The Face of Abuse

Wealth, fame, and power are no protection against the damning cycle of domestic violence. By Aimee Lee Ball

A surprising gallery of women reportedly touched by domestic abuse, clockwise from top left: Tina Turner, Miss America 1992 Carolyn Sapp, Halle Berry, Daryl Hannah, Ava Gardner, Cheyenne Brando, Judy Carne, Nicole Brown Simpson, Roseanne, Charlotte Fedders, Madonna, Anne Douglas Scripps, Stephanie Seymour, Hedda Nussbaum, Dorothy Stratten, Robin Givens, and Carré Otis.

We're all amnesiacs, is what we are. O. J. Simpson has confirmed this. Our horror on hearing Nicole Brown Simpson's frantic calls to 911 came just six months after newspaper heiress Anne Scripps Douglas was beaten to death by her husband in the genteel suburb of Bronxville, NY, and six years after we apparently forgot about Hedda Nussbaum, the Greenwich Village book editor who allowed a lawyer named Joel Steinberg to disfigure her and kill their adopted child. Three years before that, we witnessed the resignation of John Fedders, the chief enforcement officer of the Securities and Exchange Commission, after he acknowledged that he'd broken his wife's eardrum and blackened her eyes. We return, over and over, to the conceit that the very successful, the very educated, and the very rich have no place in the annals of domestic violence.

"The truth that everybody seems to stumble over is that wife abuse cuts across social class," says Richard J. Gelles, Ph.D., director of the Family Violence Research Program at the University of Rhode Island. "People are shocked that it happens to an upper-class woman. They think there must be a reason, some pathology in her life. She must be a flirtatious slut or married to a psychopath. It happens because the husband is overly invested in controlling his wife. We call it lack of boundaries. He doesn't know where his life ends and hers begins. That's an important part of marital violence—the enmeshment and dependence that the two people have. She doesn't see herself as having a life independent of him, and his identity is completely tied up in his ability to control this woman—even if he's a prominent doctor, a pillar of the community. What's important is what the world looks like from his eyes."

The FBI reports that two million American women are beaten each year—one every 16 seconds—and the U.S. Surgeon General ranked abuse by husbands and partners as the leading cause of injury to women ages 15 to 44. The 1993 Commonwealth Fund Survey of Women's Health puts the numbers even higher: 3.9 million women were physically abused and 20.7 million were verbally or emotionally abused by their spouse or partner within the past year. (Any survey done by telephone may grossly underestimate the problem, since a pollster has no way of knowing if the abuser is standing right there by the phone, coloring the response.) A study done by Gelles found that the incidence of violence did decrease exponentially as wealth increased. But still, nearly 20 out of every 1000 women with incomes over $40,000 reported severe violence. That's a lot of Park Avenue abuse.

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How does this go on virtually unchallenged? There's a clue in one classic experiment: The participants were ostensibly waiting for a class to begin, in a room with a telephone nearby, when a fight between a man and a woman was staged out in the hall. When it sounded as if the woman was being attacked by a stranger—she was shouting, "Who are you? Why are you doing this?"—everyone rushed to the phone to get help. When it was clear that she knew her assailant—her shouts were, "Bill, why are you doing this?"—nobody lifted a finger.

"We've been taught to believe it's a private matter," says Jacquelyn Campbell, Ph.D., a researcher in domestic violence at Johns Hopkins University School of Nursing. "In 11 states it is not even illegal to rape your wife." The English common law, on which our legal system is based, actually sanctioned this "zone of privacy" with the early-19th-century Rule of Thumb, stipulating that a man could not beat his wife with a stick that was wider than his thumb. It was not until 1977 that New York State made wife beating a crime. In some states, a man who strikes a stranger is committing a felony, but a man who attacks his wife is committing only a misdemeanor.

It's much easier to predict which man will be abusive than which woman will be his victim. He probably saw his father do the same thing. "But there are no consistent risk factors for women—not education, not finances, not even if they were raised by an abusive father," says Campbell. "Men tend to replicate their fathers' behavior, but women do not replicate their mothers'." Our collective societal shock when the abuser is wealthy or successful seems naive, since, as Campbell remarks, "You see this profile played out in the biographies of our most admired businessmen. They're aggressive and controlling. They step on other people. They get to say what happens in every aspect of their lives. They boss their secretaries and minions. This is the profile of a man who thinks he ought to be in charge at home. Oftentimes the middle-class abuser isn't physically violent very often, and never in a place where it will show. He has a whole scenario of excuses and explanations, as we all do when we do something rotten: 'Yes, I lost my temper, and I did push her, but I don't know how she ended up with a broken jaw.' And the more middle class she is, the less support she gets from friends and neighbors. Her family is more horrified. She becomes more ashamed, more isolated."

There's a war-zone term that makes an unexpected appearance in the chronicles of domestic violence: "post-traumatic stress." Lots of former victims reported flashbacks on hearing of Nicole Brown Simpson's litany of abuse. "Nicole was every battered woman's nightmare," says Lenore Walker, Ph.D., a clinical and forensic psychologist who is the chairwoman of a task force on violence in the family for the American Psychological Association. Walker actually advises women to call a man's former wife or girlfriend, because the behavior is so well disguised; and if he abused her, he is going to abuse the next woman. "Batterers look like everybody else," she says, "and you don't see their violence in the courtship period. They demonstrate only kind, nurturing, Prince Charming behavior. We want a man to listen to us, and batterers get it right. If you're doing a big presentation at work, he calls you in the morning and asks, 'How do you feel?' and he calls five minutes before the meeting to say, 'You're going to be wonderful.' That changes once you've given him a commitment. It becomes, 'Why didn't you

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answer the phone on the first ring?' or 'Don't say that in your presentation.' It turns to possessiveness and jealousy and intrusiveness. The difficulty for all women is once we have seen a certain period of consistent behavior, it's difficult to believe that's not the real man. So any woman can fall into it."

Elizabeth Friend's blind date began in the foyer of her Beacon Hill townhouse and ended with a wedding three weeks later on the lawn of her Martha's Vineyard estate. She was in her 30s and recently divorced, a much-honored businesswoman. He was a respected scientist. "It was a marvelous fairy-tale romance," she says. "I had just returned from the South Pacific, and he met me at the airport and said, 'How about a short serenade and a long life together?' It was the most romantic thing I'd ever heard. He is fast and furious in his romances. He's attractive, intelligent, and to someone from the business world, he seemed noble. It felt like an honor to be a partner to somebody in science. But then he has a dark side, a rage that's totally unpredictable."

It started small. When she became pregnant, he criticized her habits and warned that the baby would be born brain-dead. "I would do things to try and gain his favor," she says. "He would tear down the meals I cooked, and I started keeping menus to prove that I wasn't making things to hurt him. He wanted a nanny who brought a certain station to the house, so I called a friend in Europe and got a French au pair, but he was so nasty that she left within 24 hours. We went through 40 or 50 people working in the house." Then Friend developed a rare blood disease. "He took a can of Lysol, backed me against a wall, and sprayed me because I was filthy," she says. "He got a knife and was going to cut me because I was vile."

Friend covered her bruises with expensive makeup and actually began a business, all the while trying to "work" on the marriage. "I have a wall full of honors and accomplishments," she says. "There's nothing I've majorly failed at in my life. I'm an enabler. I couldn't believe I couldn't make it better. Successful women may be even more vulnerable to a man who has that sense of smell, a man who's attracted to them and wants to destroy them. And you become a partner in the process. They test you, and you allow them to get away with more."

She managed to convince herself that even such a compromised family life would benefit her child. "I believed I was staying because I did not want my daughter to be without the father that I sometimes saw my husband to be," she says. "But I had a tape of a song that my daughter wrote, about how she was worthless and her mother was scum—things she'd heard her father say. There was a blowup one morning. My husband attacked me, threw me on the ground, and drove off with my daughter in the car. I was bruised and broken and punched in the stomach, and the judge gave me a protective order and removed him from the property. My husband asked the police how to go about getting a permit for a gun."

A woman of such means and substance shares a flaw with the more prosaic victim of domestic violence: "Something that cuts across all these women is relatively low self-esteem," says Barbara Lewis, Ph.D., a New York City psychologist who counsels battered women. "There's a one-sided loyalty: If a man were truly able to value the woman, he couldn't do this to her. But the woman is made to feel that if she had behaved in a different way, he would have responded differently. A lot of women are into rescuing, and there's a certain grandiosity or hubris about that. She lives in a fantasy world where she's going to change him."

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What is even more trenchant for the woman of higher social strata is the disparity between the expectations she and others have about her life and the reality. "We like to look at things simplistically and make assumptions, but in the case of battered women, we often assume wrong," says Sandy Koorejian, executive director of Domestic Violence Services of Greater New Haven, Connecticut. "It's hard to look at someone who's educated, making *x* number of dollars a year, with *x* number of people reporting to her, and apparently in charge of her life, and accept that she has allowed someone else to control another significant aspect of her life. We all grew up the same, learning that part of our identity is through a man. We change our names—many women find a lot of solace and security in that—and we give a lot of that stuff away. These women believe that a relationship with a man, even one who hits you, is better than none. And he's saying, 'She has the best clothes. The kids are in the best schools. What does she have to complain about?' We live in a society that values those things, so we tacitly agree."

The prospect of becoming a public spectacle is a powerful deterrent to reporting abuse for any woman living in a neighborhood where the police blotter is routinely reported in the local newspaper. "On the outside, her partner may be considered a fine, upstanding citizen," says Sue Dowling, an advocate at the New Haven service. "That's the mask, the dichotomy, the part that keeps people from knowing what's happening. 'I'm okay, everything is fine.' If they're living in the suburbs, the denial goes along with the manicured lawns and better schools and opportunities for families. The thinking is, 'This is a nice town and I'm a nice person, not a battered wife.' Women with financial stability may have an opportunity to make changes, but the complications come about in other ways: exposure in the community, the loss of the facade."

Sometimes it's loss of face in the family—or in the mirror. "If I had told my mother what was going on, it would have meant that I had failed," says Janet Dean of Denver, "and I didn't want to hear the I-told-you-so. It was too embarrassing to think I could have been so stupid—that's why I stayed for so long."

Dean became ill after her first year of college, and while recuperating at home, she met a guy, got pregnant, and married him. "There was a lot of chaos before there was any ➤ 216

together in New York. (This partially explains Wright's short list of credits.) Penn is currently dedicating himself more to directing than acting; he recently signed a three-picture deal with Miramax. And Wright is excited about starring in *Loved*, which will begin shooting this winter.

Their union could join Hollywood's long list of onscreen and offscreen collaborations like Roberto Rossellini and Ingrid Bergman, Vincent Minnelli and Judy Garland, Woody Allen and Mia Farrow, and even Blake Edwards and Julie Andrews. "More like John Cassavetes and Gena Rowlands," quips a colleague of the two, the inference being that Penn and Wright will continue to choose idiosyncratic material and be better known in art houses than at the multiplex. Translation: critical kudos and no box office.

But unlike Cassavetes and Rowlands, Penn and Wright have no qualms about working within the Hollywood system. The couple recently bought a house on the coast after Penn's home burned in last year's Malibu brush fire. And now that daughter Dylan is three, she is beginning to grasp and enjoy what her mom does for a living.

"She is hooked on *The Princess Bride*," Wright says with equal parts pleasure and embarrassment. "She loves Inigo Montoya [the Mandy Patinkin character] and says that speech all the time: 'You killed my father! Prepare to die!'"

Like most moms, Wright brightens when talking about her daughter, who is beginning to demonstrate an uncanny knack for material. "She should run a studio someday. She could run one now," says Wright.

When the two read stories together, Dylan acts like a smart development executive and points out parts that would be good for her mom.

"Like what?" I ask.

"Curious George," answers Wright. "Dylan says, 'You could play the monkey.'" ■

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violence," she says. "One night he came home all riled up. He had been fired for smoking pot, and he said, 'We're moving to Texas.' The next morning we packed everything we owned in the back of a Volkswagen bus and moved to Texas for a month." The first time she got punched in the face, she was nursing their three-day-old daughter. "I was never so shocked," she recalls. "I thought, What did I do to deserve that?"

Dean's husband would not allow her to go back to college and made it difficult for her to hold a job, preventing her from getting to work on time and moving the family to a remote mountainous region of Colorado. "It was constant survival mode," she says, "always watching out, doing what he wanted. I just got to the point where I thought, If I stay, I'm going to die. I already felt dead emotionally." She moved out with her children, but he continued to harass her—a friend of his had told him, "If you can make them cry, it means they still love you." He showed up one day when Dean's mother was visiting and assaulted both of them, running away before the police arrived. "Three days later he came back and beat me until I almost died," she says. "I was on the floor, crawling down the hallway, trying to call an ambulance. My kids were there—it's still the most awful thing I can imagine—giving me a pillow and blanket. I was in intensive care for two weeks. He was in jail for five months and got two years probation. If he had done it to someone else, he would probably still be in jail for attempted murder."

While Dean was lying on a gurney in the emergency room, she was thinking, If I live through this, I'm going to do something so this doesn't happen to other women. She went back to college and to medical school, with the support of her second husband, and at 40 is an obstetrician/gynecologist in Denver. She questions every new patient about domestic violence. "It's part of my routine," she says. "I ask about smoking, about drinking, and I ask if there is any history of physical abuse, sexual abuse, or emotional abuse. The ones it's never happened to say, 'No, thank God.' Some of the ones it's happened to say no with a funny look on their faces." Dean offers several levels of assistance: teaching about the cycle of violence, assessing the individual danger, and planning an escape route, with extra car keys and a change of clothes set aside. She's probably saving as many lives as the Pap smear.

Anyone without a personal frame of reference for violent behavior might cling to the principle: Hurt me once, shame on you; hurt me twice, shame on me. "But people don't understand the glue that holds these relationships together," says New York City clinical psychologist Karen Greene, Ph.D. "There's a cycle, an escalation of control, and then this incredibly romantic, remorseful period. The romantic part probably marked the beginning of the relationship also—these two against all the calumnies of the world. These people are glued together in an extreme way." The why-doesn't-she-leave issue is a particular conundrum for a middle- or upper-class woman. "Chances are her husband can hire a good lawyer to say she's crazy or popping pills," says Greene. "And she's as likely to be stalked by somebody he hires." Jacquelyn Campbell of Johns Hopkins notes that deciding to leave may not take her out of harm's way. "As the abuse increases, so do his threats, and one of them is 'I'll never let you have the kids.' She may have gone for counseling and gotten a diagnosis of depression—wouldn't you be depressed?—and in the custody hearing he'll say, 'Look at her, she's mentally ill.' For her to leave him is the ultimate slap in the face, and he will continue to harass."

The women whose wealth is dispensed at the discretion of abusive husbands present a poignant picture. "Their situation is actually worse than most of the battered women I deal with," says Richard Gelles of the University of Rhode Island. "The upper-class woman married to the nice Jewish doctor gets zero social services, and the support system in the U.S. is not designed for her. Can you imagine her checking into a shelter, where she's got to share the third mattress from the left? She could go to a motel, but the American Express card is probably in her husband's name, so as soon as the bill comes in he knows where she is."

Margaret Hintz did check into many motels, hotels, and spas. For years she kept a suitcase under the jumper cables in the trunk of her car, and as the seasons changed she'd replace the contents, just as she rotated the clothes in her closet. Once she went to a shelter but felt guilty about taking up the ➤221

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limited bed space. After all, she was married to a millionaire.

Hintz fell in love with a nice young man stationed in the U.S. Air Force in her native Germany, was showered with gifts, and came to the U.S. as a 20-year-old bride. Meeting her in-laws was her first intimation of trouble. "My mother-in-law looked 30 years older than she was," Hintz remembers, "and she cowered. When she put her hand on her husband's shoulder, he roughly pushed her away. Later I asked my husband, 'Why is your mother so afraid of your father?' and he just said, 'What do you mean?'"

The newlyweds lived in Rapid City, SD, where Hintz was alone and homesick while her husband worked long hours at a top-secret military base. "I wanted to surprise him," she says. "When he came home one day, I said, 'Guess what? I got a job!' His whole demeanor changed. He came toward me and hit me so hard that I fell back against the wall and crumbled." The abuse continued for more than 30 years, traversing the country when the Hintzes relocated to Pennsylvania. Hintz raised two children while her husband made a fortune in the electronics business and threatened to kill her. "We had a yacht on the Chesapeake," she says, "and he told me he could knock me over the head and put me in the water, and nobody would ever know. While I was getting hit, he was yelling, 'Why do you make me hit you?' and I was saying, 'I'm sorry.' Women are fixers, and you want to have a happy home or you think somehow you've failed. That's what all the professionals said, all the doctors and clergy. I saw so many. They would say, 'What are you doing wrong? Meet him at the door, fix him a martini, and don't bombard him with your small household annoyances.' When you're told it's your fault, you believe it. But there was always a tiny voice telling me I wasn't wrong. I would lie in bed and think, If he had done to my neighbor what he did to me today, he'd be in jail."

With her son in college and her daughter graduated, Hintz began putting money aside and preparing her escape. When her husband put a piece of broken glass to her throat, she got a protection order and filed for divorce. "The day they served the protection order, the sheriff stayed with me until one in the morning," she says, ➤

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"until I had the locks changed. They had never seen such hate as they saw in his eyes. Nobody was more shocked than our neighbors. We looked like the perfect family. We went to church on Sundays. I always looked right for PTA meetings. They thought he left me."

Smart and successful men can often be particularly diabolical. A month after Hintz filed for divorce, her husband bought four cemetery plots—but he didn't pay for them. He let the charges stand so that Hintz would be reminded of his implied threat with every monthly statement. She fought like hell for her fair share of the family fortune and now serves on the advisory board of a shelter for battered women as well as working with Pennsylvania Legal Services. She also tried to help one woman with a personal connection: Hintz had an account at a local florist and found out that her former husband had ordered flowers for his new girlfriend on that account. Equipped with a name and address, she sent the woman documentation of the abusive marriage and told her to call if she ever needed help. She never got a response.

Despite the dramatic stories, it's a mistake to overemphasize the blackened eyes and broken ribs of battered women, says Evan Stark, Ph.D., director of Connecticut's Domestic Violence Training Project of New Haven. "While injury is a significant piece," he says, "almost always the most salient issue is the chronic humiliation and the fear. Domestic violence may often involve severe injury. But the vast majority of abusive assaults do not result in medically significant injuries. The problem is not only that he's going to knock your teeth out. It's the intimidation, isolation, and control. Once a guy hits you, whenever he says, 'Pass the coffee,' it's something completely different. These women are linked inextricably to feelings of being subordinate, walking on eggshells, having to please him. It's less of an assault crime. I think of it as a hostage situation."

These days there are more efforts to bring the hostages home. Earlier this year a mandatory reporting law went into effect in California that requires doctors and other health professionals to report suspected battering, just as they must report suspected child abuse. This is a volatile issue: Many of those who work in the field are opposed to mandatory reporting, arguing that it may actually jeopardize the women it means to help. "I'm sure there was a benevolent motive, but we're concerned about the chilling effect it may have on women," says Debbie Lee, associate director of the Family Violence Prevention Fund in San Francisco. "Given the epidemic proportions of domestic violence, there's a push for screening of the at-risk population, which is all women, just as there is for breast cancer."

There is some concern that mandatory reporting treats women as children. "There is no need for another bureaucracy like the child-welfare services," says Nancy Durborow of the Pennsylvania Coalition Against Domestic Violence. "What we support is some incentive to get doctors and nurses trained on issues of domestic violence for earlier intervention." There are three pilot programs in Pennsylvania: at Mercy Hospital in Pittsburgh, Abington Memorial Hospital in suburban Philadelphia, and Nesbitt Memorial Hospital in Wilkes-Barre. On-site advocates work with the women who come in, and medical personnel are trained in what to look for and how to ask.

The Pennsylvania Coalition also supported a bill in the state senate that would prevent insurance discrimination against victims of domestic violence in issuing policies, such as canceling policies or raising rates. Some companies have denied women health or life insurance because of a medical record of abuse. "The insurance companies have categorized it as 'fair discrimination,'" says Durborow, "like if you decided to be a race-car driver. We're saying that no one chooses to be a battered woman."

In Hollywood's recent ode to violence, *Natural Born Killers*, an abusive husband and father says pointedly, "If your ass is in my house, it's my ass." Perhaps part of that missive bears repeating to any man who tyrannizes the woman he purports to love: It is your ass ... that's on the line now.

Pseudonyms have been used in some cases and identifying characteristics have been changed. For information or referral concerning domestic violence, call the National Victim Center at 1-800-FYI-CALL.

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Somewhat ironically, Armani has developed quite a glamorous reputation; the Hollywood crowd are the designer's most ardent—and most visible—fans. Richard Gere's first encounter with the designer was the white Armani suit he wore for his role as a high-class escort in *American Gigolo*. He's worn Armani pretty much ever since but shows a preference for the designer's black jackets. Michelle Pfeiffer, Ali MacGraw, Anjelica Huston, and Sherry Lansing all wear Armani. But while he's dressed Hollywood's power players and Manhattan's power brokers, Armani has also dressed the Italian air force, Alitalia flight attendants, waiters in some of the world's best restaurants, and, as a special birthday tribute, Donald Duck—who, along with the designer, turned 60 this year. "I've always thought of Armani's style as the perfect bridge between refined elegance and down-to-earth comfort," says Danny Meyer, owner of New York's Union Square Cafe and a card-carrying member of the legion of Armani wearers. Armani designed the uniforms for the staff of Meyer's newly opened Gramercy Tavern: a white cotton banded-collar shirt with a six-button navy wool crepe vest and matching double-pleat pants. "The uniforms are understated and handsome and look equally attractive on men and women," Meyer says.

This plain, unassuming navy suit is not unlike the uniform that the members of Armani's sales staff wear, and it is exactly the sort of uniform in which Armani himself feels most comfortable. "I'm not a good advertisement for my own label," Armani says. "I am not even a good consumer, because I only buy a new suit when the old one is worn out, and if possible I buy the same model, in hopes that it will wear out quickly! I believe that the important thing in life is to avoid seeking celebrity and, if it comes, to avoid turning it into stardom," he says, then adding, "and to always remain aware that success must be earned again every day." ■