

Part 2: A Short History of the Anti-Violence Movement

(Yes, it is a movement!)

Overview

- ❑ A brief history of violence against women in Western society.
- ❑ The Women's Liberation Movement
- ❑ The "Battered Women's Movement" and shelters

Part 1: Socially and Legally Accepted

Violence against women is historically based...

- ❑ Laws of Chastisement (established legal precedent to allow husbands to beat their wives and children) - *753 B.C.E., Rome*
- ❑ Witch trials, Stake-burning
- *1500's through 1700's, Europe and American Colonies*
- ❑ Marital Rape: "Wives give themselves to their husbands" was the legal argument that supported rape in marriage. This became established in English law. - *Lord Hale, 1500's*

A Tool for Conquest and Slavery

. . . and violence against women was (and is) a tool used for war, colonization and slavery . . .

For example, rape against slaves was not a crime; it was a common way for slave owners to produce more slaves. Post-Emancipation, a reality that permitted the rape of African American women continued.

“Nowhere in the law was the rape of a black woman considered a crime.”

- “Rape, Racism and Reality,” Feminist Alliance Against Rape, 1978

A Private Family Matter

. . . Violence against women and children within the family was considered a “private family matter.”

Local and state laws regulated what kind of wife battering was allowed (such as the size of the stick), and when it was allowed (such as not on Sundays).

U.S. case law established battering by husbands and fathers as a private family matter, not to be interfered with by government. - State v. Rhodes, 1868

Part 2: Resistance

However, feminist historians have found organized resistance to violence against women at many moments in history.

Here are some examples of recent social movements that were driven, in part, by women striving for freedom from abuse and violence:

- ❑ Temperance Movement (Prohibition)
- ❑ Suffrage Movement (women's right to vote)
- ❑ Civil Rights Movement

All had women in leadership who linked the struggle for human rights to freedom from violence against women in their community.

Women's Movement

- ❑ The women's movement grew out of the Civil Rights and Gay Rights Movements.
- ❑ It is no accident that this occurred at a time of great economic change in the U.S., when a significant percentage of middle-class women obtained jobs that allowed them new economic choices. Poor women came together as mothers and organized for welfare rights (a radical idea at the time, and today).
- ❑ It is often said that the greatest struggle for freedom occurs within the mind. Women in many cities and towns around the country formed consciousness-raising groups to talk about the conditions of their lives.

Raising Consciousness

In the informal environment of small consciousness-raising groups, masses of women broke the silence about rape. They began to talk about rape as an act of dominance rather than sex, and a common experience that reinforced the social order.

“Today this sounds obvious; [the idea that rape is not the victim’s fault] was a revelation. The anti-rape movement changed women’s consciousness...” (Susan Schecter, *Women and Male Violence*, p. 34).

Part 3: Battered Women's Movement

In the 1970's, a new movement emerged among women's liberation and rights activists, including those organizing to stop rape.

- ❑ Survivors of domestic violence opened their apartments and houses, forming an informal, loose network.
- ❑ Del Martin published the ground-breaking book "Battered Wives" (1976), giving a name and credence to many women's reality.
- ❑ Women created and organized hotlines, safe homes, networks, legal action and much more. Many women became leaders by doing, acting on their own experiences of sexual violence and battering.

Hotlines, Shelters and Support Groups

With the rallying cry of “We will not be beaten!”, women (and a few good men) created crisis lines, support groups, safe homes, and shelters all across the country in the 1970’s through the early 1990’s. Some communities of color organized culturally-specific programs.

Some efforts were rooted in a feminist analysis of sexism as the root of violence against women. Other programs started with a more neighborly emphasis (especially in rural areas) or social service focus (especially among multi-service agencies) of helping women and children in need.

Successes of the Movement

The anti-violence movements achieved great success in just three decades. Prompted by activists, a sea change in legal rights and protections against rape and battering became institutionalized. Survivors could find a safe place to call or go in every state. Media reports began to reflect the shocking frequency of violence in the family. Clergy, medical providers, schools, social service providers, and employers responded to the call to get involved.

Perhaps most importantly, the social acceptability of domestic violence and sexual assault shifted. They are no longer “private family matters.”

Unintended Consequences of Success

However, the successes of the movement had some difficult consequences.

Grassroots power and all-volunteer energy began to fade in the face of community pressure to become social service-oriented, structured, and hierarchical. Meeting the endless need for shelter began to eclipse organizing for social change. Some funders declined to support organizations with lesbians or women of color in leadership, leading to a national split within the movement. Backlash against women's rights began to take hold.