



WARNING SIGNS

Abuse and Relationships

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Survivor Violence

Survivor violence is assaultive behavior by a **survivor** that, while it may be frequent, is ineffective in altering power and control in a relationship. **The goal of this violence is to *increase* the survivor's *options*.** Survivor violence may meet the legal definition of abuse but it does not meet the **behavioral definition**. Survivor violence also tends to be in proportion to the threat and to cease when the threat is gone. This is in distinction to abusive violence, which tends to be extreme and continue until exhaustion.

Survivor violence may include episodic coercion but with a completely different goal. Because primary aggressors do not comply with any attempts by the survivor to be coercive, the situation rapidly escalates and so the survivors actions tend to come more easily to the attention of police. This is why there are still far too many '*victim-defendants*.'

Survivor violence may or may not meet the legal definition of self-defense, usually it doesn't. Unlike stranger violence, a survivor cannot avoid the primary aggressor or attempt to flee at first sight. This makes the legal construction of self-defense inadequate for survivors of intimate partner violence, and survivors are sometimes themselves charged with domestic violence by mechanically applied mandatory arrest laws. It has even become another tactic of primary aggressors to maneuver partners into this situation.

Therefore, when a women is charged with domestic violence, the public safety and public health communities carefully try to separate someone using survivor violence, ('victim-defendants') from the occasional woman with a position of power and control (**primary aggressor**.) Survivor violence can usefully be discussed as having several sub-goals which may influence how it is treated:

- **Warding Off.** An example of this is pushing or slapping a primary aggressor who is assaulting the survivor. This has the most possibility but uncertain probability of being deemed self-defense.
- **Preemptory Acts.** Most survivors can recognize a build-up in abusive energy. It is quickly learned defensive strategy that provoking an outburst or breaking the tension decreases the overall abusive violence of an episode. However, by definition, acting first will not be deemed self-defense.
- **Protecting Children** A mother understands that mere exposure to abusive energy harms children, but if a survivor blocks an escalated father from waking up his children, she is likely deemed as 'starting something.'
- **Deception.** It is almost accepted that a person has a right to lie to preserve an option he or she should have (white lie). But when a survivor, to modulate the abusive arousal of a primary aggressor, lies or hides money, this is almost always deemed wrong-doing.
- **Aversive Acts** This is inflicting distress on the primary aggressor in order to decrease abuse in the future (punishment) Examples are pouring hot or ice water on a sleeping or passed out primary aggressor. This is almost always a desperate act because of course it provokes massive retaliation. Because in order to hurt a primary aggressor a survivor must catch him unawares, these acts are especially likely to be deemed survivor wrong-doing (pre-meditated, unprovoked, etc..)
- **Resisting Objectification.** This takes a little explaining. Every human wants to be seen as a

subject, someone with self-determination, and feelings that matter. The process of objectification, on the other hand, treats a human as if they are only a thing, without agency, without feeling, interchangeable, owned, and suitable to be acted upon in anyway.

Intimate partner violence is the ultimate objectification. It is very basic to resist this. For example, a survivor has been berated and menaced for 30 minutes. The primary aggressor turns and starts to leave, and the survivor throws something at them as they walk away. It is like saying, "I will not submit completely!" Since the primary aggressor was walking away, this will not be deemed self-defense. Yet it seems to be the nature of resisting objectification, that such demonstrations can only be made when the primary aggressor is finished attacking.

Everytime we impose our will on another, it is an act of violence

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-Gandhi

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