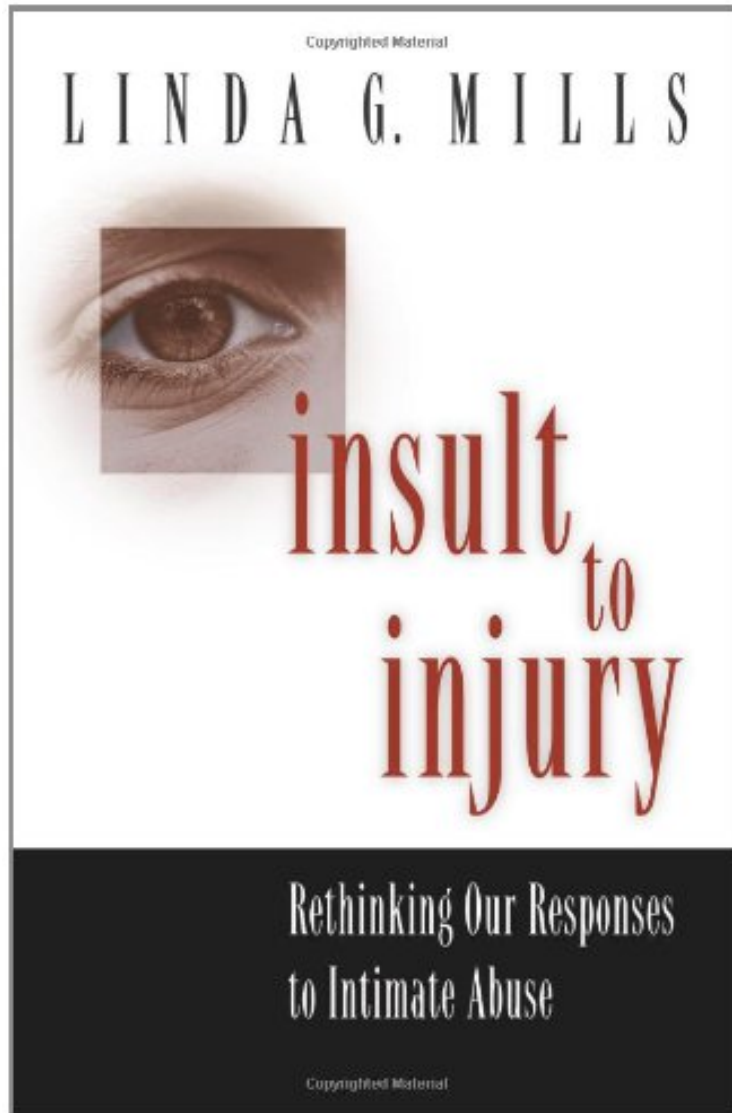


(Library ebook) Insult to Injury: Rethinking our Responses to Intimate Abuse

Insult to Injury: Rethinking our Responses to Intimate Abuse

Linda G. Mills

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#2451756 in Books Princeton University Press 2006-09-10 Original language: English PDF # 1 8.90 x .58 x 5.76l, .63 #File Name: 0691127727192 pages | File size: 40.Mb

Linda G. Mills : Insult to Injury: Rethinking our Responses to Intimate Abuse before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Insult to Injury: Rethinking our Responses to Intimate Abuse:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. A PROVOCATIVE VIEW OF ABUSE OF WOMEN By ginicar
INSULT TO INJURY by Linda G. Mills
Review by Ginny NiCarthy
Linda Mills opens Insult to Injury by describing a scene she observed .as she strolled along a London street. She noticed a mother, walking with her five-

year-old son, who was demanding her attention. The woman appeared to lose patience, and whipped around and smacked the boy across the face. Then, the child punched his mother in the stomach. The interaction was commonplace, Miller says, but it also may have long-term consequences. Twenty years after a child is assaulted by his mother, he may batter his wife, perhaps with no awareness of the connection. Mills believes that, throughout our lives, each of us experiences some form of violence, whether as witness, perpetrator or victim, and it is often intergenerational. She is right when she writes that the complexity of intimate violence is missed sometimes by advocates who focus solely on violence against women. But Mills is misinformed about a couple of controversial issues. For instance, she says women and men are equally violent to their partners, a claim that eminent scientists have found to be incorrect. Yet, that belief remains a fundamental aspect of her therapy with abusive clients in what she calls Intimate Abuse Circles (IACs). Her method differs radically from interventions of mainstream feminists. *Insult to Injury* is intended to spell out Mills' reflections on the ways that mainstream feminists have taken the wrong path. It is time, she says, for reflections and a new agenda. I applaud her fresh perspective, but when she writes about mainstream feminists (MSFs) she doesn't allow for the variety of opinions held by advocates, some of which have changed as they learn more from their work with abused women. In my forty-some years of work with women who have been abused by intimate partners, I've observed some advocates who shifted their thinking to a more broad canvass, while others continue to accept the original analyses that Mills sees as seriously damaging. (I've changed my own thinking about Domestic Abuse several times, and my book, *Getting Free*, went through four editions, as I struggled to incorporate important changes, updating each one.) In the first half of her book Mills explains in detail the pervasive flaws she perceives in the policies of advocates in the movement against violence to women. Though she is a feminist herself, she is highly critical of the grass root advocates she labels Mainstream Feminists (MSFs). She especially targets what she views as MSFs' monolithic reliance on the justice system to punish batterers. But she fails to see that many MSFs are ambivalent about the connection with the justice system. By MSFs, Mills refers to those who developed Battered Women's Movement theories about abuse. She faults workers in that movement who, early on, claimed that victimized women experienced Learned Helplessness and Battered Women's Syndrome. Those concepts have been useful for certain court procedures. But Mills believes the use of such labels fosters weakness and vulnerability. Much of what she says about some early advocates is understandable. But MSFs are not of one mind, and when she lumps together all MSFs, she goes too far. MSFs have developed ideas that differ from each others, often replacing outmoded perspectives. But Mills can't be held completely responsible for her incorrect assumptions because many changes of understanding have surfaced only after her book was published. It would have been too late to amend some of her views, even if she wanted to. Yet there is one exception where there may be nearly unanimous thinking among MSFs. It's probably true that most MSFs warn women that couples counseling can be hazardous. Some therapists and researchers vigorously object to MSFs' negative attitude toward that form of therapy. And this dispute has caused a significant fissure in both theory and practice. Some MSFs might assume Mills' method is essentially the same as couples counseling. The second half of Mills' book is mostly about her unusual process, and I hope mainstream feminists will open their minds and will not dismiss Mills' therapy model as just one more brand of couples therapy. Mills' process differs from most therapists' ideas of couples counseling, right from the start: the therapist interviews each partner separately, with particular attention to any potential lethality, and requires a participant to forego any violence. Next, a violent partner who tries to manipulate the therapist as many do - will probably find that it won't work. When those potential hazards are resolved, the therapist expands the group by inviting extended family members, neighbors - or whoever is willing to participate in the process - to join the group. They, too, will have participated in solo interviews, to determine whether they are likely to help foster the couples' success. After all that preparation, the two people couple seeking help are no longer just a couple. The process looks more like group therapy than couples therapy. Mills borrows from South African Truth and Reconciliation processes, as well as from Restorative Justice experiments. She describes her process in some detail, but I would have liked more information about how it works. I hope in her next book she will add information about how many abusive partners have succeeded in finishing the course, and have stopped the abuse? Professionals, abused women and advocates who have open minds will find *Insult to Injury* provocative and eye opening. The movement to end domestic abuse needs more fresh ideas, and this book is a good start.

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. Fascinating Powerhouse of a Book with Only Minor Blemishes By J. Steven Svoboda New York University Social Work and Law Professor Linda G. Mills has produced an interesting and valuable book, which I would describe as more allied with men's rights than a men's rights book per se. Such books may actually be more illuminating than those written by movement "insiders" in that they provide insight as to how sympathetic outsiders view our work. Mills calls herself a feminist though her position on most issues seems much closer to a masculinist position. Mills' goal is to put forward a paradigm for how society should address domestic violence that is quite different from the currently reigning imprison-the-man approach. While fully aware that women are involved in a higher percentage of domestic violence than conventional wisdom admits, for the purposes of this book at least, Mills' analysis focuses on male-perpetrator female-victim cases. The author eloquently contends that feminism is disempowering women by denying the effect of women's behavior on the presence or absence of male domestic violence. "[M]ainstream feminists have legislated that [a male batterer] be

taken out of the context of his biography and into an automatic legal process in which he will be held absolutely accountable for any violence he committed. He will be defined as a product of patriarchy, and his masculine privilege will account for the sole source of his aggression. "Interestingly, the effectiveness of the current male-punitive approach to DV varies across races, working the best for Caucasians (surprise, surprise!) and being counterproductive for African-Americans in the sense that it actually increases the incidence of DV. "[W]omen in abusive relationships are placed in the untenable position of choosing between protecting their lovers or husbands from incarceration or protecting themselves by relying on a criminal justice system that is unresponsive to their individual needs." Arrest statistics for men of color charged with intimate abuse crimes are "disturbingly disproportionate" when compared to arrests of white men for similar offenses. Feminism also does poorly in addressing gay and lesbian violence. Overall, prosecution seems to have no effect on the likelihood of the batterer's rearrest within six months. "Years of research, which mainstream feminism has glossed over or ignored, shows that when it comes to intimate abuse, women are far from powerless and seldom, if every, just victims. What is appallingly apparent is that we have refused to address the role of women in the dynamic of intimate violence." Mills convincingly accuses feminism of "projecting onto men the aggression they reject in themselves." The author later brilliantly expands on this insight. "[M]ainstream feminists use patriarchy to prevent deeper reflection on the genesis of intimate abuse, including their own reactions to it, and especially its dynamic, intergenerational, and intergendered nature." Mills distills four related yet independent assumptions behind the mainstream feminist response to DV: 1) men batter women because our patriarchal society permits them to do so; 2) women stay in abusive relationships because of patriarchy; 3) the criminal justice system is sexist; and 4) only extraordinary measures will counteract men's patriarchal power and violence, women's weakness, and the justice system's sexism. One cannot help but be struck by Mills' observation that women understandably tend to support policies requiring mandatory reporting of DV, but only "for others," not for application to their own partners. "Paradoxically... mandating a response may rob a woman of the most important resource she has to counteract the violence: her personal power." The author's proposed DV response program stems out of her desire for society, the judicial system, and the individuals involved to see the whole picture. In her view, we do not have to choose between thinking, for example, that a wife's nagging may have contributed to violence and thinking that a husband's violence arose out of a desire for control. Both could be true. These two considerations could even be related. "If we took the time to discover how women and men understand their own aggression in the context of their intimate relationships, we not only could help them gain insight into it but also might help them manage the violence, both physical and emotional, directed against them." Mills proposes addressing DV via an Intimate Abuse Circle (IAC), in which a group of people from a couple's community--friends, family, even children--collaborate with a couple in understanding violence and in the healing process. The real purpose of the IAC meetings "is to open up a dialogue about the abuse within the context of the relationship--to look at rather than away from the violence--and to fashion specific, individualized interventions that are most likely to result in a reduction of harm." This may sound idealistic and unrealistic but the author carefully explains many advantages over the IAC relative to the current punitive system. I appreciated Mills' willingness to confront received wisdom. The advantages of treating the whole family system seem irrefutable. The author may be a bit unrealistic in imagining that IAC's could work in most violent families, though even she says that she is "not yet prepared to impose it on persons who believe that punishment will accomplish the justice they seek." Mills' choice of words ("impose") may reveal a bit of inflexibility in her own approach to her nevertheless infinitely more flexible recommendation. Based on this book, it certainly seems plausible that IAC's could work in quite a number of cases, probably the great majority of the time, and are well worth a try. An approach that allows for nuanced positions and is capable of considering numerous contextual factors easily triumphs over the current winner-take-all, man-bad woman-good system. At the end of her book, Mills reveals her own victimization by a past partner, and demonstrates her own fair-mindedness in her detailed reflection on his strengths and weaknesses and her final statement that, "Even now, with all that I have learned, I would choose to protect him" [rather than permit his arrest]. In an impressive display of her own willingness to seek out a fuller truth than a tired story of female victimization and male predation, she writes that "we fed on each other's insecurities and dependencies. I fostered his; he reinforced mine." Eventually, Mills did find a way out of this stalemate. "Not until I could see my own contribution to the abuse in the relationship and assign responsibility for mine and his could I free myself of that history and create the possibility of not repeating it." The book is not without minor blemishes. Repeated references in discussing DV-caused trauma to the September 11, 2001 tragedy never quite struck me as appropriate or helpful. Similarly, Mills' repeated attempts to render relevant and illuminating a hypothetical tale of a child who suffers physical abuse at the hands of his mother never quite coheres with the book's core material in the way the author seems to intend. But in the end, Linda Mills has written a fascinating powerhouse of a book. She aptly concludes this unique work with some well-chosen words. "Knowing where and when our own aggression or violence exhibits itself or kicks off another's is powerful because it gives us the option to change it. And there is much to change." Indeed. 0 of 1 people found the following review helpful. The Truth behind abuse comes to life in this book. By Timothy Austin REAL abuse is intimate abuse. Projection of the abuser actions upon other, for them not be held responsible for their actions. Least we forget Penn State Coach, Catholic church, Kyle Cameron, Methodists church and any adult or human being feeling

entitled to abuse to all way. For any human being finding a way to control another human being for personal gain and no responsibility of actions.

Locking up men who beat their partners sounds like a tremendous improvement over the days when men could hit women with impunity and women fearing for their lives could expect no help from authorities. But does our system of requiring the arrest, prosecution, and incarceration of abusers lessen domestic violence or help battered women? In this already controversial but vitally important book, we learn that the criminal justice system may actually be making the problem of domestic violence worse. Looking honestly at uncomfortable facts, Linda Mills makes the case for a complete overhaul and presents a promising alternative. The evidence turns up some surprising facts about the complexities of intimate abuse, facts that run against mainstream assumptions: The current system robs battered women of what power they do hold. Perhaps as many as half of women in abusive relationships stay in them for strong cultural, economic, religious, or emotional reasons. Jailing their partners often makes their situations worse. Women are at least as physically violent and emotionally aggressive as are men toward women, and women's aggression is often central to the dynamic of intimate abuse. Informed by compelling evidence, personal experience, and what abused women themselves say about their needs, Mills proposes no less than a fundamentally new system. Addressing the real dynamics of intimate abuse and incorporating proven methods of restorative justice, Mills's approach focuses on healing and transformation rather than shame or punishment. Already the subject of heated controversy, *Insult to Injury* offers a desperately needed and powerful means for using what we know to reduce violence in our homes.

From Publishers Weekly In a bold new book guaranteed to cause a stir among mainstream feminists as well as among mental health and law-enforcement professionals, Mills exposes the limitations and shortcomings of the current approaches toward domestic violence. Although activists have helped get domestic abuse on the criminal justice map, Mills, a professor of both law and social work at NYU, asserts that their strategies have a tendency to ignore the racial, ethnic and religious complexities of domestic violence. In some cases, she argues, current policies may even exacerbate the problem. For example, by failing to recognize the individual needs of women in abusive relationships, "mandatory arrest" policies may strip women of their agency, thus perpetuating their role as helpless victims. Mills also challenges the axioms upon which the existing theoretical model is predicated (namely, that abuse is caused by patriarchy and sexism), and she demonstrates how such assumptions create a static, one-sided view that runs contrary to the dynamic, shifting and cyclical reality of intimate abuse. In one of her most provocative statements, Mills asserts that the current simplistic view may be motivated by "countertransference reactions of mainstream feminists and some helping professionals" who have themselves suffered abuse. Women can be as aggressive as men, she points out, and regardless of gender a child who endures violence is three times more likely to become violent as an adult. While she agrees that perpetrators should be held accountable, her new paradigm eschews punishment in favor of a "restorative justice" approach, which encourages dialogue in a counseling group called the Intimate Circle of Abuse (ICA). Mills's hope is that, in ICA, couples will begin to understand their narratives of abuse, and equip themselves with the skills necessary to prevent future recurrences. Hers is a system both inclusive and liberating; whether it is idealistic remains to be seen. Copyright 2003 Reed Business Information, Inc. "A bold new book guaranteed to cause a stir among mainstream feminists as well as among mental health and law-enforcement professionals."--Publishers Weekly "Drawing both on research and on her own experience in the field, Mills concludes that the conventional feminist paradigm of domestic violence as a form of patriarchal oppression is woefully inadequate. . . . [Mills's] message needs to be heard by politicians, judges, prosecutors and many others. It took the 'mainstream' feminists about 30 years to establish their monopoly on the public debate about domestic violence. Mills's book may be the first step in dismantling that monopoly."--Cathy Young, Boston Globe "The real strength of Mill's book lies in her repudiation of a one-size-fits-all approach to domestic violence. . . . As a challenge to current dogma, it is a breath of fresh air. One can only hope that its alternative message will be heard in the courses and seminars held across the country to educate counselors, law enforcement, and judges about domestic violence."--Cathy Young, Reason "From the Inside Flap" "What a breath of fresh air. [This book] takes on the entrenched and very powerful. Superb stuff. . . . Exhilarating."-- Archbishop Desmond Tutu "Here is a searching and spirited story of human intimacy as it sometimes descends into aggression: violence inflicted and vulnerability endured--a melancholy story told with thoughtfulness, with sensitivity, and with a brave willingness to consider the subtleties and ironies of affliction perpetrated and endured."--Robert Coles, author of "The Secular Mind" "Mills is thoughtful, nuanced, and original in her analysis of intimate abuse. With compassionate insight, she reveals how insult can lead to injury and outlines a practical alternative path to healing and safety. "This is a feminist critique, and a survivor's, of a mandated one-size-fits-all approach to punishing domestic violence. Mills moves our thinking beyond unilateralism, beyond bilateralism, to a multilateral approach to repairing lives shattered by violence. It poses a profound challenge to existing orthodoxy and should spawn a generation of empirical research to refute, refine, and vindicate its analysis."--John Braithwaite, Australian National University "Insult to Injury will change the public relationship to intimate violence: "Linda Mills mines the depths of our personal denial, challenging us to return to what we somehow already know. She'll take hits for the honesty--and

the expectations it holds out to us. But she's done the long labor of real scholarship, building a sturdy bridge to these next dangerous steps of trust."--Adrian Nicole LeBlanc, author of "Random Family: Love, Drugs, Trouble, and Coming of Age in the Bronx""In this book, Linda Mills generates abold and provocative thesis. While some may disagree with her, her views must be taken into account in the conversation on domestic violence."--Phyllis Goldfarb, Boston College School of Law"Mills's accomplishment is impressive and courageous. Clearly and even elegantly written, her book offers a way out of the current unproductive debate about the agency of women in abusive relationships."--Christine A. Littleton, Professor of Law and Chair, Women's Studies Programs, UCLA"Mills is the right person to write this book, and she does an admirable job."--Richard Gelles, author of "The Violent Home and The Book of David: How Preserving Families Can Cost Children's Lives"