

## Reflection

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We completed our Ph.D.'s in sociology at Washington State University in 1972 and immediately moved to Scotland to share a temporary post at the University of Stirling for a period of one year. Our intention was to have a one-year "adventure" before beginning academic careers in the United States. During that year, we taught at a new and exciting university, traveled extensively around Britain and Europe, and learned a bit about how to live in a different country. At the end of the year, we were both offered full-time posts and decided to stay a bit longer. During that year, the first refuges for "battered women" began to open in England and Scotland. The problem was only just beginning to receive public attention and we saw a tiny, four-line note about it in a national newspaper. This struck our interest because it crossed our respective areas of academic training in crime, criminal justice, and the community, as well as the family, social psychology, and gender. We believed that social science should contribute to a better understanding of social problems and thereby make a contribution to their solution. With this combination of training, orientations, and interest, as well as the belief that this was an important area to study, we began what has now become a lifelong investigation into violence against women.

In order to gain initial insight into the problem, we started by talking to the women who were beginning to open the first refuges for battered women in England and Scotland and the women who became some of the first residents. We searched the libraries for literature and found almost nothing except historical accounts of laws and attitudes about the acceptability of wife beating. It was clear to us that this was an important issue whose acceptance and neglect had resulted in little or no knowledge about the problem. As social scientists, we hoped we might use our training and skills to help rectify this through research and we approached the Scottish Office to fund a small, exploratory study that was followed by a larger study. Thus, we began our first empirical study of violence against women and the institutional responses to it. The research provided the foundation of our first book, *Violence Against Wives* (Free Press), and our initial journal articles and contained many of the ideas, issues, concerns, and lines of investigation that have continued to inform our research agenda as it has expanded and developed since then. While it is for others to say what impact this article may have had on subsequent thinking, ideas, and research, we can reflect on the material contained in "The 'Appropriate' Victim" that has continued to appear in the now voluminous literature on intimate partner violence and that has continued to inform our own research agenda as it has expanded since this publication.

In revisiting this publication and reflecting on its content, we see strong lines of continuity in our current research and themes that now regularly appear in the literature but that were relatively unfamiliar at the time. Our main goal was to provide an explanation of the contemporary problem of violence against women that was comprehensive and helped us better understand the development of the problem and current responses to it. In order to do

this we used a wide range of sources and evidence across disciplines, time periods, and different cultures. We used a context specific approach that examined the violence in the various contexts in which it occurs and must be understood as including institutional, cultural, interactional, and interpersonal. Violence was characterized as purposeful behavior and we argued for a definition of violence that was restricted to physical force.

The historical analysis of “wife beating” helped us understand the conditions under which the violence was used, its continuity over time, its legal and social acceptance, and the roles of men and women, as they were constituted in the institution of the family. This legacy is fundamental to understanding why it is women, and not men, who are the “appropriate” victims of violence in intimate relationships. It illustrates the foundations of male power, control, and authority over women in intimate relationships and provides an understanding of the use of violence for the purposes of maintaining, enforcing, and exercising that power. Cross-cultural evidence illustrates these common threads in differing contexts.

Contemporary evidence about assault and homicide within the family was used to illustrate the prevalence and severity of this violence and its asymmetrical nature, that is, that men are more likely than women to perpetrate this form of violence. It also revealed that women are far more likely to be killed by a male partner or former partner than the reverse, and that men often engaged in “overkill” in the act of uxoricide (killing a wife). The evidence further indicated that when women do kill a male partner it often occurs in the context of the man’s use of violence against her.

The Violence Against Women study discussed in the article was based on our own research, which included an analysis of over 33,000 arrest records held by the police in the two largest Scottish cities and in-depth interviews with 109 women. Evidence gathered from these records suggested that approximately 10 percent of all crime is violent crime, with two types constituting the vast majority: violence between adult males and men’s violence against a female partner. Violence against women perpetrated by male partners constituted 26 percent of all violent crime reported to the police. When considering violence within the family, the records revealed that 76 percent was directed at women by their partners and only 1 percent involved women’s violence directed at male partners. The results of the interviews with women were only briefly considered in the paper; they revealed that men’s violence occurred in the context of their increasing possessiveness and attempts to control and punish their partners. Chronic sources of conflict within these relationships that led to violence included disputes regarding sexual jealousy and possessiveness, the domestic responsibilities of women, and women’s attempts to leave the relationships.

The theoretical and methodology themes considered in “The ‘Appropriate’ Victim” continue to inform our recent and current work. For example, we have explored the development of innovative social and legal responses to violence against women (Dobash & Dobash, 1992; Dobash et al., 2000) and maintained a strong interest in the issue of asymmetry in intimate partner violence (Dobash et al., 1998; Dobash & Dobash, forthcoming). The context specific approach is always to the fore in our research and leads to a specific focus on the contexts, situations, and motives associated with violence (Dobash & Dobash, 1998). When this is coupled with the use of qualitative and quantitative forms of research, we think it provides a comprehensive evidentiary base from which to draw theoretical

conclusions. Additionally, in recent years we have turned our attention to violent men, having just completed a national study on homicide that considers all forms of homicide and also includes an explicit focus on intimate partner homicide (Dobash et al., forthcoming).

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