

PART TWO

Physical Violence against Women

To many readers, some of the excerpted works that comprise this section of the book may appear incompatible. Indeed, as several authors note in their reflections, their work has been criticized—even castigated—by others whom they considered allies, a reaction that obviously continues to perplex them. But despite the apparent incompatibilities, what these authors share is a willingness to ask really tough questions and to doggedly puzzle out answers. Their answers may not satisfy everyone, but they have served as a catalyst for a tremendous amount of subsequent research and, even more important, collective social action to address the problem of violence against women.

The first three works excerpted in this section set out to answer the questions “How much intimate violence occurs?” and “Is wife abuse an anomaly?” The authors went about answering these questions in different ways. As Del Martin points out in her reflection, she did not have the benefit of empirical studies, but through her compilation of anecdotes and piecing together the findings of various scattered reports, she developed a “guesstimate” that has since been supported by empirical research. Her goal, though, was not so much to generate a precise accounting of wife abuse incidents, but rather to demonstrate that wife abuse occurs far more often than the general public supposes and to motivate people to do something about it. Certainly, few readers would quarrel about whether Martin succeeded.

Rebecca and Russell Dobash used both quantitative and qualitative methods to document the incidence of wife abuse. They provided a historical context with which to frame the problem and, perhaps most importantly, emphasized the gender-specific nature of most marital violence. Their work continues to be cited as a prime example of the feminist perspective on wife abuse.

Murray Straus approached the questions from a slightly different angle. His goal was to obtain objective, reliable data on domestic violence from a large random sample of the U.S. population—a task that fellow social scientists at that time said couldn’t be done. Undaunted, Straus developed the Conflict Tactics Scales (CTS), but we doubt that he anticipated the firestorm of controversy that instrument and his subsequent national survey findings would unleash. The CTS has been roundly criticized by some of the most prominent

researchers of violence against women. Yet, it continues to be the most widely used instrument in this field—even by its critics—and Straus’s article, excerpted here, is still one of the most frequently cited.

One of the most commonly asked questions about abused women is “Why do they stay?” Setting aside for the moment what has become our almost knee-jerk response (i.e., “That’s the wrong question to ask; you should ask why men are violent toward women”), we may consider the next four excerpts in this section. In her careful reconstruction of the emergence of the Battered Women’s Movement, Susan Schechter provided not only an answer to this question (“Because they have nowhere to go”), but also produced a valuable historical document that, as she noted in her reflection, can be used by future generations of activists. While emphasizing the courage and perseverance of “ordinary” women in responding to violence and abuse, Schechter also showed that the movement, even in its formative years, did not speak with one voice and was not effectively responsive to all groups of women. Although she wrote in her reflection that *Women and Male Violence* “was written with very little movement history under its belt,” this is one of the reasons the book is so significant: It constitutes the foundation of the chronology of the movement on which so many others have, and will continue, to build.

In sharp contrast to Schechter, Lenore Walker turned to her field of psychology for an answer to the question of why battered women stay. In applying the theory of learned helplessness to battered women, Walker clearly was trying to prompt greater understanding of the women’s plight and elicit more sympathy for them from social institutions, such as the courts, as well as the general public. Although some readers may dispute the claim in her reflection that the theory has been “highly successful in persuading juries to understand how battered women killed their abusive partners in self-defense,” few will argue that Walker has not had a substantial impact on the field in terms of both research and practice.

Angela Browne’s book, *When Battered Women Kill*, the next excerpt in this section, is often contrasted with Walker’s. Like Walker, Browne interspersed battered women’s personal stories with a review of empirical research, but instead of focusing on the individual psychology of battered women, Browne framed their narratives in a social structural context. She documented the women’s repeated *active* attempts to get help and the lack of responsiveness of “help providers.” And she powerfully conveyed the desperate fear of these women as they perceived their intimate partners as “out of control” and their lives and the lives of their children in imminent danger. Browne’s analysis depicted battered women who kill not as helpless, but as women who had exhausted all other potential solutions and who, given the circumstances, responded to threat the way any “rational person” might respond. In doing so, she, too, provided the criminal justice system and juries with a framework for understanding how battered women, with no police record or history of violence, could kill their abusive partners in self-defense.

As the excerpt from Browne’s book shows, many battered women say they stay in abusive relationships for the sake of their children. But as Stark and Flitcraft demonstrated in their excerpted article, battered women are typically demonized rather than valorized for this. Stark and Flitcraft’s article has been a major catalyst in bringing together child welfare and battered women’s advocates who, as Stark points out in his reflection, previously often saw one another as opponents. Stark and Flitcraft’s findings—that domestic violence is a

typical context for child abuse and that mothers' male intimate partners, not mothers themselves, are usually the child abusers—has had, as Stark also notes in his reflection, a major impact in the courts recently.

The final two excerpts in this section address the question, as one of the authors states it in her reflection, “What difference does difference make?” Barbara Hart, while giving credit to many others in her reflection, nonetheless bravely “named the violence” in lesbian relationships. Hart provided a springboard analysis of lesbian battering when all that existed were anecdotes and, worse, a strong reluctance to say anything public about the problem at all. Today, few textbooks on violence against women or domestic violence exclude lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgendered partner violence and, even more telling, as colleagues quoted by Hart attest, *Lesbian Battering: An Examination* continues to motivate battered lesbians to speak out and to challenge service providers, researchers, students, and the public to broaden their understanding of intimate violence.

Kimberle Crenshaw's article, *Mapping the Margins*, excerpted here, put the concept of *intersectionality* in the vocabulary of researchers, practitioners, and advocates. Crenshaw showed how women of color were multiply jeopardized when they were abused by intimates: The dominant culture didn't really care—in fact, had never really cared—what happened to them, and members of communities of color worried more about what would happen to the abusers than what happened to the women they victimized. Crenshaw demonstrated that in terms of understanding and responding to violence against women, one size does not fit all. Inequalities of race and ethnicity, social class, sexual orientation, age, and other social locating variables require diverse perspectives and nuanced responses to address the problem. Crenshaw's work continues to be a wake-up call: to articulate, as she puts it in her reflection, “when and how difference matters” so we can “effectively work to include our difference within the broader struggle to end the violence that circumscribes our lives.”