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# Restorative Justice as Social Justice for Victims of Gendered Violence: A Standpoint Feminist Perspective

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This article provides an overview of restorative justice as a process and examines its relevance to women who have been victimized by physical and sexual abuse. The starting point is the justice system with its roots in adversarial, offender-oriented practices of obtaining justice. The widespread dissatisfaction by battered women and rape victims and their advocates with the current system of mandatory law enforcement opens the door for consideration of alternative forms of dealing with domestic violence. Restorative justice strategies, as argued here, have several major advantages. Like social work, these strategies are solution-based rather than problem-based processes, give voice to marginalized people, and focus on healing and reconciliation. Moreover, restorative justice offers an avenue through which the profession of social work can re-establish its historic role in criminal justice. The four models most relevant to women's victimization are victim-offender conferencing, family group conferencing, healing circles, and community reparations. Each model is examined separately from a feminist standpoint. The discussion is informed by insights from the teachings of standpoint feminist theory and social work values, especially social justice.

KEY WORDS: *criminal justice; domestic violence; restorative justice; standpoint feminism*

Because of an increasing awareness of inadequacies in the criminal justice system in meeting the needs of victims of crime, there is a growing movement to use alternative, more informal forms of instituting justice for victims, offenders, and communities (see, for example, Belknap, 2007; Bui, 2007; Chesney-Lind, 2002; van Wormer & Roberts, 2009). The strategies, known collectively as restorative justice, involve a conferencing process guided by a trained facilitator. The purpose of the restorative form of justice is reconciliation rather than punishment, healing rather than retribution. To date, restorative processes have been used primarily to deal with cases of property crime and juvenile offenders. "No one foresaw," as researchers Umbreit, Vos, Coates, and Brown (2003) informed us, "that such processes might be appropriate in cases of severe violence such as felony assaults, vehicular homicide or murder" (p. 13).

Restorative justice is rarely explored from a perspective that is attentive to gendered crime, such as domestic violence (Stubbs, 2007). Some experts in the field have ruled out the suitability of restorative techniques in cases of domestic violence because of power imbalances in the relationship and the fact that the relationship between offender and victim

is often ongoing (see Busch, 2002; Strang & Braithwaite, 2002; Stubbs, 2007). Others have advocated for restorative strategies for the same reason—because the relationships are ongoing (Grauwiler & Mills, 2004; Presser & Gaarder, 2004).

The overall purpose of this article is to explore the possibility of adapting restorative processes to the needs of female victims of gendered crime. A related challenge is to examine the principles of restorative justice for compatibility with the teachings and values of standpoint feminist theory. But first let us review the conventional legal process that commonly takes place from the time that a battered woman calls on law enforcement for help through her movement through the system of prosecution and sentencing. The policies of mandatory arrests and prosecution are viewed from a feminist perspective, as are the principles and practices of restorative justice.

From the many varieties of feminism, the teachings of one school of feminism—standpoint feminism—is chosen as the guiding framework for this discussion. This branch of feminist theory was selected because of the clear formulation of its precepts and because of its emphasis on "giving voice" and listening to women's voices (Bui, 2007; Collins, 1990, 1998; Swigonski, 1994). The central

focus of this article is on the basic tenets of restorative justice and consideration of its relevance to the gendered crimes of intimate partner violence and sexual assault. Restorative justice processes, as will be seen, may or may not be advisable for these gendered crimes.

## **STANDARD HANDLING OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE CASES**

Standard court processes and plea bargaining behind closed doors often fail to meet the needs of the victims and members of the community (Van Ness & Strong, 2002). The results of victim satisfaction surveys show that even when the prosecution of a perpetrator of domestic crime has been successful, the results may not meet the needs of the victim-survivor (see Rozee & Koss, 2001; van Wormer & Bartollas, 2007; Zehr, 1990).

Erez and Belknap (1998) and Grauwiler and Mills (2004) found, in their studies of battered women, that many of them had a negative view of the criminal justice system. Most of these women expressed a desire to make the decision whether or not to have the person arrested and whether or not to withdraw the charges at some later point. Furthermore, they expressed a desire to be treated as individuals by law enforcement officers and prosecutors.

To get at the roots of the problem, Hotaling and Buzawa (2003) interviewed victims of intimate partner violence whose cases had been handled in a model court setting in Massachusetts. They found that almost half of the hundreds of victim-survivors interviewed were dissatisfied with all aspects of the criminal justice process and that another 27 percent were dissatisfied with prosecution of the cases in court. Lack of control over the process, mandatory arrest and prosecution policies, continuing to live with the abuser, and identity as African American were key determinants of dissatisfaction.

The criminalization of domestic violence following the Duluth model (the domestic abuse intervention program developed in Duluth, Minnesota) represented the most progressive thinking of the 1970s through the 1990s (Bui, 2007; Chesney-Lind, 2002; Presser & Gaarder, 2004). Arrest of batterers was mandatory; often, jail terms were mandatory too; and victims who filed charges were not allowed to later drop them. So today if the case comes to trial and the victim is forced to testify, what she says against her partner may compromise her safety later. Moreover, child protective services may investigate a

mother for her failure to protect her children even if the children only witnessed the violence (Cheon & Regehr, 2006). Perhaps for these reasons, only one-quarter of all physical assaults are reported to the police (Tjaden & Thoennes, 2000). Among the unintended consequences are the disproportionate arrests of African American men and increasing numbers of arrests of women in the dual arrest policies that evolved (Chesney-Lind, 2002).

Critics also point to the disempowerment felt by the victims of family violence once they turn the case over to law enforcement and the courts (Belknap, 2007; Burford & Adams, 2004). By disempowerment, these researchers are referring to the relegation of the victims to a passive role in the prosecution of the case. Their lack of control over the process once the wheels of justice start rolling is in clear violation of the standpoint feminist emphasis on self-determination (Bui, 2007).

Current mandatory arrest and prosecution policies that proliferate across the states often fail to address the reality of women's lives and their ethnic backgrounds. In her interviews with 23 Vietnamese immigrant women who had been beaten, Bui (2007) learned of numerous instances in which the criminal justice system's arrest and prosecution practices had created problematic relationships between these women and members of the extended family, including in-laws.

Today, globally, and most notably in Britain, Canada, Northern Ireland, Australia, and South Africa, as well as the United States, alternative forms of settling disputes have been introduced. These alternative, more informal methods that stress resolution through dialogue arguably are consistent with the needs of women to speak on their own behalf (Gilligan, 1982; van Wormer, 2004).

As Audre Lorde (1984) so famously noted, "the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house" (p. 11). Perhaps it is time to seek some other tools outside the adversarial system of criminal justice, tools that are more consistent with the principles of feminism. Standpoint feminism is especially relevant to issues of power, marginalization, personal choice, and a reliance on insider knowledge.

## **FEMINIST STANDPOINT APPROACH**

"Giving voice" has become a defining characteristic of the feminist standpoint approach that focuses on gender differences in social situations (Bui, 2007). Standpoint theory starts with the premise that the

standpoint or position in society of women provides a vantage point from which to view women's social reality (Swigonski, 1994).

Nancy Hartsock (1983), in her classic study of feminist standpoint epistemology, argued that women's cognitive styles, in their affirmation of relationality and life-affirming goals, provide a standpoint from which one can envision possibilities for overcoming oppression and building a better society. It was Hartsock's belief that such a vision is superior to a masculine focus on hierarchy, dominance, and dichotomous, oppositional thinking. Ways of knowing informed by the motive of caring for everyone's needs will produce more valuable representations than ways of knowing informed by the interests of domination (Hartsock, 1987). It is necessary to attend, however, to Alcoff's (1988) cautionary note that cultural feminism's belief in women's innate peacefulness and ability to nurture can promote unrealistic expectations.

Feminist standpoint theory begins with the idea that less powerful members of society experience a different reality as a consequence of their oppression. Research that is undertaken from this perspective is political in the sense that the research is committed to social action on behalf of oppressed groups (Belknap, 2007). Standpoint theory is compatible with social work, which also deals with people at the margins of society and seeks to enhance their sense of dignity and worth (Swigonski, 1994).

Of special relevance to women's victimization are the following standpoint feminist values: reliance on the woman's personal narrative for truth telling; acceptance of a holistic, nondichotomized view of reality including a merging of the personal and political; a focus on choice and options; an understanding of the gendered nature of power relations in the society; and an emphasis on personal empowerment and respect for one's personal dignity. Empowerment is defined by standpoint theorists Sprague and Hayes (2000) in terms of facilitating one's self-determination. Empowering relationships occur on both personal and structural levels. Similarly, the *Social Work Dictionary* defines empowerment in terms of helping individuals "increase their personal, interpersonal, socioeconomic, and political strength and develop influence toward improving their circumstances" (Barker, 2003, p. 142).

Now we turn to a conception of justice that is highly consistent with the tenets of standpoint feminism summarized in this article. Restorative

justice, as a grassroots process that comes in many forms, is only as good as the people who guide the process. This is especially true in the handling of some domestic violence situations. Still, a woman-centered model of justice that values caring and personal relations might be more reflective of women's personal needs than are standard forms of justice (see Robbins, Chatterjee, & Canda, 2006). Before considering what restorative justice has to offer women who have been victimized through gendered crime, let us examine restorative justice in terms of its philosophy and basic models.

### WHAT IS RESTORATIVE JUSTICE?

Restorative justice is a movement within (and sometimes outside of) the criminal justice system, a victim-centered approach, with special relevance to marginalized populations, one of which is women. Unlike standard forms of criminal justice that are adversarial and hark back to primitive practices related to combat, restorative justice can be considered more humanistic (Van Ness, 2004). Instead of revenge, the emphasis is on resolution. Typically, in this process, offenders take responsibility for their crimes and make restitution to the victim and community. Restorative justice approaches are promising in their ability to respond to relationship issues with special meaning for women (Failing, 2006).

Representing a paradigm shift from conventional forms of resolving wrongdoing, restorative justice focuses more attention on the harm to victims and communities and less on the act of law-breaking (Van Ness, 2004; Zehr, 1990). At the macro level, restorative justice is about peacemaking—at the micro level, about relationship. From the point of view of the offender, restorative justice is about taking responsibility for the wrong that was done; from the view of the victim it is about being heard, receiving an apology, and beginning the process of healing. Healing, in restorative justice parlance, "implies a sense of recovery, a degree of closure" (Zehr, 1990, p. 186).

Parallels between restorative justice and standpoint theory are most evident in the nonadversarial, nondichotomized process itself that does not pit a lawyer on one side of a dispute against a lawyer on the other side. As in standpoint theory, truth telling through personal narrative is the mode of communication. Above all, the whole process is guided by personal choice on the part of all parties in whether or not to participate, and by the victim-survivors in details

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of the proceedings. The most controversial and undeveloped area of feminist scholarship concerns the application of restorative initiatives to gendered crimes, namely, partner and sexual violence (Daly & Stubbs, 2006).

### **MODELS OF RESTORATIVE JUSTICE**

The four models most relevant to women's victimization are victim-offender conferencing, family group conferencing, healing circles, and community reparations. Each model will be examined separately through a standpoint feminist lens. Victim-offender conferencing, sometimes incorrectly referred to as victim-offender mediation, brings together parties in which one person has injured another, for the sake of resolution and, if possible, righting the wrong. Unlike a mediation model, which implies a dispute among equals that must be negotiated, restorative conferencing recognizes its participants as victim and offender, rather than as disputants (Presser & Gaarder, 2004). There may be more than one victim and more than one offender. The largest programs to date have been offered through victim assistance services of state departments of corrections (Umbreit et al., 2003). A trained professional opens the conference and describes the wrong that has been committed in a general way. Informal discussion takes place among all the participants; typically, the offender offers restitution of some sort and expresses remorse for the harm that was done.

In recent years, practitioners have found themselves being asked to bring together victims or survivors of severe forms of violence, such as murder of one's family member. Such cases, as Umbreit et al. (2003) suggested, require longer case preparation for all participants, with special attention paid to their expectations and feelings about the encounter; greater professional skills of facilitators; negotiation with correctional officials; and clarification of boundary issues.

A variation of victim-offender conferencing is the use of victim-offender panels in which offenders

listen to crime victims unknown to themselves, who describe the pain and suffering they endured as the result of the crime. The purpose is to help offenders develop empathy for their own victims and to regret what they have done. Sometimes on hearing of the pain of the victim-survivors, the offenders will get in tune with their own past victimization. Getting in touch with their own feelings may prepare them for the humanization-rehabilitation process.

From a standpoint perspective, the victim-offender process stands out from the other forms in its reliance on the impact of victim-survivor testimony, telling their stories in their own words and styles.

Family group conferencing (FGC), which originated among New Zealand's indigenous population, also represents feminist concerns stemming from the international women's and children's rights movements of the late 1980s and beyond. This solutions-based process most often is used by child welfare departments in cases of child abuse and neglect. This approach is appropriate for the needs of women in that the focus is often on parenting and helping the mother with problems in caregiving to take better care of the child, often through support from other relatives and direct help in child care responsibilities. This model works well in close knit, minority communities with strong extended family ties (Burford & Hudson, 2000). FGC's singular quality, relevant to standpoint feminism, is that it is centered on the woman, with the options derived from the families and community rather than from officials of the state.

Healing circles are used in North American native rituals for work with victims-survivors in providing family and community support. The process here is that people who are involved in some form of victimization are seated in a circle to provide personal support following the trauma caused by a crime of violence. Often the ritual opens with a prayer. A feather or "talking stick" is passed from person to person whose turn it is to speak about the occurrence in question. Unlike FGC, communication and healing are the central focus, not the finding of a solution to a specific problem. Similar to FGC and consistent with standpoint feminism, truth telling and open communication are primary.

Community reparation is a form of restorative justice that operates at the macro level and outside of the criminal justice and child welfare context. Reparation refers to the attempt to repair the damage

that was done by the wrongdoers. In community reparation, the violation was committed by a whole population or even by the state. Wartime persecutions, rape of the land of the people, slave labor, and mass murder are forms of crimes against humanity that demand some form of compensation for survivors and their families, even generations later, as long as the wounds are palpable. More than 30 truth commissions have been established to officially investigate and provide a record of the pattern of abuses that were committed against a population (Reddy, 2004).

Two powerful examples are the sessions of public truth telling and catharsis for a nation's woundedness that took place before the truth and the reconciliation commissions in South Africa and later in Peru. The latter investigated the massive sexual violence against women that had occurred in the context of an earlier civil war (Falcón, 2005). The Peruvian commission's final report provided appropriate recognition of the women's victimization and recognition of sexual violence in such cases as crimes against humanity. Key aspects of community reparation relevant to feminist standpoint theory are truth telling and, most important, bringing together the personal and political, that is, the recognition of the personal suffering that stems from political crime.

### **RESTORATIVE JUSTICE AND BATTERING SITUATIONS**

Choice is the hallmark of standpoint theory as well as of social work's strengths model and of its aim to help clients find their own way, to carve out their own paths to wholeness (Rapp & Goscha, 2006). The dilemma facing battered women's advocates today, for which there is no clearly perfect solution, is whether the process—giving the battered woman a choice about how to proceed—or whether the outcome—pursuing domestic violence cases to the full extent of the law, regardless of the victim's wishes—is more important (van Wormer & Roberts, 2009). This issue is viewed through a standpoint feminist lens, with attention to concerns of power imbalances, women's special needs, and choice.

Presser and Gaarder (2004) have called into question the ideology of absolute justice—policies such as forcing the victim to testify in open court against her partner or spouse who assaulted her. Such coercion of victims is inconsistent with the women movement's goal of self-determination.

Women of color, as they suggested, often see both the courts and social services as adversaries rather than allies, so an emphasis on judicial intervention may turn them away. Many women, moreover, are dependent on a man for financial support; others have drug problems or undocumented immigration status that might make them wary of pursuing criminal prosecution (Miller & Peterson, 2007; van Wormer & Roberts, 2009). Research in the 1990s found that battered victims who have a say in legal or less formal proceedings may feel more empowered to get help, possibly even terminating the abusive relationship (Presser & Gaarder, 2004). Presser and Gaarder viewed restorative strategies as a viable alternative to standard practices.

Victim-offender conferencing is currently practiced in New Zealand as one way of meting out justice for victims of battering. The results have been favorable as determined in follow-up interviews and surveys (Braithwaite & Daly, 1998). Sentencing in such a system is handled by community groups that include the victim and her family, as well as the offender and individuals from his support system. Power imbalances are addressed in various ways, such as limiting the right of the offender to speak on his own behalf and including community members in a sort of surveillance team to monitor the offender's compliance. The New Zealand conferencing model is effective, noted Koss (2000), because it draws on sanctions that abusive men fear most: family stigma and broad social disapproval. The message to all concerned is that any form of family violence is unacceptable. Such conferencing can attend to the psychological as well as the physical abuse a survivor has experienced and counter her sense of helplessness by involving her as an active participant in the process (Koss, 2000). Measures can be taken, moreover, to reduce the survivor's vulnerability, as in providing access to an individual bank account or transportation, for example. Such conferencing, as Koss further indicated, is recommended for young offenders without extensive histories of violence.

Similarly, in Canada, community-based victim-offender conferencing is practiced even in cases of severe family violence through traditional native community ceremonies. In the case of an alcoholic, aboriginal man who had beaten his wife, for example, a sentencing circle was formed in the native tradition (Griffiths, 1999). Seated in a circle, the victim and her family told of their distress—a young man

spoke of the contributions the offender had made to the community. The offender was ordered into alcoholism treatment, and the ceremony concluded with a prayer and a shared meal. After a period of time, the woman who had been victimized voiced her satisfaction with the process. This case, as Griffiths explained, was clearly linked to the criminal justice system. Other cases may be handled more quietly by tribal members. Griffiths concluded on a note of caution: Victims must play a key role throughout the process to ensure that their needs are met and that they are not revictimized.

One issue raised by Goel (2005) is whether the restorative process is the best option for South Asian immigrant female victims who Goel suggested may be too easily influenced by the process. Grauwiler and Mills (2004) argued in the affirmative. They recommended a restorative approach known as "intimate abuse circles" as a culturally sensitive response to domestic violence that is well adapted to helping immigrant, minority, and religious families who are more likely than others to want to stay intact.

This model acknowledges that many people seek to end the violence but not the relationship. Such restorative processes help partners and those who would like to separate in a more amicable fashion than through standard adversarial disputes. A fallacy perpetuated by Grauwiler and Mills (2004), however, is their stated belief that men and women are equally violent. This claim is easily refuted by a review of data from the Bureau of Justice Statistics and national victimization surveys (Rennison, 2003).

According to Curtis-Fawley and Daly (2005), in situations of rape restorative justice strategies are more acceptable from a feminist perspective for situations of sexual assault than as responses to domestic violence. Their reasoning is as follows: Although sexual assault can occur in the context of domestic violence and as a pattern of abuse, many sexual assaults are discrete events. Moreover, if the case comes to court, a major hurdle for these victims is the state's difficulty in obtaining a conviction. The pressing concern for victims of domestic violence, in contrast, is to find methods of stopping the violence and securing safety.

Roze and Koss (2001) and Hopkins and Koss (2005) criticized the handling and outcomes of acquaintance rape at every level of the criminal justice system from police officer's treatment to the prosecutor's reluctance to take the case to court,

not to mention hostile cross-examination should the case go to trial.

Racial and ethnic differences between state officials and the victim compounded the lack of consideration and respect for women of color. In addition, as Roze and Koss (2001) suggested, adversarial justice is experienced as "white imposed" (p. 306). African American and Latina women, therefore, may avoid seeking help from the criminal justice system. Another inhibiting factor is that women of color may fear they will be criticized for turning on members of their race or ethnicity and for subjecting them to a system with a history of racism and brutal treatment of minorities.

Conferencing can offer a better option for such victims because in conferencing the starting point is the admitted guilt by the perpetrator (Daly & Stubbs, 2006). The victim-survivor is not placed on the defensive, therefore. Roze and Koss (2001) described a successful project at the University of Arizona for handling acquaintance rape situations. Drawing on community conferencing principles and operating outside of the public eye, this project strived to redress the harm to the victim-survivor while sanctioning the offender for his bad behavior. Conferences are led by a facilitator, often a mental health professional, who has been trained in restorative justice strategies. As long as there is no re-offense, the facts of the case are sealed.

As indicated by Roze and Koss (2001), advantages of this format are as follows: strengthening of community trust; empowerment of the victim-survivor; release of legal authorities from pressure to take action under difficult circumstances; provision of a forum for volunteer advocates to offer antirape messages; and impact on the student offender who is forced to take responsibility for his behavior.

A remarkable illustration of how circle conferencing was successfully applied to a whole tribe of aboriginal people who had been plagued with problems of alcohol and sexual abuse is provided by Green (1998). These events took place in the late 1980s in Hollow Water, Manitoba, Canada.

## RESEARCH AND DISCUSSION OF RISKS

What does the literature show us about the long-term effectiveness of these restorative justice models? Of special significance to gendered violence is research on victim-offender conferencing and dialogue in cases of severe interpersonal violence. In their review of the literature, Umbreit et al.

(2003) found that the process was well received by both victims and offenders. Such research involving domestic violence and rape, however, is only in its infancy.

Curtis-Fawley and Daly (2005) conducted interviews with victim advocates in two South Australian states on their views on the appropriateness of restorative justice strategies for the women they serve. They found that 12 of the 15 advocates interviewed had favorable attitudes toward restorative justice, which most saw as a positive alternative to the criminal justice processes. Those who had unfavorable attitudes were unfamiliar with the process and seemed to have confused conferencing with mediation.

Standpoint theory values research that places the welfare of marginalized groups in the center of our research (Swigonski, 1994). A critique of restorative practices from this perspective would consider first and foremost the degree to which a process gives voice to women as subjects (not objects) of the proceedings. And an examination of practices, such as the Canadian aboriginal healing circles, from this standpoint would want to know who was organizing the circles and how was justice for the victim-survivor being achieved. Indeed, some of these circles are offender centered rather than victim centered, according to feminist critics Razack (1998) and Ross (2000). An article in *Canadian Dimension* reported about a controversial case, known as the Morris case, that took place in a small town in the Yukon (Pope, 2004). The case involved the brutal rape at gunpoint of a woman by her common-law husband. The focus was not on the wrongdoing but on mitigating cultural factors in the life of the offender. When the offender was placed on probation by the tribal council, angry voices were raised all across Canada for a review of the case by governmental authorities.

Rubin (2003), in her examination of women's experiences in restorative processes in Nova Scotia, cautioned commentators and researchers not to romanticize these alternative forms of justice, but to be aware of cultural forces that may reinforce male control of women. Her recommendations include prioritizing women's safety concerns and guaranteeing their safety in domestic violence situations. Unless the restorative process is cautious and fully planned through joint decision making with the victim-survivor, the informal process can be worse than nothing at all. This is especially the

case when conducted by cultural systems that are patriarchal and without guidance from domestic violence advocates.

Restorative processes are inappropriate in many situations related to the level of danger for the victim. An important research question that has not been adequately explored is the following: For whom, for which type of batterers, would a restorative justice approach be effective? More precise knowledge of batterer typologies may ultimately be used to discriminate between offenders who might reasonably be expected to benefit from such an approach and those who are unlikely to benefit, or who pose too great a safety threat. For a detailed discussion of the personality characteristics of men who are unsuitable for restorative interventions, for example, men with antisocial tendencies and those who are emotionally volatile, see Cheon and Regehr (2006).

## **RELEVANCE TO THE SOCIAL WORK PROFESSION**

Regrettably, the social work profession and, most especially, social work education, has largely abandoned the criminal justice field (Reamer, 2004). It is time, argued Reamer, for social work to reclaim the territory. A familiarity with the principles of restorative justice offers a path for reentry.

Consider the core values of social work—service, social justice, dignity and worth of the person, importance of human relationships, integrity, and competence (NASW, 2000). Each of these values is congruent with the principles of restorative justice. The service aspect of restorative justice is found through advocacy for this humanistic approach and integrity in determining for which situations these alternative forms of justice are appropriate. Social justice entails fairness or equity to provide a balance among people who have varying degrees of power in a social setting. That restorative justice is a form of social justice of special relevance to social work practice is a major argument here. The value of competence comes into play as social workers get training in restorative practices and become familiar with the emerging research literature on participant satisfaction with the process.

Recently, and for the first time, the social work profession through NASW gave recognition in its professional newsletter to the principles of restorative justice. In the article titled "Restorative Justice: A Model of Healing," Fred (2005) indicated that social workers, who are schooled in cultural sensitivity

and a strengths-empowerment approach will find that their values make for a natural fit between their profession and the initiatives of restorative justice. Social workers in New Zealand, Canada, the United Kingdom, and Australia made this discovery years ago.

Whether offered in workshops or in university courses, the teaching potential of restorative justice concepts is considerable. Drawing on these concepts, the trainer or instructor can help participants connect the principles of restorative justice with social work values and ethics. Participants can be helped to see from a feminist perspective how women who have been personally victimized can benefit by sharing their stories of trauma and receiving community support in the healing process.

In their daily practice with women who have been victimized, social workers may find that some clients may want to meet with the victimizer, usually years later, for purposes of information gathering or healing. Many such conferences take place in prison. In such circumstances, social workers can make appropriate referrals to victim assistance services professionals who conduct victim-offender conferencing. Because our concern was with male-perpetrated crime against female victims, or gendered crime, a feminist theoretical framework of the standpoint school was chosen as the appropriate formulation to guide the discussion. Four basic restorative models (victim-offender conferencing, family group conferencing, healing circles, and community reparations) were described. Common to all these models, which are used globally, is an emphasis on the needs of the victim, truth telling in one's own voice, direct communication, and accountability of the offender to the victim. These attributes are consistent with the teachings of standpoint feminism in their focus on listening to the voices of women and oppressed populations. These attributes are also consonant with social work values of self-determination and enhancing a person's sense of dignity and worth.

The challenge presented here was to see if principles of restorative justice that are widely acceptable in areas of juvenile justice, child welfare, and international commissions of crime and justice would have possibilities for meeting the needs of women who have been personally victimized through intimate partner violence and sexual assault. Of these two forms of gendered violence, the most controversial is the former—intimate partner violence. In Canada,

which has an extensive history with such practices under tribal law, aboriginal women's interests have not always been represented.

Still, in the United States and Canada, the present system involving mandatory arrests and prosecutions of perpetrators of domestic violence has brought about unintended consequences to the extent that many victims are reluctant to call the police. Victim choice has not been a part of this process. The widespread dissatisfaction with the current system of mandatory law enforcement opens the door to a consideration of alternative forms of dealing with domestic violence. Restorative justice strategies have several major advantages—they take wrongdoing and its resolution beyond victims and offenders into the community. Like social work, the processes are solution based rather than problem based, and the focus is on healing and reconciliation, not on inflicting wounds in the interests of retribution. Indeed, restorative justice perhaps offers an avenue through which the profession of social work can re-establish its historic role in criminal justice. To exert leadership in an area in which exciting innovation is sorely needed is the challenge for social workers in the United States. **SW**

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