

Introduction

When things were good, they were so good. Like I said, I was always secure with him. He might try to hit me and he might try to kill me, but nobody else was going to do it. Nobody else was going to talk bad to me or hurt me or talk bad about me. That just wasn't going to happen. I was secure in that sense with him. *He was going to protect me from everybody else.*—Candy, twenty-something white woman, North Carolina

On April 16, 2007, the worst school shooting in the history of the United States—to date—took place when a gunman shot thirty-two members of the Virginia Tech University campus community before turning the gun on himself and becoming the thirty-third “victim.” Early speculation about the motive focused on a possible domestic dispute.

Perhaps the most troubling aspect of this situation is the fact that many accounts of the morning of April 16, 2007, indicate that the campus police did not immediately recognize the risk that the shooter presented to the entire Virginia Tech campus *because the first homicide committed that morning was believed to be a domestic violence homicide*.¹ “Virginia Tech President Charles Steger said authorities believed that the shooting at the dorm was a domestic dispute and mistakenly thought the gunman had fled the campus. ‘We had no reason to suspect any other incident was going to occur,’ he said” (Lindsey 2007).

The events surrounding the Virginia Tech shooting are troubling for many reasons, first and foremost because the decision by the Virginia Tech president implies that domestic violence homicide is nothing to take too seriously, and certainly it does not constitute a threat to public safety in the larger community. And yet in many cases of domestic violence homicide, other victims are maimed and/or murdered. Even more troubling is the fact that in examining

other school shootings, a clear and disturbing pattern emerges (Newman et al. 2005). Beginning with the Texas Tower shootings at the University of Texas, Austin, in 1966, many school shootings either began with or involved domestic violence homicide. In the Texas Tower shootings, the shooter, Charles Whitman, murdered his wife and his mother the night before the terrible rampage in Austin. Luke Woodham, the school shooter in Pearl, Mississippi, also began his rampage by shooting his girlfriend and mother. And, of course, the most recent tragedy at Virginia Tech was believed to begin with a domestic violence homicide. In all of these cases, had law enforcement and emergency responders taken the initial domestic violence homicide as a matter of public safety, perhaps the greater tragedies would have been avoided.

April 2007 was indeed a deadly month. Earlier that month a 19-year-old Texas A&M student was murdered by her ex-boyfriend. After killing her, he barbecued her body on his backyard grill in an attempt to dispose of it. A few days before that a University of Washington college student was murdered by her ex-boyfriend who shot and killed her *on campus*. Those who are not moved by the tragedy of domestic violence, conceptualizing it as something that women often bring on themselves, should care because it is a threat to public safety in this society. And, though high school and college students are far less vulnerable to domestic violence homicide than adult women, the community living situation that characterizes college campuses and the high concentration of people on high school campuses creates a situation ripe for the "spillover" of domestic violence into what have become some of the worst school shootings in U.S. history.

The violence continued into May 2007 when in Moscow, Idaho, a man shot and killed two police officers and wounded bystanders in a standoff with police. This man's rampage began with the murder of his wife, whose body was found after the man committed suicide inside the courthouse where he had barricaded himself during the standoff.

Taken together, these events, both on and off campuses, are part of a larger culture of violence in the United States. Tragically, forty times more women are killed by their intimate or ex-intimate partners *each year* in the United States than the total killed at Virginia Tech that fateful day in April 2007. On average, four domestic homicides occur *each day*. Millions of women live in fear of their intimate and former intimate partners. The tragic events at Virginia Tech became second-page news, having received more coverage but no more analysis than did the tragic stories of battered women introduced in this book. These women's stories bring to light a dirty secret that most Americans are even less willing to discuss than school shootings.

Lost in all of the media attention and hype around the shootings at Virginia Tech is the fact that to date all of the school shooters, from Columbine to

Jonesboro, Arkansas, to Virginia Tech, have been men. Violence is *gendered*. And intimate partner violence (IPV) is *doubly* gendered in that the victims are almost always—95 percent of the time—women.²

Little attention is paid in the public sphere, the media, or the academic literature to the epidemic of intimate partner violence. Sociologist Lisa D. Brush argues that sociologists, even those who identify themselves with the study of social problems, no longer study individuals' lives:

It has become unfashionable to speak of first-order social problems—the events or beliefs or dilemmas that threaten peoples' livelihood or safety or health and well-being—rather than the second-order construction or third-order reception and interpretation of the discourse about such problems, the people who suffer them, and how to organize relief. It is hard to find a *Social Problems*³ article that presents research and theory-testing as a means of remedying suffering by laboring to understand the world in order to change it (or at the very least to change social policy!). (Brush 2006, 1)

This book not only provides another exposé of the tragedies of intimate partner violence, but it does so using the voices of actual battered women and the men who batter them. Second, rather than painting batterers as crazy men and battered women as helpless victims, the analyses presented here identify the structural and cultural factors that create an environment where gendered violence is normalized and unfortunately all too common. By constructing acts of battering as “rule” enforcement and “role” enforcement, I argue that individual men and communities use intimate partner violence to discipline women for “misbehaving.” Equally important, IPV is a “tool” used to keep all women in their “proper place” in the gender hierarchy (Epstein 2007), thus maintaining the status quo dictated by gender inequality regimes (Acker 2006).

THE PROBLEM

As noted, intimate partner violence is an epidemic societal problem.⁴ We should care about IPV because it affects our mothers and sisters and partners and friends, and because it is our fathers and brothers and male partners and friends who are responsible for this violence. IPV kills fifteen hundred women per year and sends millions to local emergency rooms for medical treatment (Bureau of Justice Statistics 2003).

So, Will's at work one day and I'm, I'm home. Bri's at school. And I was sleeping up in my bedroom, and all of a sudden, my bedroom door came flying in.

GW [Stella's ex-boyfriend] had broken through a window downstairs, come in and kicked open my door, and I was in T-shirt and panties and it was winter out, so I was barefooted. And he jumped on top of me and started choking me. Then he yanked me up, and started banging my head against a cement wall. And I managed to get my feet up against his chest and push him backwards, and I ran down the stairs, and got to the front door, but its one of those, you have to turn the door knob and the thing at the same time. One of those old fashioned locks. And he got me before I could get it out and he grabbed me around the waist and threw me backwards and I hit the banister to the stairs, which was solid wood, and I slid down. He ripped the phone out of the wall and then he was standing over me with a baseball bat. And I thought, this is it. I'm going to die.—Stella, twenty-something white woman, Minnesota

Until very recently, domestic violence, as it has been referred to, was a problem to be dealt with inside the family. Furthermore, domestic violence was essentially legal; men were legally allowed to beat their wives as long as they did not kill them or the violence did not become extreme (Browne 1987).⁵ As evidence of this, many feminist scholars cite "the rule of thumb," noting that men were legally sanctioned to beat their wives as long as they did so with an instrument that did not exceed the diameter of their own thumb (Browne 1987).⁶ In the late 1970s and early 1980s second wave feminists began to draw attention to the situation of domestic violence and its victims. The writings of these scholars (e.g., Browne 1987; Kirkwood 1993) were critical in that they brought this common experience of IPV to the attention of the larger American population. However, as awareness of IPV has grown, our discussions of it have remained narrowly focused on conceptualizing and defining IPV as a "women's problem." Certainly IPV is a women's problem. Millions of women are injured and thousands are killed each year as a result of IPV. And certainly, women face many problems as they experience IPV, such as the difficulty of finding a safe place to live (Tiefenthaler et al. 2005). However, it is their male partners who beat them.

A significant barrier to effectively dealing with IPV is our continued conceptualization of it as a "women's problem," thus focusing on or examining only the women who are victims. I argue that we need to redefine and reconceptualize IPV as a "men's problem" and as a problem faced by couples in our society. I also argue that it is a social problem, one that has significant costs to our society. The most notable costs are those associated with law enforcement, the criminal justice system, welfare payments and shelter costs for women who leave, health care costs as a result of injury, labor costs as a result of sick leave, and of course the innumerable and inestimable costs to our children who grow up with this violence and so often go on to perpetuate its cycle.

I argue further that it is precisely this tendency to categorize and segregate by gender that creates the environment in which IPV is not only common but more or less accepted and expected. And, though I explore in this book both the race and class underpinnings of IPV, it is fundamentally a product of *gender inequality regimes* (Acker 2006). Extrapolating from the work of Cynthia Fuchs Epstein, I suggest that the existence of IPV fundamentally reminds us as individuals and as a society that men and women live in different social worlds. IPV is a powerful tool in enforcing and reinforcing gender hierarchies and gender inequalities. And, as we shall see in subsequent chapters, "triggers" to IPV can be understood as reactions to the perception (by men) that women are trying to act "equal," that they have lost sight of their "proper place." I term this type of IPV "role enforcement."

Epstein, in her 2007 Presidential Address to the American Sociological Association (ASA), argued that one of the core concepts in understanding gender is recognizing that, historically, patriarchy has constructed men and women as "different" and that the closer women get to men at work in earning potential, in holding public office, in running corporations, and in gaining educational credentials, the more important it is for patriarchy to identify and reinforce gender differences. She writes:

The enforcement of the distinction is achieved through cultural and ideological means that justify the differentiation. This is despite the fact that, unlike every other dichotomous category of people, females and males are necessarily bound together, sharing the same domiciles and most often the same racial and social class statuses. Analyses of these relationships are difficult given the ways in which they are integrated with each other and the extent to which they are basic in all institutions. (Epstein 2007, 4)

In other words, just as Ku Klux Klan violence arose during the Reconstruction period in the South to enforce racial boundaries threatened by the emancipation of millions of slaves—in short, to remind African Americans of "their place"—so, too, gendered violence can be understood as a tactic for reminding women of *their* place. Furthermore, Epstein notes that the need to enforce between-group boundaries is greatest when there is a high degree of intimacy between the group members. This framework suggests it is not surprising that Klan violence was far more prevalent in the South, a geographic landscape in which African Americans and whites shared the intimate spaces created by wet-nursing, domestic service, and so on, than in the North (see Hattery and Smith 2008). So, too, is the rate of gender violence high. In fact, it is significantly higher than racial violence, because men and women share intimate space not just as spouses and partners but as siblings, parents, and

children. In the context of this intimacy, and in a time when women are gaining access to freedoms and opportunities that have been denied them for so long, it is not surprising that we see the high rates of IPV that characterize the contemporary United States.

ASSUMPTIONS

People always ask why I focus my attention on men who batter, with particular attention to those who also grew up in violent homes, instead of focusing on the more common experience: men who do not batter *despite* the fact that they were raised with violence.

This is an interesting question and one that I have thought about long and hard. I've come to realize that people who ask me this question are in fact applying a different set of assumptions to understanding intimate partner violence than they apply to most other aspects of life. The question arises from their assumption that the common experience should be studied rather than the exception to the rule.

Asking why I do not study men who are not batterers rises from the assumption that all men are bad, and therefore we had better study the process by which men, indeed most men, can and do become "good" (Zimbardo 2007).

This runs counter to the assumptions that permeate all aspects of sociology. Nearly all of sociology is based on the exception. And, the discipline rests firmly on the assumption that people are generally good, and we need to understand what happens when things go wrong.

Allow me to illustrate. I do not ask my colleagues who study poverty, "Why don't you study the more common experience of being middle class or moderately affluent in order to understand what those folks did right?" This query would rest on the assumption that most people are poor but that a few figure out how to make money and not become or remain poor.⁷

Similarly, I do not ask my colleagues who study incarceration, "Why don't you study the more common experience of those who never go to jail?" That, too, would imply that most people are destined for jail but for some lucky event in their lives that keeps them out of jail. And, fortunately, most Americans are lucky.

I study men who batter because I believe they are the exception to the rule. I believe that men (and women) are born fundamentally good, not bad. But, being raised in a patriarchal, violent society, many boys, far too many, grow up learning to beat women. Though statistically they may be the exception to the rule, I am also interested in the ways in which patriarchal culture normal-

izes violence against women. Though men who engage in IPV may still be the exception to the rule, I will argue in chapter 5 that in fact IPV and other forms of violence against women are an expected outcome of patriarchy. This can be seen in the recent remarks by Isaiah Thomas, former Indiana University and NBA standout and former manager of the New York Knicks. Thomas, in a deposition taken as part of a sexual harassment lawsuit filed against him, indicated that it was offensive for a white man to call an African American woman a "bitch," but he was not equally troubled by the same word being used by an African American man.

Jurors heard the Knicks coach say he wouldn't stand for a white man calling a black woman a "bitch"—but wouldn't be as angry if the same words came from the mouth of a black man. In a videotaped deposition played for the jury at fired Knicks exec Anucha Browne Sanders' sexual harassment trial, Thomas said he drew a distinction between whites and blacks when it came to the B-word. Asked if he was bothered by a black man calling a black female "bitch," Thomas said: "Not as much. I'm sorry to say, I do make a distinction." (Zambito 2007)

And, of course, I must point out here that Thomas is considered one of the "good guys" in basketball. People note that he is sophisticated, articulate, and not a thug like some of his peers. What is notable about his statement is that it points out the pervasiveness of misogynistic beliefs among everyday kinds of men.⁸

Now, a caveat: in fact I am especially interested in men who were raised with violence but not socialized to be violent themselves. They do not learn to beat women, even though most of us would not be surprised if they did. As a feminist I am interested in these men who throw off the trappings of patriarchy. Men who do not batter, especially those who were raised in violent homes, are interesting because they fail to conform to hegemonic constructions of masculinity, which I will explore in this book. Yet, this project is based on an examination of the reasons that men do beat the women they love and the ways that this shapes their relationships and the individual lives of both the men and women who live with this violence.

Finally, as a researcher, I will continue to base my research on two major assumptions: (1) that people are born "good," and it is society that teaches them to be "bad"; and (2) that the interesting part of science lies in these exceptions to the rule, even if they, too, are far too "common," as I will argue is the case with men who batter.

My thoughts here are in many ways similar to those of the late African American historian and sociologist William Edward Burghardt DuBois, who argued for most of his academic/activist career for a more accurate account of U.S. and world history. He said, "We have the record of kings and gentlemen

ad nauseam and in stupid detail; but of the common run of human beings, and particularly of the half or wholly submerged working group, the world has saved all too little of authentic record and tried to forget or ignore even the little saved" (1951).

THIS BOOK

The approach of this book is unique in that it is not limited to a discussion of IPV per se. Though the stories of men and women living with IPV will be presented and analyzed, several chapters of the book will examine the ways in which IPV is a structural, perhaps inevitable, outcome of the ideology and false consciousness that is a part of the patriarchal socialization process. Patriarchy proscribes a certain set of gender relations as well as imposes limits and constraints upon educational attainment, labor force participation, and economic freedom for women. Patriarchy results in restricted constructions of motherhood and fatherhood and constrains women's reproductive lives. For example, women continue to be socialized to believe that it is better to have a man who beats you than no man at all (Rich 1980). Women continue to earn seventy-five cents on the male dollar, leaving them economically disadvantaged (England 2005; Levine, n.d.; Padavic and Reskin 2002).

Until we address these fundamental, root causes for staying in a relationship with a batterer, such as economic dependency, battered women will continue to make unsuccessful attempts to leave, returning because they cannot "make ends meet" (Edin and Lein 1997). Therefore, IPV, a gendered phenomenon, and all of its causes and outcomes, must be examined within the larger system of patriarchy. Only when we understand the ways in which patriarchy creates unequal gender outcomes can we begin to consider social reconfigurations that will eliminate (or at least reduce) the violence plaguing so many of our families.

But, IPV is not structured only by a system of patriarchy. It is also structured by a system of racial superiority and capitalism and of the intersections of these systems with patriarchy. I will argue later in the book that one of the battering "triggers" for men is feeling that their masculinity is threatened. One of the patterns that emerged from these interviews is that when men feel emasculated they will often try to reassert their masculinity through violence. One of the fundamental tenets of patriarchy is the requirement that men be the breadwinner in their families. But, one of the outcomes of capitalism is that this is a difficult if not impossible task for a large number of American men. And the situation is far worse for minority men, especially African American men. Thus, this book will not only present data on the experiences of whites

and African Americans, but it will utilize the lens of integration provided by the race, class, and gender theory to analyze the differences that exist across race, class, and gender demarcations. Until we understand better the nuances of IPV as it is structured by systems of domination (racism, sexism, classism, and so forth) we will be unable to work toward building a society free of violence and oppression. This book is also framed by the notion that IPV consists of individual, structural, and cultural components. Thus, I devote a chapter to each of these components, and each includes an analysis framed by the race, class, and gender paradigm.

The Stories

What makes a book like this compelling are the stories of the men and women—regular, everyday people like those we work with, those we meet in the aisle of the grocery store, and those we live near. The stories here are of regular, everyday people who live with a secret, and that secret is IPV.

The stories that constitute the data utilized in these analyses vary. Some of the men and women we met had experienced only one violent episode before the violence was interrupted. Others have lived for fifteen or twenty years with severe violence. Many of the women we met have an injury report that would fill a medical chart—broken bones, miscarriages, blackened eyes, broken teeth, pulled hair, and even scars from being bitten in the face. The stories presented here chill the spine. But, until we can be honest about IPV and examine it systematically, we will be powerless in reducing and eliminating it as a major cause of injury and death to women in this country.

Chapter 1, "Setting the Stage," presents the most recent statistics and empirical data to paint a broad picture of IPV in contemporary U.S. society and provide an overview of race, class, and gender theory, which I use to contextualize and advance our understanding of IPV.

NOTES

1. At the time of this writing it has not been determined if in fact the first homicide was a domestic violence shooting. My claim here is only that at the time of the events, the decision to not alert the campus about the first homicide was based on the belief that it was a domestic violence homicide and thus was considered an isolated event. In fact, according to the official report commissioned by the governor on the tragic shootings, "Had university officials not waited more than two hours to tell the campus about the initial shootings, lives could have been saved when Seung-Hui Cho later began his massacre inside a classroom building." See *Report of the Virginia Tech Review Panel*, www.governor.virginia.gov/TempContent/techPanelReport.cfm.

2. Among scholars of domestic violence are two schools of thought. Feminist scholars tend to focus on severe battering when they describe its gendered quality. In contrast, Michael Johnson and others prefer to distinguish what they term intimate terrorism from situational couple violence. They note that while 95 percent of the victims of intimate terrorism are women, situational couple violence involves similar numbers of men being violent toward women as women being violent toward men. I will examine this distinction in chapter 1.

3. *Social Problems* is the journal of the Society for the Study of Social Problems (SSSP).

4. IPV in the gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender communities is an important issue. For the purposes of this book, however, I am restricting my discussion of IPV to the heterosexual community. For an excellent report on IPV in the lesbian community see Renzetti 1989.

5. In an examination of Palestinian women from the West Bank and Gaza Strip, Haj-Yahia (2000) found that even among fundamentalists, this seemingly universal truth holds for these women subjected by their mates to annual incidences of psychological, sexual, and economic abuse as well as physical violence. Battering, then, especially in legally constructed unions like civil and religious marriage, has been researched and argued by scholars to be legal in many countries, including the United States, well into the twentieth century (Browne 1987; Weitzman 1998; Leone et al. 2004). This finding correlates well with the early text by Engels in which he argues that women all over the world who enter into marriage become the property of their husbands. While originally contested, family scholars using the then unique database of the Human Relations Area Files, located at Yale University, confirmed this "husband's right" (Murdock 1954, 1983).

6. Note that legal scholars who trace the origins of the "Rule of Thumb" conclude that it is probably half true and half not true. In other words, men were legally sanctioned in beating their wives, but only in accordance with an actual rule comparing an instrument to the thumb of the husband (Kelly 1994; U.S. Commission on Civil Rights 1982).

7. Recent IRS reports on wealth suggest that in fact more and more Americans may soon be considered "poor" as more and more wealth concentrates among an ever-decreasing proportion of the U.S. population. www.commondreams.org/archive/2007/10/12/4509/.

8. "He has no right to put her down, and then think it's ok for me to put her down but it's not alright for a white man to put her down. What are you talking about? She is a human being and as a female, and in particular as a black female, I took tremendous offense to that." C. Vivian Stringer, Rutgers's head basketball coach, October 26, 2007. ESPN, <http://sports.espn.go.com/ncw/news/story?id=3081048>.