
Patriarchal Terrorism in *Black and Blue* by Anna Quindlen

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Abstract

All relationships and interactions are subordinate to the social idea of power. Men have been seen to have more significant influence and control over decisions than women. This discovery aligns with gender roles that traditionally favored women in supporting their partners and handling most domestic chores. All human relationships are considered to be centered on power and control. The roots of patriarchal terrorism are traditions that uphold men's authority over "their" women through the employment of terror tactics such as economic subjugation, isolation, threats, and systematic use of violence. The concept that men own their female spouses is the foundation of this cycle of violence. Domestic abuse has many different forms, and there is proof of it happening for as long as documented history exists. It is a global problem. Numerous socio-legal precedents have either openly endorsed domestic abuse or failed to denounce it throughout history and in numerous civilizations around the globe. Due to a lengthy history of indifference towards the issue, a significant body of social, legal, cultural, and traditional ideas and attitudes have developed that modern societies, despite their best efforts, have

not yet been able to dispel. Patriarchy is an underlying feature in all societies that permits domestic violence against women and children.

Keywords: domestic violence, abuse, patriarchy, terror, power and control

Introduction

Power is a social construct that governs all interactions and relationships. Men have been found to have greater power and influence over decision-making than women. This discovery is consistent with traditional gender roles that have favored women in supporting their relationships and performing most domestic responsibilities. All human interactions are considered to revolve around power and control. It is "the ability or capacity to change a partner's thoughts and feelings so they align with one's own desired preferences, along with the ability to resist influence attempts imposed by the partner" (Simpson et al. 409). (Qtd from "Power in Romantic Relationships") Having power means having a sense of control to have choices to influence our environment. It

is a natural instinct to exert power to meet our wants and needs (Lancer, 2020). The problem surfaces when power is used to terrorize and victimize the partner.

Patriarchal terrorism originates from patriarchal traditions that proclaim men's right to rule "their" women using terroristic techniques that include the systematic use of violence, economic servitude, threats, and isolation. This pattern of violence is based on the assumption that men own their female companions. Power and control dynamics are exploited in various ways, each of which harms the victim. The ability of the batterer to maintain power over the victim has been termed as control. They restrict their mobility and social connection. Much of his abusiveness comes from punishments used to retaliate against his spouse for resisting his control. This is one of the most important concepts about an abusive man (Bancroft 115).

Roots of Violence in History

Domestic abuse is not a new or localized problem. Domestic violence takes many forms around the world, and evidence of its presence can be found as far back as documented history. Many socio-legal precedents have existed throughout history and in numerous communities around the world that either openly endorsed domestic abuse or refused to condemn it. This lengthy history of apathy towards the matter has resulted in a massive mass of social, legal, and traditional beliefs and attitudes that, despite their best efforts,

modern countries have failed to remove. Patriarchy is an underlying trend in every civilization that has allowed for domestic violence against women and children. The contrast in human rights is astounding when men are the ultimate authority and women and children are considered property. Historically, the only human right guaranteed to women about their worth was the right to a man's property. Children had no rights whatsoever.

Our feelings on the love between men and women, on marriage and parenthood, on the family and ourselves as fathers, wives, and mothers, are primarily conditioned by the society that produced us, more so than we realize. The types of women that our society has produced in the past, the roles they have played, sprang from the dictates and expectations of men. Women have been largely artificial, and even today, numerous psychological studies have revealed that women and girls are still more dependent on social approval than men. (Figs, 15)

The Hammurabi Code, the oldest written law, contains provisions for the patriarch to discipline his wife and children. These were state-sanctioned rights to regulate the family privately. If caught committing adultery, the wife might be killed or drowned in the river. To repay his obligations, the patriarch could sell his wife and children into

slavery for three years. Children may also be executed for misbehavior. A rapist was forced to marry his victim and pay a modest fee to her father. Hebrew laws were stricter. In Greece, women and children were at the mercy of men because there were no controlling punishments. In the Roman Empire, the male head of the family had the authority to beat, divorce, and murder. When the violence grew unbearable, only upper-class women could seek divorce. Lower-class women would never consider divorcing their abusive husbands, no matter what. Domestic abuse was not considered aggression in these ancient societies, even though they were warring societies where the death sentence was applied even for minor offenses like pickpocketing.

According to the Worldwide History of Criminal Justice, Constantine the Great was the first Christian emperor in recorded history to execute his wife. She was cooked alive in 289 C.E. on suspicion of adultery rather than being caught red-handed in adulterous behavior. Later, the Catholic Church declared him a saint:

The Catholic Church's endorsement of "The Rules of Marriage" in the 15th century exhorted the husband to stand as judge of his wife. He was to beat her with a stick upon her commission of an offense. According to the "Rules," beating showed a concern for the wife's soul. The common

law in England gave a man the right to beat his wife in the interest of maintaining family discipline. The phrase "rule of thumb" referred to the English common law, which allowed a husband to beat his wife (*Violence Against Women*, 1994)

Feminist theory of Domestic Violence argues that due to the gendered nature of violence, men become vulnerable to perpetrating abuse, and women become vulnerable to becoming victims of men's abuse (Smith, 2017). In most parts of the Western world, women are socialized to believe that personal happiness can only be found by satisfying men's wants at their own expense and that women bear the burden of relationship maintenance. They are not taught to retaliate or to advocate for themselves. "Men and women grow to embody their genders under patriarchy, which means that violence becomes inscribed on the bodies of males while violation becomes written on the bodies of women. Every romantic relationship has a power imbalance, but the stakes are higher for women", says Laina Bay-Cheng. Conventional wisdom holds that a woman must cede her power to her man. In their book, *The Good Wife's Guide*, Christine Rose and Gina Greco argue that a wife must be unselfish, overlook her husband's transgressions, and keep her thoughts and intentions covert.

Gender ideologies and patriarchal culture validate men's abusive behavior as an effective means of controlling women. They are raised to think that being in a relationship is necessary for them to be happy individually and that women are responsible for ensuring the relationship's success by putting their partners' demands above their desires. The idea that men are superior and women should be subservient still exists even though women have made such strides in every sector.

As freelance health and wellness writer Elizabeth Plumpre points out, abuse can never be justified. The main reason abusers act in specific ways is to obtain dominance and control over their victims. The need for control can stem from several factors, including personality disorders, taught behavior, low self-esteem, jealousy, anger management problems, alcohol or drug addiction, and inferiority complexes.

Terrorism in *Black and Blue*

The portrayal of physical violence in *Black and Blue* by Anna Quindlen is one of emotional and mental torment as much as physical anguish. A nurse by profession, Frances is the wife of Bobby Benedetto, a police officer and a typical conservative who appears to be doing her a favor by allowing her to live. He wants his wife to give up her nursing profession and stay at home like his mother and his colleagues' wives. Even if her income is somewhat more than his, his

conventional ego will not allow it. Bobby is incredibly violent and a control freak. Because she wants to go to the hospital and serve humanity instead of staying at home to feed her husband's enormous inflated ego, he pulls, pushes, punches, and hurts her in any way he pleases every other day at the slightest pretext, as if venting his frustration on a punching bag. When he gets into the about of physical assault, he makes her so black and blue that it becomes nearly impossible for her to move out of the house without covering herself adequately. There is an antiquated mentality at work here, one that prevents women from thinking for themselves and acting on their inner calling. This is the cost Frances must bear to live as she pleases and pursue her dream job. They have been together for about seventeen years.

Frances's terrible existence is reminiscent of Soheir Khashoggi's portrayal of the cramped, rarefied lifestyles of numerous wealthy Arab ladies. The protagonist of *Mirage* is Amira Badir, a stunning, perceptive, and brilliant young lady who suffers heinous torment at the hands of her cruel royal husband, the cruel prince Ali al-Rashad of al-Remal. He oppressively controls her. She receives equal parts luxury and mistreatment. He almost murders Amira once and then tries to frame her for infidelity by hatching a scheme with his close friends and family. However, Amira's foresight and caution in enduring harsh living conditions cause the scheme to fail.

Amira had witnessed the abuse her mother endured at the hands of her controlling, dictatorial father. She did not have high hopes for her marriage, but when the pampered cruel prince beats and humiliates her, her fantasy of a royal existence is torn to pieces:

Ironically, he now demanded her body nearly every night. That, too, had become a hell. Before, she had endured occasional cruelty; now, there was outright sadism. She knew the term from her psychology books, but it had never seemed natural. How could anyone take sexual pleasure in the pain of others? Well, Ali did. However, even that was deteriorating. More and more often, like tonight, he could not become aroused no matter how much he abused and humiliated her. (Khashoggi, 220)

Domestic violence is a pattern of aggressive and coercive actions, including economic pressure and physical, sexual, and psychological attacks that adults or teenagers use to control their intimate partners. Domestic violence goes by many names, including battering, intimate violence, conjugal violence, woman battery, spouse abuse, wife hitting, and wife abuse. It includes any forms of aggressive and demanding behavior that incites intimidation on the physical, psychological, sexual, and financial levels. Aggression can take many forms, such as repeated

criminal activity or, in certain situations, daily aggression. Domestic violence can involve physical assaults as well as controlling techniques that instill fear in the victims and their children, harming them physically or psychologically. It occurs amongst close companions who have been together for a considerable time. The offenders have unrestricted access to their victims and are fully aware of their daily schedules, vulnerabilities, and medical histories. Perpetrators employ a range of abusive and coercive strategies against their victims. The establishment of power and control over a partner can occur from a single act of physical violence, and this dominance is then further reinforced by coercive and abusive non-physical actions. It only takes one physical assault or threat of abuse.

Emily J. Cross, a University of Auckland post-doctoral student in New Zealand, states, "Power dynamics are not as simple in intimate relationships since even in well-functioning relationships; both partners are inescapably dependent on each other." The first feelings of security and comfort are taken for granted, but eventually, a range of rules appear, roles become apparent, and the relationship starts to stall. Frances had been waiting to understand Bobby's intense body language, aggressive tone, and expressive facial expressions all her life. Bobby uses malevolence and emotional blackmail to achieve his power. After a while, their relationship

turns into him following her like a cat after a squirming mouse. Terror takes precedence as the most dominant emotion in their marriage. According to Machiavelli, it is far safer to be feared because fear preserves you by a dread of punishment that never fails. Frances is restricted to being a response to Bobby's actions. "My clothes, my makeup: they were more or less his choice. I bought them, of course, but bought them with one eye always on Bobby's face. And his hands" (Quindlen 11).

In her seminal essay *The Second Sex*, Simon de Beauvoir writes that man defines woman not in herself but in him; she is not recognized as an independent creature. Bobby does everything he can to undermine her self-worth and effectiveness. He goes on an angry rant about how much he hates her for going to work and hanging out with her sister and friends "instead of being home, where you belonged." (99)

In his Domestic Abuse, Jackie Davis of the Cabot Police Department, School of Law Enforcement Supervision Session XVII, notes that religion also impacted this viewpoint. In the late 1400s, Friar Cherubino wrote *The Rules of Marriage*, which described the circumstances in which a man may use force to conquer his wife. Scolding, bullying, and terror followed first. A hammering with a stick was necessary if that failed. Instead of exacting revenge on the man, this would deliver

the poor woman's soul from her immoral actions.

Society, in those times, was constantly exposed to brutal violence in the form of wars, sports, and criminal punishments. The use of torture devices and burning alive demonstrated a barbaric spirit. To make matters worse, these penalties occurred in open spaces where sizable gatherings would gather to applaud the brutality. In contrast, domestic abuse was accepted as a typical mode of communication within families. Domestic abuse was nothing in comparison. Before the 1870s, no state had officially outlawed a man beating his family. Before the feminist movement of the 1960s brought domestic abuse to the attention of the media, the rules were only loosely enforced for over a century. Most states had enacted laws against domestic abuse by the 1980s.

Physical abuse is the most primitive form of violence. Disguising or hiding it is not easy. The offender uses it as an opportunity to take charge of the relationship by using brutal force to render the victim helpless. Domestic abuse is sometimes lethal. There is always a chance of death. It might also be an intentional outcome. A closer look reveals that domestic abuse occurs in private, at home. Cuts and bruises are examples of physical assaults that typically occur in areas of the victim's body that are covered by clothing. In *Black and Blue*, Anna Quindlen realistically illustrates domestic violence. Her novel is a flashback of the

deathly torment Frances had gone through in her treacherous married life. Although Bobby is not bothered which part of the body he targets, it is always in the privacy of his bedroom, where his son has never seen him hit his mother. Amira Badir (*Mirage*), too, is subject to physical torture in the privacy of her bedroom. She goes through hell when her husband beats her and blames her for covering up his inefficiency as a husband. He falsely frames her for adultery and does his best to prove his point, pushing her to the operation table to get her incapacitated as a woman by getting her uterus and a kidney removed.

The conventional abuser is primarily concerned with providing physical care. In addition to making an inexhaustive list of other household duties, he expects his partner to cook him his favorite supper and watch the kids. In his eyes, her primary status is that of an unpaid worker. Interwoven with the abuser's overvaluation of his work is the devaluation of his partner's labor (Bancroft 118). The high status of the abusive man causes him to have unfair and unreasonable expectations, which causes the relationship to center around the demands he makes.

"Bobby, what is your problem?" I had said, squinting in the light, and it happened, just like that, three good punches that I remember, and then I came to maybe an hour later, covered in blood, my nose and tongue numb. I had broken one

and bitten right through the edge of the other. (Quindlen, 64).

Most women desire to maintain their appearances and hide their feelings of grief. In *The Woman Who Walked into Doors*, Roddy Doyle depicts similar brutality. After her marriage to her infamous husband Charlo, the narrator, Paula Spencer, an abused woman, is disillusioned. Like Frances, she also experiences the same cycle of abuse and concealing her wounds from the world.

Broken nose. Loose teeth. Cracked ribs. Broken finger. Black eyes. I do not know how many; I once had two at the same time, one fading, the other new. Shoulders, elbows, knees, wrists. Stitches in my mouth. Stitches on my chin. A ruptured eardrum...For seventeen years. There was not one minute when I was not afraid, when I was not waiting and waiting for him to go, waiting for him to come. I was waiting for the fist, waiting for the smile. I was brainwashed and brain-dead, a zombie for hours, afraid to think, afraid to stop, entirely alone. (Doyle, 176)

In a similar vein, Doyle also uses the flashback technique to highlight the horrific abuse. The suffering and torment that Frances endures are akin to Paula Spencer's existence in a controlling and unloving marriage. Paula, in contrast to Frances, uses alcohol as a coping method and suppresses many of the painful memories, but this makes things more chaotic and disorderly at home. She stores her alcohol bottles in a locked shed, where she leaves the key during the day and retrieves it at night. She also makes sure her kids are asleep before she drinks. "He loved

me, and he beat me. I loved him, and I took it. It is as simple as that and as stupid and complicated." Elsewhere, she says:

There were days when I did not exist; he saw through me and walked around me. I was invisible. There were days when I liked not existing. I closed down, stopped thinking, stopped looking...There were days when I could not even feel pain. They were the best ones. I could see it happening. There was no ground under me, nothing to fall to. I was able not to care. I could float. I did not exist (178).

Perpetrators of domestic violence communicate aggressively toward their partners in the form of yelling, criticizing, and manipulating. Bobby spares no occasion to harass her. On the contrary, he battles with her to express his rage and wild power, acting as though his life's work is to make his wife miserable.

Abuse is not a one-time event; instead, it is a continuous pattern of dominating and manipulating behavior that leaves the subservient partner feeling afraid and unworthy. The batterer employs a variety of violent techniques, such as verbal abuse and other control mechanisms combined with the threat of physical harm in order to create and preserve his dominance through fear; long-term relationship damage can be caused by verbal abuse alone, but it does not generate the same level of terror as verbal abuse combined

with threats and physical assaults. As Ganly (2002) points out, domestic violence perpetrators share specific characteristics, including mental illness, unrestrained power and control, poor communication skills, an inferiority complex, and a lack of self-control, leading to aggressive behavioral patterns, denial, and other justifications for their abusive behavior.

Domestic violence is perpetuated because it is practical, which feeds into the vicious cycle of conduct. Through violence, threats, and terror, the abuser gains control over the victim. Bobby frequently resorts to harsh methods to get Frances to submit. Stereotypical reactions from acquaintances, family, and friends promote abuse. The main characters remain motionless and do not withstand their husbands' disparaging actions. This is because of the gender-based upbringing that facilitates the offenders' ability to rationalize their actions because of the widely held patriarchal ideology that asserts men's natural right to dominate women through the use of harsh or degrading behavior.

The status of homemakers is equated with female powerlessness, which has been assumed to contribute to victimization (Hotaling & Sugarman, 1986). Men are not interested in discovering their woman's thoughts, feelings, or desires. Men take their affirmation for granted. Domestic abuse typically affects women who are not

good communicators. When there is little or no communication, there is a high likelihood of miscommunication, disagreements, and instability, leading to victimization. Wives who irritate their husbands are rarely shown sympathy, which could result in physical and verbal violence. One cannot attribute domestic violence to anger alone. Not every battering incident is emotionally charged. Some abusive behavior is "carried out calmly to gain the victim's compliance:

Sometimes physical abuse, threats of harm, and isolation tactics are interwoven with seemingly loving gestures (e.g., expensive gifts, intense displays of devotion, sending flowers after an assault, making romantic promises, tearfully promising it will never happen again). Amnesty International (1973) describes such "occasional indulgences" as a method of coercion used in torture. With such tactics, the perpetrator provides positive motivation for victim compliance. The perpetrator can control the victim through this combination of physical and psychological tactics since the perpetrator connects the threat of physical harm so closely with the psychological tactics. The message is always there that if the victim does not respond to this "loving" gesture or verbal abuse, then the perpetrator will

escalate and use whichever tactic, including force, is necessary to get what he wants. (Ganley, 9)

Regardless of how differently the personalities of their victims differ in intimate relationships, many abusers use this pattern of control in all of their relationships. Bobby resorts to all of these acts, kissing her wounds, preparing dinner to appease her, and setting the stage for the subsequent abuse.

Research indicates that there are no personality profiles for battered women (Hotaling & Sugarman, 1986). The personality profiles of women who have experienced abuse and those who have not do not differ. This dispels the misconception that a woman's characteristics cause violence. A study by Jacobson et al. (1994) states that the victim's behavior never alters the batterer's behavior. It makes it abundantly evident that the victim's actions are unable to influence the abusive behavior of the offender. The attitude and mindset that result from prior experiences and social ideas that enforce dominance and are endorsed by peers and family members are typically the cause of abusive action.

Conclusion

To summarize, what happens inside homes and the meaning of what happens inside homes differs for women and men (Loseke, 2005). It is common for a woman to make less money than her spouse, for him to be physically larger than her, and for her to devote more time and energy to caring for her home and family

than he does because of the gendered nature of partnering. Men's and women's perceptions of violence and the prospect of "leaving home" are influenced by these gendered elements of family life. Due to the gendered nature of partnering, it is normal for a woman to earn less money than her spouse, he being physically more significant than her, and she devoting more time and energy to taking care of her home and family than he does. These gendered aspects of family life have an impact on how men and women view violence, as well as the possibility of ending the violence or "leaving home." These texts highlight the frequency and severity of the harms that women suffer at the hands of men, as well as how society actively supports the institution of marriage, which makes it extremely difficult for victims of trauma to escape their oppressors—their violent, despotic husbands.

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