

Rethinking Domestic Violence

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Our society has created an environment where beating women and children and violating their civil rights are acceptable. In fact we have actually created an industry that is the violence against women movement. This movement thrives on building “safe houses” and places of “retreat” to protect victims, as opposed to enforcing “on the books laws” against the men who abuse.

The 1970s ushered in the epitome of misogyny with the development of facilities to protect women from violent men. As well as brutalizing and maiming women, violent men in the United States kill three women each day. That’s more than we were losing in the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq combined. Although we don’t acknowledge it, this is War.

A few years ago, the Governor of Illinois signed legislation increasing protections for domestic violence victims. The bill allows courts to order the abuser to wear a GPS tracking device as a condition of bail. The legislation was sparked by the murder of a woman whose ex boyfriend shot her, even after on two separate occasions he had been arrested and prosecuted for violating a restraining order. Similar legislation has since passed in many states.

In 2009, the Suffolk County, New York, Legislature voted eighteen to fourteen to create an online registry of convicted abusers. But a veto of the measure was inspired by the County Executive who claimed the bill was “unnecessary.” The Retreat, a safe house for women and children in Suffolk County, and the Suffolk Coalition Against Domestic Violence also denounced the bill as not necessary. Often legislation to protect women and children from violent men is met with “yes but” objections and resistance, especially from those feminists, sometimes called “protectionists,” who choose to hide women away as opposed to changing the system that imprisons them.

A too large faction of the Domestic Violence industry is more involved with raising money, gathering volunteers, and building safe houses than with solving problems or empowering women to take care of themselves. By hiding women and children away, we are certainly not fixing the problem, as can be seen by the latest statistics showing more and more retreats are being built as more and more women and children are being abused.

Instead of being overly concerned, as we currently are, with the rights of men who abuse, we should begin to look at this problem by thinking outside the box, with a fresh perspective, with an egalitarian attitude, and with better ideas for aiding the women and children.

We have semi-effective measures that work, using GPS and/or registering convicted abusers online in order to track them. However, these practices are not a panacea, as proven by the previously mentioned escalating numbers.

Why not consider the obvious? Why should women and children be carted away, bleeding and bruised, often in the middle of the night, while violent men stay in the family home, resting comfortably, perhaps beer in hand, watching television, and showing absolutely no remorse? By

anyone's standards this is not equality of justice. If a man were to beat up another man he would be arrested. However, beating a woman is tolerated. We hide the women away so abusers can't find them. It's absolutely outrageous.

Why not use these "safe houses" to board the men. They could be put on work-release and equipped with GPS devices, allowing them to go to work each day while being monitored. They would then be responsible for supporting their families, and at the same time be charged room and board. We could also be sure they were taking care of themselves in such ways as doing their own laundry and preparing their own meals.

If judges and/or offenders had such a choice, offenders could avoid jail and still be held responsible for their violence. Furthermore, convicted batterers could keep their jobs, pay child support, and avoid incarceration without endangering their victims. Additionally, judges would be more inclined to impose meaningful sanctions. It would also save hundreds of thousands of dollars on prisons.

The United States is spending close to six billion dollars every year on Domestic Violence. This covers housing, counseling, medical expenses, etc. These monies would be much better used if we implemented stronger sanctions against the men who batter. Meanwhile, our criminal justice system exacerbates criminal behavior and contributes to its prevalence by its failing policies.

Of course details of a new program would have to be worked out. We need to put our heads together for a new Domestic Violence approach, a policy grounded in equality, to insure that battered women are treated the same way as are victims of stranger violence.