



University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire

105 Garfield Avenue • P.O. Box 4004 • Eau Claire, WI 54702-4004

January 15, 2005

To: Women's History Month Awards Committee

From: Patti See

RE: Nomination of Mike Lutz's Undergraduate Research paper

I am pleased to nominate Mike Lutz's paper "Domestic Violence and the Battered Women's Movement" in which he explored issues and stereotypes surrounding domestic abuse.

For an assignment in my summer course WMNS 210: Culture of the Third Wave, he challenged himself by visiting the Bolton Refuge House. Throughout his encounter at Bolton and his research on domestic violence he spent time rethinking his views on the subject. He does a fine job integrating his own experiences with his solid research.

Excellence. Our measure, our motto, our goal.

Academic Skills Center • phone: (715) 836-5844 • fax: (715) 836-3418
web: www.uwec.edu/admin/ASC/ASChome/htm

Undergraduate Research Category

Domestic Violence and the Battered Women's Movement

WMNS 210: Culture of the Third Wave

**Michael Lutz / Senior, Management Information Systems
Patti See, Instructor**

We've all seen the pictures of domestic violence on television: an enraged husband yelling and striking his wife. However, most of us have only experienced the dramatized version of domestic violence. The thought of something like this happening in real life is a totally foreign concept. The images aren't real to us, and we know that we don't have to live that kind of life.

However, these images are real for thousands of people across the United States. They've felt the effects of the abuse that we so often disregard. For them, both the physical and emotional pains are all too real, and the damage that it does lasts a lifetime. It wasn't until I visited the Bolton Refuge House in Eau Claire, Wisconsin that I truly realized the devastating effects that domestic violence has on these individuals.

When I first started researching domestic violence, I didn't have any set direction. I had always had a passive concern for the topic, and it admittedly wasn't at the top of my list of concerns. I felt that I did my part by putting some loose change in the collection box at the grocery store or by taking a pamphlet outside of the student union. However, I probably spent more time criticizing the "crazy feminists" who handed me the pamphlet than it would have taken to just listen for a few minutes to what they had to say. It wasn't until I was forced to approach the topic on my own that I even gave it a second thought.

You can interpret the topic in a hundred different ways. However, my visit to the Bolton Refuge House brought three questions to mind: what is the definition of domestic violence, what are the personal perspectives of domestic violence, and what is the history behind the abuse shelters that we encounter today?

When you do an Internet search for the term “domestic violence,” you are bombarded with thousands of results that encompass many differing perspectives of the term. Some regard it as the physical abuse of one’s spouse, while others carry it into a more diverse realm that includes any sort of abuse (mental or physical) in any domestic setting. I was expecting to discover a concrete definition for the term, but I realized that it takes on a totally different meaning for almost every person. However, I was able to find a legal definition that embraced the many different faces of domestic violence. According to the Morgan, Glessner and Roti Family Law website, domestic violence is “Conduct against another member of a family which can include beatings, threats, stalking or other forms of intimidation, harassment, neglect, and physical, emotional, and sexual abuse. May include any act by one member of a family that causes one of its members physical or emotional harm” (<http://mgrlaw.com/index.html>).

This definition really made me realize how broad domestic violence is, and why it’s such an important issue to be concerned about. Like many, I had considered domestic violence to always be a husband beating his wife. However, I quickly discovered that it is much more than that. Domestic violence affects a wide array of people in very different ways, which is why we should look to this more inclusive definition when we talk about domestic violence. By spreading the focus, we will have a better understanding of the issue, and we can hopefully find a better means to its resolution and ultimately its prevention. If we neglect to consider this broader definition, we are excluding situations that have no other set definition, and alienating victims that otherwise do not fit within the umbrella of a defined legal classification.

Domestic violence is a concept that people often disregard, because it hasn’t directly affected their lives. Upon my visit to the Bolton Refuge House, I realized that this desensitized attitude is what contributes to the problems surrounding domestic violence. Going into my visit,

I had a “just leave” attitude. I felt that if the situation was really that bad for the individual, then she should just pack of her bags and leave. However, having the courage and the ability to leave the situation are two very important keys to making a change, and they are often the most difficult decisions that some of these victims will ever have to make. Although I wasn’t allowed to directly talk with anyone staying at Bolton, I was given a very real glimpse of what it feels like to be in an abusive situation. The director emphasized the fact that the victims (most often women and children) live in constant fear. Not just of the abuser they are leaving, it’s a fear brought on by the unknown. Many people feel they have no place to go once they leave the abusive relationship, and they are afraid of starting over. The fear that leaving will only lead to harder times is what drives many to stay in abusive relationships.

As Ginny NiCarthy states in *The Ones Who Got Away*, the ability to leave an abusive relationship needs to come from someone’s intrinsic motivation to “overcome fear, dependency, hopelessness and overwhelming practical obstacles to freedom” (3). This quote embodies what it takes to leave an abusive relationship. When people make the first steps towards leaving, they have to face some very sobering facts. Leaving is never easy, and there are many variables that complicate the decision. Undoubtedly questions will arise as to whether leaving was the right thing to do, but in the end leaving needs to be a decision that was made for themselves. There is no doubt that people’s lifestyles will dramatically change once they leave the relationship, but it’s the realization that the change will positively impact their life that makes them continue with the journey.

The attitude of “just leave” does not take into account the complexity of the situation. Leaving is never easy, and there are more than personal aspects that many people take into account. Society’s attitude towards the subject is based on ignorance about the situation. Unless

an individual has witnessed domestic violence first-hand, it is almost impossible to comprehend what victims of abuse are feeling. I had no idea how complicated the situations usually are, and blindly carried an almost negative attitude towards the victim. By simply thinking someone has the power to leave at anytime, I was really putting much of the blame on the victim. I was inadvertently saying "it's your fault for not leaving." This is how society contributes to the problem of domestic violence. They don't fully understand what the victim is going through, and make assumptions about what can be done to remedy the situation. In fact, there is much more to situations than what we see on the surface. Information found on the National Domestic Violence Hotline website helps emphasize what third-parties tend to overlook. In addition to the uncertainty that victims feel, they are also often struck by issues relating to financial security, social insecurities, judgment by others, guilt, and, if children are involved, additional emotional and legal battles. Because of this, many people decide to do nothing about their situation. They are living under false hopes that the situation will magically change, and as a result are falling further into a feeling of helplessness.

Because domestic violence is often considered a taboo subject to talk about, we need to consider what we can do as individuals to prevent it from occurring. According to the Family Prevention Violence Fund, one of the biggest obstacles to preventing domestic violence is the fact that men "may believe it is a women's issue, and that they are not supposed to get involved" (<http://endabuse.org/>). This is one of the biggest misconceptions that society needs to overcome when dealing with domestic violence. The fact is domestic violence is everybody's concern, which means everyone has a social obligation to get involved. This means talking about domestic violence with friends and family, reaching out to families of domestic violence (both the victim and the abuser), and becoming a role model for younger and current generations. By

making a stand against this violence, we have the opportunity to positively impact the lives of individuals who would otherwise feel hopeless and alone.

Taking a stand against domestic violence is never easy, and many victims feel like they have no place to go once they leave. This is why the domestic abuse shelters that have been established across the U.S. are such a valuable asset. They offer a safe place to receive both physical and emotional support. After visiting the Bolton Refuge House, I was curious how this network of shelters began. My research led me to the topic of the Battered Women's Movement, a term given to the groups that challenged domestic violence in the 1960's and 70's. The goal of the Battered Women's Movement was to stop violence directed at women, as well as change the way society viewed abusive relationships. According to Bonnie Mann, the early organizers of the movement "challenged mental health centers who claimed women were sick, police who charged that women were provocative, courts that refused to acknowledge that women's bruises were the result of criminal behavior, and churches that implored women to stay in violent relationships as part of the Christian duty" (<http://www.letswrap.com/LetsWRAP/Spring97/groups.htm>).

Clearly, it was the mission of these groups to make a change in the way the topic of abuse was approached. Until this point, abuse was seen as the woman's fault. The common misconception was that the woman was either exaggerating certain events, or that she somehow deserved what she had endured. No real blame or accountability was placed upon the individuals who were responsible for the abuse, and the matters usually weren't carried any further. This mindset had beleaguered women for years, but there was now a voice standing up for the rights of these women.

The significance of the Battered Women's Movement in this era lies within the approach that these groups took in order to bring about change. During the 60's and 70's feminism was in

its second wave, and individual acts and concerns were not the “correct” way to create change. According to Deborah Siegel in “The Legacy of the Personal: Generating Theory in Feminism’s Third Wave,” “The goal of second wave consciousness raising was to create a shared space and experience to use as a uniting force for all women” (69). Essentially, the second wave of feminism was about creating one common voice for all women. But by doing this, many women who did not or could not share this voice were alienated. This is where the Battered Women’s Movement, and more specifically abuse shelters, differed from the movement. Rather than taking on an overwhelmingly political front, shelters looked at the psychological aspects of battery. Instead of having marches and protests on the streets, coordinators and volunteers at these shelters worked individually with each victim and gave the movement a very personal and individual voice.

Some believe that the Battered Women’s Movement is often overlooked because of the perceived lack of impact it had during the second wave of feminism. Because there were no dramatic rallies or events to draw large-scale attention to the movement, so people have often disregarded it as nothing more than moderately influential. What most people at the time didn’t realize was the power of the movement was based on the fact that it did not draw the attention of some of the more dramatic second wave acts. In *Women and Male Violence*, Susan Schechter illustrates this by saying, “I learned that I knew less about the battered women’s movement than I had originally thought. I discovered that the movement was much more diverse, complex and rich than I had assumed” (4). By recognizing the power behind the movement, one can come to appreciate the legacy that it left behind.

The greatest contribution that the Battered Women’s Movement made towards the development of third wave ideals is the ability to share personal stories, ideas and beliefs without

a fear of criticism. Having someone to privately confide in and turn to for help was an outlet that was desperately needed during the second wave, but was not always readily available. Ginny NiCarthy states:

Since the beginning of the battered women's movement in the mid-seventies, women have learned there is nothing as helpful to them as a group of women who have been in situations that are similar to their own. The group can be in a shelter or at a community center, it can be a formal arrangement with a professional leader or just three women talking at a laundromat. (4)

This underlines the significance of the movement. The Battered Women's Movement gave women both the courage and the means to share their stories. By sharing their struggles, the women were taking the first steps to recovery, which is something that other movements didn't necessarily allow them to do. NiCarthy goes on to state that "a full understanding of the circumstances of each woman's decision to stay away from her abusive partner can only be seen in the context of her life" (5). By looking at each victim individually, the Battered Women's Movement allowed the individual to discover why she remained in certain situations and what she can personally do to make a change for herself.

Although new terms have developed to replace the Battered Women's Movement, the movement and its concepts continue to live on today. The movement is directly responsible for the creation of abuse shelters across the U.S. and the campaign to educate people about the affects of domestic violence. It also gave a voice to those women who did not fit the traditional mold of second wave feminism, and allowed them to take control of their lives. Survivors of domestic violence now have the means to make a decision that they otherwise would have desperately struggled to make. Domestic violence is a problem that we have to consciously

approach at both an individual and social level. What we all need to realize is that in order to eliminate domestic violence, we have to make the stand for ourselves and anyone who is in an abusive relationship.

Works Cited

Family Violence Prevention Fund. 29 July 2004.

<<http://endabuse.org/>>

Mann, Bonnie. "Working with Battered Women: Radical Education on Therapy." *Battered Women's Groups*. Aug. 1, 2004.

<<http://www.letswrap.com/LetsWRAP/Spring97/groups.htm>>

Mogren, Glessner & Roti, P.S. 28 July 2004.

<<http://mgrlaw.com/>>

NiCarthy, Ginny. *The Ones Who Got Away*. Washington: The Seal Press, 1987.

Schechter, Susan. *Women and Male Violence*. Boston: South End Press, 1982.

Siegel, Deborah L. "The Legacy of the Personal: Generating Theory in Feminism's Third Wave." *Hypatia* 12.3(1997): 46-75.