



'You only get what you fight for': Understanding the Backlash against the U.S. Battered Women's Movement

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In this chapter Dragiewicz provides an empirically grounded analysis of why, despite major gains in the understanding of, and actions against, violence against women there has been a reaction against such progress. Recent years have seen the rise of an intensely complex gender politics, focused on the rights of parents and family violence, among other issues. Alongside a more polarised politics it seems that apparently 'liberal' gains that promote intolerance of violence are being eroded or challenged by a more aggressive reaction. Despite the pronounced advocacy and commitment of those working in battered women's refuges Dragiewicz finds a 'reaction and against the reaction' where earlier advances in the understanding of what was needed to label violence against female partners as a crime and policy responses to promote safety have increasingly seen vocal attacks. The chapter provides not only a critical criminological reading of the need to reassert the importance of feminism within a project of uncovering social harms and violence, but also an analysis of the complex gender and community politics shaping debates about how to deal with violence against women.

I understand that if I resist what I'll get back. I get that, I don't feel like that's a conflict, that's just what it is (R2).ⁱ

Introduction

While feminist demands for sweeping social changes in order to ameliorate men's violence have been largely ignored, efforts to institutionalize emergency assistance for abused women are pervasive and highly visible. In the United States, 'awareness' of the problem is nearly universal. Politicians from both major parties regularly declare their condemnation of domestic violence.

University students don ribbons and paint T-shirts to ‘break the silence’ and show solidarity with survivors. The Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) passed in 1994, outlined a federal policy agenda on the issue. Feminist concepts, language, and concerns, largely drawn from survivors, have been institutionalized in law and discourse, even if ‘not to the degree sought by groups of activists involved in the process’ (Dobash and Dobash 2001: 189). In this context, it is easy to forget that violence against women was not always such a high profile issue. For critical scholars, it is easy to become mired in theoretically-based critiques of contemporary responses to violence and abuse, resulting in disengagement from action on these key issues.

Drawing upon interviews with 35 advocates working within the mainstream battered women’s movement I identify foundational themes for theorizing about the backlash against the battered women’s movement in the United States. The advocates’ accounts of support for and resistance to work to end violence against women provide a rich source of information about what has changed, and what has not, over the past forty years. The respondents’ narratives point to key pressure points in the struggle to address violence against women as well as the need to expand the focus of contemporary criminological theory beyond the social construction of deviance and responses to it. We also need to study and organize around the backlash: the response to the response.

Literature Review

Critical criminologists have devoted considerable attention to previously under-studied social harms. They have dedicated sustained effort to understanding how repressive forms of social control are deployed and maintained through formal institutions, from mass media to law, and informal relations, such as those between peers and family members. Violence against women has been an important focus for such work. Critical criminologists have made important contributions to theory and methodological improvements to measuring violence and abuse (Dobash and Dobash 2001; Godenzi et al 2001; Mooney 2000; Schwartz and DeKeseredy 1997). Significantly, critical work on woman abuse has long questioned the extent to which it is actually a deviant behavior. Rather than being a manifestation of deficient collective efficacy, woman abuse, and the failure to intervene in it, may in fact be an expression of social organization and

hegemonic community values (Godezi et al 2001; DeKeseredy and Schwartz 2009; Mooney 2000). In other words, men's violence against women may represent a transgression of some social norms *and* a reassertion of others (Dragiewicz 2008).

Despite critical contributions to the field, violence against women has sometimes been awkwardly positioned within the scholarship on deviancy (Carrington 2002; Dragiewicz 2010). Scholarship on the social construction of crime has targeted the gratuitous criminalization of deviance and delinquency in the service of conservative politics. As Carrington (2002: 126) has argued, early radical theories were 'primarily interested in the expressive, rather than the instrumental qualities of deviance'. While the shift to a focus on the social construction of deviance through criminalization was a major contribution to critical criminology:

Only the experience of those doing the criminalising (i.e. the state) seemed to matter. Within these kinds of critical frameworks, the lines between the victim and offender were almost meaningless. The offender was the victim of some overarching structure of class, sexual, or racial exclusion, domination, repression, or oppression. (Carrington 2002:127)

In other words, many criminologists emphasized the process of criminalization over victims' experiences of crime. Criminologists' accounts of male offenders as feckless victims of an authoritarian state are remarkably similar to those produced by antifeminist men's groups who complain about persecution based on false accusations of violence (Dragiewicz 2008, 2010, 2011). Even more problematically, a similar narrative is articulated by male batterers who have had repeated encounters with police (Buchbinder and Eisikovits 2004) and men who murder intimate partners (Dobash and Dobash 2011). Work with survivors and advocates in the mainstream battered women's movement points to the need to turn our attention to the response to the naming of men's violence against women as deviant, the criminalization of the deviant act, and responses to both.

Battered women's movement work to improve the application of existing laws to men's violence against women sits uneasily alongside critiques of the prison-industrial complex. Feminist work

to draft new laws has undoubtedly contributed to the more generalized encroachment of state surveillance and control (Currie 1990; Gottell 1998) and violence against women has historically been used to justify funding for law and order initiatives (Pleck 1987). Perhaps the most blatant recent example of this is U.S. justification of the war in Afghanistan as being about rescuing women from patriarchy (Ayotte and Husain 2005). The unintended consequences of the institutionalization of criminal justice responses to woman abuse appears to be the disproportionate criminal justice system involvement in relation to women and men of color and poor women and men (INCITE! 2003; Wood 2005).

Despite these serious problems, the battered women's movement has had a profound impact on problematizing men's violence and inadequate responses to it. Naming men's violence against women as a social problem has been no small feat. Naming the violence has posed a preliminary challenge to patriarchal norms. While this is a necessary first step toward changing the culture that produces violence, there is more to be done. Accordingly, I propose that we need to expand our focus beyond the social construction of deviance, and responses to it, and study the reaction to that response. Indeed, the criminalization of different types of behavior by different groups has been taken up very differently. Lamenting the creeping encroachment of the neoliberal capitalist State doesn't really get at these differences, nor do descriptions of the disproportionate impact of law and order campaigns on the most marginalized populations. In the current cultural environment where the normative position is ostensibly anti-violence, critical analysis of the dynamics of the backlash against the battered women's movement can help to illuminate the abstruse values and structures that continue to engender violence.

Historical Developments

Just as the context of individual acts is required to understand the nature of violence and abuse, consideration of the political history of the battered women's movement is a prerequisite to understanding critiques of contemporary responses to woman abuse. The earliest theories of woman abuse were developed out of the dual practices of feminist consciousness-raising and supporting battered women in the absence of a State response. As such, early feminist theories

about woman abuse were empirically grounded in the experiences of many women with abusive men.

Feminism facilitated the conceptualization of men's violence against women as a social problem requiring a collective response. One early article in a medical journal put it succinctly, 'Assertion of women's rights has created the climate for exposure of the previously hidden facts of wife abuse' (Gayford 1975:196). From the beginning, multiple varieties of feminist theory proposed various relationships between patriarchy and men's violence against women (Schechter 1982: 40). Accordingly, there has never been a singular, monolithic feminist theory of woman abuse. Nor has there been a feminist consensus on the one best approach to ending violence against women. However, early work in the battered women's movement did focus on a few key areas. When Del Martin wrote *Battered Women* in 1976, she concluded:

After having reviewed all the supposed options open to battered women, I have reached the conclusion that the creation of shelters designed specifically for battered women is the only direct, immediate, and satisfactory solution to the problem of wife-abuse. Victims and their children need refuge from further abuse; any other consideration-such as the need for counselling or legal advice- is of secondary importance. (Martin 1981: 196)

This analysis was based on the realities of the time. Systems which did not yet recognize men's violence against female intimate partners as a public social problem could not respond appropriately to the violence. Reflecting on the beginnings of the battered women's movement, Schechter (1999) wrote:

Because so few institutions heard us in those early days - or took the violence seriously - we in the battered women's movement worked as outsiders. Our resources were almost non-existent. We started to house women on our pluck and courage. A shelter for battered women was a totally new and creative phenomenon that we designed, managed and maintained, and that required a tremendous amount of energy to sustain. Our early advocacy for battered women with the police and courts led us

to be sharp critics of victim blaming and unjust responses and to design new and ingenious legislative and administrative innovations with our allies.

Schechter (ibid) identified three priorities of the early work: '1) securing shelter and support for battered women and their children, 2) improving laws and the police and court response, and 3) changing public consciousness about violence against women through education'. The battered women's movement has made remarkable progress toward meeting these goals over the past 40 years.

As Tierney (1982: 207) observed, 'wife beating has received increasing attention in recent years, not because it has become more widespread, or because the public has become more concerned, but because social movement organizations (SMOs) have effectively mobilized resources to aid battered women'. Services designed specifically to meet the needs of battered women developed out of the particular constellation of needs shared by many survivors. Although early services were provided by organizations like 'suicide or mental health crisis hotlines, rape crisis centers, organizations aiding families of alcoholics, or homes for transients, now independently operated battered women's organizations are the norm' (Tierney 1982: 208).

Significantly, Tierney (1982: 208) noted that '[s]ince 1975, the movement has made substantial headway in three areas, besides emergency shelter: legislation, government policy and programs, and research and public information'. Publications from 1976 identified twenty resources for abused women. By 1978, The U.S. Commission on Civil Rights identified 300 such organizations (ibid). This growth coincided with the influential 'second wave' of the women's movement. Despite the proliferation of resources in the 1970s, efforts to secure a federal law on 'domestic violence' were unsuccessful at the time. However, funding for services to battered women was already beginning to be incorporated into government programs like Victim Witness (ibid).

In 2010, The National Network to End Domestic Violence (NNEDV 2010) identified 1920 local domestic violence programs in the U.S. NNEDV's 24 hour census, conducted on September 15th 2010, gathered information about these programs. The study had a 91% response rate and found

that 70648 victims were served in one day while an additional 9541 requests for help went unmet due to lack of resources and 60% of the unmet requests were for shelter. In addition, local programs answered 22,292 hotline calls and the National Domestic Violence Hotline answered 1,230 calls.

Domestic violence organizations reported feeling the effects of the recession and concomitant retrenchment of public spending, with 77% of programs reporting funding cuts during 2010. However, funding from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act also benefited 854 local programs, allowing them to maintain or add 1384 victim advocacy jobs during the same year. Despite budget cuts, 82% of programs reported an increase in demand for services in 2010 (NNEDV 2011).

NNEDV's census points to both the rapid expansion of services for survivors of violence and the persistent need for these resources. Contemporary efforts to end violence against women comprise disparate approaches and institutions. As in the beginning of the movement, practitioners, scholars, attorneys, and survivors continue to differ on the best ways to prevent and respond to violence (Schechter 1982: 40). There continues to be considerable debate and disagreement among feminists over the efficacy and desirability of involvement from State institutions including, but not limited to, the criminal justice system (INCITE! 2003). One part of this debate is over the concept of backlash.

Theorizing Backlash

Backlash has been alternately defined as 'resistance to attempts to change the status quo' (Sanbonmatsu 2008: 634) and efforts to roll back past changes (Faludi, 1991). Mansbridge and Shames (2008: 625) argue that 'When a group of actors disadvantaged by the status quo works to enact change, that group necessarily challenges an entrenched power structure'. Accordingly:

movements do not advance in linear progression; they are marked by successive periods of definition, progress, consolidation, backlash, redefinition, regrouping, new

support, and on and on. A movement is a shifting, ever-becoming entity, not an event that is won or lost (Sancier 1992).

Backlash is a response to a threat to existing hierarchies of power and privilege rather than simply the ebb and flow of change (Mansbridge and Shames 2008). In this sense, antifeminist backlash is not just a ‘countermovement’ as some have portrayed it (Crowley 2009). This conceptualization misses the key component of power that shapes the emergence of backlash as well as its effectiveness. Accordingly, the ways in which power is deployed in backlash efforts is of central interest.

There is growing body of scholarly work on antifeminist backlash (Chafetz and Dworkin 1987; Chesney-Lind 2006; Chunn et al 2007; DeKeseredy 1999; Dragiewicz 2011; Faludi 1991; Laidler and Mann 2008). This literature describes backlash tactics, attempts to assess its impact, and counters inaccurate claims. To date, however, the concept of backlash has been loosely defined and minimally theorized in criminology. Although feminist criminologists write about backlash, we rarely define what it means. With the exception of a few critiques of the conceptⁱⁱ, the interdisciplinary work on understanding the particular nature of backlash in order to counter it comes mostly from organizational psychology, and more recently, political science (Mansbridge and Shames 2008).

Sylvia Walby (1990:23) wrote, ‘few writers on gender consider issues of historical regress in the position of women...or even the social forces which oppose advance....I think this is a serious gap in feminist scholarship. Men and some women have actively and effectively opposed feminist demands’. To date, little empirical consideration has been devoted to the specific dynamics and effects of backlash against the changes wrought by the battered women’s movement. Jalna Hanmer (2001: 9) noted that, ‘resistance to identifying violence against women as crime, as serious, as worthy of agency intervention, has been examined in health, housing, social services and policing services. Resistance by informal contacts, and the actions taken by the women and men involved, has received less attention’.

Woman abuse and state responses to it are located at the intersection of profound cultural anxieties about crime, law, gender, economics, knowledge, and the family. The research literature on woman abuse has grown exponentially since the beginning of the battered women's movement. Elizabeth Castelli (2004: 2) described the landscape of gendered violence as, 'the myriad structures of domination and exchange that sustain frameworks of violence: global and local economic inequalities, patterns of (forced and voluntary) migration, transnational trafficking in small arms, institutional and ideological structures that continuously legitimate violence as the default response to a situation of conflict or hostility'.

Despite anti-feminist objections to 'the politicization of violence against women by feminists', there would be no scholarship on 'domestic violence', no prosecution of wife beaters, no shelters for battered women and their children, and no consideration of woman abuse at custody determination if not for feminist activism. Calls for the imposition of gender-blind approaches to violence in the name of 'neutrality' or 'fairness' ignore centuries of patriarchal law and culture that condone violence as a justifiable, if sometimes illegitimate means of controlling women. Furthermore, especially at the present time, they arise in opposition to the effective deployment of feminist conceptualizations of woman abuse as a gendered problem intricately tied to power differences between women and men. As Dobash and Dobash (2001: 187) wrote:

Perhaps the most important first step in the process of social change is the very act of creating new visions and thinking new thoughts. ...Thus, it is important to acknowledge that while may now be generally agreed that it is unacceptable for a man to use physical or sexual violence against his female partner, this is, in fact, an extraordinary departure from thinking of the recent past. This is a change of great magnitude.

Although a minority of scholars argue that patriarchy and gender are not important factors in violence against women, this is a marginal position. Discourses from human rights to public health have institutionalized conceptualizations of violence as highly gendered.

Methodology

This study used semi-structured interviews to gather information about support for and resistance to anti-violence work. A convenience sampling method was used, with invitations to anti-violence advocates to participate extended online via listservs for prevention advocates, anti-violence advocates, scholars, and lawyers. The invitation encouraged recipients to forward the call for volunteers to anyone else who might be interested in the study. Volunteers were interviewed until responses reached thematic saturation. The sample consisted of 35 interviews conducted and transcribed between 2007 and 2009. Interviews ranged from fifty-two minutes to over two and a half hours, with an average of approximately an hour and a half. Transcribed interviews were coded using MAXQDA, a qualitative software analysis package.

The average age of respondents for this study was 59, and the age range was from 30- 67. Thirty one of the respondents were Caucasian, and four identified as mixed race, including a mix of Caucasian, Asian, Native American heritages. Thirteen respondents had a Juris Doctor, fifteen had Master's degrees, five had PhDs, two had some college, and one had a university degree and some graduate classes. Respondents were from twenty different states. For respondents who reported salaries, the annual average was \$49,000. Two respondents reported being retired and working on a volunteer basis. A few respondents noted that their income fluctuates from year to year due to consulting work. Thirty of the respondents were female and five were male. Seven respondents identified as lesbian or queer, and 28 identified as straight or heterosexual. Respondents averaged 22 years in the field, ranging from nine years to more than 40 years. The sample included clinical law professors, practicing attorneys, battered women's shelter staff, state coalition staff, national advocacy organization staff, university antiviolence program staff, child counsellors and therapists, government anti-violence program staff, and independent advocates. Most of the respondents had had more than one job working on anti-violence projects prior to their current position.

Findings

'Yeah, there's resistance' (R7).

While the larger study looked at a range of issues related to support for and resistance to battered women's movement work, this paper is focused on advocates' understandings of the backlash against their work on violence against women. In response to a question about whether respondents experience resistance to their antiviolence work, the most common response was 'absolutely'. While all respondents indicated experiencing or observing some forms of resistance to their work, the level and impact of resistance varied widely according to respondents' specific professional locations. Respondents differed about whether there was a change in the level of resistance to their work, with some remarking that resistance had increased and others describing changes in the ways that resistance is manifested.

Respondents identified six key types of resistance: victim blaming; discrediting women/feminists; individualisation; changing the subject; and direct attacks and threats.ⁱⁱⁱ These types of resistance are related to advocates' perceptions about the factors contributing to the backlash. The picture of backlash that emerged from the interviews was remarkably clear. Advocates described a rising tide of awareness of 'domestic violence,' generally understood as men's violence against women, and increased condemnation of it. As one advocate put it, 'We used to be pushing everybody and there are a lot of people we don't have to push anymore' (R1). At the same time that awareness and disapproval of men's violence against women were on the increase, pressure points emerged where resistance to anti-violence work was especially fierce. For example, 'It changed over time. But I would say that with specifically my own evolution, our evolution as a program, overall I'd say in the world as I see it today, I see support for anti-patriarchal work has been an issue. Constantly getting worse' (R5). In other words, the resistance that this advocate saw was focused on recognition of patriarchy as contributing to violence rather than resistance to recognizing the violence itself as a problem. Another respondent said of resistance, 'it is more frequent, it's worse, there are more tactics' (R8).

Respondents' explanations for why there has been a backlash against battered women's movement work reflect the two definitions of backlash described above. Some respondents saw the backlash as efforts to roll back advancements in the protection of abused women. Others saw the backlash as a constantly evolving effort to prevent change in the first place.

Backlash as effort to maintain the status quo

Advocates' descriptions of the backlash as efforts to maintain the status quo included a few primary forms: resistance to challenging individual authority figures; resistance to cultural-level changes to prevent violence; and resistance to the deep implications of work to end violence on a personal level. The first variation on this theme is resistance to anti-violence work that challenges the authority of high profile or powerful community members. For example:

I was getting some flak in the legal community before I left because in the last year [I was there], my office represented thirteen victims whose perpetrators were attorneys in the community. That nobody else would take. And of those, three of the victims were from the same attorney. And I've represented sports figures, caught flak for that, represented against attorneys caught flak for that, represented against doctors in the community caught flak for that, against military officers caught flak for that. (R2)

Challenging authority figures came at a cost for some of the advocates, including facing harassment from individuals and retaliation from professional organizations. However, many of the respondents observed that pushing the boundaries of standard practice is a necessary part of systems change.

Another thing I think we need to accept is that probably three times out of five, force is the way that they're going to decide they have to change. It's awful, those of us that have been around counselors a lot like to think of ourselves as enlightened, know that shouldn't be the case, but the fact of the matter is in many institutions in our criminal, civil justice system and law enforcement etcetera, that's what it takes. You have to do this so that's what it takes (R2).

Another example of efforts to maintain the status quo can be seen in this response in which the individual implications of social change is considered:

I really think that the reason why is that people are too afraid of what would happen if they really looked at making a change in things. Sort of grab them with the

underlying issues that... would... result in some pretty fundamental changes to how we order our lives how we relate to one another, you know the personal relationships... and that's scary to people. I mean that calls into question who makes decisions and how we make them and how we co-raise our families and you know, all those things come into question.... And I also think that people want to make a distinction between us and them. And that if you sort of accept sort of my view of what causes violence against women that you don't get to say it would never happen to me... I think that that's really sort of the pearl behind, sort of the crux of why people are like this (R9).

In this example, the respondent identifies interpersonal implications of social change related to anti-violence work. Resistance to the very social changes sought by feminists is identified as a source of backlash. The respondent also mentions individual level resistance to thinking about the nature and causes of violence against women. Victim blaming explanations for woman abuse enable the maintenance of belief in a safe, just world. In other words, if violence against women is the victim's fault, it can never happen to me.

Backlash as efforts to reverse changes that have been made

Other respondents described backlash as an effort to roll back the changes that have come about as a result of battered women's movement work and the institutionalization of anti-violence policies. For example:

Yes from the batterer's perspective and in terms of what about the resistance in men I think it's that there is, and it's hard to articulate, but it's like for a millennium men have had the premier spot in the universe and all of a sudden women are starting to be vocal and heard and dealt with so there is this whole bunch of people going, 'wait what about me?' and 'I used to be first and I want to be first again!' and so there's this whole pushback from the patriarchy on that one. The other one is a pushback on women who are finding their voice and I think that's where it is coming from (R1).

This example points to resistance to women as authorities on violence and abuse, whether as survivors or scholars. The legitimization of women's authority as producers of knowledge about violence and abuse was a frequently mentioned location of backlash efforts. One advocate explained resistance to changes in the common knowledge about violence against women this way:

Because I think we are winning. That's why I think these vitriolic pockets are popping up is because we are winning and that's what causes resistance and backlash and if we weren't winning we wouldn't be having all of this crap. Some resistance is just bureaucratic crap but the fathers' rights things and the custody stuff is all because we have been getting our way and we are getting people to understand and if not the word feminism at least the concepts of it and we settle for that because at least it's something (R1).

This quote references organized resistance to feminism in general and battered women's movement work in particular as a response to the institutionalization of feminist understandings of violence.^{iv} Many respondents named areas where state responses to woman abuse needed improvement, including multiple critiques of the unintended outcomes of recent changes. However, the overall impression was that at the very least, battered women's movement work had forced fundamental changes in influential discourses on woman abuse.

Whatever it may be, the more effective, when you make good laws that are there that require them to do the right things in the court systems, the better we get, the more effective we become, the stronger the resistance gets. I think in the past we challenged, we got some good things through and we challenged things to some extent and we got people angry and upset enough the politicos thought they needed to make changes. Then they settled right back down into the same comfortable groove but the really fairly thin veneer over it of change. And now we're getting to the point where we're starting at least in [this state], and I think nationwide too, threatening them with you really are going to have to fundamentally change your system, and that's bringing about a huge lash out, which really we should expect (R2).

As this respondent indicates, advocates aren't surprised that the call for system change provokes a strong reaction. Rather than being paralyzed by reports of incomplete reform, unintended consequences, or efforts to circumvent the changes that have been made, advocates reported the need to keep working. In fact, despite occasional reports of increased crankiness due to certain forms of resistance to their work, many respondents indicated that it had made their work stronger and smarter, and had reinvigorated them for sustained struggle.

Discussion

The interviews illustrate that despite the ascendancy of awareness of violence against women, competing interests and values have shaped the assimilation of this problem into the machinery of social control. Martha McMahon and Ellen Pence (2003: 71) remind us that:

...much of the battered women's movement's work has been to challenge the social sanctioning of male violence in the private sphere and to end the protections afforded such male privilege by the criminal justice system and other institutions. Every effort we have made has met with resistance and claims that we seek to establish a double standard. We have consistently fought against such efforts to obscure women's realities.

Efforts to resist feminist-informed approaches to violence against intimates are not unique to the United States. Similar campaigns are underway in many countries, and a scholarly literature is emerging on the situation in Australia (Flood, 2010; Murray and Powell 2009); Canada (DeKeseredy 1999; Dragiewicz and DeKeseredy, forthcoming); India (Basu 2011) and the United Kingdom (Hester 2009).

While 'governments typically try to reintegrate disaffected groups or their leadership into the power structure and direct them to less politically disturbing forms of behavior' (McMahon and Pence 2003: 62), feminist efforts to 1) secure shelter and support for battered women and their children, 2) improve laws and the police and court response, and 3) change public consciousness about violence against women through education have all been at least partially accomplished

(Schechter 1999). Because of the success of efforts to de-normalize men's violence against women, at least at a surface level, the backlash against the battered women's movement has been forced to use more subtle and indirect tactics. Advocates' stories can help us to identify the contradictory social values around violence that we need to understand to craft more effective campaigns to end violence in the short and long term. In addition, advocates' stories can sensitize us to similarities and differences in these efforts across time and place.

Castelli (2004: 2) has observed that, 'theorizing always takes place in time and space, situated in history and in particular places of enunciation'. In the contemporary context, efforts to reclaim the ground ceded to the battered women's movement are well underway. As scholars who study crime and responses to it, we can contribute to addressing the backlash as well as the violence itself. This preliminary study points to some key themes for theory development on backlash as efforts to preserve the status quo and roll back the changes that have been accomplished. Despite the tendency for feminists and other critical criminologists to engage in merciless critiques of our always imperfect engagement with the State, the study of backlash can help us to understand what is working and to what extent.

Anti-violence advocates are doing what critical criminologists say we want to do: foregrounding the experiences of those most affected, developing theories of violence that stand up to the test of reality, and engaging with the people who can actually affect systems. This work is rife with perils and possibilities, but it is essential given that so many women utilize state resources, especially the police (Hutchison and Hirschel 1998). Blaming advocates, activists, or scholars for failing to end men's violence against women inside of forty years or for the unintended outcomes of their work is not the most useful focus for our energies. Neoliberal notions of equality and neutrality have definitely been taken up by backlash forces, but the impurity of critical or feminist theory or discourse is not the primary cause of violence against women. Likewise, the perfect words or theory will not end violence against women. Any tool that we devise will undoubtedly be used against us. This does not mean that we can throw up our hands and walk away.

Directions for research and policy

The findings from this study suggest several directions for future research. First, comparative research on the dynamics of backlash against groups doing antiviolence work with different groups of women and men is needed to develop a more comprehensive understanding of backlash. Different communities experience resistance in very different ways. Second, theory testing will be necessary to see if the themes emerging from this study apply on larger scale. Third, respondents working in different institutional locations described different dynamics and effects of backlash, so future studies could focus more closely on the particular dynamics of each field. Finally, future studies should compare resistance to antiviolence work to the backlash against other social movements to promote a better understanding of their similarities and differences.

The study findings point to the need for continued systems advocacy even as work to reform and change social systems moves forward. The reality is that many social institutions affect abused women's lives and their ability to leave abusers, protect themselves and their children, and support themselves. While critique and caution around the institutionalization of antiviolence work is productive and necessary, these can contribute to theoretical paralysis and inaction. As early advocates noted, meeting the basic safety and survival needs for abused women and their children continues to be of paramount concern. It is neither timely nor safe to move on from this basic function of advocacy for abused women. Finally, it is clear that continued research and public education efforts are needed to promote a more nuanced, holistic understanding of violence as an abuse of gendered power as well as a location for the expression of race and class inequality. Respondents articulated a changed landscape wherein violence against women is denounced, but there is still plenty of work to do to prevent it and respond effectively.

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ⁱ All identifying information has been removed or disguised to protect the privacy of the respondents.

ⁱⁱ See Chunn, Boyd & Lessard (2007) and Newson, (1991) for critiques of the concept of backlash.

ⁱⁱⁱ For an in-depth discussion of these themes, see M. Dragiewicz (forthcoming).

^{iv} The “custody stuff” referred to is in reaction to legal requirements that violence and abuse be considered at custody determination. These policies were created at the behest of feminist antiviolence organizations which were concerned about women being forced into joint custody arrangements with abusers.