

## INTRODUCTION

I know only two things for certain. One is that we gain nothing by walking around the difficulties and merely indulging in wishful thinking. The other is that there is always something one can do oneself. In the most modest form, this means: to study, to try to sort out different proposals and weigh the effect of the proposed solutions—even if they are only partial solutions. Otherwise there would be nothing left but to give up. And it is unworthy of human beings to give up. (Alva Myrdal quoted in Bok 1991: 286)

On December 6, 1989, Marc Lépine<sup>1</sup> entered the engineering school of L'École Polytechnique in Montreal carrying an assault rifle. In a classroom he separated the men from the women and shouting “You are all feminists,” began to shoot. Lépine killed fourteen young women before turning the gun on himself.

How do we make sense of an event such as the Montreal Massacre? Or wife battering or war rape? What does making sense mean in the context of violence against women? Political philosopher Hannah Arendt, describing what prompted her to write *The Origins of Totalitarianism* in the immediate aftermath of the Holocaust, argues that the outrageous requires not only lamentation and denunciation but also comprehension (1979: xiv). She goes on to suggest that comprehension requires a kind of intellectual courage, a determined willingness to bear the burden of events, to face facts unflinchingly.

For thirty-five years now, feminists of the contemporary women's movement have worked to identify issues of violence against women, to provide services to the women and children victimized by men's violence and to fight for change in the legal, social, economic and ideological conditions that allow such violence to proliferate. These three aspects of feminists' work—identification, service provision and activism—are related particularly inasmuch as they all have a common grounding in women's lives. Feminists start by listening to women, to what they say about their experience in the past, their needs in the present and their hopes for the future.

Based on what they were hearing from women, feminists named rape as a crime of sexual violence against women, founded rape crisis centres and lobbied endlessly for changes in laws and changes in police and legal procedures. So too have feminists listened to and spoken out on women's experience of wife assault, sexual harassment in the workplace, child sexual abuse and dating violence. Feminists have also exposed systems of pornography and prostitution as woman abuse and are investigating the prevalence and meaning of elder abuse.

Through all this work, feminists have learned a great deal about men's violence against women and children. Sometimes it seems we know too much; the horror is so much, so various, so unrelenting, so unthinkable. But of course it is thinkable, and we have an obligation to think it and speak it and continue to struggle to end it.

We have also learned about women's courage and determination and creativeness in overcoming the effects of male violence. We have learned that individual women do survive, that they do emerge from experiences of violence and degradation strong and knowledgeable and whole. We have learned that women can and do make the transition from victim to survivor. Women do it every day.

Before proceeding further, I should at least briefly discuss who "we" are. For the purposes of this book, feminists (and pro-feminist men) share an analysis of women's oppression by men which is pan-historical and cross-cultural. Oppression exists in all social realms including the political, the economic and the legal. It is present in our smallest and most intimate relations and in the largest institutions of the state. It is present in all life stages, from the sexual abuse of toddlers to the feminization of poverty among our elder citizens. As shall be discussed more fully in the body of the text, feminists recognize that gender oppression acts dynamically with other axes of oppression such as race, ethnicity, class, citizenship, sexuality and physical and mental ability/disability. Feminists are committed to being a force for change in women's interests.

Feminism is also a method of analysis, a standpoint, a way of looking at the world from the perspective of women. It questions government policies, popular culture, ways of doing and being, and asks how women's lives are affected by these ideological and institutional practices. Feminism recognizes a unity among women, recognizes that we all live somewhere on a continuum of oppression with none of us completely free of male dominance. While cognizant of differences both individual and social, feminists understand that to work for women is to work for ourselves.

A note on terminology may be in order here. There is some debate among feminist thinkers regarding the appellations applied to women who have experienced male violence. In particular, some theorists maintain that it is important for women to overcome understanding themselves as victims of male violence. It is important for women to make the transition from victim to survivor. As I have written:

The stories of men's violence are also stories of women's survival. Women do survive in the literal sense: they outlive the violence done to them. They do what Linda Marchiano did: they endure while they have to, escape when they can, and live beyond the violence. Alone and with the support of feminist services such as transition houses, women find ways to overcome the consequences

of what has been done to them. (1989: 96)

MacKinnon, on the other hand, argues:

For example, the parade of horrors demonstrating the systematic victimization of women often produces the criticism that for me to say women are victimized reinforces the stereotype that women “are” victims, which in turn contributes to their victimization. If this stereotype is a stereotype, it has already been accomplished, and I come after. To those who think “it isn’t good for women to think of themselves as victims,” and thus seek to deny the reality of their victimization, how can it be good for women to deny what is happening to them? Since when is politics therapy? (1987: 220)

It may be possible to reconcile the two positions by adding in a temporal component, that is, in the immediate aftermath of, say, a sexual assault it seems important to emphasize the women’s victimhood. But in the longer term it may be necessary for the victim to make the transition to survivor.

As to the permanent potential of male violence Elizabeth Stanko writes: “All women have some experience of male violation.... *To walk the streets warily at night is how we actually feel our femininity*” (1985: 157, italics in original). Similarly, Lori Heise maintains, “There are two experiences that unite women across culture and class, those of giving birth and the fear of male violence” (quoted in Hotaling 1996: 1). This may be somewhat overblown but the point for both Stanko and Heise, it seems to me, is that men’s violence is so pervasive that virtually none of us live free from it, even if we do not always consciously pay attention to it.

As I sit alone in my study in the summer of 2004, I imagine who you the readers of this book will be and what will prompt you to open it. I assume you are looking for a concise introduction to specifically feminist analyses of issues of violence against women. You want to make sense of child sexual abuse or sexual harassment or more generally the violence men do to women and you hope/believe an overtly feminist text offers the best available resource in your quest. Most of all you are looking for a grounding. I project these wishes on you because they are ones I have experienced for years, and while I certainly do not promise that this one book will answer all of your questions, it is intended to be a guide to the literature, a signpost to where you might look for more information and analysis. In short, this book is an *entrée* to a much larger field of texts.

As to why readers would be searching for such a text, I imagine that the motives will vary greatly. Some will be looking to make sense of their own direct and indirect experiences of men’s violence. Other women who as yet have not been confronted by violent men, at least not in their conscious memory, may be eager to learn from other women’s experiences.

More than that, though, I would claim that an education in feminism is incomplete without a nuanced understanding of the role of violence in the lives of women and men. This is the “feminism unmodified” of which MacKinnon writes. Or, in Cole’s words,

It was the issue of violence against women that gave radical feminism its spark, and what distinguished radical feminism from its sister groups. By naming what was happening to women, by using terms that had not made their way into public consciousness, let alone public policy, radical feminists tugged away at public awareness until the unspoken came out of its closet. We talked about rape, violence against women in the home, sexual harassment and more recently about incest. As activists and sociologists tried to make sense of the crisis, feminist research, the kind that listened to women, uncovered the truth that sexual abuse was epidemic, not occasional, more normal than marginal. (1995: 215–16)

I at one time worked for the Women’s Research Centre, a national feminist organization based in Vancouver. For each research project, when it came time to write up our results, we would ask each other, “Who is sitting on your shoulder?” The question was meant in part to help the writer bring into focus the audience for whom she was writing. It was also meant to keep at the forefront of our minds the women whose lives we hoped would benefit from the work we did. For this current project who sat on my shoulders were some of the undergraduate Women’s Studies students I used to teach. They were on fire, desperate for knowledge and analysis to rebut the image of women they got from their other courses. They wanted to know everything all at once. Their passion, their demands for knowledge and analysis were sometimes frightening but also made the students a joy to teach. I felt very privileged to be their instructor. So I imagine with this book women (and a few men) will want a concise overview of feminist understandings (in the plural) of violence against women. The book is an introduction to a large body of work (witness the bibliography). Here the readers will meet some of the most prominent thinkers on the question of male violence—Susan Brownmiller and Catherine MacKinnon and Susan Cole and all the rest. Whether university/college students or not, readers have a hunger for which this book is simply an *hors-d’oeuvre*.

It will shortly become apparent that a number of texts I cite date from the 1980s and in a few cases the 1970s. They are included as foundational texts upon which much feminist theorizing has been built. Furthermore, some of the insights contained in these texts remain as fresh today as when they were first written. In short, early works by Brownmiller, Hanmer, and Dobash and Dobash remain crucial to the project of making sense of male violence against women.

I have called this book *Feminist Frameworks* because I envision it providing you the readers with a structure within which you might develop your own analyses of men's violent, intimidating and coercive behaviours toward women and children. It is the frame upon which you will build the walls and doors and windows of your particular conceptual house. I hope you will find that the frameworks presented here are not idiosyncratic but are built on a firm substratum of thirty years of feminist writing on male violence.

This book constitutes a literature review of texts on the origins, operations and meanings of violence against women. It is not an exhaustive search. It is limited in the first instance to widely available published materials, which, given the feminist movement's activist history and commitment to *praxis*, is a significant if unavoidable limitation. Perhaps more critically, the review is restricted to materials published in English, thereby overlooking substantial bodies of work. These circumscriptions are not unrelated. With notable exceptions such as Nawal el Sadaawi's *The Hidden Face of Eve* and Rigoberta Menchu's *I, Rigoberta*, few feminist texts are available in translation in the English-speaking world. Put simply, what is published in the English-speaking world tends to be what is written in English.<sup>2</sup>

Even with these limitations, there is a large and rather daunting array of works. In the end, the choice of which writers and which texts to include in this review is based in part on an assessment of the significance of contributions—writings that pushed our thinking along—together with a wish to avoid repetition. Thus, for example, of Diana Russell's numerous books on rape, I have included only one: *Rape in Marriage* is at once representative of Russell's larger *oeuvre* and historically noteworthy as the first extensive analysis of wife rape.

I have chosen to discuss individual writers and texts rather than schools, either national (British, American, Canadian) or political (liberal, socialist, radical feminist). While it is sometimes important to note the national context of a work, particularly when discussing law and law reform, by and large it seems similarities outweigh differences to the extent that identifying "British feminism," for example, simply is not useful. Similarly, classifications of feminist theory too often lead, as Anne Edwards points out, to oversimplification and distortion (1987: 15). Where appropriate, writers have been grouped thematically as sharing a common perspective on particular issues. That said, readers will find that the majority of writers included in this book tend to the radical stream of feminism, though some liberal feminists are also included. This is not deliberate on my part; rather, when I came to examine the metanarratives of men's violence against women, I found that it was the radical feminists (as opposed to, say, socialist or psychoanalytic feminists) who had the most to say. Finally, the book examines feminist analyses in eight broad areas:

definitions of violence; theories on the origins of male sex/sexual violence; Catharine MacKinnon's critique of sex and sexuality; intersectionality and violence against women; violence as process; choice and accountability; feminist interventions into the violence process; and feminist jurisprudence. When viewed together, these streams of thought offer a comprehensive, though not exhaustive, *précis* of the work undertaken to date to explain men's violence against women.

## NOTES

1. Some feminists argue that Lepine's name should not be broadcast and that instead the names of his victims should be remembered. I take the view that perpetrators should be recognized as the ordinary men they are. Accordingly, I use Lepine's name but also include the names and brief biographies of his victims in Appendix I.
2. In Canada some government-supported feminist research organizations such as the Canadian Association for the Advancement of Women publish all materials in both official languages. Independent feminist publishing houses by and large lack the financial resources to do so. Journals such as *Resources for Feminist Research/Documentation sur la recherche féministe* publish individual articles in either English or French but only the abstracts are translated.