham, Women's Consciousness . . ., pp 32-3.
- 54 See R. E. Dobash, 'The Relationship Between Violence . . .', 1977; Dobash and Dobash, Violence Against Wives, 1979; 'Wives: The Appropriate Victim . . .'. See especially R. E. Dobash, 'When Non-Sexist Language is Sexist', 1981 for a paper which addresses this matter directly.
- 55 See Dobash and Dobash, 'If You Prick Me . . .', 1979; 'Patriarchy and Violence Against Wives', p.34 ; Violence Against Wives, 1979.
- 56 See R. E. Dobash, 'The Negotiation of Daily Life . . .', p. 15ff; Dobash and Dobash, Violence Against Wives, 133-137.
- 57 R. E. Dobash, 'The Negotiation of Daily Life . . .', 14. This understanding of marriage as consisting of "two realities", male and female, echoes the findings of Bernard (Future of Marriage, 1972). It does, however, again call into question the comprehensiveness of research which deals with only one of these two realities.
- 58 Dobash and Dobash, Violence Against Wives, p. 234. See also Dobash and Dobash, 'With Friends Like These Who Needs Enemies . . .', 1978.
- 59 Dobash and Dobash, 'Patriarchy and Violence Against Wives', p. 25.
- 60 Dobash and Dobash, 'Patriarchy and Violence Against Wives', p. 25.
- 61 Dobash and Dobash, 'Patriarchy and Violence Against Wives', p. 26.
- 62 Dobash and Dobash, Violence Against Wives, pp 129-130.
- 63 Dobash and Dobash, Violence Against Wives, p. 129.

- 64 Dobash and Dobash, "Patriarchy and Violence . . . ", p. 34.
See also Violence Against Wives, pp 223-243.
- 65 Dobash and Dobash, 'Wifebeating - Still A Common Form of
Violence', p. 65. See also 'Love, Honour and Obey . . . ', 1977;
'With Friends Like These. . . ', 1978; 'Patriarchy and Violence',
1980.
- 66 Dobash and Dobash, 'Love, Honour and Obey . . . ', p. 413.
- 67 Dobash and Dobash, Violence Against Wives, p. 241.
- 68 Dobash and Dobash, 'Social Science and Social Action . . . ',
p. 29. Note that this call for a 'new social order' is very
different from the position of MacLeod, criticized on p. 117
of this work, in that MacLeod seeks to reform the existing
'social order' so that men and women will be equal.
- 69 The reference to Weber is made in a footnote in Dobash and
Dobash, Violence Against Wives, p. 274, n. 66.
- 70 Dobash and Dobash, Violence Against Wives, pp 43-4. This is
a constant theme in their work, especially in 'Wives, The
'Appropriate Victims'. . . ', 1978.
- 71 Dobash and Dobash, Violence Against Wives, p. 44.
- 72 Dobash and Dobash, Violence Against Wives, p. 45.
- 73 Dobash and Dobash, Violence Against Wives, p. 32.
- 74 Dobash and Dobash, Violence Against Wives, p. 49.
- 75 Cf R. Hamilton, The Liberation of Women (London, 1978) for a
similar point.
- 76 Dobash and Dobash, Violence Against Wives, p. 56. See also
R. P. Dobash and R. E. Dobash, 'Community Response to Violence
Against Wives . . . ', 1981.
- 77 Dobash and Dobash, Violence Against Wives, p. 74.
- 78 M. Barrett, Women's Oppression Today: Problems in Marxist-
Feminist Analysis. (London, 1980). I am grateful to Meg Lux-
ton for drawing this passage to my attention.
- 79 Dobash and Dobash, Violence Against Wives, p. 43.
- 80 Marx, Capital III, cited in Dobash and Dobash, Violence Against
Wives, p. 27.

- 81 Dobash and Dobash, Violence Against Wives, p. 66.
- 82 See M. Eichler, The Double Standard: A Feminist Critique of Feminist Social Science (London, 1980), pp 106-115 for a detailed presentation of the concept of the family as a quasi-feudal institution.
- 83 Dobash and Dobash, Violence Against Wives, p. 242. Rebecca Dobash has suggested in a personal communication that she believes that a socialist feminist analysis offers the hope of a truly adequate analysis of wife abuse.
- 84 Allodi, "Sociocultural and Psychological Aspects . . . ", 1980 is an example of this type of reasoning.
- 85 See Wolfgang, "A Preface to Violence", 1966, as an example.
- 86 K. Marx, "Peuchet: On Suicide" in K. Marx and F. Engels, Collected Works Vol 4:1844-1845 (New York, 1975). I am grateful to Peter Archibald for helping me to locate this reference. Emphasis in original.
- 87 Walker, The Battered Woman, 1979; Byles, "Family Violence in Hamilton", 1980.
- 88 See, for example, MacLeod, Wife Battering in Canada, 1980; D. Martin, "Battered Women: Society's Problem", in J. R. Chapman and M. Gates (eds.) The Victimization of Women (London, 1978).
- 89 Walker, The Battered Woman, 1979.
- 90 Tones, "A Torrent of Abuse . . . ", 1978.
- 91 Blumberg, Stratification . . ., 1978.
- 92 Gelles, "Violence and Pregnancy . . . ", 1975.
- 93 M. Luxton, More Than A Labour of Love (Toronto, 1980), p. 65.
- 94 It should be noted that an exploration of "three generations of women's work in the home" was the focus of her study and thus this orientation is a logical one.
- 95 F. Edholm et al., "Conceptualizing Women", Critique of Anthropology 3:9-10 (1977), p. 120.
- 96 MacLeod, Wife Battering in Canada, 1980..

PART TWO

TOWARDS A METATHEORY OF WIFE ABUSE

INTRODUCTION TO PART TWO

To this point the focus of this work has been the literature which attempts to explain the phenomenon of wife abuse. It has been demonstrated that it is possible to view this material in terms of three general divisions, depending on the attributed locus of causality: the individual, the family, or a conceptualization of a broader social system. The logic of my analysis has been to consistently push the boundaries further from the starting point (i.e. the abusive incident), but always to do so with an awareness of the specific nature of the phenomenon for which explanation is sought: the victimization of wives by their husbands.

The literature on wife abuse can be characterized can be characterized as "uneven", in terms of depth of analysis, validity and generalizability. Part of the problem lies in the nature of wife abuse itself: most researchers would agree that one cannot simply walk into a person's home and say to a man, 'Mind if I hang around and see if you beat your wife?' Samples based on people who have come to the researcher's attention because they have presented themselves to the medical, legal or social work professions as part of an abusive situation are biased from the beginning, in that they represent only that segment of the abusing population who for one reason or another encounter "the system". Even with "representative" samples, problems may be expected because of underreporting of apparently "shameful"

behaviour, differing conceptualizations of what constitutes "abuse", or a highly developed sense of privacy in matters concerning the family.

However, a more telling problem which has weakened most of the existing literature is the lack of an adequate theoretical formulation informing the research. What is argued here is that it is necessary to think in terms of wife abuse as a valid subject for theorizing in and of itself. It is not sufficient to deal with "domestic violence", of which wife abuse is regarded as a sub-type; nor is an adequate understanding to be found in analyses which seek to root wife abuse in psychological anomalies. Based on an understanding of wife abuse as a widespread phenomenon with a long and dishonourable history and a high degree of historical and contemporary legitimacy, the argument is put forward here that what is required at this time is a construct which will enable wife abuse per se to be thought in theoretical terms.

The need for theory in the area of wife abuse cannot be taken for granted. Discussing the problems inherent in "theoreticism" - the construction of theory for its own sake - Kuhn and Wolpe argue:

. . . in arguing the need for a more rigorous and analytical approach to work on the position of women - in arguing, that is, for theoretical work - we have still to question constantly the purpose of such work. The need for theory cannot be taken for granted: theory needs to be justified for each specific situation within which and for which it is produced . . . The need for theoretical work arises quite simply from the very urgent and specific need for constructing an analytical and effectual understanding of women's situation.

Thus, the argument that there is at this point in time a need for a metatheory of wife abuse is based on an assessment of the inadequacies of previous analyses of the phenomenon, coupled with an awareness of the need to understand and intervene in an issue where thousands

of women are being brutalized each year. Chapters Five and Six represent initial steps towards a metatheory of wife abuse.

In order to approach understanding, wife abuse is conceptualized in terms of violence directed against women qua women and against women qua wives. Both women's gender, i.e. their socially constructed identity as women in a society in which the terms of the definition are dictated by masculinist standards, and their role as wives, i.e. as actual, potential, and/or expected domestic labourers, structure wife abuse.

Chapter Five addresses the pervasiveness and specificity of violence against women and, through the existential construct of Woman-as-Other, explores the question of why it is women who are the victims of this abuse. What is focused on are the dominance/subordination relations that exist between husbands and wives/men and women. It is argued that these are maintained through the actual, threatened or implicit violence which keeps women subservient to and/or dependent on men in both a specific and a generalized sense. In addition to structural considerations which render the wife the "appropriate" victim of marital violence, her gender, her Woman-ness, her construction by the man as "Other", augments his appropriation for her of the victim role. This perspective illuminates the apparent intransigence of wife abuse and offers a beginning from which to work in trying to forge theoretical and practical links between those who seek to understand and/or combat specific forms of violence against women (e.g. rape, pornography, wife abuse).

Chapter Six, on the other hand, explores the phenomenon of

wife abuse from the historically specific role of the woman qua wife in contemporary Western society. The wife's role as domestic labourer is taken as a central focus,² from which three major insights are drawn. First, it is argued that wife abuse, or the potentiality thereof, through the legitimacy of the phenomenon in terms of community and/or societal mores and laws, is a support for the acceptance by the population of the legitimacy of force as the underpinning of the authority of the State. Insofar as we accept actual or potential force as the underpinning of the husband/wife hierarchy (and, by extension, the broader male/female hierarchy), so too are we predisposed to accept force as the legitimate property of the State. Secondly, it is also argued that wife abuse, in its crudest formulation, can be understood as one aspect of the husband's expectations of the wife's role as tension manager. Thirdly, the combination of the fiscal crisis of the state together with the logical consistency of wife abuse with the needs of capital (i.e. for domestic labour in the home), is suggested to pave the way towards a reprivatization of the phenomenon of wife abuse from its current status as a (quasi) public issue.

The two streams which I develop - Woman-as-Other and wife as domestic labourer, are both necessary for an understanding of wife abuse. This dual line of thought must be understood as a precondition to a comprehensive theory of wife abuse. The two lines are not totally autonomous, however, and it is argued that the relationship between the two could be most accurately understood as a dialectic. The synthesizing of the two lines of argument is not developed in

this work, except insofar as it is possible to state that the conceptualization of Woman-as-Other reinforces/acts upon the material fact of women's role as (actual/potential/expected) domestic labourer and at the same time provides ideological justification for the victimization that is wife abuse. Reciprocally, in contemporary Western society, the hypostatization of the home (family) versus work dimensions and the concomitant female/male role allocations, underwrite the phenomenon of women's "Otherness". A more extensive synthesis remains to be undertaken.

CHAPTER FIVE

WOMAN AS OTHER: 'A RENT IN THE SOUL'

Introduction

That a human being should be a thing is from the point of view of logic, a contradiction; but when the impossible has become a reality, that contradiction is as a rent in the soul.³

Popular argument holds that violence in families is generalized rather than gender-specific, and that it is a manifestation or articulation of contemporary stresses. However, violence against women and in particular against wives has been a recurrent feature in the history of Western society. In certain periods this violence has been legitimated through the legal system such that domination of husbands over their wives mirrored the relationships of domination and subordination which were found throughout the rest of the social formation.⁴ However, in contemporary Canada, wife abuse is nominally illegal and employer/employee relationships are supposedly entered into on a freely-contracted basis. There is neither model nor legal justification for wife abuse. In fact, the prevalence and apparent legitimacy of violence in the home, specifically wife abuse, is one of the factors which make it remarkable in an era of apparently "rational-legal" authority.

What is argued here is that one of the reasons for the apparent intransigence of wife abuse despite changes in both laws and be-

havioural norms, is the conceptualization of women as "appropriate victims" of violence.⁵ In order to elaborate the concept of "appropriate", Simone de Beauvoir's conceptualization of Woman-as-Other is adopted. De Beauvoir's Woman-as-Other provides a paradigm by which it is possible to see women as dehumanized and rendered "appropriate" as victims of male violence, both generalized and in specific, individual terms. The generalized definition is both the precondition and the underpinning of the specific articulation. In what follows, I explore the existential meaning of women's situation as appropriate victim, of Woman-as-Other.⁶

Woman-as-Other: Simone de Beauvoir

Woman, as de Beauvoir argued in her classic work, The Second Sex, is the Other in a totality that is conceived as human but is defined by men. De Beauvoir stated, ". . . no group ever sets itself up as the One without at once setting up the Other over against itself."⁷ The Other, Woman, is not conceived as an autonomous being, but is viewed only in relationship to man; Woman is what man is not. Men define roles for Woman-as-Other (mother and wife, goddess and whore), and these roles deny women subjectivity and freedom. In a 1976 interview, de Beauvoir reiterated her earlier formulation:

. . . women are, in fact, defined and treated as a second sex by a male-oriented society whose structure would totally collapse if that orientation was genuinely destroyed.⁸

The role prescriptions define both women's social position and their behaviour:

[Men] established, in other words, the Sartrean situation in which women must exercise her power to choose. But as Beauvoir [sic] concluded, the situations, or circumstances, for the woman were so confining that she actually was not permitted freedom of choice.⁹

Historically, Woman has been associated on the side of darkness, night, earth and evil over against man, light, day, sky and good. Myths such as those of Eve, Pandora and Lilith tell of Woman's role as temptress, luring man from his goodness into a fallen state, and lay the blame for worldly ills at the feet of a mythical mother.¹⁰ That which is "Other" is beyond understanding, it is not an autonomous being, it is incidental, inessential, contingent.¹¹

It is not my intent to suggest the origin of the dualism between essential/non-essential, Self/Other. Perhaps, as de Beauvoir suggests, "Otherness is a fundamental category of human thought."¹² Perhaps the construction of Woman-as-Other dates back to male fears of female reproductive capabilities.¹³ Perhaps, as Engels¹⁴ suggests, the 'world historical defeat of the female sex' occurred with the origins of private property at which point women, as producers of heirs, were compelled to become appendages of men and Other-ness followed. While it is an issue of both academic and practical concern, the matter of origins is not the focus of this analysis. What is suggested is a model of process rather than of origins. The conceptualization of dualism does not in itself imply a gender hierarchy - Woman-as-Other is only a powerful denial in a world in which men have sole power to define. Given this power, I argue that it is articulated through the conceptualization of Woman-as-Other, to render Woman/women as the appropriate victim(s) of violence.

Commenting on this duality, Rowbotham notes:

We [women] are continually translating our own immediate fragmented sense of what we feel into a framework which is constructed by men. The particular sensations of women have the quality of the exceptional . . . According to all the reflections we are not really there . . . Every time a woman describes to a man any experience which is specific to her as a woman she confronts his recognition of his own experience as normal. More than this, his experience of how he sees the 'norm' is reinforced by the dominant ideology which tells both him and the woman he is right.¹⁵

The insights gained from the analyses conducted by feminists of women's absence and isolation from the mainstream of society can be inverted to provide an understanding of the objective nature of women's/Woman's Otherness vis-à-vis men. For example, in a world in which 'male' is normal, 'female' is the exception:

Now 'she' represents a woman but 'he' is mankind. If 'she' enters mankind 'she' loses herself in 'he'. She-he cannot then suddenly become the 'she' she abandoned or the 'she' she wants to become. The present inability of 'she' to speak for more than herself is a representation of reality . . . The exclusion of women from all existing language demonstrates our profound alienation from any culture which can generalize itself.¹⁶

Evidence of the contingent, inessential nature of Woman-as-Other is noted in the contemporary English language. A woman who is not defined in terms of a property relationship with a male is often subject to ridicule (e.g. the denigratory emphasis often applied to the prefix 'Ms' as opposed to the legitimacy of 'Mrs.'), and, as noted, the generic use of 'man' and masculine pronouns effectively defines women out of much of the language.¹⁷ Denigratory language is often applied to persons of the female gender, equating women to animals (bitch, cow, bird, chick, dog), to objectified parts of the anatomy (piece of ass, boobsie, cunt), to the status of an infant (baby, girl, doll, cutie-pie), or to

food (dish, peaches-and-cream, tomato, cup of tea).¹⁸

The message, however couched, arises from an intransigent kernel - Woman, from the perspective of men, is the Other. Dorothy Smith suggests:

. . . women's consciousness does not appear as an autonomous origin of knowledge, an authoritative perspective on the world from a different position in and experience of it [to that of men]. Women do not appear to men as men do to one another, as persons who might share in the common construction of a social reality.¹⁹

The implications of this Other-ness in terms of wife abuse is explored in the subsequent pages.

Violence Against Women: Its Historical Specificity

The historically specific social meanings of the male/female hierarchy and the respective legal/social rights of the marital partners will be reflected in who may do what to whom, when, where, how often and with what degree of intensity, before legal and/or social approbation is applied.²⁰ Edholm et al. make a similar point:

. . . to treat male violence as a constant factor throughout history makes it impossible to understand how it has been socially defined and controlled. Only certain sorts of male violence will be acceptable in any social context: both the form it takes and the possible recipients will normally be limited by cultural rules.²¹

Thus the question of wife abuse is intrinsically linked to the relative position of the woman and the man, the wife and the husband.²²

In other words, although a man knocking out his wife's teeth in Rome of 750 B.C. has the same immediate physical consequences for the woman as a man knocking out his wife's teeth in Hamilton, Ontario in the 1980's, what are the legal, economic, political, religious and

familial conditions and consequences which define and/or determine the incident? Do they differ historically? Why? These are crucial questions which all too often are ignored in the face of the apparent intransigence of wife abuse.

A recurring feature of the history of the western world has been the formal subordination of women by men. In many periods, women have actually been designated the legal property of fathers or husbands. Men were frequently in a position to dispose of their property - be it cattle, slaves, or wives - as they pleased, within the limits of contemporary community mores.²³ While a woman was not an "individual" in any formal or legal sense, neither could this term be applied to a man, in the modern conception of the word wherein an "individual" is an autonomous being with personal responsibilities over and above those embedded in one's institutional and/or structural location in the social formation. Men and women had their respective roles to fulfill, and woman's was to be the complement of man, first in production and later as his spiritual complement.²⁴

That this "fit" between complementary roles was imperfect is suggested by the scope which was allowed men in controlling the behaviour of "their women" (daughters or wives). If a man decided that it was necessary for him to chastize "his woman" physically, or if a man chose to vent his temper on her physically, then this was his legal and moral right. He was legally responsible for her actions, and it was only "proper" in his eyes and in the eyes of the (male-dominated) community that he direct her as he saw fit, barring (with some exceptions such as the early Roman Empire), killing her.²⁵

Only when a woman is not considered the chattel of her husband is his violence against her difficult to justify.²⁶ Within the nineteenth century concept of "individuals" having legal rights lay the seeds for women's freedom from male brutality. However, the bourgeois ideology of individual freedom was predicated on the smallest unit in the society being the family, of which the father was the head. The concept of individual rights grew up with women still defined as Other within a male/female duality. However, within this individualistic framework women gradually achieved some legal rights, largely due to the efforts of nineteenth century feminists who invoked the logic of bourgeois individualistic ideology to buttress their arguments. However, in a society where people are supposed to be individuals, a certain sleight of hand was required to justify violence against women. The matter was no longer straightforward as it had been when women were chattel, first of their fathers and then of their husbands.

As noted in Chapter Four, Edholm et al. suggest that male violence towards women (of which wife abuse would be an instance) is a social control mechanism which must be understood in the context of the organization of production and human reproduction in society.²⁸ Their work can be modified and extended as follows: "Where women's freedom and autonomy are strictly circumscribed, the incidence of male violence against them should be understood as a repressive mechanism designed to quell signs of revolt . . . " and must be read in a context of social control applied at other levels in the social

formation (e.g. slaves, felons, school children, etc.). In cases where some juridical autonomy is granted to women, male violence should also be seen as a repressive mechanism that, in its actuality or potentiality, restricts the parameters of women's existence. Male violence, however, will be articulated in terms of the areas in which such autonomy is least clearly spelled out.

To put it another way: where women's freedom and autonomy are strictly circumscribed, women's subordination is both materially and ideologically straightforward and, in such societies, the rights and obligations of both men and women will be understood - though not necessarily accepted passively - by all. Women's position is similar to other "unfree" and/or rebellious individuals in the society. For example, Dobash and Dobash cite Philippe Ariès' Centuries of Childhood (1962) and John R. Gillis' Youth and History (1974) to support their contention that:

. . . extreme brutality and authoritarianism were a part of the school and the home from the sixteenth to the eighteenth century. Flogging was used throughout society as a means of controlling the powerless: children, women, and the lower classes.²⁹

People, including female people, had (and generally knew) their place in society.

On the other hand, where women have some degree of juridical autonomy, as in Canada today, women's formal autonomy will overshadow or mystify those areas in which she is subordinated. An example is the male/female wage differential which, despite changes in the legal system, women's continued influx into the labour market, and a popular conception that women have "come a long way", does not seem to be

closing.³⁰ Further, this subordination may be articulated in indirect or symbolic forms and, as such, may be difficult to identify.³¹

In both cases (i.e. those where women have no formal/juridical autonomy and those where they have achieved it), male violence against women serves as a repressive mechanism. In the former, violence is likely to be seen by the perpetrator (and perhaps the recipient) as legitimate, in that women's roles are strictly delineated as are those of men. The male role may well include the "right" of chastisement.³² In the latter instance, violence against particular women is generalized to act as a form of social control, i.e. a repressive mechanism, in that it truncates the autonomy that women have won in various areas. Speaking specifically of rape, but in terms which it is argued apply to all forms of male violence against women, Barrett notes:

. . . rape has secondary oppressive consequences for women in that it is often used as a rationale for curtailing women's freedom to go out (at night, unescorted) . . . For if sexual practice is the area in which systematic inequalities of power between men and women are played out, then all men are in a position to exercise this power (even if only by mild pressure rather than brutal coercion), whether or not they are inclined to do so.³³

However, generalized, overt male violence against women is less likely to be accepted as legitimate, and may take indirect or symbolic forms (e.g. pornography) except in those areas where women's juridical autonomy is least clearly articulated, or least visible, i.e. the family.³⁴

Because of the mystification of women's subordination, debates occur over whether or not "patriarchy" is still operative, based on definitions of "patriarchy" in terms of a particular form of familial organization or male ownership of women's property,³⁵ with the conclu-

sion that juridical reform has rendered "patriarchy" obsolete. We exist in a "post-patriarchal" society, one would assume, and such forms of domination as women experience have a new, as yet unnamed, form.³⁶

Such arguments are dangerous - for that which has not been named cannot be understood other than in its phenomenal form. Evidence of male domination of women (rape, wife abuse, pornography, media images, economic inequality, etc.) take on an isolated character in which each manifestation must be read on its own (lack of) merit, and unified analysis becomes by definition impossible. One is reminded of Dahrendorf's formulation wherein "capitalism" has been replaced by a "post capitalist" society.³⁷ Just as in "post capitalist society" class conflict is relegated to a minor role, so too in "post patriarchal" society, objective or structural male/female conflict is in danger of being relegated to, at best, a position of secondary importance in contemporary understanding. It is likely that we will be asked to understand issues in terms of individual psychological manifestations of fear and reaction to threatened (masculine) authority. This tendency can be identified in the work of contemporary authors:

The effective network of male control has been damaged and the responses of individual men are likely to be violent, according to McGrath.³⁸ Kitchen's observation is similar in tone:

Child battering and wife battering can be seen as an expression of the difficulties a great many men experience with respect to changes in family role expectations.³⁹

Another writer, Easton, adds:

As the old mechanisms of male control over women break down, the blatant efforts of some men to retain that control, through rape and other forms of violence, intensify.⁴⁰

The hypothesized danger here is that an objective and subjective feminist issue may be reduced to (a series of) male identity crises,⁴¹ public issues may be reprivatized and, a key issue - the fact that woman is not only victim but "appropriate victim" is obscured.

What is being said here is that wife abuse, as part of the wider context of violence against women, appears as an intransigent feature of western society. It has been present in various forms throughout much of our history. What is argued here, however, is that, while the phenomenological form of the matter may appear the same, the meaning which it has changes depending on the social and historical conditions. This work deals with wife abuse in contemporary Western society and the arguments which are developed herein are applicable to this time period. It is a mistake to try to reason backwards from the present. This does not mean that I do not accept the concept of 'Woman-as-Other' as one which has been prevalent through recorded Western history. However, the articulation of this concept, the way in which it has been articulated in the lives of women (and men), has varied, and this variation can best be understood through a paradigm which looks at the property relations that exist between women and men, between wives and husbands.

To consider the phenomenon of wife abuse in this fashion is to consider it as a political issue. This goes far beyond the notion of wife abuse as a function of individual psychopathology wherein the individual psychology is simultaneously source and explanation for the behaviour. While it is acknowledged here that flesh-and-blood individuals engage in abusive and battering relationships and that the

concept of "Woman-as-Other" is purely a metaphysical construct except insofar as it is played out in the lives of human actors, what is under scrutiny here is wife abuse - and violence against women in general - as sociological phenomena.. The focus here is on the dominance/subordination relations that exist between husbands and wives/men and women. What is argued is that these are maintained through the actual or threatened violence which keeps women subservient to and/or dependent on men in both a specific and a generalized sense.

At this point, what will be discussed is one manner in which the construct of "Woman-as-Other" is sustained so as to justify the appropriation of the classification of "appropriate victim" for Woman/women, by men.

On the Justification of Violence:

The Dehumanization of the Victim

In the literature which appeared during the Viet Nam war attempting to understand massacres and other atrocities, we find some clues as to how this justification is accomplished. A key concept which emerges is that of the dehumanization of the victim which accompanies gross forms of violence:

Conscience and empathy, as sources of guilt and compassion, pertain to human beings; they can be evaded if the human element in the victims of aggression is first sufficiently obscured.⁴²

⁴³ Kelman notes that the dehumanization process involves denying the other identity and community. By "identity" he means seeing the other as an independent, autonomous individual; by "community" he means seeing the other and one's self as part of an interconnected network

of caring human beings or, in other words, empathy.

The effects of the dehumanization process on the victimizer can be summed up as increased emotional distance from other human beings. Relationships are viewed in a stereotyped, rigid manner; there is what Bernard et al. term a "diminished sense of personal responsibility for the consequences of one's actions", an increasing tendency to view another individual as a means to an end, and "feelings of personal helplessness and estrangement."⁴⁴ Dehumanization is a psychic defense mechanism which "entails a decrease in a person's sense of his [sic] own individuality and his perception of the humanness of other people."⁴⁵ As it operates, dehumanization generates a vicious circle in which both aggressor and victim are progressively diminished - a "no-win" situation.

A discussion of wartime atrocities, i.e. the subject which the cited literature addresses, refers to acts which people are ordered to perform. However, in a culture where the masculine ideal involves a certain amount of aggression and where stereotyped sex roles have been the norm, the dehumanization process may provide fruitful clues to understanding the process of wife abuse and violence against women in general. Evidence that this may indeed be the case can be found in the emerging literature on violence in military families. Preliminary findings suggest that stress in military families is high due to low income, lack of concern on the part of the employer (the armed forces) for the families, rapid and enforced transfers, and separation and isolation. It is interesting, however, that two groups in the military community have been identified

as particularly prone to wife abuse. The first group is made up of U.S. soldiers who have married Asian women and subsequently returned to the United States; the second is composed of the families of Viet Nam War veterans who have experienced combat. While the first group's violence is explained by the researchers as a result of "communication problems, cultural differences, and unrealistic expectations of marriage", the second is discussed in terms of a physical manifestation of "post traumatic stress".⁴⁶ An alternative explanation might begin with the process of dehumanization as posited here. Perhaps the military men, when they find themselves in the already stressful environments of their families, proceed to generalize the processes of dehumanization they have learned in the armed forces. This hypothesis should be tested by further research, including comparisons of military and non-military men and their families.

That dehumanization may be a "logical" consequence of certain aspects of contemporary western society is suggested by Kelman⁴⁷ in that stereotypical male and female roles are argued to truncate individual humanity by limiting the male's development of empathy and the woman's of identity. This would suggest that a certain amount of dehumanization is an integral part of traditional gender relations in contemporary society and that wife abuse/violence against women may be a logical concomitant of sex role stereotypy.

To pursue this line of thought, it is interesting to consider Marsh's work on ritualized aggression among British football fans or "aggro".⁴⁸ In this ritualized behaviour, men "insult" each other by denigrating the other's masculinity, accusing the other of effeminacy and calling him a "cunt" - the ultimate insult which demands a reaction

from the recipient. According to Marsh, women are totally irrelevant in aggro:

Silly girls are not worth bothering about [in these men's eyes], and they are certainly not legitimate targets for violence.⁴⁹

In other words, according to Marsh, calling the other a "silly girl" is defining him out as an opponent. Thus, Marsh concluded that "aggro" is ritualized conflict management and as such is functional in maintaining order in British (male) working class society.

It is not sufficient to accept Marsh's definition of women as simply irrelevant in this situation, however. As Edholm et al. caution:

. . . the relations between men and women are crucial in determining many social structures and practices and, in order to 'see women' . . . these practices and structures have to be analyzed to reveal the significance of women's absence, to see whether this absence is not in fact a critical feature.⁵⁰

Seeking meaning in the absence of women in "aggro" suggests that the dehumanized Woman is the symbolic object of the ritualized violence. While the actual woman - living, breathing, made up of sweat, blood, hair and demands - is irrelevant in the male world of "aggro", the dehumanized Woman-as-Other is very relevant as that against which the man measures himself. She is what he abhors. Insofar as the dehumanized Woman has traditionally been considered (by men) as a prize for male aggressiveness, the real woman who may or may not accept this objectification might well become the target for male rage acted out as violent behaviour.

Implications of Male Violence
for Male/Female Power Relations

De Beauvoir commented on male violence, suggesting that it is the ultimate expression of male subjectivity:

Against any insult, any attempt to reduce him to the status of object, the man has recourse to his fists, to exposure of himself to blows, he does not let himself be transcended by others, he is himself at the heart of his subjectivity . . . It is a profound frustration not to be able to register one's feelings upon the face of the world.⁵¹

The extension of Woman-as-Other, the inversion of that which is essential, the non-being, the flesh-and-blood woman, is appropriately the face upon which male frustrations can be registered, often violently. McCarthy, writing about rape, expressed a sentiment which can be paraphrased to apply to violence against women in general (and hence to wife abuse): What we may be dealing with is the banality of violence against women, the sheer ordinariness of it as the logical end of macho.⁵²

While not all - perhaps not even the majority - of men act in a violent manner, male violence against women as a generalized phenomenon in contemporary society acts as a mechanism of social control which sustains the male/female hierarchy.⁵³ Men who are bound by circumstances and are unable to "register [their] feelings on the face of the world", may experience resentment. Whether or not the individual man behaves violently, Gray suggests that resentment may explain "why so many who do not actively engage in destruction take a secret satisfaction in the rage of the small minority."⁵⁴

It is crucial in this context to recall that men, in addition to being the perpetrators of violence against women, are also the

source of protection against male violence. Griffin notes:

The same set of beings who define us as Other is the one who rapes us, or threatens us with rape and violence, and those are the same beings who govern us.⁵⁵

Women, de Beauvoir argues, partake in their Otherness with a certain degree of enjoyment in that it allows them to "evade at once both economic risk and the metaphysical risk of a liberty in which ends and aims must be contrived without assistance."⁵⁶ However, this position severely underestimates the coercion that structures Otherness for women. Earlier, de Beauvoir noted:

To decline to be the Other, to refuse to be a party to the deal - this would be for women to renounce all the advantages conferred upon them by their alliance with the superior caste.⁵⁷

It is perhaps more accurate to say that women are defined as Other in an existential sense, but that this Other-ness reflects and is reflected in an economic, social and cultural reality. For women to decline to partake of their Other-ness is not only a renunciation of personal advantage, it is a profoundly revolutionary act.

For a woman to even suggest she is other-than-Other, for her to attempt a declaration of subjectivity, is threatening to the male/female hierarchy.⁵⁸ The woman who travels without male protection is "fair game"; the woman who hitchhikes or walks home from the subway after dark is "asking for it". If she is raped (or beaten) she will have trouble invoking the protection, post facto though it may be, of the law.⁵⁹ Any woman who is not part of a constellation defined in terms of an essential being (i.e. a male) is the quintessential "Other", the personification of the myth of feminine evil. She may be acted against with relative impunity.

Thus as legislation is enacted which places in force an increasing number of juridical rights for women, as women attain even a limited degree of autonomy in economic terms, a curious phenomenon is occurring. Rather than emerge as equal beings, Woman's fundamental Otherness in the eyes of men becomes concentrated into the non-governed areas, specifically those areas where (to quote then-Justice Minister Pierre E. Trudeau's 1968 assertion) "the state has no business" - the bedrooms of the nation or, to move to another level of abstraction, to women's sexuality, to Woman as Sexuality.

Thus, it is argued that we are not currently confronted by another, nameless phenomenon which has taken the place of patriarchy. We are witnessing a concentration of the Otherness of Woman, for which concentration women in their contemporary flesh are being victimized.

In terms of wife abuse, what is suggested is that, in addition to structural considerations which render the wife the appropriate victim of marital violence, her gender, her Woman-ness, her construction by the man as Other, augments his appropriation for her of the victim role. Crudely, it makes it easier for him to haul off and sock her in the mouth, should he feel so inclined.

Conclusions

The implications of the concentration of Otherness into non-governed areas is key to an understanding of wife abuse, especially in terms of its persistence in the face of manifest sanctions against the behaviour. Wife abuse takes place within a familial relationship

or within the privacy of the relationship of a couple.⁶⁰ Within the family - despite the various regulations imposed by the State - social control is largely a private, rather than a public, matter.⁶¹ It is not surprising that, at the same time, we are witnessing a re-generation of the mystique of motherhood and women's domestic role as a deity-ordained calling. This increased mystification of the role of the woman in the family goes hand in hand with the condition which I have argued to be a concentration of her Otherness.

At the same time, it is possible to understand pornography, violence against women in advertising, and violence in films in a similar context. Insofar as the concentration of Otherness is a reality, the symbolic violence against Woman such as that which is articulated in the British "aggro", becomes writ large in pulp and celluloid. If men and women lived in separate communities, perhaps this symbolized aggression would continue to spiral into greater levels of abstraction. However, men and women live in the same communities, share the same facilities, sleep in the same beds. The disjuncture between the symbolic Woman-as-Other and the reality of the flesh-and-blood woman, always hazy, is blurred even further and Woman/women are reiterated as appropriate victims of violence.

The responsibility of those involved in what Smith refers to as ideological production is grave in the case of wife abuse and violence against women. The assertion of subjectivity is an essential and continuing requirement:

In insisting that women appear as subjects in the formation of a social consciousness we represent ourselves. We cannot break though we can be aware of the other enforced silences.

And we can assert that there is not one way of seeing the world, not one way from which it may be known. There is not one universal subject from whose perspective knowledge can be simply transformed into an objective and universal account.⁶²

There are no answers to the problem of wife abuse in the formulation of Woman-as-Other, no threads to mend the rent in the soul. There are pieces which indicate something about the pervasiveness of the phenomenon. Wife abuse, however, is a concrete occurrence which is articulated daily in the lives of women and men. The second thread of the investigation seeks to explore the stage on which the drama is acted out - the family and the role of the woman therein. This is the focus of the sixth Chapter of this thesis.

Footnotes to Chapter Five

- 1 Kuhn and Wolpe, "Feminism and Materialism", pp 4, 6.
- 2 See Chapter 6, n. 11 for discussion of this concept as it is suggested to apply on a cross-class basis.
- 3 Simone Weil, quoted in S. Griffiths, Rape: The Power of Consciousness (San Francisco, 1979), 64.
- 4 A prime example is the case of the early Roman Empire where, as Dobash and Dobash note in Violence Against Wives (pp 34-40), the wife of a Roman had the same status as one of his slaves, i.e. he had the right to sell her or to put her to death.
- 5 The term "appropriate victim" is drawn from the work of Rebecca Dobash. She defines it as follows:

The term 'appropriate' is used to imply that there are very strong attitudes which reflect the 'basic right' of some members of the family (parents and husbands) to control other members (children and wives), even if it requires the use of physical force . . . The use of physical coercion as a means of gaining or maintaining control is accepted by individuals and agencies alike. It is only when such coercion becomes too excessive, too blatant, or a public nuisance that it is deemed inappropriate . . . It is only when these limits are violated that intervention or attempts at prohibition are deemed necessary and/or appropriate.

Dobash, "The Relationship Between Violence Directed at Women . . .", p. 146. This describes the situation which occurs when certain structural positions in the family are designated as "appropriate" loci for victimization, in the form of violence directed at the incumbent, by the occupant of another structural position in the family. What is argued is that women, as wives, are abused by men, as husbands. It is women who are the "appropriate victims" of violence at the hands of men.
- 6 Another way in which women's victimization has been explained begins with the argument that women are a 'minority group'. See H. M. Hacker, "Women as a Minority Group", Social Forces 30 (1951), 60-69 for the initial formulation of this argument wherein Hacker concluded women did not fit the minority group paradigm and her later article "Women as a Minority Group: Some 20 Years Later", in R. J. Unger and F. L. Denmark (eds.), Woman: Dependent or Independent Variable (New

York, 1975) where she reanalyzed the position.

These arguments are based closely on the application of Louis Wirth's definition of a "minority group":

. . . a group of people who, because of their physical or cultural characteristics, are singled out from the others in the society in which they live for differential and unequal treatment, and who therefore regard themselves as objectives of collective discrimination. (Cited in G. E. Simpson and J. M. Yinger, Racial and Cultural Minorities (New York, 1965), p. 16)

In her initial attempt to apply the concept to women, Hacker was forced to concede in 1951 that one of Wirth's criteria (collective awareness of discrimination) did not apply. However, in 1975 she again analyzed the concept's applicability and concluded that the actions of the women's movement had impacted on women's consciousness so that they could indeed be considered a "minority group" in the strict sociological sense.

Hirsch's recent work (M. F. Hirsch, Women and Violence, New York, 1981) uncritically accepts Wirth's definition and concludes that "women are by definition a minority and as minorities they have become and always were legitimate objects of hostility" (p. viii).

Sociology claims to involve the scientific study of society. Hacker, at least, attempted to operationalize the concept of "minority group" in a scientific fashion, subjecting the position of women to rigorous analysis to determine if the concept could be applied. Hirsch makes no such concession but links the definition with the phenomenon in what must be at best an uneasy alliance. While it is convenient to apply the concept of "minority group" to women in order to explain the apparent historical constancy of male violence against them, such an analysis neglects the fact that women live with their oppressors. It also deflects analysis from the condition of the (victimized) women per se, making it a special case of a wider issue of prejudice and discrimination. What is argued here is that it is not necessary to resort to stretching sociological concepts to understand the oppression and victimization of women.

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Simone de Beauvoir, The Second Sex (New York, 1961), xvii.

8

Simone de Beauvoir, "Simone de Beauvoir: The Second Sex 25 Years Later", Society 13:2 (1976), 80.

- 9 J. A. Sabrosky, From Rationality to Liberation (Westport, Conn., 1979), 116.
- 10 E. Neumann, The Great Mother: An Analysis of the Archetype (Princeton, 1963) provides a discussion of these myths from a Jungian perspective. For a feminist analysis of this mythology, see M. Stone, When God Was A Woman (New York, 1976) and the extensive bibliography contained in her book.
- 11 De Beauvoir, Second Sex, p. xvi.
- 12 De Beauvoir, Second Sex, p. xvii.
- 13 Firestone, Dialectic of Sex, 1970.
- 14 F. E. Engels, The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State (New York, 1972), 119.
- 15 Rowbotham, Woman's Consciousness . . ., p. 35.
- 16 Rowbotham, Woman's Consciousness . . ., p. 33-34.
- 17 For discussion of this concept from the standpoint of traditional political linguistics, see D. V. J. Bell, Power, Influence and Authority: An Essay in Political Linguistics (New York, 1975). More explicitly feminist positions are argued in the work of R. Lakoff, "Language and Woman's Place", Language and Society 2 (1973), pp 45-80; and B. Thorne and N. Henley, "Difference and Dominance: An Overview of Language, Gender and Society", in Thorne and Henley (eds.) Language and Sex: Difference and Domination, 1975.
- 18 This objectification is a major feature of the contemporary advertising media wherein advertisements objectify women's anatomy as in, for example, pictures presenting panty hose which show only the lower half of the woman's body, the balance being buried in sand. In other advertisements, the legs are illuminated while the rest of the woman is in darkness. An interesting argument could be made that the contemporary advertising media have replaced the mythologies of earlier religions wherein women were clearly presented as Evil (e.g. Genesis, St. Paul and St. Augustine from the Christian tradition; the myth of Lilith from the Jewish). I am indebted to Berkeley Kaite for the discussions from which this insight arose.
- 19 Smith, "An Analysis of Ideological Structures . . .", p. 365.
- 20 See, for example, R. P. Dobash and R. E. Dobash, "Community Response to Violence . . .", 1981; Tones, "A Torrent of Abuse. . .", 1978.

- 21 Edholm et al., "Conceptualizing Women", p. 120.
- 22 See, for example the work of Allen and Straus, "Resources, Power and Husband-Wife Violence", 1980; Ehrenreich and English, Complaints and Disorders . . ., 1975. These authors remind one that within a given social formation, these relative positions must be expected to vary depending on the individual's position in the class structure as well.
- 23 See the work of L. Clark and D. Lewis, Rape: The Price of Coercive Sexuality. (Toronto, 1977); N. Z. Davis, Society and Culture in Early Modern France (Stanford, Calif., 1975); Tomes, "A Torrent of Abuse . . .", 1978; as well as much of the work by Dobash and Dobash, especially Violence Against Wives, 1979 and "Community Response . . .", 1981.
- 24 See Hamilton, The Liberation of Women, 1978, for a discussion of this duality, as well as Dobash and Dobash, Violence Against Wives, 1979.
- 25 This is discussed in Dobash and Dobash, Violence Against Wives, 31-47; "Wives: The 'Appropriate' Victim", 1978; see also Tomes, "A Torrent of Abuse . . .", 1978.
- 26 S. J. Ball-Rokeach, "The Legitimation of Violence" in J. F. Short and M. E. Wolfgang (eds.) Collective Violence (Chicago, 1972), 104.
- 27 This is discussed in the work of Christopher Lasch, especially Haven in a Heartless World, 1979.
- 28 Edholm et al., "Conceptualizing Women", p. 120. Refer to Chapter Four, n. 95 for the text of this argument from Edholm.
- 29 Dobash and Dobash, Violence Against Wives, p. 56.
- 30 Armstrong and Armstrong, The Double Ghetto, 1978.
- 31 Thus one finds bank managers stating that women are granted credit on equal terms with men (Hamilton, Cable 4 TV, February 1981), neglecting to recognize the structural constraints which render women less-than-equal competitors in the "race" for bank loans. Movements have arisen which denounce the vendors of and the (female) models for pornography rather than the (male) readers and publishers. We have public dismay and fear over the fact that a large number of Black male youths were killed over a period of several months in an American city while the death of a greater number of young Black women in the same city in the same period goes unnoted (Atlanta, Summer, 1981). (I am indebted to Meg Luxton for pointing

out the connection between this last example and the issue of women as victims.)

- 32 For example, Tomes, "A Torrent of Abuse . . . ", 1978. Her work on wife abuse in Britain in the nineteenth century noted that, insofar as the man was responsible for the woman's actions, he was perceived by the community to have the right to chastise her as he saw fit, including utilizing physical "discipline". Similar observations can be located in the work of Davis, Society and Culture, 1975 and R. P. and R. E. Dobash, "Community Response . . . ", 1981.
- 33 Barrett, Womens Oppression . . . , p. 45. See also C. Smart and B. Smart, "Women and Social Control: An Introduction" in Smart and Smart, Women, Sexuality and Social Control (London, 1978).
- 34 This is not to say that violence may not take indirect and/or symbolic forms in the family also, but rather to emphasize that it is less likely to be vested solely in these forms in the familial environment. Again, the caveat that the arguments framed in terms of the family must be read as applying to the private relationships between the heterosexual couple whether or not they are married, applies. See Ch. 6, p. 178.
- 35 See B. Easton, "Feminism and the Contemporary Family", Socialist Review 39, 8:3 (1978), 12ff for an example of this debate and summary of the arguments; cf. V. Beechey, "On Patriarchy", Feminist Review 3 (1979), 66-82 for a summary of the various viewpoints on this issue. Barrett, Women's Oppression . . . , 1980, criticizes the use of the term "patriarchy" (pp 10-19).
- 36 Easton, 1978.
- 37 Dahrendorf, 1959, cited in I. Taylor et al., The New Criminology: For a Social Theory of Deviance (London, 1973), 247.
- 38 McGrath, "The Crisis of Domestic Order", p. 22. Emphasis in original.
- 39 B. Kitchen, "The Family and the State", International Journal of Women's Studies 4:2 (1981), 191.
- 40 Easton, "Feminism and the Contemporary Family", p. 31.
- 41 See, for example, "Group Therapy Aids Batterers", a Globe and Mail article (1981)
- 42 V. W. Bernard et al., "Dehumanization", Chapter 8 in N. Sanford et al., Sanctions for Evil (San Francisco, 1971), 109;

See also H. Kelman, "Violence Without Moral Restraint", Journal of Social Issues 29 (1973), pp 25-61; E. V. Walter, "Violence and the Process of Terror" in J. V. Bondurant, Conflict: Violent and Non-Violent (Chicago, 1971), 99.

43

Kelman, 1973.

44

Bernard et al., "Dehumanization", p. 115.

45

Bernard et al., p. 102.

46

W. M. Turner and L. A. West, "Violence in Military Families", Response to Violence in the Family 4:5 (May/June, 1981), 2. Although it would be logical to assume that there would be some overlap between the two groups, this is not mentioned.

47

Kelman, p. 59.

48

P. Marsh, Aggro: The Illusion of Violence (London, 1978).

49

Marsh, p. 28.

50

Edholm et al., "Conceptualizing Women", p. 126.

51

De Beauvoir, Second Sex, p. 309.

52

S. J. McCarthy, "Pornography, Rape, and the Cult of Macho", The Humanist (September/October, 1980), 17. There are echoes here of Talcott Parson's notion of "compulsive masculinity"; this is an area which should be explored further.

53

J. Hanmer, "Violence and the Social Control of Women", in G. Littlejohn (ed.) Power and the State (London, 1978), makes a similar point.

54

J. G. Gray, "Understanding Violence Philosophically", in Gray (ed.) On Understanding Violence Philosophically and Other Essays (New York, 1970), 20. Gray deals with a philosophical understanding of collective violence; his insights, however, are instructive for our analysis.

55

Griffiths, Rape . . ., p. 61.

56

De. Beauvoir, Second Sex, p. xxi.

57

De Beauvoir, Second Sex, p. xx.

58

A contemporary example of this is located in advertisements for feminine hygiene products where independent women leading active lives are portrayed. A common theme therein is the repetition of the asserting that these women need "protection"

from some nameless horror which one can suggest is located in the consequences of their sexuality as evidenced in their menstruation. I am indebted to Berkeley Kaite for discussions which yielded this insight.

- 59 Clark and Lewis, Rape . . . , 1977; Griffiths, Rape . . . , 1979 both deal with this issue.
- 60 As has been noted, it is recognized that not all of what is defined as 'wife abuse' occurs in families. However, central to my argument is the contention that the norms and ideologies surrounding the family structure abusive relationships.
- 61 For a discussion of social control within the family, see T. S. Dahl and A. Snare, 'The Coercion of Privacy: A Feminist Perspective', in C. Smart and B. Smart, Women, Sexuality and Social Control (London, 1978). M. McIntosh, 'The State and the Oppression of Women' in A. Kuhn and A. M. Wolpe, Feminism and Materialism (London, 1978) also provides insights in this matter.
- 62 Smith, 'An Analysis of Ideological Structures . . . ', p. 366.

CHAPTER SIX

WIFE ABUSE AND THE ROLE OF THE WOMAN

IN THE FAMILY UNIT

IN CONTEMPORARY CAPITALIST SOCIETY

Introduction

A man may work from sun to sun, but a woman's work
is never done (Proverb).

The purpose of this Chapter is to consider the domestic duties of the victim of wife abuse - i.e. the woman, qua wife, performs a certain job, that of domestic labourer. What will be argued is that there are a number of aspects of this job which make wife abuse, or the potentiality thereof, logical within contemporary capitalist society.

Beginning with a discussion of domestic labour per se (i.e. the daily and generational reproduction of labour power including the management of tensions within the family), I proceed to a general discussion of wife abuse as it relates to the interconnections between the family and the State. Specifically, it is argued that wife abuse (or the potentiality thereof), insofar as it is conceived as legitimate in terms of community and/or societal mores and laws, is a support for the acceptance by the population of the legitimacy of force as the underpinning of the authority of the State. Insofar as we accept actual or potential force as the underpinning of the husband/wife hierarchy (and by extension the broader male/female hierarchy), so too are we

predisposed to accept force as the legitimate property of the State.

Wife abuse, in its crudest formulation, can be understood as one aspect of the man's expectations of the woman's role as tension manager. Insofar as it is supposed to be the wife's job to manage tensions within the family, and insofar as the family is deemed to be the appropriate location for the working out of tensions generated at other levels of the social formation (notably the work place), tensions brought into the family setting or generated therein may be articulated in the form of wife abuse. In that such abuse is a logical extension of the woman's "job" as domestic labourer (i.e. tension manager), there is a strong tendency to perceive it as "legitimate".

Ultimately, what is argued is that the combination of the fiscal crisis of the State together with the logical consistency of wife abuse with the needs of capital, may result in the reprivatization of the phenomenon of wife abuse from its current status as a (quasi) public issue. This argument is supported by reference to the current spate of "pro-family" conservative legislation in the United States and strong conservative sentiment, particularly as it pertains to the male/female hierarchy and the sanctity of the nuclear family.

'The family' must be considered in its historical specificity, and variations occur along class as well as racial, ethnic and other lines. Furthermore, it is only in recent years in Canada that the percentage of wives with waged employment outside their home has crossed the 50% mark.¹ 'The family' of the sociology of Talcott Parsons is

no longer (if indeed it ever was) the norm. However, despite recent changes, I would argue that, within the family in contemporary capitalist society, woman's primary role is that of domestic labourer.

The Applicability of the Domestic Labour Model

Outside the Case of Working Class Women

The bulk of the discussion of domestic labour which follows focuses on the phenomenon as it appears in the working class household, with a male breadwinner and female housewife. This obviously raises questions about the validity of the analysis for explaining wife abuse outside the working class or in the 51% of Canadian households where the wife holds outside employment. There are several points to be made in support of the contention that this analysis will hold true in other class situations and familial configurations.

First, although wife abuse is not class-specific, there are considerable data which suggest that the issues which are the underlying precipitants of abuse can be related to issues of male supremacy/female dependency within the family.² This relationship is most clearly identified in the male breadwinner/female housewife type of family in which the housewife is totally dependent in the most fundamental sense for the survival of herself and her children.

Second, although a high proportion of married Canadian women are in the labour force, and although others contribute to the family income through part-time jobs such as babysitting, women's wages are, on the average, considerably lower than those of men. Further, women wage workers tend to be concentrated in a narrow band of low-status

positions.³ Thus, despite the increasing prevalence of two-wage households, it is not possible to argue that women's dependency has been eradicated.

Third, research has shown that, whether or not they hold paid jobs, women perform and/or take responsibility for the bulk of the domestic labour in the household.⁴ There is no indication that women have been relieved of their concomitant role as tension managers. Thus, while discussions in terms of a traditional division of labour may ignore the variable of women's paid employment, it is possible that the inclusion of this factor would increase rather than alleviate some of the pressures to be discussed in this Chapter.

Fourth, while the tensions which working class men bring home from their employment are understood in terms of a specific relationship to the means of production, the subjective experience of tension on the job is not something on which working class men have a monopoly. The argument that tensions are channelled to the home for absorption, with the woman being the sponge, is argued to apply to non-working class as well as working class situations.⁵

Finally, in the areas of both wife abuse and domestic labour, the bulk of the literature deals with the working class.⁶ Obviously, these areas need further study in terms of the lived experience of the petty bourgeoisie, new middle class, etc.⁷ Insofar as the model developed herein is not directly applicable, however, I would argue that it would be beneficial to place greater emphasis on the factors of misogyny which have been discussed in Chapter Five, in order to explain the phenomenon of wife abuse.

A General Statement About Domestic Labour

Domestic labour can be understood as the reproduction of labour power on both a generational and a day-to-day basis, i.e. the biological reproduction of children, their care and socialization, together with the daily chores of housework (e.g. cooking, cleaning, tidying, laundry) and consumption management or 'making ends meet'.⁸ In the working class family, for example, Luxton observed:

. . . domestic labour . . . converts the wages of the paid worker into the means of subsistence for the entire household and replenishes the labour power of the household members again and again so that it can be re-sold the next day, the next year and in the next generation.⁹

The management of tensions in the family can be understood as an extension of the daily reproduction of labour power. It is essential that workers - present and future - be returned to their daily tasks rejuvenated and ready to perform what is required of them, whether it be the expenditure of their labour power for a wage, or the learning of a discipline which will prepare them for future expenditures.¹⁰

This understanding of the family is specific to contemporary industrial capitalism, however. Zaretsky has argued that the rise of the split between work and family, public and private, male and female realms, was a concomitant of the rise of capitalism. This split, he argues, has continued in an evolutionary manner until the split in contemporary industrial capitalism is seen as completely natural by the participants. "The family" is understood as the realm in which the individual can be valued for him or her self as opposed to the impersonal relations which govern alienated labour.¹¹ In the family unit, the locus of the domestic labour performed by the wife, the management of the realm of the personal has become part of her responsibilities.

The "happy family" is understood as the place where people can "be themselves", where people will be treated as individuals, as compared to the increasingly dehumanized aspects of the work place. Janet MacLachlan, keynote speaker at a 1979 conference on "The Family" sponsored by the Ontario government, articulated this ideology:

The family is rapidly becoming the only institution in an increasingly impersonal world where each person is loved not for what he does or makes, but simply because he is.¹²

Sheila Rowbotham expressed the concept more realistically:

The family is a place of sanctuary for all the hunted, jaded exhausted sentiments out of place in commodity production . . . The family is the only place where human beings find whatever continuing love, security and comfort they know.¹³

The family is presented ideologically as a harmonious monad; it is the responsibility of the woman to approximate this ideal:

The home, then, is where the tensions generated by the corporation are managed . . . women are expected to give this kind of emotional support to their husbands and . . . they are supposed not only to provide physical comforts and the calm and ease of a no-tension home, but also to work actively a curative effect on the injuries done to [the man] in his occupational world.¹⁴

Women's role in the family provides a crucial source of humanization:

Within the family women are carrying the preposterous contradiction of love in a loveless world. They are providing capitalism with the human relations it cannot maintain in the world of men's work.¹⁵

The tensions which are generated in the work place as a consequence of the deskilled and dehumanized nature of the capitalist labour process¹⁶ are appropriately channelled into the home, as that environment where the worker is expected to "let off steam". After a "long, hard day", a worker is supposed to be able to return to his or her

home and relax. However, tensions generated on the job cannot be left at the timeclock or office door. Nor can they legitimately be vented at work.

The ideal of the factory and, to a lesser but increasingly prevalent extent, the office work process, is the assembly line: smooth running, even, disciplined, emotionless. Human feelings interfere with production and therefore with profits. Despite the "human relations school" of management theory, individuals are expected to keep their emotions away from their job (except, of course, those emotions which make them "team players", "good workers").

Reciprocally, neither can tensions generated in the domestic milieu be appropriately vented on the job. While some firms have instituted employee assistance programmes such as counselling, the ultimate object is suggested to be not the resolution of conflict, but the rehabilitation of the employee qua worker. One could posit a spiral - domestic conflict upsets a worker, leading to problems at work, which ultimately are re-channelled to the hapless home environment. This process is hypothesized to operate in parallel with the channelling of work-generated tensions to the home.¹⁷

Alienated workers performing alienated labour - are supposed to be able to, at 4:30 or 5:00 or 6:00 p.m. (or at various times during the day, thanks to the "blessings" of the 24-hour plant operations and other jobs which operate around the clock, together with the relatively new phenomenon of "flexible hours"), go home and enjoy the fruits of their labour, the "good life", in the privacy of their own home. Setting aside the question of whether or not the media-dictated standards

of what constitute the "good life" in any way approximate fulfillment of genuine human needs,¹⁸ it is clear that it is impossible to separate one's work from the rest of one's life.

It is the responsibility of the woman to maintain the "sanctuary", showing the outside world an image of peace and tranquility (the "well-run home") and to engineer the home as an arena where members of the family can "let their hair down", be soothed and replenished to return to the outside world of school or work.¹⁹ This dichotomy was recognized by Marx:

The worker . . . only feels himself outside his work, and in his work feels outside himself. He is at home when he is not working, and when he is working he is not at home . . . [M]an [the worker] no longer feels himself to be freely active in any but his animal functions - eating, drinking, procreating, or at most in his dwelling and in dressing-up, etc.; and in his human functions he no longer feels himself to be anything but an animal . . . Certainly eating, drinking, procreating, etc., are also genuinely human functions. But in the abstraction which separates them from the sphere of all other human activity and turns them into sole and ultimate ends, they are animal.²⁰

It is the "abstraction" of the family from the work process which restricts the performance of tension management within familial parameters; it is the division of labour by gender which makes this an aspect of women's work.

At the level of the individual family unit, domestic labour is one of the primary means by which the household's level of subsistence is maximized.²¹ Women's domestic labour is flexible in that it expands to compensate for reductions in the wage packets due to layoffs, strikes, illness or unemployment, or to decreases in real wages as a consequence of inflation or increased family size.²² The purchase of fewer "convenience" foods, production of clothing at home and

shopping for "bargains" are examples of aspects of women's domestic labour which take on added importance when money is scarce.²³ Furthermore, domestic labour must be flexible in that it must fit itself around the schedules of the family's wage workers and school children as well as the hours of operation, location and organization of the stores and agencies with whom the family deals.²⁴ These constraints on domestic labour do not take into account the psychological and/or emotional needs of the family members, but rather the demands of and consequences of the relationship with, capital.

Similarly (and sometimes consequentially), tension management is also intensified in historically specific circumstances, in that women in their families may be required to "cool out" added tensions which come from inflation, from insecurities in the work place, from "future shock", from disruption through sudden transfer, from crime and violence in the streets and other areas of stress which are part of contemporary life. This may take the form of interpersonal arbitration, humouring family members, trying to keep children quiet, or innumerable other intensifications of the domestic labourer's job. The key aspect, however, is that under certain circumstances, additional tension management may be required to maintain the family as a "haven". This work is usually performed by the woman.

In addition to management of tensions within the family (characterized later in this Chapter as management at the level of the private family unit), women as domestic labourers serve as a "buffer", absorbing some of the impact of state policies such as cutbacks in social spending. For example, to the extent that sick and/or elderly people are cared for in the home as a result of hospital cutbacks,

women in their traditional role as nurses in the family serve as managers of structurally-generated tensions which might otherwise surface as glaring contradictions in capitalist society. (This aspect of women's role will be developed in a subsequent section of this Chapter.)

The roles of women as domestic labourers - specifically, the reproduction of labour power and the management of tensions - serve as foci for the balance of this chapter in which the relationship between wife abuse, domestic labour, and the State is explored.

The State and the Family in Contemporary Capitalist Society

In considering the relationship between the family and the State, there has been a tendency to concentrate primarily on the Welfare State.²⁵ As Moroney notes, welfare policy (and hence, it is suggested, analyses of the State which arise from this focus) assumes:

The healthy family is one that does not seek support from extra-family institutions and for a family to do so is admission that their support network is inadequate. When it breaks down the social welfare system intervenes on a residual basis.²⁶

As an example, a recent examination of "the Family" conducted by the Ontario Secretary for Social Development concluded that social policies should encourage the "independence" of the family unit, in economic and psychological terms.²⁷ This underestimates both the complexity of the family and the breadth of State policies that impinge upon it. What is attempted here begins with the role of the family and works outwards, looking at the role of the State from the perspective of the

the family rather than viewing the family as a peripheral, derivative or directly consequential institution.

After an initial overview of some of the areas in which the State impinges on the family both directly and indirectly, the issue of wife abuse comes more sharply into focus. As will be noted, the breadth and comprehensiveness of State intervention in the reproduction of labour power calls its passivity in the face of wife abuse into question. By looking at wife abuse in the context of women's roles within the family (in terms of the reproduction of labour power and tension management), wife abuse will be argued to be not only on one level indirectly consequential of certain actions of the State, but at the same time to offer (insofar as it is "legitimate") a training ground for acceptance of the ultimate forms of the authority of the State.

The State intervenes in the reproduction of labour power both directly and indirectly, constituting the parameters within which the family unit can operate on an at least relatively autonomous basis. For example, laws regarding the age of legal marriage, choice of spouse, the legitimacy of children, divorce and/or separation, and child custody, directly set parameters within which "the family" exists as a legal entity. Legislation pertaining to compulsory education, curricula, and age at which one may leave school, also directly structure the degree of intervention by the State (in the form of the education system). Family allowance legislation and daycare provisions structure families insofar as they affect the ease with which both parents can enter the labour force or mitigate the financial burden on the family

unit. A similar point may be made with regard to deduction structures which are offered in connection with income tax (e.g. married exemptions, who may be claimed as a dependent, child care provisions). Also, as this legislation directly affects the future generation of workers (e.g. quality day care), it can be seen as State intervention (or non-intervention) in the reproduction of labour power on a generational basis. Educational policies which, for example, determine whether funds will be allocated to technical schools, universities, or some other area altogether, offer yet another example of this intervention.

Also crucial are the effects of legislation regarding abortion and contraception (both of which have only been legal in Canada since the late 1960's). To the extent that families - and particularly women - can determine the number and spacing of their offspring, the reproduction of labour power becomes more apparently voluntaristic. Further in that the generational reproduction of labour power is an aspect of women's job within the family, issues surrounding abortion and contraception can be read as an aspect of a struggle for control. Analysis of the selective enforcement of abortion legislation in Canada, for example, suggests direct correlation with the need for labour power.²⁸

The State's impact on the reproduction of labour power is not limited to direct forms, however. Laws surrounding censorship determine what material will be accessible to children, as do regulations regarding programming content and advertising standards for children's television programmes.²⁹ Legislation regarding religion in the schools and on television determines the minimum exposure children will get to dominant religious ideologies. Marriage bars in hiring practices,

whether direct (e.g. 'no married women need apply' -currently illegal in Canada) or indirect (e.g. ideological pressures against employment of married women such as prevailed in the post-World War II period), structure the family insofar as they affect the number of single-wage households. In addition, absence of, or toothless antidiscrimination legislation in the areas of hiring practices and wages affect women's labour force participation and their objective dependence on men for survival. Tax incentives such as home improvement loans and Registered Home Ownership Savings Plans, affect people's ability and possibly their willingness to make commitments to the single-family dwellings and, hypothetically at least, to long-term, relatively stable relationships. Unemployment insurance and pension plans ease the financial burden on many families, whereas minimum wage laws, wage freezes and direct and indirect forms of taxation have an indirect impact on the amount of domestic labour required in the home to maintain a given standard of living.

While these examples illustrate but by no means exhaust the direct and indirect intervention of the State into the reproduction of labour power, they do provide a context within which to consider wife abuse.

Female Dependency, Domestic Labour and Wife Abuse

It has been argued that women's labour in the home constitutes the major way in which families function as reproducers of labour power in contemporary capitalist society. Domestic labour is the woman's job. In the single (i.e. usually male) wage household, and in those two-wage households where the woman's wage is substantially lower

than the man's,³⁰ the woman is ultimately dependent on the male wage for her subsistence and that of her children.³¹ As Walker noted,³² this dependency is not limited to the women of the working class. The predominantly middle class, battered women she interviewed were consistently reluctant or unable to identify their own financial resources (earned or inherited) as belonging to them. Women's primary role as wife and mother appears to cut across class lines and to reinforce their dependency - actual or accepted - upon their husbands and upon the male control over the family's economic resources.

Male economic control is translated into male primacy in decision-making within the family. Seccombe terms this "breadwinner power".³³ While decision making power in major issues such as the purchase of an automobile is fairly clearly correlated to breadwinner power, it is less obvious that the gender asymmetry extends to managerial control over domestic labour. Dobash and Dobash cite examples of such petty tyranny as women being required to rise in the middle of the night to prepare a snack or a wife being expected to have a meal on the table the minute the man comes home.³⁴ Seccombe explains:

[The man] has a right to require his wife to serve him in the household as the reciprocal discharge of her obligation to him. Through this service relation, however discreetly it is done, he monitors and supervises the performance of her domestic tasks.³⁵

A man may back up his demands for service or servitude with force, specifically, with wife abuse. Dobash and Dobash note:

Men who repeatedly attack their wives often do so because they perceive . . . that their wives are not providing for their immediate needs in a manner they [the men] consider appropriate and acceptable.³⁶

In their study of 109 battered women, Dobash and Dobash determined that the source of conflict preceding the first, worst and last assault was most frequently negotiations over the way in which the woman performed housework or childcare and the time parameters within which she did her job. The other major sources of conflict were sexual jealousy (usually unwarranted in the woman's perception), and allocation of money, both of which can be related to women's responsibilities as domestic labourers.³⁷ In the first instance, her responsibility to provide sexual access to her husband is part of the woman's domestic labour in that it is both part of her legal obligation as wife and of her job as tension manager in the family. In the second instance, management of the family's resources affects the woman's performance of her job insofar as she is responsible for the maximization of their level of subsistence.³⁸ Men, as breadwinners, attempt to exercise control over women's domestic labour, backing it up with violence on occasion.³⁹

Wife Abuse: Its Legitimacy

Wife abuse is popularly perceived as legitimate as, for example, in the belief that women are "masochists" who "love to be beaten", or the conviction that a nagging woman is "asking for it" - widely held, even by battered women themselves.⁴⁰ Tacit legitimacy is accorded wife abuse by the way the issue is handled in the courts. For example, in a six-month period in 1980 in the Hamilton Wentworth region of Ontario, 214 women pressed charges in Family Court, charging their

husbands with physical abuse. In the same period, only three men were fined and only one man was sent to jail for wife beating.⁴¹ Also, despite the horror generally expressed over child abuse, the legitimacy of corporal punishment for one's children (sanctioned by the Canadian Criminal Code, sec. 43), makes it difficult for a line to be drawn between "legitimate force" and "abuse".⁴²

Legislation which structures the legitimate application of physical force within the family represents the extension of the repressive arm of the State into the family. Selective application of laws, laws which offer lesser protection to individuals within (as compared to those outside of) families, government non-recognition of problems - all legitimate domestic violence along lines which parallel age and gender hierarchies within the family. Read through an understanding of the family as the primary site of the reproduction of labour power, this selective legitimacy will be argued to provide support for the acceptance of the legitimacy of force as the underpinning of the authority of the State.

Wife Abuse: Implications for the Authority of the State⁴³

In seeking to explore the relationship between the authority of the State and wife abuse, I am examining a specific aspect of the involvement of the State in the reproduction of the social relations of reproduction, i.e. the reproduction of labour power in the family. As has been developed, the woman, through her domestic labour, reproduces labour power within the family unit. Through an examination of three issues:

- (a) force as the underpinning of the authority of the State;

(b) acceptance of the State as possessing a monopoly over the right to public use of force;

(c) the selective legitimacy of domestic violence;

I develop the argument that the selective legitimacy of domestic violence provides support for the acceptance of the legitimacy of force as the underpinning of the authority of the State.⁴⁴

(a) Force as the Underpinning of

the Authority of the State:

The relationship between force and authority has frequently been presented as an inverse one, i.e. force as a means to shore up waning authority. Through a critique of one expression of this view, the argument is developed that force can be understood as the underpinning of the authority of the State.

Specifically, Arendt's assertion that violence is a means to an end rather than an end in itself is considered, together with the corollary that, as a means to an end, violence cannot be the underpinning of anything.⁴⁵ Although she neglects to offer a definition of "power", Arendt says it precedes and may at times use as an implement, violence.⁴⁶

The relationship between the power of the State, of which violence can be understood as a means to its realization, and the authority of the State, is the crucial area which Arendt does not appear to acknowledge.⁴⁷ Power is not, contrary to Arendt, the collective manifestation of the consensus of the majority, maintained by and through consensus and using force only to ward off the encroachment of dissenting individuals. Power is bound up in the role of the State,

its ultimate role as arbiter in class struggle and facilitator of the capitalist social formation. The interconnection of power and violence is illustrated by the fact that, when the State has lost its authority, its violence comes to the fore. When the State has lost its power, it no longer has the capacity to command the means of violence. Power, with its accompanying tool of violence/force, underpins the authority of the State.

Speaking of the relationship between force and authority, Hanmer echoes this argument:

Force and its threat is never a residual or secondary mode of influence rather it is the structural underpinning of hierarchical relations, the ultimate sanction buttressing other forms of control.⁴⁸

(b) Acceptance of State Monopoly Over

Legitimate Public Force: The relationship that is posited in this section is similar to that which Max Weber posited as part and parcel of the modern State:

. . . a state is a human community that (successfully) claims the monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force within the given territory.⁴⁹

Acceptance of the authority of the State implies acceptance of the State's potentiality for violence as an inherent part of its power.⁵⁰ Challenge addressed to the authority of the State throws the State's power, and its force, into relief. For the most part, however, we accept this potentiality for force, insofar as we do not overtly challenge the legitimacy of the State. Therefore, it is suggested that the second issue, the acceptance of the State as possessing a monopoly over the right to the public use of force is correct, at least in the con-

text of contemporary Canada.

(c) Selective Legitimacy of Domestic Violence: The relationship of the third issue - the selective legitimacy of domestic violence - to the first two is hypothesized thusly:

Wife abuse, in popular parlance and in the selective non-intervention of the State, is accorded legitimacy. The family unit is argued to be the primary site of the reproduction of labour power. Borrowing from social learning theory,⁵¹ it is suggested that the legitimacy of violence which follows a specific authority hierarchy within the family, provides a lesson which is learned during the period of childhood and reinforced throughout one's adult life. The message that is communicated and absorbed is, "FORCE UNDERPINS AUTHORITY".

Althusser's understanding of the State as composed of Repressive and Ideological State Apparatuses is a useful framework for considering wife abuse as one of the supports of State authority. According to Althusser, the State should be understood as made up of a Repressive State Apparatus (government, administration, army, police, courts, prisons, etc.) and Ideological State Apparatuses (schools, churches, legal system, political system, literature, sports and, most relevant to this discussion, the family).⁵² He argued that the Repressive State Apparatus functions primarily by repression and secondarily by ideology, whereas for Ideological State Apparatuses the reverse is true. Thus, according to this formulation, the family "functions massively and predominantly by ideology, but . . . secondarily by repression, even if ultimately, but only ultimately, this is very attenuated and concealed, even symbolic."⁵³ As Althusser observes:

. . . very subtle explicit or tacit combinations may be woven from the interplay of the (Repressive) State Apparatus and the Ideological State Apparatus.⁵⁴

According to Althusser, these combinations can only be understood in concrete situations.

It is argued here that it is possible to understand wife abuse in contemporary Canadian society as an example of this interplay. Insofar as, within the family unit, violence is considered to be "legitimate" when it follows age and gender hierarchies, the overt or symbolic repression that is played out in the family Ideological State Apparatus is one of the conditions which affects the degree to which the Repressive State Apparatus can function by ideology, without recourse to overt force or violence. This interplay between the Repressive State Apparatus and the family Ideological State Apparatus occurs both at the level of the socialization of the individual in the family unit and at the broader level of the ideological representation of the woman as the logical recipient of (male) violence within the domestic (and, as argued in Chapter Five, the societal) environment.

At the level of the socialization of the individual, this argument accepts the validity of the social learning theorists' contention that violence is learned behaviour. However, it goes beyond their work in that it recognizes the learning as a more complex phenomenon than simply "violence breeds violence". The process as it is hypothesized here occurs at the level of familial power relationships, and the perceived relationship between force and authority.⁵⁵ If one accepts "X" as possessing authority, one learns to accept that "X" has the right to use force as a basis for maintaining this authority.

Insofar as the State retains monopoly over the legitimate use of public force⁵⁶ wife abuse is hypothesized to have particular ramifications, the understanding of which go beyond the boundaries of traditional approaches to domestic violence.

Ultimately, what is argued is that, insofar as it is considered to be "legitimate", wife abuse is one support of the authority of the State and its monopoly over public force.

Summary: It has been suggested that the State intervenes in the reproduction of labour power within the family in many ways which go beyond those understood in the context of analyses of the 'welfare state'. Insofar as the reproduction of labour power (and thus domestic labour) is the woman's job within the family unit, State intervention can be understood on one level as control over the parameters of this job. Insofar as State intervention - or selective non-intervention - intensifies women's dependence on the male wage, the links between the economy and the reproduction of labour power are strengthened. Wife abuse can be read as providing one facet of this dependency.⁵⁷

On a different level, domestic violence, in its "legitimate" manifestations, has been argued to follow age and gender hierarchies within the family and in this way offers a training ground for the acceptance of the legitimacy of force as the underpinning of the authority of the State.

There remains another aspect of women's role as domestic labourers which as yet has not been explored in terms of its implications for wife abuse, that of tension management. It is to this area that I now turn.

Tension Management

It has been argued that women's role as tension manager is articulated on two levels: (a) that which is articulated in terms of the private family, i.e., the engineering of the family as a harmonious unit, and (b) the provision of a buffer which absorbs some of the tensions which are structurally generated through crises in the capitalist economy. In this section these two levels are developed and the argument is offered that wife abuse can be expected as an indirect consequence of tensions within the family, which themselves are at least in part determined by the actions of the State.⁵⁸

(a) The Private Family: In its crudest formulation, wife abuse can be seen as an extreme form of "tension management" - the woman absorbs with her psyche and her body, the tensions generated in the public sphere. On one level this can be seen as "functional" for the capitalist economy:

The tendency of male workers to think of themselves as men (i.e. powerful) rather than as workers (i.e. members of an oppressed group), promotes a false sense of privilege and power, and an identification with the world of men, including the boss. The petty dictatorship which most men exercise over their wives and families enables them to vent their anger and frustration in a way which poses no challenge to the system. The role of the man in the family reinforces aggressive individualism, authoritarianism, and a hierarchical view of social relations, values which are fundamental to the perpetuation of capitalism.⁵⁹

There is a structural source of tensions situated in the nuclear family form which augments those generated in the workplace: the wife's economic dependency on her husband increases the pressure

on the man to continue work, day in and day out, whether or not he gets any personal satisfaction from the job. On the wife's side, her responsibilities for the maintenance of the home and the subsistence of her family mean that she has, as part of her job as domestic labourer, a responsibility to encourage the man to continue his job.⁶⁰ Although the conservatism of housewives is debatable,⁶¹ it is reasonable to assume that her concern for the family's welfare may at times lead her to engage in 'hagging' which in turn increases the husband's perceived tensions and may be seen by the man as justifying wife abuse.

Women as tension manager must not only absorb the tension generated or augmented in the work place and brought home by themselves or other members of the family, those tensions generated within the family through intensity of interaction (including violence), conflict between the ideologies of individualism and togetherness,⁶² conflict between male and female expectations of marriage,⁶³ and structural pressures, but she must also absorb those tensions which may arise as her own lack of "fit" with (male) expectations of the roles of wife and mother. In other words, wife abuse may arise because the woman does not live up to cultural expectations of her as wife-and-mother, as these expectations are held by the individual man with whom she lives.

When a woman does not fulfill her duties as wife-and-mother, as, for example, when she "chooses" to go to a consciousness raising meeting rather than remain at home and complete the ironing, or when she opts for convenience foods rather than "something from the oven", fails to prepare dinner at all, "chooses" to work late, or asserts her opinion in a discussion, she may be perceived by her husband as dere-

lict in her duties.⁶⁴ Conflict arises, and the woman herself may attempt to manage it by modifying her behaviour or feeling guilty.⁶⁵ Ultimately, the man may enforce his wishes by physical or psychological abuse and the woman is de facto forced to comply with his understanding of her cultural role prescriptions - an effective form of social control over her behaviour.

In a discussion of the notion that women "provoke" battering, Dobash describes contemporary Western marriage as 'a form of marriage in which women must either conform and comply with their husband's wishes or, by failing to do so, engage in behaviour which is by definition provocative.'⁶⁶ The pervasiveness of this perspective is illuminated by the following anecdote. In a recent discussion oriented around establishing a transition house in Hamilton, Ontario, a woman with five years' experience working with battered women observed that some of the "ladies" with whom she worked had, in fact, "asked for" their abuse. The examples she cited involved the women's poor housekeeping - they weren't "doing their part of the job" in return for their husbands going out to work and "doing their half".

The problem with this perspective is that it reflects a tacit acceptance of male violence against women as an ultimate manifestation of male authority, and male control over women's domestic labour. As Dobash notes:

Basically the idea of provocation supports the husband's authority and his almost unlimited right to control his wife. It also reinforces the belief that the woman has no real rights to resources such as time, money or mobility and that she can only negotiate for them as long as her husband doesn't really mind her doing so, and that she has no REAL freedom to act in opposition to his wishes or decisions.⁶⁷

According to Dobash, a critical aspect in dealing with domestic violence is the recognition that no woman, no person, no matter what their standards of housekeeping or personal grooming and no matter what their psychological makeup, deserves to be battered. The idea of provocation provides more of a moral justification for male dominance than an observation of reality. It assumes that what occurs within the dyad should be comprehended solely in terms of a single interaction rather than in the wider historical, cultural and economic context. Speaking of contemporary Western society, Dobash notes:

For a woman to simply live her daily life she is always in a position in which almost anything she does may be deemed a violation of her wifely duties or a challenge to her husband's authority and thus defined as the cause of the violence which she continues to experience at his hands.⁶⁸

However, the point which is important here is that it is the confluence of the wife's role as tension manager and the husband's legitimate authority that permits the conflict, arising from the disjunction between male expectations of women's role as wife-and-mother and the woman's actual behaviour, to be "legitimately" looped back onto the woman.

(b) Family as Buffer: The concept of the family as "buffer" refers to the role played by the family unit in absorbing the impact of, for example, cutbacks in welfare spending (e.g. hospitals). As O'Connor⁶⁹ demonstrated, the contradiction inherent in the combination of increasing socialization of costs (e.g. medicare) and private appropriation of profits (e.g. private laboratories) creates tendencies towards fiscal crises, i.e. an increasing gap between state expenditures and revenues. Demand for services is apparently open ended. As Wright⁷⁰

notes, once demands are granted, they become institutionalized and are seen as a "right". Any removal of these services then contributes towards a tendency towards delegitimation of the State.

Moroney⁷¹ observes that there are two forms which cutbacks can take: reduction in available benefits and reduction in the number of eligible beneficiaries. When there are cutbacks in hospital services, for example, people who would formerly have been cared for in these institutions are either forced to look towards the private sector or are thrown back upon the community for care. Insofar as families - and specifically women in their traditional role as nurses - perform this caregiving role, the family both supports the actions and contributes to the legitimation of the State. Speaking of cutbacks in social services generally, Barrett observes:

It is predominantly women who will take up the slack as the social services cuts result in a reduction of facilities for the disabled and elderly.

Such labour is undertaken by women in a relationship of financial dependence upon a man. The degree of this dependence, although obviously not total in all cases, is far greater than the dependence of women in a household where all adults engaged in social production, or in the early decades of capitalism.⁷²

Women perform the work which creates what has been termed this "buffer" in two ways, both related to their jobs in the family. In the first place, the reversion to familial care increases the domestic labour which must be performed,⁷³ in terms of direct caregiving as exemplified by care of the sick, the elderly, the mentally retarded or the handicapped. For middle class women, such cutbacks may lead to an increase in involvement in volunteer work, traditionally carried out by such "idle" women - the domestic labourers of the middle class who thus assume an invisible double day of labour.⁷⁴ Further, cutbacks

in welfare payments, unemployment insurance provisions and/or (actual or threatened) layoffs of breadwinners, increase domestic labour in that the woman must perform more labour to maintain the same (or even, at times, to sustain a radically reduced) standard of living (e.g. shopping more skillfully; cooking more carefully and using more basic ingredients; travelling from agency to agency in an attempt to obtain the maximum provision for her family; spending large amounts of time and energy organizing and practicing "refunding"). This additional labour is not precluded by the fact that she may take a (usually low-paying) wage job herself. Secondly, in absorbing structural tensions, the family increases its internal strains. Insofar as women are the locus of tension management within the family unit, their workload can be seen as being increased.

Earlier it was suggested that, in its crudest formulation, wife abuse is a physical manifestation of women's role as tension managers in the family. If this is correct, it is possible to suggest that an increase in tension leads to an increase in requirements for tension management. Insofar as part of the wife's job is the management of tensions, and insofar as wife abuse is one form by which male tensions are defused, the stage is set for further abuse.⁷⁵

I have attempted in this section to go beyond a model which posits "social control" as the "cause of wife abuse". I have argued that, in contemporary capitalist society, wife abuse is an institutionalized part of the social relations of production in their broadest sense. It is to be expected that tensions or shifts in one area of these relations would impact upon the level of wife abuse in society.

Impact of the Women's Liberation Movement

One argument that was noted in the wife abuse literature suggested that wife abuse can be expected to rise as part of a male backlash against the Women's Liberation Movement.⁷⁶ It is argued that men, as they perceive themselves losing control over the patriarchal family structure, strike out to defend their 'male dominance'. Only when men accept egalitarian ideologies, so these writers say, can wife abuse be ended. In other words, the challenge is articulated as the necessity of resolving a contradiction between the ideologies of the Women's Liberation Movement and male supremacy - an ideological power struggle which the former can win only if the latter acquiesces. The position argued herein suggests another framework.

There is little doubt that some men feel threatened by the independence of some women. However, the tendency is to abstract wife abuse from the complex nuclei of women's position in the family and the overall context of violence against women. There is an attempt to explain a phenomenon in collective terms, but the argument used implies that the whole is the extrapolation of individual men's actions and beliefs. Further, the position is ultimately idealistic in that it assumes that men feel threatened by and therefore hit women - the ideal of male supremacy determines their behaviour.

It is, of course, virtually impossible to document an increase in wife abuse and, in fact, studies in Hamilton Ontario in 1976 and 1980 found no increase in reported wife abuse between the four years.⁷⁷ As noted, the amount of wife abuse that is reported, as well as the

behaviour that is considered "abusive", varies historically. The argument of a causal relationship between the Women's Liberation Movement and wife abuse can, therefore, be substantiated only on the impressionistic level and thus the argument potentially defuses approaches to the problem of wife abuse into debates about whether or not the phenomenon is increasing.⁷⁸

The Women's Liberation Movement, it is suggested, has decreased women's tolerance of wife abuse and has led to its becoming a "public issue" rather than a "private trouble". If wife abuse can be understood in part as an indirect consequence of tensions within the family - which themselves are at least in part determined by the actions of the State - what is faced is NOT a conflict between the ideologies of the Women's Liberation Movement and male supremacy, but a contradiction arising out of inconsistencies in the needs of capital - for the reproduction of labour power and the management of tension, within the confines of the nuclear family.⁷⁹

Conclusion

This Chapter has traced threads arising out of an understanding of the woman's job within the family as primarily one of domestic labourer, and relating them to the phenomenon of wife abuse, specifically in terms of the family as the primary site of the reproduction of labour power and in terms of the woman's job as tension manager.

Given what Marx⁸⁰ termed the "abstraction" which separates the family into the private sphere and "work" into the public sphere in contemporary capitalist society, the need for the reproduction of labour power carries with it the need for domestic labour in the home. Although the State and capital determine the reproduction of labour power in both direct and indirect ways, insofar as it is considered in the context of domestic labour, what is under consideration is women's job within the family. The argument has been made that the male breadwinner/female housewife paradigm is a useful model for understanding wife abuse in that the issue of male dominance/female subordination is most clearly identifiable therein. State intervention (and selective non-intervention) into the area of wife abuse is conditioned by the objective position of the husband in the gender hierarchy. Through his authority, the woman's actual or experienced dependency on the male wage, and thus indirectly on the economic system, is sustained. It has also been argued that wife abuse can be understood from one perspective as attempted control by the man over the woman's labour process.

It has been argued that the selective legitimacy of domestic violence (i.e. in terms of age and gender hierarchies) provides support for the acceptance of the legitimacy of force as the underpinning of the authority of the State. The Althusserian concept of the State as composed of the Repressive and Ideological State Apparatuses, with the family understood as one of the latter, was utilized to provide a framework for this position. Specifically, it was argued that insofar as, within the family unit, violence is considered to be "legitimate" when it follows age and gender hierarchies, the overt or symbolic

repression that is played out in the family Ideological State Apparatus is one of the conditions which affects the degree to which the Repressive State Apparatus can function by ideology, without recourse to overt force or violence. The interplay was hypothesized to operate at both the level of the individual (socialization) and in terms of the ideological support for women as the appropriate victims of male violence. This model accepts the social learning formulation of violence as learned behaviour, but argues that the learning takes place at the level of familial power relationships and the perceived relationship between force and authority. The message which is transmitted is not "violence breeds violence", but rather "force underpins authority".

In terms of tension management, the argument has been put forward that the woman absorbs tensions both internal to the family and those generated by contradictions arising out of the fiscal crisis of the State. In that wife abuse can be considered as the logical extreme of the woman's role as tension manager, the phenomenon is related to the level of tension management in the family. However, there is a point of diminishing returns inherent in repressive control, and this point is being exacerbated by the actions and ideologies of the Women's Liberation Movement which has been argued to provide a precondition for lowered tolerance of wife abuse by women.

In tracing these threads of the explanation for wife abuse, I have considered the fact that the victim is a woman who is occupying, either in fact or in role, the position of a 'wife'. Through an understanding of this role - i.e. the importance of domestic labour and the

necessity of a locus for the management of individual and societal tensions - the threads have been coloured in such a manner that the tapestry of wife abuse of which they are a part, takes on added dimension and meaning. Coupled with the understanding of wife abuse in the context of Woman-as-Other, as developed in Chapter Five, this work forms the basis for an understanding of something that has for many years been an "invisible" problem.

Footnotes to Chapter Six

- 1 Ontario Provincial Secretary of Social Development, The Family as a Focus for Social Policy (Toronto, 1979).
- 2 See Dobash and Dobash, Violence Against Wives, 1979; Dobash, 'The Negotiation of Daily Life . . . ', 1978; MacLeod, Wife Battering in Canada, 1980; Walker, The Battered Woman, 1979 for major statements of this formulation.
- 3 Armstrong and Armstrong, Double Ghetto, 1978; P. Connelly, Last Hired, First Fired: Women and the Canadian Work Force (Toronto, 1978).
- 4 Michèle Barrett notes:

 Women are primarily responsible for all the tasks connected with housework and children. As is now well known, even when women work outside the home they normally carry the burden of household organization and labour at home as well.

 (Women's Oppression . . . , p. 208). The now-classic formulation can be found in the time budget studies from western Canada reported by M. Meissner et al, 'No Exit for Wives: Sexual Division of Labour and the Cumulation of Household Demands', Canadian Review of Sociology and Anthropology 12:4 Part 1 (1975), 424-439. See Also the work of S. Clark and A. S. Harvey, 'The Sexual Division of Labour: The Use of Time', Atlantis 2:1 (1976), 46-66.
- 5 For a discussion of tension management in terms of middle class women, see Smith, 'Women, the Family and Corporate Capitalism', in M. Stephenson, Women in Canada (Toronto, 1977), 38-39.
- 6 Dobash and Dobash, in for example Violence Against Wives, 1979, based their research on a sample of predominantly working-class women, as have other researchers who obtain their data from transition houses, the majority - but not the totality - of whose clients are working class women. The work of W. Secombe, 'Domestic Labour and the Working-Class Household', in B. Fox (ed.) Hidden in the Household: Women's Domestic Labour Under Capitalism (Toronto, 1980) and 'The Expanded Reproduction Cycle of Labour Power in Twentieth Century Capitalism' from the same volume, as well as that of Luxton, More Than a Labour of Love, 1980, discuss domestic labour from the perspective of the working class household. See also other contributors in the Fox book.
- 7 See, for example, Erik Olin Wright, Class, Crisis and the State (London, 1978) for a discussion of the complexities of

class and class relations.

- 8 For contemporary discussions of the mechanics of domestic labour, see especially L. Briskin, "Domestic Labour, A Methodological Discussion", in B. Fox, Hidden in the Household . . . (Toronto, 1980) and Luxton, More Than a Labour of Love, 1980. Cf Mitchell, Woman's Estate (1971) for an earlier and somewhat different formulation.
- 9 Luxton, p. 14. Cf Seccombe, "Domestic Labour . . .", p. 41.
- 10 For a discussion of the relationship of middle class women to the reproduction of labour power (although not in that precise terminology), see Smith, "Women, the Family . . .", 1977.
- 11 E. Zaretsky, Capitalism, the Family and Personal Life, (New York, 1976), p. 113.
- 12 Ontario Provincial Secretary for Social Development, Ontario Looks at the Family (Toronto, 1981).
- 13 Rowbotham, Woman's Consciousness . . ., p. 59.
- 14 Smith, "Women, The Family . . .", p. 39.
- 15 Rowbotham, Woman's Consciousness . . ., p. 77.
- 16 For a discussion of this aspect of work, see H. Braverman, Labor and Monopoly Capital (New York, 1974); J. Rinehart, The Tyranny of Work (Don Mills, 1975). Again, Smith (1977) makes reference to this aspect of the middle class family's life.
- 17 I am indebted to Vivienne Walters for drawing to my attention the importance of domestic conflict in the job milieu and the extent to which company physicians appear to focus on domestic conflict as the primary source of problems, tending to negate the influence of the labour process itself.
- 18 Lasch, Haven in a Heartless World, 1979.
- 19 See Rowbotham, Woman's Consciousness . . ., 77; Luxton, More than a Labour of Love, 65f.
- 20 K. Marx, Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844, as excerpted in R. C. Tuckett (ed.) The Marx-Engels Reader (New York, 1978), 74. Emphasis added.
- 21 See Luxton, More Than a Labour of Love, p. 169; Briskin,

"Domestic Labour . . . ", p. 159; Seccombe, "Domestic Labour . . . ", p. 92 n. 17; Seccombe, "The Expanded Reproduction Cycle . . . ", p. 230; B. Weinbaum and A. Bridges, "The Other Side of the Paycheque: Monopoly Capital and the Structure of Consumption", in Z. Eisenstein (ed.) Capitalist Patriarchy and the Case for Socialist Feminism (New York, 1979), 194.

- 22 These contingencies are not restricted to the working class, as current news media make one aware. Recently, soaring interest rates have forced families from all classes to make adjustments in order to maintain or alter their style of living. Stories abound of Ph.D. holders driving cabs to make a living, and a university degree is no longer a guarantee of a job, let alone of job security.
- 23 Luxton, More than a Labour of Love, p. 168ff; cf Seccombe, "Domestic Labour . . . ", 1980.
- 24 Weinbaum and Bridges, p. 195; see also Luxton, 1980.
- 25 For example, see the work of E. Wilson, Women and the Welfare State (London, 1977); J. Lewis, The Politics of Motherhood (London, 1980).
- 26 R. M. Moroney, The Family and the State (London, 1977), p. 28.
- 27 Ontario, 1979.
- 28 W. W. Watters, Compulsory Parenthood: The Truth about Abortion. (Toronto, 1976), offers a demographic argument which suggests this conclusion. This argument, however, needs to be reviewed in light of the current crises in unemployment and the shifts in abortion politics of recent years.
- 29 This point can be found in R. Miliband, The State in Capitalist Society (London, 1973), 213.
- 30 This is the usual arrangement. See Armstrong and Armstrong, Double Ghetto, 1978.
- 31 See, for example, Luxton, More Than a Labour of Love, 1980.
- 32 Walker, The Battered Woman, 127ff. Michèle Barrett observed:
- . . . it seems to be the case that even in households where women contribute considerably to the budget (whether professional 'dual-career' families or lower-paid workers) the ideology of women's dependence remains strong.
- (Women's Oppression . . . , p. 214-5).

- 33 Seccombe, "Domestic Labour . . . ", 1980; cf Dobash and
Dobash, Violence Against Wives, 1979; Luxton, More than a
Labour of Love, 1980.
- 34 Dobash and Dobash, Violence Against Wives, p. 100.
- 35 Seccombe, "Domestic Labour . . . ", p. 84.
- 36 Dobash and Dobash, Violence Against Wives, p. 101.
- 37 Dobash and Dobash, Violence Against Wives, pp 98-103.
- 38 See, for example, Luxton, More Than a Labour of Love,
1980; Weinbaum and Bridges, "The Other Side of the Paycheque
. . . ", 1979.
- 39 The underpinning of male authority with force is not new, nor
is the observation thereof. As noted earlier (Chapter Three),
William Goode, a resource theorist, pointed this out in a
somewhat different context. For Goode, the use of personal
structural force by a man against his wife, which Goode de-
picts as a countervailing pressure against the explosive ten-
dencies apparently inherent in the nuclear family (a conclusion
which Goode does not draw explicitly from his work), is functional
to the preservation of the family. This acceptance of the male/
female hierarchy with its underpinning of force, offers tacit
legitimation for wife abuse.
- 40 Dobash and Dobash, Violence Against Wives, 116; Walker, The
Battered Woman, 1979.
- 41 MacEachern, "Family Violence . . . ", 1980.
- 42 Stark and McEvoy, "Middle Class Violence", 1970.
- 43 Two bodies of literature hold promise for informing this line
of thought in the future. The first is the literature which
came out of the Frankfurt School - Adorno, Marcuse, Horkheimer.
When this material has been analyzed and explained from a
feminist perspective, it is to be expected that it will shed
additional light on the issue of wife abuse. However, at this
point in time the literature ignores the question of gender
and therefore is not immediately relevant to this discussion.
More immediately promising is the burgeoning literature on
women and the State, such as that which has been written by
Michèle Barrett (1980), whose book unfortunately came to my
attention too late to be fully incorporated into this analysis.

44

Poulantzas, State, Power, Socialism (1980), approaches this conclusion when he notes:

State-monopolized physical violence permanently underlies the techniques of power and mechanism of consent; it is inscribed in the web of disciplinary and ideological devices, and even when it is not directly exercised, it shapes the materiality of the social body upon which the domination is brought to bear (p. 81).

Again, this literature bears assessment from a feminist perspective, as does the bulk of the Marxist literature on power.

45

H. Arendt, On Violence (New York, 1970), 51.

46

One would assume from her argument that power would use violence only as a last resort. This is similar to the resource theorists' arguments in which violence is conceptualized as the "ultimate resource", used to achieve one's ends.

47

See D. V. J. Bell, Power, Influence and Authority (New York, 1975), for a different formulation on these three concepts from the standpoint of political linguistics, but a similar critique of Arendt.

48

Hanmer, "Violence and the social control of women", p. 229. See also L. Althusser, "On the Reproduction of the Conditions of Production", in Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays (London, 1971), where he notes that the "Repressive State Apparatus" functions, at least ultimately, by violence. This will be discussed later in this Chapter. See also supra, n. 44.

49

M. Weber, "Politics as a Vocation", in H. H. Gerth and C. W. Mills, From Max Weber (New York, 1958), 78. Later in the essay (pp 82-83), Weber reiterates this point:

. . . the modern state is a compulsory association which organizes domination. It has been successful in seeking to monopolize the legitimate use of physical force as a means of domination within a territory.

50

Acceptance - or at least resignation towards. Acceptance must be understood as having at least two possible manifestations - an active affirmation and a passive resignation. W. P. Archibald, in Social Psychology as Political Economy (Toronto, 1978) notes that Weber argued that submission may arise out of a belief in legitimacy or "from individual weakness and helplessness because there is no acceptable alternative." (Quoted on p. 71). I appreciate Carl Cuneo drawing this active/passive distinction to my attention.

- 51 This framework is clearly outlined in the opening chapters
of Steinmetz, Cycle of Violence, 1979.
- 52 Althusser, 1971.
- 53 Althusser, p. 138. Emphasis in original.
- 54 Althusser, p. 139.
- 55 This reformulation of the social learning theorists' view
allows one to answer the question about why it is that not all
children who witness violence grow up to become violent adults.
The learning takes place, I argue, on a different plane than
the straightforward "violence breeds violence" one. The
argument also offers food for thought in relation to the
finding in some of the social learning research that women
who have witnessed violence as children grow up to become
victims rather than aggressors. From the perspective presen-
ted here, it would be stated that their learnings took place
at the level of understanding the nature of the relationship
between force, power and authority.
- 56 As, according to Weber, is the case by definition. See also
supra, n. 44 (Poulantzas); Althusser, 1971.
- 57 It is interesting in this regard to note that, in Hamilton
Ontario, the Police have been trying for several years to ob-
tain funding for a Home Intervention Team programme. This
would allow trained personnel such as social workers to inter-
vene and assist the police in "cooling out" violent families
(MacEachern et al., 1980.) Police are enthusiastic about
this sort of intervention as it reduces the need for them to
involve either police or families in the legal system. From
another perspective, Home Intervention Team programmes appear
as a form of intervention in which the woman is treated as
part of a "violent" domestic unit - hardly a paradigm designed
to meet her immediate or long term needs as an individual.
This intervention model is predicated on the theore-
tical approach of the social learning theorists (see Chapter
Three). It assumes that violence is one form of conflict
resolution which appropriate education can supplant with
verbal skills. Families will be taught to exchange one band-
aid for another which is congruent with contemporary middle
class values about "appropriate" behaviour. Without pushing
this critique too far, it should be remembered that the
existence of psychological abuse alone raises immediate ques-
tions about the viability of this approach.
- 58 It must also be noted that wife abuse also exacerbates or
increases tensions both within the family and in terms of

the family/society interaction. Within the family, women who have been battered apparently live in constant fear of the next violent episode (Dobash and Dobash, Violence Against Wives, pp 116-120; Walker, The Battered Woman, pp 56-59). This is hardly a relaxing family environment. Also, one would expect that the battering itself would form the focus of future battles, particular as the woman reached the stage where she was considering leaving the relationship. In terms of family/society interaction, the very fact that it is up to the woman to maintain the appearance of her family as a harmonious unit renders the abusive situation a tense one. For example, women find it difficult to conceal or explain away bruises and other visible injuries. It is also to be expected that in many cases the neighbours have heard at least some of the abusive interaction, and that the woman and the man will be aware of this. Insofar as they wish to retain their family's "privacy", it is to be expected that they will dissemble, a task which will become increasingly difficult as the violence escalates. (I am indebted to Carl Cuneo for suggesting this relationship.)

59 "Housewives Talking", 1971; quoted in Rowbotham, Woman's Consciousness . . . ", p. 58. This is supported when one considers the concern exhibited over the phenomenon of husband abuse. (See especially Steinmetz, "Wifebeating, Husbandbeating . . . ", 1977) With "man-bites-dog" logic, husband abuse provokes an outrage out of proportion to the damage done. This reflects the fact that a wife, in abusing her husband, is with one (or several) blow(s) inverting the accepted man/woman hierarchy, doing injury to the ideological incumbent of the "breadwinner" role, and undermining the patriarchal structure of the family. On another level, it can be argued that tension management is not the job of the man in the family; the outrage with which husband abuse is greeted may be understood as a "last-ditch stand" against egalitarian role distribution in families while at the same time offering tacit acceptance of wife abuse.

60 Luxton, More Than a Labour of Love, p. 66. See also Breslow-Rubin, Worlds of Pain, 1976; Dahl and Snare, "The Coercion of Privacy", 1978; Smith, "Women, The Family . . . ", 1977.

61 An example of a case where wives were far from conservative is the 1978 Inco strike in Sudbury where the wives formed a support committee which did not consistently see itself in terms of a "ladies' auxiliary" to the union. For a moving depiction of this, see the film, A Wives' Tale.

62 Steinmetz, "Services to Battered Women. . . ", 1978.

- 63 Bernard, The Future of Marriage, 1972; Dobash and Dobash, Violence Against Wives, 1979.
- 64 Dobash and Dobash, Violence Against Wives, 1979.
- 65 Dobash and Dobash, Violence Against Wives, 1979; Luxton, More Than a Labour of Love, 1980; Walker, The Battered Woman, 1979. Walker, who it will be recalled dealt primarily with middle class women, presented an example of a different kind of role violation when she speaks of wives of corporation executives, physicians and politicians:
- In the eyes of the public, the activities of these reflect on their men, and the men are well aware of the possible negative consequences. Frequently, the women were not permitted to engage in activities unless first approved by their men . . . Such restrictions result in the same kind of social isolation, dependency, and loss of individuality that physical brutality produces . . . The threat of physical violence, however, is always present. These women get the message that if they do not obey orders, they will be seriously harmed (p. 166).
- Clearly, what is defined as part of a woman's "duties" is variable.
- 66 Dobash, 'The Negotiation of Daily Life . . . ', p. 2.
- 67 Dobash, 'The Negotiation of Daily Life . . . ', p. 20.
- 68 Dobash, 'The Negotiation of Daily Life . . . ', p. 22.
- 69 J. O'Connor, The Fiscal Crisis of the State (New York, 1973).
- 70 Erik Olin Wright, p. 157.
- 71 Moroney, p. 97
- 72 Barrett, Women's Oppression . . . , pp 208-9
- 73 Weinbaum and Bridges, 'The Other Side of the Paycheque . . . ', p. 197
- 74 Wilson, p. 175.
- 75 This, of course, assumes that structurally-generated tensions continue to implode upon the family. Given the current spate of "pro-family" legislation (e.g. U.S. Family Protection Act), the scarcity of viable alternatives to the nuclear family (especially for women) and the ideological strength of the ultra-conservative 'New Right' coalitions, there is little reason to expect an immediate change in this regard.

- 76 See, for example, Easton, "Feminism and the Contemporary Family", 1978; Gelles, "Research Findings . . . ", 1978; O'Brien, "Violence in Divorce-Prone Families", 1971; Whitehurst, "Violence in Husband-Wife Interaction", 1974.
- 77 MacEachern et al., 1980.
- 78 I am indebted to Rebecca Dobash for her comments on an earlier draft of the preceding argument.
- 79 It is worth noting that, in their efforts to provide real help to battered women, feminist activists who operate hostels and shelters (either with short-term government funding or on a wholly volunteer basis) can be understood as fulfilling women's traditional tension management role. Wilson (1977, p. 175) characterizes this as a 'cheap solution to an embarrassing problem'. McGrath further articulates the contradiction this presents for feminist activists:
- We attempt to meet real human needs and create pre-figurative socialist and feminist institutions, but by creating an 'unofficial' support network, we take up the systems' slack, partially resolving its contradictions out of whatever crumbs we can gather plus our own slim resources, drawing our own energies away from challenging the structures that create the crisis in the first place
- ('The Crisis of Domestic Order', 1979, p. 27).
- 80 Marx, Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844, p. 74.

CHAPTER SEVEN

CONCLUSION

. . . we can only grasp silence in the moment in which it is breaking. The sound of silence breaking makes us understand what we could not hear before.¹

In the introductory chapter, I stated that the purpose of this thesis was to seek an understanding of wife abuse in contemporary Western society. A study of wife abuse at this time takes place within the context of silence breaking, i.e. the gradual emergence of the phenomenon from private trouble to public issue.

One of the major foci of the work has been an extensive critique of the literature, a task which my review revealed had not been accomplished (or at least had not been published) previously. The criticisms which were developed can be generally understood as falling into one of three orientations, i.e. of the methodology, of the ideological preconceptions which inform the work and of the context in which the work is situated.

The first orientation, methodology, is straightforward, in that it refers for the most part to conclusions generalized from non-representative samples, research which claims to understand battering behaviour but which is based on interview data from women only, inferences from animal behaviour without adequate corroboration from human populations, and other details which have been dealt with at length in Part One.

The second critical orientation, the ideological preconceptions which inform the work, is less straightforward, yet, because of the fact that research on wife abuse not only shapes public attitudes towards the phenomenon but influences the interventionist techniques that will be utilized (or at least those that will be funded),² is argued to be of key importance. Criticism has been directed, therefore, to work which accepted the male/female dominance/subordination hierarchy as legitimate and which "explained" wife abuse in this context.³ Similarly, work which understands women and men as equal players in a game of familial conflict has been criticized as ignoring or negating the effects of the power differential inherent in the gender hierarchy and for presenting models of wife abuse which gloss over this important aspect of contemporary reality.⁴

The third orientation in which criticism was levied was in the area of context, i.e. the breadth and depth of the contextual setting in which the phenomenon of wife abuse was situated, and at which "solutions" were posed. This orientation informed the logic according to Part One was organized, i.e. the division into three levels: the individual, the family as an interacting unit and some conceptualization of a broader social "system". Central to this perspective is the explicitly sociological preconception that it is insufficient to explain a social fact with the prevalence and longevity of wife abuse in terms of individual psychology of actors. Nor is an explanation rooted in biological reductionism deemed to explain the variety in human behaviour or the effect of the inter-

change between humans and their environment. If a meaningful explanation is to be constructed, wife abuse must be situated in a context which allows for both historical and cultural variation, yet at the same time recognizes that the contemporary family (or its approximation) is the site in which battering takes place in the here-and-now.

Another aspect of the critical orientation towards context has been the recognition that "the family", the private unit which "does its own thing" within relatively impermeable boundaries, is a myth. It is inadequate to conceptualize wife abuse solely as a product of interpersonal dynamics which occur within these boundaries, for both the existence and the structure of the family are culturally and historically specific and take on their meaning within the context of the wider social formation.

I have also argued consistently that there is a need to go beyond measuring the incidence of and cataloguing the correlates of wife abuse. While these empirical orientations are valuable, they do not satisfy what is argued to be a need for theoretical explanation which explores material and ideological relations and which allows identified correlates to be grounded in a broader understanding.

At this point it is worthwhile reviewing the major specific criticisms of the literature which were considered in Part One of this work. In Chapter Two, it was demonstrated that individualistic orientations, such as those which posit the "cause" of wife abuse as rooted in human biology or individual psychopathology, tend to imbue the phenomenon with an aura of inevitability, or alternatively, to present a "blame-the-victim" interpretation which looks to the battered woman to explain her victimization. It has been argued that these explanations are inadequate, in that they ignore or gloss over the corporate nature of wife abuse - i.e. its history and prevalence.

In those explanations of wife abuse which focus on the family as an interacting unit (Chapter Three), I reviewed perspectives which held as an underlying premise the concept that the family tends to have primacy over the individual or the cultural or the economic environment in determining or conditioning the behaviour of its members. Specifically, functionalist, conflict and social learning theories were considered in this section. Despite its obvious focus on "the family" as a small group, a problem was identified in functionalist theory in that it was argued that its logic presented a major contradiction when dealing with wife abuse. Faced with the presence of an apparently dysfunctional phenomenon within the (harmonious, nuclear) family, functionalist logic was left with no place to go but into the individual psyche for an explanation - specifically, to the Oedipal crisis of the contemporary male.

While it cannot be denied that there are - as conflict theorists would argue - conflicts of interest between family members, and that violence may indeed be perceived as an "ultimate resource" for resolving conflict, this perspective negates the imbalance of power that exists in the nuclear family along gender (and age) lines. While conflict theory provides an interesting analysis of the interactional dynamics of violence, it tends towards an orientation where solutions to battering situations are sought in and through the interaction of the marital dyad without seriously calling the validity of the dyad itself into question. Meaningful critique of the social and cultural roots of wife abuse is therefore inhibited.

Still in Chapter Three, the familistic emphasis was noted as a feature of social learning theories. While looking at the intergenerational transmission of violence as a means of conflict resolution within families, the "cycle of violence" approach of Suzanne Steinmetz ignores overwhelming evidence that the phenomenon should be understood in terms of male dominance and argues strongly for an understanding of "family violence" and "spouse abuse" instead of "wife abuse". This approach has been argued to obscure the reality of abused women.

Lenore Walker's work on the concept of "learned helplessness" as an explanatory tool for women's remaining in an abusive relationship is valuable, as is her discussion of battering in terms of five areas of abuse (physical, sexual, economic, familial and social) and in terms of the wider context of violence against women. However, an inaccurate understanding of history and a tendency toward psychological reductionism flaw what is an otherwise good beginning.

In Chapter Four, less favourable comments were offered about the first theory considered under the rubric of "systemic" understandings of wife abuse. Specifically, the subculture of violence hypothesis, argued to be articulated in popular if not social scientific wisdom on abuse, was criticized as obscuring the widespread nature of the phenomenon and making questionable assumptions about the congruity of male and female world views.

General Systems Theory, while attempting to incorporate all possible correlates, results in an approach which presents a static view of the world and thus is unable to explain wife abuse in its historical specificity. In the same Chapter, the work of Linda MacLeod (chosen as representative of liberal feminism) has been criticized as ultimately weak in that it suggests that change is possible from within the existing social and economic system - e.g. through law reform, education and consciousness raising, without questioning fully whether or not such change is possible.

This problem is not shared by Rebecca and Russell Dobash, whose work is acknowledged as the most comprehensive in the field of wife abuse studies. They situate wife abuse in a context of male domination and female subordination and discuss the phenomenon in

terms of male expectations of female roles. However, in that they tend to explain male dominance in terms of "the patriarchy" (without clearly articulating what this means), I argue that their analysis is incomplete. Explicitly political economic analyses have also been argued to offer partial explanations in that they focus on women's roles as domestic labourers, usually in a working class setting.

While it must not be forgotten that any discussion of wife abuse deals with personal tragedies, familial disruption and injuries, it is necessary that a broad theory be formulated within which the phenomenon can be understood if more than "band-aid therapy" is to be applied at both the individual and the general level. Accordingly, I argued that wife abuse must be understood in terms of two general aspects. In the first, I have argued that the conceptualization by men of women as "Other" has resulted in a dehumanization of women such that women are "appropriate victims" of male violence. Whether or not women have gained some degree of juridical autonomy, male violence must be seen as a repressive mechanism which, in its actuality or potentiality, restricts the parameters of women's existence. This violence, however, is articulated in terms of the areas where women's autonomy is least clearly spelled out. In contemporary Western society these areas are found within the locus of the family. In terms of wife abuse, what is argued is that, in addition to structural considerations which render the wife the "appropriate victim" of marital violence, her gender, her Woman-ness, aug-

ments the man's appropriation for her of the victim role.

Finally, women's role as domestic labourers was considered. Suggestions have been offered that wife abuse can be understood both in terms of attempted male control over women's domestic labour (including sexual access) and as an extension of the woman's "job" as tension manager, both within the family and in the capacity of "buffer" between the family and the wider society. The apparent legitimacy of wife abuse is conditioned by the requirements of capital for the reproduction of labour power, i.e. for privatized domestic labour which is widely viewed as appropriately the task of the wife/woman in the home.

On another level, I have argued that the acceptance of wife abuse as a (generally) legitimate phenomenon - or the acceptance of the potentiality for the abuse within the male/female dyad - provides support for the acceptance of force as the underpinning of authority and therefore for the acceptance of the legitimacy of force as the underpinning of the authority of the State. On the other hand, the ideologies and actions of the Women's Liberation Movement have been argued to provide a precondition for lowered tolerance of wife abuse by the women who are its victims.

Given the continuation of the need for the reproduction of labour power as performed by women in the family, given the need for continued tension management in the family, and given the decrease in the legitimacy of wife abuse, it is not surprising that there is currently a relatively high level of concern over the phenomenon of domestic violence. However, given the logical consistency of wife abuse with the requirements of capital in contemporary Western society, it

is also not surprising that State actions have taken the form of ill-funded research, the results of which appear to have been shelved;⁶ investigations which adopt the "social learning" approach to domestic violence, emphasizing both the primacy of concern for the child (e.g. wife abuse during pregnancy = prenatal child abuse)⁷, the pervasiveness of the precipitating factors within society,⁸ or "cooling out" the violent man.⁹ The first approach can be understood as a sop to vocal women's groups without achieving either short term (shelters) or long term (social structural) change. The others either diffuse the issue so that it appears beyond amelioration, or offer privatized non-solutions. Each, however, presents reports to the Canadian people which suggest in tones of gravest concern that the State has the interests of "the people" and "the family" at heart.

From the perspective of the subjective aspects of the wife abuse situation, it is helpful to return to the original definition with which this work began, wherein wife abuse was defined as:

forceful physical or psychological behaviour by a man which results in the repeated abrogation of the rights or wishes of the woman to whom he is married, or with whom he lives and/or has a primary relationship, or which on more than one occasion causes the same woman physical or psychological injury or pain.

Key to this definition was the male/female relationship which legally, structurally or psychologically reflects married status. While violence against women is a critical feature of contemporary Western society, for this violence to take the form of wife abuse this (at least pseudo) marital relationship is essential. While it is acknowledged that "times are changing" and that many couples are striving

toward more egalitarian relationships than have been the traditional norm, I argue that an understanding of wife abuse can be situated in terms of the traditional (masculinist) expectations of the woman's role of wife-and-mother. While individuals may make efforts to change with varying degrees of success, so long as their expectations, needs or wishes tend toward the traditional role structure, the situation (at least potentially) exists where a disjunction between (male) expectations and (female) performance may be reacted to with violence. Further, so long as the existential condition of Woman-as-Other remains as a construct against which men both measure and react to the individual and collective women around them, the precondition exists for violence against women, the familial expression of which is wife abuse.

The Future of Wife Abuse as a Social Problem

In view of the continuing fiscal crisis, it is to be expected that research which is uncovering the dimensions of wife abuse may have the long term effect of boomeranging the phenomenon back into the realm of invisibility. The rationale behind this somewhat paradoxical statement is as follows: Wife abuse is a widespread phenomenon which damages bodies and psyches. As more and more women realize that they need not be paralyzed in the victim role, they impact upon the health care system in various ways - social service agencies, hospital emergency wards, psychotherapists, general practitioners, all find themselves dealing with a problem which is only now coming to be recognized as a separate and identifiable phenomenon - the "battered

woman.¹⁰ Recommendations are made for new levels of social service bureaucracy to be established to coordinate, study and systematize service delivery.¹¹ Groups attempting to start hostels and transition houses apply for grant after grant.¹² Increasing numbers of social scientists are specializing in the area - meaning more grant applications and more research projects. As a major research study conducted in 1980 in Hamilton, Ontario, observed: 'The impact of the problem of family violence on the health care system would, be itself, be worthy of investigation.'¹³

McGrath suggests the priorities of the State render arrest and divorce logical solutions for wife abuse:

The priorities of the state work to channel attention toward less 'political' solutions to domestic violence, like arrest and divorce, rather than either toward the creation of real economic alternatives for women, or toward providing an emotional and material context in which a restructuring of family relations could take place.¹⁴

While McGrath is correct to examine the priorities of the State vis-à-vis wife abuse, her position abstracts those "priorities" from the contemporary situation and ignores the fiscal crises with which the State is forced to cope. In the long run, both arrest and divorce are impractical from the viewpoint of the State, as they counter the more "appropriate" thrusts for reprivatization and familiarization of problems which are social in origin.

Recent action in the United States has involved cutting the funding for national and regional offices which had been coordinating research on domestic violence. A strong "pro-family" movement is insisting, for example, that children belong to their parents rather than "to the State", and that wives should be subordinate to their

husbands both in practice and in law. Impeti for reduction of funding, combined with the privatization inherent in the "pro-family" ideology, suggests that future efforts on the part of the State to "combat" wife abuse may increasingly take the form of stressing the legitimacy of the male/female hierarchy.¹⁵

Suggestions for Future Research

This thesis has presented a theoretical formulation which must be viewed as an hypothesis, to be criticized, reviewed and tested against empirical reality. There is need for a metatheory of wife abuse, but such a theory is sterile if it is constructed and considered as sufficient in and of itself.¹⁶ It is my hope that this work will stimulate further research, in areas which include but which must not be restricted to, the following:

- (1) In my review of the literature, I have acknowledged several gaps. Specifically, material oriented towards service delivery for battered women, critiques of legislation in various jurisdictions and analyses of different methods of police intervention have not been included. Each of these would make an excellent focus for a comprehensive analysis of their conceptualization of the problem and the subsequent effect on service delivery and intervention.
- (2) It was noted that investigation into the phenomenon of wife abuse had different bases in the United States and Britain.

In the former country, concern with the level of violence in the social formation appears to be the prime motivator whereas in Great Britain research appears to be more "action-oriented" and geared to alleviating the condition of the victims. It was suggested that this differing orientation might reflect the differing levels of violence in the two countries. This suggestion bears investigation, particularly in light of the current increase in the level of violence in Britain and the cutbacks in research funding in the United States.

- (3) A key area for further research lies in the relationship between women's economic power and men's physical use of force, hypothesized by Blumberg¹⁷ to be of an inverse nature. In this investigation, it will be crucial to bear in mind that the phenomenon must be considered at the level of the social formation rather than the individual because, as Walker¹⁸ has pointed out, women's actual and perceived economic power may not be congruent. However, in that economic equality between men and women is a key demand of both liberal and socialist feminists, the investigation of the relationship between this equality and male force has significance for those who would develop strategies in this regard.
- (4) It is crucial that methods be devised for investigating the nature of psychological as well as physical abuse of

women. This is admittedly a "difficult" area in that "psychological abuse" is an extremely complex phenomenon and one that offers serious problems in terms of operationalization. However, if research is to be undertaken which will investigate the broad phenomenon that is wife abuse, these problems must be overcome. One initial idea which has been suggested is the consideration of the population of women who are identified as users of tranquillizers and/or abusers of alcohol.

- (5) Little empirical research has been done on wife abuse in Canada. It would be of particular value to an understanding of the phenomenon in its Canadian context if a historical study were completed, dealing with wife abuse in Canada from the early nineteenth century to the present, perhaps comparing the findings to results from other western countries such as Britain and Germany. The focus of this study should be a comparison of the changes in the law and ideology surrounding women and women's roles in the family, together with an analysis of the legitimacy of and the actual occurrence of male violence against women, and the overall level of violence in society. The analysis could perhaps be structured along the dimensions suggested by Lenore Walker¹⁹ - physical, sexual, familial, economic and social. Such research could also form the basis for a text which would fill a gap in the literature for women's studies, family and social problems courses in Canadian universities.

A Reminder

The focus of this thesis has been on wife abuse. That it is possible to consider wife abuse at the level of a theoretical analysis is a result of the work which has been done by researchers and activists and by the actions of battered women themselves in coming forward to be both aided and analyzed. This courage is immense in its dimensions and should not be forgotten when attempting to talk at the level of abstraction which tends to ignore the "praxis of pain"²⁰ in which the empirical reality is rooted.

I have discussed wife abuse in terms of the male-structured construct of Woman-as-Other and the traditional women's roles of wife-and-mother as they relate to male domination and female subordination. It is important that this not obscure the subjective aspects of subordination and domination if we are to remain aware that what is being discussed are battered, bruised and bleeding women, and a truncated system of human interaction in which neither gender can achieve its full potential. Despite my perhaps overweening pessimism in drawing predictions for the future, it is perhaps now, in the context of the sound of silence breaking, that the possibility for intervention and change can be actualized.

Footnotes to Chapter Seven

- 1 Rowbotham, Woman's Consciousness . . . , pp 29-30.
- 2 See, for example, Fields and Kirschner, "Battered women are still in need . . . ", 1978; Hanmer, "Violence and the Social Control of Women:", 1978; Hanmer and Leonard, "Men and Culture . . . ", 1980, for discussions of the limited range of studies that have been funded in the U.S. and Britain, and the policy implications that arise therefrom.
- 3 Implicated here are those works which I have identified as "biological" and "psychopathological" in Chapter Two.
- 4 Principal area which falls into this criticism is that of the social learning theories. It is acknowledged, however, that the concept of violence as learned behaviour has been accepted and incorporated into Chapter Six - within, however, a broader social and political and economic framework.
- 5 It is suggested that the studies of Murray Straus and Rebecca and Russell Dobash fall into this category, Straus because he does not push his analysis far enough in either direction to reach what I argue is adequate theoretical understanding, and Dobash and Dobash because they stop short of their own conclusion about the necessity for social change. They recognize the locus of one of the key threads of wife abuse (the role of the wife), but they fail to make an analysis thereof in terms of domestic labour.
- 6 MacLeod, Wife Battering in Canada, 1980.
- 7 Gelles, "Violence in Pregnancy . . . ", 1975.
- 8 Child at Risk, 1980.
- 9 MacEachern et al., "Family Violence . . . ", 1980.
- 10 MacEachern et al., 1980; Orr, 1980.
- 11 Orr, 1980.
- 12 MacLeod, 1980. Also private communication from activists in the field.
- 13 MacEachern et al., p. 28.

- 14 McGrath, 'The Crisis of Domestic Order', p. 27.
- 15 This thrust would derive its theoretical legitimacy from some of the mainstream literature on wife abuse, i.e. that material which argues that abuse is an offshoot of women's negation of the legitimacy of the husband's authority.
- 16 See Kuhn and Wolpe, p. 6.
- 17 Blumberg, 1978.
- 18 Walker, The Battered Woman, 1979.
- 19 Walker, 1979.
- 20 Rowbotham, Women, Resistance and Revolution (New York, 1972), 98.

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