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CHAPTER 1

INTIMATE VIOLENCE

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The prevalence of intimate violence has become frighteningly apparent: Current statistical estimates suggest that 28 percent of marital relationships in the United States include incidents of physical violence (Gelles & Straus, 1988; Straus & Gelles, 1990). Further, the rates of dating violence are at least as high (Gelles, 1997). Clearly, the magnitude of intimate violence suggests that a slap, punch, or kick within couples cannot be fully understood solely in terms of individual pathology, though it may be tempting to do so. While individual behavior is certainly shaped by psychological factors, it is simultaneously influenced by social structures such as the family, religion, law, and power relations particular to gender, race, and class. In this way, psychology's focus on the individual, and sociology's focus on groups and society, are both important in coming to terms with the awesome problem of intimate violence.

Consider the following case study of Lisa reported in Barnett and LaViollette (1993):

I believe that you stay with your partner for better or for worse. I didn't know what "worse" was when I made that promise, but I promised. I believe my husband loves me, and I'm starting to believe he could kill me. I'm not sure how long

I should stay and how “bad” is “too bad.” I know I don’t believe I should be hit.

But I do believe if my relationship is a mess, I should stay to help make it better.

(p. 2)

Through her statement, Lisa reveals a discourse surrounding gender and marriage; namely, that it is important to work on a marriage, even if that marriage involves violence. Her experience as an individual is wrapped up in cultural expectations surrounding commitment in relationships. Linking the individual and social structure is important in making sense of intimate violence.

Peace psychology may contribute to understanding and transforming intimate violence because it traverses difficult bounds between individual, organizational, and societal levels of analysis in addressing conflict and violence. At its core, intimate violence rips away security, identity, and self-determination. Intimate violence often centers on power and control over another person. Let’s take a look at the case history of Betty and Henry reported by Barnett and LaViollette (1993):

Betty and Henry were married and had a 14-month-old daughter, Melissa. Henry was self-employed but unmotivated. When Betty’s independence got the better of him, he became abusive. Betty had gone to work on numerous occasions with bruises on her face and arms. For the most part, nobody talked about what was happening. (It is often easier for friends and family to deny abuse, to minimize the severity of discord, and to ignore evidence.)

Betty’s friends and financial security were a threat to Henry. He became more controlling, and he threatened to kill her if she tried to leave. His obsession

culminated in Betty's 2-week "confinement." He stayed at home to watch her. Eventually, he needed money and took her to the bank to make a withdrawal from her savings account. Betty and Melissa escaped to the Long Beach Battered Women's Shelter.

Henry threatened to sue Betty for custody of the baby unless he was allowed to visit her. A third-party visitation was set up by the shelter through her attorney. No one at the shelter felt good about this arrangement, but everyone felt compelled to go ahead with the plan because of the legal ramifications of non-compliance. Betty and the baby were to go to her attorney's office accompanied by a male friend of Betty's (the father of one of her friends). While they were in the parking lot, Henry grabbed the baby and told Betty to get into his car or she would never see Melissa again.

Betty's body was not discovered for several months. Henry was charged with murder. He had taken Betty to an isolated spot in the desert where he beat and shot her. Her body had to be identified by her dental records. Melissa had been in the car.

At Henry's trial, one of his previous wives admitted to the abuse she had experienced at his hands. She was still afraid of him. Henry was eventually convicted of second-degree murder. Betty's last words to one of the authors as she left to meet Henry were: "If I don't come back, it is because he killed me." (p. 49–50)

Nearly 700 husbands and boyfriends are killed by their girlfriends or wives each year,

whereas more than 1,500 wives and girlfriends are killed by husbands and boyfriends each year (U.S. Department of Justice, 1995). Murder constitutes an extreme form of intimate violence: it represents the tip of the iceberg of a problem that is widespread in intimate relationships.

Since peace psychology identifies and promotes conditions that favor human needs for security, identity, and self-determination, peace psychology can and should concern itself with the daunting problem of intimate violence. Research on violence for the twenty-first century must develop a language that adequately addresses *power relations* as they relate to intimate violence. Psychology must be more closely melded with sociology in research on intimate violence. In so doing, we will be afforded the opportunity for a more integrated response to the questions: What are the dynamics underlying an adequate explanation for intimate violence? What can be done to reduce intimate violence?

For more than twenty years, researchers, activists, and survivors have struggled with the dynamics underlying intimate violence. Psychologists and sociologists have contributed to an understanding of intimate violence. In this chapter, I review approaches to intimate violence within the fields of psychology and sociology. I discuss the problems with early research, particularly in the field of psychology. In addition, I examine ways in which dominance and control are central to addressing intimate violence. For the purpose of this chapter, I focus on physical violence among adults. Physical violence is one form of intimate violence along with emotional abuse and sexual abuse. In addition, child abuse within families is a huge problem in its own right. I narrow the focus here not because other forms of intimate violence are less important, but simply to allow some depth in my discussion of this aspect of intimate violence.

PSYCHOLOGICAL APPROACHES TO INTIMATE VIOLENCE

There are a variety of approaches within the field of psychology to intimate violence. In particular, intimate violence has been studied in relation to abnormal psychology and personality theories, behavioral and attitudinal approaches, and social learning theory.

Abnormal Psychology and Personality Approaches

Early psychological research tended to emphasize the unique, abnormal characteristics of individuals who engaged in intimate violence. For example, physically assaultive husbands were deemed sadistic (Pizzey, 1974) or suffering from brain lesions resulting in sporadic outbursts of violence (Elliot, 1977). Sometimes, researchers suggested that battered women were masochistic (Snell, Rosenwald, & Robey, 1964). In part, early research relied on small samples of violent relationships with particularly skewed groups, such as men who had been convicted of assault. And, violence was understood to be a rare occurrence in families. Most of the research, past and present, has focused on violence against women by men in heterosexual relationships.

Within the realm of psychological literature, recent research benefits from the understanding that violence cannot be adequately explained solely on the basis of personality traits. While some researchers still look to personality disorders, they explain only a fairly small proportion, estimated at 10 percent, of cases of intimate violence (Straus, 1980). Clinical research is more likely than survey research to emphasize the characteristics of individuals that might lead to violence. Hamberger and Hastings (1986), for example, suggest that assaultive men may have borderline personalities, they may be anti-social, and/or may suffer passive-dependent/compulsive disorders. In a later comparative study of violent and non-violent men, Hamberger and Hastings (1991) report that non-violent men are more comfortable in intimate relationships and experience greater control over their emotional states. Other researchers report low self-esteem among men

who batter their wives (Neidig, Friedman, & Collins, 1986), as well as feelings of inadequacy and powerlessness (Weitzman & Dreen, 1982). Dutton (1995) finds that borderline personality disorder is positively related to assaultive behavior among men in intimate relationships. He argues that men who experience absent, abusive, or cold parental upbringing develop fear and anger with respect to attachment, resulting in borderline personalities as well as intimate abuse. One exciting area of research in psychology looks at a variety of different profiles of abusers. Dutton and Golant (1995) outline a variety of types of physically assaultive men. One type of physically abusive man they discuss is the psychopathic assaulter who experiences no remorse for the abuse he inflicts and who is often violent outside as well as inside the family. Another type of abuser is overcontrolled, emotionally withdrawn, and passive-aggressive. Finally, cyclical abusers are emotionally volatile and experience an extreme need to control intimacy.

The growing recognition of a variety of psychological profiles of batterers will lead to more sophisticated, and hopefully effective, remedies for violence. In addition, the psychological complexity of battery contributes to sociological research, thereby bridging the gap between psychological and sociological approaches to intimate violence. For example, recent sociological research on the widespread practice of arresting batterers shows that only some types of batterers are likely to be deterred by arrest. Indeed, arrest may provoke further violence among batterers who are not easily shamed and who commit other types of violent acts (Sherman, 1992). In this manner, it is important to combine an analysis of psychological profiles of batterers with deterrence strategies in order to implement effective policies for reducing intimate violence.

Behavioral and Attitudinal Approaches

In addition to considerations of self-esteem, self-efficacy, and personality disorders as contribu-

tors to intimate violence, Riggs and O’Leary (1989) have considered behavioral and attitudinal predictors of violence. They suggest that acceptance of violence, past use of violence, partner aggression, and relationship conflict are important predictors of violent behavior in intimate relationships. Another important behavioral correlate is alcohol consumption. Considerable research has demonstrated a correlation between alcohol abuse and family violence (Coleman & Straus, 1983; Gelles, 1974; Leonard & Jacob, 1988). On the other hand, Song (1996), in her study of wife beating in Korean immigrant communities, found that alcohol consumption had no relationship to rates of violence. Instead, traditional cultural values predicted greater levels of violence. Indeed, the cultural expectations associated with alcohol may have a greater impact on behavior than the drug itself. From his examination of survey, police, cross-cultural, and experimental research, Gelles (1993a) also argues that alcohol does not cause family violence. In particular, cross-cultural and experimental research indicate divergent behavioral outcomes from alcohol consumption. It seems that as it relates to aggression, the effects of alcohol are less physiological than they are based on social expectations regarding cultural definitions of the effects of alcohol. As Gelles writes: “In the end, the social expectations about drinking and drinking behavior in our society teach people that if they want to avoid being held responsible for their violence, they can either drink before they are violent or at least say they were drunk,” (1993a, p. 84).

Behavior is organized and explained in relation to the culture in which it exists. In her work on behavioral cycles of violence, Lenore Walker recognizes that behavioral patterns exist within particular cultural contexts (Walker, 1999). Walker (1979) outlines a behavioral cycle that she calls the “cycle of violence” to explain intimate violence. The cycle includes a tension-building phase, an acute battering phase, and a tranquil, non-violent phase. During the tension-building

phase, the abuser may engage in psychological and/or relatively minor physical assaults. The victim of assault, generally a woman, “walks on eggshells” to assuage her partner and prevent an escalation of violence. Escalation is inevitable, however, and at some point, an explosion of violence occurs, during which time the victim has no control over ending the violence and generally feels trapped. Following the acute battering stage, the abuser is often remorseful and loving in the tranquil phase:

During the third phase, the battered woman may join with the batterer in sustaining the illusion of bliss. She convinces herself, too, that it will never happen again; her lover can change, she tells herself. This “good” man, who is gentle and sensitive and nurturing toward her now, is the “real” man, the man she married, the man she loves. Many battered women believe that they are the sole support of the batterer’s emotional stability and sanity, the one link their men have to the normal world. Sensing the batterer’s isolation and despair, they feel responsible for his well-being. (Walker, 1989, p. 45)

The inherent loss of control of physical safety through the cycle of violence leads to a type of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, according to Walker. Battered women may stay in violent relationships in part because they feel they have at least some control in the situation they are in. Escape would hurl them into the unknown. The psychological effects of the cycle of violence also help explain why battered women kill their abusers. Walker describes Battered Women’s Syndrome as a form of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder triggered by intimate violence in which battered women kill their abusive partners. Walker is quick to point out that psychological dynamics cannot be understood apart from the societal sanctioning of intimate violence and the lack of

adequate protection or response from the state (i.e., police). Battered women are trapped not only in a psychological sense, but also through the lack of support they receive culturally, economically, and from the criminal justice system.

Social Learning

Social learning provides another important area of research into intimate violence. Children who observe violence and/or are victims of violence in their family of origin are more likely than others to engage in violent behavior or to become victims of violence as adults (Herrenkohl, Herrenkohl, & Toeder, 1983; Steinmetz, 1977). In other words, through modeling, individuals may develop an acceptance of, and propensity to engage in, violence (O'Leary, 1993). The effects of witnessing violence as a child are more likely to predict violence for men than for women (Straus, 1980; Ulbrich & Huber, 1981). However, Kaufman and Zigler (1993), Straus (1980), and O'Leary (1988) warn that the effects of observing violence are easily overestimated. Growing up in violent households does not determine that an individual will become violent. As a result, understanding intimate violence must extend beyond an modeling approach.

While research on the psychological processes involved in intimate violence are important, the problem of intimate violence spills beyond individual characteristics and dispositions and relationship conflict into social structure. In order to understand what ties people to violent relationships, it is important to consider societal constructions of the family and gender. To fully explore the structural dimensions of intimate violence, sociological approaches to intimate violence must be considered.

SOCIOLOGICAL APPROACHES TO INTIMATE VIOLENCE

Within sociology, there are two primary and conflicting approaches to intimate violence. One approach emphasizes the construction of the family as a system and as a social institution. As Gelles points out, “The family, with the exception of the military in times of war and the police, is society’s most violent institution” (1993b, p. 35). The other approach centers on gender inequality. I discuss each approach in turn.

Family Systems

What is it about the family as an institution that fosters high rates of violence? Gelles and Straus (1979, 1988) suggest that a number of characteristics of families contribute to intimate violence. In part, contemporary American culture encourages very high expectations for intimacy within romantic relationships and families. High expectations regarding family intimacy may also engender disappointment over unmet desires. Violence may result from frustration over a sense of a lack of reciprocation of rewards within the family (Gelles, 1983).

Research on courtship violence suggests that dating relationships contain somewhat higher levels of violence than do marital relationships (Gelles, 1997). Perhaps even more disturbing is the finding by Henton et al. (1983) that one-quarter of victims of intimate violence and a little less than one-third of offenders viewed physical violence as a sign of love. Clearly, cultural definitions of romantic love and family intimacy feed into high rates of intimate violence.

Intimacy may combine with stress to produce intimate violence in families. Stress is an inherent outcome of ever-changing family life as families grow throughout the life course (Gelles & Straus, 1979). Stress experienced outside of the family may be projected onto the family. One source of stress is financial: Intimate violence is more common in low-income households, and

in families where men are unemployed or employed part-time (Prescott & Letko, 1977; Round-saville, 1978).

Further, societal norms of family privacy also contribute to violence. What goes on in the family is easily hidden from public scrutiny (Gelles & Straus, 1979). Gelles (1983) suggests that people engage in family violence because the rewards of violence (for example, producing a desired result from a family member, gaining control) outweigh the costs of violence such as negative labeling in the larger community.

Straus (1973) argues that families operate as systems that feed off of the normalization of violence in the larger culture and minimize, ignore, and thereby stabilize violence that occurs within the family itself.

Gender Inequality

For many feminist researchers, the family as an institution is also deemed to contribute to intimate violence, though here we begin to touch on one of the major divisions within sociological schools of thought regarding intimate violence. Language differences reveal divergent perspectives: Family systems theory sociologists write about “domestic violence” whereas feminist researchers write about “battered wives” and “battered women.” Feminist researchers emphasize gender inequality as the basis for violence (Dobash & Dobash, 1979; Yllo & Bogard, 1988). As Yllo writes: “Violence within the family is as complex as it is disturbing ... Despite this complexity, the most fundamental feminist insight into all of this is quite simple: Domestic violence cannot be adequately understood unless gender and power are taken into account” (1993, p. 47). In essence, intimate violence is one manifestation of patriarchy. Patriarchy, or male domination,

is deeply encoded in religious traditions as well as other cultural expectations that emphasize men's dominance and women's submission. Social definitions of love, nurturance, and caretaking encourage women to remain in violent homes (Barnett & LaViollette, 1993; Pagelow, 1981). This encouragement occurs both in the form of women's identities and perceptions of violence as well as in social systems surrounding women such as family, clergy, and other support systems in women's lives. Indeed, cross-cultural research suggests that cultural expectations condoning marital violence and emphasizing gender inequality contribute to high rates of intimate violence (Fawcett, Heise, Isita-Espejel, & Pick, 1999; Horne, 1999). Around the globe, high rates of wife-beating occur in patriarchal societies (Walker, 1999). From the many thousands of women burned alive by in-laws when dowry endowments are not deemed high enough in India (Narasimhan, 1994), to Chilean rates of intimate violence against woman reaching 60 percent of heterosexual relationships (Larrain, 1993), wife-beating is deeply enmeshed in the "common sense" of patriarchal cultures.

The economic structuring of society is woven into cultural traditions supporting intimate violence against women in families (Dobash & Dobash, 1992). In Western industrialized nations, women are still primarily responsible for domestic labor including child care (Berk, 1985; Hochschild, 1989) and are more likely to have interrupted career trajectories to care for small children (Huber & Spitze, 1983; Steil, 1995) while being paid less than men for the work that they do in the paid labor force across racial categories (Thornborrow & Sheldon, 1995). Interviews with women who are survivors of intimate violence indicate that economic dependence is one important bind to domestic assault (Barnett & LaViolette, 1993; Pagelow, 1981). In this way, patriarchal structures of the family and labor force contribute to wife-battering. One avenue for ad-

addressing the problem of intimate violence involves promoting economic as well as domestic equality.

At the same time, some research suggests that when husbands have lower status educationally and occupationally than their wives they are more likely to engage in intimate violence (Gelles, 1974; Hornung, McCullough, & Sugimoto, 1981). In this case, wife battery may provide a means to control and retaliate against women for infringing upon men's position of dominance. Economic, cultural, law enforcement, and legal empowerment of women must operate in conjunction with one another to achieve meaningful change with regards to intimate violence.

The lack of support for women in situations of intimate violence from the criminal justice system relates to a disjuncture between cultural meanings of violence and legal codes prohibiting domestic assault (Ferraro & Pope, 1993; Abrahams, 1998). Despite important legal changes as well as growing economic resources from the state to aid victims of intimate violence in the United States, battered women still experience a lack of support from the police, courts, and support services (Barnett & LaViolette, 1993; Hoff, 1990). As a result, battered women are left in violent homes in states of fear. Feminist research on battered women also reveals that fear holds women in families in which they experience intimate violence (Hoff, 1990). This fear is far from irrational. Indeed, the greatest likelihood of serious injury and death occurs after women have left their violent partners (Saltzman et al., 1990). Women are not adequately protected from violence by the state. In particular, Hispanic and African-American women are likely to be discouraged from calling on the police or Anglo-dominated social services for protection (Ashbury, 1993; Gondolf, Fisher, & McFerron, 1988). As a result, continued educational work with law enforcement and court officials is necessary to transform the cultural "common sense" that contains

racist and sexist beliefs and practices.

One area of controversy in intimate violence involves the question of violence against men by women. While some family systems sociologists engage in national surveys and find virtually identical levels of violence between men and women in families (Berk, Berk, Loseke, & Rauma, 1983; Gelles & Straus, 1988), hospital, police, survey, and homicide data all indicate that women are harmed by intimate violence in vastly greater proportions than are men. As Gelles writes:

Unfortunately, almost all of those who try to make the case that there are as many battered men as battered women tend to omit or reduce to a parenthetical phrase the fact that no matter how much violence there is or who initiates the violence, women are as much as 10 times more likely than men to be injured in acts of domestic violence.

It is quite clear that men are struck by their wives. It is also clear that because these men are typically larger than their wives and usually have more social resources at their command, that they do not have as much physical or social damage inflicted on them as is inflicted on women. (1997, p. 93)

Thus, while the issue of violence against men has been controversial and heated within sociological discourse and popular culture, the fact that men encounter violence inflicted by women does not erase gendered power relations of intimate violence. Still, it is important to recognize the reality that men are beaten, and that gender is not the sole determinant of violent behavior.

MOVING INTO THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY: EXPANDING THE DISCOURSE

Feminist research on intimate violence contributes a great deal to an understanding of the patriarchal structures that produce intimate violence. Clearly, cultural constructions of gender play a central role in such violence. Gender is not, however, the entire explanatory framework necessary for intimate violence. Men are sometimes victims of intimate violence in heterosexual couples. And, violence occurs in gay and lesbian relationships (Letellier, 1994; Renzetti & Miley, 1996). While international perspectives on intimate violence highlight the importance of gender inequality (Walker, 1999), we must both acknowledge the importance of gender and avoid the insistence that gender is the only important dynamic underlying intimate violence.

Further, this new discourse must somehow bind more adequately sociological and psychological approaches to violence. That is, psychological factors contributing to violence must be understood in a socio-cultural context. For example, Dutton (1994) takes us in the wrong direction when he suggests that gay and lesbian violence demonstrates the explanatory power of psychological rather than social-structural factors (such as gender) in intimate violence. A strictly psychological approach to intimate violence is akin to attempting to solve the problems of war through personality theories and counseling. No doubt, psychological processes are important in making sense of intimate violence, but psychological processes are wrapped in cultural practices and power relation structures.

How can we expand the discourse? Renzetti (1997) provides an example, integrating power relations and social structure in her discussion of internalized homophobia as it relates to violence in gay and lesbian couples. In this regard, she writes:

Internalized homophobia occurs when gay men and lesbians accept heterosexual society's negative evaluations of them and incorporate them into their self con-

cepts ... Clinicians report that internalized homophobia causes homosexuals to experience lowered self-esteem, feelings of powerlessness, obsessive closeting of sexual orientation, denial of difference between themselves and heterosexuals, and self-destructive behavior such as substance abuse. It may also lead to aggression against members of one's own group, which could take the form of partner abuse. Thus, societal homophobia (a social structural variable) generates internalized homophobia (a psychological variable), which, in turn, may lead to partner abuse in same-sex relationships. (1997, p. 290)

Alternatively, or in addition, the psychological profile of a dependent and controlling batterer across lines of sexual preference and gender may also represent individual-level manifestations of social structural values, that is, socialization in cultural traditions valuing control and dominance.

Bodies are the vessels through which systems of inequality are achieved and maintained. Bodies that are hacked apart and stomped on interpersonally and institutionally produce and reinforce inequality. At the same time, violence cannot be solely understood in relation to power. That is, psychological factors interact with sociological variables in relation to intimate violence. Sociological discourse is not easily melded with that of psychology, and yet, an expanded discourse on intimate violence requires just such a move. The danger in relying too heavily on psychological approaches to intimate violence is that it misses the "big picture," the social structures in and through which people act. On the other hand, the danger in relying solely on sociological explanations for violence is that it may overgeneralize structural categories as explanations for violence and miss out on individual-level variables that contribute to violent behavior in intimate

relationships. The problem of intimate violence requires that we develop a new, integrated language for explaining and understanding the dynamics underlying such violence: a language that weaves together psychological and sociological approaches to intimate violence.