

Myths

Battered Women are Masochistic

This is a popular myth, which is supposed to explain why the woman stays in the relationship. Traditionally, “good wives” were taught that the way to stop assaults was to examine their behavior and try to change it to please men: to be less provocative, less aggressive, and less frigid. There was no suggestion that provocation might occur for other than masochistic reasons, that **aggressiveness might be an attempt to ward off further assault, and that frigidity might be a very natural result of subjection to severe physical and psychological pain.** Because of the prevailing stereotype, many battered women begin to wonder if they are indeed masochistic.

Battered Women Are Crazy

This myth is related to the masochism myth in that **it places the blame for the battering on the women’s negative personality characteristic traits.**

Minority Group Women are Battered More Frequently than White Women

White women and women of color alike told similar battering stories and experienced embarrassment, guilt and the inability to halt their partner’s assaults.

Battered Women are Uneducated and Have Few Job Skills

The education level of the women interviewed in the research study ranged from fifth grade through completion of professional and doctoral degrees. They were homemakers, teachers, real estate agents, lawyers, psychologists, nurses, physicians, businesswomen, politicians, and successful corporate executives. Even though successful, they often stated they would give up their careers to eliminate the battering. **Thus, their self-esteem was dependent on their ability to be good wives and homemakers and was not well integrated with their successful professional activities.**

Once a Battered Woman, Always a Battered Woman

This myth is the reason why many people have not encouraged women to leave their battering relationships. They think she will only seek out another violent partner. Women in the study tended to be very careful women the remarried. Many older women did not remarry, preferring to remain single.

Battered Women Deserve to Get Beaten

The myth that battered women provoke their beatings by pushing their partners beyond the breaking point is a popular one. The stories of the women in this study indicated that batterers lose self-control because of their own internal reasons, not because of what the women did or did not do. No one could deserve the kind of brutality reported.

Battered Women Can Always Leave Home

In a society where women are culturally indoctrinated to believe that love and marriage are their true fulfillment, nothing is lost by pretending that they are free to leave after being assaulted. Psychological dependence and learned helplessness, couple with the

start realities of having no place to go and no means of survival, weigh heavily against her leaving without **assistance**.

This final myth is perhaps one of the most persistent. The question “why does she stay?” re-victimizes by placing the responsibility for the continuing violence onto the victim.

Victims Remain Trapped in the Spiral of Violence Due to a Combination of Factors

- Survival—fear of increased violence if she attempts to leave.
- Economic dependence
- Emotional dependence/identity
- Isolation
- Guilt, humiliation, shame
- Loyalty/responsibility
- Acceptance of violence—sex role conditioning
- Pressure from others—family/religious/society

If you or someone you know has experienced an unhealthy relationship, contact:

PLU Voices Against Violence Program

A project of the Women’s Center

Jennifer Warwick, Victim Advocate

(253) 538-6303

www.plu.edu/~voices



Adapted from material provided by the YWCA of Pierce County

