

**Writing Wrongs: Archival Theory, Therapeutic Writing, and the Proposed Child
Abuse Survivor Archive at the University of Manitoba**

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A Thesis

Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies

in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements

for the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

Department of History (Archival Studies)

University of Manitoba

Winnipeg, Manitoba

© June 2005



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**Writing Wrongs: Archival Theory, Therapeutic Writing, and the Proposed Child
Abuse Survivor Archive at the University of Manitoba**

BY

Julianna Trivers

A Thesis/Practicum submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies of The University of

Manitoba in partial fulfillment of the requirement of the degree

Of

Master of Arts

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Abstract

Archives have had difficulty acquiring records of controversial subjects such as child abuse that society has deemed shameful and often prefers to ignore. Institutional records do contain information on child abuse, but it has not usually been made available to archives or sought by archives. Furthermore, institutional records often reflect more the perspective of the social workers or other professionals who have created them than the people they are trying to help. The silence and secrecy surrounding child abuse are also mirrored by the meagre store of personal records in archival repositories that document abuse. However, child abuse survivors have begun to speak out about their experiences. In addition, counselling professionals have recognized that writing about their experiences is a powerful method by which survivors can come to terms with abuse they endured as children. The proposed Child Abuse Survivor Archive at the University of Manitoba would serve as a place where child abuse survivors could deposit personal accounts of their experiences, which would also be available for historical and other research purposes. This thesis examines the proposed archive as an example of an archival response to a controversial subject that is difficult to document. It discusses the topic in light of previous efforts to document other controversial subjects such as prostitution and homosexuality. The thesis contends that greater openness in society about addressing child abuse, the emergence of therapeutic writing in counselling literature, and changes in thinking about archival theory offer intellectual support for this distinctive archive. The thesis suggests that the proposed archive challenges conventional archival theory in ways that are necessary if controversial and difficult to document subjects are to be addressed by archives.

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Acknowledgements

Thanks to Brenda and Darrell, whose willingness to talk records with a fledgling archivist pointed me in the direction of social work records as a potential area of study.

Thanks to my advisor, Tom Nesmith, for his patience, encouragement, and insight.

Thanks to friends and colleagues who patiently endured monologues on the progress of my thesis.

And most of all, thanks to my parents, my siblings, and my extended family for their love, support, and encouragement. It is due to them that my acquaintanceship with child abuse and family violence is purely academic.

Introduction

Silent Cries. No More Secrets. Hidden Victims. The Common Secret. Bridging the Silence. Even a superficial perusal of child abuse literature reveals that child abuse is a social problem that is shrouded in secrecy. Child welfare legislation dictates that social welfare and criminal proceedings involving children are closed to the public. This is meant to protect children who have been victimized, but as child abuse literature indicates, it can result in feelings of isolation for survivors of child abuse. What then becomes of society's memory of a long suppressed significant social problem? These and other titles, such as *Remembering Trauma, Memory of Childhood Trauma,* and *Recovered Memories of Abuse* indicate that many think that societal silence about child abuse must be broken. In titles such as *Combining Voices, Breaking Down the Wall of Silence, Children Speak for Themselves, Speaking Out,* and *Fighting Back,* recent child abuse literature points to the fact that healing can be found in speaking out about abuse. Survivors are sometimes determined to break the silence that contributed to their victimization

Society has kept child abuse in the shadows because it is a troubling, horrific phenomenon. But attitudes toward speaking out about child abuse have changed in recent years. Publication of the titles listed above is evidence of the shift in attitudes. In part influenced by the efforts of the feminist movement and the child protection movement, child abuse now has a greater profile in our society. Many now maintain that more open discussion of child abuse will help society to deal with it more effectively. The recent decision to establish the Child Abuse Survivor Archive (CASA) at the University of Manitoba Archives & Special Collections is a further manifestation of this shift.

Chapter one of this thesis outlines changes in attitudes toward child abuse in Canada, in particular, which have made it possible to discuss this problem more openly and thus countenance the creation of an archives of records of the experiences of child abuse victims. The proposed CASA has an important and distinctive mandate. It aims to encourage the creation and preservation of records depicting child abuse from the survivor's point of view.¹ The only records that systematically document child abuse are created by social workers in government agencies. The rise of social history has brought attention to social welfare records for scholars interested in "the lives of stigmatized subjects."² However, historians and others have acknowledged that these types of sources are problematic because they consist of records created by the people administering social welfare. The stories they tell are subject to the case workers' interpretation and bias, in addition to the fact that they are second-hand accounts. Mediated by the record creator, the child's voice is, at best, muffled.

Chapter two examines trends in the history of social work theory and documentation which have responded to this problem and help make possible new efforts to archive personal documents related to child abuse. This chapter discusses the emergence of greater support for increased client involvement in the actual writing of counselling records. This has arisen from the view that such participatory writing has a therapeutic effect. The CASA plan to solicit the recorded accounts of child abuse victims is an expression of this therapeutic view of writing.

This thesis contends that CASA has important implications for archival theory

¹ Shelley Sweeney, Raymond Currie, Tom Nesmith, Jane Ursel, Elly Danica. *"Giving Voice": The Creation of a Child Abuse Survivor Archive at the University of Manitoba*. (Winnipeg, 2002), p. 2.

² Karen W. Tice, *Tales of Wayward Girls and Immoral Women: Case Records and the Professionalization of Social Work*. (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1998), p. 3.

and practice. Chapter three examines this aspect of the CASA proposal. The establishment of the archive raises significant archival questions. For example, the records that would be in the archive are unusual in that they may be created at the initiative of the archive and specifically for the archive, rather than acquired, according to conventional archival practice, after they have been created by others, who may or may not have an archival intention. The child abuse stories will be much like oral histories arranged and conducted by archives, which have not been a priority with archivists for many reasons, including their concern about the effect of archival involvement on their integrity as evidence. Yet, while the CASA child abuse records resemble oral histories in that they are deliberately solicited, and will be first person accounts, their format will differ, since they will not be interviews. These records will also be problematic in conventional archival theory because their provenance will be deliberately removed with the support of the archive. Material will be appraised and, if accepted as archival, all personal identifiers will be stripped from the records.

The implications for archival theory and research in archives of these aspects of the program will be explored in this thesis, as will the role of the appraisal process in addressing these concerns about the reliability and authenticity of the records. The Child Abuse Survivor Archive promises to be a unique bank of information about child abuse. I intend to investigate the implications for child abuse survivors, researchers, and archivists of the unorthodox way in which it will have to be constructed. That such a discussion is possible in archival circles reflects changes in archival thinking that also allow support for the CASA proposal. Recent thinking by archivists and some others about archives encourages archivists to become more involved in the actual creation and

of records than was once generally thought acceptable. This enables archivists to be more effective in responding to the need to document controversial subjects that are difficult to document. This new thinking about archives could help archivists address the challenges posed by such topics. How this challenge has been addressed with limited success within a more conventional framework of archival thinking is discussed in chapter one. That chapter concludes with an introduction to the changing ideas about archives.

This thesis also underlines challenges to conventional archival thinking in another way as well. In recent years, archives have been an increasingly valuable source of information for medical research. Archival material has been used in a variety of ways, including studying past research, trends in demographics, and epidemics.³ A greater understanding of heredity in certain diseases has prompted new uses for archives in helping people compile family medical histories. Important research has also been done on Alzheimer's disease using the archives of an American Catholic religious order. The potential of archives in medical research has not yet been explored deeply. Serving as a repository for accounts of child abuse, CASA, unlike most archives, would be established to address a major health care concern. Indeed, it is likely that few have ever thought that archives might play such a role. Yet, survivors of child abuse could be empowered to

³ For example, Tywana Whorley, "The Tuskegee Syphilis Study and the Politics of Memory," *Archives and the Public Good: Accountability and Records in Modern Society*, ed. Richard Cox and David A. Wallace (Westport, Conn.: Quorum Books, 2002), 165-175; Bertrand Desjardins, Pierre Beauchamp et Jacques Légaré. "Automatic Family Reconstitution: The French Canadian Seventeenth-Century Experience". *Journal of Family History*, vol. 2, no 1 (Spring 1977), 56-76; François Nault, Mario Boleda et Jacques Légaré. "Estimation de la mortalité des adultes à partir des proportions d'orphelins: quelques vérifications empiriques à l'aide de données canadiennes des XVIIe et XVIIIe siècles". *Population*, 41e année, nos 4-5 (juillet-octobre 1986), 749-762. Gari-Anne Patzward and Sister Carol Marie Wildt, "The Use of Convent Archival Records in Medical Research: The School Sisters of Notre Dame Archives and the Nun Study," *The American Archivist* 67 (Spring/Summer 2004), 86-106.

regain health by the knowledge that their stories will not be forgotten, and their contributions to the archive would be used to help prevent future child abuse.

Child abuse is a prime example of a sensitive and controversial issue about which documentation is difficult to find and to archive. By striving to address this deficiency the Child Abuse Archive is responding to a social need by pushing the boundaries of archives to incorporate new kinds of documents into the archival record of our society for new types of social purposes, such as health care. This thesis hopes to show that in order to remain relevant to changing societal concerns, including such controversial and problematic matters as child abuse, archives must be willing to move beyond conventional archival practice, by imaginative and innovative application of archival theory.

Chapter One

Muted Voices: Documentation of Child Abuse in the Historical Record

Within the last two decades, we have become increasingly cognizant of the presence of child abuse in our society due to broad media coverage given to numerous cases, some of which will be examined in this chapter to illustrate how silence and secrecy enable abuse to occur. That this silence has been pervasive throughout our history is evident in the difficulty that historians have encountered in studying the phenomenon of child abuse and family violence. Historical references to child abuse, including those in Manitoba, tend to be limited to institutional or legal records, in which the voice of the victim is muted or absent. Chapter one will explore the reasons why certain societal phenomena, particularly those that are disturbing or controversial, have been scantily documented in the past, and how changing perspectives have brought these deficiencies to light. Finally it touches on the role that archives can play in preserving more inclusive documentation of society.

Occurrences of systematic abuse in religious and government institutions have thrust child abuse onto centre stage of the nation's consciousness. In 1989 the Newfoundland government instituted the Royal Commission on Mount Cashal to investigate abuse that occurred in an orphanage. Similar occurrences have come to light since then, such as in the case of the Duplessis orphans in Quebec. The vulnerability of children is exemplified in the claims of Duplessis orphans, who claim that they were used as subjects in medical experiments.¹

There have been many other instances of abuse that have occurred in institutional settings. In the late 1990s, dozens of people who had attended reform schools operated

¹ William Marsden, "Duplessis orphans call for exhumations," *National Post*, 19 June 2004, A8.

by the Ontario government initiated statements of claim of having been subjected to sexual assaults, beatings, and emotional and psychological abuse by staff and supervisors while residing at the schools from the 1960s to the 1980s.² There have been cases of scandals in religious institutions, and residential schools, too numerous to be detailed here. Canadians have been horrified by the revelations of abuse and victimization of disadvantaged children that has occurred in such institutions.

The world of sports is not immune to abuse either, as evidenced by the case of junior hockey coach Graham James, which rocked Canada's national sport. Scrutiny intensified when Sheldon Kennedy, a hockey player with the Calgary Flames, stepped forward as one of James's victims. Kennedy endured sexual abuse for years because he felt that there was nowhere to turn, a feeling which he carried into adulthood, and which persisted throughout his career in the NHL: "Psychologically he suffered from extreme loneliness. 'I have always felt like I was not normal,' Kennedy told newspapers, adding that alcohol numbed him into a state he learned to think of as normal."³

On January 5, 1997 Kennedy came forward and allowed himself to be identified as one of James's victims. This was not necessary from a legal point of view, but it was very effective in focusing the nation's attention on the scourge of child abuse, because it helped personalize the abuse. Kennedy had initially contacted police in Calgary with his allegations in August 1996. In November 1996, James had turned himself in to the police. He pled guilty to the charges against him.

²James McCarten, "Ontario training schools at centre of abuse claims," *Winnipeg Free Press*, April 14, 2003, A8.

³Laura Robinson, *Crossing the Line: Violence and Sexual Assault in Canada's National Sport*. (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1998), 162.

The disclosure of James's abuses sent ripples of uneasiness throughout the hockey world. Kennedy maintained that others had known of the situation, yet they had done nothing to stop it. Other incidents also came to light, and the Calgary Sexual Assault Centre experienced a dramatic increase in calls from men. As Laura Robinson writes, "Sheldon Kennedy had set the ball rolling. Players and former players were going to police with stories of sexual abuse suffered at the hands of coaches at the minor level."⁴ Kennedy's disclosure of abuse was a necessary step in his own journey to healing, but by breaking his silence, he also reached out to others who had suffered sexual abuse.

According to Robinson, the minor hockey world in Canada is an ideal environment for pedophiles to take advantage of the children within their influence. Teenage boys as young as fourteen are drafted into the major junior level Canadian Hockey League, by teams that may be hundreds of miles from their homes, rendering them vulnerable. This is exacerbated by the fact that their future career rests in the hands of their team and their coach. Robinson observes, "It was up to Sheldon Kennedy himself to take the brave step of coming forward. Had he accepted the tradition of silenced pain that hockey reinforces in players, who knows how long it might have been before we could even get a glimpse of the crisis in our national sport?"⁵

The crippling burden of shame that accompanies abuse makes it very difficult for victims to acknowledge what occurred to them and to speak out about it. Kennedy's story exemplifies the concealment that accompanies abuse. Despite the fact that child abuse is becoming more open to discussion, it remains a phenomenon that is shrouded in

⁴ Ibid., 184.

⁵ Ibid., 210.

secrecy. Like Kennedy, many people only disclose their abuse when they have reached adulthood.

Examples of the sense of isolation that envelops children who are abused abound. The father of one of Graham James's victims wrote: "As parents we believe that our children will always confide in us in their time of hurt or need. Maybe we are being naive. But one thing we have learned is that when your child is being sexually assaulted, don't count on them confiding in you or asking your advice. Maybe it is a feeling of guilt or shame but we think more that it is mental manipulation. They will be brainwashed into believing that they have no friends and not even their own parents care about them."⁶

Sissela Bok informs us that children are particularly susceptible to the lure of secrets: "Few can resist the request for a 'promise not to tell,' least of all when a family member makes such a plea. But an important part of learning how to deal with secrecy is coming to recognize the aggressive intent behind some such requests: the desire to split loyalties, to burden, and to injure."⁷ The isolation that results from injurious secrets within the family is reinforced by the position of the family as a distinct social unit within society.

The sanctity of the family as a private entity, beyond the jurisdiction of outside institutions has been pivotal in the way that child abuse and domestic violence have been perceived. According to Elizabeth Pleck, "The single most consistent barrier to reform against domestic violence has been the Family Ideal--that is, unrelated by nonetheless distinct ideas about family privacy, conjugal and parental rights, and family stability."⁸

The components of the family ideal (which was formed over centuries) included the view

⁶ Ibid., 172-173.

⁷ Sissela Bok, *Secrets: On the Ethics of Concealment and Revelation*. (Toronto: Random House of Canada Limited, 1982), 39.

⁸ Elizabeth Pleck, *Domestic Tyranny: The Making of American Social Policy against Family Violence from Colonial Times to the Present* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 8.

of the home and family as a refuge from the public world--it was seen as beyond the bounds of the public world, a view which still has currency today. Thus, the notion of familial privacy of providing a comfortable and familiar oasis from the outside world, also establishes an environment where abuse can be concealed. Bok explains, "Secrecy may accompany the most innocent as well as the most lethal acts; it is needed for human survival, yet it enhances every form of abuse."⁹

Child welfare legislation dictates that social welfare and criminal proceedings involving children be closed to the public. This is meant to protect children who have been victimized, but as child abuse literature indicates, it can result in feelings of isolation for survivors of child abuse. The implications for scholarship of these strictures on disclosure will be discussed further elsewhere.

Healing can be achieved through speaking out about abuse. Many survivors are eventually compelled to tell their stories. Kennedy kept the secret of his abuse until soon after his marriage when he disclosed his experience to his wife. And once this initial breach of the wall of silence occurred, Kennedy was eventually able to share the story of his abuse with other people in his life, including his coach and his teammates on the Calgary Flames. Part of the impetus behind these disclosures was the desire to prevent what had happened to him from being repeated with others. For example, the birth of his first child motivated Kennedy to speak in the hope that by doing so he could help make the world a safer place for his child: "When my daughter was born, and I thought if anything ever happened to her in the future like what happened to me and I never did anything about James, I'd feel pretty bad about it." Kennedy told the *Globe and Mail*, "I'd

⁹ Bok, xv.

feel like I should have done something."¹⁰ Furthermore, Kennedy's revelations had the effect of inspiring others to begin to take steps to bring their abusers to justice and start on their own path to healing. Yet so insidious is the secrecy and silence associated with abuse, and particularly sexual abuse, that other hockey players, whom Kennedy and police investigators strongly suspected had suffered at the hands of James, refused to acknowledge it.

The ramifications of individual and societal silence regarding abuse of children extend into the future, as historians studying the issue have discovered. There is no doubt that societal secrecy regarding child abuse has had an impact on our knowledge of it, and the documentation preserved in archives about it. Child abuse has been underrepresented in historical scholarship. The reasons for this neglect can be identified by delving into existing research on this and other underrepresented groups and topics. Part of the reason that child abuse has been hidden in the past is the reluctance to face a disturbing subject. Certainly there are other groups and issues which do not receive the same attention as others. In part this has to do with current societal interests and concerns. Traditionally underrepresented groups such as women, the working class, and homosexuals were absent or only just marginal players in history until the appearance of social history in the 1960s. Greater societal awareness of a subject tends to result in increased interest in it by scholars.

One of the possible reasons for underrepresentation of certain groups is that there is a stigma associated with certain topics which may discourage pursuit of them.

Canadian historian Steven Maynard writes of the issues involved in simply being a researcher in a subject area (homosexuality) that is highly controversial. He describes

¹⁰ Robinson, 174.

feelings of trepidation when requesting archival materials which document sexual acts deemed criminal in the court records that form the foundation of his research. Maynard was concerned about the possible negative reactions to his choice of subject, and to himself since his interest in the subject could be construed as an indication of his own sexual orientation.¹¹ Although Maynard was writing in the early 1990s, the current debate over gay marriage indicates that homosexuality is still a controversial subject.

The recent surge of historical study of underrepresented groups has been influenced by postmodernism. Says Terry Cook, "Postmodernists seek, in short, to denaturalize what society unquestionably assumes is natural, what it has for generations, perhaps centuries, accepted as normal, natural, rational, proven -- simply the way things are."¹² Postmodernism has inspired scholars to delve beyond conventional approaches to study aspects of society that had previously been ignored. Great strides have been made in the twentieth century in expanding the breadth of historical scholarship, as evidenced by the rise of social history. Groups which lacked status in society, such as women, children, the working class, and homosexuals are now the subjects of significant historical research. These shifts in scholarship have occurred alongside shifts in social values, and the histories of marginal groups are examined from the perspective of current and what we like to think are enlightened attitudes. Gender relations have evolved and the movement for equality between the sexes extends to striving for more equitable coverage in history. The evolution of a multicultural Canada has improved recognition of minority groups.

¹¹ Steven Maynard, "The Burning of Willful Evidence': Lesbian/Gay History and Archival Research," *Archivaria* 33 (Winter 1991-1992), 197.

¹² Terry Cook, "Fashionable Nonsense or Professional Rebirth: Postmodernism and the Practice of Archives," *Archivaria* 51 (Spring 2001), 24.

Sex is an example of a subject in which increased scholarly interest has unearthed previously unrecognized nuances, thereby changing our perceptions of it. Due to greater openness about sexuality in recent years, it is no surprise that it has become a topic of historical study. Interest in the history of particular subjects arises out of contemporary interests and values. American archivist Timothy Guilfoyle comments, "Scholarly interest in the history of sexuality is also a practical reflection of the increasing prominence and discussion of sexual matters in American life."¹³ Sexuality is now recognized as being influenced by social factors, as opposed to simply being a biological given, and therefore, only of interest within the realms of science and medicine.

Initial explorations in social history in the areas of class and gender served as a foundation for later works on more varied and specialized topics. Maynard notes that the rise of social history in the 1960s and 1970s paved the way for advances in the study of sexuality: "Within social history, the development of women's history was particularly important in sensitizing historians to issues of gender and sexuality, and the impact of the feminist movement made it clear that the 'personal' and 'private' were also political and historical."¹⁴

The idea that many aspects of class and gender are social constructs gave rise to the realization that almost every component of society has an element of construction about it. Understanding more about one phenomenon often builds upon our understanding of other phenomena. Constructions tend to evolve over time, some more quickly than others. They are influenced by various factors, such as economics, world

¹³ Timothy Guilfoyle, "Prostitutes in the Archives: Problems and Possibilities in Documenting the History of Sexuality," *American Archivist* 57 (Summer 1994), 516.

¹⁴ Maynard, 196.

events, changes in science and technology, anything that changes the way we understand and perceive our world.

A contemporary illustration of the evolving social construction of child abuse is a case of an incest survivor seeking redress from her victimization that made headlines in 2003. Changes in societal views on child abuse over the course of her lifetime enabled an elderly woman to reveal (nearly 70 years after the fact) sexual abuse at the hands of an older brother. The assaults began in 1928, when Cecile Ringuette was 7, and continued until she was 14. Commenting on why she kept the abuse a secret for so long, Ringuette said, "It was taboo. You just didn't talk about such things. Everything was supposed to be beautiful."¹⁵ The legacy of the abuse followed her throughout her life, as she endured nightmares, recurring headaches, sexual dysfunction, and a terror of being assaulted again. Prompted by a television program about incest, she sought counselling, and eventually sued her brother. Over Ringuette's lifetime, a shift in the way that our society views child abuse has occurred, which finally enabled her to finally reveal her lifelong secret. In her youth she felt that there was no one she could tell about the abuse, because such things just were not discussed. By contrast, as an elderly woman, television brought the discussion of incest into her home, presenting proof that there is a wider community of people who have endured abuse at the hands of relatives, and presenting counselling as a method of coming to terms with the havoc wrought by the abuse.

Perhaps the most obvious factor in the increased recognition of abuse in this example is the role of technology in spreading awareness about it, thereby reducing the sense of isolation that characterizes the survivor. In this case, television diminished the constraints of geography and of Ringuette's immediate social circle, reinforcing the point

¹⁵ Ingrid Peritz, "She bore awful family secret in silence," *The Globe and Mail*, May 7, 2003, A1.

that she was not alone in her suffering, and there were resources available to help her.

Internet technology further breaks down geographical and social boundaries.

Until the publication of Kinsey's research in the mid-twentieth century, Guilfoyle explains, "Intellectuals and the public considered sexuality to be the subject of biology and the natural sciences. Generally, both groups believed that sexual behaviour was a biological given, uniform across the species and, indeed, all forms of life."¹⁶ This broadened conceptualization of sexuality has given rise to examination of related topics, such as prostitution, illegitimacy, homosexuality and child abuse.

A further factor that complicates historical study of subjects like child abuse and homosexuality is the fact that they have been differently regarded in the past. According to Maynard, this is exemplified by his argument that current understandings of sexual relations between boys and men have changed considerably since the early twentieth century.¹⁷ Homosexuality and child abuse are both issues that are currently quite prominent in our society. The fact that there is so much interest in these topics today is more a reflection of present day societal issues than of concern about them in the past. Maynard notes that, "The identification of the sexual abuse of boys as a social problem is a very recent phenomenon. It has come about not through the efforts of those who obfuscate the issue of men's power by homosexualizing the abuse of boys but through the work of women and men, including lesbians and gay men, to confront child sexual abuse."¹⁸

¹⁶ Guilfoyle, 516.

¹⁷ Steven Maynard, "'Horrible Temptations': Sex, Men, and Working-Class Male Youth in Urban Ontario, 1890-1935" *The Canadian Historical Review* 78, 2 (June 1997), 235.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 235.

There are other influences on historical constructions of child abuse, such as changing views on family life, childhood, and childrearing. These, in turn, were greatly influenced by the prevalence of the Family Ideal. Naturally the influence of the Family Ideal was not without fluctuation, but the general components of it remained consistent over time. In the context of our focus on child abuse, the main components of the ideal were the right to family privacy, parental rights in disciplining children, and the desire to preserve the family. The family idea instilled reluctance to intercede in cases of family violence.

Despite the dominance of the family ideal, Pleck identifies three specific eras in United States history in which domestic violence reforms were attempted. Seventeenth-century Puritan society, which strove to establish a model society to set an example for others, codified family violence reforms. The 1870s saw the rise of a movement through which societies for the prevention of cruelty to children were established. Finally, the 1960s and 1970s saw the development of an ethos which promoted equality and protection of minority rights, including those of children.

In the past, the balance has rested in favour of family rights over individual rights in regard to family violence. Pleck says, "Although abuse has always been separate from correction, the right of discipline has served as a justification for virtually all forms of assault by parents and husbands, short of those that cause permanent injury."¹⁹ Reform efforts directed toward family violence, then, are at odds with the family ideal, as they involve intervention by the public sphere.

While attempts at reform are laudable, it must be noted that views of what constitutes child abuse are socially constructed. For instance, the past few years have seen

¹⁹ Pleck, 9.