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Linda G. Mills: Insult to Injury

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— PROLOGUE

WALKING DOWN BETHNAL GREEN ROAD, AN ARTERIAL street in working-class East London, I witnessed a remarkable scene. I was carrying my laundry and talking with a friend when my focus was drawn to a mother walking with her five-year-old son. He was demanding attention, as all children do, and her patience suddenly snapped. She whipped around and smacked him across the face. He staggered backward. I was shocked that I was witnessing this violence at such close range and simultaneously struck by its intimacy and familiarity. I had just watched a mother assault a child in broad daylight in the middle of a crowded public street. I felt sad for the child and angry with a mother who would treat her child this way. Before I could respond, the child collected himself and, to my astonishment, stepped forward and punched his mother in the stomach.

I turned and looked at my companion; we were both impressed and somewhat pleased that the child had asserted his rights, stood up for himself, and retaliated. Then it slowly dawned on me. In that split second, we had witnessed the genesis of intimate abuse. This was an unexceptional everyday scene, just another parent who felt entitled to correct her child with physical admonitions and a child who reacted unreflectively. But the little boy would grow up to become a man, and he was already being taught to respond to women with violence. We learn to become violent, as this scene suggests, but we seldom realize that is what we are learning, let alone that it is what we are teaching.

The image of that altercation has stayed with me for many years. We

all witness and experience violence in our lives. We have all become habituated to violence, consciously or unconsciously judging who is right and wrong in relation to violence. This book is, in essence, an attempt to become conscious of the pervasiveness of violence, its role in our intimate lives, and the judgments we make about it.

Becoming conscious of violence is always met with resistance. We have a hard time believing violence is occurring, even when it is direct and personal. We tend to run, either literally or metaphorically, so as to ignore it or put it behind us. Denial kicks in, and we are left pretending it never happened.

The only time we are truly comfortable thinking about violence is when it affects other people. Then we become experts on violence and on what other people should do about it. Our denial and paralysis in the face of our own experience gets externalized: we solve the problems of others while denying our own. When our anger is exteriorized in this way, it is projected: what we cannot accept in our own past, we project onto others.

Consider the reaction of a man who grew up with a violent mother. If he is unaware of his history or how it affects his view of violence, he might project his unconscious hatred of his own mother onto the woman on Bethnal Green Road. He might villainize her without any attempt to understand or engage her. Now assume he is also a social worker; he might believe that the child is best served by taking him away from his mother. It is highly unlikely that he would have any awareness that his judgment was determined, in some significant way, by his own unacknowledged prior experiences of violence.¹ When we project, we judge someone else for what happened to us; we act out our rage at our own helplessness by controlling what others do. It is a central argument of this book that to understand violence, we must attend to the “ground zero” of intimate abuse—that is, to our own experiences of it.

Returning to the five-year-old boy, it is significant that my initial response was supportive of his physical reaction to his mother’s violence. I identified with the child’s helplessness, with his vulnerability in the face of abuse by an adult. Most of us feel that identification when we see a child struck or otherwise abused. The reality of the situation is

much more complicated. Here a mother is “coaching” a child to be abusive,² teaching her son to react violently toward women. I am sure we would not normally view the situation in this vein.

On reflection, what is most remarkable about this interaction is the complexity of violence between intimates; it crosses genders and generations. Unless we appreciate the dynamics of intimate abuse, we will judge it before attempting to understand it. Consider this disturbing fact: after a few years have passed and the boy who hit his mother on Bethnal Green Road has become a man, it is statistically likely that he will hit a woman again.³ At that time, some people, especially a group called “mainstream feminists,” will argue for his arrest and prosecution. What is perhaps most troubling about this situation is that mainstream feminists would at the same time leave the mother blameless. Paradoxically, mainstream feminists are arguing in this situation for the disempowerment of the violent mother and the empowerment of the violent man. The mother, viewed as a victim, is without blame. The man is the cause and the sum of the violence he inflicts. The mother’s contribution to his trained reaction to women is ignored. In the most traditional of terms, he is everything, and she is nothing.

Historically, mainstream feminism’s highly successful response to heterosexual domestic violence has been to ignore the complexity of the dynamic that I witnessed. The child whom I saw being hit by his mother is three times more likely to become violent in intimate relationships than a child who was not hit.⁴ The moment that he hits a woman, mainstream feminists have legislated that he be taken out of the context of his biography and into an automatic legal process in which he will be held absolutely accountable for any violence he committed. He will be defined as a product of patriarchy, and his masculine privilege will account for the sole source of his aggression. For many mainstream feminists, the causal relationship between patriarchy and violence is uniform and singular; heterosexual men beat women because of patriarchy.⁵ Domestic violence involves perpetrator and victim, and nothing more. While this makes for easy policy and uniform legislative solutions, it addresses the symptoms of intimate abuse and not its causes.

Mainstream feminism, a term I have drawn from others,⁶ is not

meant to malign any individual feminist per se. I refer to mainstream feminists as people who self-identify as “feminist” but adhere to a monolithic legal approach to domestic violence. As I will show, domestic violence does not lend itself to one solution. It is difficult to define exactly who makes up this group’s membership. It may include activists, lobbyists, and helping professionals such as police officers, prosecutors, and even judges—men and women alike. Although the focus of this book is on their support for the legal process, mainstream feminists share many of the same assumptions that informed the battered women’s movement early on. Many of the feminists who started and supported the battered women’s movement, however, have now begun to question the decision to focus so heavily on the criminal justice system. In addition, a person may agree with aspects of the mainstream feminist approach, such as arrest, prosecution, and punishment of the most violent criminals, yet reject the rest of the mainstream agenda. In the end, mainstream feminism is a collection of ideas that a powerful group of people, with shifting membership, adhere to and advocate for. Their continued advocacy for an almost exclusive focus on punishment in response to domestic violence represents the privilege of their assertion and the positions of power they hold. It also represents, I believe, their fear that if they capitulate in any way, or recognize any limitations to their approach, they will lose the benefits they have gained.

Some people believe that calling this group of women “feminist” gives other feminists a bad name or somehow implies that there is one stereotypical feminist who supports mandated interventions. This is not the case. Many straight and gay white feminists have for a long time questioned and challenged a monolithic criminal justice response to domestic violence; many straight and gay women of color have supported mandated responses. It cannot be denied, however, that overall, mainstream feminism, as I suggest in chapter 3, has forwarded an agenda that has advanced the interests of privileged white heterosexual women at the expense of the concerns of women who are different from them, at least when it comes to criminal justice system interventions. The tensions between white feminists, women of color, and les-

bians who also identify as feminists are not centered only in domestic violence. They have persisted since the feminist movement began.

This book is a reflection on where I think some feminists went wrong in relation to domestic violence and the need for other feminists to assert a different agenda. There is no one “feminism,” and this book provides us with an opportunity to reflect on both our identity as feminists and what each of us stands for. Although at times it may feel like an attack—I don’t mince words—it is meant to be an opportunity to see what we, as feminists, are doing and start to make deliberate decisions about the consequences of our actions.

The term “mainstream feminism” is not meant to blame any one person, but rather to point out the ways a group of feminists and their agenda have come to shape both how we think about domestic violence and what we should do about it.

I write as a feminist and activist of many year’s standing. Some mainstream feminists believe my attack is fundamentally conservative in approach. As I will show, I believe the opposite is true. Conservative women have advocated that no aggressive government intervention should be made available to victims.⁷ This is not my position. As a feminist, I believe that women should be entitled to their privacy to the extent that they want to maintain their privacy. If women or other members of a family want the police and/or courts to intervene, either because they ask for it or because their situation poses great risk of harm, the state should respond with appropriate assistance without reproducing the harm already being inflicted. Although in some life-threatening cases this might involve arrest, prosecution, and incarceration, in most cases a woman should be free to choose her own intimate and family destinies, with or without criminal sanctions, and after the state has provided options that respect her specific needs while also offering her methods that would help her be safe.

It is my belief, arrived at over two decades of working in the field of intimate violence, that mainstream feminists have failed to understand intimate abuse and the choices women make when they are involved in abusive relationships. To my sorrow, I have come to realize that, in general, the mainstream feminist response to domestic violence repre-

sents the views of a relatively small minority of women who have the resources and political strength to aggressively assert their narrow explanations for domestic violence. Whether by virtue of denial, projection, or privilege, mainstream feminists have been able to advocate for a uniform, and ironically conservative, law-and-order response to intimate abuse that blames men and ultimately treats women as innocent victims. Consider a recent New York City ad campaign that features pictures of men behind bars. On billboards, subway trains, and government Web sites, we see the following captions: “Successful Executive. Devoted Churchgoer. Abusive Husband.” “Big Man on Campus. Star Athlete. Abusive Boyfriend.” “Employee of the Month. Soccer Coach. Wife Beater.” At first blush these ads seem at the very least paradoxical. If these men are successful leaders in their fields, why are they behind bars? On reflection it seems shocking that the only response available is imprisonment and shame. Can it really be asserted that their abusive behaviors are all that matter? Is it really not possible, even with successful men, to work their violence through? The mainstream law-and-order response here seems to wholly fail to address the problem; it simply wants to lock it away.

What may come as a surprise to many people is that study after study confirms that arrest, prosecution, and incarceration do not necessarily reduce the problem of domestic violence and may even be making the problem worse. Arrest has been shown to have a positive deterrent effect on men who are “good-risk” perpetrators, that is, people who have something to lose by being incarcerated.⁸ On the other hand, the men most likely to be arrested because of the criminal justice system’s inherent class and race bias can become more violent in response to arrest.⁹ Even a coordinated response that includes arrest, prosecution, and incarceration has not shown better outcomes. Although there are conflicting results, no study documents an overwhelming reduction in intimate violence in the groups most likely to be arrested.¹⁰ At worst, the criminal justice system increases violence against women. At best, it has little or no effect.

The assumptions underpinning mainstream feminist advocacy efforts are that all intimate abuse is heterosexual, that violence is a one-way street (male to female), that all violence warrants a state response,

and that women want to leave rather than stay in their abusive relationships. It is on this basis that mainstream feminists advocated for interventions that called for the state to arrest and prosecute batterers regardless of the woman's wishes. Mandatory arrest and prosecution, as they have come to be called, became the battle cry of mainstream feminists. Their efforts were overwhelmingly successful.

Their success was important and drastically lowered the level of social tolerance for domestic violence and focused attention on the pervasiveness and danger of intimate abuse. Their success, no doubt, immobilized some men who were so violent that they would otherwise have killed their intimate partners. It is important however, to distinguish between that end of the spectrum that sociologist Michael Johnson dubs "patriarchal terrorism," and "common couple violence," which reflects the more common dynamic I describe throughout this book.¹¹ My argument is that recognizing that some men inflict severe physical and emotional violence on women is important, but in many cases it is neither the whole story of violence in that relationship, nor the most common instance of violence in the intimate sphere.

Here is the history. Thirty years ago, law enforcement personnel paid no attention to domestic violence and certainly did not listen to women's complaints. Twenty years ago, women, some of whom had left their abusers, started shelters and assumed that the women who came for safety or a respite from the violence ultimately needed to leave their abusive relationships. They called these battered women "victims." The irony is that statistics reflected the fact that many of these women stayed and/or returned to their abusers.¹² Yet shelter workers were politically motivated and did not stop to listen to the women who said that they sought only temporary refuge, that they were returning to their abusers.¹³ Women in abusive relationships remained unheard.

Ten years ago, mainstream feminists successfully advocated for policies that instituted mandatory arrest, prosecution, and reporting even though there was evidence that such action may increase the incidence of violence against poor women of color. As Lawrence Sherman and his colleagues observed after studying mandatory arrest practices in the city of Milwaukee: "If three times as many blacks as whites are arrested, which is a fair approximation, then an across-the-board policy of man-

datory arrest prevents 2,504 acts of violence against primarily white women at the price of 5,409 acts of violence against primarily black women.”¹⁴ Because arrest in Milwaukee is more likely to prevent future violence when the batterer is white, mandatory arrests protect the partners of white men, who are most often white women, while threatening the partners of black men, who are predominantly black women. And since three times as many black men are arrested as white men, partners of black men are at a disproportionately increased risk.

Simultaneously, mainstream feminist theory sought to explain violence against women by linking it to male oppression. After a relentless and successful effort, these feminist explanations took hold, and many men’s and women’s narratives of intimate violence incorporated notions of patriarchy into their explanations of it. The feminist strategy to construct domestic violence as a gender issue has worked. A natural consequence of this consciousness is that mainstream feminists decided that the government should no longer collude with batterers in legitimizing violence against women. Through concerted advocacy efforts, the mainstream feminist movement persuaded the state to acknowledge the oppression of women in the intimate sphere and to legislate that men’s violence against women should never be tolerated.

This history is distinctive for another important reason. People were so concerned about promoting a universal explanation for violence against women that nobody listened to the people involved in abusive relationships, and, in consequence, nobody knows how to listen. There is neither a methodology for listening nor any space within which to attend to women’s and men’s stories. Years of research, which mainstream feminism has glossed over or ignored, shows that when it comes to intimate abuse, women are far from powerless and seldom, if ever, just victims. Women are not merely passive prisoners of violent intimate dynamics. Like men, women are frequently aggressive in intimate settings and therefore may be more accurately referred to as “women in abusive relationships” (a term I prefer to the more common usages “battered women,” “victim,” or “survivor”).

The studies show not only that women stay in abusive relationships but also that they are intimately engaged in and part of the dynamic of abuse.¹⁵ As the studies of lesbian violence demonstrate,¹⁶ women are ca-

pable of being as violent as men in intimate relationships. And women can be physically violent as well as emotionally abusive.¹⁷ That violence comes out in their intimate relationships both as resistance and as aggression. We need to put aside our preconceptions of gender socialization and roles. Women are abusive in all forms and expressions in the intimate sphere, and it is up to feminists to do something about it.

What is appallingly apparent is that we have refused to address the role of women in the dynamic of intimate violence. The reasons for this are numerous. Perhaps the most important is that some feminists fear that talking about and addressing these issues reinforces the stereotypical assumption that women are somehow to blame for the abuse inflicted on them. In my view, the research on women's violence and the numerous studies that have clearly indicated that women are no less physically violent or emotionally abusive toward men than are men toward women creates an opportunity. It allows us to address women's responsibility in the dynamic of abuse without blaming them for the violence inflicted back.¹⁸ Although we do not know exactly what female violence expresses (mainstream feminists have argued it is always defensive), or what it means politically or even intimately, we should realize that women are participating to one degree or another in a dynamic of abuse, and hence are stronger and more resilient than we think. Seeing that intimate violence involves so much more than men's violence against women, acknowledging that it involves a dynamic between couples, is thus a feminist issue.

Once we recognize intimate abuse as a dynamic, we can become more accepting of certain of its often inevitable features. Women stay in abusive relationships whether we approve or not. Studies have shown that half of women return to their abusive partners after they are discharged from a shelter.¹⁹ Women stay in violent and abusive intimate relationships for emotional, familial, cultural, religious, and economic reasons. They stay because they have an intimate relationship with and emotional attachment to their partners, their children, and the life they have built.²⁰ For better or worse, their staying shows at least some resilience and strength, an ability to negotiate and to remain attached.²¹ Seeing staying in an abusive relationship as more than just women's socialization within a patriarchal system is an important start-

ing point for interrupting violence. This fact has been denied by mainstream feminists.

It has served mainstream feminism both socially and politically to simplify and reduce the violence continuum to include only physical abuse perpetrated by men. Mainstream feminists made domestic violence unilateral. A violence that was a facet of a family or domestic scene was portrayed as an inevitable, if unfortunate, expression of patriarchy. The reason that I label domestic violence as “intimate abuse” is precisely to draw attention to the crucial fact that intimate violence is intimate, a product of intimacy and an expression of relationship. Intimate abuse is a mode, however failing, of communication between lovers, friends, and family members, and not just between a mythologized patriarch and an innocent woman.

In the first part of this book, I reflect on and rethink intimate abuse. In chapter 1, I begin to explore the pervasiveness of violence in our lives, and how we have been socialized to look away from violence and to judge it from a distance. From this perspective, I introduce the mainstream feminist response to domestic violence and expose the four assumptions that have affected how we have been influenced to think about it. I challenge these assumptions with the needs, desires, and perspectives of women who are abused. This involves going to the ground zero of intimate abuse. Using the case of Monique and Jim Brown, I expose how little we listen to and acknowledge what women say they experience and what they say they desire for their intimate relationships, even when they are abusive. Mainstream feminists will frequently ignore things they do not wish to hear and override them with assumptions of which even they may not be conscious. We need to make our judgments about intimate abuse conscious and we need to attend to the origins of those judgments—our own lives. The argument drawn from looking inward is simple and powerful and sets the stage for rethinking our preconceptions both about violence and about the appropriate political, legal, and therapeutic responses to it.

Chapter 2 presents evidence that there is limited empirical support for the assumption that mandatory arrest and prosecution policies in domestic violence cases have the intended effect of reducing violence against women. A review of the literature exposes how these strategies can actually increase incidents of intimate abuse against certain

women. Factors such as race, education, and employment all influence whether mandated arrest and prosecution policies increase or decrease violence. In addition to being ineffective in these ways, these policies rob women in abusive relationships of their personal power, with the devastating long-term effect of inadvertently diminishing women's capacity to reduce the violence they are experiencing.

Chapter 3 exposes the power dynamics behind mandatory policies and the ways mainstream feminists and the professionals who carry out these policies exert power over the women they claim to help. The irony is that when women in abusive relationships feel a modicum of control or personal power, incidents of violence against them decrease.²² The question is: If we know that women who perceive that they have control in their abusive relationships can have an effect on the violence they are experiencing, why have mainstream feminists advocated for policies that undermine that sense of control? Countertransference, the personal reactions of mainstream feminists and professionals to their clients' stories based on their own histories of abuse, may help answer this question. Mainstream feminists' lack of reflection on their own histories limited their capacity to encourage a more empowering approach. They developed such theories as learned helplessness and trauma to define how to think about intimate abuse, instead of presenting a more complete picture of a woman in an abusive relationship influenced not only by patriarchy but by culture, race, religion, and emotional attachment. I argue that mainstream feminism has not done the self-reflection necessary to understand these complexities and that it desperately needs to do so to understand how mandated policies can damage women in abusive relationships both emotionally and physically.

Chapter 4 questions the assumption that only men can be violent and that male violence is the only form of aggression that should be recognized as important. The assumption that violence is distinctly male and physical was a deliberate strategy of mainstream feminists who undertook the task of criminalizing intimate abuse. The irony is that these feminists colluded in dismissing women yet again. Rather than recognizing that women were also physically violent and played a significant role in the dynamic of intimate violence, mainstream feminists dismissed and discounted female violence as insufficiently visible and

strong. They also excluded female emotional abuse and aggression from the assessment of violence, and this despite the fact that it was intimate violence that was being addressed. Yet violence is ubiquitous and operates along a continuum that includes emotional abuse, shouting, and hitting, as well as strangling or shooting. We all experience violence in our intimate or family lives. Drawing on the case of Brenda Aris, a battered woman from California who shot her sleeping husband, we learn the extent to which women can react violently and also how much we seek to deny this reality. Projection, as one form of countertransference, helps us understand how mainstream feminists have narrowed intimate abuse to serve their political and social goals. By projecting onto men the aggression they reject in themselves, or explaining away the violence expressed by women like Brenda Aris as exclusively defensive, mainstream feminism has succeeded in repressing the ways women's aggression may be contributing to the intimate abuse dynamic. This only serves to reinforce our denial of the presence of intimate and family violence in each of our lives, a fact we must reckon with if we ever hope to address it.

In the second part of the book, I develop a method to fix the failures of past approaches. In chapter 5, I present support for my argument that violence is a dynamic between people that must be recognized if we are serious about addressing it. This involves becoming conscious of the intimate abuse in each of our lives and the ways we have responded to it so as to better ensure that our reaction to other people's violence is more thoughtful, as opposed to the projection and countertransference that currently inform our judgments about these issues.

This larger understanding of intimate violence clarifies how the dynamic of abuse occurs and how victims, such as children, learn to become violent through their early exposure to aggression. The violence can become particularly acute when couples get together and attachment styles developed in childhood are revealed. At the heart of the dynamic of abuse is the important fact that all violence matters, physical and emotional, male and female, heterosexual and homosexual, parent and child, and that a feminist paradigm of intimate abuse should recognize this reality.

In chapters 6 and 7, I develop specific approaches and strategies for

professionals and laypeople alike to relate to heterogeneous groups of people in abusive relationships, both men and women, heterosexual and homosexual, white and of color. In chapter 6, I introduce, as an alternative to the criminal justice system, Intimate Abuse Circles. These circles, drawn from restorative justice models and developed out of the South African experience of Truth and Reconciliation, recognize the importance of the abusive dynamic and provide a forum for addressing it. Depending on the extent of violence and the desires of the couple, these circles involve both parties and a care community (family, friends, clergy, etc.) who participate in a process of recognition, responsibility, and change. Learning to recognize and take responsibility for one's contribution to a dynamic is key to interrupting its transmission.

In chapter 7, I present a method for listening in the Intimate Abuse Circles that is respectful of both parties involved in the dynamic. This approach is in keeping with the research that suggests that men become less violent and women more empowered when each feels respected and heard by the professionals and care communities who are expected to help them.²³ Chapter 8 concludes with evidence that suggests that restorative justice models, on which the Intimate Abuse Circles are designed, have had remarkable success in reducing incidents of violence. Their effects are sure to ripple beyond the men and women who participate in them, to other family members and to future generations.

This book is very much a part of a larger feminist effort to understand and reempower women to address violence. Our culture hopes that we can ignore or simplify violence and that it will go away. Mainstream feminists have unwittingly colluded in this thinking by hoping to end violence while ignoring its complexities. The war on drugs gets repeated in a war on violence and with similarly nugatory effects. Just as attempting to eradicate drugs without understanding their appeal tends to preclude both insight and effective policies in reducing their use, attempting to obliterate intimate violence without understanding it may increase the violence rather than reduce it. It is the intellectual equivalent of sweeping it under the carpet. The war on drugs says that if we lock up drug dealers, we will end demand; the war on violence says that if we lock up all the men who abuse women, then intimate vi-

olence will end. This does not recognize the violence of the policy itself, the aggression embedded in each of us, or the indisputable empirical fact that many of those incarcerated without treatment will be released and will offend again. As we will see, obliterating the symptoms does not cure the causes.

Consider a miscellany of recent instances of this logic. A study reports that women who have abortions suffer horribly because they are prevented from expressing their loss. The political struggle for the right to abortion has been taken as an unchallengeable reason for denying any negative side effects for fear that they may enhance the arguments of pro-life advocates.²⁴ In another instance, an Australian billiards star was charged with rape in England after a highly ambivalent late-night sexual encounter.²⁵ The complainant woman admitted that she undressed and straddled him naked but later claimed that she did not consent to penetration by the penis. It has to be acknowledged or at least canvassed, even by feminists, that her “no” could have been a teasing “yes.” Another article from a British newspaper reports that a clinic for treatment of child abusers was closed after residents protested against having a treatment program in their vicinity.²⁶ The tragedy is that the abstract desire to eliminate child abuse actually prevents any real effort to do so.

These examples share a common structure. In each case, a traumatic event leads to a community fleeing the trauma itself. Those involved transfer, externalize, or project the trauma. When certain feminists fear the loss of the right to abortion, they deny women who have had abortions the space to talk about them. When these same feminists fear the law’s recalcitrance in relation to rape charges, they deny that a woman can say no ambivalently. When a community fears child abuse, it cannot tolerate the presence of child abusers even if their presence is the precondition of a cure. Time and again, and these are just a few recent examples, we see that it is easier in the short term to turn away from violence than it is to face up to it. The same is true of intimate abuse; as I will show, it affects us all in one way or another—whether we turn away from it or not. I am suggesting that by looking at it directly, we can at least become conscious of the ways we want to look away and what is lost, in terms of cure, when we do so.

It is our experience of violence that both informs our response and triggers our panic or prejudgments. This book underscores the impor-

tance of being in the presence of violence and acknowledging its proximity both to us and to others. The lesson is that only by looking at the violence—its complexity, its history, its tendrils throughout our culture—can we begin to understand, address, and ameliorate our relationship to it.

I believe that although on the surface a lot has changed in relation to intimate abuse over the last thirty years, the work has largely focused on casting the abuse as violence against women. Although in some instances this accurately characterizes the phenomenon, it is far from the whole story. Recognizing that we all have narratives of intimate abuse and corresponding experiences with violence partly explains why we have responded so vehemently to the problem. This recognition provides a starting point for a more informed and less judgmental practice. It also provides an opportunity to rethink the limitations of our current strategies and to reformulate our current theories of intimate abuse.

It is the key argument of this book that the history of feminist responses to intimate abuse has precluded any adequate understanding of the complexity and intimacy of violence in domestic relationships. Yet developing an adequate feminist theory is the most practical of current tasks. To understand violence we need to situate ourselves in relation to it and acknowledge, reflect on, and work through those aspects of our experiences that get replicated in our judgment of violence in others. It is striking and shocking that the violence that I witnessed on Bethnal Green Road was the violence of a mother against a child, female against male, and one generation against the next. We face a choice: either, as historically has happened, we can prejudge this violence and so turn away and run from it. Or, as chapter 1 elaborates, we can walk toward the violence and endeavor to understand and work through it.

Everything is at stake. The boy will become a man, and another generation's relationship to violence will be defined. His mother will be exonerated, and his wife will be labeled a victim. His children might be the recipients of his or even her violence, and/or might become violent themselves. No one will seize the opportunity offered, each time intimate abuse occurs, to stop and reflect on the violence and, as I am suggesting, seize the chance to do something about it.

