



What is the link between intimate violence and war? Why do societies that treat women with respect fare better? A movement challenges traditions of violence in the family

every day, the headlines assault us with death and destruction. We read of brutal attacks that maim and kill civilians and even target children. The torture of prisoners and beheading of hostages in Iraq. The carnage in Sudan and the Congo. Despite anti-war protests by millions of people, despite promises by politicians that preemptive wars will bring security, despite a global peace movement teaching nonviolent conflict resolution, war and terrorism continue unabated. What fuels this firestorm of violence—and how can we stop it?

We're sometimes told violence is "human nature." But findings from sociology, psychology, and

neuroscience show that a major factor in whether people commit violence is what happens during a child's early formative years. As research from Harvard University and Maclean Hospital shows, the brain neurochemistry of abused children tends to become programmed for fight-or-flight, and thus for violence.

When children experience violence, or observe violence against their mothers, they learn it's acceptable—even moral—to use force to impose one's will on others. Indeed, the only way they can make sense of violence coming from those who are supposed to love them is that it must be moral.

Terrorism and chronic warfare are responses to life in societies in which the only perceived choices are dominating or being dominated. These violent responses are characteristic of cultures where this view of relations is learned early on through traditions of coercion, abuse, and violence in parent-child and gender relations.

It's not coincidental that throughout history the most violently despotic and warlike societies have been those in which violence, or the threat of violence, is used to maintain domination of parent over child and man over woman. It's not coincidental that the 9/11 terrorists came from cultures where women and children are terrorized into submission. Nor is it coincidental that Afghanistan under the Taliban in many ways resembled the European Middle Ages—when witchburnings, public drawings and quarterings, despotic rulers, brutal violence against children, and male violence against women were considered moral and normal. Neither is it coincidental that, in the U.S. today, those pushing “crusades” against “evil enemies” oppose equal rights for women and advocate harshly punitive childrearing.

For much of recorded history, religion has been used to justify, even command, violence against women and children. The subjugation of women and children is still the central message of many fundamentalist religious leaders today—leaders who, not coincidentally, also advocate “holy wars.”

Many religious and secular leaders have spoken out against international terrorism and wars of aggression. But we urgently need to hear their voices raised also against the intimate violence that sparks, fuels, and refuels international violence. Far too many customs and public policies still accept, condone, and even promote violence against women and children.

I'm passionately involved in an initiative to change this. The Spiritual Alliance to Stop Intimate Violence (SAIV) aims to end violence against women and children by engaging the moral authority of spiritual and religious leaders. More than 80 percent of the world's people identify with a religious faith and look to religious leaders for guidance. SAIV was formed to encourage enlightened spiritual and religious leaders to speak out against intimate violence as strongly as they do against terrorism and war. This is essential, not only for the many millions whose lives are taken or blighted by terror in the home, but for us all, because intimate violence teaches that it is acceptable to use force to impose one's will on others.

SAIV has gathered a council of leaders who are prepared to break the silence on this pivotal issue.

Among them are Prince El Hassan bin Talal of Jordan; A.T. Ariyaratne, the leader of the Sarvodaya peace movement of Sri Lanka; Ela Gandhi, granddaughter of Mohandas Gandhi; Betty Williams, Irish Nobel Peace Laureate; Bill Schulz, director of Amnesty International; Janet Chisholm, chair of the Episcopal Peace Fellowship; Irfan Ahmad Khan, president of the World Council of Muslims for Interfaith Relations; Kalon Rinchen Khando, Tibetan Minister of Education for the Dalai Lama; Harvey Cox, professor at the Harvard Divinity School; Jane Goodall; and Deepak Chopra. Under the direction of Jim Kenney, former director of the Council for a Parliament of the World's Religions, SAIV is reaching out to religious and spiritual leaders, health professionals, policy makers, teachers, and parents to discuss the link between intimate and international violence.

Cultures of war or peace

Surprisingly, none of our conventional social categories takes the relationship of intimate violence and international violence into account. Indeed, classifications such as religious versus secular, right versus left, East versus West, and developed versus developing do not tell us whether a culture's beliefs and institutions—from the family, education, and religion to politics and economics—support relations based on nonviolence and mutual respect, or rigid rankings backed up by fear and force.

In studying societies across cultures and epochs, looking at both the public and personal spheres, I discovered configurations that transcend conventional categories. Since there were no names for these configurations, I coined the terms *partnership model* and *dominator* or *domination model*.

Hitler's Germany (a technologically advanced, Western, rightist society), Stalin's USSR (a secular leftist society), fundamentalist Iran (an Eastern religious society), and Idi Amin's Uganda (a tribalist society) were all violent and repressive. There are obvious differences between them. But they all share the core configuration of the domination model. They are characterized by top-down rankings in the family and state or tribe maintained through physical, psychological, and economic control; the rigid ranking of the male half of humanity over the female half; and a high degree of culturally accepted abuse and violence—from child- and wife-beating to chronic warfare.

The partnership model, on the other hand, is based on a democratic and egalitarian structure in both family and state or tribe and on equal partner-

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ship between women and men. There is little violence, because rigid rankings of domination, which can be maintained only through violence, are not part of the culture. Because women have higher status, stereotypically feminine values have social priority.

(When I say stereotypically, I mean traits stereotypically classified by gender to fit the domination model. In this model, “masculine” traits and activities, such as toughness and “heroic” violence, are more valued than nonviolence and caregiving, which are associated with the half of humanity barred from power.)

Prosperity and rights

Where the rights of women and children are protected, nations thrive. In fact, a study of 89 nations by the organization I direct, the Center for Partnership Studies, shows that the status of women can be a better predictor of the general quality of life than a nation’s financial wealth. Kuwait and France, for example, had identical GDPs (Gross Domestic Product). But quality of life indicators are much higher in France, where the status of women is higher, while infant mortality was twice as high in Kuwait.

The social investment in caring for children characteristic of the partnership model actually contributes to prosperity. Finland is a good example. Like other Nordic nations, Finland’s economy is a mix of central planning and free enterprise. In the early 20th century, Finland was very poor. That changed as the country invested in its human capital through childcare (both daycare and allowances for families), healthcare, family planning, and paid parental leave. Like other Nordic nations, Finland ranks near the top in United Nations Human Development Reports—far ahead of the United States, Saudi Arabia, and other wealthier nations. In all the Nordic nations, a much higher than average percentage of legislative seats are filled by women (35 to 40 percent), strong men’s movements disentangle “masculinity” from violence, and governments discourage or legally prohibit physical discipline of children in families. These nations also pioneered education for peace, have low crime rates, mediate international

disputes, and invest heavily in aid to developing nations.

We see similar patterns of nonviolence coupled with respect for women and children among the Minangkabau, an agrarian culture of 2.5 million people in Sumatra, where, anthropologist Peggy Sanday reports, violence isn’t part of childrearing, women aren’t subordinate to men, and nurturance is part of both the female and male roles. The Teduray, a tribal culture in the Philippines, also don’t discipline children through violence, nor is violence integral to male socialization. As anthropologist Stuart Schlegel writes in *Wisdom from a Rain Forest*, the Teduray value women and men equally, and elders—both female and male—mediate disputes.

An important lesson from these cultures is this: How a society structures the primary human relations—between the female and male halves of humanity, and between them and their children—is central to whether it is violent and inequitable or peaceful and equitable.

Countering domination and violence

The “culture wars” launched in the U.S. by the fundamentalist right give special attention to relations between women and men and parents and children. Their fully integrated political agenda centers on reimposing a male-headed family where women must render unpaid services (with no independent access to income) and children learn that orders must be strictly obeyed on pain of severe punishment.

Progressives urgently need a social and political agenda that takes into account both the public sphere of politics and economics, and the personal sphere of family and other intimate relations. Only through an integrated progressive agenda that takes into account both the personal and public spheres can we build foundations for cultures of peace rather than war.

Riane Eisler is author of the international bestseller *The Chalice and The Blade*. Her newest book, *The Power of Partnership*, won the Nautilus Award in 2003. She is president of the Center for Partnership Studies (www.partnershipway.org) and co-founder of the Spiritual Alliance to Stop Intimate Violence (www.saiv.net).