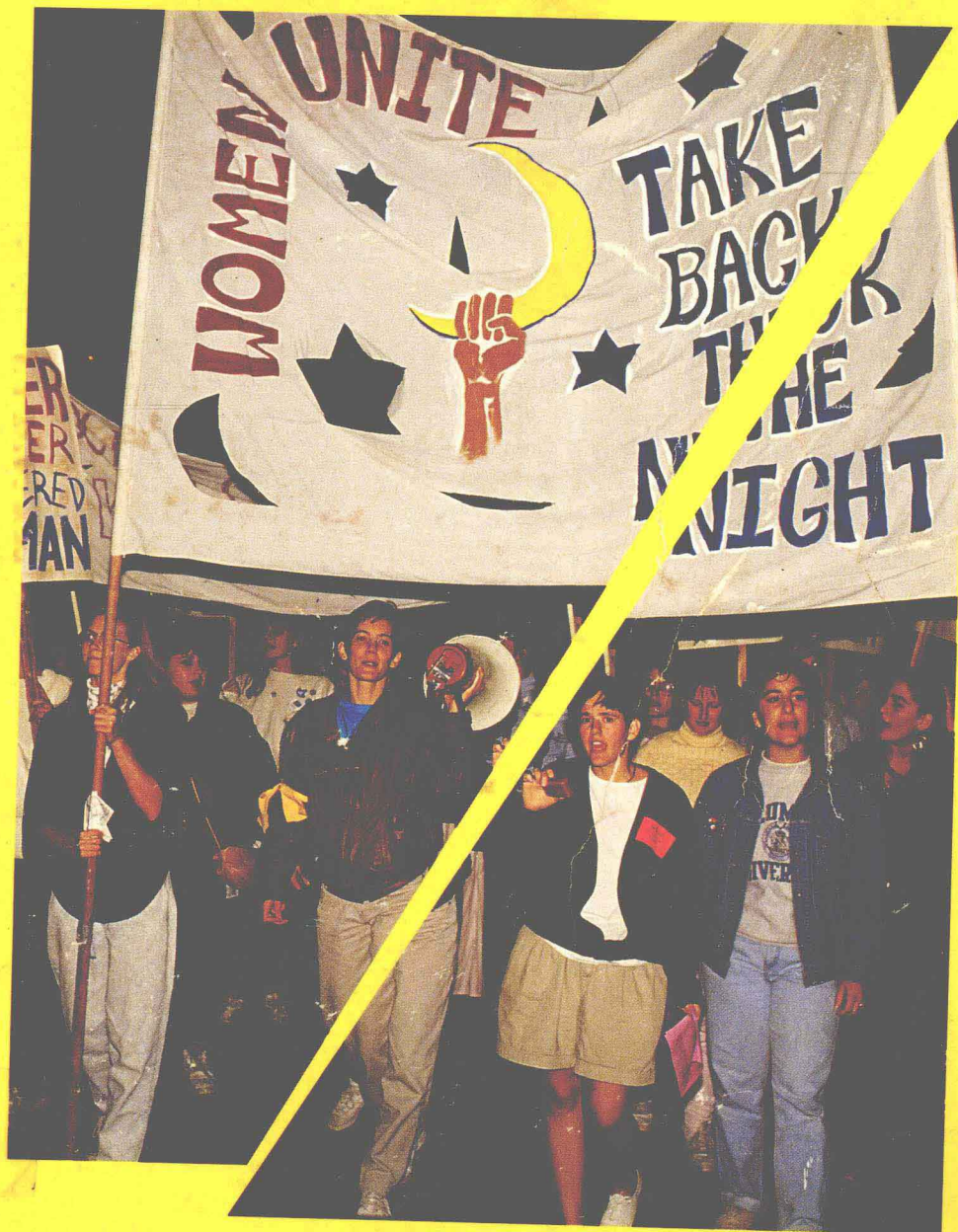


VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN



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VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

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Contents

Foreword	12
Introduction	15

Chapter 1: What Causes Violence Against Women?

Chapter Preface	18
Traditional Male/Female Roles Promote Domestic Violence <i>by Bernadette Dunn Sewell</i>	19

In many eras and regions, women were considered the property of their husbands. Consequently, wife abuse was not only tolerated, but sometimes thought to be an appropriate way for a man to discipline his wife. This patriarchal view continues to foster domestic violence today.

Society's Belief in Family Privacy Contributes to Domestic Violence <i>by Elizabeth M. Schneider</i>	26
---	----

Americans have long valued the family's right to privacy. Unfortunately, this belief led to and hid domestic violence as well as prevented women from seeking help.

Sexism Promotes Violence Against Women <i>by Nancy Hutchings</i>	33
---	----

Stereotyping of women as submissive, nurturing, and passive contributes to the continued oppression of women and to men's belief that they can harm women with impunity.

Men's Participation in Sports Causes Violence Against Women <i>by Ron Thorne-Finch</i>	39
---	----

The competitive and aggressive nature of sports can engender in men a feeling of power and a willingness to use that power against women. In addition, because team sports repress individualism for the sake of team unity, they can contribute to men's willingness to participate in gang rapes and other forms of group violence against women.

Chapter 2: What Causes Rape?

The Rapist: An Overview <i>by David Gelman et al.</i>	46
--	----

A rapist's motivation for sexual assault can be anger, insecurity, sadism, or—in the case of gang rape—peer pressure. Rapists are usually emotionally numb (often due to traumatic childhood experiences), and are therefore incapable of empathy. They also

suffer from a mental condition—“cognitive distortion”—that allows them to justify their actions.

- Society Encourages Rape *by Alice Vachss* 53
American society condones and contributes to rape. Both society and the criminal justice system often blame the victim for the rape and give the rapist tacit permission to continue his crimes. Unless the United States takes a strong stand against sex crimes, the incidence of rape will continue to increase.
- Society Encourages Rape by Athletes *by Julie Cart* 59
Because they are privileged by society and worshipped by fans, athletes often believe they are above the law. Sports institutions, by covering up incidents of rape by athletes, reinforce this perception and tacitly encourage sexual misconduct.
- Women’s Naivete Contributes to Rape *by Camille Paglia* 67
Rape has always been a danger to women. Now the feminist movement teaches women that men and women are equal and that women should have the same freedoms as men. Such rhetoric, by ignoring biological reality, encourages naive women to enter dangerous situations where they risk being raped.
- Declining Moral Standards Cause Rape *by Dwight D. Murphey* 71
The feminist movement and the sexual revolution marked the beginning of a decline in moral standards. This decline led more women to be sexually promiscuous and fewer men to abhor rape, creating a permissive climate where rapes are more acceptable.
- Hatred of Women Causes Rape *by Anne Roiphe* 77
The sexual assault of a retarded girl by a group of high school boys in Glen Ridge, New Jersey, reveals that the motivating force behind such attacks is fear of and hatred for the female body.

Chapter 3: Can Reforms in the Criminal Justice System Decrease Violence Against Women?

- Chapter Preface 81
- Yes: Changes in the Criminal Justice System Can Decrease Violence Against Women**
- ✧ Reforming the Criminal Justice System Can Decrease Violence Against Women *by Matthew Litsky* 82
America’s legal system has not responded adequately to the problem of domestic violence. By coordinating the actions of police, prosecutors, and judges, the legal system can work effectively to reduce the abuse of women.

Arresting Abusers Would Reduce Domestic Violence 94
by Jessica L. Goldman
Many police officers do not arrest batterers, believing that domestic violence is a family problem, not a crime. Arresting batterers, however, has proven to be an effective way to protect women and to motivate men to end the abuse.

Classifying Violent Acts Against Women as Hate Crimes 102
Would Be Effective *by Lisa Heinzerling*
Hate crime laws apply to crimes committed because of the victim's race, ethnicity, religion, or sexual orientation. Applying these laws to violent crimes against women would reduce such violence.

No: Changes in the Criminal Justice System May Not Decrease Violence Against Women

Arresting Abusers May Not Be Effective at Decreasing Domestic Violence 105
by Crime Control Institute
Most people assume that arresting batterers decreases domestic violence because the abuser is no longer in the home. Studies show, however, that those jailed for a short time have a greater chance of repeating the abuse later than do those arrested for longer periods or those not arrested at all. Short-term arrests, consequently, can increase domestic violence.

Classifying Violent Acts Against Women as Hate Crimes Will Be Ineffective 115
by Patt Morrison
While classifying crimes against women as hate crimes is a well-intentioned effort at reducing such crimes, it will be ineffective. Those who hate women and commit violent acts against them will not be deterred by a change in the law.

Chapter 4: Does Pornography Promote Violence Against Women?

Chapter Preface 119

Yes: Pornography Promotes Violence Against Women

✓ Pornography Contributes to Violence Against Women 120
by Franklin Mark Osanka and Sara Lee Johann
Numerous case histories indicate that pornography often contributes to sexual and physical abuse of women, children, and even men. Many wives, female prostitutes, and other women have been forced to mimic violent pornographic images and to participate in the production of pornographic materials.

Pornography Must Be Censored by *Cal Thomas* 124
Pornography promotes rape and other forms of violence against women and therefore should not be protected as free speech.

Censoring Pornography Would Reduce Rape 127
by *Ernest van den Haag*
Rape is a way for men to assert their power and control over women. Because pornography displays some women as objects to be controlled, it motivates some men to rape. Censoring pornography would therefore reduce rape.

No: Pornography Does Not Promote Violence Against Women

Censoring “Pornography” Will Not Stop Violence Against Women 131
by *Leanne Katz*
Censoring pornography will not stop violence against women. Instead, censorship represses sexuality and in the long run harms women.

Pornography Should Not Be Censored by *Marcia Pally* 135
Those who want to censor pornography are anti-sex, not pro-women. Only by changing society’s expectations of male and female behavior will violence against women be reduced.

Evidence Proves That Pornography Does Not Promote Rape 141
by *Berl Kutchinsky*
Many people assume that a direct relationship exists between a nation’s acceptance of pornography and its rate of rape. Studies, however, prove that no such relationship exists. Most pornography is sexual, not violent, in nature, and does not motivate men to commit violent crimes such as rape.

Chapter 5: How Can Violence Against Women Be Reduced?

Chapter Preface 153

Therapy for Couples Can Reduce Domestic Violence 154
by *Eve Lipchik*
Most therapists believe that abused women and their abusive partners must receive separate counseling and treatment. Couples counseling, however, can help end domestic abuse if the couple is dedicated to their relationship.

Physicians Must Act to Reduce Domestic Violence 164
by *Antonia C. Novello et al.*
Many physicians ignore signs of domestic abuse in their female patients because they fear invading a patient’s privacy or are uncertain of how to help the patient. Physicians must overcome this hesitancy and act to identify and help victims of abuse.

- Churches Must Work to Reduce Violence Against Women 167
by Christine E. Gudorf
 For years churches not only failed to address violence against women, but sometimes fostered it through denial and sexist teachings. Churches can reduce violence against women through measures such as helping abused women and addressing sexuality issues.
- ✧ Reducing Societal Violence Will Reduce Violence Against Women 176
by Victoria Mikesell Mather
 Much legal, scholarly, and institutional attention is devoted to dealing with battered women and abusive men. This attention should instead focus on reducing the amount of violence toward women, men, and children that society finds acceptable.
- Creating a Just Economy Will Reduce Violence Against Women 182
by Patricia Horn
 Economic problems—unemployment and poverty in particular—make a potential batterer more likely to abuse his family. Financial hardship also keeps many women from leaving abusive partners. Establishing an economy in which the work women do pays an adequate wage, housing and child care are affordable, and child support payments are assured will allow women to escape their abusers more easily and will help reduce the incidence of abuse.
- Human Rights Measures Can Reduce Violence Against Women 189
by Jane Roberts Chapman
 Rape, domestic violence, incest, and other forms of violence against women are clearly human rights abuses. Legal reforms and grassroots efforts that address this fact could help reduce violence against women worldwide.
- International Measures Can Reduce Violence Against Women 199
by Aruna Gnanadason
 Violence against women is an international problem. The United Nations and other international organizations are working to increase global awareness of abuse and to reduce its occurrence.

Chapter 6: How Widespread Is the Problem of Rape?

- The Incidence of Rape: An Overview *by Nancy Gibbs* 206
 Many think of rape as a violent crime committed by strangers. Most rapes, however, are committed by men known to the victim. A discrepancy in the perception of what constitutes rape has caused much debate over how widespread it is.
- Rape Is a Widespread Problem**
- Rape Is Widespread *by Mary P. Koss and Mary R. Harvey* 212
 Rape is the most underreported serious crime and government

information-gathering methods for rape guarantee that it will continue to be underreported. More accurate, private studies indicate that the incidence of rape is greater than realized.

The Incidence of Rape Is High *by Hilary Shelton* 222

Rape has a devastating impact on the lives of many women who are raped every year. Yet because of fear, embarrassment, and distrust of the criminal justice system, women report only a fraction of the total number of rapes that are committed.

Rape Is Widespread on College Campuses *by Le Anne Schreiber* 227

Increasingly universities are acknowledging that rape on campus is a widespread problem. Students, parents, and school administrators should be more aware of the incidence of rape and take steps to prevent it.

Rape Is Not a Widespread Problem

The Incidence of Rape Is Exaggerated *by Neil Gilbert* 235

Feminists and the media have drastically exaggerated the incidence of rape in the United States. By redefining traditional male-female activities as “rape,” feminists trivialize the suffering of those who have actually been assaulted.

The Problem of Rape on College Campuses Is Exaggerated *by Murray N. Rothbard* 243

Date rape is not a problem on college campuses. Feminist ideologues have convinced campus women that an epidemic of rape exists, making relationships between men and women more difficult.

Feminists Exaggerate the Incidence of Acquaintance Rape *by Norman Podhoretz* 246

The problem of acquaintance rape has been exaggerated by a radical division of the feminist movement. This group portrays women as helpless victims, denies the sexual power women have over men, and rejects the adversarial nature of sexual relationships. By defining seduction as rape, the antirape movement aims to criminalize normal heterosexual intercourse and emasculate men—for which both genders will suffer.

Broad Definitions of Rape Are Harmful *by Cathy Young* 254

To combat violence against women, some feminists have expanded the definition of rape to include sexual contacts where no physical force or threat of injury occurred. These extreme feminists’ definitions undermine the credibility of women who really have been raped.

**Chapter 7: Is the “Battered Woman’s Syndrome”
a Legitimate Defense?**

Battered Women and the Courts: An Overview *by Nancy Gibbs* 259

Some battered women have killed their abusers. Many argue that they acted in self-defense and had no other choice in a dangerous situation. Others contend that these women have carried out death sentences for crimes that do not merit such a response.

Yes: The “Battered Woman’s Syndrome” Is a Legitimate Defense

The “Battered Woman’s Syndrome” Is a Legitimate Defense 272
by Alene Kristal

The battered woman’s syndrome is a legitimate defense for women who kill their abusive partners. Expert testimony on the battered woman’s syndrome should be admitted in the courts. Furthermore, the laws defining self-defense, which are biased in favor of men, should be changed to reflect the physical differences between men and women to accommodate the battered woman’s syndrome.

The “Battered Spouse Syndrome” Is a Legitimate Defense 282
by Julia J. Chavez

The battered woman’s syndrome theory has gained increasing acceptance in court to substantiate self-defense pleas of women who have killed their abusive mates. Meanwhile, the equally valid battered husband syndrome is being neglected. To ensure equal protection for each gender, both problems should be treated as “battered spouse syndrome.”

No: The “Battered Women’s Syndrome” Is Not a Legitimate Defense

The “Battered Woman’s Syndrome” Is Not a Legitimate Defense 292
by Coramae Richey Mann

A detailed study of women who have killed their sexual partners reveals that many of them had committed violent crimes previously and that the majority of such killings were premeditated. The data suggest that women who kill are not “battered women” acting in self-defense; they are the victors of domestic fights.

Courts Should Not Allow Testimony on “Battered Woman’s Syndrome” *by Gerald Caplan* 301

So-called expert testimony on the battered woman’s syndrome should not be admitted in court because it is unscientific and biased against men. While battered women who kill their abusers may deserve leniency, they do not deserve acquittal.

Battered Women Who Kill Do Not Deserve Clemency 306
by Stanton Peele

By undermining personal responsibility, public acceptance of the battered woman defense may actually increase family violence. If battered women kill their abusers, they are guilty of murder and should be incarcerated.

Bibliography 309

Organizations to Contact 312

Index 315

Foreword

By definition, controversies are “discussions of questions in which opposing opinions clash” (Webster’s Twentieth Century Dictionary Unabridged). Few would deny that controversies are a pervasive part of the human condition and exist on virtually every level of human enterprise. Controversies transpire between individuals and among groups, within nations and between nations. Controversies supply the grist necessary for progress by providing challenges and challengers to the status quo. They also create atmospheres where strife and warfare can flourish. A world without controversies would be a peaceful world; but it also would be, by and large, static and prosaic.

The Series’ Purpose

The purpose of the Current Controversies series is to explore many of the social, political, and economic controversies dominating the national and international scenes today. Titles selected for inclusion in the series are highly focused and specific. For example, from the larger category of criminal justice, Current Controversies deals with specific topics such as police brutality, gun control, white collar crime, and others. The debates in Current Controversies also are presented in a useful, timeless fashion. Articles and book excerpts included in each title are selected if they contribute valuable, long-range ideas to the overall debate. And wherever possible, current information is enhanced with historical documents and other relevant materials. Thus, while individual titles are current in focus, every effort is made to ensure that they will not become quickly outdated. Books in the Current Controversies series will remain important resources for librarians, teachers, and students for many years.

In addition to keeping the titles focused and specific, great care is taken in the editorial format of each book in the series. Book introductions and chapter prefaces are offered to provide background material for readers. Chapters are organized around several key questions that are answered with diverse opinions representing all points on the political spectrum. Materials in each chapter include opinions in which authors clearly disagree as well as alternative opinions in which authors may agree on a broader issue but disagree on the possible solutions. In this way, the content of each volume in Current Controversies mirrors

Violence Against Women

the mosaic of opinions encountered in society. Readers will quickly realize that there are many viable answers to these complex issues. By questioning each author's conclusions, students and casual readers can begin to develop the critical thinking skills so important to evaluating opinionated material.

Current Controversies is also ideal for controlled research. Each anthology in the series is composed of primary sources taken from a wide gamut of informational categories including periodicals, newspapers, books, United States and foreign government documents, and the publications of private and public organizations. Readers will find factual support for reports, debates, and research papers covering all areas of important issues. In addition, an annotated table of contents, an index, a book and periodical bibliography, and a list of organizations to contact are included in each book to expedite further research.

Perhaps more than ever before in history, people are confronted with diverse and contradictory information. During the Persian Gulf War, for example, the public was not only treated to minute-to-minute coverage of the war, it was also inundated with critiques of the coverage and countless analyses of the factors motivating U.S. involvement. Being able to sort through the plethora of opinions accompanying today's major issues, and to draw one's own conclusions, can be a complicated and frustrating struggle. It is the editors' hope that Current Controversies will help readers with this struggle.

“The emotional, physical, and social consequences of . . . violence are profound for all women—indeed, for all of society.”

Introduction

On October 18, 1978, while walking home from her job at a nursing home, sixteen-year-old Ruth Schmidt was raped. She was attacked by a serial rapist, a man who had already raped ten other women. Fifteen years later, Schmidt describes how the rape still affects her:

There are so many things I will never do again. I will never walk on the same side of the road where a single man or a group of men is walking. I will never go past the house where I grew up without my first thought being that the rapist knew that I lived there. I will never meet a man without my first thought being, “Is he capable of rape?” . . . I see differently. I hear differently. I surely believe differently.

Women who have been raped, abused, or attacked carry both physical and emotional scars. Fear, shame, anxiety, and anger are some of the emotions experienced by these women. A large percentage of raped women consider suicide. Both raped and battered women often suffer lowered self-esteem and face feelings of self-blame. Many battered women are emotionally incapacitated by their abuse, making it difficult for them to leave the abuser. Fear that leaving will exacerbate the abuse—a justified fear, according to statistics—also paralyzes women. Many women who do choose to leave an abuser find themselves and their children homeless. According to a Ford Foundation report, 50 percent of all homeless women and children in the United States are fleeing domestic violence.

Even women who have not personally experienced violence may be hobbled by its pervasive threat. The fear of assault, like violence itself, causes emotional devastation and social dislocation for many women. As writer Susan Kushner Resnick declares, “Like most American urban women, I find that fear has become part of my life.” In their book *The Female Fear*, Stephanie Riger and Margo Gordon found that one-third of the women they surveyed always worry about being raped. More than 25 percent of the women never walk in their neighborhood after dark (compared with less than 3 percent of the men); 52 percent of the women cross the street when they see someone who seems

strange or dangerous (compared with 25 percent of the men).

This awareness of the constant potential for danger affects women emotionally, socially, and physically. Writer Kerry O’Neil describes how her fear of passing strange men on the street colors her view of all people, men in particular:

I realize . . . I am reducing myself to prey and every male that passes by into a predator. . . . Without question, when I view my world as unfriendly—specifically, as a place that breeds male monsters—I am also cutting off the potential of a larger me and a larger concept of men. When I obey a code of conduct that instructs me to put up walls and keep my face taut, I am squelching deep impulses to engage with the mysteries of the outside world.

Gordon asserts that the guarded stance described by O’Neil also affects women physically. She contends that “fear of attack is draining on people’s mental health, which leads to physical problems. It makes women more susceptible to flus and other diseases.” Resnick agrees, stating that few people “realize that when a woman is constantly tensing, jumping, clenching her fists, tightening her shoulders, and filling her veins with adrenaline she’s becoming vulnerable to heart attacks, high blood pressure, and all the diseases that stem from a compromised immune system.”

More than 1 million women seek medical treatment for abuse every year, and more than 150,000 women are raped. The emotional, physical, and social consequences of this violence are profound for all women—indeed, for all of society. *Violence Against Women: Current Controversies* addresses the impact of violence on women, explores possible causes of violence, and offers some possible solutions. Ending violence is crucial for all women, for as columnist Ellen Goodman states, “Women cannot feel free unless they feel safe.”