

Introduction to “Checklist for Differentiating Two Different Forms of Interpersonal Violence”

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In response to several requests following the workshop on “Domestic Violence and Marriage Education” that Dennis Stoica and I led at the 2006 Smart Marriages Conference, I am making available a “Checklist for Differentiating Two Different Forms of Interpersonal Violence.”

The “Checklist” is being offered, not as an exhaustive analysis, but as a summary of some of the most salient observations in the emerging consensus in the domestic violence field that there are (at least) two different forms of interpersonal violence, and that it is important for DV experts, other mental health professionals, clergy and marriage educators to be able to distinguish between them.

The reason, as the emerging consensus recognizes, is that there are important implications for treatment in that what may be advisable or necessary for one form of interpersonal violence may be inadvisable or even contraindicated for the other form of interpersonal violence.

Broadly speaking, the following distinctions can be made. With classic cases of domestic violence or battering - which involves the use of intimidation, coercion and physical violence as tools of domination and control, and where there is a clear perpetrator and a clear victim - the almost universal recommendation is separate treatment for perpetrator and victim in order to eliminate the violent behavior for the perpetrator and to provide safety, support and education to the victim.

In cases of what the literature now commonly refers to as “Situational Couple Violence” - which typically is characterized by less intense forms of violence that tend to be mutual in nature, and where there is no clear perpetrator and no clear victim - the emerging consensus accepts that couple treatment may be both a legitimate and perhaps even a preferable intervention approach.

The significance of these distinctions for clergy, marriage educators and mental health professionals alike is that it is important to be able to recognize and distinguish between these two different forms of interpersonal violence so that one can make judicious and informed decisions as to the most appropriate recommendation, referral and intervention for each couple, based on their unique circumstances and using appropriate criteria.

The “Checklist for Differentiating Two Different Forms of Interpersonal Violence” is offered, then, as a resource to help clergy, educators and professionals make well-informed decisions and sound recommendations when faced with interpersonal violence in their work with couples and families.

For a summary of the recent literature on domestic violence and how the Relationship Enhancement model can serve as an effective intervention for cases of Situational Couple Violence, please consult pages 35-42 of my book *Relationship Enhancement Therapy: Healing Through Deep Empathy and Intimate Dialogue* (Routledge, 2005).

Checklist for Differentiating Two Different Forms of Interpersonal Violence

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Underlying Premise: Interpersonal violence in all its forms is unacceptable.

Classic Cases of Domestic Violence

Violence is severe, often results in physical injury and sometimes even death; the traditional concept of “battering”

There is a clear perpetrator (usually male) and a clear victim (usually female)

Violence is motivated by a desire for domination and control

Threats of violence and tactics of intimidation and coercion are prominent

The violence often is calculated

The level or intensity of violence tends to increase over time

The victim often lives in profound fear

The victim feels powerless and trapped

The perpetrator usually is in denial and the victim may not recognize the severity of the situation due to complex psychological issues

The victim often has a fragile sense of self and a need for attachment driven by a fear of abandonment that overrides the ability to make sound choices affecting personal safety

Situational (or Common) Couple Violence

Violence typically is milder, less frequent and less intense, though it too can escalate and become life threatening or fatal

The violence tends to be mutual, with no clear victim

The desire for domination and control typically is absent

Threats of violence and tactics of intimidation and coercion tend to be absent

The violence typically is spontaneous

The violence has less of a tendency to increase in intensity over time, though there are exceptions

Fear of violence is usually absent

Neither party feels powerless or trapped

There usually is some recognition that the violence is damaging to the relationship

Each partner has a relatively strong, stable and well functioning ego, including the capacity for insight and some level of self-regulation

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