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## **Understanding Battering in Violence-Tolerant Societies**

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In modern European-based societies, battering behavior by men against female domestic partners has been the subject of copious research that examines not only why men batter, but also how they can be treated to un-learn their belief that battering is an acceptable way of resolving domestic strife. The Adlerian perspective focuses on a combination of nature and nurture factors, feelings of inferiority, possible biological (organ inferiority) factors and a loss of social interest/communal feeling (Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956). There also appears to be an implicit theory of batterers that men are superior to women, negating the feelings and emotional needs of their female partners. This same implicit theory is present among serial rapists and serial murderers (Fisher, Beech, Carich & Kohut, 2005). Added to this “recipe” for battering is the presence of alcohol and other drugs during the commission of domestic battery; one fourth to one half of men who batter have co-morbid substance abuse problems (Gondolf, 1995; Kohut, 2004).

Historical social factors resulting in male battering behavior is equally as compelling as Adler's individual psychology of these men. In fact, these two perspectives, combined, go a long way in explaining why male battering continues to occur today. Dating from European medieval times, women and children were not only considered inferior to men, they were actually considered the property, or "chattel" of the male head of the household, just like his horses and dogs. The woman was designated as the man's "chatelaine" who was in charge of the upkeep of the man's household. The popular expression "rule of thumb" originates with old English common law which held that a man was free to beat his woman, but only with a stick not thicker than his thumb. In colonial America, women could be disciplined for being a "common scold" by being placed in the stocks in the town square where they were spat upon and pelted with garbage.

Today, the physical assault of domestic partners is a crime in European-based societies, punishable by incarceration. This is *not* the case in other under-developed countries and among certain religious denominations. In some Middle Eastern countries, Islam permits Muslim men to not only beat "wayward" wives, but to murder women suspected of adultery. In 1996, President Clinton signed into law the Lautenberg Amendment (Title 18, US Code Section 9-22(g) (91) making it illegal for anyone convicted of misdemeanor domestic violence to possess a firearm. (Felons of any kind are not permitted to own weapons) The result of this law was immediate and far-reaching; law enforcement personnel, corrections officers, fugitive recovery agents and military personnel were soon fired by the thousands. At sentencing, it is standard practice for judges to order those convicted of domestic violence to complete anger

management classes. Protective orders are issued routinely to limit the access of female victims from the offending man.

And still, men continue to batter women on an astonishingly frequent basis. Why? There is still a deviant core belief among some men that violence and control over women is “normal.” This idea was learned first in the violent home life of a child and soon-to-be battering adult male, and later by movies, music and television that give an unspoken but clear message that men are more masculine, more powerful, more important, and more superior when they batter their female domestic partner. For example, rap music that refers to women as “bitches and whores” clearly indicates a disdain for females, a mere step away from violence to “keep them in line.” All forms of media “entertainment” have been blemished by the desensitization to violence in general and violence against women in particular. Through social learning, male children still acquire the subliminal message that they can get women to do what they want them to do by battering them. Adler’s early theory about compensating for feelings of inferiority by developing the polar opposite facade of superiority is just as prevalent in modern male batterers today. The only recognizable difference is that Adler did not have to contend with the saturation of violence by the media.

Despite the progress many societies have made in attempting to form a “zero tolerance” for domestic violence, it continues. Thus, it can be speculated that men continue to batter women because (1) they get away with it and (2) they have basic character/personality traits that make them prone to violence. Just as in years past, women choose not to report being battered for a variety of reasons; the batterer threatens her life and the lives of her loved ones if she tells, she thinks some deficiency in herself

caused the battering, she is financially dependent on the batterer, she has no sense of self-worth and dignity, she has been socially isolated by the batterer and does not know how to seek help, her religious beliefs require her complete submission to the male head of the household, and she still believes that the batterer loves her just as she professes to love him. The concept that love is not expressed by violence is foreign to her. Plus, her fear that the batterer will kill her if she attempts to leave him is well-founded. In 1994, the US Justice Department found that women *are* more likely to be killed when trying to leave an abusive relationship, and also when they are pregnant (Kohut, 2000). Whether she leaves or stays, her life is in danger.

Are there effective treatments for male batterers? Clinical psychologists and clinical social workers would like to think so, else why bother? Our societies have to do *something* in response to this continuing epidemic; whether legal and therapeutic intervention actually works sometimes becomes secondary to our ability to say we are making a difference in turning the tide of battering. But since male battering has existed literally from the beginning of recorded history, it may be foolish to suppose that it ever will be eradicated. If an intervention saves the life of just one woman at a time, it is well worth the effort. If clinicians and lawmakers want their efforts to be taken seriously, the role of the media in perpetuating violence against women simply must be curtailed. Years of conflicting messages about battering have taken their toll. Only when we all speak with the same voice can we expect a change in battering men's personal constructs about women. As long as battering is permitted, and even glorified, it will continue.

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