Newsweek

Patterns of Abuse

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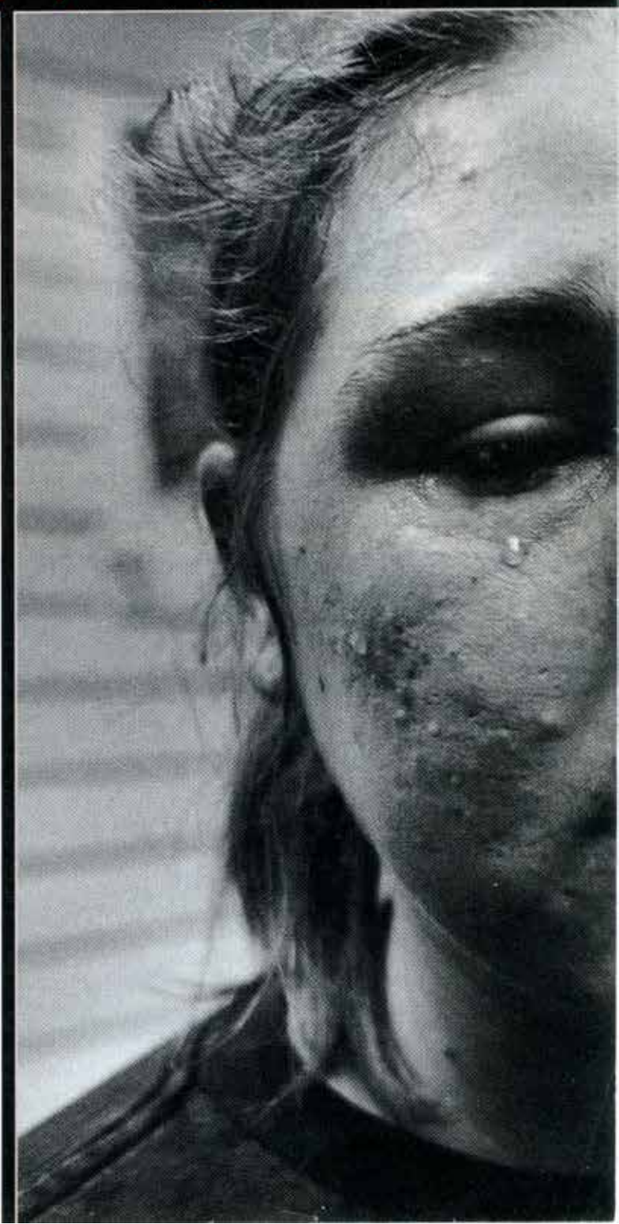
Patterns of Abuse

Two million women are beaten every year; one every 16 seconds. Who's at risk, why does violence escalate—and when should a woman fear for her life?

THE STORIES SPILL OUT FROM BEhind bedroom walls and onto the front pages. Back in 1983, before talk shows dissolved into daily confessionals, actor David Soul offered up the stunning admission that he'd abused his wife, Patti. Two years later, John Fedders, the chief regulator of the Securities and Exchange Commission, resigned after he acknowledged that he'd broken his wife's eardrum, wrenched her neck and left her with black eyes and bruises. In 1988, the nation sat mesmerized by Hedda Nussbaum and her testimony about being systematically beaten by her companion, a brooding New York lawyer named Joel Steinberg, who also struck the blows that killed their adopted daughter, Lisa. Now America is riveted again, this time by the accumulating evidence of O. J. Simpson's brutality against his wife, Nicole. Yet, for all the horror, there is a measure of futility in these tales: one moment, they ignite mass outrage; then the topic fades from the screen.

Americans often shrug off domestic violence as if it were no more harmful than Ralph Kramden hoisting a fist and threatening: "One of these days, Alice . . . Pow! Right in the kisser!" But there's nothing funny about it—and the phenomenon of abuse is just as complicated as it is common. About 1,400 women are killed by their husbands, ex-husbands and boyfriends each year and about 2 million are beaten—on average, one every 16 seconds. Although some research shows women are just as likely as men to start a fight, Justice Department figures released last February reveal that women are the victims 11 times more often than men. Battering is also a problem among gay couples: the National Coalition on Domestic Violence estimates that almost one in three same-sex relationships are abusive, seemingly more than among heterosexual couples. But violence against women is so entrenched that in 1992 the U.S. Surgeon General ranked abuse by husbands and partners as the leading cause

BY MICHELE INGRASSIA AND MELINDA BECK, WITH REPORTING BY GINNY CARROLL, NINA ARCHER BIDDLE, KAREN SPRINGEN, PATRICK ROGERS, JOHN McCORMICK, JEANNE GORDON, ALLISON SAMUELS AND MARY HAGER. PHOTOS BY STEPHEN SHAMES—MATRIX.



At a Houston police station. No charges were filed.

of injuries to women aged 15 to 44. Despite more hot lines and shelters and heightened awareness, the number of assaults against women has remained about the same over the last decade.

A disturbing double standard also remains. "If O. J. Simpson had assaulted Al Cowlings nine times and if A.C. called the police, O.J. couldn't have told them, 'This is a family matter'," says Mariah Burton Nelson, author of the book "The Stronger Women Get the More Men Love Football." "Hertz and NBC would have dropped him and said, 'This man has a terrible problem.' But family violence is accepted as no big deal." New York University law professor Holly Maguigan says wife-beating was actually once sanctioned by the so-called Rule of Thumb—English common law, first cited in America in an 1824 Mississippi Supreme Court decision, that said a man could physically chastise his wife as long as the stick he used was no wider than his thumb. Even now, Maguigan says, "we're not very far removed from a time when the criminal-justice system saw its task as setting limits on the amount of force a man could use, instead of saying that using force against your wife is a crime."

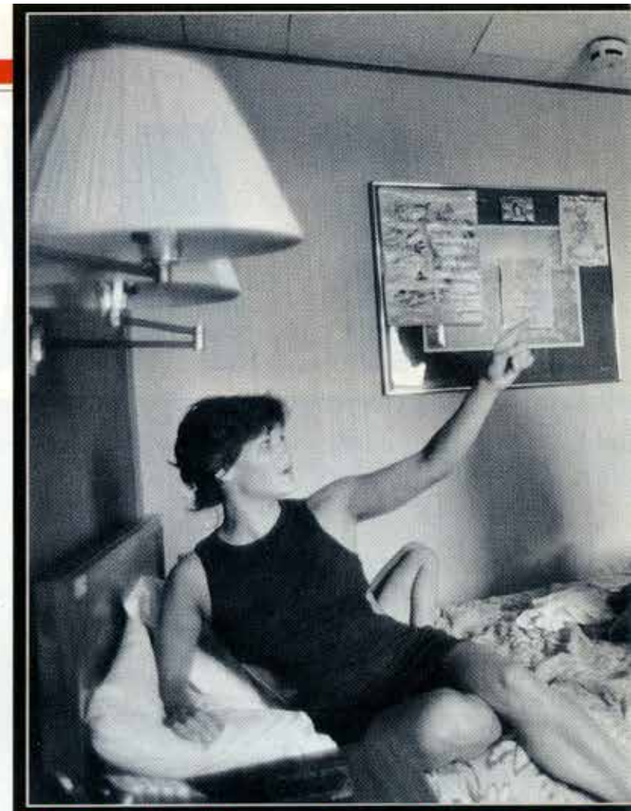
Changing attitudes is difficult. Although advocacy groups are already claiming that Nicole Simpson's case can do for spousal abuse what Rock Hudson did for AIDS and Anita Hill did for sexual harassment, that may be more rhetoric than reality; there is great ambivalence about family violence. Americans cling to a "zone of privacy"—the unwritten code that a man's home is his castle and what happens inside should stay there. It helps explain why, in some states, a man who strikes his wife is guilty only of a misdemeanor, but if he attacks a stranger, it's a felony. It helps explain why a woman can walk away from a friend who says she got her black eye walking into a door. And it helps explain why men retreat when a buddy dismisses brutality as the ups and downs that "all" marriages go through.

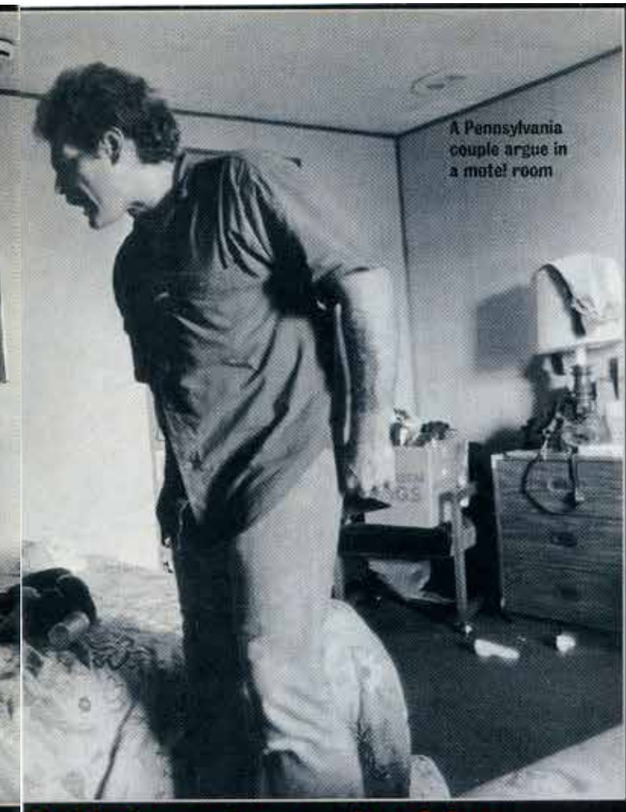
So many look away because they don't know what constitutes domestic violence. Who's a victim? Who's an abuser? Most people believe that, unless a woman looks as pathetic as Hedda Nussbaum did—her nose flattened, her face swollen—she couldn't possibly be a victim. And despite highly publicized cases of abuse, celebrity still bestows credibility. What's more, it's hard for many to comprehend how anything short of daily brutality can be wife-beating. Even Nicole's sister fell into the trap. "My definition of a battered woman is somebody who gets beat up all the time," Denise Brown told The New York Times last week. "I don't want people to think it was like that. I know Nicole. She was a very strong-willed person. If she was beaten up, she wouldn't have stayed with him. That wasn't her." Or was it? The patterns of abuse—who's likely to be at risk, why women take action and when battering turns deadly—can often be surprising, as paradoxical as the fact that love can coexist with violence.

WHO IS MOST AT RISK

EXPERTS USED TO THINK THAT BATTERED WOMEN WERE "asking for it"—somehow masochistically provoking abuse from their men. Mercifully, that idea has now been discredited. But researchers do say that women who are less educated, unemployed, young and poor may be more likely to have abusive relationships than others. Pregnant women seem to make particular targets: according to one survey, approximately one in six is abused; another survey cites one in three. There are other common characteristics: "Look for low self-esteem, a background in an abusive family, alcohol and drug abuse, passivity in relationships, dependency, isolation and a high need for approval, attention and affection," says psychologist Robert Geffner, president of the Family Violence and Sexual Assault Institute in Tyler, Texas. "The more risk factors a woman has, the more likely she is to become a candidate."

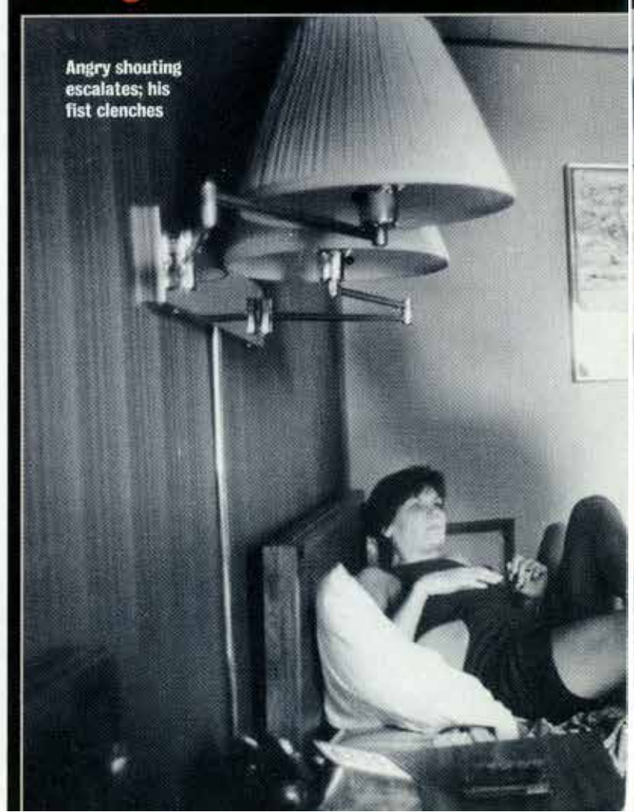
But not all women fit that profile: statistically, one woman in four will be physically assaulted by a partner or ex-partner during her lifetime, so it's not surprising that abuse cuts across racial, ethnic, religious and socioeconomic lines. "I'm treating physicians, attorneys, a judge and professors who are, or were, battered women," says Geffner. "Intelligent people let this happen, too. What goes on inside the home does not relate to what's outside."





A Pennsylvania couple argue in a motel room

Striking a wife can be a misdemeanor while hitting a stranger is a felony



Angry shouting escalates; his fist clenches

And what's outside is often deceiving. Dazzling blond Nicole Simpson didn't look like someone who could have low self-esteem. But she met O.J. when she was just 18, and devoted herself to being his wife. In her 1992 divorce papers, she claimed that O.J. forced her to quit junior college and be with him all the time. She said she'd do anything to keep him from being angry: "I've always told O.J. what he wants to hear. I've always let him . . . it's hard to explain." For all their jet-setting, she was isolated—and reluctant to discuss what was happening at home, even though some friends say they had known. "She would wear unsuitable clothing to cover the bruises, or sunglasses to hide another shiner," says one. "She was trapped. She didn't have any training to do anything, and he knew that and he used it."

But even feisty women with their own careers can get involved with violent men. Earlier this month, Lisa (Left Eye) Lopes, a singer with the hip-hop group TLC, allegedly burned down the $800,000 home of her boyfriend, Atlanta Falcons' wide receiver Andre Rison. Police say the barely 5-foot, 100-pound Lopes appeared bruised and beaten when they arrived on the scene; friends say it was an open secret that she was abused. (Rison denies the allegations.) Curiously, the lyrics of Lopes's debut album are peppered with references about standing up to men: "I have my own control/I can't be bought or sold/And I never have to do what I'm told . . ." Was that just a tough act to mask insecurity? Jacquelyn Campbell, a researcher in domestic violence at Johns Hopkins University, concludes that a woman's risk of being battered "has little to do with her and everything to do with who she marries or dates."

Ten Risk Factors

Previous domestic violence is the highest risk factor for future abuse. Homes with two of these others show twice as much violence as those with none. In those with seven or more factors, the violence rate is 40 times higher.

- **Male unemployed**
- **Male uses illicit drugs at least once each year**
- **Male and female have different religious backgrounds**
- **Male saw father hit mother**
- **Male and female cohabit and are not married**
- **Male has blue-collar occupation, if employed**
- **Male did not graduate from high school**
- **Male is between 18 and 30 years of age**
- **Male or female use severe violence toward children in home**
- **Total family income is below the poverty line**

SOURCE: RISK-MARKERS OF MEN WHO BATTER, A 1994 ANALYSIS BY RICHARD J. GELLES, REGINA LACKNER AND GLENN D. WOLFNER

WHO BECOMES AN ABUSER

WHAT KIND OF MAN HEAPS physical and emotional abuse on his wife? It's only in the last decade that researchers have begun asking. But one thing they agree on is the abuser's need to control. "There is no better way of making people compliant than beating them up on an intermittent basis," says Richard Gelles, director of the Family Violence Research Program at the University of Rhode Island. Although Gelles says men who have less education and are living close to the poverty line are more likely to be abusers, many white-collar men—doctors, lawyers and accountants—also beat their partners.

"Amy," a 50-year-old Colorado woman, spent 23 years married to one of them. Her husband was an attorney, well heeled, well groomed, a pillar of the community. She says he hit her, threw her down the stairs, tried to run her over. "One night in Vail, when he had one of his insane fits, the police came and put him in handcuffs," says Amy, who asked that her real name not be used. "My arms were still red from where he'd trapped them in the car window, but somehow, he talked his way out of it." Lenore Walker, director of the Domestic Violence Institute in Denver, sees the pattern all the time. "It's like Jekyll and Hyde—wonderful one minute, dark and terrifying the next."

Indiana University psychologist Amy Holtzworth-Munroe di-

vides abusers into three behavioral types. The majority of men who hit their wives do so infrequently and their violence doesn't escalate. They look ordinary, and they're most likely to feel remorse after an attack. "When they use violence, it reflects some lack of communication skills, combined with a dependence on the wife," she says.

A second group of men are intensely jealous of their wives and fear abandonment. Most likely, they grew up with psychological and sexual abuse. Like those in the first group, these men's dependence on their wives is as important as their need to control them—if she even talks to another man, "he thinks she's leaving or sleeping around," says Holtzworth-Munroe. The smallest—and most dangerous—group encompasses men with an antisocial personality disorder. Their battering fits into a larger pattern of violence and getting in trouble with the law. Neil S. Jacobson, a marital therapist at the University of Washington, likens such men to serial murderers. Rather than becoming more agitated during an attack, he says, they become calmer, their heart rates drop. "They're like cobras. They're just like criminals who beat up anybody else when they're not getting what they want."

Men who batter share something else: they deny what they've done, minimize their attacks and always blame the victims. Evan Stark, codirector of the Domestic Violence Training Project in New Haven, Conn., was intrigued by Simpson's so-called suicide note. "He never takes responsibility for the abuse. These are just marital squabbles. Then he blames her—'I felt like a battered husband'." Twenty-nine-year-old "Fidel" once felt the same way. When he began getting counseling in Houston's Pivot Project, he blamed everyone else for his violence—especially his new wife, who, he discovered, was pregnant by another man. "When I came here, I couldn't believe I had a problem," he says. "I always thought of myself as a well-mannered person."

Avoiding Abuse

Battered women use a range of desperate methods to discourage partners from injuring them, from running away to fighting back.

STRATEGIES USED BY WOMEN TO END SEVERE SPOUSAL VIOLENCE

Avoid him or avoid certain topics	69%
Talking him out of it	59
Get him to promise no more violence	57
Threaten to get a divorce	54
Physically fight back	52
Hide or go away	37
Threaten to call the police	36
Leave home for two or more days	32

SOURCE: INTIMATE VIOLENCE, BY RICHARD J. GELLES AND MURRAY A. STRAUS (DATA FROM A 1985 STUDY)

WHY WOMEN STAY

IT LOOKS SO SIMPLE FROM THE OUTside. Many women think that if a mate ever hit them, they'd pack up and leave immediately. But women who have been in abusive relationships say it isn't that easy. The violence starts slowly, doesn't happen every day and by the time a pattern has emerged there may be children, and financial and emotional bonds that are difficult to break. "I know when I took my marriage vows, I meant 'for better or for worse'," G. L. Bundow, a South Carolina physician, wrote in The Journal of the American Medical Association, describing her own abusive relationship. "But when 'until death do us part' suddenly became a frightening reality, I was faced with some terrifying decisions."

With more women working and greater availability of shelters, financial dependence is less of a factor than it used to be. The emotional dependence is often stronger. "Women are trained to think that we can save these men, that they can change," says Angela Caputi, a professor of American Studies at the University of New Mexico. That mythology, she notes, is on full display in "Beauty and the Beast": the monster smashing furniture will turn into a prince if only the woman he's trapped will love him.

Many abusers *can* be charming—and abused women often fall for their softer side. Denver's Lenore Walker says there are three parts to the abuse cycle that are repeat over and over—a phase where tension is building and the woman tries desperately to keep the man calm; an explosion with acute battering, and then a period where the batterer is loving and contrite. "During this last phase, they listen to the woman, pay attention, buy her flowers—they become the ideal guy," Walker says. Geffner adds that in this part of the relationship, "they make love, the sex is good. And that also keeps them going."

Eventually, however, the repeated cycles wear women down until some are so physically and mentally exhausted that leaving is almost impossible. The man gradually takes control of the woman's psyche and destroys her ability to think clearly. Even the memory of past abuse keeps the woman in fear and in check. "You can't underestimate the terror and brainwashing that takes place in battering relationships," says psychiatrist Elaine Carmen of the Solomon Carter Fuller Mental Health Center in Boston. "She really comes to believe that she deserves the abuse and is incompetent."

WHEN WOMEN TAKE ACTION

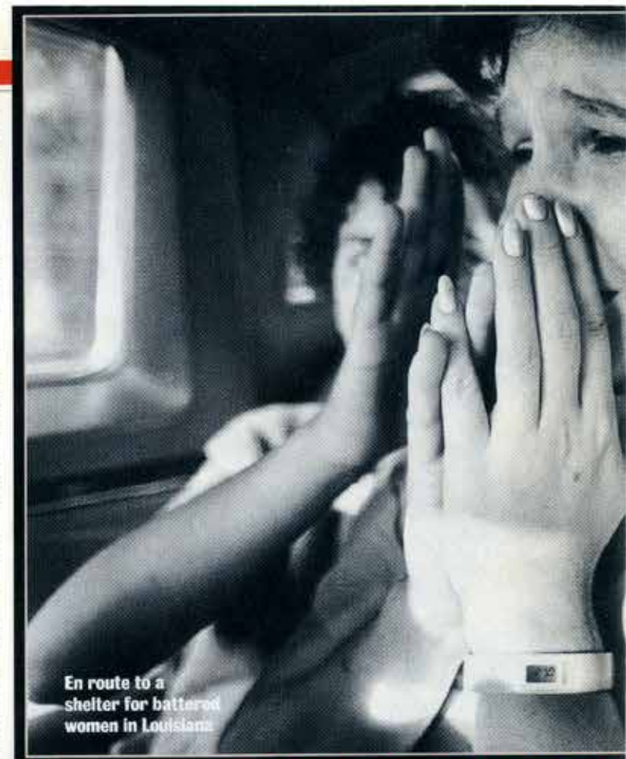
THE TURNING POINT MAY COME WHEN A WOMAN CAN NO longer hide the scars and bruises. Or when her own financial resources improve, when the kids grow up—or when she begins to fear for their safety. Sometimes, neighbors hear screaming and call police—or a doctor challenges a woman's made-up story about how she got those broken ribs. "There are different moments of truth," says psychiatrist Carmen. "Acting on them partly depends on how safe it is to get up and leave." Walker says that women decide to get help when the pain of staying in a relationship outweighs the emotional, sexual or financial benefits.

For "Emma," a bank teller, the final straw came the day she returned from work to find that her husband hadn't mowed the lawn as she asked. "You promised me you'd mow the lawn," she said, then dropped the issue. Later they were seated calmly on the couch, when suddenly he was standing on the coffee table, coming down on her with his fists. He beat her into the wall until plaster fell down. "I was dragged through the house by my hair. At some point I began thinking I don't want to live anymore. If it hadn't been for this tiny voice in the background saying, 'Mama, please don't die,' I would have surrendered." Emma finally crawled to the car but couldn't see to drive, so her grandmother took her to the emergency room, where the doctor didn't believe her story about being mugged. "He said, 'You're not fine. You're bleeding internally. You've got a concussion.' He got a mirror and showed me my face. I looked like a monster in a horror movie. It was the first time I recognized how bad things had gotten." For a while, though, life got even harder. "When I arrived in Chicago, I had two children, two suitcases and $1,500 in my pocket to start a new life." She found it running a coalition that provides shelter for more than 700 battered women.

When women do take action, it can run the gamut from calling a hot line, seeking counseling, filing for divorce or seeking a court order of protection. Often those measures soothe the abuser—but only temporarily. "They think he's changed. Then it starts three months later," says Chicago divorce attorney David Mattenson. Some women weaken, too: they may lock the doors, check the shadows—but still let him have the keys to the house. Emma herself briefly returned to her husband when he begged and pleaded. "The same week I went back, he was beating me again."

WHEN COPS AND COURTS STEP IN

BLUNTLY PUT, COPS HATE DOMESTIC CALLS—IN PART BEcause they are so unpredictable. A neighbor may simply report a disturbance and cops have no idea what they will find on the scene. The parties may have cooled down and be sitting in stony silence. Or one may be holding the other hostage, or the kids. Sometimes, warring spouses even turn on cops—which is why many police forces send them in pairs and tell them to maintain eye contact with each other at all times. But dangerous as family combat is, many cops still don't see such calls as



En route to a shelter for battered women in Louisiana

For women aged 15 to 44, domestic abuse is the leading cause of injury

'I WOULD HAVE KILLED HER'

Steve Sherwood, 42, is a chemical-process operator at the Du Pont Co. in La Porte, Texas, east of Houston. For almost 20 years, he abused his wife; the last time he hit her, he says, was about four years ago. At his wife's insistence, Sherwood finally got treatment and the couple stayed together. Here is Sherwood's account:

I got married when I was 19. My wife, Janet, was 18. At the time I was a student pastor for the United Methodist Church up in east Texas. The first time I became violent with her we had gone to a meeting, and I thought she was creating a public display, so once I got her alone, I slapped her to get her to quiet down. And she did. For many years after, she was living in fear of the next time.

I was following what I thought the Bible said about what a family should be, that the man should be the head of the house and be in control. That led to me directing what she did and where she went. We went on without physical violence, but I was shouting, balling up my fists and letting her know I was certainly willing to use violence.

The second time I hit Janet, I had become a landscape contractor in Houston and was working virtually around the clock. The business was not going well and tension was building up because I felt like a failure. Anything she said would trigger violence. But then I would apologize and cry and say I wasn't going to do it again. Things would be great for a few days, then it would build right back up again. Not even her parents, who live just a few miles away, knew what was going on. I guess like a lot of other women, she didn't want to admit her husband was abusing her.

We got into an argument one morning. I struck her across the throat and knocked her to the floor. I almost crushed her larynx. I did not go temporarily insane or become another person. I was there, and when I look back on it, I knew what I was doing. That's when she finally insisted that I get help. We'd been married 18 or 19 years at that point, had three daughters. If I didn't get help, then she was going to leave and take the kids with her. I agreed, but I felt like I was forced into it and didn't really belong there. When I looked around, I thought, "These guys are violent. They're wife-beaters. That's not me." Unfortunately, they were just like me.

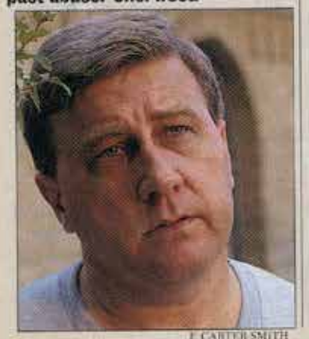
We had a lot of false starts, and I quit a couple of times. About a year into therapy, we got into another argument. I got some soup spilled on me, and I knocked her into a wall. I almost broke her neck. The police came, but by that time she was very upset, and I was very nice, calm and cool. They ended up almost threatening to take her to jail instead of me. Knowing she would have to go to jail with her neck hurting and also leave the kids, she quieted down.

That was pretty much the turning point. I decided if I wasn't going to kill my wife, I was going to have to shape up. My wife is just an exceptional person, stubborn enough to hang on and loving enough to forgive me. Now we're doing great.

The kids saw us arguing constantly. They were hiding in the other room when the police came the second time. My 19-year-old still doesn't date seriously, and my other girls are not interested in relationships. Hopefully, that will change. They are also going through family counseling.

The bad thing about it is that it never gets better without intervention. Every time I abused my wife, it got worse. Eventually, I would have killed her if I hadn't gotten help. It wouldn't matter if I had divorced her and gotten another wife—the same thing would have happened because the problem was within me.

'I knew what I was doing,' says past abuser Sherwood



F. CARTER SMITH

real police work, says Jerome Storch, a professor of law and police science at John Jay College of Criminal Justice in New York. "There's this thing in the back of the [cops'] mind that it's a domestic matter, not criminal activity."

Many cities have started training programs to make police take domestic-violence calls more sensitively—and seriously. For several years, the San Diego Police Department has even used details of O. J. Simpson's 1989 arrest for spousal battery as an example to recruits not to be intimidated by a famous name or face. Laws requiring police to make arrests in domestic cases are on the books in 15 states. But compliance is another matter. Since 1979, New York City has had a mandatory-arrest law, which also requires cops to report every domestic call. Yet a 1993 study found that reports were filed in only 30 percent of approximately 200,000 annual domestic-violence calls, and arrests were made in only 7 percent of the cases. Many cops insist they need to be able to use their own judgment. "If there's a minor assault, are you going to make an arrest just because it's 'a domestic crime'?" asks Storch. "Then if you take it to court and the judge says, 'This is minor,' it's dismissed. If you place mandates on the police, you must place them on the courts."

Prosecutors are just as frustrated. Testimony is often his word against hers; defense attorneys scare off victims with repeated delays and many victims decline to cooperate or press charges. "When women call the police, they don't call because they want to prosecute," says Mimi Rose, chief of the Family Violence and Assault Unit at the Philadelphia District Attorney's Office. "They are scared and want the violence to stop. Ten days later when they get the subpoena to appear in court, the situation has changed. The idea of putting someone you live with in jail becomes impossible." Pressing charges is just the first step. The victim is faced with a range of potential legal remedies: orders of protection, criminal prosecution, family-court prosecution, divorce, a child-custody agreement. Each step is complex and time-consuming, requiring frequent court appearances by the victim—and the abuser, if he'll show up.

Courts around the country have made an effort to streamline the procedures; more than 500 bills on domestic violence were introduced in state legislatures last year, and 100 of them became law. In California alone, new bills are pending that would impose mandatory minimum jail sentences and long-term counseling for abusers, set up computer registries for restraining orders, ban abusers from carrying firearms, mandate training for judges—and even raise the "domestic-violence surcharge" on marriage licenses by $4 to be used for shelter services. On the national level, women's groups are pushing for the $1.8 million Violence Against Women act that would set up a national hot line, provide police training, toughen penalties and aid shelters and prevention programs. But those in the field say the question is whether the justice system can solve a highly complex social problem. "We need to rethink what we're doing," says Rose. "Prosecution isn't a panacea. It's like a tourniquet. We put it on when there is an emergency and we keep it on as long as necessary. But the question is, then what?"

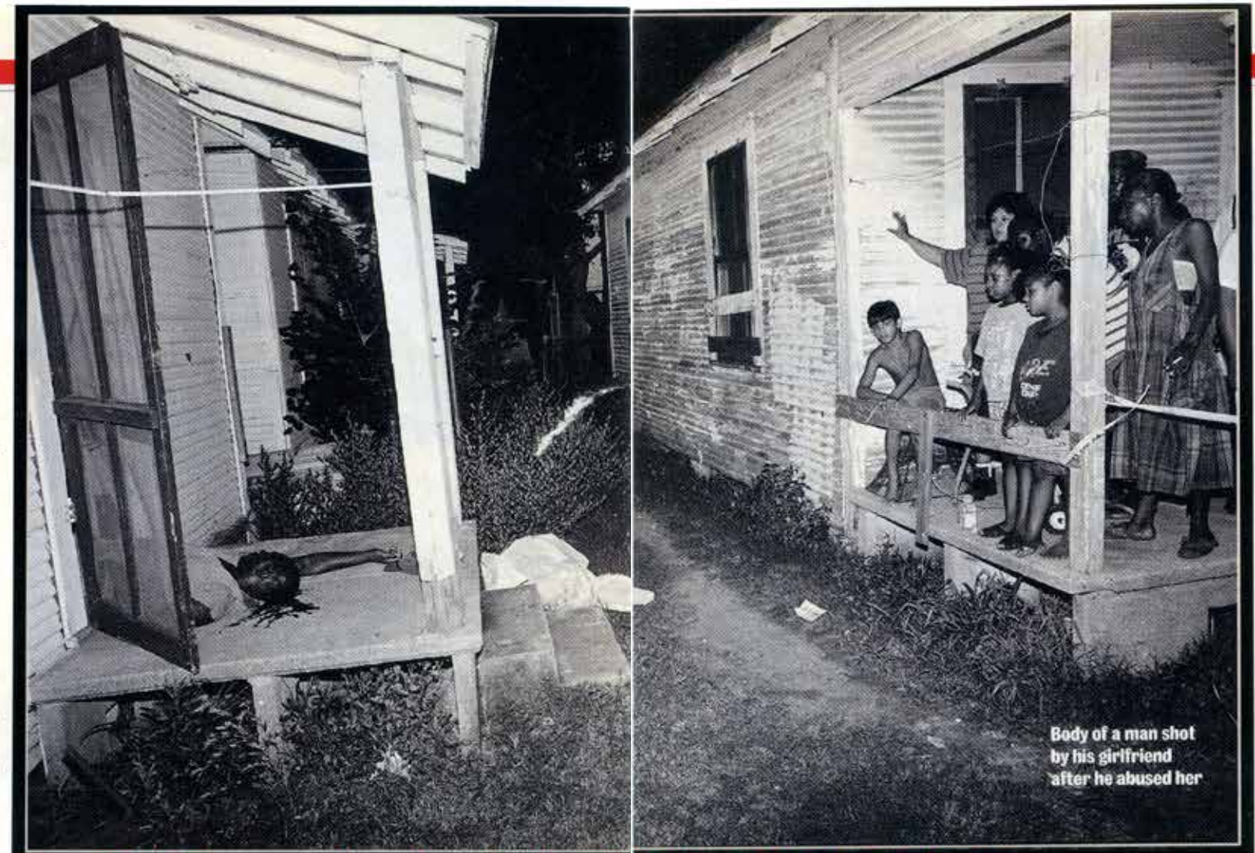
WHEN ABUSE TURNS DEADLY

AFTER YEARS OF ABUSE, LEAVING IS OFTEN THE MOST dangerous thing a woman can do. Probably the first thing a battered wife learns in counseling is that orders of protection aren't bulletproof. Severing ties signals the abuser that he's no longer in control, and he often responds in the only way he knows how—by escalating the violence. Husbands threaten to "hunt them down and kill them," says Margaret Byrne, who directs the Illinois Clemency Project for Battered Women. One man, she recalled, told his wife he would find her shelter and burn it down, with her in it. "It's this male sense of entitlement—'If I can't have her, no one can'," says University of Illinois sociologist Pauline Bart. Friends claim O.J. made similar threats to Nicole.

Although conventional wisdom has it that women are most vulnerable in the first two years after they separate, researcher Campbell is suspicious of limiting danger to a particular time. Typically, she says, women report they're harassed for about a year after a breakup, "but we think the really obsessed guys remain that way much longer." In the last 16 years, the rate of homicides in domestic-abuse cases has actually gone down slightly—particularly for black women—according to an analysis of FBI data by James Fox, dean of the College of Criminal Justice at Northeastern University. Fox is not certain why. "More and more women are apparently getting out of a relationship before it's too late."

Or perhaps women are getting to the family gun first. While studying some 22,000 Chicago murders since 1965, researcher Carolyn Block of the Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority discovered that among black couples, women were more likely to kill men in domestic-abuse situations than the other way round. In white relationships, by contrast, only about 25 percent of the victims were male. Nationwide, about one third of the women in prison for homicide have killed an intimate, according to the Bureau of Justice Statistics. While judges and juries are increasingly sympathetic to "Burning Bed" tales of longtime abuse, the vast majority don't get off.

Whatever the numbers, men and women kill their partners for very different reasons. For men, it's usually an escalation of violence. For women, killing is often the last resort. "The woman who is feisty and strong would have left," says Geffner. "The one who murders her husband is squashed, terrified by, 'You're never going to get away from me, I'm going to take the kids.' There's nothing left for her. To protect herself or her kids, she ends up killing the batterer."



Body of a man shot by his girlfriend after he abused her

One third of women in prison for homicide have killed an intimate

STOPPING ABUSE: WHAT WORKS

Can a man who batters his partner learn to stop? Can psychotherapy turn an abuser into a respectful companion? Specialized treatment programs have proliferated in recent years, most of them aimed at teaching wife-beaters to manage their anger. But abusive men tend to resist treatment, and there are no proven formulas for reforming them. "We don't have any research that tells us any particular intervention is effective in a particular situation," says Eve Lipchik, a private therapist in Milwaukee. "We have nothing to go on."

Some abusers are less treatable than others. Researchers have identified a hard core, perhaps 10 to 20 percent, who seem beyond the reach of therapy. Experts differ on how best to handle the rest, but they agree that abusers shouldn't be coddled, even if they have grown up as victims themselves. "These men need to be confronted," says New York psychologist Matthew Campbell, who runs a treatment program in Suffolk County. "Giving them TLC just endangers women. The man has to take full responsibility. He has to learn to say, 'I can leave. I can express upset. But I cannot be abusive'."

Some therapists favor counseling abusers and victims as couples, provided the beating has stopped and the relationship has a healthy dimension to build on. But couples therapy is controversial, especially among feminists. In fact, several states have outlawed it. "Couples therapy says to the victim, 'If you change, this won't happen'," says Campbell. "That's dangerous."

To avoid that message, most clinics deal exclusively with abusers, often having them confront each other in groups. During a typical session at Houston's Pivot Project, a private, not-for-profit counseling agency, batterers take turns recounting the past week's conflicts. (As a reminder that women aren't property, the participants must refer to their partners by name. Anyone using the phrase "my wife" has to hold a stuffed donkey.) As each man testifies, his peers offer criticism. Therapist Toby Myers says one client recently boasted that he had avoided punching his wife by ramming his fist through a wall. Instead of praising him, a counselor asked the other participants what message the gesture had sent to the man's wife. A group member's reply: "It says she better be careful or she's next."

There's no question that such exercises can change men's behavior. At the Domestic Abuse Project in Minneapolis, follow-up studies suggest that two out of three clients haven't battered their partners 18 months after finishing treatment. Unfortunately, few abusers get that far. Only half of the men who register at the Abuse Project show up, even though most are under court orders. And only half of those who start treatment see it through.

Drug treatment may someday provide another tool. Preliminary findings suggest that Prozac-style antidepressants, which enhance a brain chemical called serotonin, help curb some men's aggressiveness. Neither counseling nor drug treatment is a cure-all. "We need psychological services," says Campbell, the New York psychologist. "But services mean nothing without sanctions. Men need to know that if they don't change, they'll go to jail."

Not every abuser is sensitive to that threat. Dr. Roland Maiuro, director of the Harborview Anger Management and Domestic Violence Program in Seattle, notes that some men simply become more bitter—and more dangerous—after they're arrested. But until treatment becomes a surer science, keeping those men behind bars may be the best way to keep their victims alive.

GEOFFREY COWLEY *with* GINNY CARROLL *in Houston and bureau reports*

WHAT HAPPENS TO THE KIDS

THE CHILDREN OF O.J. AND NICOLE Simpson were reportedly with their maternal grandparents in Orange County, Calif., last week, riding their bikes and playing with cousins on the beach. Sydney, 9, and Justin, 5, know their mother is dead, but they reportedly have not been told that their father has been charged in her murder. Even if their family unplugs the TV and hides the newspapers, the scars may already be too deep.

"The worst thing that can happen to kids is to grow up in an abusive family," says Gelles. Research has shown that children reared amid violence risk more problems in school and an increased likelihood of drug and alcohol abuse. And, of course, they risk repeating the pattern when they become parents. Former surgeon general C. Everett Koop says domestic violence is often three-generational: in families in which a grandparent is abused, the most likely assailant is the daughter—who's likely to be married to a man who abuses her. Together, they abuse their children. "If you are going to break the chain," Koop says, "you have to break it at the child level."

The effects of violence can play out in many ways. Some boys get angry when they watch their father beat their mother, as Bill Clinton did as a teenager. Other children rebel and withdraw from attachment. All of them, says Northwestern University child psychiatrist David Zinn, suffer by trying to hide their family's dirty little secret. As a result, they feel isolated and unlike other kids. Sadly, it's a good bet the Simpsons' children will never again feel like everyone else. "The worst of all tragedies is to become social orphans—they lost their mother through a horrific crime and now their father has been turned into Mephistopheles," says Gelles. It's difficult enough for any child to overcome the legacy of domestic violence; having it play out on a national stage may make it all but impossible. ■

Getting Help

These national information and referral centers handle domestic-violence calls from male and female victims as well as abusers, whether gay or straight. Or contact local mental-health organizations.

- **National Victim Center 1-800-FYI-CALL**
- **National Coalition Against Domestic Violence 303-839-1852**