



“Intimate” Violence against Women

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When Spouses, Partners, or
Lovers Attack

**Edited by Paula K. Lundberg-Love
and Shelly L. Marmion**

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Preface

Both of us have been actively involved in providing therapeutic services to women who have been victims of intimate violence and/or in educating college graduate and undergraduate students of psychology about the issues of violence against women for over 20 years. As class sizes have increased and more and more of our graduates have chosen professions dedicated to helping victims of intimate violence, there are moments when we muse about the day when books like this will no longer need to be written. We try to imagine what it would be like for women to be able to walk down a street at night without worrying about the footsteps behind them. What would it be like to be alone with nature, with a beautiful full moon overhead, and feel serene? We contemplate what the world would be like if there were no longer a reason to tell women that they must stay vigilant to the possibility of abduction and assault. What would it be like to walk down the street of any city alone and be able to look men in the eye, smile, and be friendly without being misunderstood? How would it feel to wear the clothing one wanted and not feel self-conscious about the possible responses of men? We wonder how society would change if the prevalence of sexual assault, intimate partner violence, and other crimes against women radically decreased. What would it be like to be able to negotiate our way through the world and not have to worry about the possibility of being the victim of intrusive stares, harassment, "peeping Toms," exhibitionists, fondling, and unwanted physical and sexual battery? To what extent would the levels of depression, anxiety disorders, eating disorders, substance abuse disorders, sexual dysfunction, and numerous medical disorders decrease if the sexual abuse of children became nonexistent? For brief moments, we enjoy our vision of what it

would be like to live in such a world. Then we come crashing back to reality.

Recently, the widely publicized cases of Kobe Bryant, Scott Peterson, and Mark Hacking have brought violence against women to the public eye. When the United States Congress passed the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) in 1994, it was clear that domestic violence and sexual assault were no longer unsubstantiated “feminist” complaints. Although VAWA created a new climate that promoted victim safety, offender accountability, and a more responsive criminal justice system, millions of women continue to suffer at the hands of their abusers and lack the resources to begin their journeys toward safety, healing, and a better way of life.

Even though the high-profile cases of intimate violence against women receive societal attention, there remain hundreds of thousands of nameless, faceless women who are victimized about whom we hear and know nothing. For example, one of us recently conducted an initial client interview with a 17-year-old woman from a town near Tyler, Texas. She was formerly employed by a national pizza chain delivery/take-out restaurant. One day when she arrived at work, the store was short-handed because an employee had not shown up. The 40-something-year-old male manager was present as were two young male employees who were brothers. This young woman had worked with these individuals for awhile and trusted them. While they were working, there was verbal banter between the brothers and the young woman. Then, suddenly, one of the brothers started grabbing the girl’s breasts. She protested, pushed him away, and resisted. His brother then came over and started to try to grab and fondle her breasts. The young woman continued to resist and attempted to get away. The young man who initiated the assault told his brother to grab her arms and hold them behind her back, which the brother did. The first young man then moved the young woman to the drive-through window and pulled up her shirt and bra, pressing her bare breasts against the window so that customers could see them. The manager sat there watching the assault and laughing. He did nothing to intervene or to help the young woman. She finally was able to break free of her attackers, and she fled the restaurant. She called a friend who came to get her and took her home. After an initial delay, she told her grandmother and the assault was reported to the police.

One morning, this young woman had awakened and her life was good. All she did was show up for work and her perceptions of the world and other people in it changed forever. She learned what too many women already know. Safety can never be taken for granted. There are many people in this world who will choose to victimize you because you are a woman. To live as a woman is to be always vigilant,

never trusting too completely. Tragically, events like this happen daily, and society remains unaware of their frequency and oblivious to their long-lasting effects on women in this culture. As a nation, we are far too complacent. We are lacking the sense of outrage that should be our response when such actions are commonplace, when small acts of violence are laughed off, and when large acts of violence are met with curiosity followed by indifference.

There are events that occur on the international level that remind us that even as the world changes some attitudes and behaviors remain the same. For example, in mid-January 2006, the United States Secretary of State, Condoleezza Rice, criticized the Russian government for a gas conflict with the Ukraine. The news and analysis on-line publication *Pravda, RU* contained an article dated January 11, 2006, with an interview of Vladimir Zhirinovskiy, the leader of the Liberal and Democratic Party of Russia, about Dr. Rice's comments. He said, "Condoleezza Rice released a coarse anti-Russian statement. This is because she is a single woman who has no children. She loses her reason because of her late single status." Later in the interview Zhirinovskiy proclaims that:

Ms. Rice's personal complexes affect the entire field of international politics. This is an irritating factor for everyone especially for the East and the Islamic world. When they look at her they go mad. Condoleezza Rice needs a company of soldiers. She needs to be taken to barracks where she would be satisfied. On the other hand, she can hardly be satisfied because of her age. . . . Condoleezza Rice is a very cruel, offended woman who lacks men's attention.¹

Are his statements merely a reflection of an unenlightened male from a repressive regime? Unfortunately, he is not alone in his views. Men who have similar views are easily found in every culture. So, is there still a need for a book such as this? Absolutely.

"Intimate" Violence against Women will dispel the myths surrounding these crimes and replace them with the reality of this issue. This book will address the prevalence of intimate violence against women and describe its impact on their emotional and physical health and their views of the world. It will also describe the difficult legal issues involved in these crimes. Finally, the global and cultural issues regarding intimate violence against women will be addressed. This book will integrate the current research, theory, and advocacy on the topic of intimate violence against women so that you, the reader, will have the knowledge to help yourself or others who may become victims of such violence. Unfortunately, there is no way to know whether one's friend, intimate partner, or husband is a potential perpetrator. There is no magic checklist or

psychological test that can accurately predict who will commit intimate violence. So, while we will continue to imagine what it would be like to go to a place where there is no intimate violence, we will in the meantime arm ourselves and others with knowledge. We believe that these words of Elie Wiesel from his acceptance speech for the Nobel Peace Prize in 1986 must resonate with survivors of intimate violence and with those who work to eliminate that violence:

There is so much to be done. There is so much that we can do. One person of integrity can make a difference, a difference of life and death. As long as one dissident is in prison, our freedom will not be true. As long as one child is hungry, our life will be filled with anguish and shame. What all victims need above all is to know that they are not alone; that we are not forgetting them, that when their voices are stifled we will lend them ours. . . .

All of the contributing authors of this book wrote their chapters to let survivors of violence know that they are not alone, and they are not forgotten. We hope that this book gives survivors and their experiences a loud, clear voice. We hope, as well, that the information provided, including the recommendations made to friends, families, therapists, and policy makers, will provide tools for every person to become part of the solution in fixing a pervasive problem that, in the end, affects us all.

Paula K. Lundberg-Love, Ph.D.
Shelly L. Marmion, Ph.D.

Acknowledgments

We would like to thank all of the contributors to this volume for their involvement and dedication. During its construction many individuals faced some major obstacles in their personal and professional lives, but they persevered, in spite of it all. We want them to know how much we value their commitment to this project.

We also want to thank Debbie Carvalko at the Greenwood Publishing Group for her support. She provided excellent guidance for and nurturance of the completion of this volume. When we needed some understanding and assistance, she rose to the occasion. Additionally, Lindsay Claire of Greenwood Publishing has kept us on course during the final stages of publication, and Laura Smith of Cadmus Professional Communications was instrumental in the final stages of the editing of this book. We thank both of them for their help.

Additionally, the contributors to this volume deserve our appreciation for all of the work that they do to aid in the healing of women who have been victims of intimate violence, and/or in educating college students and community members about the prevalence and consequences of such victimization. Indeed, Tyler, Texas is a proactive community for victims of intimate violence due to the efforts of many of these women.

I, (PLL), want to express my gratitude to Michele Paludi for the mentorship she has generously provided me throughout our graduate school years together, and our twenty-some years of friendship thereafter. When I made the transition from “rat research” to studying adult survivors of incest, Michele encouraged me. Also, she has afforded me invaluable opportunities to enhance my scholarship. Michele has been my touchstone. Thank you for believing in me. And to my daughter,

Jill Wright, thank you for being the best daughter any mother could have hoped for. You have enriched my life immeasurably.

We wish to dedicate this volume to our mothers, Alma Stern and Lois Gully. From our earliest recollections, they always told us we could achieve whatever we attempted. For some reason, we believed them. We also dedicate this volume to Alexis Wright and Jennifer Marmion and all the girls and young women who deserve to live in a world without intimate violence.

Writing this book was a more exhausting and exhilarating project than we initially anticipated. However, the contributors want the readers to know that this volume is not just a compendium of our collective knowledge. It is constructed from pieces of ourselves, rendered into a mosaic of hope and will.

Chapter I

Violence against Women: The Extent of the Problem

Brittney Nichols

Violence against women is one of the most prevalent problems in America. The men who are committing these violent acts are not strangers to their victims. When women are attacked, it is most often by men they know. In 2004, men were as likely to be victimized by a stranger as by someone they knew, but women were most often victimized by someone they knew.¹

The murder trial of Nicole Brown Simpson captivated the nation. The celebrity status of O.J. Simpson and race issues dominated public discussion, overshadowing the core issue of the case, which was domestic violence. The evidence presented at the trial included a history of domestic abuse, something O.J. didn't deny. During the investigation, it came to light that Nicole rented a safe-deposit box. The box contained a picture of Nicole with a black eye. It also held letters containing apologies from O.J. to Nicole for abusing her; in one letter, O.J. acknowledged the fact that he abused Nicole because she refused to have sex with him.² The prosecution tried to focus on domestic violence as being important to the case, but the brutal beatings that Nicole endured at the hands of O.J. were largely dismissed, even though it is common for domestic violence to escalate to homicide.³ A former cop and friend of O.J. testified that, at Nicole's request, he had warned O.J. that he fit the pattern of an abuser.⁴ Despite evidence to the contrary, one of defense lawyer Johnnie Cochran's arguments at trial was that not every man who beats his wife murders her.⁵ Five days before

Nicole was brutally murdered, she phoned a shelter and was frightened that O.J. was going to kill her.⁶ Domestic abuse advocates understand how domestic abuse and violence often escalate to murder, but this fact did not appear to be taken seriously at the trial. A juror called a 911 tape recording of Nicole begging for help as O.J. shouted at her “a waste of time.”⁷ O.J. Simpson was acquitted October 3, 1995.⁸

The disappearance of Laci Peterson caught the nation’s attention in 2003. Laci was reported missing on December 24, 2002. Her body and that of her unborn son (already named Connor) washed up on the California shore in April 2003.⁹ Although Laci’s husband, Scott, was a suspect, Laci’s family supported him in the early days of the investigation, describing him as a “loving husband” and “model son-in-law.”¹⁰ He was eventually convicted of killing his wife and dumping her body in the San Francisco Bay.¹¹ If Amber Frey, the woman with whom Scott was having an affair a month before Laci’s disappearance, had not come forward, he might have gotten away with the murder. Amber helped the police catch Scott in several lies by cooperating with the investigation and taping his phone calls to her.¹²

Mark Hacking admitted to a Salt Lake City judge, “I intentionally shot Lori Hacking in the head with a .22 rifle on July 19, 2004.”¹³ After killing Lori, Mark had reported her missing, saying that she had not returned from a jog. Lori had recently discovered she was pregnant, and the couple had planned a move to North Carolina for Mark to attend medical school. They had found an apartment, arranged for a moving truck, and packed.¹⁴ However, during the search for her body, it was discovered that Mark had been living a lie. Investigators learned that Mark had not been admitted to medical school (he never even applied); he also had not graduated from college.¹⁵ Mark killed his wife after she discovered his secret.¹⁶

David Brame was a police chief. The city of Tacoma was shocked in April 2003, when he shot his wife before turning the gun on himself. What at first appeared to be a random act of violence was actually preceded by a history of domestic abuse. Crystal Brame had filed for divorce in February before the shooting. It was then that she spoke up about her husband’s violence, revealing that he had choked her four times the year before, shoved her in a closet, and pointed a gun at her head. She also divulged to her psychologist that David was pressuring her to participate in group sex.¹⁷ David kept Crystal in an intimidating environment not only through physical violence but also by playing mind games and making threats. David called her mentally unstable and threatened to take away her children (a son and a daughter), if she left.¹⁸ Given David’s position in the community, Crystal felt she had no one to turn to for help.

Although these cases appear to be isolated tragedies, they have consistent themes. One major theme is that of control. Many abusers feel a strong need to control the behavior of their partner. The threat of a breakup or divorce threatens that sense of control, while their need for it escalates. When abusers feel that they are losing control, they increase the violence and intimidation. Nicole and O.J. were divorced in 1992. In the time leading up to her murder, friends and family reported that Nicole was reducing her contact with O.J. and disengaging from her relationship with him. Instead of letting go, O.J. stalked Nicole by following her and peeking into her windows.

Crystal Brame described her husband's controlling behavior in court papers. His behavior included making her get permission to use their credit card and monitoring her trips to the grocery store by checking the car's odometer.¹⁹ Leaving an abusive partner often triggers more controlling behavior, more abuse, and, all too often, murder.

Another common theme is manipulation. Like Scott Peterson and Mark Hacking, abusers often spin a web of lies to cover their tracks and even blame the victims for their behavior. Ironically, they are often well liked and popular, even charming—a trait that comes in handy when they need to hide the truth of what they are really like. A childhood friend of David Brame said that David never appeared to be a violent person. In fact, the friend described him as a "class act."²⁰ To continue his affair, Scott Peterson lied to Amber Frey about several things, including his marital status.²¹ He also told Amber on the phone that he was celebrating New Year's Eve 2003 in Paris, when he was actually at a candlelight vigil for his missing wife in Modesto, California.²² The lies told by these men gave them a temporary sense of control, but when the lies started to fall apart, their control quickly began to slip away. Like many abusers, these men were apparently so unable to deal with the loss of control they were willing to go to extreme lengths to regain control, even if it meant murder. Mark Hacking managed to convince everyone he knew that he was living a different life. He went to extremes to support the fantasy, such as picking out an apartment near the medical school he was never going to attend. When his wife discovered his secret, he panicked and killed her to protect the secrets of his false life. In general, the more the abusers feel the lack of control, the more they will act to regain it. Men often try to regain control with intimidation and violence, and all too often this has deadly consequences.

Some common triggers for an escalation of violence in a relationship are affairs, separation, and child custody battles. As in the cases of Lori Hacking and Laci Peterson, one important trigger was pregnancy and the changes it would bring. In fact, the number one cause of death in

pregnant women is homicide. It outranks any health risk associated with pregnancy.²³ During pregnancy, the father may feel that he has little control over the situation. The wife or girlfriend begins turning more of her attention to taking care of herself and the child, while giving less attention to him and his needs. The baby to come may also be perceived as either competition or a burden, taking away from or even putting a strain on the father's social and financial freedom. The closer the due date gets, the more the father feels the strain and loss of control. In the Peterson trial, prosecutor Rick Distaso theorized that Scott's motive was not to continue the affair with Amber Frey but to gain “freedom from the burden of a wife and son, or if he divorced, freedom from paying child support.”²⁴

When Rae Carruth, former Carolina Panther, found out that his girlfriend, Cherica Adams, was pregnant, he pressured her to get an abortion. He did not want the financial burden, as he was already paying \$3,000 a month in child support for another child he had fathered while still a teenager. When Cherica refused to get an abortion, he planned her murder. Rae and Cherica saw a movie together and then left in separate cars. Rae was driving in front of Cherica. Rae stopped his vehicle, blocking Cherica, while three men with whom Rae had conspired pulled alongside her vehicle and shot her. Cherica called 911 and lived long enough to tell how Rae had been blocking her car and that she thought he may have been involved. Cherica's son was saved via C-section before she died, but he suffered brain damage and is in the custody of his grandmother.²⁵

On the surface, the men who commit these crimes do not appear to be cold-blooded killers or psychotic maniacs. Many are accomplished role models or the guy next door. They are our neighbors. They are seemingly upstanding citizens, from all walks of life. These cases, as shocking as they are, are not that unusual. We may want to believe that these crimes are committed under rare or unusual circumstances by people who are psychotic or monstrous, but it is not so. Perhaps the most horrendous thing about these crimes is that they and the people who commit them are not unique or unusual. Our society has not yet widely acknowledged how common these crimes are and what a challenge it is to address the circumstances that lead to such occurrences.

These stories are tragic. However, they help to bring attention to the rampant problem of violence against women in this country. This can provide a gateway for discussion, instill awareness, and help to spawn change. The diversity of the victims in these stories shows that abuse can happen to anyone. Victims of abuse should not feel stigmatized or alone in their experiences. It is hoped that these tragedies will encourage women suffering physical or emotional abuse to get help before

their situation turns deadly. During the Simpson trial, as women realized that what had happened to Nicole could happen to them, domestic violence calls increased.

THREE MAJOR TYPES OF ABUSE: PHYSICAL, SEXUAL, AND EMOTIONAL

Physical abuse includes slapping, hitting, kicking, burning, punching, choking, shoving, beating, throwing things, locking a person out of the house, restraining, and other acts designed to injure, hurt, endanger, or cause physical pain.²⁶

By the most conservative estimates, one million women in the United States suffer nonfatal violence by a spouse or partner each year.²⁷ In 2001, more than half a million American women (588,490) reported being victims of nonfatal violence committed by an intimate partner; undoubtedly, many other cases went unreported.²⁸ Physical abuse is such a common problem that it is very likely that someone you know has experienced it or is currently in an abusive relationship. Thirty percent of Americans say they know a woman who has been physically abused by her husband or boyfriend in the past year.²⁹ Although these statistics are staggering, they only give part of the picture. Many acts of violence go unreported and are hidden even from friends and family.

The following vignettes are examples of physical abuse:

Sarah is cooking dinner when her husband, Matt, comes home from work. He is angry that the meal isn't ready and begins to complain. He calls her incompetent and throws a pot of boiling water at her, causing serious burns.

Jennifer breaks up with her boyfriend Nick and begins dating another guy. Jealous, Nick follows her home one night and attacks her before she is safely inside. He kicks and punches her, calls her a slut, and leaves her with several bruises and a broken jaw.

Sharon's husband, Ted, is screaming at their five-year-old daughter for leaving a mess on the floor. Sharon suggests that he calm down. He then slaps Sharon, shouting that the house is his house and he can scream all he wants.

Sexual abuse includes sadism and forcing a person to have sex when he or she does not want to; forcing a person to engage in sexual acts that he or she does not like or finds unpleasant, frightening, or violent; forcing a person to have sex with others or while others watch; or forcing a person into acts that make him or her feel sexually demeaned or violated. Sexual abuse may also include forcing a woman into reproductive decisions that are contrary to her wishes or forcing her to have sex without protection against disease or pregnancy.³⁰

When we think of rape in America, the typical scenario we imagine is a young woman being attacked in a dark alley by a stranger. Although rape is certainly perpetrated by strangers, this common stereotype of the crime does not convey the whole story or even the most common story. When women are sexually assaulted, it is most likely to be by a friend or acquaintance.³¹ In their lifetime, one in four women are likely to experience sexual violence by an intimate partner.³² In 2001, 41,470 women reported rape/sexual assault committed by an intimate partner.³³ However, these numbers only give us a fraction of the picture, because rape is the most underreported violent crime in the country. Victims often know their attacker. In a survey of victims who did not report either rape or attempted rape to the police, they stated the following reasons why no report was made: 43 percent thought nothing could be done, 27 percent felt it was a private matter, 12 percent were afraid of police response, and 12 percent felt it would not be seen as that important.³⁴

All of the following vignettes are examples of sexual abuse:

Jeff secretly videotapes his girlfriend Shannon having sex with him. He then shows the tape to a group of his friends, knowing that Shannon would never have consented to such an act.

John forces his wife, Mary, to have sex when she doesn't want to do so. He laughs afterward, calling her a prude, and tells her that it is his right as her husband.

Bryan and Cindy have five children. Cindy is overwhelmed, and they have agreed not to have anymore children. To keep Cindy busy at home, Bryan tampers with her birth control and she becomes pregnant.

Emotional abuse includes consistently doing or saying things to shame, insult, ridicule, embarrass, demean, belittle, or mentally hurt another person. This may include calling a person names such as fat, lazy, stupid, bitch, silly, ugly, or failure, or telling someone he or she can't do anything right, is worthless, is undeserving, or is unwanted. Emotional abuse may also involve withholding money, affection, attention, or permission; destroying property; forcing a person to do things he or she does not want to do; manipulating; hurting or threatening children or pets; threatening to either abandon a person or take his or her children away. It may also include refusing to help someone who is sick or hurt; ridiculing a person's valued beliefs, religion, race, heritage, or class; or insulting a person's family or friends.³⁵

Emotional abuse is less recognized as a significant social problem, but it is very harmful, quite common, and often occurs in conjunction with physical and sexual abuse. Due to the nature of emotional abuse, it is difficult to get accurate information on its prevalence. Some studies estimate that emotional abuse is 22 percent more prevalent than physical abuse.³⁶ Many people mistakenly believe that if there has been

no physical damage, the behavior is not abusive and does not cause real harm. Ironically, emotional abuse is often described by victims as being worse than the physical abuse. The scars it leaves remain long after physical bruises have healed.

Here are examples of emotional abuse:

While Debbie fixes her hair in the morning, her live-in boyfriend, Tim, belittles her. He calls her names and tells her that she is wasting her time trying to look nice, because she will always be ugly.

Rob constantly comes home and complains that his wife, Sandra, is ruining his life. He tells her that he knows that he can find someone better and that someday he is going to take the children and leave.

Clearly, intimate violence against women has a profound impact on many facets of our society. It affects women of every age, race, or social status. Globally, one in three women has been beaten, coerced into sex, or otherwise abused in her lifetime.³⁷ According to the American Medical Association, family violence kills as many women every five years as the total number of Americans who died in the Vietnam War.³⁸ Financially speaking, the cost of domestic violence is tremendous. According to a study by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the health-related costs of rape, physical assault, stalking, and homicide by intimate partners exceed \$5.8 billion each year, including \$4.1 billion in direct health care expenses, \$900 million in lost productivity, and \$900 million in lifetime earnings.³⁹ Businesses lose about \$100 million annually in lost wages, sick leave, absenteeism, and nonproductivity as a direct result of domestic violence.⁴⁰

Violence against women not only causes physical and emotional harm to women, it also affects the children. In a national survey of more than 6,000 American families, half of the men who frequently assaulted their wives also frequently assaulted their children.⁴¹ Each year, an estimated 3.3 million children are exposed to violence by family members against their mothers or female caretakers.⁴² Battered mothers are more likely than other mothers to abuse their children. Children whose mothers are abused are six times more likely to attempt suicide and 50 percent more likely to abuse drugs and alcohol. One study found that 63 percent of men between 15 and 20 years old who are incarcerated for homicide killed their mother's batterer. Domestic violence can also have detrimental effects on a woman's ability to support her family and herself. Victims are over-represented in the welfare population. Although studies show that these victims seek employment, they are often unable to maintain it because their abusers sabotage their efforts.⁴³ It is estimated that 50 percent of homeless women and children in the United States are fleeing domestic violence.⁴⁴

These statistics show that despite the tendency in our country to dismiss violence between intimate partners as a private matter, the

damage it causes reaches far beyond the closed doors it hides behind. The numbers clearly show that this is not an individual problem—this is society’s problem. It is time to bring attention to this matter and ask ourselves why, in a country that glorifies rights and freedoms, we fail to deliver to women the right to live without fear of violence. Despite being the richest country in the world, the United States has some of the highest rates for rape, domestic violence, and spousal murder.⁴⁵ Rape, for instance, is 18 times higher in the United States than in Great Britain, and rape is one of the few categories of crime in the United States that has not seen a decrease in recent years.⁴⁶ Such numbers tell us that we are still too tolerant of violence directed at women. As a culture, we continue to believe that violence against women is a “normal” interaction between men and women. It is time that we find such behavior completely unacceptable.

Chapter 2

Dismantling the Myths about Intimate Violence against Women

Carol A. Grothues
Shelly L. Marmion

A number of myths or false beliefs exist about intimate partner abuse; some are more harmful than others. These myths are based on misinformation that is commonly held by both men and women, stemming from traditional values or attempts to understand the unbelievable—that a sane woman could actually be “stuck” in a bad relationship. People often try to make sense of these bad situations and end up maintaining harmful stereotypes.

Researchers studying domestic violence strive to publish studies that prove these myths to be untrue in order to stop their harmful effects. These beliefs are so common that they are often not questioned and are accepted by both men and women. All too often these myths are believed even by the victims themselves. Not only do they allow the violence and abuse to continue, but they keep victims stuck and lessen their opportunities to get the help they need. These myths must change if we will ever have any hope of stopping violence against women.

MYTH 1: DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IS USUALLY A ONE-TIME, ISOLATED OCCURRENCE

Battering is a pattern of power and control through use of force. It is not just one physical attack. Domestic violence includes the repeated use of a number of tactics, including intimidation, threats, economic

deprivation (controlling all money in the relationship and only providing necessary living expenses when one chooses to do so, usually when the partner is submissive and acting “appropriate”), isolation (keeping all friends and family members away), and psychological and sexual abuse. This abuse typically involves demeaning, destructive comments that crush self-esteem and any sense of self-confidence. When someone tells you constantly that you are ugly and stupid and no one else could possibly love you, you begin to believe it.

This pattern of domestic violence tends to occur in cycles and usually involves three phases. The first is the *tension-building phase*, where anger and conflict start to grow. This is a very uncomfortable, tense time in the home, marked by negativity, emotional distance, and increased fear. When this tension builds high enough, violence erupts in the *acute battering phase*, often resulting in significant physical damage. Violence is usually followed by the *loving phase*, in which the batterer becomes sorrowful and repentant and promises never to do it again. Evidence is clear that the cycle continues and cycles more rapidly, with increasing levels of violence.¹ Moreover, even if the violence does not happen often, it remains a constant, hidden, terrorizing factor.

MYTH 2: MANY VICTIMS “ASK FOR” VIOLENT TREATMENT AND ABUSE

This belief is maintained by individuals who beat others, by persons who cannot understand why women just don’t leave, and even by those who believe that women “deserve” to be beaten for overstepping the bounds of being a proper wife. Batterers “rationalize” that they had to hit or beat their wife because she needed to learn that what she had done was wrong or that it is better to let out the anger rather than hold it in. This is a blame factor that serves to take all responsibility from the person committing the violence. Even well-educated people sometimes conclude, for example, that if only dinner had been ready on time, then this would not have happened. Others get wrapped up in the mistaken logic that if the woman did not want it, she would just leave. Therefore, the situation is not so bad or perhaps she even likes it.

Victims do not ask for this abuse any more than do the victims of other types of crime. Victims of domestic violence have historically been characterized as masochistic women who enjoy being beaten. Evidence does not support this theory. Rather, victims of domestic violence desperately want the abuse to end, and they engage in various survival strategies, including calling the police or seeking help from family members, to protect themselves and their children.² Women may also use silence as a survival strategy, and they may endure a beating to keep the batterer from attacking the children. Clearly these

strategies do not mean that women enjoy being beaten or abused, but these are ways that women have to lessen a dangerous situation. Some women will also admit to provoking the violence in order to get it over with in the hope of moving into the loving phase more quickly. This is certainly not evidence that this woman is “asking for” abuse. No one deserves to be hit. No one asks for it.

MYTH 3: IF A WOMAN IS ABUSED, SHE CAN EASILY LEAVE THE SITUATION

Many men and women believe this myth to be true, especially in America. In the land of democracy and free will, people believe that an individual can make absolutely any choice he or she wants to make, including leaving a violent spouse. “Just pack your bags and get out” is what battered women hear most often. The truth is that all women in battering relationships face barriers to leaving these relationships. First, they are at greater risk of being killed by the batterer than those who stay.³ There is significant evidence that a woman is at greater risk for being seriously injured or killed during the two years following departure than at any time she lived at home with the batterer.⁴ In reality, victims make repeated attempts to leave violent relationships, but they are prevented from doing so by their partners, who tend to increase control and coercion through threats.

Economic issues are often a major reason for staying. Women who leave their spouse often have no good alternatives for housing or support for themselves or their children. Because of the nature of the abuse, which often involves increasing isolation from others, victims tend to have a very small support system. Shelters are not readily available in all communities, and even this option has limitations and has an impact on the children. It is not simply a case of not wanting to leave; most women do wish to do so. However, the costs of leaving are significant.

We also need to consider the complexities of these relationships that make leaving difficult. As stated before, the violent relationship is cyclical and almost always involves a loving phase that serves to maintain the loving feelings the woman has for her partner. She hopes he will change and wants desperately to believe it when he tells her that he will never harm her again. She does not want to give up on the dream she has for the happy family she once hoped to create.

MYTH 4: PERSONS WHO COMMIT SUCH VIOLENCE ARE SERIOUSLY PSYCHOLOGICALLY DERANGED OR PSYCHOTIC

Actually, male batterers often appear to be normal in every respect. Studies have found that batterers come from all walks of life and every

socioeconomic and ethnic group. There are no psychological characteristics that distinguish batterers from men who do not batter. Even though some batterers do meet the criteria for antisocial personality disorder or substance abuse, many do not.⁵ Moreover, these characteristics are not immediately observable. Often people outside of the relationship have trouble believing that such a seemingly normal person would be capable of such acts.

MYTH 5: VICTIMS SHOULD JUST GET OVER IT, BECAUSE THERE ARE NO LONG-LASTING EFFECTS AND A STRONG PERSON IS STRONGER WHEN THEY PUT IT IN THE PAST

In truth, there are significant long-lasting effects on a woman’s physical and mental health. Although physical healing usually occurs fairly rapidly, the emotional scars are long lasting and sometimes permanent. Battered women tend to have low self-esteem as a result of constant or chronic name-calling and criticism. They are made to feel powerless and useless and begin to believe in these statements. Emotional abuse is usually not a one-time incident that can be ignored or dismissed. Most women report that the mental or emotional abuse is more destructive than the physical abuse.⁶ Many women develop chronic low self-esteem and even clinical depression.⁷

Although challenges often make us stronger, this is not usually the case in domestic abuse situations due to the relatively long-term and extremely personal nature of the relationship. We often hurt the ones we love the most deeply, because we know all of their weaknesses and insecurities. Batterers tend to be superb at finding these buttons and pushing them often as they serve to enhance their control over others.

MYTH 6: SEXUAL ABUSE IS ABOUT SEX, AND IF A WOMAN WERE PROVIDING ADEQUATE SEX, HER HUSBAND WOULD NOT BE ABUSIVE (TO HER OR OTHERS)

The vast majority of sexual assault is about power, anger, and control, not about sexual gratification.⁸ As in other forms of violence, the perpetrator believes that he is entitled to force others to his will. It is simply not true that men who rape or engage in sexual abuse of others do so because their sexual needs are not being met by a partner. One study found that rapists often have higher levels of consensual sexual activity than other men.⁹ The reality is that sexual abuse is not about sex or sexual gratification at all. Although these perpetrators may achieve sexual release through their actions, it is not their motivation for engaging in such acts. When aggression is rewarded and associated with increased power and even sexual gratification, the tendency