VIOLENCE
INEQUALITY AND
HUMAN FREEDOM

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Violence, Inequality, and Human Freedom

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THE REYNOLDS SERIES IN SOCIOLOGY

Larry T. Reynolds, *Editor*

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Dedicated

to

Petrea, Kirstin, Joey, Oliver, Abigail, and Andrew.

May they grow up and live in a world with greater peace and freedom.

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Preface

A friend and colleague once said that to write a book you need to have a story to tell. In studying and analyzing the phenomenon of violence, the overwhelming fact that we were confronted with was the scope of the problem. Violence is a ubiquitous phenomenon. It is pervasive in human existence. It exists in virtually every institutional setting and has been a feature of all societies throughout human existence. But what is curious about the study of violence is that only a small category of violence has been studied or discussed. The first goal that we had as authors was to tell a more complete story of violence, not just to focus on the violence that readers automatically think of when they hear the term, but also to educate readers to the many different forms of violence that lead to the death or injury of millions of people in a given year.

This book tells the story of the violence that harms people throughout the world. It tells the story of the violence that most people think of when they hear the word: murder and rape. But it also tells the story of the forms of violence that most people do not think of when they hear the word. In these categories of violence we discuss violence that is a product of institutional actions (family, economic, state, and religious violence) and violence that is the product of the very organization of societies (structural violence). Most of the writings on violence focus on interpersonal violence. This book is unique because the focus is principally on these other more devastating forms of violence. Each chapter in this book examines a greater range of violence, from interpersonal to institutional to structural.

Another story that this book tells is how the forms of violence are linked together. Although we can think of a form of violence in isolation, in reality the forms of violence that exist in the society and the world as a whole are linked together. We discuss the idea of a chain of violence that links the interpersonal forms of violence with the institutional and structural violence in society and the world.

Lastly, this book tells the story of how violence is related to inequality and freedom. We discuss how violence is fundamentally about control and the conflict over freedom of action. Violence is ultimately a form of power that at the same time extends and denies freedom to the actors involved. The story of violence is also about inequality. We argue that what first allows one individual to violate another is the ability to define those who are violated as lesser persons. A question that is asked repeatedly in our discussion of violence is how violence is related to the structures of inequality in society and the world.

We view this book as an introduction to the subject matter. It is not intended to be a theoretical treatise on the topic. Instead, our goal is to provide the reader with a new way of looking at the phenomenon and to gain an appreciation for the scope and complexity of the topic. Also, this book introduces some new concepts and hypothesized relationships. Our hope is that others will take these ideas beyond their elementary formulation and analyze and develop them more completely. This book is also rooted in the sociological tradition. Although other disciplinary perspectives provide insight into the phenomenon, our intellectual tradition is firmly rooted in the sociological perspective. In this work, we analyze violence as a product of social forces.

Several people have provided us with resources and insight into the subject of violence and who have contributed their labor for the completion of this project. Specifically we thank Larry Tifft, Harold Pepinksy, Alan R. Sandstrom, and Lawrence A. Kuznar for their theoretical and/or substantive critiques and sources. Laura Nagy and Irene Glynn provided suggestions for clarifying points and improving our style of presentation. Finally, we appreciate series editor Larry Reynolds considerable patience with two authors who alternated chairing an academic department (with all attending distractions) and balanced other responsibilities while seeking out sources of information on a wide range of types of violence. None of those mentioned, of course, is responsible for what we have thought out and written, but they are to be credited for having improved the book beyond what it would have been without their contributions.

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The Domain of Violence

White youths shoot an African American teenager who accidentally ventures into the "wrong" neighborhood of New York City. A mob of teenagers goes "wilding" in Central Park and gang rapes a female jogger, punching and kicking her even as she is repeatedly violated. Islamic terrorists kidnap a Marine officer serving on a UN peacekeeping force in Lebanon, then execute him by hanging and send the whole grotesque episode into America's living rooms via video-tapes provided to the nightly news. It is learned that industrial factories that produce radioactive elements for nuclear weapons have been systematically and knowingly polluting their surrounding communities for years, with no one punished. Unarmed Chinese university students are ruthlessly gunned down by government troops in Tianamen Square because they dare to demonstrate for democracy.

Violence—against individuals, against minorities, against nations, against even our home planet—is the overarching problem of our age. It is no exaggeration to say that every conceivable social problem interfaces with this destructive phenomenon. Violence's myriad forms consume the attention of news media reports and cost us dearly as citizens as we try to cope with or prevent their destructive effects. Many other social problems—drug addiction, the breakup of the American family, deteriorating city schools, corporate corruption, terrorism, religious intolerance—are interwoven with violence. Violence is not simply linked to such obvious controversies as building larger prisons, tightening criminal sentences, or passing gun-control laws. It is also linked to problems of famine, pollution, and overpopulation. Moreover, the advanced technology of nuclear destruction in the hands of increasing numbers of countries has made it a fundamental element of twentieth-century social, cultural, political, and economic life, and an inevitable element of twenty-first century reality.

The various behavioral sciences, from anthropology and psychology to economics and political science, have developed theories about the causes of destructive actions. Considerable research has accumulated, especially during the past thirty years. Most important, a rich scholarly legacy of testing and refining concepts has made it abundantly clear that the sum of violence in any social order must be understood as multiply determined. No single viewpoint, no solitary theoretical "slant," will suffice.

For example, psychology is better able to address questions about imitation and the learning of actions, innate drives, and personality as these relate to interpersonal violence than about the economic, social, political, and historical circumstances most conductive to political revolution. Anthropology tempers our Western understandings of violence with analyses of the roles and functions violence and conflict play in cross-cultural settings. Political science casts violence in the rational, decision-making mold of being a conscious policy alternative used by statepersons, instead of simply serving as a physiological release of frustration, anger, or sadism.

Ball-Rokeach (1980) notes that because the phenomenon of violence cuts across many disciplines and fields of inquiry, it tends toward a fragmented inquiry into this or that form of violence. There is a need for a more unitary approach, discussing violence as a phenomenon in and of itself. The sociological perspective, which we believe permits the most comprehensive understanding of violence, is the likely place for such a unitary approach to develop.

Sociology examines the phenomenon as a pattern of behavior that emanates fundamentally from the very organization of society. For sociologists, the pattern of violence in a given society is unique to that social system. It emanates from structural and institutional sources that are suprapersonal but, to most persons, are manifest at the interpersonal level. Nevertheless, sociologists seek to discuss the common features of societies that produce a particular pattern of violence. Sociology takes the most general perspective in trying to uncover the social forces that produce violence.

The sociological perspective lends itself to the development of this unitary approach. First, sociology facilitates the viewing of action from the position of an outsider or an objective position by providing us with a lens to see *what is strange in what is familiar to us*. All our behavior can be viewed as unusual or strange when taken out of the cultural context in which we are immersed. The foods we eat, the dwellings we reside in, and the style of fashion—all can be seen as unusual. What we define and consider to be violent or nonviolent also can be seen as strange. In fact, what is violent may often not be defined as violence by those socialized to accept it as natural or justifiable. For example, the spanking, slapping, or even belt-lashing of children by their parents when they are deemed to be unruly is not viewed as violent unless it exceeds some established norm. Yet, in Sweden the spanking of children is an act of violence and is criminal. In many societies, and in our own in a not-so-distant past, husbands striking their wives was not considered violence. During the 1950s and 60s, the threat of beating of one's wife was the subject of jokes or situation comedies as in the case of the Honeymooners, a television comedy produced during the 1950s. At moments of comedic frustration, Ralph Kramden would physically threaten his wife Alice. Shaking his fist he would say "Oh Alice, someday," and then he would wave his arms simulating how Alice would fly through the air, bouncing

off walls—bang! zoom!. The audience laughter was heard at this moment signaling to the viewers at home to see the humor in this. Yet in colonial America, wifebeating brought severe corporal punishment by the community on the abusing male. Today, courts and the police are compelled by social pressure to treat spouse abuse as a serious case of assault that requires criminal justice intervention. Yet in other parts of the world wifebeating is seen quite differently. Harris notes that among the Yanomamo, no "woman escapes the brutal tutelage of the typical hot-tempered, drug-taking Yanomamo warrior-husband. All Yanomamo men physically abuse their wives. Kind husbands merely bruise and mutilate them; the fierce ones wound and kill" (Harris 1974,74).

The denial of medical care to those in need because of their economic status is not considered violent. Infant mortality rates for African American infants that are twice that of white infants are not considered violent. Neither is paddling children in school for their misbehavior, nor the denial of medical care to the indigent. Often we even do not think of capital punishment as violent. Yet from another perspective, all these acts can be considered forms of violence. Sociology helps one to view the "social reality" from the position of a stranger, inviting the viewer to step back and "out" of the social situation so that what was first viewed as nonviolent and even commonplace comes to be viewed in a different light.

Alternately, not only does sociology allow us to view the world from the vantage point of a stranger but it helps the viewer to be cognizant of the different positions that the actors occupy in the violence. It furthermore allows one to assume the subjective positions of the actors themselves in order to understand the social reality from the position of the victims and perpetrators of violence in the performance of roles in the violent interaction. How is an act of violence defined differently because of the different statuses and roles of the actors participating in the interaction? How is the form of violence understood by the actors involved? What social processes and contexts allow actors to see some forms of violence and not others, or to judge violence differently as a result of the different roles they are performing in the violent interaction? How is the role of victim and offender defined in each form of violence?

If one individual is struck by another as a result of an altercation, we would define this as an assault. If the perpetrator was a mugger using violence as a way to get money from a elderly women, this would be clearly understood. The victim and perpetrator would experience the violence in a similar, particular way. In contrast, if the perpetrator was an adult women, a mother, and the victim was a small child, her son, we would think of the violence another way, and the victim and perpetrator would experience the violence differently. Or say that the perpetrator was a police officer and was using violence to apprehend a suspect who was resisting arrest. What about the case of a soldier assaulting a soldier of an opposing army during the time of war? Again the objective violent act of

striking another is the same; however, in viewing the subjective phenomenon from the vantage point of the different actors, we understand the violence differently.

A second characteristic of this unique disciplinary perspective is that sociology searches through various instances of action for patterns. In short, sociology looks for the *general in the particular*. What are the patterns of violence in our society? Who is more likely to participate in violence? What kinds of people are more likely to be offenders or victims of a particular form of violence? Under what social circumstances or contexts are people more likely to be violent or to be victimized by violence? At which times and places are people more likely to be violent or be victims of violence?

Although we hear about the random act of violence, this is a rarity. Violence is patterned. Some people are more likely to be victims of violence than others because of their social, temporal and geographic positioning. Today the leading cause of death among adolescent African American males is homicide. The U.S. Justice Department calculated the following alarming lifetime odds of being murdered: white female, 1 in 495; white male, 1 in 179; African American female, 1 in 132;, and African American male, 1 in 30. Almost half of homicide victims are African American (Bureau of Justice Statistics 1988). The National Center for Health Statistics found that in 1988 the risk of victimization for violent crime in general was two and one half times greater for individuals whose family income was under $7,500 compared to those whose family income was $50,000 and over (National Center for Health Statistics 1991). Lastly, more than three-quarters of the victims of violence are men. Thus, violence is hardly random. It is part of a pattern. The more we know about the patterns of violence the greater insight we have as to the causes.

Sociology also looks for the interrelationship among the patterns. How may one pattern of violence be related to another? Are the patterns of violence noted above related? Is the violence within the minority population related to income? What about gender and income? Is the violence of men related to their income level? Are there relationships between types of violence? For example, are the patterns of violence between parents and children at all related to the patterns of violence between husbands and wives? Does the violence that children experience today with their parents prepare them to be violent with their own children in the future? Does it prepare them to be violent with their spouses? At a more macro level, are the patterns of violence we see between nations related to the patterns of violence experienced within nations? Does war between nations lead to higher levels of homicide within nations? In short, how are patterns of violence related within a society and between societies? Sociology as a discipline directs us to look for the relationship between the patterns of violence.

Lastly, sociology facilitates our understanding of individual behavior as it is the product of the way society is organized and functions. In the language of

sociology the discipline *depersonalizes the personal.* Sociology helps us see how our individual behavior is the product of the nature of the society. This does not mean that social forces are deterministic. As individuals, we choose our behavior, yet social forces limit the range of choices available to us and compel us to choose one option over another. Every day we make individual decisions as to which actions to choose. We decide what time to wake, what and when to eat, whether and how to cloth ourselves, and what to do once we have awakened, eaten, and dressed. Nevertheless, there are forces that incline us to choose to get up at a certain time, to eat one food as opposed to another, to wear a particular article of clothing, and so forth. Some of these forces are a product of cultural expectations as they define diet and style of dress, others are a result of the statuses we occupy and the role expectations that stem from these positions. These are some of the social forces that limit the range of choices of our action and direct us to choose from a more limited range of alternatives that we may have available to us. In all our actions, including violence, these are seen as personal decisions, but what choices we have available to us and what choices we are likely to choose are products of the social forces that compose the society.

Sociology asks, How are the patterns of violence that exist in our society the product of the social forces rooted in how our society is organized? How is the pattern of violence in a society related to how families, schools, the economy, the political system, and the like are organized and function? How is it that the ways the family, school, the economy, and the political system are organized and function limit the range of choices of people and direct some to choose acts of violence as opposed to other routes to accomplish their goals? Moreover, not only is the pattern of violence in a society a product of how that society is organized, but also the people's cultural understandings of violence is the product of the nature of that society's system of shared meanings and knowledge. Culture provides a lens in which we define or not define acts as violent. In short, sociology facilitates our understanding of violence as a societal phenomenon with particular attention to how violence is linked at all levels within the society, and how it is fundamentally a product of how society is organized and functions. Furthermore, sociology teaches us that how we understand violence is conditioned by the forces of the society of which we are products.

In addition to the general sociological perspective, the basic assumptions that underlie the disciplinary viewpoint facilitate the conceptualization of violence as a unitary phenomenon. For example, sociologists assume that *individuals are by their nature social beings.* Children enter the world totally dependent on others for their survival. They have a longer period of dependency than any other animal. Our need for an association with a "group" is an essential element of human nature. Human beings can survive only in social groups of one kind or another. The importance of group affiliation is most clearly evident in primitive societies, where the most severe punishment was banishment from the group.

A second disciplinary assumption is that *individuals are, for the most part, socially determined.* During infancy, the child is at the mercy of adults, especially parents. These persons shape the infant in an infinite variety of ways, depending on their proclivities and those of their society. Parents will have a profound impact on the child's way of thinking about himself or herself and about others. Parents will transmit religious views, political attitudes, and attitudes toward other groups. Most significantly, parents act as cultural agents, transferring the ways of the society to their children. These processes continue beyond the primary group level to all the groups of which we are a part. Thus, how we define ourselves and the world we are part of are products of the society in which we are members.

According to sociologists, we are the products of the groups of which we are members. The groups we are members of provide the most fundamental social forces that direct our behavior. Whether we are talking about the family, the nation-state or country, the ethnic group, or a school class, they all provide the social forces in constraining our actions. It makes little sense to conceive of us apart from such group affiliations For example, today many babies born in poorer countries to parents of little means are taken from birth and adopted by parents of higher status in wealthier countries. Babies born to poor parents in Guatemala, Romania, Bolivia, or the Philippines and then adopted by people in upper-class positions in advanced capitalist countries experience a dramatic change in who they are and who they are likely to become. This affects not only what language they will speak but also how long they are likely to live, how healthy they will be in their lives, how they are likely to live in terms of quality of life, how they will be educated, what occupation they will choose, who they will marry, how large their family will be, and so on. Who they are and what they think of themselves change because of the change in the social groups of which they are a part. In this way, we are socially determined.

A third disciplinary assumption is that *individuals create, sustain, and change the social structures within which they conduct their lives.* Social groups of all sizes and types are human creations. The social world that we are immersed in is a human creation. All the structures, beliefs, norms, institutions we are a part of are a social creation, a creation of the groups we are participating in or participated in by previous generations of members of the society. We are born into a society that is a product of the social creation efforts of previous generations. The social world we are born in becomes the context in which we interact with others. As we interact in the context of groups within the society, we act on structures that frame our social interaction. We act to change, sustain, and create new structures, beliefs, norms, institutions, and the like that then set the social context for interaction for ourselves and other new members of the society. This is a continuous ongoing phenomenon of creating, maintaining, and changing the social structures in which we live our lives. Thus, as social beings,

we are products of the society we are born in, and yet we are the principal force in changing those structures that define the initial social context of our existence.

It is important to qualify this last statement by noting that we all do not have the same power or ability to create, maintain, and change the social structures within the society. One's position via systems of stratification provide us with differences in the amount of power to create, maintain, and change social structures. Nevertheless, it is important for the reader to recognize that the social reality that they experience is human made.

The significance of these assumptions as they relate to the issue of violence is that, first, violence is a problem because it fundamentally weakens the social web that is the basis of human life. Violence that reaches a critical level threatens the interconnectedness of people that is necessary for human survival. Second, violence in a society is ultimately a product of social organization. All social or antisocial behavior can ultimately be understood only as it is a product of the nature of the society. Thus, we may discuss acts of interpersonal violence that appear on the surface to be a clear expression of individual behavior, but this level views a phenomenon out of its societal context. Sociology provides the viewer with this context. Lastly, since the social world is a human creation, so are the patterns of violence that permeate it. Thus, as humans act to create, sustain, and change the social world, they also create, maintain, and change the patterns of violence within it.

Order and Conflict Approaches within Sociology

It is important to recognize two orientations within the field that provide differences in emphasis in viewing social reality in general and violence in particular. The order and conflict approaches are these two paradigmatic approaches. Each approach establishes a framework for us to view a phenomenon, and in many ways their implications for addressing the violence problems are radically different.

Table 1.1 presents a comparison of these two approaches to the study of society: The order approach views the society as normally stable. All members of the society have, relatively speaking, the same values, interests, and cultural orientation. The primary social process in the society is cooperation. All individuals are performing roles within the formal institutions contributing to the ongoing maintenance of the social order. The organismic analogy best describes how the order approach defines how a society functions. It refers to the idea of viewing the social system in the same way one views a biological system. For example, the human body is made up of organs. Each organ carries out a specific physiological function. The heart functions as a pump to move or circulate the blood throughout the system. The lungs function to transfer gases, removing

carbon dioxide from the blood and replacing it with oxygen. Processes link the organs to one another; respiratory processes, digestive processes, circulatory processes, and so forth. When all organs are appropriately carrying out their function, working in coordination with one another, linked via processes, we say that the organism is in a state of health.

The society is composed of institutions that are analogous to organs. Each institution carries out a specific social function. The education institution functions to enculturate and provide the skills necessary for neophytes to assume statuses or positions within social institutions. The economic institution functions to distribute the scarce resources in the society in order to reproduce the population. As in the case of organs, institutions are linked via processes (i.e., socialization processes, exchange processes, governing processes etc.). As with the organism, when all the organs are working appropriately and in coordination, the society is normatively in a state of balance. All parts of the system are carrying out their designed function, linked via processes, all working to the maintenance or reproduction of the whole.

To continue our description of the order approach, the foundation of the society is the cultural system, the system of ideas, beliefs, knowledge, attitudes that unify the population. The divisions that exist in the society along class, race, and gender lines are viewed as either basically natural to people in the society and/or necessary or functional to the nature of the society (Parsons and Robert Bales 1955; Jensen 1969; Hernstein 1973; Davis and Moore 1945).

For the order approach, the functioning and organization of institutions are manifestations of the cultural system. For example, the structure and the processes within education systems in this country emphasize individual achievement as it is a product of competition in the classroom and self interested/rational action by the student. These are all central cultural values of our society. Furthermore, the order approach focuses on how the institutions are linked via processes. It asks, Is the nature of the linkages efficient given the functioning of the institutions in fulfilling the needs of the larger social order? For example, do the methods we use to socialize our children in home and their outcomes complement the methods used in the schools and the outcomes expected? Or do they conflict? Lastly, the order approach emphasizes how institutions serve to create and maintain boundaries that separate members of this society from other societies and give members of the society a sense of unity or cohesiveness.

The order approach emphasizes and views social change as part of a natural, evolutionary progression of the society. Change principally comes from the top down, a product of the innovation of elites who govern the basic institutions of the society. In any particular case, elites may be responding to social pressure. However, they, through their power and actions, constitute the engine of change. The political orientation of the order approach is within the ideological parameters of the system it is describing; therefore, it is either conservative or liberal.