

April 15, 2004

## FAMILY VIOLENCE

Read:

- Read: Goodrum, Umberson, Anderson: The Batterer's View of the Self and Others in Domestic Violence. Hutter 325-340  
Johnson and Ferraro: Research on Domestic Violence in the 1990s: Making Distinctions. Skolnick 493-517.  
Straus: Ten Myths that Perpetuate Corporal Punishment. Hutter 341-350.

I. In the 1960s and 1970s there was an awakening of concern in child abuse, wife abuse, and incest

A. Why?

1. In the last 25 years people came to speak of a "crisis" in the family
2. The family became more permissive and child-centered, probably with less toleration of parental abuse of authority, especially father's
3. The women's movement had a slogan: "the personal is political"
  - a. Family began to be examined as a structure of domination
4. This period is also characterized by more self-exposure: commercial, personal, artistic
5. Decline in religiously based moralism

B. Omissions that were left out of these concerns:

1. Other kinds of violence in partnered relationships
  - a. Debate about gendered rates of violence discussed in the Johnson reading
  - b. Violence in gay and lesbian relationships
  - c. Began to be addressed in the 1980s and 1990s
2. Sibling violence
3. Violence against the elderly

4. Child *neglect*
  - a. Poverty, inadequate care, inadequate educational institutions, etc.

C. Problems with many of the early studies of violence in the family

1. No attention to the *history* of family violence in Western civilization
2. A weak understanding of:
  - a. Family—its structure, dynamics
  - b. Gender
  - c. Power
  - d. Attention to language
    - 1) Exercise: define “violence”
      - a) Unwanted physical injury perpetrated by another person
      - b) But a child does not want what the dentist does to her: is this violence?
      - c) We have to qualify: injury that causes harm
      - d) Executing men and women causes serious harm; is this violence?
    - 2) Point: *authorized* violence is usually not defined as violence
      - a) And who gets to say what is authorized and what is not has the power to define violence
      - b) These definitions vary over time, cross-culturally, and within a given culture at a given time
      - c) Readings show that men and women don’t always see eye to eye; people don’t agree about “violence” with respect to children (Straus)

- e. Remember: violence isn't "natural"; it's a social fact, created by society
  - 1) I am not saying that bodies don't get mutilated, tortured, killed
  - 2) But that who suffers, and when it's seen as unnecessary, illegal, immoral suffering—and when it's seen as necessary, moral and legal—is determined within a cultural and social context

#### D. Let's look at power

1. All violence must be seen in terms of power relations
2. Families are by their very nature characterized by gender and generational inequities
3. We have a gendered society in which male power dominates
  - a. We are also democratic and egalitarian in ideology
  - b. This creates contradictions, sometimes conflicts
    - 1) As we saw in the men Arendell interviewed when talking about their divorce and post-divorce lives
    - 2) And in the men described by Goodrum et al. and Johnson and Ferraro
4. Yet violence occurs in intimate relationships that's only indirectly linked to asymmetrical heterosexual power ideologies
  - a. So, as Johnson and Ferraro point out, we need to look at meanings, motives, etc., in other kinds of relationships

## II. Child Abuse

- A. Earlier reports of it were done by charity workers, professional social workers
  1. SPCA (Society for the Protection and Care of Animals) was founded earlier; first case to be won of child abuse punishment was reported to the SPCA

- a. Tells us about the strength of patriarchal authority at the time
  - b. Father-husbands could punish children, could physically punish wives: as Straus says, common law gave the right to the husband to “physically chastise an errant wife”
2. Physicians got into the act in early 1960s
    - a. Henry Kempe, a physician, in 1962 described the “battered child syndrome”
      - 1) Offered a narrow definition—not surprisingly
      - 2) Prior to this, physicians had been reluctant to admit there were such patterns
- B. Psychological explanations of child abuse and critiques of them:
1. These are very popular
    - a. Abusive parents are sometimes seen as *pathological, deviant, neurotic, psychotic*
      - 1) Fits with our tendency to dismiss any kind of pathological behavior by working hard to define perpetrators as “not like us”
    - b. Variation on this theme: they are *immature individuals* who want the child to behave like a grownup
      - 1) Idea is that these individuals interpret the child’s inability to control himself as willful, hostile, excessively demanding
    - c. Another variation: *role reversal*: parents’ desire for love and approval from the child, as though child were the parent
    - d. *Cycle-of-abuse hypothesis*: the generations repeat
      - 1) Parents who were deprived of nurturing go on to repeat the behavior
      - 2) Very popular: read the critique in Johnson and Ferraro

C. Societal explanations offered in the literature

1. Sweeping political/social ones:

- a. The argument that child abuse cannot be eliminated unless our inegalitarian, competitive, irrational, hierarchical society is changed into an egalitarian, cooperative, rational, humane one
- b. That we live in a violent society that teaches:
  - 1) It's OK to hit those we love
  - 2) It's OK for more powerful people to hit less powerful ones
  - 3) It's OK to use hitting to achieve some end
  - 4) It's OK to hit as an end in itself

2. Themes in this type of societal explanations:

- a. Rejection of uniquely psychological explanations
- b. Challenge the notion that home and family are havens of tranquility
  - 1) The family is *not* always a peaceful haven (a romantic notion), but in fact sometimes a "cradle of violence"
    - a) Hardly the harmonious institution we idealize it as
  - 2) It can be a place in which violence and hate are felt, expressed, and learned as consistently as love
    - a) Why? Because it is where intimacy is enacted, and one which can be supportive or destructive
    - b) E.g., murder victims...more are members of the murderer's family than any other setting
- c. Arguments, like Straus's, that we must condemn all physical punishment in child rearing

3. Gender factors

- a. Child abuse is the only form of family violence in which women are assailants as often as men
  - 1) But when we compare amount of time mother spends with the child to father's time, fathers hit far more often
- b. Aggression socialization as part of masculinity

### III. The attention to, research on, wife beating

#### A. Critiques of early research on wife-battering

- 1. Critique of psychological explanations that often identified problems of the victim as the cause of her battering
  - a. And used clinical language when speaking of batterers
    - 1) "Temporarily insane"
  - b. But neither wife beaters nor their victims are necessarily crazier than non-violent adults
    - 1) As Goodrum et al. point out, violent men choose to behave in this way
  - c. The study of the family as an institution again

### IV. Incest

#### A. Primarily a relation between older men and young girls

- 1. Some between men and boys
- 2. If incest occurs between children of similar ages, it's frequently viewed as nonproblematic by all who know about it
  - a. When sibling incest is a problem, it's often because the sister is younger by several years
- 3. Mother-son incest is virtually nonexistent in this country; but is a problem in Japan
- 4. Incest is not at all rare

- a. Some figures report that up to 1 out of every 4 women in the USA has been a victim of sexual molestation by the time she reaches 18, and 1 out of 10 are incest victims
  5. When it's between older men and girls it's usually experienced by the girls as coercive and assaultive
  6. Child sexual abuse in general: 97% male perpetrators, 92% of the victims are females
    - a. Incest follows this pattern
- B. Earlier analyses
1. Reports of incest were often dismissed by adults as fantasy on the part of the child
    - a. Ignored father-daughter incest cases
    - b. A professional clinician can usually tell the differences between fantasies and actualities in incest cases
  2. The collusive mother was discussed a lot—mother-blaming
    - a. Similar to victim-blaming in wife-battering
    - b. Frigidity was spoken of as the cause: failure as mother, as wife
  3. Or the child's seductiveness toward her father
  4. To the extent the father allocated any responsibility he was seen as immature, unable to communicate, etc.
    - a. Again, pathologizing, using clinical language
    - b. Generally, very little curiosity has been shown towards him
    - c. Again, men don't want to talk, so most research focused on other parties
  5. "The best kept secret" was so well kept because it's extremely embarrassing to all men
  6. Incest victims do try to fight back

- a. But when they tell clergymen, teachers, neighbors, all too often they are rebuffed, disbelieved, ignored, humiliated
  - b. Illustrated in the current movie “Monster”
7. Often the father feels no contrition
8. These fathers display an overwhelming lack of parental and protective feelings toward their own children
  - a. If the mother is ill or incapacitated, they don’t take on nurturing functions to make up for mothers’ incapacities, as mothers would have done in the reverse situation
  - b. If their wives are unavailable, then their daughters should be
9. Often do not understand destructiveness of incest, express no parental or nurturant feelings for the victim, and blame her or their wife
  - a. Tend to have had very little parenting experience
10. Clearly the father is responsible, and if he doesn’t feel responsible
  - a. He hasn’t internalized the sense of his child as one to be nurtured