ONE

"I'll Be Scared for Everyone in the World"

The Pervasiveness of Domestic Violence

Don't trust. Men kill. The police don't help us and, if the judges don't do it, we're lost. I'll be scared for everyone in the world.

—Josephine

INTRODUCTION

In ways nearly beyond belief, a woman's body in the world is frequently a body in pain. Women suffer extensively from violence directed at them by their most intimate partners. Some women suffer in silence. Other women, like Josephine, escape to safety and speak out. Some women's bodies alone tell the story. They suffer and die, many times without redress. Overwhelmingly, domestic violence is violence directed by men at women. Women initiate violence as often as men do, but research makes apparent the gender disproportion of seriously injurious intimate violence.[1] Ninety-five percent of serious assaults are acts perpetrated by men against women who are several times more likely than men to need medical care and to experience psychological injuries after an assault.[2]

The acts of violence against women are many, the list long. Most commonly, women's spouses or partners throw objects at them. They shove, grab, and slap. They kick, bite, or hit women with their fists. They beat women up. They rape them. They threaten women with guns and knives.

The list of violent acts does not always convey the grievous reality, or frightening extent, of male brutality or women's suffering, but women often are violated in appalling ways and means. A blow to the head is followed by another, and another, and another. A pregnant woman is kicked in her stomach. A girlfriend is hit by a car or pushed from a moving one. Eyes are blackened, limbs broken. Women from the Women's House depict the violence starkly:

— You would think that the times I was choked to the point that I lose consciousness would be enough!
— I was pregnant with my third son. My boyfriend came in angry from working. He just started yelling at me because I moved something off his desk. Somehow we ended up on the bed—him squeezing me real tight and I was scratching him in the face.
— He did stuff. Putting a gun to my head. Biting me and holding on for a long time. You know when someone bites you really hard for a long time? You can't feel it anymore. Hit me, beat me with a broom. My body is so marked up from three years, I'm afraid to show another man my body. He'd say, "What man would want you with all those bruises?" He put me in a trunk. I just couldn't stand it! I begged him to let me out. He put me in for only three minutes, but it seemed like it lasted for hours. [. . .] My son now, he was around this. [My abuser] would hit my kids, knowing it would hurt me.

Some women do not even know all the ways in which they are being injured by abusers. Lily was kicked and spat upon by her partner, but her bruised body and self-esteem were only one shard of her suffering:

> My daughter, she was being molested from the time she was nine until the time she was thirteen. Her father, her natural father, was molesting her. [. . .] I could have been on death row. I could have and it wasn't that far away because my daughter was being raped by her own father. She was bleeding out of her rectum. I never knew what was wrong with my child. I could find no reason. My child was scared to death to tell it to anybody. He went to her school and kicked her and beat her like she was a dog. They called the cops. Only time my daughter had the nerve to even tell anybody that her daddy been doing that to her. The only thing I could say was, "Lord, have mercy! You've been killing my child." Then I had to look at her when she asked me, "Momma [. . .], you were my mother. Why didn't you know?"

Women suffer more subtle, less visible, forms of violence. They endure psychological, emotional, and economic abuse. They are confined or isolated. They are humiliated and degraded. Their paychecks, food, and clothing are taken away or carefully controlled. Tiffany, a twenty-five-year-old mother in the Women's House, tells her story succinctly: "He hits me with a crowbar and asks me for my money." Anything might serve as a weapon in nonphysical forms of violence, including kinship ties (especially children), jobs or coworkers, school, language, sex, and religion. Anything that can be taken away, manipulated, or suppressed serves as a weapon in the struggle for power and control. Shelter women share some stories:

— I am scared of my husband getting my kids. He wants custody. He didn't [want them] when we were there. How can he [take care of them] if he gets them? What will happen?

— [My abuser] cuts you off from your friends and family. He tells you what you can and can't wear. He has extreme jealousy. He always has to know where you are and he gets angry if he doesn't. He calls you names when he is angry. He always has to be in control of everything.

— The first signs of an abuser: He's always calling you. He wants to know your whereabouts at all times. He knows personal information about you [that you did not] give to him. He hit women in past relationships. He talks about women in a degrading manner and hates women in general. He has no respect for his mother or sisters. He makes unexpected visits. He hangs up your phone calls. He has extreme anger.

— He always told me what I was doing wrong, what I didn't do. He still tells me what I did wrong and he blames me when things go wrong. I hear it everyday. That's why I'm here. I'm tired of it—to the point I feel like I'm going to die. I admit, I don't know how to raise kids. But my husband was always sure. I never had kids! So I just raised my kids by the seat of my pants—even with all his complaints.

— I got sexual, mental, physical abuse for three years. One thing I want to say: this is the worse abuse. Not the beatings and the physical. The mental abuse was the worse, telling me I was nothing. The sexual thing too. After he beat me up, he always made me give him oral sex in front of my daughter. My son now. The thing about that was, he didn't get off. He got off on the control of making me do it when I didn't want to do it. He got off by seeing me not wanting to do it. It made me so sick when he got off. He enjoyed himself. I got so I don't even like sex anymore. Sex is like a nasty thing to me.

Obviously, domestic violence is more than bruises, black eyes, and broken bones. It involves a constellation of forms of frequently escalating violence such as physical, sexual, psychological, emotional, or economic coercion.[3] It involves intimidation of all sorts: isolation and other forms of literal or social captivity, the infliction of emotional pain and degradation, the withholding of affection or resources, the destruction of property, and the maltreatment of children or pets. This violence is used by partners in calculated ways to control women.

Perhaps because domestic violence may be the most common form of crime in the United States, many women are unsure they are suffering it or suffering it unjustly.[4] Among factors making it difficult for women to define their cases as domestic violence are these: the remorse of the batterer after the violence; the shame and guilt of the survivor who believes she triggered the violence; the infrequency or irregularity of assaults; the absence of physical assault or serious injury; and the gender of the batterer.[5] Women may believe they deserve suffering because of their own being, that is, the femaleness they embody. Everywhere, this belief garners evidence. There are many antiwoman messages in the media, in our institutions, in our social and political arrangements, rules, and regulations, and elsewhere in our world. Even our most sacred texts, such as the Bible, spread the bad news. These messages take a place in a system of oppression in which interpersonal and cultural factors are interwoven to encourage violence against women.

HOW PERVASIVE IS IT? SOME STATISTICS

The prevalence of intimate violence is simply staggering.[6] Domestic violence is the number one health threat to women. In the United States, one-third to one-half of all women will be physically assaulted in their lifetimes by partners. One woman is physically assaulted every fifteen seconds and injuries are twice as likely to occur if the attack is perpetrated by a partner rather than by a stranger. Half of all female homicide victims are killed by husbands or boyfriends while only 3 percent of male homicide victims are killed by wives or girlfriends who are often acting in self-defense. One out of every three women worldwide has been beaten, raped, or abused.[7]

Such numerical data is stunning; nonetheless, experts agree that the figures are underestimates. Most instances of violence against women are not reported. Indeed, one estimate is that only 7 to 14 percent of intimate partner assaults are reported to police.[8] In 1994, Secretary of Health and Human Services Donna Shalala called the problem domestic "terrorism," an "epidemic" in the United States.[9] The underreportage is due in part because of shame, fear, or distrust. Often women do not wish to bring their plight to the attention of their families, churches, or communities. The family is sac-

rosanct. Indeed, few people wish to give up notions of the family as a safe and loving haven. To make matters worse, according to shelter women, the police and justice systems are slow to intervene or they do not intervene effectively in domestic problems even in areas with mandatory or preferred arrest policies.[10] Josephine's words earlier—"The police don't help us and, if the judges don't do it, we're lost"—are a common refrain among battered women. Tiffany, the young woman whose partner hit her with a crowbar to get her paycheck, puts it this way:

> When I called up the police, they came and locked him up. Somehow he got out and now I do not know what to do. I called my mother and she told me he was out. Now I do not know what to do!

Her story is common. Battered women are bewildered when the police or the courts allow their partners to walk while they themselves are injured, homeless, and afraid for their lives. Shelter women sometimes cite harassment by police as proof that the law enforcement system is not to be trusted. One woman said: "When I was with [the police], they said all these things to me. They said, 'Let me see how you taste.' I went back to my mama. I was so scared!"

Sherri, a policeman's wife, angrily complained that the police were unwilling to intervene in the domestic affairs of one of its own—wife-beater or not. She came from a shelter nearly a thousand miles away to hide from a husband who could easily access information about her whereabouts, her legal recourse, and other self-protective measures. Now she worries about other policeman's wives: "I tell my stories of abuse for cops' wives. I want them to know there's somewhere to go. Don't take the abuse. You are going to end up dead."

In the following conversation, some shelter women share their low opinion of law enforcement to explain their unwillingness to call for help. Their words are angry, their tone of voice derisive:

PAM: Most police are bruising their own wives! It's best to get their badge numbers [when they respond to a call]. [Get their] badge number and they will face it.

TERI: I'll never forget his bad ass [that is, the police who responded to her call]!

PAM: We got a neighbor. He's a cop, and he's doing his wife the same way. I can't go to him for help. I can't call him. I'm crying with her. He's doing her the same way. The uniform is the check. The badge. They do what they want.

TERI: It's the authority they have.

PAM: Most police are doing drugs. I saw on TV. They tore up the hotel. They were shooting guns. It was in the paper and everything. Police doing what they want to do. Tore up the hotel and everything. Did you see that?

TANYA: They need more training. I was talking to the police. They were listening to me. When [my abuser] started talking to them, it changed everything! He was putting me down. They listened to him. Told me to get in the house! "Get in the house," they said. "Don't get him upset." Then they left. They separate you. I could hardly hear what he was saying, but he told them all these things about me and they said to me, "Get in the house!" I felt so stupid. He was already on probation. They let him go back to the bar. Then it all started again. [The police] need more training. [My abuser] could have stayed [that is, conned] the chief of police!

PAM: They are supposed to arrest him.

BETH: They told you to go back into the house?

DENISE: What color were they? They were white?

TANYA: They was white. And there was one, a plainclothes, following him up my street and another [plainclothesman] with two uniformed officers and they were listening to me and I was trying to explain to them and they were: "Okay, okay." And they said "You should not be hanging around with him" and "We aren't doing you any good."

These women's experience and opinions of the police are typical of shelter talk. Denise's words imply the racial conflicts, a topic to be discussed forthrightly. The women's conversation elucidates the serious underreportage of domestic violence. Of course, their perception of the unwillingness of law enforcement to effectively protect women is only one aspect of the problem. The judicial system does not usually intervene to their satisfaction either. One woman, Sasha, whose husband made the telephone call to the police though he assaulted her, was given six months of probation and a fine. She calls her piece, "The Process of Justice":

> In the courtroom, the judge stares down at you. The course of action [or lack of] taken by the law officials and the judge tells me that the victims now have something else to fear. This also tells the attacker that they now have another hold on you, another way to punish you. So what will eventually happen to the true victims if this continues?

Shasha's title is an ironic one. For her, justice was not dispensed in the courtroom. She ended up in the shelter. So did Dharma with whom I had the following exchange:

DHARMA: The courts don't care about domestic violence. This man is a drunk and two days before his first hearing he got stopped by the police again for DUI. It's escalating. I tried to talk to the prosecutor. They don't care. They won't care 'til he kills.

CAROL: You?

DHARMA: Yeah, kills me or my kids.

Unfortunately, battered women often do not receive adequate support from other institutions either, including their churches or faith communities.

WHO ARE THE VICTIMS? THE DEMOGRAPHIC DATA

The demographic data reported by the United States Department of Justice makes clear that domestic violence traverses class, race/ethnicity, and age groups.[11] Although demographic factors may vary, affecting rates of reportage and ability to escape, some of the facts often presented are these: Race or ethnicity is not associated with level of risk; women between the ages of twenty to thirty-four have the highest rates of victimization; women who graduate from college have the lowest rates compared to women who have less education; women with incomes under $10,000 are four times more likely to be victimized than women with incomes of over $50,000. The geographic location (that is, urban, suburban, rural) does not affect rates of victimization.

Clearly, the violence is not restricted to any one demographic group; yet, there are complicating factors in the data. For example, although geographical location does not affect rates, it does affect the availability of support systems or resources to escape. Rural women frequently do not have access to shelters or other social service agencies. They may be isolated from neighbors or families.[12] Rural people often hold strong notions of independence and self-sufficiency. Rural communities covering large geographical areas can be numerically small and relatively stable in population as well. People know one another. Thus, family affairs are kept quiet to avoid public attention or humiliation. Men who must depend on one another for neighborly help do not cross one another over private affairs; women are often bound to secrecy through shame. When rural folk, such as the Appalachian women in this study, come to the city, they bring such notions of silence, shame, and self-sufficiency with them.

There are also many misconceptions about domestic violence and race or ethnicity. Black, white, and Hispanic women are attacked by intimate

partners at the same rate.[13] One study indicates that black women seek help from public services more frequently than white women,[14] but women of color or ethnic women may find it more difficult to escape abuse[15] because of different cultural beliefs about family and privacy. Women of color may believe race loyalty is critical in a society controlled by the white male patriarchy; thus, they sometimes hesitate to call upon the criminal or justice systems. Their partners would then be subject to discrimination. As well, women of color suffer disproportionately from poverty. The National Research Council reports that "Blacks continue to lag far behind whites on most indicators of economic and educational status."[16] Women of color often simply lack the resources to escape from intimate violence. When they do escape, they may be bound to use public resources—the shelters, for instance, rather than personal or extended family resources.

Ethnic minority women and immigrant women may experience "dual subordination" based on gender and some element of primordiality. They are discriminated against both for being nonwhite and for being female. They are marginalized for femaleness and for cultural features such as race, origin, or language. Ethnicity has a social construction dimension: that is, ethnic women experience problems with interpersonal dynamics and symbolic meaning-making in immediate settings or situational contexts. They must negotiate multiple, sometimes conflicting, identities manifested through language, history, customs, beliefs, and values in concrete and unfolding situations often unfamiliar or inhospitable to them. How does an Asian woman, for example, explain to white neighbors or social workers about the seemingly insurmountable cultural conflicts she faces when she considers leaving an abusive partner? She may not speak English fluently and she may suffer from cultural shame; meanwhile, her interlocutor may evidence prejudice, fear, or mistrust. The two dimensions—the cultural and the social—interact to create more problems for women regardless of their family incomes.[17]

Further regarding class issues and the complexities of the demographic data, there is some evidence that income disparity—rather than simply poverty or education—may be a significant factor in intimate violence.[18] Disparities in income or occupational status favoring women have been found to be related to escalating violence. Women who earn more than their partners or who enjoy more occupational prestige may suffer from the imbalance in traditional gender roles and relations. There is reason to further explore intimate violence as it relates to social class rather than simply income. Ironically, total family income may have less impact on intimate violence against women than their own economic contributions to the family. It seems that men will use violence to equalize their power in situations where women gain resources or men lose them. "When women's resources approach or exceed their partners,' " states Laura Ann McCloskey, "they are more

likely to be victimized."[19] The researchers Kersti Yllo and Murray Straus find that battery is highest in states where women's status is highest.[20] Linda Gordon's research also shows that battering is a problem when the feminist movement has been strong. When women actively struggle for resources and benefits, violence arises.[21]

In truth, the demographic data are complicated and both the causes and contributing or conflicting factors need to be further explored. Yet, evidently, many men feel entitled to use physical violence to retain patriarchal control. Social institutions encourage and protect them.

THEORIES OF CAUSES OF INTIMATE VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

Theories about the causes of violence against women in intimate relationships and ideas about the resolution of it through social policies and programs have been seriously conflicted areas of scholarly research. The main division in sociological approaches has been between family violence theorists (including systems theorists, exchange/social control theorists, and symbolic interaction theorists) and feminist theorists.[22] By no means exclusive, these approaches do, however, represent very different perspectives, especially as they took shape in the early years of domestic violence research.

Generally, the family violence theorists concentrate on microlevel analysis. They use survey research or study male-female or family interaction in order to explain dysfunctional communicative patterns. Typically, they attribute the causes of violence against women to individual pathology or malfunctional family communicative practices. Family interaction practices are viewed as a system. Women initiate or contribute to violence through their own aggressive language practices or physical violence; men initiate violence or respond to women's violence. Family violence theorists may advocate family therapy to change disruptive or precipitating patterns. In early family violence research, there was no or little attempt to address the social or cultural factors out of which acts of violence arise—a preoccupation of feminist researchers. More recently, family violence researchers take these factors into account. Increasingly, they recognize the social and demographic indicators of structural inequality that influence the conditions giving rise to, or propensities for, domestic violence.[23]

Feminist researchers concentrate particularly on macrolevel analysis. They view the problem as a sociocultural problem extending from the patriarchal need for power and control. Violence is a critical component of a system of coercion through which men maintain social dominance. This is the heart of the debate between family violence researchers and feminist researchers: the degree to which patriarchy figures as the source explanation in domestic violence etiology. For feminist researchers, the sources of conflict

arise from "men's possessiveness and jealousy, men's expectations regarding women's domestic work, men's sense of the right to punish 'their' women for perceived wrongdoing, and the importance to men of maintaining and exercising their positions of authority."[24] Violence, argues feminist historian Linda Gordon, stems from "power struggles in which individuals are contesting for real resources and benefits."[25] For feminist researchers, the nexus of social location factors in interaction with gender are critical: income, social class, education, race/ethnicity, social status, and so forth. These factors figure importantly into the meaning of the violence. An unemployed or seasonally employed older Hispanic immigrant woman living in a rural community may be completely victimized by her batterer; a young white professional woman living within a family support network may physically suffer as much but she has resources to escape and rebuild her life.

Feminist researchers further argue that, by contributing in their own ways to the cultural fabric of the systemic oppression of women, our legal, religious, and other social and cultural institutions are complicit in the problem of domestic violence. Even when confronted with their complicity, many institutions have been unable or slow to respond; thus, relatively few men are confronted with their violent behavior. The anecdotal evidence provided by battered women about law, judicial, and (as I will discuss soon) religious institutions support this finding.

Feminist and family violence research is sociologically based research. Nonsociologically oriented researchers also offer explanations for the causes of male violence toward women. These explanations include chemical or psychological factors. Their explanations may be based on psychological or other types of intraindividual factors such as drinking or drug problems, personality disorders, or biological or neurophysiological disorders. Some nonsociological researchers, for example, may look at atypical levels of testosterone or serotonin (that is, the neurotransmitter that modulates the action of brain chemicals) in abusive men.[26] Other researchers look at depression levels. Even pediatric illness has been posited as a possible cause for domestic violence. Head injury, metabolic disorders, epilepsy, attention deficit disorder, and other neurological problems have all been posed as contributing factors.[27]

Many nonsociological researchers, however, admit to the primacy of social factors in violence against women. In fact, feminist sociological theories are a dominant influence in domestic violence research. As conceded by well-known family violence researcher Richard J. Gelles, numerous studies have all found that gender inequality explains variations in the incidence and rates of violence against women.[28] The strict delineation of camps—the feminist, the family violence, and other researchers—oversimplifies common ground. Yet the distinctions remain and the ramifications are not negligible. These camps vie for control of the field and the authority to sway policy makers as they allocate resources and make political decisions.

This study is based on the theory and principles of feminist anthropological linguistics, an interdisciplinary field that seeks to explain language in context. One basic assumption of my analyses is that there is a relationship between the language of a community and its worldviews, values, belief systems; that is, culture is socially, semiotically, and discursively constructed. The researcher can make reasonable claims about this worldview by searching for themes or patterns of language usage. Feminist linguists further assume that race/ethnicity, class, and gender are particularly cogent categories of analysis because they are used as tools in the unequal distribution of power, status, and material goods. Thus, feminist linguistics has both macrolevel and microlevel components. It is sociological, but it looks at the individual and intraindividual language in order to create knowledge and to draw conclusions. In the end, the production of knowledge for the sake of knowledge is not the goal of feminist linguistics; rather, the goal is social change. And none too soon: Linda Gordon points out that U.S. feminists have been agitating against wife-beating for at least 120 years.[29] Christine de Pisan wrote about woman battery in the early fifteenth century.[30] The struggle for social change has been going on for a long time and it is far from over.

THE AFTERMATH: SUFFERING AND SURVIVORS

Feminist research has made visible the seriousness of violence against women. With somewhat more regularity, both researchers and advocates against domestic violence are bringing the actual voices of women into our writing. Additionally, battered women frequently require medical care for serious bodily injuries. These injuries are sometimes photographed and, in publications, depicted so others may more viscerally know the horrendous truth about intimate violence against women. Perhaps such photographs are the best way to create the public outrage necessary to more adequately address violence against women. Language evades direct renderings of the actual pain and the frequently unfathomable depths of the emotional suffering. Yet battered women must be able to speak publicly—in fora that matter. This study is an attempt to give voice to battered women as they try to make sense of their suffering.

Still researchers and advocates may be ambivalent about revealing the psychological or emotional ravages of violence against women. The controversy surrounding Lenore Walker's pioneering but highly contested research on the cycle of violence and the "learned helplessness"[31] of battered women is but one example of the delicate nature of forthrightly discussing the emotive and affective components of violence against women. The notion of learned helplessness is that battered women become less able to extricate themselves from their situations because they are terrorized by males into profound levels of dependency.[32] Many researchers will not lend support to this stance

because it seems to diminish the strengths of survivors. Similarly the label "victim" and the idea of "codependency" between two partners have been contested. These labels, the argument goes, add to the degradation of battered women.[33] The term "victim" makes invisible the strategies battered women devise in order to avoid or minimize male violence. It makes invisible their skills, resistance, and forbearance. The term "codependency" would seem to make women complicit in their own abuse.

Nevertheless, some staggering facts remain. Women are "significantly more likely than men to suffer psychological injuries related to their abuse."[34] Twenty-five percent of women who attempt suicide and 25 percent who seek psychiatric emergency services are battered.[35] Battered women suffer depression, fear, anxiety, shame, self-blame, low self-esteem. Their senses of self are shaken, their identities fragmented. Often they lose their families, homes, and jobs. Women suffer the violence of men against their bodies, minds, spirits, and hearts in inestimable ways. Clearly, their suffering is a social evil that remains to be fully explored and rectified. The statistics suggest a problem of enormous proportions, but the voices of battered women tell the real story. The stories are heartrending; at the same time, the strength of women comes through in stirring ways. Their strength stems from two elements in particular: the safety and support of shelter life and faith in God. Hazel says it succinctly, but her words are a common refrain:

> I felt rather confident that I was handling my departure from home in a positive way. [Then my husband] called me at work and he made me feel guilty for leaving. His call was so upsetting. I left work early and I returned to the safety of the shelter. After talking to some supportive people, I came to terms with my guilt—at least for now! Each day that I am away from home, I'm getting stronger. However, I know greater challenges are ahead. I can only take it one day at a time with the help of God.

Feminist researchers talk about shelters, but not often about the main source of strength for so many battered women like Hazel: their faith in God—with all his patriarchal trappings and interestingly, many times, without them. Shelter women depend on God to survive.