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**From the Selected Works of David Peterson del Mar**

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# Wife Beating: An American Tradition

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David Peterson

## **Wife Beating: An American Tradition**

Emma

Hotchkiss was not a powerless or submissive woman. The niece of a colonel, she had children, substantial economic resources, and a strong will when she married M. E. Hotchkiss in Iowa in 1888. She later explained that her husband “was good to me for about six months” before he began extracting money from her and generally tormenting her and her children. By the late 1890s the couple had moved to Eugene, Oregon, from California, and his abuse became worse. Tensions came to a head when he struck his wife and one of her young-adult daughters: “I told him,” recalled Emma, “that if he ever struck one of the girls or myself again, ‘I would never live another hour with him as his wife; that when a man stoops to strike a woman, he is not fit to live with.’”<sup>1</sup>

Sociologists who write historical treatments of wife abuse seldom cite statements like Emma Hotchkiss’. The battered wives appear helpless, the community, at best, disinterested. These scholars sometimes grant that legal sanctions against wife beaters appeared in the nineteenth century in the United States, but they typically minimize the intent and the consequences of the laws. “Woman-battering,” concluded Okun, “has always been epidemic.”<sup>2</sup>

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1 Oregon, Lane County, Lane County Circuit Court (Eugene, 1891-1900), case #4332, (hereafter cited as LCCC). I have corrected misspellings and typographical errors in the court documents.

2 Lewis Okun, *Woman Abuse: Facts Replacing Myths* (Albany, 1986), 1; Kathleen H. Hofeller, *Social Psychological and Situational Factors in Wife Abuse* (Palo Alto, 1982), 1-25; Del Martin, *Battered Wives* (San Francisco, 1976), 25-43; Mildred Daley Pagelow with Lloyd W. Pagelow, *Family Violence* (New York, 1984), 277-284; Irene Hanson Frieze, “Perceptions of Battered Wives,” in Frieze, Daniel Bar-Tal, and John S. Carroll (eds.), *New Approaches to Social Problems* (San Francisco, 1979), 79-108; Terry Davidson, *Conjugal Crime: Understanding and Changing the Wifebeating Pattern* (New York, 1978), 102-103; *idem*, “Wifebeating: A Recurring Phenomenon Throughout History,” in Maria Roy (ed.), *Bat-*

The highly influential family violence school of interpretation seldom incorporates historical research, yet it locates wife battering in strong cultural traditions. "We maintain," wrote Gelles and Straus, "that physical violence between family members is a normal part of family life in most societies . . . and in American society in particular." Chapters in two of their leading books are entitled "The Marriage License as a Hitting License" and "Because They Can." Straus and his colleagues have emphasized, as Okun persuasively pointed out, "the existence of cultural norms that permit conjugal violence, especially woman abuse."<sup>3</sup>

Many feminist sociologists, although perceptively critical of the family violence perspective, also have presented wife beating as both pervasive and unchanging. Dobash and Dobash asserted that the practice "is not, in the strictest sense of the words, a 'deviant,' or 'aberrant,' or 'pathological' act. Rather, it is a form of behavior which has existed for centuries as an acceptable, and, indeed, a desirable part of a patriarchal family system." Such feminist scholars argue or imply a direct relationship between the degree of male dominance in a society and the extent of violence toward wives.<sup>4</sup>

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*tered Women: A Psychosociological Study of Domestic Violence* (New York, 1977), 18–20. Two recent surveys include historical sketches that are more sensitive to change over time in wife beating: Anson Sharpe, William A. Stacey, and Lonnie R. Hazlewood, *Violent Men, Violent Couples: The Dynamics of Domestic Violence* (Lexington, Mass., 1987), 11–12; Robert T. Sigler, *Domestic Violence in Context: An Assessment of Community Attitudes* (Lexington, Mass., 1989), 8–9.

3 Richard J. Gelles and Murray A. Straus, "Determinants of Violence in the Family: Toward a Theoretical Integration," in Wesley R. Burr, Reuben Hill, F. Ivan Nye, and Ira L. Reiss (eds.), *Contemporary Theories About the Family: Research-Based Theories* (New York, 1979), I, 549; Straus, Gelles, and Suzanne K. Steinmetz, *Behind Closed Doors: Violence in the American Family* (New York, 1980), 31; Gelles and Straus, *Intimate Violence* (New York, 1988), 17; Okun, *Woman Abuse*, 90–97. Cathy Stein Greenblat's research suggests that Straus and his colleagues overstate the contemporary tolerance of wife beating: "A Hit Is a Hit . . . Or Is It? Approval and Tolerance of the Use of Force by Spouses," in David Finkelhor, Gelles, Gerald T. Hotaling, and Straus (eds.), *The Dark Side of Families: Current Family Violence Research* (Beverly Hills, 1983), 235–260; *idem*, "'Don't Hit Your Wife . . . Unless . . .': Preliminary Findings on Normative Support for the Use of Physical Force by Husbands," *Victimology*, X (1985), 221–241.

4 R. Emerson Dobash and Russell P. Dobash, "Wives: The 'Appropriate' Victims of Marital Violence," *Victimology*, II (1977–78), 427; Michele Bograd, "Family Systems Approaches to Wife Battering: A Feminist Critique," *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, LIV (1984), 558–568; Dobash and Dobash, *Violence Against Wives: A Case Against the Patriarchy* (New York, 1979); Martin, *Battered Wives*, 25–43; Mary Metzger, "A Social History of Battered Women," *Heresies*, VI (1978), 58, 60–63; Lenore E. Walker, "A Feminist Perspective of Domestic Violence," in Richard B. Stuart (ed.), *Violent Behavior: Social Learning*

Only a handful of historians have studied wife beating, but their works suggest that the relationship between male dominance and male violence can be complex and dynamic. Breines and Gordon remarked that the Dobashes' interpretation implies "a history of unrelieved battering of women and obscures women's own strategies in response." Gordon's treatment of family violence among twentieth-century lower-income Bostonians suggested that battered women were not necessarily helpless or passive, and that wife beating was frequently accompanied by a heroic struggle against male dominance. Pleck demonstrated that concern over family violence waxed and waned in United States history before the 1960s and argued that late-nineteenth century wife beaters sometimes faced substantial legal and community opposition. Other historians have discovered that neighbors sometimes intervened in violent marriages. Still others have pointed out that nineteenth-century law became increasingly paternalistic, offering meek-appearing women some protection from male brutality. Community members, quasi-legal groups, and courts sometimes set and enforced limits on wife beating in the nineteenth century.<sup>5</sup>

An examination of fifty-six divorce cases filed from 1891 to 1900 in a white, rural, largely middle-class Oregon county con-

*Approaches to Prediction, Management and Treatment* (New York, 1981), 102–115; *idem*, "Psychological Causes of Family Violence," in Mary Lystad (ed.), *Violence in the Home: Interdisciplinary Perspectives* (New York, 1986), 71–97.

5 Wini Breines and Linda Gordon, "The New Scholarship on Family Violence," *Signs*, VIII (1983), 520; Colleen McGrath, "The Crisis of the Domestic Order," *Socialist Review*, IX (1979), 18; Linda Gordon, *Heroes of Their Own Lives: The Politics and History of Family Violence, Boston, 1880–1960* (New York, 1988); Elizabeth Pleck, "Wife Beating in Nineteenth-Century America," *Victimology*, IV (1979), 60–74; *idem*, *Domestic Tyranny: The Making of Social Policy Against Family Violence from Colonial Times to the Present* (New York, 1987); *idem*, "Criminal Approaches to Family Violence, 1640–1980," in Lloyd Ohlin and Michael Tonry (eds.), *Family Violence* (Chicago, 1989), 19–57; Christine Stansell, *City of Women: Sex and Class in New York, 1789–1860* (New York, 1986), 80–83; Nancy Tomes, "A 'Torrent of Abuse': Crimes of Violence Between Working-Class Men and Women in London, 1840–1875," *Journal of Social History*, XI (1978), 328–345; Myra C. Glenn, "Wife-Beating: The Darker Side of Victorian Domesticity," *The Canadian Review of American Studies*, XV (1984), 17–33; Robert L. Griswold, "Apart But Not Adrift: Wives, Divorce, and Independence in California, 1850–1890," *Pacific Historical Review*, XLIX (1980), 265–283; *idem*, "Divorce and the Legal Redefinition of Victorian Manhood," in Mark C. Carnes and Clyde Griffen (eds.), *Meanings for Manhood: Constructions of Masculinity in Victorian America* (Chicago, 1990), 96–110; Michael S. Hindus and Lynne E. Withey, "The Law of Husband and Wife in Nineteenth-Century America: Changing Views of Divorce," in D. Kelly Weisberg (ed.), *Women and the Law: A Social Historical Perspective* (Cambridge, Mass., 1982), II, 133–153.

firms that courts, friends, neighbors, and relations sometimes intervened against violent husbands. But this study, unlike others, also suggests that constraints against wife beating were not just external, that most of the violent husbands seemed to have internalized the belief that striking women was wrong. These men, according to wives and other witnesses, usually did not resort to physical violence quickly or frequently, particularly compared to their late-twentieth-century counterparts. Wife beaters were more restrained in their violence in the 1890s than they were in the 1970s, and the proportion of men who beat their wives may have also been lower in the late nineteenth century than later. This apparent shift to more widespread and unrestrained violence could have occurred not simply because community control over marriages eroded, but also because men's views of their responsibilities toward women changed.<sup>6</sup>

Settlers had begun trickling into the southern end of Oregon's Willamette Valley in the two decades before the Civil War. Nineteenth-century arrivals usually hailed from the Ohio and mid-to-upper Mississippi River valleys; relatively few came from overseas. In 1900 more than 93 percent of Lane County's nearly 20,000 residents were native born. More than 99 percent were white. Eugene was its only sizable town with 3,236 residents. A large majority lived in smaller towns or on medium-sized, owner-operated farms that produced crops both for market and home consumption. Lane County residents were overwhelmingly white, native born, middle-class, and rural dwellers at the turn of the century, much more so than the nation as a whole.<sup>7</sup>

Lane County women and men occupied different emotional and occupational worlds from each other at the close of the nineteenth century. Whatever special opportunities that came to fron-

6 For the purpose of this paper, physical violence and wife beating are defined as action that directly results in a woman feeling physical pain or that includes a threat with a gun or knife. This definition is roughly equivalent to items L (pushing, grabbing, and shoving) through R (used a knife or gun) in Straus' Conflict Tactics Scales: Straus, "Measuring Intrafamily Conflict and Violence: The Conflict Tactics (CT) Scales," *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, XLI (1979), 75–88. Wife abuse was and is much broader than this definition of wife beating.

7 Christopher Dean Carlson, "The Rural Family in the Nineteenth Century: A Case Study in Oregon's Willamette Valley," unpub. Ph.D. diss. (University of Oregon, 1980); *Twelfth Census of the United States, Taken in the Year 1900: Population, Part I* (Washington, D.C., 1901), 326–327, 533.

tier women by virtue of their scarcity had largely disappeared by 1880, for the ratio of men to women was down to 117.0:100. In 1900 it was 115.8:100, 111.2:100 for native borns and 97.8:100 in Eugene. County newspapers expressed both hostile and idealized images of women, portraying them as vain, flirtatious, virtuous, and self-sacrificing, and they lampooned men who exhibited characteristics associated with femininity. Extant letters and diaries indicate that southern Willamette Valley farmers were familiar with the cult of domesticity by 1880, and that the work of farm women tended not to overlap with that of their husbands. The 1900 census listed just 4.8 percent of women over age sixteen in three agricultural precincts as being employed, this compared to 12.8 percent in Eugene and 18.8 percent for the nation as a whole. All but a handful of Eugene's female wage earners worked in highly sex-segregated jobs. More than six out of ten were servants, laundresses, or teachers. About three quarters of the remainder worked in textiles, hats, or sales. The genders' spheres did not include much common ground in turn-of-the-century Lane County.<sup>8</sup>

Lane County was relatively progressive on women's issues. Its men voted for suffrage in 1900, twelve years before the state as a whole gave women the vote and twenty years before the nation did. Its residents filed for divorce at nearly twice the national rate and slightly above the state average. But these characteristics did not make Lane County a hotbed of radical feminism. The Women's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU), with six chapters, appeared to be the county's most salient women's organization, and here, as elsewhere, its members strove for eminently respectable reforms. One of Lane county's WCTU presidents campaigned both for suffrage and Bible reading in the schools, for example. The state WCTU motto was "For God and Home and Native Land."<sup>9</sup>

8 *Twelfth Census of the United States*, 517; 1900 manuscript census, Lane County, Oregon; Melinda Tims, "Discovering the Forty-Three Percent Minority: Pioneer Women in Plesant Hill, Oregon, 1848-1900," unpub. M.A. thesis (L'université de Poitiers, 1982), 39-51, 121-124; Carlson, "Rural Family," 240-268; *Historical Statistics of the United States: Colonial Times to 1970, Part I* (Washington, D.C., 1975), 128.

9 Tims, "Discovering the Forty-Three Percent Minority," 84-85, 162; Bureau of the Census, *Marriage and Divorce, 1867-1906: Part I: Summary, Laws, Foreign Statistics* (Washington, D.C., 1909), 15-16, 72, 170; Robert D. Clark, *The Odyssey of Thomas Condon: Irish Immigrant, Frontier Missionary, Oregon Geologist* (Portland, 1989), 384-385, 417-420.

The divorce-seeking women who appeared in Lane County's circuit court were more assertive than most Lane County wives. Dissolving one's marriage entailed securing an attorney, giving testimony, answering questions about highly personal issues, perhaps enduring a cross-examination, procuring a witness, having papers served on one's husband, and spending at least \$20.00—a month's wages for many women. Women petitioners had to be particularly careful to avoid the appearance of sexual impropriety, and wives and their witnesses typically spent a large fraction of their time addressing that concern. Husbands who contested suits made getting a divorce less likely and more expensive, and some threatened to kill wives who persisted in going to court. Such considerations discriminated against women who were poor, isolated, or timid. A few divorce-seeking women had substantial amounts of property, and about 40 percent indicated that they had earned wages. A large proportion of the women petitioners, battered or otherwise, lived in Eugene, in part because of its relative opportunities for employment. In sum, wives who sought divorces confronted a thorny paradox. The nature of Oregon law encouraged such women to present themselves as the helpless victims of their husbands' irresponsibility. Yet wives who sought divorces were not helpless.<sup>10</sup>

The husbands described by divorce-seeking wives were an unimpressive lot. Over one half of the fifty-six women who complained of their husbands' violence also described them as poor providers. There were exceptions. One man was a grocer, and several were well-to-do farmers. But most appeared to be agriculturalists of middling or poor means, or laborers, and some did not work. Many moved frequently; one half of the women who complained of violence had married outside Lane County.

Correlations between wife beating and social status are notoriously difficult to draw. Modern studies suggest that middle-class couples may be less candid about family violence than poorer ones. The divorce-seeking women of the 1890s had legal incentives to describe their husbands' flaws, but women married to well-to-do men were probably less likely to seek divorces than women who could not count on a husband's income. The

10 William Lair Hill (compiler and annotator), *The Codes and General Laws of Oregon* (San Francisco, 1887), II, 452-457.

violent men described in the testimony tended to be poor not so much because poorer men were apt to be violent as because wives of poorer men tended to seek divorces. It is suggestive, however, that the proportion of wives complaining of violent forms of abuse shot up during the depression of the 1890s. Over three quarters, 78.0 percent, of the wives who filed for divorces from 1893 to 1897 and cited abuse described their husbands as violent compared to less than one half, 46.7 percent, for the nondepression years. Unemployment seemed to result in more wife beating.<sup>11</sup>

Lane County's legal system offered abused wives some options. About 85 percent of the women petitioners who complained of physical violence won their cases, and most of them won even when their husbands contested the suit. A violent husband might lose more than his spouse. A few of the wives said that they had gotten their husbands arrested in separate legal actions. The relatively few battered women who used the courts did so successfully.

Wives and their witnesses indicated that some battered women received substantial support from community members. The roomers in Hotchkiss' Los Angeles boarding house came to her aid and took her husband from the parlor after he had hit her. Another woman's neighbors sheltered her after a violent episode and turned away her spouse. In all, the women noted five instances in which nonfamily members had intervened directly against violent husbands. Other neighbors or friends offered verbal support. Mary Rogers of Eugene recalled a conversation with her neighbor, Hattie Alexander, after she had walked into her neighbors' house and found her crying: "She said, 'Mr. Alexander has struck me across the back.' I said, 'O No, Hattie, Will hasn't struck you.' And she said, 'Yes, he has too.'" Some weeks or

11  $\chi^2 = 8.935$ ,  $df = 1$ ,  $\alpha < .005$ , meaning that the difference in the proportion of abusive husbands who hit their wives in depression versus nondepression years would occur randomly less than .005 times out of 1.0, or less than 5 times in 1,000. For the purpose of this paper and these calculations, "abuse" is defined as: threats of physical violence, accusations of martial infidelity, and swearing at one's wife—as well as physical violence. Hence the women's descriptions suggest that abusive husbands were much more likely to be physically abusive during the depression of the 1890s than before or after it. Okun, *Woman Abuse*, 45–59 treats the issue of class and wife beating. For a more in-depth historical treatment, see Peterson, "Physically Violent Husbands of the 1890s and Their Resources," *Journal of Family Violence*, VI (1991), 1–15.



months later, after Hattie Alexander had left her husband, he asked Mary Rogers to intervene on his behalf: "I told him I would not," she recalled, "Because I thought she had tried it long enough. . . . and he had brought this trouble on himself by continual nagging and fault-finding." Eugene's Masonic Lodge confronted at least two violent husbands, although probably more for the benefit of the husbands' step-daughters than for their wives. Not every observer interceded directly or even indirectly in violent marriages, and few did so regularly. Yet such intercession was not rare. This behavior is evidence of the belief that a man's right to hit his wife was not widely held.<sup>12</sup>

Family members also interposed themselves in violent marriages. A. J. Yeats' mother-in-law stopped him from hitting his wife with a piece of stove wood. Maggie McMurry's husband blamed her sister, mother, and daughter from a previous marriage for her departure, and he was sure she would not have filed for divorce, "had it not been for the intermeddling of her said relations." Nora Marcott's parents gave her money so she and her three children could escape her violent and improvident husband in Illinois to live with them. Another woman left a husband in Nebraska who had told her that he would kill her and their child if he thought that they would not return. After living with her parents in Oregon for two years she felt safe enough to file for a divorce. The parents of at least nine of the women took them in, at least two despite their son-in-laws' threats to kill anyone who helped the women. Ann Bosquet's brother said that she had fled to his home for safety and that he had frequently gone to her house "and remained all night to protect her."<sup>13</sup> Another woman noted that her husband's abuse became much worse soon after her father died. There was an element of braggadocio in John Tapp's assertion that he would hit his wife in front of her father, and her brothers, too.

Battered women also received aid from their nuclear family. Elsie Freeman said that when she resisted her husband's attempt to pull her from bed "the children helped me and he slapped one of the little girls." James Johnson allegedly remarked that "the

<sup>12</sup> LCCC, case #3645; Pleck, "Wife-beating," 60-74; Bryan D. Palmer, "Discordant Music: Charivaris and Whitecapping in Nineteenth-Century North America," *Labour/ Travail*, III (1978), 5-62.

<sup>13</sup> LCCC, case #2832; case #3643.

children beat him off” when he had tried to kill his wife.<sup>14</sup> Likewise, Martha Hay’s adult son testified that he had stopped his father from killing his mother.

The battered women certainly found their husbands’ violence unacceptable. None of the fifty-six wives indicated that they countenanced any form of physical abuse, despite the fact that some of them based their divorce suits largely on grounds other than physical cruelty. The women did not necessarily censure all forms of family violence, such as striking children. They typically described only extreme instances of child abuse, such as beatings with a large whip or rocks. M. E. McLeod complained that her husband had whipped their children in a manner that was “very severe and unnecessary and vicious.” R. E. Johnson said her husband was “unnecessarily abusive” to their children.<sup>15</sup> The wives did not seem to think that physical violence was ever necessary or appropriate for women. Emma Hotchkiss apparently raised no objections when her six-year-old daughter received a blow to her head, but she physically intervened when her husband struck one of her young-adult daughters. Women seemed to feel that females should be free from physical abuse once they reached the age that divided childhood from adulthood.

Battered women who sought divorces frowned upon wife beating. If they had not, they might have stayed married. Also, women who sought divorces often enjoyed the support of family and friends, without which they might have remained with violent husbands. Battered women who did not file for divorce had fewer social supports, and their experience was more representative. Lane County communities and the women who lived in them were more tolerant of wife beating than the court records suggest.

The more arresting aspect of the court documents is that the abusive husbands who appear in them were somewhat restrained in their violence. Even some extremely angry and cruel husbands did not strike their wives. Alice Yeats characterized her husband as “a man of violent temper and when he gets mad he is almost insane.” Yet he apparently did not hit her. J. W. Severs’ neighbor testified that Severs “could scarcely control his passion when angry and the least provocation would make him completely wild

14 LCCC, case #3460; case #2900.

15 LCCC, case #4013; case #2900.

in his expression,” and Severs’ wife noted that he frequently sharpened his knife while muttering about letting out the paunch of one of his enemies. Yet she testified that he had hit her only once. Said another wife of her husband: “I heard him threaten to kill one or two of the neighbors, he threatened to kill everybody on the river. I took it he would begin at home.” Nevertheless, she admitted that her husband had never struck her. Cora Chase recalled that her husband had threatened to break her neck, and two witnesses heard him threaten to slap her. Yet none of the three said that Charles Case had ever hit his wife. Percie Lamb also indicated that her husband had never struck her, but she complained that he stood by idly while his sister “cruelly and mercilessly beat plaintiff with her fists” so badly that she was bedridden for more than four weeks.<sup>16</sup> Other wives described husbands who destroyed furniture, tried to force them into prostitution, charged them with adultery, or said that they would kill them—all without physically attacking them or threatening them with a knife or gun.

Some men were more apt to threaten their wives with a lethal weapon than to strike them. Complaints and testimony indicated that twelve of the fifty-six violent men had menaced their wives with a firearm, another two with a knife. One half of these weapon-wielding husbands apparently did not hit or grab their spouses in anger. Abbie Allen, for example, complained only that her husband was lazy and often away from home until she described an incident when he came back in a rage to visit her at her parents’ house, drew a pistol, threatened to shoot her, and then fired it into the air.

None of the wives indicated that their husbands had claimed a right to beat them. John Karst tried to dismiss a late-night choking by saying that he had mistaken his wife for a burglar. Duncan Scott offered no such excuse after striking his wife for apparently the first time. She recalled that he then declared “that he had no love for her or respect for her, that he could not treat any woman with decent respect” and told her to go back to her parents.<sup>17</sup> Duncan apparently believed that his violent act illustrated or constituted unfitness for marriage. The abusive men’s

16 LCCC, case #3413; case #3503; case #4651; case #4581.

17 LCCC, case #4609.

failure to claim wife beating as a prerogative suggests some sort of inner, although certainly not absolute, restraint against wife beating.

Most of the women who complained of physical violence indicated that their husbands had not immediately employed it. Some described long periods of torment unaccompanied by physical violence. George Land began to abuse his wife on their wedding day in late 1889, was calling her a slut by 1894, and struck her a month later. R. C. Taylor waited a year before verbally abusing his wife. In another year or two he threatened to cut her throat, and a few weeks later he beat her with his fists. M. E. McLeod recalled that her husband “became cross, overbearing and abusive” soon after their marriage in 1871 “and grew worse and worse on up to the present time.”<sup>18</sup> In 1895 he threatened to use force, and in the spring of 1896, after twenty-five years of marriage, he tried to hit her with a poker. A month later he struck her with his fist. In all, only 20 percent of the fifty-four women who dated their husbands’ physically violent acts placed them within the first year of the marriage, and 35 percent indicated that the first such act had occurred ten years or more after their wedding. The actual figures were undoubtedly different, since few of the women explicitly stated when the initial violent act had occurred. But even doubling the number of women battered during their first year of marriage would leave the proportion at only slightly over 40 percent. Most husbands of the 1890s who used physical violence apparently did not do so in the beginning of the marriage.

Most of the wife beaters also appeared to resort to physical violence infrequently. Some 34 percent of the fifty-six wives indicated that their husbands had used physical force against them only once, and another 34 percent cited two or three incidents. Only 18 percent indicated several violent acts, 14 percent frequent or ongoing battering. To be sure, most of the attorneys did not directly ask the wives to quantify abuse. Yet a wife who had been beaten more than once or twice could gain much in court by being detailed and specific, and some were. During the summer of 1895, said Susan Dennis, her husband “struck me several different times, and cursed me continually.”<sup>19</sup> Clara Carns gave a

18 LCCC, case #4013.

19 LCCC, case #4263.

more typical account. She said that her husband had continually cursed and abused her over the two previous years before throwing her to the floor and trying to crush her. She did not refer to any other act of physical abuse.

On the whole, the battered wives from the 1890s described men who used physical abuse with reluctance. There were exceptions. James Johnson began beating his illiterate wife in the mid-1860s, nearly three decades before she sought a divorce. Someone who had seen her shoulders in the early 1870s later described them as “bruised and almost black from the top down to the points.” Another witness quoted Johnson as mentioning that he had intended “to Kill the damned old Bitch.”<sup>20</sup> Several wives indicated that their husbands had beat them frequently and apparently without compunction. No doubt there were many other women who suffered decades of extreme and frequent abuse rather than seeking a divorce. Yet most of the wives who went to court described violent husbands who did not easily or immediately batter them.

The court records do not, however, describe typical violent marriages. Battered wives who sought divorces no doubt had more social and economic resources than those who stayed in marriages, and those resources could deter husbands from battering very often. Those with children, money, or experience from previous marriages seemed particularly powerful. Emma Hotchkiss had more money than her husband did, as well as several assertive young-adult daughters. She described two instances in which her husband had hit her. The first ended with her boarders removing him from the room, and after the second blow “my eldest daughter pitched into him and scratched his face and he would have killed them, had not Mabelle run out on the porch crying, ‘murder! murder! papa will kill mama,’ and the neighbors came running into the yard.”<sup>21</sup>

Another step-daughter apparently prompted Eugene’s Masons to send a threatening letter to her abusive step-father. Sixty-one-year-old M. A. Severs had been married to her husband

20 LCCC, #2900. This marriage was apparently the only one in which the wife was illiterate, and it most resembles the sort of overt, political violence that Stansell and Ross found among urban working-class husbands earlier in the nineteenth century: Stansell, *City of Women*, 78–80; Ellen Ross, “‘Fierce Questions and Taunts’: Married Life in Working-Class London, 1870–1914,” *Feminist Studies*, VIII (1982), 575–602.

21 LCCC, case #4332.

for less than a year when she had him arrested for threatening her life and divorced him. Alice Yeats had a son when she married A. J. Yeats, and his style of disciplining the child was one of several points of friction in the marriage. Within five months he had accused her of witchcraft and asked her to leave, a request to which she immediately acceded.

Each of these four wives had uncommon resources that may well have deterred extensive physical abuse from their husbands and made it possible for them to file divorce suits. Still, most of the women petitioners had apparently not wed before. The typical one was only in her early thirties and had been married for about ten years. The divorce records, in addition to featuring some uncommon women, may also underestimate the actual violence the women suffered. Perhaps these wives veiled the degree of their husbands' brutality, either out of fear or to avoid shame. Yet simply seeking a divorce brought risk and shame, and failure to detail a husband's cruelty could make the whole effort for naught. Courts were unique in that they usually rewarded women for detailing their husbands' shortcomings. Their records provide a rare, if biased and murky, view of late-nineteenth-century wife beaters.<sup>22</sup>

The court records suggest that violent husbands battered less readily in the late nineteenth century than in the late twentieth century. Only 20 percent of Lane County women in the 1890s who complained of violence dated it within the first year of their marriage. Yet modern studies find that 59 to 90 percent of United States wife beaters had battered by their first wedding anniversary. Less than one third of the battered Lane County wives indicated that their husbands had employed physical force against them more than three times. Studies from the 1970s found that most violent husbands beat their wives at least once every few months or weeks.<sup>23</sup> The modern research is more precise than the 1890s'

22 Studies of contemporary wife beaters share this bias, since social scientists have yet to devise a method for obtaining a random sample of wife abusers.

23 Barbara Star, Carol G. Clark, Karen M. Goetz, and Linda O'Malia, "Psychosocial Aspects of Wife Battering," *Social Casework*, LX (1979), 479-487; Hofeller, *Factors in Wife Abuse*, 69, 93; Okun, *Woman Abuse*, 49; Bruce J. Rounsaville, "Battered Wives: Barriers to Identification and Treatment," *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, XLVIII (1978), 487-494; Maria Roy, "A Current Survey of 150 Cases," in *idem* (ed.), *Battered Women: A Psychosociological Study of Domestic Violence* (New York, 1977), 25-44.

divorce testimony, yet the figures are so dissimilar that a substantial fraction of their differences are probably real.

The proportion of husbands who beat their wives apparently increased from 1890 to 1980. Only 33.1 percent of the women who filed for divorce between 1891 and 1900 mentioned physical violence. The rate dropped to 21.6 percent for the nondepression years. Eight decades later, in 1976, 51 percent and 57.4 percent of wives seeking divorces through two legal service agencies for poor people in greater New York City complained of physical assaults by their husbands. More significantly, a random sample of nearly 1,800 married or cohabiting people in Kentucky in the late 1970s found that 64 percent of the women who had divorced or separated within the last twelve months said that their husbands had been physically violent. The three studies cannot be easily compared. Women from the 1890s might not have reported violence if they had grounds for divorce other than cruelty, the New York City study focused on low-income families, and apparently only the Kentucky survey explicitly asked women if they had been physically abused. Yet the 1890s rate is much lower than the three from the 1970s, the former decade's severe depression notwithstanding. The evidence, although far from conclusive, suggests that wife abuse was less common among divorcing couples in the 1890s than in the 1970s, despite the ratio of divorces to population increasing more than seven-fold in those eighty years.<sup>24</sup>

Other studies suggest that wife beating has become more common and severe during the twentieth century in the United States. Lane found that a greater fraction of Philadelphia's homicides were domestic from 1948 to 1952 than from 1839 to 1901. Gordon's study of child protection records in Boston showed that women complained of being beaten in 1880 and 1890 much less often than they later would, a difference perhaps attributable to their initial lack of familiarity with the agency rather than to a lack of wife beating.<sup>25</sup>

24 Marjory D. Fields, "Wife Beating Facts and Figures," *Victimology*, II (1977-1978), 643-647; Mark A. Schulman, *A Survey of Spousal Violence Against Women in Kentucky* (Washington, D.C., 1979), 18.

25 Roger Lane, *Violent Death in the City: Suicide, Accident, and Murder in Nineteenth-Century Philadelphia* (Cambridge, Mass., 1979), 77-114; Gordon, *Heroes of Their Own Lives*, 255, 362-363. Vera St. Erlich, *Family in Transition. A Study of 300 Yugoslav Villages*

The rise of the privatized family no doubt affected the degree of violence within marriage. The typical late-nineteenth-century white family was nuclear, but it often included servants, boarders, hired men, or kin. Family might also live nearby. In 1880, about one in every eight farm families in Lane County lived adjacent to a relative, and diaries from the period described numerous work-related and social contacts among rural people. These people—family members, boarders, servants, hired men, or neighbors—sometimes observed a husband’s violence and, as several witnesses testified, intervened against him. But lower birth rates, the further removal of work from home, increased geographical mobility, and more private entertainment such as radio and television, made marriage less public during the twentieth century. The marital relationship, furthermore, became increasingly companionate and intense, and community members and organizations, family members and friends became more hesitant to intervene in couples’ quarrels. The typical wife of the 1970s had relatively few social resources with which to deter a husband’s violence, even if she might more easily escape it.<sup>26</sup>

Violent husbands were not simply conditioned by outer controls; most abusive husbands in the 1890s seem to have internalized the belief that it was wrong to lay hands on a woman in

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(Princeton, 1966), 227–286 argued that wife beating was allowed but seldom practiced in patriarchal areas of Yugoslavia. During times of rapid twentieth-century change, wife beating was censured in theory, but was tolerated and commonly practiced in fact. Once a region had attained a new equilibrium, wife beating was neither tolerated in theory nor practice. Historians are divided on how prevalent or acceptable wife beating was in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in North America. Pleck, “Wife-beating,” 60–74; *idem*, *Domestic Tyranny*, 88–107; Jerome Nadelhaft, “Wife Torture: A Known Phenomenon In Nineteenth-Century America,” *Journal of American Culture*, X (1987), 39–59 argued that it was not necessarily widely accepted, but several less detailed studies at least imply that wife beating was both common and accepted: Terry L. Chapman, “‘Til Death do us Part’: Wife Beating in Alberta, 1905–1920,” *Alberta History*, XXXVI (1988), 13–22; Glenn, “Wife-Beating,” 1–33; Melody Graulich, “Violence Against Women in Literature of the Western Family,” *Frontiers*, VII (1984), 14–20.

26 Barbara Laslett, “The Family As a Public and Private Institution: A Historical Perspective,” *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, XXXV (1973), 480–492; *idem*, “Family Membership, Past and Present,” *Social Problems*, XXV (1978), 476–490; Pleck, “Wife-beating,” 1–33; Carlson, “Rural Family,” 89–268; Alice Echols, “The Demise of Female Intimacy in the Twentieth Century,” *Michigan Occasional Paper* (Ann Arbor, 1978); Gerald M. Erchak, “Cultural Anthropology and Spouse Abuse,” *Current Anthropology*, XXV (1984), 331–332; Noel A. Cazenave and Murray A. Straus, “Race, Class, Network Embeddedness and Family Violence: A Search for Potent Support Systems,” *Journal of Comparative Family Studies*, X (1979), 281–300.



anger. Most wife beaters apparently started hitting relatively late in the marriage and did not hit frequently. One half of the wives who said that their husbands had threatened them with a knife or a gun in the 1890s did not say that their husbands had shoved or hit them. If violence is defined to include threats with a dangerous weapon, fully 25 percent of the violent Lane County husbands threatened their wives with a gun or a knife. Rates from the 1970s were much lower. The National Family Violence Survey of 1976 found that 3.3 percent of violent husbands had threatened their wives with these weapons. About 8 percent of the violent husbands identified in the 1979 Kentucky survey had done so. According to these statistics, a physically violent husband was three to seven times more likely to confront his wife with a lethal weapon in the 1890s than his late-twentieth-century counterpart would be. Although of scant consolation to their wives, some husbands apparently believed that threatening a woman with death was a less odious transgression of Victorian mores than pushing, slapping, or punching.<sup>27</sup>

Criminal cases in Lane County's circuit court suggest that men also hesitated to hit women to whom they were not married. In only three of twenty-five nonrape assaults reported from 1891 to 1900 was someone charged with attacking a woman, and in two of these cases the woman had the same last name as the assailant. In 1979, on the other hand, federal statistics identified women as the victims of roughly one third of nonrape assaults.<sup>28</sup>

A paternalistic sense of women's otherness and dependence may have inhibited men's violence towards them. Levinson found that gender separation in work groups correlated negatively with wife beating. The genders still lived in very dissimilar worlds in Lane County in the 1890s, particularly once they wed. According to the 1900 census, only 7.2 percent of Eugene's employed women were married, and nearly one half of those wage-earning wives did not live with their husbands. The vast majority of wives were their husbands' dependents. Even employed women usually lived

27 Gelles and Straus, *Intimate Violence*, 250; Schulman, *Survey Spousal Violence*, 59.

28 J. Frederick Shenk, *Criminal Victimization in the United States, 1979* (Washington, D.C., 1981), 29; Timothy J. Flanagan, Michael J. Hindelang, and Michael R. Gottfredson (eds.), *Sourcebook of Criminal Justice Statistics, 1979* (Washington, D.C., 1980), 351. One case in which the alleged victim's sex could not be determined is not included in the figures for the 1890s.

in households headed by someone else: 130 of 153 in Eugene. Women's economic status, together with more tangible symbols such as dress and physical size, marked them as inappropriate targets of male violence.<sup>29</sup>

Women's increased employment opportunities outside the home and the women's movement which began in the late 1960s played a role in paternalism's decline, and men's belief that women had been usurping male prerogatives may have led to increased violence against wives. Goode and others have argued that husbands often employ physical violence against their spouses when other advantages have disappeared. Teichman and Teichman wrote that the battering man often "views himself as being neglected, rejected, and stripped of his honor and status." In actuality, twentieth-century men continued to enjoy major social and economic advantages over women, and women's ability to resist male violence by overt means remained circumscribed. But from men's point of view, women's expanding sphere provided a motive for battering one's wife and eroded the basis for the paternalistic constraints against doing so.<sup>30</sup>

Yet the twentieth-century decline of paternalism has had a life apart from feminism. Ehrenreich's study of men in the 1950s and 1960s persuasively shows that a men's revolution preceded the feminist one—that a large fraction of men began denying at

29 David Levinson, *Family Violence in Cross-Cultural Perspectives* (Newbury Park, Calif., 1989); 1900 manuscript census, Lane County, Oregon.

30 Meir Teichman and Yona Teichman, "Violence in the Family: An Analysis in Terms of Interpersonal Resource-Exchange," *Journal of Family Violence*, IV (1989), 139. William J. Goode, "Force and Violence in the Family," *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, XXXIII (1971), 624-636; Bruce W. Brown, "Wife Employment, Marital Equality, and Husband-Wife Violence," in Straus and Hotaling (eds.), *The Social Causes of Husband-Wife Violence* (Minneapolis, 1980), 176-187; Richard N. Harris and Roslyn Wallach Bologh, "The Dark Side of Love: Blue and White Collar Wife Abuse," *Victimology*, X (1985), 242-252; Hyman Rodman, "Marital Power and the Theory of Resources in Cultural Context," *Journal of Comparative Family Studies*, III (1972), 50-69; Robert N. Whitehurst, "Violence in Husband-Wife Interaction," in Steinmetz and Straus (eds.), *Violence in the Family* (New York, 1974), 75-82; Straus, "Sexual Inequality, Cultural Norms, and Wife Beating," *Victimology*, I (1976), 54-70; Edward M. Levine and Eugene J. Kanin, "Sexual Violence Among Dates and Acquaintances: Trends and Their Implications for Marriage and Family," *Journal of Family Violence*, II (1987), 55-65. To point out men's fear of feminism is not to say that feminism caused an increase in violence against women. Rather, men reacted to women's assertiveness by expressing their misogyny more overtly. Pleck, *Domestic Tyranny*, 145-163 argued that in the 1930s Freudian ideas about women's complicity in their husbands' violence undermined the sense of moral outrage that late-nineteenth century reformers had expressed over the practice.

that time that they owed women financial support or paternalistic deference. As conservative women pointed out, feminism accentuated this trend. But the erosion of paternalism was part of a general twentieth-century movement: there was a broad shift from a disciplined society of producers to a pleasure-oriented society of consumers. This movement toward absolute freedom and individualism and away from self-restraint served both to obscure the profound advantages that men continued to wield and to excuse them from using those advantages in socially responsible ways.<sup>31</sup>

Men's movement away from paternalism's burdens did not defuse male violence. The nuclear family became more emotionally intense and explosive as it became more isolated and as other institutions supplanted its educational, economic, religious, and social welfare functions. Couples were able to spend more time together, and they were apt to expect more satisfaction and intimacy from each other during these times. Increased marital expectations, often dashed by frustration, contributed to a rising divorce rate. They might also have led to more wife beating.<sup>32</sup>

Chodorow has persuasively argued that modern men tend to find marital intimacy problematic. She locates males' ambivalence

31 Barbara Ehrenreich, *The Hearts of Men: American Dreams and the Flight from Commitment* (New York, 1983); Garry Wills, *Nixon Agonistes: The Crisis of the Self-Made Man* (New York, 1971); Christopher Lasch, *The Culture of Narcissism: American Life in An Age of Diminishing Expectations* (New York, 1979). Lasch generally interprets feminism as being part of this movement toward narcissistic individualism and neglects the degree to which feminism has stood apart from and critiqued that movement.

32 Brown, "Wife Employment," 176–187; David Brion Davis, *From Homicide to Slavery: Studies in American Culture* (New York, 1986), 166–183; John Demos, "Images of the American Family, Then and Now," in Virginia Tuft and Barbara Myerhoff (eds.), *Changing Images of the Family* (New Haven, 1979), 43–66; Michael Mitterauer and Reinhold Sieder, "Has the Family Lost Its Functions?" in Bert N. Adams and John L. Campbell (eds.), *Framing the Family: Contemporary Portraits* (Prospect Heights, Ill., 1984), 4–23; Janet Saltzman Chafetz, "Marital Intimacy and Conflict: The Irony of Spousal Equality," *Free Inquiry in Creative Sociology*, XIII (1985), 191–196; Hotaling and Straus, "Culture, Social Organization, and Irony in the Study of Family Violence," *idem* (eds.), *Social Causes*, 3–22; Steven Mintz and Susan Kellogg, *Domestic Revolutions: A Social History of American Family Life* (New York, 1988), 107–131; Elaine Tyler May, *Great Expectations: Marriage and Divorce in Post-Victorian America* (Chicago, 1980); Anthony Rotundo, "Boy Culture: Middle-Class Boyhood in Nineteenth-Century America," in Carnes and Griffen (eds.), *Meanings for Manhood*, 15–36 suggests that nineteenth-century boys' violence toward each other may have been an expression of mutual affection, since affection and violence often overlap for men. See also A. R. Mawson, "Aggression, Attachment Behavior, and Crimes of Violence," in Travis Hirschi and Michael Gottfredson (eds.), *Understanding Crime: Current Theory and Research* (Beverly Hills, 1980), 103–116.

toward women in infancy, a time overwhelmingly dominated by mothers. Young boys must repress this strong maternal connection to establish their identities as males, usually without the benefit of father figures to take her place. A boy's sex-role identification is more harrowing, abstract, and anti-female than is his sister's. Yet, as Chodorow points out, women nonetheless come to represent for males a lost, golden age of security and gratification, so men both dread and yearn for the emotional security that women represent. Although Chodorow's analysis employs oedipal terms, one need not accept psychoanalytical theory to appreciate the broad outlines of her thesis.

The combination of women's low status and fathers' domestic absence creates an anxiety in boys that they will become like their mothers, people who command little respect, according to Parsons. He also has suggested that boys' preference for hyper-masculine activities, including violence, is an attempt to defuse this fear of being feminine. Women, by virtue of the disinterest of fathers in parenthood, are, for men, an extremely potent symbol of male vulnerability. In social terms, wrote Lesse, the modern, industrial-era wife beater is punishing the usurper of traditional male rights. In psychodynamic terms, he is punishing his mother.<sup>33</sup>

Several social scientists have linked men's ambivalence toward women to violence against them. Rosenbaum found that wife batterers tend to lack a clear sex-role identity. He suggested that their violence is an attempt to define a strong male identity. Other scholars have asserted that wife beaters tend to have deep feelings of inadequacy based on unmet dependency needs, and that they often fear being both engulfed and abandoned by women. In a cross-cultural analysis Campbell identified father absence in infancy as the characteristic most clearly associated with wife beating. Clinical, quantitative, and anthropological

33 Nancy Chodorow, *The Reproduction of Motherhood* (Berkeley, 1978); Talcott Parsons, *Essays in Sociological Theory* (New York, 1954; rev. ed.), 298–322; Stanley Lesse, "The Status of Violence Against Women: Past, Present and Future Factors," *American Journal of Psychotherapy*, XXXIII (1979), 190–200; Lillian Rubin, *Intimate Strangers: Men and Women Together* (New York, 1984), 49–58; Miriam M. Johnson, *Strong Mothers, Weak Wives: The Search for Gender Equality* (Berkeley, 1988), 96–127. Carnes includes an excellent treatment of Chodorow's theory and male socialization in *Secret Ritual and Manhood in Victorian America* (New Haven, 1989), 106–127.

studies have suggested that the history of fatherhood conditions men's fear and their battering of women.<sup>34</sup>

Since so little is known about the history of fatherhood, this variable's impact on the history of wife abuse is difficult to trace. Carnes and Marsh have suggested that middle-class men may have become more involved in childcare around 1900. Yet the late-nineteenth and twentieth centuries also brought an increased emphasis on male success outside the home, and a dwindling proportion of men worked where their young sons had access to them. It seems unlikely that a high proportion of fathers engaged in intensive infant care at any point in United States history.<sup>35</sup>

Evidence from a white, largely rural, and broadly middle-class Oregon county's court records in the 1890s suggests that wife beating was less common then than it would become in the late twentieth century. Several variables explain this shift. As other studies have suggested, relatively open nineteenth-century households facilitated community oversight of wife beaters. A variety of family, neighbors, and kin intervened against violent Lane County husbands in the 1890s, a practice that no doubt waned as marriages became more private. But most of the wife beaters in the 1890s were affected by inner standards of accountability as well as outer ones. They seemed to believe that women were not appropriate targets of male violence, and they were less

34 Alan Rosenbaum, "Of Men, Macho, and Marital Violence," *Journal of Family Violence*, I (1986), 121-129; J. L. Bernard and M. L. Bernard, "The Abusive Male Seeking Treatment: Jekyll and Hyde," *Family Relations*, XXXIII (1984), 543-547; Diane Goldstein and Alan Rosenbaum, "An Evaluation of the Self-Esteem of Maritally Violent Men," *Family Relations*, XXXIV (1985), 425-428; Donald G. Dutton, *The Domestic Assault of Women: Psychological and Criminal Justice Perspectives* (Newton, Mass., 1988), 38-42, 75-82; Roland D. Maiuro, Timothy S. Cahn, Peter P. Vitaliana, Barbara Wagner, and Joan B. Zegree, "Anger, Hostility, and Depression in Domestically Violent Versus Generally Assaultive Men and Nonviolent Control Subjects," *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, LVI (1988), 17-23; Mawson, "Aggression, Attachment Behavior, and Crimes of Violence," 103-116; Jackson Toby, "Violence and the Masculine Ideal: Some Qualitative Data," in Steinmetz and Straus (eds.), *Violence in the Family*, 58-65; Jacquelyn C. Campbell, "Beating of Wives: A Cross-Cultural Perspective," *Victimology*, X (1985), 174-185. I argue that the men in the 1890s Lane County sample tended to exhibit the sort of dependency behaviors described in these studies in "Physically Violent Husbands," 1-15.

35 Carnes, *Secret Ritual and Manhood*, 153-156; Margaret Marsh, "Suburban Men and Masculine Domesticity, 1870-1915," *American Quarterly*, XL (1988), 165-186; Demos, *Past, Present, and Personal: The Family and the Life Course in American History* (New York, 1986), 41-67; Rotundo, "Patriarchs and Participants: A Historical Perspective on Fatherhood in the United States," in Michael Kaufman (ed.), *Beyond Patriarchy: Essays by Men on Pleasure, Power, and Change* (Toronto, 1987), 64-80.

violent than their late twentieth-century counterparts would be. Women's movement toward equality and, more importantly, a popular culture based on untrammled self-gratification eroded paternalism in the twentieth century. At the same time, marriages became more emotionally intense and volatile, tendencies that both drew and alarmed men who lacked a strong sense of self-worth or gender identity.

But the late nineteenth century was no golden age for women, nor were their marriages relatively abuse free. Some men who did not lay hands on their spouses in anger pulled guns on them, a more life-threatening form of violence than hitting. Many wives described extensive emotional abuse unaccompanied by physical violence. Even those with gentle, empathetic husbands suffered from living in a society that punished women who stepped beyond the domestic sphere. Husbands could be extremely abusive without using overt, physical force, and men's overwhelming social and economic advantages meant that all wives suffered from coercive marriages.

For their part, the women who appeared in Lane County's circuit court in the 1890s defined abuse broadly. "He has always treated me in a careless, indifferent and cruel manner; he has neglected me when I was sick," said Hattie Alexander. "He has treated me any way but the way a husband ought to treat his wife for the last 13 years. He has cursed and abused me many times and called me vile and dirty names" said Elsie Freeman. "He was jealous. He was never kind to me in sickness. He accused me of running off with J. Darniel, while we lived at Coberg," said Elizabeth Moore. "He has treated me bad," said Julia Couch of her husband. "He did not provide for me, he has cursed me, and called me vile names, would go away from home and would not come back until one or two o'clock at night, and leave me alone." Physical violence, laying hands on a woman in anger, was the unkindness that abusive Victorian men most abhorred and avoided. The wives, although not condoning such acts, spoke of broader cruelties: accusations of adultery; harsh language; failure to support; and, in many instances, unconcern for their physical and social needs, particularly in sickness. It is doubtful that a very large fraction of Victorian husbands were free from such faults.<sup>36</sup>

36 LCCC, case #3645; case #3460; case #3066; case #2884; Griswold, *Family and Divorce in California, 1850-1890: Victorian Illusions and Everyday Realities* (Albany, 1982), 120-140, 176.

The relationship between male dominance and male physical violence has been neither simple nor static. A relatively low rate of wife beating in a particular time or place might indicate respect and power for women. But it could also mean that men were so well entrenched that they did not need to employ the crudest forms of coercion, for when male dominance is unquestioned husbands can eschew abuse and still benefit from an extremely one-sided, exploitative marriage. By the same token, increased violence against wives may well be accompanied by, and related to, an overall improvement in the status of wives, particularly when men exaggerate women's ascendancy. The psychological history of men's relationship to and view of women is another critical if complex variable in wife beating. So is the degree to which communities monitor marriage and the degree to which cultures encourage personal responsibility and self-restraint.

Such issues are difficult to unravel when social scientists overlook the pervasiveness of male dominance, or when they define family violence as a discrete field of study.<sup>37</sup> Treatments of wife beating, historical or sociological, are most profitably located in the broader context of gender and family studies. These studies should be sensitive to the varied expressions of misogyny, and to the social, psychological, and cultural developments that have conditioned the rising and falling of its manifold cruelties.

37 Breines and Gordon, "New Scholarship," 490-531; Demie Kurz, "Social Science Perspectives on Wife Abuse," *Gender and Society*, III (1989), 485-505; Aafke Komter, "Hidden Power in Marriage," *Gender and Society*, III (1989), 187-217; Evan Stark and Anne Flitcraft, "Social Knowledge, Social Policy, and the Abuse of Women: The Case Against Patriarchal Benevolence," in Finkelhor et al. (eds.), *Dark Side of Families*, 330-347; John Mack Faragher, "History From the Inside-Out: Writing the History of Women in Rural America," *American Quarterly*, XXXIII (1981), 537-557.