

## BOOK REVIEWS

THE BATTERED WOMAN. By Lenore E. Walker. New York, New York: Harper & Row, 1979. \$10.95.

Lenore Walker is a clinical psychologist and feminist whose interviews with 120 battered women form the core of a book which analyzes why men physically abuse women, why women do not escape this abuse, and why other people are unable to help these women. Walker's sample, composed of American and British women, demonstrates that physical abuse of women occurs in intimate relationships among all age groups, and in every socio-economic class and racial and cultural sub-group.

Walker's study draws on other researchers' documentation of the pathology of relationships in which battering occurs. Supported by these researchers' conclusions, she notes that society sanctions the use of violence as a method of discipline among family members. Researcher Murray Straus, for example, has pointed out that children learn that they are physically punished "for their own good" by adults who love them.<sup>1</sup> Psychologists Darryl and Sandra Bem have shown that, as a result of this socialization process, many people feel that men have the right to punish their women just as adults are permitted to discipline children.<sup>2</sup> One experiment in particular highlights this phenomenon. Three disputes involving the same level of physical and verbal abuse were staged. Passersby more often intervened in the arguments between two men or two women than in the male-female confrontation. When asked why, the strangers replied that they did not feel they should interfere in a marital dispute.<sup>3</sup>

Walker's contribution to this body of research is her application of certain psychological theories to the problem of battering relationships. First, she applies the theory of learned helplessness to a battered woman's relationship with her abuser. She explains that in experiments on caged dogs, researchers administered electric shock at random intervals. After trying in vain to avoid the shock through their own behavior, the dogs eventually ceased attempting to escape the shock; they become compliant, listless, and submissive. When the researchers attempted to change this behavior by teaching the dogs to move to the other side of the cage to avoid the shock, the animals resisted the lesson. They repeatedly had to be dragged to the exit of the cage to teach them to respond voluntarily.

When applied to battered women, this theory has several important implications for the criminal justice system. First, it helps to explain why women do

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1. Straus, *A Sociological Perspective on the Prevention and Treatment of Wifebeating*, in *BATTERED WOMAN* (M. Roy ed. 1977).

2. L. WALKER, *THE BATTERED WOMAN* 13 (1979).

3. *Id.*

not voluntarily leave what has been a chronically abusive relationship. Second, it indicates the need for intervention on behalf of battered women to help them escape from a destructive situation even when they resist such help.

The most original and legally significant of Walker's ideas is what she calls the "cycle of violence" between two people. Her case studies reveal that most violent relationships have a three-stage cycle. The first stage is the tension-building stage. During this stage many relatively minor abusive incidents occur for which the female victim accepts all or part of the blame until, eventually, her anger against her abuser mounts. The abuser is placated at first by the woman's passivity, but gradually her submissiveness reinforces his feeling of self-righteousness and permits him to lessen his self-control.

This tension culminates in the second stage, which Walker calls the acute battering incident, in which the male completely loses control and injures the woman. An external event or the internal state of mind of the male ordinarily triggers this incident. Occasionally, however, the woman may provoke the violence herself. This usually occurs when the couple has been through the cycle many times and the woman knows that the beating is inevitable. Her terror and anxiety are so great that she simply wants to get the violence over with and thereby prompts her abuser to act. The final stage of the cycle, which Walker describes as "kindness and contrite loving behavior," is characterized by the male's promises never to hit or hurt the female again, by visits, and flowers sent to hospital rooms, and by optimism on the part of the victim. The batterer may make sincere attempts to stop drinking, dating other women, or whatever else is perceived as a cause of the violence. The woman, in return, promises him another chance.

Walker's research provides ample evidence of the danger inherent in these violent relationships. She gives examples of the destructive interdependence of couples whose lives run in successive violent cycles. When a woman decides to leave the relationship, the man frequently threatens to commit suicide. These batterers often are desperate, lonely, and alienated from the rest of society. In the author's sample, 10% of the men committed suicide once the woman left. If even a fraction of this percentage of all family violence cases ends in suicide, great strides might be made in preventing this outcome of abusive relationships through effective counseling of the abuser.

Other men threaten to kill the woman if she leaves. Some women succeed in fleeing and some are killed in their attempt. More than 10% of all homicides are committed by one spouse against the other; this statistic does not include couples who are unmarried. Although it is not known how many of these murders result from the syndrome described in Walker's book it seems clear that the homicide rate could be significantly lowered if the cycle of violence within couples could be interrupted.

Four women, out of the 120 interviewed by Walker, had killed their husbands, while others had attacked their batterers with deadly weapons. The killings took place after several short intense cycles of battering followed by longer periods of calm. When stage-one behavior began again, the women countered the abuse with weapons. Each said she wanted to stop the man from hurting her, but did not want to kill him. In fact, all were shocked and sur-

prised when told by police that the men were dead. Walker notes that women who have been abused repeatedly seem to adapt to constant fear by losing perspective on the danger inherent in the violence.

Lawyers who defend those battered women who have killed their abusers will find Walker's descriptions of the states of mind of these women useful. She suggests that the women in her sample suffered an impaired mental state because of their prolonged fear or seething anger, and that they thus were unable to realize that the natural consequence of their actions would be the death of their assailant. The fact that their killings of the men were unintentional is consistent with Walker's observation that the victim and her assailant are typically locked in a symbiotic relationship that neither wants to terminate.

Perhaps because her sample is small and none of the four homicides in the sample presented appropriate facts, Walker does not address a situation in which a woman kills in self-defense. Nonetheless, based on her cycle of violence theory, it can be hypothesized that a certain number of previously abused women would use a weapon to protect themselves from another stage-two attack. Several courts have accepted the argument (developed in *State v. Wanrow*<sup>4</sup>) that a woman's perception of danger and, therefore, her justifiable use of deadly force in self-defense, may be different from a man's. This reasoning may be enhanced by Walker's evidence that the previously abused woman knows from experience when a severe attack is imminent. Based on prior experience she also may reasonably fear death or grave bodily harm.

Walker recognizes that the dynamic which she describes is resistant to effective intervention. This realization has important implications for law-enforcement response. Police usually are called during a stage-two acute battering incident. They are trained to calm the couple, possibly counsel them, and then leave them alone. While these actions might be effective during a stage-one disturbance, they may exacerbate a stage-two encounter by making the man angrier. According to Walker, the woman often fears this result and, therefore, sides with her attacker against the police.

Arrests are usually made and formal charges are filed only after a serious injury has been sustained. Police, prosecutors, and judges reasonably assume that the victim of such a beating will be emotionally ready for revenge. They do not realize that the recently battered woman may be entering the stage-three period of reconciliation, which is the only time in the relationship with her abuser that she finds truly satisfying. The male is remorseful and demonstrates his desire for her forgiveness; the woman, eager to maintain the relationship, is happy to forgive. Thus, the woman may frustrate the efforts of a prosecutor to obtain "justice" for her in the courts, by dropping the charges or becoming a reluctant witness.

The battered woman often is unwilling to accept the fact that if she goes back to the man, the cycle of violence will almost certainly repeat itself. Promises by the abuser to seek help with his violence problem seldom are honored after the stage-three contrition has run its course. In fact, treatment usually is

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4. 88 Wash. 2d 221, 559 P.2d 548 (1977).

sought only when the woman has left the man and it has become a condition of her return to the home, or when treatment is offered as an alternative to prosecution or punishment.

Walker's research helps to explain the ineffectiveness of the criminal justice system in dealing with domestic violence cases, and provides alternative approaches to deal with this problem. It illuminates the need for timely authoritative intervention, treatment for the batterer, and emotional support services for the victim.

Lawyers and criminal justice system personnel will find *The Battered Woman* useful because of the insight it provides into violent relationships between men and women. The book, however, provides only a brief overview of the major legal and law enforcement issues presented by this form of family violence. Although this book may serve as an introduction to the problem of spouse abuse for any audience, it will be of greatest interest to persons providing mental health and social services to battered women.

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**SEXUAL SHAKEDOWN: THE SEXUAL HARASSMENT OF WOMEN ON THE JOB.** By Lin Farley. New York, N.Y.: McGraw Hill Book Co., 1978. Pp. 228. \$12.50.

The reluctance or inability of many men and women to identify sexual harassment on the job has prevented its recognition as a widespread problem in today's labor market. If Lin Farley's new book, *Sexual Shakedown*, merely documented various instances of sexual harassment on the job, it would be an important consciousness-raising text. In fact, it does much more. It is a well-written and convincingly argued book which goes beyond case documentation. After reading the book, one grasps the extent to which sexual harassment pervades the marketplace, and the socioeconomic impact of this discriminatory employment practice.

Lin Farley's emphasis on sexual harassment as a form of employment discrimination is supported by her development and application of theoretical analysis based on the work of economist Heidi Hartmann. In a 1976 issue of *Signs*, Hartmann published an article entitled *Capitalism, Patriarchy, and Job Segregation by Sex*,<sup>1</sup> perhaps the most significant contribution to socialist-feminist theory to date. In that piece, Hartmann used historical and anthropological data to demonstrate the relationship between capitalism and the male-

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1. Hartmann, *Capitalism, Patriarchy, and Job Segregation by Sex*, 1 *SIGNS* 137 (no. 3, pt. 2) (1976).

centered system of relations between the sexes that is characteristic of a patriarchy. Hartmann argued in part that the woman's role in human reproduction has been used politically by men to sustain their control over women.

Farley, a journalist who has been researching and writing about sexual harassment since the mid-nineteen-seventies, interprets and extends Hartmann's theories to explain further the links among women's participation in the labor force, sexual harassment, and employment discrimination. Farley's thesis that sexual harassment is a critical factor in the subordination and exploitation of working women is supported by current labor statistics and longitudinal data on wage structures, occupational segmentation, and job segregation by sex, as well as by sociological observations about the hierarchical structure of organizational authority.

In a competitive market economy, extensive participation by women in the labor force threatens male-dominated wage and job structures at every level. Sexual harassment, like rape, becomes a form of retaliatory aggression directed almost exclusively against women. It is systematically and overwhelmingly used by men in positions of authority to control women and inhibit their advancement in the work force.

Farley believes that use of this social control mechanism escalates sharply as the female labor force increases, and becomes more frequent as legislatures direct male employers and union officials to practice equal treatment and opportunity in employment. Consequently, women employed under such adverse working conditions are often forced into stigmatic and clearly undesirable market activity. Absenteeism markedly increases and job tenure decreases because of sexual coercion. Many women find the constant humiliation and intimidation too costly personally and therefore relinquish their positions.<sup>2</sup> Because these restrictions are broadly labelled "personal," however, causation is obscured and sexual harassment remains an under-documented factor in the unemployment and mobility patterns of women.

Sexual harassment is supported by the disproportionate power of the patriarchy. The historical evidence Farley presents suggests that sexual exploitation has existed wherever women have worked. Charges of harassment traditionally have been dismissed or treated with jocularly by the perpetrators. Male assumptions about women's culpability contribute to the way this coercion is perceived and perpetuated. In a society where women exist as sexual objects, touching, teasing, and outright propositions often are excused as the "natural" outcome of heterosexual encounters.

Many of these assumptions pervade judicial action as well. Farley's chapter on civil remedies explores the way in which working women have utilized the legal system to establish the illegality of sexual harassment. Unemployment compensation and private tort actions have accounted for much litigation in this area. Recently, Title VII claims have been pursued, although not all fed-

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2. The woman who quits her job under the pressure of verbal and sometimes physical abuse loses not only job security, but also the seniority and employment benefits usually accrued by uninterrupted employment. Sexual harassment, then, imposes on women extreme economic penalties that counteract the intent of equal employment opportunity legislation.

eral judges are receptive to expansive interpretations of the statutory provisions.<sup>3</sup>

Although Farley believes that successful claims under Title VII by victimized women will force significant changes in present employment practices, she writes, "No society can convince its victims through statutes alone that justice will be served."<sup>4</sup> While the impulse to assist and seek damages for victims is an important one, it must occur with heightened awareness of the dominant social context within which courts operate. Although some claims of sexual harassment have been resolved in favor of the victimized woman, the pattern of decisions has yet to bring sexual harassment solidly under the aegis of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. It seems the issue will remain open until one of the many pending appeals reaches the Supreme Court.

While Farley is less than optimistic about the gains to be realized by legal victories, she favors other forms of private action. Women must continue to organize at the grassroots level and within established labor unions. Men must assume responsibility for their own behavior and the behavior of their male co-workers. Ultimately, Farley believes, only women can undermine the power of patriarchy by working, organizing, and protesting their abuse. This analysis is important because it grasps both the essence of sexual exploitation and the immediate necessity for relief.

The humiliation, guilt, and emotional pain experienced by victims of sexual harassment is similar to that articulated by victims of battering and rape. Sexual coercion, like pornography, engenders a sense, no matter how repressed, of degradation and defilement in women. That sense, so belittled or negated by those who find virtue or worth in women's sexual presence, is allowed expression in the book. *Sexual Shakedown* is written in a style that reflects the anger of abused women. This is not a dispassionate account. The quality of the research and analysis demonstrates, however, that one can reflect such anger without diminishing the validity of the argument.

For women learning to confront the invisible struggle against on the job sexual harassment, *Sexual Shakedown* provides a careful and thoughtful history of the origins of sexual harassment and a prospectus for its remediation. For others consciously involved with combatting sexual harassment, it provides an analytic means for evaluating currently available social and legal remedies. This is an important book that deserves to be read by those concerned with the right to human dignity.

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3. See, e.g., *Corne v. Bausch & Lomb, Inc.*, 390 F. Supp. 161 (D. Ariz. 1975).

4. L. FARLEY, *SEXUAL SHAKEDOWN: THE HARASSMENT OF WOMEN ON THE JOB* 27 (1978).

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