



# **The Victim and the Perpetrator: Self Esteem Issues**

---

Professor Roberta Steinbacher,  
Melissa Forinash,  
Professor Sanda Kaufman

Levin College of Urban Affairs  
Cleveland State University

Anger Rage & Reconciliation Conference

Metro-Health Medical Center  
Cleveland, May 19, 1998

# What is Domestic Violence?

Attempt to cause or causing bodily injury or death to spouse or significant other

## Defining characteristics:

- repeated
- escalates in severity over time
- defined by society as personal/private
- asymmetric in power, status, protection of law
- isolates victim from the outside world with intent to control
- *associated with low self-esteem in perpetrator & victim*

# Historical Perspective on DV

(based on Family Life Development Center, Cornell U.)

- 
- Religion-sanctioned dominion over women, e. g. Bible, Koran -- OK to beat women
  - Societal norms, e.g.:  
Punic Wars (200s BC) “illegal to beat upper class women,”  
-- all the rest OK to beat
  - Sanctioned old habit, e.g.:  
“the rule of thumb” in England (1150-1861)  
-- OK to beat women, but limit damage
  - Outside norms and laws, e.g.  
Texas law, 1961; DV declared crime, 1984  
-- not OK to beat women, but not hate crime

1984

# Extent of Problem, U.S.

***EACH YEAR: America's most predictable murders***

- 4M reported/2-3M unreported (est.) incidents
- approx. 1 incident every 12 seconds
- leading cause of injury, women aged 17-28
- 1/8 of all homicides, 75% of female homicides
- 3000 murders committed by husbands
- 75% of murders occur after woman leaves
- 30% of teenage girls have violent dating relationships

# Costs of Problem, U.S.

*EACH YEAR:*

- individual health/psychological/economic damage  
ò shelter costs
- medical, productivity loss, absenteeism  
ò \$4 billion
- dysfunctional families, societal problems  
ò prison costs
- trans-generational perpetuation  
of battery pattern

# Why DV? Some theories

1890s

- Psychoanalytic (Freud)
- Social Learning (A. Bandura)
- Attachment (J. Bowlby)
- Systems (Lane & Russel)

1990s

- Male psyche (T. Real)
- Relational (N. Jacobson & J. Gottman)
- Low self-esteem theory (SFK)



Cartoon by Steve Sack. Reprinted with permission of the **Star Tribune**, Minneapolis.



# Self-Esteem:

Love of self, one's own imperfections notwithstanding

## ⊗ Source:

- unconditional positive regard during infancy/childhood

## ⊗ Signs:

- essentially internal
- inherent worth considered same as others'

## ⊗ Lack leads to:

- Need for supplements
- Endless search



# Male Self-Esteem Supplements

## ☼ Futile search for external fixes

Addictive!

→ Covert depression:

- S. Freud: Depression is a form of internalized violence
  - Self-attack
- 
- T. Real:
  - Self-attack = Shame (low self-esteem)

## ☼ Manifestations:

- Narcissistic defense
- Grandiosity to ward off shame
- Diminishing other (“less than...” to “better than ...”)
- Ultimately, destruction of other

## T. Real: Male searching modes

- ☼ Old heroes:  
from helplessness to triumph through spiritual awakening:
  - Odysseus, Orpheus, Siddhartha, Jesus
- ☼ New heroes:  
from helplessness to triumph through rage & revenge:
  - Movie heroes: The Graduate (D. Hoffman)  
The Unforgiven (C. Eastwood)  
Rambo 4 (S. Stallone)

# Female Self-Esteem Supplements

## ❁ Futile search for external fixes

→ Overt depression:

- Freud: Repetition compulsion
  - Self-loathing
- • Steinbacher, Forinash, Kaufman:
  - Self-loathing = Self-annihilation

## ❁ Manifestations:

- Dates/marries “strong” man
- Loses boundaries between self and perpetrator
- Goes into denial -- “stands by her man” despite abuse
- Experience of conflict between home security & flight

# SFK: Female searching modes

- ❁ Old heroines:  
from helplessness to desired helplessness  
through endurance, humility & virtue:
  - Penelope, Virgin Mary, Maria Goretti
- ❁ New heroines:  
from helplessness to desired helplessness  
through submission:
  - Movie heroines: Gone with the Wind (V. Leigh)  
Pretty Woman (J. Roberts)  
Eve's Bayou (L. Whitfield)



# Gottman & Jacobson: **Perpetrator profile**

## ☼ **Pit Bulls: remorseful**

- emotionally dependent
- insecure, sees betrayal everywhere
- heart rate increases during battery

## ☼ **Cobras: remorseless**

- violence can be diffused
- severe antisocial traits
- heart-rate decreases during battery
- fight ends when control is reestablished

# Steinbacher, Forinash, Kaufman:

## Victim profile



◀... Rag-doll

Piñata ...▶



# Steinbacher, Forinash, Kaufman:

## Victim profile

- ☼ Rag-doll: self-esteem lowered prior to relationship
  - emotionally dependent on protector
  - expects battery as deserved punishment
  - harbors sense of inherent worthlessness
  - perpetual striving to please
  - submits to abuse compulsively to fix the past
- ☼ Piñata: self-esteem lowered due to relationship
  - passive
  - self-blame for abuse of self and loved ones
  - sees battery as price for security
  - harbors suppressed anger

# Male-directed strategies

|               | Ex ante  | Ex post                                |
|---------------|--|--|
| • Societal:   | G norms<br>G educational<br>(toys, books,<br>movies)     | G penalties<br>G enforcer<br>attitudes |
| • Individual: | G family<br>G role models<br>G programs<br>incarceration | G recognition<br>of depression<br>G    |



# Female-directed strategies

|   | Ex ante  | Ex post   |
|---|--|---|
| • Societal:<br><br>resources<br>legislation | Gn norms, laws<br>G educational<br>movies)<br>G human rights | G attitudes<br>G<br>(toys, books,<br>G                              |
| • Individual:                               | G family<br>G role models<br>G protection                    | G recognition<br>of anger<br>G emergency<br>G long-term<br>programs |

# Conclusions

## ■ Violence against Women:

- | global/American problem

## ■ Past remedies:

- | inadequate singly

- | ignored root causes  
(men 's outward rage,  
women's inward anger)

Ideal: combination of past & new remedies

- | multi-pronged approaches

- | combined short- & long-term strategies:

### Short term

remove/punish/reform offender  
protect/restore victim

### Long term

educate  
change norms

# Next Steps

- Validate SFK self-esteem framework:
  - case studies
  - new analysis of existing data
- Test/evaluate variety of remedial strategies:
  - at different scales
  - at short/long range
- Inject knowledge into political decisions
- Expand awareness & action to global scale