

Advocacy on Behalf of Battered Women

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Over the past 25 years, reform efforts for battered women have produced two distinct yet interwoven forms of advocacy. The first, individual case advocacy, is characterized by an advocate who tries to help one woman get what she wants and needs—either from a local agency or an entire institution, representing a complex system of community agencies that help the state regulate the lives and conflicts of ordinary citizens. This advocate takes up the woman's situation as one case to be managed and resolved by the state. In the second form of advocacy, often called systems or institutional advocacy, an advocate takes up many cases as one representative unit and tries to alter the practices that produce unfair outcomes for battered women as a group. My mother, who has been engaged in both forms of advocacy since the mid-1970s, defines the difference this way:

When I advocate for an individual woman, I am trying to help her overcome the many obstacles on her path to effectively using the courts and police to protect her. When I do systems advocacy, I am trying to build a new path. I come to understand what I need to do in systems advocacy by my work with individual women.

In this chapter, I will offer some observations about the current state of institutional advocacy in the U.S. battered women's movement. Specifically, I want to discuss advocacy efforts to create civil and criminal court responses that effectively protect women who are being battered and to examine our efforts to correct the criminal court system's historic hands-off approach to men who beat their wives and partners.

Almost three decades after the first battered women's shelters opened in the United States, we face a critical juncture in our work as advocates. As our programs and agendas for social change become mainstreamed into the legal system, we risk losing our most powerful tool—our position of solidarity with women who are beaten. Today, advocates witness alarming numbers of battered women being arrested for assaults that, given a slightly different set of circumstances, would be hailed as acts of heroism. The legal system has reluctantly granted us interventions that gain control over offenders. However, in many communities, advocates are not positioned to argue that applying those strategies to women who are battered and fight back neither protects public safety nor meets any reasonable standard of justice. Women are being charged with child neglect for failing to stop their batterers from using force against them. New laws require shelter advocates to report women for child neglect when they fail to stop their batterers' use of violence and are unable to leave them. At the same time, judges grant unsupervised visitation to men who have brutally assaulted their children's mothers, but judges themselves are not charged with failure to protect children. More and more women are being aggressively prosecuted for crimes committed on behalf of drug dealers who regularly beat them. Immigration policies are changing—for example, the 1985 marriage fraud act and H1 work permit rules—and making foreign-born women more vulnerable to their partners' violence (Dasgupta, 1998). Finally, shelters once open to all battered women are increasingly screening out "inappropriate" women from their life-saving resources. These are not problems that cannot be overcome or transformed, but doing so requires a critical examination of our present course, a more sophisticated understanding of how institutions—such as the legal system—continuously reproduce relationships of domination between men and women, and a commitment to finding new ways to stand in solidarity with women.

I was asked to write this chapter because I have been around since the earliest days of our collective work. I have been a part of the Duluth Domestic Abuse Intervention Project, the most often cited

example of an effective, locally organized, criminal justice reform effort. I have also had the opportunity to visit similar projects in the United States and abroad to learn about their successes and frustrations in using the legal system to protect women from continued abuse. These experiences give me an insight into our history that can be important for those who are working to move our collective efforts forward. Still, I am limited in my experience, both personally and politically. A chapter such as this should be written by a group of advocates from different states, representing different communities. As I describe the history of advocacy, I will use terms such as *we*, *us*, and *our* as if there were a universal "we," but there never was. I use these terms to represent the social movement of the 1970s and 1980s, in which women worked toward common goals, even while holding different views on how to reach those goals.

The Early Years of Institutional Advocacy—The 1970s

The women who organized the first shelters for battered women described themselves as advocates. The term *advocate* means mouthpiece; it connotes one who speaks for or takes up the cause of another. The *others* in this context were women who were being beaten by their husbands, lovers, or partners. The notion of speaking out was a core theme of the women's movement, the same movement in which local women's groups opened shelters and articulated a message to a community that was alternately half-hostile and half-listening. However, we did not use the term *advocate* to distinguish between those who were beaten and those who fought for new institutional responses to battered women, particularly because many advocates themselves had experienced violence in their lives. As advocates, we intended to stand in solidarity with shelter residents. Working at a shelter did not so much require a college degree as a willingness to speak out in often hostile institutional environments. We hoped that battered women differentiated the role of advocates from the role of social workers or other professionals who managed their situations as cases. By the 1970s, social workers had long left their radical roots and were fully entrenched in the institutional processes of regulating and managing the lives of poor people and, in particular, the lives of poor women. As advocates, we claimed the role of articulating the needs of women to the system, not the reverse.

Social movements are characterized by the changes they demand in their formative years. The women's movement in the United States was preceded by over a decade of progressive organizing by black civil rights activists to strike down the Jim Crow laws, organizing by migrant farm workers to get decent wages and health protection, organizing by welfare recipients to get rid of patronizing vendor payments and secure a guaranteed annual income, organizing by Native American activists to assert tribal rights as sovereign nations, and organizing by antiwar protesters to end the draft and the Vietnam war. Many early women's advocates had worked in or were heavily influenced by these struggles.

As women filled shelters to the rafters, they told their stories. Women were devastated by the personal betrayal of their abusers but perhaps equally harmed by the seemingly endless ways that police officers, clergy, welfare workers, judges, family members, landlords, attorneys, and therapists found to blame them for their partners' violence. Advocates heard the same stories in every state. Of course, every story had its parochial twist, but the overarching theme of community collusion with batterers was starkly visible. Like activists in all of the progressive social movements of the 1960s, we sought a paradigm shift. We wanted practitioners in agencies that battered women needed for protection to refrain from finding fault with the victims and instead to understand and eliminate the social facilitators of this violence. We wanted to train the eye of scrutiny away from a woman's so-called "healthy" response to being beaten, on to both the abuser and the institutional practices that failed to help women.

Our demands as a social movement emerged from what women needed: They needed to be safe. Women needed exceptions to the legal aid rule that determined eligibility through the family's income level. Women needed new welfare intake rules that recognized their need to hide from the father of their children. Women needed police to keep records of repeated calls to their homes. To control the use of violence against them and their children, women needed a revision of most of the social service system's rules. In a sense, we were breaking new ground. We were using legal strategies inspired by Thurgood Marshall and other civil rights activists, but at the same time, we were trying to alter the case management practices of the court and human service systems. This dual role of outside agitator and inside reformer characterized our early years of advocacy.

When we listened to a woman's experience of being beaten and then turned with her to the legal system for help that was not forthcoming, her anger became ours. Although this empathy with women was seen as unprofessional, in those days being called unprofessional was not an insult; we had no desire to be professionals. In fact, many of us were glad someone noticed the difference. We were also labeled man-haters, a name that struck a more divisive cord among us. For some, it was not much of an insult, although it seemed unfair that our indignation over men beating women was interpreted as *our* problem with men rather than men's problem with women. Nevertheless, some women felt that the accusation questioned their loyalty to their sons, fathers, and husbands. Our critics often coupled these accusations with claims that we were all lesbians, unable to get a man, biased because we had been in bad marriages, or alarmists because we had not yet healed from our personal traumas. The list of what made us biased—and, by default, made the practitioners objective—seemed endless, and it was a powerful tool of resistance to our efforts. The accusations eventually fueled divisions in advocacy organizations and added to the complex set of circumstances in which many activists stepped back and stopped critiquing institutional collusion with batterers. Still, although the seeds of division were already being sewn, so, too, were the fundamental principles of good advocacy. The notion of basing our critique on the experiences of real women was fully entrenched by the late 1970s. Our strength at the state legislatures, with the media, and in efforts to counter bogus research lay in our connection to what was happening to women and our willingness to speak out.

Some workers in the movement identified themselves as feminists, but feminists hardly constituted the majority of volunteer and paid staff. It was a personal commitment rather than a political ideology that inspired large numbers of women to start and maintain local shelters. Many workers in the movement had themselves escaped violent partners or were still living in or attempting to leave violent relationships. Others were daughters, sisters, or mothers of women who had been or were being beaten. Middle-class, working-class, and poor women all joined the working committees and carried out the work of the newly organized shelters. The presence of so many women who had used these systems enriched our movement. Whereas many white middle- and working-class feminists offered a political analysis important to our work, those same women tended to be somewhat naïve about how the state regulated the private lives of women. The term *feminist* was used mostly by white women who offered an important gender analysis to our work. Progressive African, Native, Asian, and Latin American women in the movement were less likely to use the term *feminist*. Nevertheless, women of color brought a deeply historical and far less naive understanding of relationships of domination and exploitation—and, correspondingly, of the pitfalls we would face in using institutions of social control to benefit women.

Progressives in the movement offered a crucial analysis of the violence we all abhorred, but because they did not make up the majority of workers, they did not control the movement's politics. This broad spectrum of movement workers was not unanimous on how to talk about families, marriage, and women's roles within those institutions. We did, however, agree that—contrary to what was portrayed in Hollywood and women's magazines, in romance novels and from the pulpit—women were not safe within the family setting. We agreed that community agencies responsible for

controlling criminal and antisocial behavior made the wide-spread abuse of women possible, and even worse when they engaged in practices that either ignored violence or treated it as a symptom of defective relationships. Practices that assumed that violence was the result of a relationship gone sour were particularly problematic because of the resulting intervention activities that focused on changing women. These practices were not simply misguided or ineffective; they were often dangerous. We perceived safety as every woman's right, as the goal of our work, and most important, as the responsibility of the community to ensure. Safety was to this social movement what liberation was to the larger women's movement.

In response to the specific needs of women entering shelters, we developed legal avenues of protection in both civil and criminal courts. A number of activists argued that pursuing civil remedies to this violence undermined our long-term goal of getting the police and court systems to view domestic violence as a serious crime against women. However, some civil solutions, such as court restraining orders, held great promise for women who needed immediate state intervention with "teeth" that achieved the same level of relief afforded by a divorce without the long, drawn-out process. On the criminal side, we pushed for greater enforcement of criminal statutes, which had, for almost a century, been ignored when the offender was the husband or lover of the victim.

Seeking a Civil Remedy

In 1976, the Pennsylvania Coalition against Domestic Violence became the first advocacy organization to approach its state legislature for a civil relief tailored specifically to the needs of battered women. Within 5 years of the coalition's success, more than 30 other states had passed legislation allowing courts to grant immediate restraining orders; among other protections, these orders could exclude an abusive party from the petitioner's home. Few people working in courthouses and advocacy programs today are aware of the historical significance of this accomplishment. For more than 10 centuries, women in Western society futilely sought and went without state protection from the violence of brutal husbands. By the late 1970s, we had garnered the political strength and the social consciousness to undermine the husband's "king of the castle" privilege. Women could now tell their story in a courtroom and if a judge were convinced, by a preponderance of the evidence, that she was being physically or sexually abused, the judge could order the man to leave his home and have no contact with her until the court lifted the order. This achievement is on par with the victories of the first wave of feminists, who struggled for almost a century for the right to divorce, sue for custody of our children, use birth control, and vote.

The protection order replaced the old peace bond and divorce restraining order. It was more powerful—most states made the violation of a protection order a misdemeanor—and gave police the authority to arrest violators without requiring women to return to court. In average-size cities such as Minneapolis, Minnesota, literally thousands of women filed for this protection every year, and hundreds of men were arrested for not obeying the orders.

Criminal Intervention Strategies

Activists in the battered women's movement were deeply conflicted over an agenda for criminal system reforms. Yet we did find common ground in the problems women faced as cumbersome and adversarial criminal court system slowly processed their abusers' cases. We knew it was not in the best interests of women to have laws that effectively required them to arrest their abusers, so we advocated for—and achieved—police authority to arrest in misdemeanor cases without witnessing

the assault. We knew that taking part in hostile court actions against their abusers was dangerous for women, so we successfully argued for several evidentiary rule changes, as well as police documentation practices that gave prosecutors the ability to bring the victim's story into the courtroom without relying exclusively on her testimony.

Women wanted and needed many things from the justice system, including police protection, orders for their abusers to leave them alone or even leave the house, limits placed on their abusers' contact with them, financial help from him or the state, freedom to stay in their own homes safely, and a way to make abusers' contact with children safe for both the women and the children. Moreover, some women wanted the most hotly contested and controversial of wishes: someone to help him change.

Few women said they wanted their abusers punished, jailed, or put in prison. Most battered women saw imprisonment as a last resort, whereas advocates were more likely to pursue jail as an intervention goal. However, even many advocates recognized jails or prisons as hostile to women and felt that little was to be gained by sending men already fully engaged in anti-woman behaviors into an environment that would only reinforce their hatred of women. Many activists were reluctant to adopt a strategy that used imprisonment against men who were already overly criminalized in our society. Not surprisingly, Native American and African American women offered particularly strong arguments for alternative strategies.

As advocates, we had all seen or heard police officers, prosecutors, probation officers, social workers, or judges shake their heads sympathetically and say, "she's just not ready to testify," "she's reluctant," "she's still stuck in the honey-moon phase," or "she's too dependent on him." While we relentlessly educated professionals in training sessions and court-house hallways about the personal struggles of battered women, we also tried to maintain the premise that the problem lies not in a woman's response to being beaten but in the community's response to the beating. Adhering to the notion that women's experiences should form the foundation of our agenda, we asked a fundamental question. Why would a woman who is being punched by her husband take an adversarial action against him that (a) will take up to a year to resolve; (b) will likely result in her being cross-examined by a lawyer who will try to make 12 perfect strangers think that she is an evil, wicked, lying, wretched woman; (c) will focus exclusively on the violence in this one incident and rule as irrelevant the countless blows, insults, threats, and disloyalties she has endured over the years; (d) may result in him being sent to jail—but probably will not; (e) may result in him being sent to a batterers' group that he will hate and probably not finish; (f) may result in him being fined by the court—a fine he could coerce her into paying; and (g) will very likely not penalize him if he fails to follow through on any of the court orders that presumably protect her?

We pursued an agenda of criminalization, not because women in shelters were saying, "I want my partner prosecuted," but because many activists believed that men would not stop battering women until the community thought of and treated doing so as a crime. We knew that no group of people who systematically dominated others quit doing so because of a spiritual or ethical revelation. Historically, excessive power—the freedom of dominators to act without consequence—has only been curbed by the oppressed who organize to take it away. Our strategy was inspired by the assumption that to make wife beating a crime would profoundly alter the premise of male dominance in marriage. Prosecuting an individual batterer does not necessarily protect the woman he is beating. In fact, sometimes, she becomes subjected to even more intimidation and abuse. Pursuing a criminal agenda meant using individual cases to make a social point. We tried to create some safeguards so that this agenda would not be used against women, but even from the beginning, we faced an uphill battle. When we criticized the almost universal problem of low conviction rates, some prosecutors—instead of improving investigations and police evidence gathering—responded by criminally charging women who refused to testify or who changed their testimony when subpoenaed to testify against their wishes. Today, many advocates have lost sight of this history, and they join other practitioners

in viewing the primary barrier to holding offenders accountable as the failure of women to cooperate with prosecution efforts. Criminal consequences for individual men who batter—prosecution and convictions—have become goals of advocates, and many of us see battered women who do not share our enthusiasm for this presumed deterrence strategy as problematic. We label them as reluctant, in denial, recalcitrant, recanters. Note that using the legal system to right a historic wrong is rarely free of risk to those whom the reformed laws are intended to protect.

Eventually, efforts to enhance the state's control over offenders translated into laws that expanded police powers of arrest, strengthened a prosecutor's ability to present evidence, and allowed jailers to hold suspects longer. This type of reform is typically supported by the political right, not people of color, progressives, and/or feminists. We pursued every reform effort only cautiously; as I mentioned earlier, each gain has itself been used against some battered women in ways we tried, but were unable, to avoid.

Training and Conversion Efforts

In the late 1970s and early 1980s, on the heels of new legislation, we had the notion that if we trained practitioners to understand the new laws, things would change. We put together training packages—for police officers, social workers, therapists, doctors, judges, and anybody who would let us into their training rooms. I still remember every detail of the first training I did at a police station. In 1977, we had successfully lobbied the Minnesota legislature to pass a law saying that if, during their investigation, police officers reasonably established that one adult household member had assaulted another, the officers could arrest and charge the suspect without the victim initiating the legal action. However, 6 months after its passage, advocates from every shelter in the state were reporting that the new law was rarely used. Police were still asking women at the scene of the assault if they wanted to arrest and prosecute their abusers. Women, of course, continued to say, "No, just get him out of the house."

It was common in those days for us to train in a group. Usually, one woman went as the expert and gave a speech full of statistics and the feminist analysis of battering. Then, three or four other women—the "victim's panel"—talked about their personal experiences of being abused. The expert speaker got dressed up and carried a briefcase. If she had been battered, she would not necessarily talk about it. The other women dressed innocently—no low-cut blouses or tight pants. We all tried to look very heterosexual, because police and others in the system had branded us as man-hating lesbian radical feminists who had been turned off men by some bad experience with a guy. We even stooped to coaxing pregnant shelter workers into accompanying us on these training sessions to improve our image.

On this occasion, in August 1978, I got dressed up as the expert. Three former residents of the Duluth shelter, all of whom had called the police within the past year, dressed innocently. We went off to the police department for 2-hour training, having spent the early part of the day drinking coffee in the shelter lounge and talking with four or five of the current residents, discussing exactly what the police needed to hear. We planned for me to talk for about 20 minutes on the new arrest law and the "dynamics" of battering. Specifically, I was to say that women who lived with men who battered were not sick, crazy, masochistic, or products of bad families but were being controlled by violence and constrained by the inadequate backing of police and the courts. Then, each woman was to talk for about 15 minutes about the kinds of violence her husband used against her and the impact that the police response had on her and her husband. Then, we would open it up for questions.

The speech would open their minds, the panel their hearts. On leaving, we would know that, through our efforts, the police had seen the light and the state— instead of women—would start to

take responsibility for arresting men who battered. We were all nervous but determined to do our task well. When we arrived at the police station, the desk sergeant directed us to a basement training room and said "Good luck" as we turned to the staircase. I remember thinking, "How nice." Downstairs, the training officer introduced us as "the girls from the shelter" to 25 or so uniformed officers, and we began.

I started by answering the question police always ask: Why do women stay? About 5 minutes into this little speech, an officer named Tommy Cich—a name etched into my memory—raised his hand and said, "I'll tell you why *these* women get hit—they let their alligator mouths outrun their hummingbird brains." I was a bit shocked, but I said, "Thank you, Officer Cich, for that analysis. Mine was slightly different," and I went back to my planned remarks. Then, another officer raised his hand; I ignored him, but he spoke anyway. "You know, there is something about a battered woman that just makes you want to hit her." For the second time in as many minutes, the room filled with laughter, and I found myself at a complete loss for words. I finally blurted out in a high-pitched tone, "Well, let's take a short break here, and you boys can all go get yourselves a cup of coffee!" I motioned to the victim panel, which looked as stunned as I felt, and we slipped off to the women's toilet. The Duluth Police Department in 1977 did not boast a large women's restroom with several stalls. Instead, the women's restroom was a converted closet with a stool in the middle and a tiny sink off to the side. Nevertheless, we hovered around the toilet and said, "Now what?" I remember one woman asking, "Why do they hate us so much?" None of us attempted an answer. None of us knew what to do, nor did we want to try anything. So, we walked out the back door, drove back to the shelter, called the desk sergeant, who no longer seemed so nice, and told him we had left.

Advocates from shelters across the state spent the next few years subjecting themselves to these types of training experiences. We quickly learned how to make witty comebacks to officers who acted like they had been recruited from caves. We occasionally converted an officer or two to be sympathetic to the plight of beaten women. Almost every shelter found a couple of allies in its local police department: someone they could go to with complaints. In some cities, police chiefs agreed to ongoing training programs for officers. Several departments ordered their dispatchers to make calls from the shelter a top priority for sending a squad car. In city after city, police became active participants in the increasing number of task forces and commissions addressing the problem. Nevertheless, none of these accomplishments seemed to substantially alter the way that police responded to calls. In fact, many of us felt that our newly formed cooperative relationships were drawing us into the police way of thinking more than we were persuading them to ours.

Eventually, we recognized the futility of these educational efforts. We began to understand that patriarchy is not simply a mind-set or just a function of attitudes—patriarchy is a practice. We needed to change it at the level of practice. This realization led to the development of criminal justice reform projects in cities across the United States and Canada. These projects were marked by the attention their organizers paid to drafting and lobbying for the enactment of procedures and policies that defined what practitioners could and could not do when responding to cases involving women abuse.

Intervention and Coordinated Community Response Projects—The 1980s

Every community has its own advocacy story. No single strategy was employed by everyone, but innovators created common visions for those of us who attended the growing number of regional and national gatherings. Seattle and San Francisco developed early prosecution programs. The state of Oregon took the lead in requiring police to make an arrest when violence reached a certain level. Pennsylvania shaped the dual track agenda of civil and criminal interventions. Courageous lawsuits

against police inaction in New York, California, and, later, Connecticut, gave countless advocacy programs access to police training rooms for the first time.

Advocates in Duluth, who organized the first community-wide intervention project, capitalized on the work of dozens of other programs when defining their multi-agency approach to intervention, and they introduced some of their own innovations. They organized a local effort to implement legal strategies conceived at state, regional, and national gatherings. Most state domestic violence coalitions had already obtained new arrest laws, civil protection legislation, and welfare regulations. Duluth's contribution was organizing a project with advocates at the center of a planning and implementation strategy for law enforcement, courts, and human service agencies, responding to the mounting criticism of inadequate protection for battered women. We met with policy makers from key intervening agencies and somehow convinced them to let us help write a comprehensive policy for their agencies on responding to domestic violence cases. Toward that end, we called a series of small interagency meetings to work out the overlap in policy language, and ultimately, we became the central group encouraging interagency relationships for cases involving domestic violence. We immersed ourselves in the intricacies of case processing and, by so doing, learned to stop pointing at practitioners with poor attitudes and a lack of understanding about battered women and focus instead on the institutional work routines, policies, and procedures that produced an inattention to women's safety.

From the 911 dispatcher to the probation officer, scores of system workers—representing agencies from federal, state, county, or city government—will act on one woman's case before it is closed. Each action taken, beginning with that call to the police, is an opportunity to centralize or marginalize women's safety. When Duluth advocates started raising questions gleaned from the reality of our own and other women's lives, we were brought deep into the daily workings of the justice system. We began to take note of literally hundreds of institutional steps used to process a case while listening to women's stories, observing courtroom procedures, riding along with police, and attending meetings between women and prosecutors. We found opportunities to enhance women's safety in dispatch and patrol response procedures, booking procedures, and bail hearings; when decision were being made to prosecute, defer, or drop a case; during pretrial maneuvers, trial tactics, sentencing hearings, and revocations of probation. We proposed changes at every stage of a case's journey through the system. We proposed new legislation, new notions of practitioners' job duties, new department policies, new interagency protocols, and new administrative forms. Although never instrumental in achieving landmark legal decisions, we were pioneers in fighting for their enforcement, and we succeeded in rearranging how the system processes each aspect of a case. In doing so, we carved out a role for ourselves that few grassroots groups before us had done.

This intervention model eventually became known as a Coordinated Community Response (Shepard & Pence, 1999). In 1987, the Hilton Foundation awarded close to a million dollars to a national judicial organization to coordinate an intensive summit of interdisciplinary teams from all 50 states. After the 5-day conference, teams returned home with the message that effective coordination should be spearheaded by community councils and that the judiciary should play a key role in organizing those councils. Advocates should be present at the table, but not in the central, agenda-setting role that Duluth and other grassroots groups had envisioned. Coordinating councils proliferated, and advocates became increasingly marginalized in identifying problematic practices in a community. Even more significantly, the agenda of change focused more on increased efficiency, arrests, and convictions than on critiquing the impact of institutional responses on the safety, autonomy, and integrity of battered women.

While "systems-driven" reform efforts were taking shape, shelter and nonresidential advocacy programs were maturing in several unfortunate ways. Urban programs started placing their workers into limited and specialized roles. Some advocates were restricted to accompanying women to civil

protection court—day after day, month after month—or to working the criminal court, or to finding housing. Such a development has many implications for our effectiveness. First, advocates began to talk about women in noticeably different ways. Opportunities for advocates to problem-solve larger issues disappeared as administrators in the increasingly stratified workforce took on the roles of agency spokespersons. Without full responsibility, advocates lost the ability to respond fully. Second, a growing attraction to being professional left fewer opportunities for shelter residents to have meaningful ways of joining the struggle. Finally, funding relationships started to shape advocacy programs in several problematic ways. Foundations and local government funding sources began to link dollars to units of services provided. Women coming into shelters became clients, advocates became counselors, and the distinction between the shelter programs and the institutions that regulate women's lives became far less pronounced. The federal government finally supported institutional advocacy on a large scale in 1994 with the passage of the Crime Bill's Violence Against Women Act. However, grant guidelines funneled a substantial amount of Violence Against Women Act funds through police and prosecutors, whom they required to collaborate with local advocacy programs. In some communities, local advocacy programs received subcontracts from the police or prosecutors' offices, but in other communities, the police department or prosecutor's office built its own advocate staff positions into the budget. In cities and towns across the country, advocates started being managed by or working directly for the very agencies we had originally organized to change.

The crux of advocacy is identifying the site of problems and the standpoint from which to articulate and pose solutions to those problems. An advocate, therefore, places herself at the position of interaction between the battered woman and the system and makes her agenda the problematic ways in which the woman experiences that interaction. This standpoint of advocacy is unattainable when the advocate has only partial loyalty to the woman. Advocates must offer absolute confidentiality, a clear commitment to the safety needs of a woman, and the ability to speak out on behalf of women without risking reprisal—conditions that do not exist when we merge with the institutions that we are committed to changing.

Advocacy in the New Millennium: Reclaiming Our Roots

I want to propose five concrete actions that can return advocacy programs to our more radical roots while still capitalizing on our growth of the past three decades. I offer each of these proposals as a point of departure—an action plan that should quickly transform our waning attachment to the viewpoint of women and, in doing so, map out a new course of advocacy for the next decade.¹

Build critical reflection into the structure of advocates' work. At the core of my proposal is increasing an advocate's ability to develop critical perspectives about her work. This program will be successful if advocates can nest their efforts in the larger political understanding of violence against women and move away from atomized tasks. Advocates from all around the country complain about how little time they get to think. Their activities on behalf of battered women seem to take them from crisis to crisis. As a result, advocates rarely get the chance to pursue theoretical questions that arise from their work, scrutinize the fundamental philosophies of their programs, debate policy issues, or link domestic violence work with other oppressions in society. Nor do they get the space or time to acquire information that is vital to connecting theory with practice. This lack of opportunity to think critically makes advocates fall into traditional and fragmented work patterns, lose their connection to women's realities, and prioritize their tasks according to bureaucratic expediency. We can take several simple steps to recapture our perspective. First, schedule regular discussions—at least every 2 months—for advocates and battered women to think through issues they are facing. Second, assemble a video and article library to expose workers to new ideas for ending oppression from a

broad range of progressive efforts. Finally, set aside at least a half hour of every staff meeting for one advocate to summarize an article or documentary and lead a short discussion on its local implications.

Build community-organizing activities into advocates' job duties. Ultimately, we must guarantee a battered woman's safety *within* her community, not away from it. The community is a battered woman's life source; removing her from it may be a temporary solution to her problems but never a permanent one. The success of the battered women's movement, therefore, hinges on changing minds and society. Organizing communities must become central to our advocacy work. However, in the melee of our frenetic activities to ensure the safety of individual battered women, we have increasingly ignored this basic understanding. Even when we recognize community organizing as an important part of our program, most of us do not quite comprehend what it entails, nor the skills it requires. We must acknowledge community organizing as the complex activity that it is and prepare ourselves. The work of transforming our communities is the work of all women, including battered women. It is our community and, therefore, our historic task to change the conditions that make women unsafe in their homes. Again, simple steps will make this a reality. Every advocate should attend at least one community-organizing training a year. We should restructure women's groups to introduce ways for battered women to organize around their common problems, which means that group facilitators should plan to spend more than 2 hours a week in each group. Every group should lead into subsequent sessions to act on an issue, and women attending the groups should be provided with the basic resources of community organizing, such as paper, stamps, and transportation funds.²

Give battered women and advocates decision-making control over the work methods used by advocacy programs. The battered women's movement was founded on the reclamation of decision-making power by the women whose lives were affected by program policies. Over time, most programs abandoned their efforts to include battered women's opinions and voices in the decisions being made on their behalf. The same thing eventually happened to advocates, as programs moved from cooperative management structures to increasingly hierarchical ones. It is time to reverse this condition. I propose that each program develop a decision-making committee in which battered women occupy prominent positions, holding veto power over every proposed policy. The decision-making tree might even allow advocates who work closely with battered women to have a central role in developing program policies. Ultimately, the reference point of all policies would be the interests of battered women.³

Strengthen the collective advocacy efforts of progressives in the community by linking the anti-violence work of marginalized groups. A significant problem of the contemporary battered women's movement is that it has drifted away from other types of violence against women, as well as the oppressions under which other marginalized groups struggle. Unless we understand the relationships between various social oppressions, our movement runs the risk of working in isolation and perhaps even in opposition to other social change campaigns. We can overcome this by developing an accountability committee made up of community members and activists from other progressive groups working against oppression. This committee would not only help the domestic violence program make decisions but also act as the watchdog of official institutions such as the courts and police. Thus, if a judge makes a decision that endangers a woman or her children, the committee—rather than a "special interest program"—would assume the responsibility for public confrontation. Today, advocacy programs have been reduced to the status of special interest groups, separated from the concerns of the larger community. An accountability committee could create connections among progressive organizations to enhance our collective work toward a society free of relationships of domination and deepen our commitment to the whole experience of women.

Rebuild our programs to minimize our dependence on institutions that subjugate women. It is impossible for us to be truly free of the influence of institutions that produce and maintain patriarchal privilege. We can, however, be far more conscious of how our relationships to our funding sources and other

institutions that manage women's cases might subvert our ability to stand in solidarity with battered women. The first step to reclaiming our grass roots is to ensure that every community's advocacy program for battered women is independent from local law enforcement and criminal and civil court systems. That does not mean we cannot work cooperatively with court-employed victim assistants, nor that we compete with staff in other institutions for the role of victim advocate. It simply means that we must be clear about the differences between people who help manage victims' participation in legal proceedings, such as prosecutors, and people who are mouth-pieces for the goals and needs of battered women. The second step is to set standards for fund raising that give our relationship with battered women priority over our financial stability. The politics of money plays out differently in each state and philanthropic setting. However, we collectively face similar challenges in our approaches to federal funding. We must not have unspoken agreements, if we get money from funding sources, to not speak out about their failures to protect battered women. State and federal sources—the largest being the U.S. Department of Justice—now provide some of the most influential advocacy programs in the country with significant financial support. Yet we are almost silent on the Justice Department's role in increasing the vulnerability of immigrant and undocumented women to abusive partners through their immigration policies, practices, and laws. We have mounted no unified voice against the failure of the Justice Department to offer guidelines to prosecutors on working with women living under the control of drug dealers—women who are easy game for major convictions in federal court. We have no national plan to confront the dismal charging and conviction rates of prosecutors charged with upholding the law on reservations and federal lands. I only mention these as examples of how subtle collusion can be and how easily the system co-opts our voices. The decision to apply for and accept funding must always be accompanied by an analysis of how a funding source contributes to women's vulnerability to male violence. Although we are not obliged to be penniless by taking a position of only accepting clean money, we must not be silent about funders' institutional practices that are harmful to battered women.

Conclusion

Today, we are miles away from where we started. Although we are weaker in some ways, we are stronger in others. We have established a foundation of important legislation, we enjoy more resources and a more diverse leadership, we have more experience, we have a more sophisticated understanding of how institutions affect our lives, and we have greater access to inner chambers of power. Nevertheless, we must actively pursue an agenda of reclamation if we are to continue to be a force of liberation for women who are battered. The suggestions I have made for immediate actions toward reclamation are only starting points. As we discuss the possibilities in our state coalitions and local programs, a more contextually appropriate course of action will emerge.

Thirty years ago, we faced incredibly hostile reactions to our insistence on the most basic protections for women: sending a squad when she calls or arresting men who brutally beat their partners. Because of our work and the important and courageous work of allies in the system, these institutional responses are now normal. However, these institutions are still the guardians of men's power over women. Our role is never to help the legal system manage cases or women's lives—it is to continue to make women's real experiences visible and to make women's safety a goal of legal intervention and the responsibility of the community. We must resist the forces that swallow up social movements and their transforming agendas.

Notes

¹ A special thanks to Shamita Das Dasgupta who helped me think through these five points and eliminate others that would have cost so much money as to further compromise our autonomy.

² A wonderful resource for thinking like organizers in a women's group is *Training for Transformation: A Handbook for Community Workers* by Anne Hope and Sally Timmel. This manual can be ordered from the Grailville Art & Bookstore, 932 O'Bannonville Rd., Loveland, OH 45140, 1-888-683-2302.

³ In 1990, when the Domestic Abuse Intervention Project faced the problems discussed here, we adopted such a decision-making tree. To obtain a copy, write to DAIP, 202 East Superior Street, Duluth, MN 55802.

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