

Conceptual Clarity: *The difference between moral and strategic behavior in understanding the perpetrator of domestic violence.*

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We must have a profoundly accurate analysis of the etiology of battering, or the batterer will continue to have the advantage and he will use our lack of clarity towards his own end. In order to effectively intervene with batterers, on any level, one must fully comprehend WHY he has chosen to utilize this behavior. Simply knowing the “correct” answer to this question is no longer sufficient. Today you must have utter clarity regarding the full etiology of this matter.

The myriad responses to this “Why” question only serve to further the batterer agenda of “I want what I want, when I want it” and a willingness to get it at the expense of another. Batterers are opportunists and the lack of clarity regarding the “Why” question creates vast opportunity. For example, one may believe the answer is an anger control problem. Saying that a batterer has an anger control problem is like saying Lucciano Pavorotti needs vocal lessons. Batterers use their anger instrumentally and strategically. If a situation calls for the effective use of anger, the batterer will summon his anger to do the job. The batterer may, just as effectively use his sorrow, sadness or shame to also be an effective and coercive means to establish maintain or regain control. Simply stated battering is purposeful, instrumental and strategic behavior designed to bring about a result.

Anger is a potential reaction to various stimuli or circumstances. It can also be used to create a mood, scenario or to affect change. There is not a sports coach or military officer who does not understand this dynamic. Most have heard of the expression “to cry Crocodile tears.” Crocodile tears are actual water, but their authenticity is questionable at best and manipulative at worst. The function of anger for the batterer is no different. Anger can be described as the archetype mood of the batter. Anger is simply a means to an end, one way to get the job done. In fact a popularly held excuse for battering. I must acknowledge that this article was, in part, inspired by the article “The Case Against Anger Control Treatment Programs for Batterers” by Edward W. Gondolf and David Russell.

PREMEDITATION

It is my opinion that battering is 100% premeditated. Consider that there are two “types” of premeditation. One that would meet the legal definition of premeditation and the other, a logical and cognitive

and behavioral understanding. In the case of the former one could posit that your reading of this article was to gain a better understanding into the dynamics of the batterer and that you are reading this article, not “by accident”. The second understanding of premeditation entails an understanding of “patterned behavior.” Patterned behavior is that which we have done with enough frequency, that we have now become proficient at it and no longer necessitates the focus and attention, which it once did. An example of this could be as simple as tying ones shoes.

At one point in our early life, ostensibly, this was an insurmountable task. We trained for it under our parents/caregivers mentoring and for some this even included a story about a bunny going round the tree and into the hole and back out again. However, today we have mastered this seemingly impossible mystery and tie our shoes with ease and confidence, not to mention without the rhyme. We no longer need that focus and concentration that was once a necessity. Why is this? We are able to do an innumerable amount of tasks seemingly without thinking; riding a bike, blowing bubbles with bubble gum, driving a car, and more!

Batterers who say, “I acted without thinking” are in actuality giving us an important insight into their history. Why is it when a firefighter or law enforcement officer rushes into a burning building and later states, “it was like I acted without thinking”, or “I was on auto pilot” ---the community response is to give him/her a medal or an award. Yet, when a batterer says these same words we immediately begin to “psychologize” this behavior and wonder what must have gone on (what did she do) that caused him to “snap”. We must understand the subtext of the batterer who is making these statements as stating “I have some experience at doing this sort of thing, so I didn’t have to give it much thought.”

While it is true the abuser’s/batterers’ victim may do or say things, which evoke an emotion and/or belief on the batterer’s part. This is far from saying she caused this to happen. Assigning the power to the victim, to cause him to batter, not only fails to understand and recognize the dynamics of battering, but also portrays the batterer as a simple dupe. It is erroneous to think that the batterer was caught off guard, was not thinking and got caught up in his

reaction. Not only is it erroneous, but it is a “batterer friendly” belief. The quick fix for the batterer who comes with this superficial and simplified analysis is as follows. “If I am violent when I get angry, my wife leaves me, I go to jail and (assuming) I don’t like that. Then to not go to jail and not have my wife leave me, I have to never get angry.” Because in the immortal words of Dr. Bruce Banner (the Incredible Hulk) “You wouldn’t like it when I’m angry.” Anger is a normal human emotion and has no ascribed behavioral manifestations associated with it whatsoever. Society has ascribed behavioral manifestations to the emotion of anger. Just as with intoxication and behavior, certain behavior is not only tolerated when angry (or drunk for that matter), but it is expected, in particular, from men.

The **Quick fix** for the community comes into play in the way that the community wants to be able to control intimate abuse so this may be portrayed in various stereotypical ways. The erroneous belief, that you can tell the really “bad batterer” by looking at him. For example he is an angry minority or an angry man with missing teeth, a dozen tattoos, wallet on a chain, chewing tobacco, scar on his face, riding a Harley and has a broken pool cue in his back pocket. Well, some batterers may look like this, however, the other 99.9% of batterers look like the rest of the men at your job, school or church. In other words, you can’t tell by looking at him, batterers don’t have the Scarlet Letter “B” branded on them. This would be akin to saying “alcoholics look like the disheveled man who wears a trench coat and sleeps in the gutter. While it may be true that you may be an alcoholic if the aforementioned describes you, it is also true that the other 99.9% of alcoholics look like the rest of the men (or women) at your work, school or church.

The last area which could easily consume volumes in and of itself is the “P-word”, **Patriarchy**. I have had the opportunity to travel around the states, when I have been afforded the opportunity, I have visited other Batterer Intervention Programs. On one occasion in particular, I traveled to a southern state, that same morning I facilitated an intervention group in Ann Arbor, Michigan. I drove south after facilitating the group here and visited the group that evening. I became more fully aware that day how the men in the group in the south sounded the same as the men in the group in Ann Arbor. The same types of excuses, styles of battering, and blaming the victim. The only discernable difference being the men in the south spoke with a southern accent. Now, I am convinced these men in the south and the men I had seen in the Midwest were not in communication with one another. While there are many hideous and

misogynistic web sites on the Internet, I believe none of these men were visiting the same site teaching battering 101 or a 600 level extension course. What is the connecting thread between these men in the south and the Midwest, what silent and not so silent institution is causing, supporting, condoning, endorsing and promoting intimate violence? We are simply left with a clear and resounding answer, patriarchy.

Patriarchy is the insidiously silent as well as utterly deafening institution, so much so, that when women talk about patriarchy they are immediately silenced. When men talk about patriarchy, they are immediately “feminized” and ostracized. Simply said, if we are to say anger causes intimate violence, we then lose this rich context that intimate violence takes place in.

Many resort to blaming intimate violence on **mental illness**. It is my understanding that mental illness afflicts approximately 10% of the general population. If this is accurate then one could posit, that 10% of batterers suffer from it as well. One of the things we know about people who suffer from mental illness is that they tend to be less violent than the rest of the population. Batterers who have a mental illness, batter in a similar way to those men who have no mental illness. Their witnesses, are their victims, and they are only as violent as they are willing to be. No more, no less. Thus if we are faced with a batterer with mental illness, both of these issues must be addressed. This is no different than the batterer/abuser who is an alcoholic/drug addict. The anecdotal wisdom of Alcoholics Anonymous has heard and repeated, “if you take a drunken horse thief and sober him up, what are you left with? Answer: a sober horse thief. So if you treat a mentally ill batterer by treating his mental illness, you are left with a better mentally and psychologically adjusted batterer. One issue did not cause the other, so it only stands to reason, that one issue can not cure the other.

Intoxication: Running neck and neck in the obfuscation race with anger, is the excuse of intoxication. As with any of these examples, space dictates the need for brevity. One of the quick remedies for this excuse that has been used by our staff is to ask the question, “How drunk would you have to be to French kiss your Grandmother?” (No offense to Grandmothers intended). Almost immediately, the listener is faced with the dilemma, if I say I am out of control when I am drunk, then I do not retain the privilege to say what I would and would not do under those circumstances.

Family History: When it comes to family history and the erroneous belief that this somehow causes intimate violence we can ask the question in any gathering (and I have), “how many people here chose to enter into the profession of their father (or mother for that matter)? A certain number of people will likely raise their hands. We can ask them if their parent caused this to happen or if simply gave them a particular affinity or appreciation for the vocation? I do believe witnessing intimate violence puts one at a greater level for perpetrating it later in life. But we are still not talking cause and effect. With regard to the metaphor of choice of profession, I will use myself as an example, my father and mother are social workers, my sister is a social worker, my aunt is a social worker, my maternal grandmother was a psychologist. All of this gave me an affinity for the profession of social work, prepared me well to be a social worker, but the decision to enter into the field is one that I made myself. Influenced? **Yes!**, caused? **no!**

We must consider that intimate violence is purposeful, instrumental and strategic behavior designed to bring about an outcome.

Increasing Systematic Controls:

The following can be used to understand the process of increasing use of systematic controls.

Example: You have a stain on your beautiful concrete driveway, you may approach it with the following methodology of increasing systematic controls.

1. Examination and scraping with the foot.
2. Examination and stooping to touch.
3. Using a broom to sweep it away.
4. Using a hose to wash it away with water and water pressure.
5. Using soap and water to scrub it away.
6. Spreading kitty litter on the stain in an attempt to soak up the stain.
7. Using a wire brush to scrub away the stain.
8. Using chemicals and a wire brush scrub away the stain.
9. Leaving chemicals sit on the stain for a few days to eat away at the stain.
10. Using a Jackhammer to remove the slab and have a new slab poured.

This is a methodical process, which in practice is no different than the batterer who “wants what I want, when I want it”. Another example that clearly illustrates this clear mindset, is the story I use in training of “Billy & Bobby”. Imagine a Grade School playground at recess. There are two children on a seesaw one whose name is Billy, and a third is

Bobby. Bobby is walking around them, stomping his feet, kicking stones and muttering to himself. Suddenly, he hauls off and hits Billy in the head, sending him flying. The school officials ask the other children, “why did Billy hit Bobby in the head?” What might you think the children said? Did they say; “well you know that Bobby, he’s just not right!”, “Bobby, well he’s got an attitude”, or even, “You know Bobby’s father was a teeter-totter knocker-offer!”... NO!!! They tell us that “Bobby wanted to teeter-totter”. This is simply another way of saying, “I want what I want, when I want it” and a willingness to get it at the expense of another.

Self-esteem is often credited with being at the root of any many a human malady. While it may be true that an individual perpetrator of domestic violence may have issues with self-esteem, this in no way was what caused the violence. The reality is more along the lines of having an inflated sense of self. Grandiosity, self centeredness, “King of the Castle”, and Lord and Master are more along the lines of the requisite mentality. One training exercise I utilize is to ask the audience to describe the attributes of “God”, I then list them on the board. The next step is to ask, “what are the attributes of the batterer?” (in his mind as well as his victims mind). The lists betray the reality that the perpetrator of domestic violence sees himself as “a God”, thereby delivering the final unpacking of the myth-information that batterers batter as a result of low self-esteem.

Battering can be broken down into the following equation. Likened unto the weather forecaster that knows some things to look for, the following are things to look for. Seeing these things do not mean that battering is eminent, it simply means that conditions are good that it may take place perpetrated by this individual. It is important to note here that battering can take place when these conditions are not present as well.

Self-Interest: The distinction between those who are batterers and those who are not is that the batterer is willing to get what he wants at the expense of another, those who do not batter, are not.

Objectification/Vilification: This is the mindset to prepare to harm another person, to objectify and ultimately vilify them as a means to justify and minimize the reality of their actions.

Opportunity: This is a slippery and ever changing target. The batterer will use what ever is at their disposal to batter her, family, job, self-doubt, family heirlooms, past history, children, etc.

Choice: Batterer’s clearly make a choice before they do what they do. They may arrogantly or ignorantly

ignore this cognitive process, but that does not mean that it has not taken place. In order for any action whether verbal or physical to be committed there must first be the brain activity, or the cognitive process, then and only then can the action be committed.

Consequence: I believe batterers are motivated by consequences in two ways. First in terms of the effectiveness of their behavior and secondly the risk to oneself.

Obfuscation: Later to cover up their tracks of intentional premeditated, purposeful, instrumental and strategic behavior.

Moral v. Strategic Behavior:

We must analyze battering and abuse in the realm in which it was created. Battering is about strategy, not about morals! A man who commits intimate abuse may quickly say, “what I did was wrong” in an attempt to seek/demand forgiveness or in an attempt to obfuscate the listener. His explanation of wrong is speaking to the moral nature of his behavior. In order to effectively intervene with this individual we must get to his core belief. The assessment of right/wrong is not based on the moral answer, but on the strategy implemented. Here the “right” answer is one that assists in attaining the “goal”. This may take one by surprise, because we will want to simply focus on the right vs. wrong aspect of this, from a moral perspective. This analysis can assist in teaching how battering behavior is intentional premeditated, purposeful, instrumental and strategic behavior designed to get what you want at the expense of another.

1. **Circumstances:** This is simply what was going on? (an example follows) “Kathy was yelling at me about not spending time with her family.”
2. **Goal** (what did I want?): “I wanted Kathy to stop yelling at me and to not question my actions.”
3. **Behavior** (what did I do?): “I grabbed Kathy and threw her on the bed. I then sat on Kathy and yelled in her face to shut up!”

Given this simple scenario we can ask the question, was this, the right or wrong thing to do? Without a doubt, battering and abuse are morally wrong! Because this scenario did not include a moral dilemma, it can NOT be explained by a moral analysis. From a strategic viewpoint what the individual did in the aforementioned scenario was strategically correct. He wanted “Kathy to stop yelling at me and to not question my actions.” The means by which he sought to achieve this were intended to fulfill his goal. He was not dwelling on

what is the “spiritual” /“faith-based” right thing to do, what would the man do on the TV show “Father Knows Best” do, or even any thing close to what would be considered a moral consideration/dilemma. This individual had a goal, period, and then set into motion a series of actions, which were intended, strategically so, to bring about the conclusion of his goal. This is the core, this is the irrefutable bulls eye that we must use as a yardstick to understand intimate abuse. To truly understand domestic violence we must first begin with dismantling what it is not! Then we will be ready to understand the utter simplicity of domestic violence.

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