Power-Under

TRAUMA AND NONVIOLENT SOCIAL CHANGE

steven wineman

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TO ELISABETH

For Eric and the world he is growing up into

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FOREWORD
by Aurora Levins Morales

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It is Passover, and as a Jew I recite the words, never forget that we were slaves in Egypt, hearing all the ambiguity in the instructions. What does it mean to promise the remembrance of pain? Is it so we never take anyone else's pain lightly? Is it a promise to become so fierce that no-one will ever enslave us again? Exactly how are we to carry a trauma thousands of years old?

It is Passover, and the sixtieth anniversary of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, when a small group of young Polish Jews fought back against stormtroopers whose mission was to deport and kill the remaining Jews in Warsaw and bulldoze the Ghetto. Sixty years later, soldiers who might have been their grandchildren are using the same strategies that the SS used in Warsaw: starvation, isolation, denial of medical care, assassination of those who resist and indiscriminate shootings of anyone caught in the streets, the demolition of building after building, sometimes burying the residents in the rubble.

 It is not difficult to find a nearly endless supply of such historical repetitions: emancipated slaves turned slaveholders; persecuted religious minorities from England who burned, hanged and crushed heretics and witches; newly independent colonies creating their own internally colonized, their own categories of the economically and culturally suppressed second class.

But what do we do with this information? I watch my relatives reenact the horrors of holocaust, insist they are fighting for their survival against ruthless conspirators, live increasingly militarized lives, believe

they have no choices, become more and more like their wounds. What are we to do? It is not enough to feel shame. It is not enough to point out the "ironies" and use them to condemn the atrocities of a new generation of perpetrators.

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There are people who believe this is human nature, that all it proves is that we are all equally capable of viciousness. But as people committed to social change, to creating just and peaceful societies, we have a responsibility to understand how the unjust and violent societies we live in sustain and recreate themselves, how brutality reproduces, how the son of a Polish Jewish refugee can become the key strategist of world conquest for the grandson of Prescott Bush, who laundered money for Thysen, Nazi Germany's most prominent steel manufacturer, who used Jewish slave labor in his operations. How the granddaughter of a sharecropper, growing up in segregated Birmingham, hearing the church bomb explosion that killed her schoolmate, could utterly embrace the strategy of being better at white men's power games than they are, and advise the descendant of Virginia landlords on how to recolonize the Middle East. How the Harlem born son of Jamaican immigrants, raised in a city that devoured young Black men, became the man who helped to cover up the My Lai massacre of Vietnamese civilians, the peddler of forged evidence and plagiarized misinformation trying to win support for genocide in Iraq. For that matter, how did English women and men become Massachusetts colonists and give rise to Richard Cheney? How did Prussian immigrants to 1860s Chicago produce Donald Rumsfeld, a man whom Kissinger allegedly described as the most ruthless person he knew?

We have learned about the cycles of abuse within families, about the way a child who is beaten and abused can grow up believing there are only two choices, victim and perpetrator, and can become an adult who feels like a victim while acting like a perpetrator. But, somehow, as activists, we have failed to see the immense implications of that knowledge for the work of social change. Over and over I see movements of liberation get stuck at the same place, the moment when we "other" the agents of our oppression, without trying to understand why they are as they are and how we can prevent more people being that way in the future. If we even begin to ask those questions, we are rapidly drawn to the places where we ourselves have been most deeply wounded. In the exact place where it is most difficult to understand how anyone could do as our enemies have done, and still be human, in the exact moment when they cease to be our kin in our imaginations, is the place of greatest potential illumination.

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"If we view the oppressor as an inhuman Other – no matter how understandable this view is from the perspective of the victim and the oppressed – we rule out all possibilities for the kinds of dialogues that can win hearts and minds. If we view the oppressor as invariably acting from a place of subjective dominance, I believe that we will completely miss the deep and typically hidden suffering, the complex histories of violation and trauma, and the subjective experience of profound powerlessness that often go hand in hand with the cruelty and malevolence enacted by oppressors."

<div align="right">-from *Power-Under*</div>

I first encountered Steve Wineman when he contacted me for support in trying to persuade a

progressive small press that the politics of trauma really was a cutting edge issue. He had read my work, and knew that we shared this belief. That both of us saw the ways in which the experience of victimization, and the traumatic rage that accompanies it, were being mobilized toward escalating violence in the world. That both of us saw a gap in the political practices of the left that seemed of the utmost importance. When Steve wrote to me, I was in the thick of questions of my own: How do we reframe our experiences of oppression so that we don't act from a sense of victimhood, and end up recreating what we abhor? Why do oppressors oppress, and how can we win them away from doing it? How do we interrupt the cycles of reenacted pain at the level of nations? How do we stop the self-defeating expressions of traumatic rage between oppressed constituencies that shatter our coalitions?

These are not abstract questions for me. I wrestle daily with the impacts of colonialism, of sexism, of racism and anti-Semitism, of poverty and disability in an economy in which people are dispensable. I am also a survivor of severe and sustained sexual and psychological abuse during my childhood, carried out by a group of adult men that has left me with an intimate knowledge of the dynamics of torture, of the systematic attempts to shatter the spirits of the victimized. These are core issues in my life: How is it that I did not become a torturer? How is it that others do? What is it that allows some of us to choose outside the circle of reenactment?

A few years ago, as part of a study conducted by Staci Haines to develop better policies around child sexual assault, I participated in one of a series of focus groups, organized by constituency. Mine was made up of people who had all experienced severe abuse in group perpetrator situations, involving torture, killings, and nearly unimaginable cruelties. I found it

fascinating that we were also the group with by far the clearest and strongest concern for the recovery of abusers.

A friend of mine, another veteran of what we wryly refer to as "special childhoods," describes our common survival strategy as one of abandoning the fields to save the castle. For myself, for my friend, for the members of that focus group, the castle was our refusal to become like our tormenters. In order to remain human, we had to resist the urge to dehumanize those who traumatized us. We chose to hold on, in whatever ways we could find, to a sense of their wounded personhood. The paradox is that in our defiant determination not to resemble them, it was our recognition of their humanity that preserved our own. But how?

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That hatred dehumanizes the hater, and makes the victim resemble the perpetrator, is not a new or unique understanding. Or that trauma leaves people with a pull toward repeating what was done to them. Or that oppression leaves masses of traumatized people in its wake. But these understandings have not made their way into the heart of social policy or of political action. What is groundbreaking about *Power-Under* is the passion and intelligence with which Steve Wineman gathers together stories and insights about the nature of our wounding and the power of our choices and from them attempts to forge a set of strategies for changing the world in which we have all been so brutalized. How shall we carry our wounds? How should we remember? Like the policies of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa, Wineman seeks first to acknowledge the devastating nature of the wounds, and then to direct the rage of the traumatized, by conscious choice, into an assertion of humanity, into the deliberate decision that the cycle stops with us.

Power-Under is incisive political theory, is a deeply integrated fusion of personal and social healing, is a declaration of principles, and it is also a powerful act of individual practice. To announce that oppression causes deep and lasting pain is in itself a highly subversive act. In fact, the study of trauma has only been tolerated when strong social movements have forced acknowledgement of collective pain. To the extent that we don't think about it, it's because it's hard to think about. As the poet Antonio Machado wrote, "we make the road by walking." We must already be acting against the effects of trauma in order to be capable of thinking about the importance of acting against the effects of trauma. In *Power-Under*, Steve Wineman is making such a road, by reaching, as a traumatized human being, for a theory of his own humanity, and everyone's. He is probing our wounds for a new way to tell their story, one that releases us from perpetuating them. He is seeking to understand what allows us to stay human when we have been dehumanized, how the impotent fury of victimization can become "constructive rage" for the mending of the world. There is a story that oppression writes upon our lives. It carves itself into our psyches, our bodies, our ways of living, our sense of possibility. Steve Wineman has crafted a kind of handbook for rewriting that story, so that the memory of pain becomes the ground of a new, compassionate and powerful way to be together. As Wineman writes in the final sentence of this book, we need to find "as many ways as we can to tap our unbearable pain and use it to expand the boundaries of what we had imagined to be possible, personally and politically." As far as I can see, learning to transform our collective and individual suffering in this way is the only path out of the narrow place in which we struggle.

When the Hebrew people fled from slavery, they came to a seemingly impassible barrier, a wide sea they

could not cross. According to the Passover story, the Red Sea did not open just because of their need. It was not the prayers of Moses, or the consternation and desperate cries of the refugees, seeing Pharaoh's soldiers almost upon them. What we are told to remember is that the sea opened because one ordinary man, Nachsun, decided that what was behind him was intolerable, and that the only way forward was through, so he began to walk, on a path he couldn't see, toward a destination that was nearly impossible for enslaved people to imagine. It was not until the waters had reached his mouth that the sea parted and a way became clear. *Power-Under* is just such an act of walking forward, of imagining us into a state of wholeness, of opening a way.

Chapter One

THE POLITICS OF TRAUMA

"We are a society of people living in a state of post-traumatic shock."

-Aurora Levins Morales[1]

If trauma was not widely recognized before September 11, 2001 as an issue of urgent political significance, it certainly should be now. In the aftermath of the attacks against the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, massive numbers of people have experienced a bone-deep sense of violation, helplessness, powerlessness, terror, and rage. These are core phenomena associated with trauma. In turn, this mass experience of victimization has been mobilized politically in the service of counter-aggression, war, and a frontal assault on civil liberties.

One of the striking – though not surprising – features of the public response to September 11 is how little discourse we have had about traumatization and its political relevance. There has been fleeting mention in the media of a heightened level of psychological stress. The word *terrorism* is on everyone's lips; but, at least in the public arena, hardly anyone is talking openly about feeling terrified. We have seen rage displayed in all kinds of ways, from support for war to attacks against Muslims, but there has been virtually no conscious reflection about rage as a traumatic response to violation. Least of all has there been discourse about how trauma, in addition to causing intense personal distress, is a significant factor that shapes political behavior.

My central thesis in this book is that trauma plays a crucial role in the politics of oppression, domination,

and violence. There is a strong tendency for traumatized people to internalize the experience of powerlessness, and then at critical moments to engage in desperate efforts at self-protection that are driven from that place of subjective powerlessness. This is a psychological and political place from which we are incisively aware of the ways in which we have been acted upon, victimized and harmed, but from which it can be difficult or impossible to gauge the impact of our enraged behavior upon others, or even to maintain our awareness of the core humanity of those defined as Other. I attempt to describe and understand this phenomenon through the concept of *power-under*.

Power-under plays itself out in acts of violence ranging from the physical and sexual abuse of children to male battering, and in political stances ranging from racism to homophobia, from xenophobia to support for war. It is particularly relevant to a post-September 11 world in which many Americans perceive themselves as innocent victims, acted upon by forces of evil.

In the state of heightened vulnerability caused so prominently by the terrorist attacks, the psychological need for self-protection cannot be overstated. The ways that we attempt to defend ourselves psychologically against trauma can easily conspire to equate retaliation with self-protection. These include the demonization of the perceived perpetrator, our subjective immersion in powerlessness and lack of agency, the tendency for victimization to make us unaware of our own access to power and dominance, and the overwhelming need to give expression to unbearable feelings of rage. From the perspective of traumatized victims, we have been threatened with annihilation by inhuman monsters, and any actions "we" take against "them" (no matter how broadly the Others are defined) are readily justified as acts of self-defense rather than acts of aggression. When "they" kill it is terrorism; when "we" kill it is

self-protection.

At its core, this book is about breaking cycles of violence and domination. In Starhawk's novel *The Fifth Sacred Thing*, the wise old woman Maya says, "The ends don't justify the means….The means shape the ends."[2] Consistency between means and ends is the essence of nonviolence, and that is the value system from which I am writing. Political violence, whether in the hands of individuals who blow up planes and buildings or of governments that bomb countries, always rests on the belief that the ends justify the means. In a world that is literally rocking with violence and counter-violence, the need for new political forces rooted in the principles and practices of nonviolence has never been more urgent.

In order to promote the practice of nonviolence, we need as many people as possible to critically reflect on their experiences of traumatic powerlessness and rage. This is true not only in relation to the trauma of September 11, but also in relation to the extraordinary breadth and depth of traumatization in a society that is saturated with domination and brutality, at both the personal and institutional levels. It is not a new idea that brutality begets brutality. The question that needs much more conscious attention and investigation is exactly how this happens, both psychologically and politically. My contention in this book is that the internalization of powerlessness is a central link in cycles of violence. Becoming conscious of how our own subjective powerlessness can lead us to dehumanize and violate others is one of the keys to breaking these cycles.

As I have completed the final revisions on this work, a new peace movement has blossomed to oppose the Bush Administration's proposed war with Iraq. (I write this in March 2003, as we stand at the very brink of war.) Antiwar activism has grown exponentially in

the last six months. This outpouring of opposition to war, both in the U.S. and globally, creates important new opportunities to engage people in the task of trying to understand how to break cycles of violence. Given the fluidity of events since September 11, how long those opportunities will last – and what direction they will take – is far from clear. But at the very least, we have fresh and compelling evidence of the human capacity and the political will to respond to violence with nonviolence.

Trauma is one piece of a much larger puzzle that includes factors from childrearing practices to the institutional arrangements of economic and political power that shape political values which legitimize violence and domination. But I believe that trauma is a critically important factor that is largely ignored from left to right on the political spectrum. My goal in this book is to raise awareness of trauma as a political issue and, above all, to stimulate dialogue about trauma and nonviolence. Far more than "expert" pronouncements or instructions, we need people critically reflecting on and talking to each other about our experiences of powerlessness, violation, suffering, terror and rage.

I write this book as a political observer and a mental health worker – but also as a trauma survivor. While this is not a memoir, later in this chapter I will describe my experience of childhood trauma; and the analysis I develop is at all times informed by the sensibility of someone conscious of having experienced severe emotional trauma.

Though this book is strikingly relevant to the political response to terrorist attacks in the U.S., it is not specifically about September 11. It was largely written before September 11, and it addresses issues that long predate – and will long outlive – our current crisis.

Trauma is both an effect and a cause of brutality

and domination. If ours were a society that valued people over the accumulation of wealth, that raised its children nonviolently, that lived in harmony with the earth, that recognized the intrinsic worth of each life, the terrorist attacks in all likelihood would not have happened; and if they had, our response would have been far different. In a society organized around inequality, systemic oppression, and the legitimization of many forms of domination and violence, it is inevitable that people will experience the powerlessness, violation, and intense suffering associated with trauma on a massive scale. While a specific event such as the hijacking of a plane or the bombing of a building is not inevitable or predictable, patterns of violence which feed on the internalization of powerlessness are all too predictable.

The horror of September 11 resonates with and builds upon this deep underlay of traumatic powerlessness in people's lives; and the trauma related to this one event is the tip of an iceberg. It is the iceberg that I aim to address.

Creating a Radically Humane Society

The most important goal of this book is to contribute to our capacity to achieve a more just and humane society. A core contention is that if trauma were more widely understood and explored as a political issue, we would be better able to build effective movements working toward peace and social justice. I will outline the reasons why trauma is related to social change efforts shortly. But first, here is a brief description of the kind of society that I believe in – the values and vision that I hope this book can help to promote.

In a radically humane society:

- *The basic, intrinsic value of all life is recognized and affirmed.* There is a core ethos of equality, based on each person's inherent worth rather than on ability,

accomplishment, or such arbitrary tokens of value as race, gender, nationality, and so on.

- *People are valued more than the accumulation of wealth, status, or power.* Promoting the well-being of each person individually, and of people collectively, is recognized and practiced as the greatest personal, social, and political accomplishment. Cooperation is valued over competition; mutual aid over "winning." Individual accomplishment is not at the expense of others.

- *Wealth is democratically limited and shared.* The ideal of getting as rich as possible is replaced by the ideal of self-chosen limits on wealth at levels which are consistent with everyone having enough to meet their basic needs, and at levels which are consistent with ecological health.

- *Diversity is valued and celebrated along lines of race, gender, class, sexual orientation, and ability.* There is recognition of the richness of multiple cultures. Individual diversities based on the incredible range of human aptitude, personality, interests, and creativity are affirmed and nourished.

- *We live in harmony with the earth.* The paradigm of exploiting the earth's resources for human benefit is replaced by the paradigm of interconnectedness between the health of the earth and the health of human life.

- *Power is shared through participatory institutions and practices.* The democratic ideals that our current society preaches are actually put into practice in ways that give ordinary people shared control over their workplaces,[3] communities, and homes through a proliferation of participatory institutions in which people learn and practice the skills of democratic self-management.

- *There is a revitalization of community life.* As human interconnectedness becomes a primary societal

value, and mutual aid becomes a social and cultural norm, community life flourishes.[4]

- *Society's key institutions are organized on a decentralized, human scale.* In place of gigantic, centralized, bureaucratic economic and political institutions, economic and political life is decentralized through democratically managed small businesses and neighborhood councils. Federations of decentralized economic and political institutions coordinate and manage issues that must be dealt with on a larger scale.

- *Nonviolence pervades social, economic, and political relations.* New norms emerge at every level of human existence which take violence off the map as an acceptable option for solving problems or resolving conflicts. From child rearing and gender relations to international relations, peaceful "win-win" conflict resolution methods are developed and practiced as routine aspects of daily life.[5] To the extent that pockets and remnants of oppression and violent behavior persist, they are resisted through nonviolent means of struggle that respect the core humanity of those identified as oppressors.

Of course, I recognize that we are light years away from a radically humane society at present, and I have no illusions about the obstacles that have to be overcome and the degree of struggle entailed in moving toward such a society.

At the same time, it's important to also recognize that every one of the values I have described has actually been put into practice to some degree, either historically or currently. Ruth Benedict and Riane Eisler have written about "primitive"[6] and historical[7] societies which were organized around the alignment of self-interest with the common good. Even within our present society, in the face of a prevailing ethos that

legitimizes greed and domination, there are large numbers of people who do not seek limitless wealth, who genuinely value human life and diversity, who try to share power and to live in harmony with the earth, and so on. These are ideals in the sense that they are not prevailing norms – but they are squarely within the range of human capacities.

It is especially important to hold these positive possibilities in view in the context of a book that delves into the politics of trauma. The study of trauma brings us face to face with human capacities for gross brutality and malevolence at levels which are extraordinarily difficult to take in and come to terms with. What may be even more daunting, particularly from a political perspective, is the extent to which the experience of traumatization itself can lay the groundwork for further acts of violation and dehumanization. Immersed in this kind of analysis, it is critical not to lose sight of the full range of human potentials – including our ability to resist the experience of violation and oppression in ways that move us toward the affirmation of life and the creation of humane social conditions.[8]

Trauma and Progressive Social Change

How can the study of trauma help us to move toward a more humane society of the sort that I have described? I believe that trauma is relevant both to mounting a critique of the existing society and to our efforts to build effective social change movements. A more broadly shared understanding of trauma as a political issue can help us to articulate and expose critical ways in which oppression harms people; it can also clarify key aspects of how oppression is socially reproduced and perpetuated. In addition, I will argue that trauma is critically relevant to overcoming divisions between social change constituencies and movements, and relevant to the central task of

mobilizing progressive activism.

Understanding trauma can help us to articulate what is deeply wrong with the current society. Personal suffering is the most basic reason for social change. Trauma offers a conceptual framework for describing our most profound suffering[9] – and for showing how oppressive social conditions degrade human experience and cause wide ranges of personal dysfunction. It is the fact that oppression wounds people so deeply that creates its magnitude as a social wrong.[10] The study of trauma can help us to make those wounds visible and to show how pervasively, how systematically, and how deeply our society injures people.

Sandra Bloom and Michael Reichert, in their recent book *Bearing Witness*, call the U.S. a "trauma-organized society" in which people are routinely exposed to "traumatogenic environments."[11] Over the last 30 years, since the women's movement began to unmask childhood sexual abuse, there has been increasing public awareness of the ways that violence against women and children cause trauma.[12] There is much less recognition that *oppression is generically traumatizing*.

Racism, patriarchy, homophobia, and economic brutality all routinely violate people's integrity and repeatedly render people powerless in the face of overwhelming personal and institutional forces. The social experience of people of color, gay people, women, workers, poor people, children, and disabled people is saturated with abuse, humiliation, violence, and negation of personal worth. As Aurora Levins Morales argues, "abuse is the local eruption of systemic oppression, and oppression the accumulation of millions of small systematic abuses."[13]

Trauma belies myths that people are immune to destructive social environments, that anyone can

emerge unscathed and through hard work succeed, and conversely that those who don't succeed are to blame for their own failures. The study of trauma can teach us that ours is a *sickening society* — a society in which *toxic social conditions* create psychological and physical illness by routinely traumatizing people. It teaches that a society organized around domination is bankrupt not only because it spawns enormous material inequality, violence, and oppressive power relations, but also because it degrades the quality of individual lives on a massive scale through the mechanism of trauma.

Understanding trauma can help us to analyze the persistence of oppression and the popular appeal of the right. In order to develop effective social change strategies, we need to understand the forces that sustain the existing social and political order. Left analysis has understandably focused on systems of *power-over* – institutions and structures built around class, patriarchy, and race that concentrate power and wealth in the hands of elites that are overwhelmingly white and male. As a foundation for effective social action, this kind of analysis is crucial. But in my view it is also incomplete.

The politics of powerlessness can add significantly to our understanding of why and how many people enact dominance personally, and can also help us to explain the popular appeal of the right. I will argue that it is common for traumatized people to occupy dominant positions – as parents, as men, as white people, as heterosexuals, as bosses, as Americans, and so on. When internalized powerlessness is paired with objective dominance, it creates a lethal dynamic in which we unwittingly respond to our own victimization by oppressing others. In Chapter Two I describe how power-under combines with objective dominance in examples that range from Holocaust survivors to male

batterers.

Along exactly the same lines, right wing populism consistently appeals to ordinary people's sense of victimization and mobilizes traumatic rage toward the demonization of politically scapegoated groups (the welfare poor, gays and lesbians, women exercising reproductive rights, immigrants, and so on),[14] as I try to show in Chapter Four. As Aurora Levins Morales notes, "If trauma distorts the ability of the subjugated to direct their desire to empower themselves and in fact tends to drive them toward assuming perpetrator roles, and if people in objectively dominant positions often perceive themselves as victimized and defending themselves as a result of unresolved trauma, then understanding how trauma works and how to undo its effects is one of the most critical issues we face."[15]

This kind of understanding is critical particularly because it can inform how we try to effect change among people identified as oppressors. If we view the oppressor as an inhuman Other – no matter how understandable this view is from the perspective of the victim and the oppressed – we rule out all possibilities for the kinds of dialogues that can win hearts and minds. If we view the oppressor as invariably acting from a place of subjective dominance, I believe that we will completely miss the deep and typically hidden suffering, the complex histories of violation and trauma, and the subjective experience of profound powerlessness that often go hand in hand with the cruelty and malevolence enacted by oppressors.

Conversely, if we are willing to recognize that "the oppressor" is not fundamentally different from us, and that the dominant behavior of oppressors is often embedded in personal pain and internalized powerlessness, it may help us to have the kinds of human-to-human dialogues that *can* reach people's hearts and minds. In Chapter Three I try to develop this

kind of understanding specifically regarding gender-based oppression.

Understanding trauma can help us to overcome divisions that chronically plague progressive social change movements. The left has been repeatedly weakened by internal divisions and fragmentation,[16] both in the form of in-fighting within social change organizations and through the inability of different oppressed constituencies to form robust and sustainable coalitions. There are many reasons for these divisions that have nothing to do with trauma. These range from principled ideological differences to unprincipled power struggles; from the complex ways in which multiple oppressions create divisions in our society to the divide-and-conquer strategies utilized by forces aligned with the status quo in the face of unrest and social change activism.

I believe we could benefit from adding trauma to this list, not as a competing explanation but as one that is typically ignored to the detriment of social change movements. If we can recognize that social change movements and constituencies are made up largely of traumatized people, many of the difficulties we encounter dealing effectively with difference and conflict become much more understandable. Internal conflicts blow up and become unresolvable in part because we lack a common language and framework for recognizing the effects of trauma, and lack practical tools for managing the traumatic rage that we all too readily direct at each other.

When trauma is unnamed and unrecognized, its presence – at once palpable and invisible – can cause an enormous amount of damage. We need to develop shared understandings of the politics of trauma that bring awareness of trauma *into the room* in the same way that feminism has brought awareness of power relations involving domination into the room. By this I

mean an awareness that people may carry the effects of trauma – victimization, subjective powerlessness, traumatic rage, and so on – into any situation: any meeting, any organizing effort, any coalition-building project, any conflict.

It is only through the emergence of consciousness and a common language to describe the politics of powerlessness that we can create possibilities to interrupt and counteract the damaging effects of trauma within our social change organizations and movements. Developing language and a conceptual framework along these lines is the work of Chapter Two.

Understanding trauma can help us to mobilize rage in the service of nonviolent social change. As Allan Wade eloquently writes, "Whenever persons are badly treated, they resist."[17] But *how* we resist oppression has decisive implications for achieving progressive social change. There are many inspiring examples of people who, individually and collectively, have responded to traumatizing conditions through acts of constructive resistance, including the mobilization of movements seeking to overcome and transform racism, patriarchy, homophobia, capitalist exploitation, war, and so on. In Chapter Five I discuss the civil rights movement in particular as an extraordinary example of the capacity of traumatized people to resist oppression through sustained commitment to nonviolent struggle.

But in the same breath, there is an equally wide range of examples which show how the psychological effects of trauma can profoundly obstruct social change. In the context of a society organized around domination, our resistance to victimization and trauma can readily be expressed destructively by being directed *downward* at others over whom we hold some modicum of power rather than *upward* at the sources of our own oppression.

We see this dynamic played out politically in the

racism and homophobia of whites and heterosexuals who themselves are oppressed in significant ways; in class contempt directed toward working class and poor people; in the xenophobia which fuels anti-immigrant politics and popular support for U.S. policies of exploitation and aggression toward Third World countries; and in many other incarnations of right wing populism. We likewise see dominance fueled by traumatization in virtually every domain of personal politics, ranging from male battering[18] and sexual violence to the abusive parenting practices of both women and men.[19]

When we view trauma from a political perspective, two truths emerge which stand in stark tension with each other: that trauma can psychologically debilitate people in ways that help to perpetuate domination and oppression; and that trauma can help to spark personal and political resistance to domination and oppression. I believe that it is critical to develop our understanding of both sides of this tension. It is in the push and pull between the ways that traumatized people are damaged and defeated by oppression and the ways that traumatized people stand up to oppression that our prospects for mobilizing effective social change movements rise or fall.

Traumatic rage is one of the keys to this tension and how it is resolved. On the one hand, people's rage in response to oppression is a driving force behind the mobilization of movements for social change. On the other hand, as I try to show in Chapter Two, when trauma takes the form of *powerless* rage, it readily slides into all kinds of destructive behavior. One of the central challenges of progressive social change efforts is to learn how to mobilize traumatic rage toward constructive ends through the use of nonviolent and humanizing means. Addressing that challenge is the central focus of Chapter Five.

Breaking Cycles of Violence

One of the keys to breaking cycles of violence is our willingness to acknowledge and come to terms with complexity. I am thinking specifically of the complex ways in which each of us can *at once* be both oppressed and oppressor, both victim and perpetrator.[20] This complexity is hard to take in.

We all have an understandable tendency to be incisively aware of our own victimization and to deny our own capacities to cause harm.[21] As a result, we tend to describe neat divisions between victims and perpetrators, between oppressors and the oppressed. But we do so at the expense of an accurate description of political and personal realities; and our perceptions of ourselves as pure victims, and of oppressors as inhuman Others, can set the stage for continued cycles of violence.

Conversely, if we can take hold of more complex versions of reality, in which we are willing to describe ourselves and others as *both* victims and perpetrators, both oppressed and oppressors, it can be a path toward the kind of awareness and compassion that we need to break cycles of violence. Let me offer my own trauma story as an illustration.

I experienced trauma as a child at the hands of my mother and my older brother, and also from my parents' treatment of each other.

One of my vivid memories from early childhood is of my mother's ritual of sitting me on her lap, telling me adoringly that I had her face, and then specifying each feature on my face and telling me that it was hers. Part of the clarity of this memory is the deep pleasure that my mother took in owning my face as hers. This dynamic repeated itself in countless other ways: my role in my mother's life was to be a vehicle to her pleasure. While this never took the form of overt

sexual contact or stimulation, it had the emotional quality of a lover relationship.

I have a photo of my mother and me when I was seven which captures the essence of our relationship, at least as I experienced it, in stark detail. In the picture I'm with my mother on a couch. My mother has her arms around me, her left hand cupped over my left hand. She leans toward me at a 45 degree angle, kissing me at the corner of my mouth, and looking straight into the camera. She's beaming. It's as if she is so full of joy she's bursting with it. I am leaning away from my mother at that same 45 degree angle. My legs are stretched out behind me on the couch, almost perpendicular to my torso, my body impossibly contorted. My mouth is turned from my mother, my lips avoiding hers as much as they can. I'm looking away from my mother, away from the camera, off into space.

My expression in the photo is unspeakably sad. There clearly is a cold, silent anger there too. I'm trapped in her loving embrace, and every ounce of my body is straining to get away from her. My mother doesn't notice; she's too captivated by her love for me to notice my unmistakable body language, and by extension to have any sense of who I am. In response, in order to survive, by age seven I have learned to go off into space, to hide within myself – what I now understand to be the classic traumatic response of dissociation.

My mother treated me as an extension of herself rather than as a separate person. When I was little she insisted that I promise to "always stay good," which meant adhering to her wishes without any room for maneuver or exploration of my own potentials (for example, I had no permission to be messy, rambunctious, express anger, or make mistakes that I might learn from) – explorations which might cause her

discomfort or might confront her with my reality as a separate self. I lived in constant fear of my mother yelling at me or calling me bad, which I saw her do on a daily basis to my brother. As a result, I learned to hide my real self. I learned to stay small and quiet, to numb out my feelings – particularly feelings of anger – and to live in a constricted world in which I was able to survive but at enormous psychological cost.

Meanwhile my brother, who was four years older, abused me physically. For a period of about six years, for me spanning from age four to ten, he repeatedly pinned me on the floor and clawed at my stomach until I was sobbing hysterically. This was a common event during those years, and while I am not sure of the frequency, I believe that it happened as often as once or twice a week – possibly even more frequently – during that entire period of time. My memories are of times when my brother and I were alone, having come home from school before my mother got home from work, or on Sunday mornings when my parents slept late. My brother would convince me to wrestle with him, promising to let me win, and eventually would pin me, claw my stomach until it was burning with pain, and then leave me sobbing on the floor. I would roll over, face down on the floor, and have vivid revenge fantasies of being old and big enough to beat him up – consumed with powerless rage.

There were also times my brother abused me when my parents were home and within earshot, when I would call for help and my father would come and take my brother off of me. Despite my parents' awareness that this happened, my brother and I were repeatedly allowed to be alone together; despite the times when my father did take my brother off of me, there were innumerable other times – I believe hundreds of times – when I was physically and emotionally overwhelmed

by my brother and no one was there to stop him.

My brother would go on to become an adult molester of boys. When he was finally arrested and convicted of child molesting at age 55, the police found 1,200 audio and video tapes and pictures in his apartment depicting his sexual encounters with boys, as well as bags of boys' underwear, according to press accounts. While my brother never sexually abused me, the driving force, the persistence, and the intense violation I experienced in his physical assaults were all consistent with his later sexual behavior as an adult.

Finally, spanning my entire childhood it was commonplace for my parents to scream at each other. Though they were not physically violent toward each other, they were as piercing and verbally abusive as I can imagine two adults being. They yelled at each other in front of me and my brother and with no apparent regard for our presence. This was a terrifying event for me, and one which made me feel invisible and totally powerless. From a very young age I learned to shut off all feelings when my parents had their screaming arguments – to go emotionally numb, which again as an adult I have learned to name as a form of dissociation, but which at the time was an unarticulated and desperate mechanism for emotional survival.

When I was 17 I left home for college, hundreds of miles and several states away, and for a long time I believed that I had emerged from childhood and from my family relatively unharmed. Meanwhile, I developed political understandings that led me to view myself as someone with a great deal of access to privilege and power. As a white middle class man, as someone who is highly educated, as a heterosexual, as a program director at work, and eventually as a parent, I have occupied many positions of dominance, and many forms of institutional power are conferred on me whether I want them or not. I have defined an

important part of my politics around awareness of privilege and commitment to struggle against it; I've reacted against privilege along the lines of class, race, gender, sexual orientation and age. For a long time I viewed myself as someone with too much power, not as someone who was oppressed or powerless, and in many ways I still hold to that view.

It was not until I reached my forties that I named my childhood experiences as trauma. I was led to do so by a depth and intensity of emotional pain which forced me to face and to understand my childhood in ways which enabled me to make sense of my experience and what had become glaring areas of emotional dysfunction. I began to acknowledge and to *feel* the full force of the ways that I was abused as a child – and I began to recognize myself as a victim.

My childhood trauma has stayed with me for the three decades of my adult life. For many years I blocked and numbed it out, as I learned to be a competent and functional person; but I was walking around with unhealed and festering wounds. When I reached the place in my life where I could no longer deny or minimize the depth and intensity of my suffering, I came face to face with the truth that I am an oppressed person – that I was dominated and abused as a child in ways that I was powerless to prevent, with effects that I have carried ever since and that can still render me powerless. Standing alongside all of the privilege and power in my life, there is a depth of powerlessness and victimization that at moments can debilitate me and can trigger an enormous amount of rage.

Standing alongside is the key. My oppression does not negate or *in any way* diminish my access to privilege and dominance. The two co-exist, and no matter how powerless and victimized I feel in the moments when my traumatic experience is triggered,

the truth is that in those moments I continue to exercise power as a parent, to occupy a position of authority at work, to hold institutional privilege and power based on my class, gender and race, and so on. By the same token, my access to privilege and dominance do not negate or diminish the truth of my experience of powerlessness and its basis in the historical reality of my childhood trauma. I am at once an oppressed person and someone with multiple opportunities to act as an oppressor; and at the times when I experience profound powerlessness, I continue to hold power over others.

The greatest challenge that I face to break a cycle of violence is in my role as a parent, where the complexity of my position as both oppressed and oppressor is poignant and, at critical moments, overwhelming. Parenting persistently evokes my experience of victimization; and, for me, it can trigger incredibly intense feelings of helplessness, worthlessness, and rage. At one stage, this could happen when my son would wriggle when I would try to dress him in the morning; at another stage, when he would startle me by running up from behind me and jumping on my back; at another (current) stage when he talks to me in ways that I feel to be disrespectful. (These are three out of many, many examples.) No matter how much I know that the intensity of my feelings in these moments is rooted in my childhood trauma, I experience the feelings *in the present*; they are vivid and often overwhelming; they make me feel victimized and powerless; and they can lead me to lash out at my son – unless I can find a way to break the cycle.

At the moments when I am most triggered and feel the most powerless as a parent, what is truly poisonous is that I can lose all sight of the power that I actually hold over my child. In fact, there is no greater power imbalance in our society than that between parent and

child.

It is true that a parent's power over the child is not absolute. Child abuse laws mandate state intervention in cases of severe physical mistreatment and assault. And there are all sorts of mundane ways that we often can't make our kids do what we want them to do – can't make them go to sleep, can't make them stop crying, can't make them obey us or respect us – and these are often the very things that make parents feel powerless.

But parents have an enormous range and magnitude of power over our kids that we simply take for granted. We can physically assault our kids by spanking, slapping, and various other forms of corporal punishment that fall short of the threshold for what is considered child abuse – and do so with legal and cultural impunity. We hold absolute control over our kids' food, clothing, and living conditions. We control the minute details of our kids' daily lives – what and when they will eat, whether they can go out to play, when and how often they have to bathe, when they go to bed, and so on. We exercise an incredible amount of power by the giving and withholding of praise, blame, acceptance and rejection. Even when we are not able to get our kids to do what we want, we have the power to wreak devastating harm through acts of physical or emotional aggression against children who are legally, culturally, physically, and emotionally at our mercy.

Because of the strength of my belief in nonviolence, I have never physically attacked my son. But there have been many times that I have responded to my own feelings of powerlessness and traumatic rage by attacking and hurting him emotionally. Sometimes I do this by lashing out at him verbally, blaming him for something that is as much my fault as his, not listening to or valuing his side of the story, and not acknowledging or validating his feelings. At other times I withdraw from him in a cold fury, for as much

as a few hours at a stretch, leaving him completely stranded emotionally, my rage silently but palpably directed at him. The irony is that at the moments when I feel most powerless and overwhelmed, my behavior is most overpowering and overwhelming in its effects on my child. This is an example of the phenomenon that I call *power-under*.

When I *am* able to break this cycle – to cope with my own traumatic experience in ways that do not harm my child – it's because, in the first place, I'm able to recognize that I am still in a position of objective dominance even when I am internally powerless. It's because I'm able to recognize, to really believe in and honor the full humanity of my son, to really believe that his feelings matter as much as mine and that he still deserves to be treated with respect and kindness and concern, no matter how overwhelmed I am, no matter how victimized and enraged I feel. It's because I'm able to maintain an attitude of compassion toward myself as someone who is still suffering the effects of childhood abuse, and *at the same time* maintain an attitude of compassion toward my son as someone who deserves not to suffer childhood abuse. And it's because I have specific tools for managing and containing my feelings of victimization and rage.

For years I have carried a piece of paper in my wallet that lists "what to do when Steve loses it with Eric." It gives me simple, graspable options such as taking an adult time out, reminding myself that I expected this could happen, apologizing to my son for blowing up at him, telling him that when I over-react to what he does it's my problem and not his fault, offering him a hug, and attending to my own needs. More recently I have been using the "mindful breathing" practice described by Thich Nhat Hahn in his book *Anger*,[22] which is also a very simple technique that I find extremely powerful and effective.

The *very* hard work is to actually mobilize myself to use these tools in the heat of the triggered moment. Sometimes I succeed and sometimes I don't. But I do have a framework and a strategy that allow me to make headway, to gauge my successes, and to keep working at it.

I have used my story as an illustration because I think it captures something common about cycles of violence and how we might think about breaking them. In order to view my experience as not simply personal but also political in a broader sense, we need to be willing to stretch it out in two directions.

First, I believe that it is fundamental to the organization of our society that most people occupy oppressor and oppressed roles simultaneously. This is what Aurora Levins Morales has called the "interpenetration" of oppressions.[23] While the form that this takes in my story is limited to the realm of parenting, the oppressor/oppressed dynamic plays itself out in a maze of intersections and interactions of oppressions based on class, race, gender, sexual orientation, age, and ability. This theme is central to every chapter of this book, and will be illustrated with a wide range of examples at each step of my analysis.

The second stretch is from the personal and private actions of a struggling parent to organized political action that seeks to break cycles of violence. While there are obvious differences of scope and scale, I believe that the essentials of (in my case) a personal strategy to manage internalized powerlessness without acting abusively carry over to strategies and actions on a larger scale. They are:

- A basic belief in nonviolence and commitment to nonviolent action.
- Recognition of simultaneous oppressor/oppressed roles.

- Willingness to humanize the Other.
- Compassion for self and other.
- Cultivation of accessible options for nonviolent action that manage and contain traumatic rage, and break the stranglehold of internalized powerlessness.
- Clear understandings of power relations that enable us to distinguish between internalized powerlessness, shared power, and dominance, and enable us to constrain the exercise of objective dominance.

Developing these strategic points, and applying them to possibilities for large scale political action, is the work of Chapter Five.

The Prevalence of Trauma

If trauma were a rare event, it would probably not deserve much attention as a political issue, regardless of the power dynamics involved. In fact, there is good reason to believe that trauma is occurring at epidemic levels.

Sexual violence against girls and against women is probably the issue most commonly associated with trauma, and for good reason. A study published in 1986 by Diana Russell found that of a random sample of 930 women, 16% reported sexual abuse by a family member before the age of 18, and 19% reported incestuous abuse at some time in their lives; 31% of the women reported sexual abuse by a non-family member. Altogether 38% of the women in Russell's survey reported having been sexually abused by either a family or non-family member before the age of 18. When the criteria for sexual abuse were broadened to include exposure of genitals, unwanted nongenital touching or kissing, and sexual advances not acted upon, 54% of the women reported at least one instance of sexual abuse within or outside of the family before age 18.[24]

A 1985 national random sample of 1,374 women

contacted by telephone found that 27% of women reported sexual abuse during childhood.[25]   The somewhat lower abuse rate found in this survey (compared to Russell's results) is probably attributable to the methodology: telephone interviews are less likely to elicit personal revelations than the in-person, in-depth interviews used by Russell.[26] Another survey found that approximately 1 in 4 college women reported having been victims of rape or attempted rape.[27] Both of these studies corroborate the essential point that sexual violence against girls and young women takes place at epidemic levels.

Violence against women all too obviously does not end with childhood or college years. Regarding physical violence against women, Neil Jacobson and John Gottman cite research finding that "each year at least 1.6 million wives in the U.S. are severely assaulted by their husbands"[28] and that violence is reported by 36-50% of newlywed couples.[29] Jacobson and Gottman conclude, "The domestic assault of women in the United States is a problem of epidemic proportions."[30]

While I am not aware of research which has attempted to comprehensively assess sexual and physical violence against women at any time in their lives, it seems reasonable to estimate that as many as 50% or more of all women have been victims of sexual assault at some time – a figure which is reached for childhood sexual abuse alone using Diana Russell's broad criteria for sexual abuse – and that the number of women who have experienced either sexual abuse or battering considerably exceeds 50%.

A survey reported by CNN in the mid-eighties underscores the prevalence of sexual violence against women and children. Male respondents were asked whether they would commit rape if they could be sure

that they could do so with impunity; 30% said there was some likelihood that they would. The respondents were then asked if they would force a woman to have sex if they could be sure of no legal consequences (this repeated the first question, but without using the word "rape"); 50% reported some likelihood. Finally, the respondents were asked if they had actually molested a child, and 10% answered that they had.

Even though the first two questions were posed hypothetically, the responses provide a staggering view of widespread male attitudes and values about sexual violence against women – namely, that the only reason not to do it is fear of arrest and punishment. Given the plethora of opportunities for men to commit sexual assaults with no witnesses, and the extremely low rates of convictions for rape and other acts of sexual violence, there is every reason to believe that the attitudes revealed in the survey translate into action in many cases. There is also reason to believe that the self-reports by 10% of the men in the survey that they had molested children is an under-representation, given that it is common for offenders to deny their offenses and also that, even if anonymity is guaranteed to respondents, there would be a tendency to deny actions that are both criminal and socially unacceptable. Even if the 10% figure were accurate, it would probably be consistent with a sexual abuse rate upward of 20 or 30% for all children, given that a single offender may commit multiple acts affecting multiple children.

While sexual violence is widely perceived as an issue affecting girls and women, it also affects boys to a significant degree. The previously cited 1985 national telephone survey also contacted 1,145 males and found that 16% of the men reported sexual abuse during childhood.[31] This is a stunning figure, particularly given that public attention to the issue of sexual abuse of boys is virtually confined to sensational cases

involving priests or day care providers – cases which make up a fraction of the total indicated by this survey. A 1998 review of 166 studies concludes that "sexual abuse of boys is common, underreported, underrecognized, and undertreated."[32] Underreporting is likely because men would tend to deny having been sexual objects and having been victimized in ways associated with helpless girls and women.[33] Sexual violence against boys remains a vast uncharted territory.

There is another way that boys are traumatized, unrelated to sexual abuse, having to do with the crushing of boys' emotional capacities in the course of their socialization to male gender roles.[34] This is a complex and, I believe, crucially important process in which the very means by which boys are taught to assume dominant roles also massively expose them to experiences of humiliation, shame, powerlessness, and profound trauma. I develop this analysis of male socialization and trauma at length in Chapter Three.

Yet another type of sexual abuse of children is what Judith Herman calls "covert incest."[35] She defines this as "behavior that [is] clearly sexually motivated, but which [does] not involve physical contact or a requirement for secrecy."[36] Herman cites examples including fathers telling daughters about their sexual activities, "ceaselessly interrogating" their daughters about the daughters' sexual activities, exhibiting themselves to their daughters, watching their daughters undress, and buying their daughters sexy underwear.

Alice Miller in her classic *The Drama of the Gifted Child* more broadly describes parents who seek to meet their own deep emotional needs through their children, and who therefore use their children as a means to their own pleasure.[37] In a later work, Miller observes that

adults who "experience their…child as a part of themselves…cannot imagine that what gives them pleasure could have a different effect upon the child."[38] I believe that this is the dynamic that goes to the heart of a sexually abusive parent-child relationship, whether or not the sexual dimension is overt. While Herman confines her focus to father-daughter relationships, Miller's broader formulation can apply to parents and children of either gender, in whatever configuration the abuse actually happens.

There is probably no way to know how commonly covert sexual abuse occurs. It is not readily observed or commonly reported, cannot be verified by physical examination, and may not be perceived or identified as abuse by parent or child, either when it happens or in retrospect. But that does not necessarily mean that this type of abuse is rare. Nor does it mean that the damage caused by covert sexual abuse is insignificant (as my own experience indicates). Herman, based on interviews with groups of women who reported overt and covert sexual abuse by their fathers during childhood, concludes that while overt abuse is more damaging, covert abuse causes lasting harm: "[t]he pathological effects of overt and covert incest were similar in nature and differed mainly in degree."[39] Miller describes lasting effects which include depression, "a sense of inner emptiness,"[40] self-alienation, narcissistic disturbance and rage.

Physical (non-sexual) violence by adults against children – spanking, slapping, hitting, strapping, whipping and so on – is another vast source of traumatic experience. A 1995 nationwide Gallup survey asked parents if they had spanked, slapped, pinched, or hit their children one or more times in the last year. The vast majority responded that they did. Rates of parental violence varied for children of different ages, peaking at *94% among parents of four-*

and five-year olds. For every age between one and eight, a minimum of 65% of parents reported using some form of corporal punishment, with the rate dropping below 50% only from age 13 on.[41] These statistics are consistent with findings from previous national surveys of family violence which lead Murray Straus to conclude that "almost all American children have been hit by their parents – usually for many years. For at least one out of five, and probably closer to half of all children, hitting begins when they are infants and does not end until they leave home."[42]

Subsumed within these statistics is a huge range of parental acts of abuse, in terms of both severity and frequency, from occasional spankings to repeated beatings. Neil Jacobson and John Gottman estimate that 20-25% of children in the U.S. "grow up in violent homes";[43] if this figure is accurate, it indicates that a large number of children experience parental violence which goes beyond occasional spankings. Surely the degree of harm caused by parental violence can also vary enormously. But, with David Gil,[44] Alice Miller,[45] and Murray Straus,[46] I believe that any adult act of violence against children should be considered abuse in the basic sense of abuse of power. This is a classic instance of might making right, and it is no coincidence that rates of corporal punishment begin to diminish abruptly as kids reach adolescence – not because they are better behaved, but because they begin to achieve the size and prowess to ward off attacks by their parents. As David Gil argues, parental violence is a concrete manifestation of societal values which legitimate domination and violence.[47]

From the point of view of the child, being hit by an adult means being physically and psychologically overwhelmed by someone who, at least in the moment of the attack, holds total power over you by virtue of

superior size and strength. If it is your parent who attacks you, this is the person you rely on for your physical and emotional survival.

Consider the experience of a one year-old (an age at which the corporal punishment rate reaches almost 70%) or a two year-old (where corporal punishment passes 80%). Your parents are literally giants who hold total control over every significant aspect of your life – food, shelter, attention, activity, comfort, and love. Imagine the first time one of these giants strikes you. To begin with the blow causes physical pain which – even if "minor" in the eyes of adults – is likely to be overwhelming for a child of this size and level of development. But what immeasurably compounds the effect is that you have been betrayed by the parent you are bonded to: that your parent would intentionally inflict pain on you and expose you to what Alice Miller describes as contempt.[48]

This occurs at a stage at which the child not only is completely at the mercy of adults physically, but also has no *psychological* capacity for any kind of constructive self-defense. It is a moment of staggering destructive significance, despite the cultural normalcy of hitting children.   As Straus argues, "Corporal punishment is *deeply traumatic for young children.*...For a child who can barely walk or talk (the age at which children are most likely to be hit), it can be truly traumatic if the most loved and trusted figure in the child's life suddenly carries out a painful attack. The consequence can be a post-traumatic stress syndrome that creates deep, lifelong psychological problems...."[49]

The cultural normalcy of violence against children means that *childhood trauma is a normal event*. By ages four and five, at which corporal punishment is a virtually universal practice in the U.S., most children have become combat veterans.

There is a long and imposing list of other events which can traumatize children and adults. For children, this includes abuse by older siblings and unrelated older children; being yelled at and verbally demeaned by parents; verbal and physical abuse by teachers; witnessing violence; and witnessing verbal abuse. Adults experience trauma in the military (both through abusive treatment by superiors and through combat experience); in workplaces when they are treated abusively by bosses; through violent and/or violating crime; and through incarceration.

In addition, and critically, systemic oppression is in itself traumatizing. To be a member of a disenfranchised race or ethnic group or gender or class or sexual orientation, or to be a child confronted at every turn with an overwhelming system of adult power, is to be bombarded on a daily basis with messages that who you are as a person does not matter in the larger scheme of things; that you are not as good, not as smart, not as powerful, not as valid in the core of your being as the enfranchised others. Those messages are conveyed through acts of violence and gross brutality, such as sexual violence and gay bashing; they are manifested in material conditions such as severe poverty; and they are also encoded in countless mundane events which are invisible to the dominant group. The totality of these messages can be chronically traumatizing to the extent that they repeatedly create experiences of violation and powerlessness among oppressed people.

Linda Stout offers a compelling account of the traumatic effects of poverty. Writing from her own experience, she observes, "I often define poverty as a lack of options…Middle class people…don't understand that it is a privilege to have options, and that a lot of people don't have that privilege. They also cannot understand the intense pain and shame of not

having those options available to you, and as a result, the sense of being a failure that it instills in you."[50]

bell hooks makes similar points about the impact of racism and about the interlocking impacts of race, gender, and class. She writes,

> Many black people see themselves solely as victims with no capacity to shape and determine their own destiny.[51]…Life-threatening stress has become the normal psychological state for many black women (and black men). Much of the stress black people experience is directly related to the way in which systems of domination– racism, sexism, and capitalism, in particular— disrupt our capacities to fully exercise self-determination.[52]

hooks poignantly describes the effects of oppression in the lives of black women. For example,

> [B]lack female students would come to my office…and confess the truth of their lives—that they were terrorized psychologically by low self-esteem; that they were the victims of rape, incest, and domestic violence; that they lived in fear of being unmasked as the inferiors of their white peers; that stress was making their hair fall out; that every other month one of them was attempting suicide; that they were anorexic, bulemic, or drug addicted…[53]

While neither Stout nor hooks uses the language of trauma, both describe how oppression renders people subjectively powerless – the experience of being without options, with no capacity for self-determination. Subjective powerlessness stands at the heart of traumatization, as I discuss at length in Chapter Two.

At the end of this long list of social conditions that cause widespread emotional trauma comes September

11. This was an event of such magnitude, creating the vivid experience of annihilation on a mass scale, that the terrorist attacks can by themselves by cited as a source of pervasive trauma. But September 11 occurred in the context of a society in which many of us had already experienced multiple traumas in our lives – through childhood abuse, through other experiences of sexual and non-sexual violence, and through the many manifestations of oppression; and that underlay of traumatization has made us far more vulnerable to the psychological effects of terrorism.

Objections to the banality of trauma may come from three directions. The first, which has attracted considerable public attention, is to question the reliability of accounts of sexual abuse – including claims of "false accusations" by children[54] and "false memories" by women.[55] While there may be isolated cases in which sexual abuse is reported when none actually occurred, in my view it is blatantly preposterous to suppose that sexual violence is really a minimal problem which has been grossly exaggerated by false reports – a contention particularly advanced by fathers accused of raping their children.[56]

Historically, sexual violence has been encased in denial and silence.[57] There are persistent social forces which inhibit victims of sexual abuse from reporting it and prevent them from being believed. There are also significant psychological forces which lead victims to deny and repress memories of trauma. Given both factors, it is almost certain that any false reports of sexual violence are outnumbered by unreported incidents.

It may also be objected that rates of childhood sexual abuse are declining. David Finkelhor, who was one of the key researchers of sexual abuse during the eighties, more recently has reported that during the

nineties there was a drop of as much as 40 percent in the number of child sexual abuse cases reported nationally.[58] However, Finkelhor notes that this could reflect changes in reporting practices rather than an actual reduction in incidence. In addition, child sexual abuse is only one of many pervasive causes of trauma; and previous sexual abuse rates were so high that, even if there has been a 40 percent reduction (which is by no means certain), it remains an epidemic problem. Finally, and critically, women and men who were sexually abused as children prior to the last ten years are likely to carry the traumatic effects of those experiences throughout their adult lives, as I will try to show in Chapter Two. Even if child sexual abuse were completely eliminated, which we are very far from achieving, the trauma associated with previous occurrences would remain a pervasive social problem for many years.

The other objection that may be raised is that acts of abuse do not necessarily cause trauma. This is an empirical question, incident by incident, and one that in many cases is not easily resolved. Abuse is an observable act; trauma is an internal psychological effect – one that does not always manifest itself immediately in observable symptoms, or which may have symptoms (such as depression, substance abuse, or physical illness) that have many possible causes. Moreover, emotional trauma often is not consciously recognized or identified by those who experience it. While it is relatively straightforward to conduct surveys asking adults if they were sexually abused as children, or asking parents if they hit their kids, it is far more complicated to try to determine whether and to what extent the victims of these acts of abuse have been traumatized by them.

Common sense suggests that the intensity of psychological damage is likely to vary with the

intensity and duration of someone's exposure to abuse.[59] Other things being equal, a child raped once by a stranger is not likely to be as traumatized as a child raped repeatedly over a period of years by her or his father. As previously suggested, kids who are occasionally slapped or spanked predictably suffer a lot less harm than kids who are routinely beaten. It is more useful to think of trauma as encompassing a continuum of psychological harm, with a range of both severity and types of disturbances, than it is to argue over how much someone has to suffer in order to qualify as traumatized.

It remains theoretically possible, and perhaps empirically the case, that there are people who have enough internal strength and social support to weather abuse and emerge psychologically unscathed. For purposes of this book, it is enough to conclude that this is not the norm. Given the breadth of the types of abuse which I have noted, and particularly given the staggering rates of sexual and physical abuse affecting children – who are least likely to emerge unharmed – the conclusion seems inescapable that traumatic experience is widespread. Sandra Bloom and Michael Reichert draw the same conclusion, writing that "our society has become organized around unresolved, multigenerational traumatic experience."[60] If, as I have contended, trauma has political implications, then the prevalence of trauma offers yet another important reason to pursue an understanding of this as a political issue.

Chapter Two

THE POWER-UNDER PARADIGM

Understanding the psychology of powerlessness is important because it can give us a fuller description of how current social conditions harm people. Trauma expands our critique of the existing society by revealing the ways in which oppression crushes people *internally*, at the depths of personal experience. In order to give substance to this kind of analysis, it is only a starting point to say that "people are traumatized by oppression"; the more concretely and graphically we can describe the experience of traumatization, the better we can explain the toll of oppression in human terms.

At the level of strategy, if it is true (as I contend in Chapter One) that the rage of oppressed people is inevitably present in social change efforts, then we need to learn whatever we can about rage in all its forms. In particular, we need to identify and understand *powerless rage* in order to develop strategies to both *constrain* the destructive face of rage and to *mobilize* rage politically in the service of humanization and egalitarian social change. This means delving into the psychology of trauma. We need to understand what causes powerless rage, what it feels like on the inside, what it looks like from the outside, and how it affects our social and political landscapes in order to frame realistic and effective strategies for mobilizing rage toward constructive ends.

At the practical level, we encounter trauma and the politics of powerlessness every day in our movement-building efforts, whether or not we recognize them or name them as such. One face of powerlessness presents itself as burnout, disaffection, apathy, and despair among potentially radical constituencies. A more

sinister face is reactionary populism, which mobilizes people's experience of victimization into support for right wing policies and the politics of scapegoating and demonization. But power-under also presents itself *within* progressive/left organizations and movements. We find it in our own tendencies to demonize the oppressor, in our susceptibilities to in-fighting and splintering, and in the imposing difficulties we repeatedly encounter in our efforts to build coalitions and to forge a kind of unity that can house multiple identities and honor the integrity of our experiences of oppression.

We have known for a long time that tendencies toward domination and top-down practices don't just exist in mainstream society, but also within progressive/left movements and organizations – that we internalize these tendencies and carry them with us, no matter how honestly and deeply we believe in egalitarian principles and values. As products of a society organized around domination, the struggle to create equal power relations is always internal as well as external. I am suggesting that the same is true regarding powerlessness, and that we need to pay the same kind of scrupulous attention to power-under within social change movements that is needed to struggle against tendencies toward power-over. In fact domination and powerlessness are two sides of the same coin, and are interrelated not only between individuals but also within individuals in ways that are critical to examine and understand.

We have language and frameworks to identify problems caused by domination, and consequently we have tools that enable us to struggle against it. We need a comparable language and framework to identify problems caused by subjective powerlessness – ways to be able to say that *trauma is in the room*. This is what I try to develop in this chapter. I believe that articulating

the power relations spawned by traumatic rage can help us to work with political allies or potential allies whom we too readily write off as "impossible" to deal with. It can likewise add to our tools for running more productive meetings, for resolving intractable or chronic conflicts, for nurturing constructive dialogues among our diverse constituencies and identities, and other concrete aspects of movement building work.

For any of this to happen, we need to think about the politics of trauma not only in terms of "them" but also in terms of "us." If we add trauma to our set of political understandings, but only apply it to the "impossible" Other who is obstructing meetings or polarizing organizations or standing in the way of coalition-building by acting out powerless rage, then we are unlikely to resolve conflicts or bridge differences. We need to inspect our own experiences of powerlessness and how they affect us in situations of conflict, in-fighting, polarization, and so on. If we are all products of a society organized around domination, then we are also products of a society organized around powerlessness. I believe that most of us internalize both sides of this power equation in significant ways.

Power-under describes one kind of common response to the traumatizing effects of oppression and abuse. It is one of many manifestations of trauma, and it is therefore important to place an analysis of power-under into the larger context of traumatic experience. By the same token, traumatic rage is not the only possible response to oppression and abuse: active resistance is also possible and more common than most of the trauma literature suggests.[1] The major reason for exploring traumatic rage and power-under from a political perspective is to use these understandings as bridges toward mobilizing constructive resistance.

Trauma as Overwhelming Experience

A traumatic event incapacitates our normal mechanisms for coping and self-protection. Bessel van der Kolk and his colleagues describe traumatic events as "overwhelming experience."[2] Judith Herman writes that "the victim is rendered helpless by overwhelming force…Traumatic events overwhelm the ordinary systems of care that give people a sense of control, connection, and meaning…they overwhelm the ordinary human adaptations to life."[3] The trauma victim consequently resorts to extraordinary measures in order to survive psychically. These emergency responses typically are mechanisms for enduring what would otherwise be unbearable pain and terror.

In the moment of trauma, the victim's psychological task is to maintain some semblance of normalcy, coherence, integrity, meaning, control, value, and equilibrium. This must be done in the face of an overpowering assault which threatens to annihilate the victim psychologically, and in many cases physically as well. Psychological mechanisms which enable the victim to deflect or deny the full force of the assault are therefore indispensable when it is impossible to actively resist. But these traumatic responses persist. They are functional in the moment when we are overpowered from without and lack other options; but frozen in the psyche of the survivor, they lead to the many types of dysfunction associated with post-traumatic stress.

Herman cogently describes the differences between non-traumatic fight or flight responses and traumatic responses which occur when we are rendered powerless by overwhelming force. She writes that the "ordinary human response to danger is a complex, integrated system of reactions, encompassing both body and mind." These reactions include adrenaline rush, concentrated attention, and "intense feelings of fear and anger. These changes in arousal, attention, perception,

and emotion are normal, adaptive responses. They mobilize the threatened person for strenuous action, either in battle or flight."[4] In the case of the "ordinary human response," the threatened person is able to take action for self-protection through fight or flight.

By contrast, according to Herman, "Traumatic reactions occur when action is of no avail. When neither resistance nor escape is possible, the human system of self-defense becomes overwhelmed and disorganized. Each component of the ordinary response to danger, having lost its utility, tends to persist in an altered and exaggerated state long after the actual danger is over."[5] The result can be symptoms of traumatic stress such as severely elevated states of arousal and vigilance, emotional numbing or dissociation, disruptions in memory of traumatic events, and psychological and emotional fragmentation. "Traumatic symptoms have a tendency to become disconnected from their source and to take on a life of their own…[T]rauma tears apart a complex system of self-protection that normally functions in an integrated fashion…"[6]

Powerlessness stands at the heart of traumatic experience. Bessel van der Kolk and Alexander McFarlane note that "the critical element that makes an event traumatic is the subjective assessment by victims of how threatened and helpless they feel."[7] In turn, one of our key responses when we are powerless – when it is subjectively impossible to fight or to flee – is what both Judith Herman and Peter Levine[8] describe as constriction and *freezing*. Herman observes that "[w]hen a person is completely powerless, and any form of resistance is futile, she may go into a state of surrender. The system of self-defense shuts down entirely. The helpless person escapes from her situation not by action in the real world but rather by altering her

state of consciousness. Analogous states are observed in animals, who sometimes 'freeze' when they are attacked."[9]

Levine elaborates on freezing, which he describes as a basic biological response. He describes this as an instinctive "last option" which occurs "[w]hen fight and flight responses are thwarted... As it constricts, the energy that would have been discharged by executing the fight or flight strategies is amplified and bound up in the nervous system. In this emotional and anxious state, the now-frustrated fight response erupts into rage; the frustrated flight response gives way to helplessness."[10] Levine writes that prolonged inability to take action in the face of threat creates a level of constriction which "overwhelms the nervous system. At this point, immobility takes over and the individual will either freeze or collapse. What happens then is that the intense, frozen energy, instead of discharging, gets bound up with the overwhelming, highly activated, emotional states of terror, rage, and helplessness."[11]

There is a growing body of research indicating that trauma has a significant and damaging biochemical impact on the brain, particularly affecting the brain's capacity to process the traumatic event.[12] Daniel Goleman summarizes studies showing that trauma over-stimulates the amygdala, located in the most primitive (or "reptilian") part of the brain.[13] The result "appears to be a sweeping alteration in the chemistry of the brain set in motion by a single instance of overwhelming terror."[14] Goleman also identifies helplessness as the "wild card" that triggers the biochemical effects associated with traumatic stress.[15] Francine Shapiro theorizes that trauma has the specific effect of physiologically blocking the normal processing of information by the brain; "disturbing information" rooted in traumatic experience is then "stored in the

nervous system."[16]

There is good reason to believe that the effects of trauma are likely to be most severe during childhood, when we are most vulnerable to being overpowered and have the fewest physical and psychological resources for self-protection. Sandra Bloom and Michael Reichert observe that "[c]hildren are especially prone to post-traumatic stress because they are helpless in most situations."[17] Van der Kolk reports that childhood trauma typically does more psychological damage than trauma experienced later in life; the younger the child, "the longer the trauma, and the less protection, the more pervasive the damage."[18] William Pollack notes the malleability of the brain during early childhood in response to the social environment: "Scientists have demonstrated that at birth the human brain is wired to accommodate developmental interactions that further shape the nervous system after birth…[Adult] behavior fundamentally, and at times irrevocably, alters a boy's [sic] neural connections, brain chemistry, and biological functioning."[19]

Given the extreme prevalence of physical and sexual assaults by adults against children,[20] along with an array of other dominating and abusive parenting practices described by Alice Miller as "permeat[ing] so many areas of our life that we hardly notice it anymore,"[21] the heightened susceptibility of children to traumatic experience is particularly significant. It is significant not only because of the prevalence of childhood trauma, but also because the effects of traumatic experience persist for so long, in such a variety of forms, and manifest themselves in ways that have such bearing on social conditions and power relations at many levels.

Whether or not trauma occurs during childhood, it is the endurance of traumatization which is probably its

most striking feature. Judith Herman observes that "[l]ong after the danger is past, traumatized people relive the event as though it were continually recurring in the present."[22] Van der Kolk and McFarlane similarly write that "the past is relived with an immediate sensory and emotional intensity that makes victims feel as if the event were occurring all over again."[23] The persistence of traumatic intensity is consistent with, and presumably at least partially caused by, the biochemical effects of trauma on the brain and nervous system. Traumatic experiences become frozen, unprocessed, and wired into our bodies, taking on the quality of raw and festering wounds.

Paradoxically, trauma also typically evokes *dissociation* or numbing, both in the moment of trauma and in its aftermath. Confronted with the terror and horror of threatened annihilation, with an overwhelming and malicious force that violates us to the core of our being and renders us utterly helpless, dissociation offers a compelling way to protect ourselves by blocking out unbearable pain and the events that cause it. Dusty Miller notes that "dissociation occurs when the mind cannot tolerate a traumatic event and responds by splitting off the experience from consciousness."[24] This can involve physical and/or emotional numbing, confusion, or out-of-body states, as well as blocked memories of traumatic events which either entail "disconnected fragments of memory" or total lack of recall.[25] Jennifer Freyd argues cogently that forgetting traumatic events is particularly likely when children are traumatized by parents or other trusted caretakers, because children rely on these adults for their psychic survival and therefore cannot psychologically afford to be conscious of their abuse.[26]

The long term pattern that emerges is what Judith

Herman describes as "an oscillating rhythm" between the intense re-experiencing of the traumatic moment and the dissociative responses of numbing, denial and constriction. "This dialectic of opposing psychological states," according to Herman, "is perhaps the most characteristic feature of the post-traumatic syndromes."[27] It is common for trauma survivors to alternate between states of hyper-arousal and shutting down; between blocked memory and intrusive memories in the form of both conscious recall and nightmares; between defensive detachment from the overwhelming pain of trauma and outbursts of traumatic reenactment in which that pain becomes vivid and immediate; between healthy functioning and intense states of physical and/or psychological dysfunction. Ronnie Janoff-Bulman observes that "denial/numbing and reexperiencing are generally regarded as the sine qua non of traumatic stress…"[28]

When trauma remains unresolved, the result is a fragmented and fractured self. The psychic forces set in motion by trauma do not cohere, literally alienating us from ourselves. Herman writes that "the traumatized person…finds herself caught between the extremes of amnesia or of reliving the trauma, between floods of intense, overwhelming feeling and arid states of no feeling at all, between irritable, impulsive action and complete inhibition of action. The instability produced by these alternations further exacerbates the traumatized person's sense of unpredictability and helplessness."[29] To the extent that we "split off" the parts of ourselves that have actually experienced the unbearable pain of trauma, we undergo a different and perhaps even more poignant fracturing: the loss of deep and significant aspects of who we are, or what Alice Miller calls "the true self."[30] Herman observes that "[l]ong after the event, many traumatized people

feel that a part of themselves has died."[31]

This fracturing of experience manifests itself in a huge range of personal dysfunction and dysfunctional behavior that is linked to trauma. Mike Lew identifies over 60 symptoms related to childhood sexual abuse.[32] Common problems include substance abuse, self-injury,[33] depression, suicide, violence against others,[34] shame, chronic fear, isolation, eating disorders, dysfunctional relationships, traumatic rage, psychotic episodes, sexual dysfunction, multiple personalities and physical illness. Experienced with differing frequency and with widely varying severity, the harms caused by trauma diminish and debilitate countless lives.

Powerless Rage

At the moment when abuse takes place, the victim's *objective* powerlessness usually is not absolute. Objectively, there are always choices that can be made about how to respond to overwhelming force; and to the extent that we consciously exercise options, we claim power. Aurora Levins Morales argues that "we always have agency. All our responses to our conditions are strategic, the best we could come up with at the moment. We are always trying to figure out how best to survive and thrive…[W]e are never simply acted upon."[35] Alan Wade offers a similar perspective when he focuses on the typically overlooked ways in which the victims of childhood sexual abuse take actions to resist their abuse.[36] Nelson Mandela's ability to withstand 27 years of captivity under the most brutally abusive conditions offers an extraordinary example of the human capacity to resist abuse through active strategic responses,[37] as I will discuss at length in Chapter Five.

Our capacity or incapacity to actively resist abuse

goes to the heart of whether we are traumatized by it. To the extent that we are able to take effective actions to resist, and to the extent that we subjectively experience these actions as conscious choices that give us a degree of control, we are not rendered completely powerless; when we experience ourselves as actors, trauma is contained and its harmful effects reduced.

Consider for example the common scenario in which the perpetrator of a physical or sexual assault orders the victim to be still and silent. If as the victim we believe that it is still up to us whether to try to resist – that we have the option to yell or to physically struggle, and that our task is to quickly come up with the best possible strategy for self-protection and personal integrity – then we maintain subjective agency and power even if we decide that our best option is to be still and silent. By contrast, if as victim our response is that we have no choice but to be still and silent, we have been rendered subjectively powerless; this is a strikingly different subjective reality despite identical objective behavior.

Levins Morales recounts consciously choosing to envision how her abusers were themselves tortured as children, and says that her ability to take this type of mental action "was what enabled me to survive spiritually."[38] Peter Levine cites an incident in which, out of a group of 26 children who were kidnapped and spent 30 hours in an underground vault, it was only the one boy who was able to take effective action to lead the group out of the vault who did not suffer severe traumatic stress in the aftermath of the incident.[39]

As a practical matter, the objective possibilities for active resistance at the moment of abuse vary tremendously with age, size, social support, psychological resources, the degree of the victim's dependence on the perpetrator, and the degree of external force. For very young children, the entire

concept of consciously exercising options at the moment of abuse may be meaningless. For victims of any age, there can be a level of sheer brutality which similarly makes their "objective power" theoretical at best. How does a two year old resist rape? How many of us could respond with anything approaching organized strategic resistance to external force at the magnitude of internment in a Nazi concentration camp – even at the level of envisioning some core of abused humanity in our captors? In the face of overwhelming force, and in the absence of the requisite psychological and social resources, active and conscious resistance becomes *subjectively impossible*.

In the moment of abuse, it is the reality of the victim's subjective response that determines the degree of trauma. It is true that dissociation can be seen as a kind of resistance – but it is not usually a conscious or active choice, and it is not likely to create a subjective sense of power or control. The more passive our resistance, the less it is consciously determined, or the less effective our attempts to actively resist, the greater our experience of subjective powerlessness and the greater the traumatization.

Traumatic rage is an enormous force, emotionally and physiologically, which is directly related to subjective powerlessness when we are abused. As previously noted, Judith Herman and Peter Levine both describe rage as a distortion of the biological fight response which occurs when our experience is that resistance is impossible. The physical imperatives of the level of arousal associated with the fight response, as well as the psychological imperative to resist violation and abuse, *demand* the most vigorous action and expression. In the moment of trauma, this drive to act in self-defense and to release hyper-aroused energy runs headlong into the brick wall of powerlessness; confronted with an overpowering external force *and*

with subjective powerlessness, neither action nor release is possible. The pairing of *rage* and *powerlessness* is thus a pairing of opposite forces – the necessity of taking effective action to protect ourselves countered and stymied by the subjective impossibility of acting to protect ourselves – which causes psychological and physiological disintegration.

It is in the nature of traumatic stress that rage becomes chronic. Judith Herman writes that "[t]he survivor is continually buffeted by terror and rage. These emotions are qualitatively different from ordinary fear and anger. They are outside the range of ordinary emotional experience, and they overwhelm the ordinary capacity to bear feelings."[40] Although traumatic rage festers within the survivor as a chronic condition, it rarely manifests itself in a steady state (though certain symptoms, such as physical illness or substance abuse, may take on a steady state). Typically survivors' rage is *triggered* by events in the present which stimulate and surface our traumatic history.

Triggering events may be internal (such as nightmares, memories, or physical pain), or may involve a physical location or an aspect of the environment which recall the location in which the trauma occurred. But they are also commonly interpersonal and relational. Comments, gestures, or oversights which make us feel disrespected, controlled, pushed around, invaded, or disregarded can evoke the full force of our historical abuse. Unwanted physical touching or contact, or any touching of the parts of our bodies that were violated, can be particularly triggering. Being caught off guard or taken by surprise can re-stimulate the abruptness of an assault when our safety and integrity were swept away without warning.[41]

My own triggers have included being treated arbitrarily by a boss, being told what to do in many different situations, being tickled or poked in the

stomach (where I was physically tortured as a child), any unexpected or jarring physical contact, and being confused. The other person whose actions trigger us may be in a dominant position, such as a boss, but is at least as likely to be a partner, a child, or someone who in a variety of other contexts is an equal or subordinate. The triggering action may be anywhere on a continuum of severity from harsh and callous to mild or utterly benign (at least as it would affect most people); I was once triggered by a joking comment about the size of my feet, and have often been triggered by my son running up to me from behind. Any trigger that makes the survivor feel victimized can result in an unleashing of rage which from the outside may appear hyper-reactive, irrational, and frightening.

The triggering of rage takes place within the context of *traumatic reenactment*. Herman notes that "[t]raumatized people relive the moment of trauma not only in their thoughts and dreams but also in their actions. The reenactment of traumatic scenes is most apparent in the repetitive play of children…Adults as well as children often feel impelled to re-create the moment of terror, either in literal or disguised form."[42] Van der Kolk and McFarlane write that the "core issue" in post-traumatic stress "is the inability to integrate the reality of particular experiences, and the resulting repetitive replaying of the trauma in images, behaviors, feelings, physiological states, and interpersonal relationships."[43] Dusty Miller describes the dynamic which underlies women's acts of self-injury as "trauma reenactment syndrome."[44]

Traumatic reenactment above all involves an eruption of the feelings of helplessness and terror that were experienced in the moment of trauma. There can be a snowballing of subjective powerlessness, rooted in the traumatic events themselves but also in the ways that traumatic stress endures after the moment of

trauma. As survivors we are powerless to undo the traumatic event, just as we were without resources to protect ourselves and prevent the violation when it occurred. Typically we are powerless to exact amends, contrition, or even acknowledgment of the abuse from the perpetrator. To the extent that there have been *many* moments of abuse and trauma in our lives – which is the norm regarding childhood sexual and physical abuse, male battering, and the recurrent assaults on personal integrity constantly generated by racism, homophobia, sexism, and classism – our experience of powerlessness as a core subjective reality has been repeatedly reinforced and exacerbated. To the extent that we are subjected to long term patterns of debilitation related to trauma – such as substance abuse, self-injury, shame, depression, and dysfunctional relationships – there is a real sense in which we continue to be acted upon and victimized by our historical abuse.

We are also powerless in the face of psychological and emotional phenomena that overtake and overwhelm us from within, flooding us with unwanted and unmanageable feelings. At the moment of reenactment, when as survivors we are triggered by an event which makes us feel that *yet again* we are being acted upon against our will, subjectively we have many reasons to feel trapped in a repetitive and relentless pattern of being violated and overpowered.

Reenactment objectively offers us an opportunity to give voice and form and action to the unbearable feelings and physical energy that could not be expressed or released, and in many cases could not be consciously experienced, in the moment of trauma. It therefore creates possibilities for re-establishing a sense of control and efficacy.[45] But these objective possibilities, as well as our deep yearnings for expression and release and self-protection, are often

overrun and distorted by the persistence of our subjective experience of powerlessness, which causes the expression of our rage to become desperate, self-defeating, and destructive. What is relived is not only the experience of onslaught from an overwhelming and malicious external force, but also of helplessness and futility internally; not only the experience of being overpowered from without, but of being profoundly powerless from within. This is so despite a current objective reality in which the external force that has triggered us may only be a fraction of our historical abuse, the possibilities for action are enormously greater, and the choices we actually make have real and significant impacts on others.

The result is that during reenactments we are driven to act by the overwhelming force of stored rage and terror; we are able to act in a whole range of ways that provide physical and emotional releases that were not available to us at the moment of trauma; but subjectively we may still feel *acted upon* at the core of our being. To the extent that we remain trapped in this traumatized state, our actions become chaotic and futile. What we most desperately need – to emerge from a state of helplessness, to be actors in the world, to achieve a sense of control and efficacy, to re-establish personal integrity and safety – remains out of our grasp, because we have no sense of agency. The discrepancy between our objective power and subjective powerlessness, which was minimal or only theoretical at the moment of trauma, mushrooms into a chasm in the moment of reenactment.

The tendencies of traumatized people to vilify and demonize the targets of our rage, which I have touched on in Chapter One, follow a direct path from the psychology of violation and internalized powerlessness. Emotionally we may experience an overpowering need to find someone *at hand* to blame and hold responsible

for the intensity of our suffering. This can take the form of political scapegoating via racism, homophobia, anti-Semitism, xenophobia, class contempt, and so on. It is also very commonly played out in personal relationships in which the other becomes a proximate villain at whom we direct all of the immediate intensity and charge of our feelings about our historical perpetrator (or perpetrators in the case of multiple traumas).

It is difficult to overstate the psychological fragmentation of the survivor who remains in the stranglehold of traumatic powerlessness. Typically there are many areas of the survivor's life in which s/he is perfectly aware of having agency and is able to act effectively. Subjective powerlessness remains stored and festering at a deeper and more profound level of psychological and emotional reality. When we are triggered it bursts to the surface, and in the same breath drags us down to that deeper level where we have so painstakingly tried to keep our trauma buried; and then the power and agency we know that we hold in ordinary daily life melts away.

Outbursts of powerless rage can be disconnected from traumatic events – in terms of passage of time, the social context in which the rage occurs, and the conscious awareness of the survivor. But even when we consciously connect rage to traumatic events, it doesn't necessarily mean that we can achieve a sense of subjective power or find constructive forms of expression. What Herman describes as the "driven, tenacious quality" of traumatic reenactments[46] applies particularly to the subjective experience of powerlessness. Consciousness is crucial but not by itself enough to resolve trauma, and in the absence of other resources can simply lead to conscious suffering.

When triggered, the survivor can descend with stunning abruptness into a victim state. Consciously or

not, we have returned to the moment of trauma. It is a subjective experience of being acted upon maliciously – of being acted upon by an overwhelming force which is entirely outside of our control and which we are powerless to stop. One moment things are normal; the next moment things are out of control, from without and from within. Externally, something is happening to us *again* that we experience as profoundly unfair, totally wrong, which suddenly makes life feel intolerable. Internally, feelings are suddenly unleashed we may not even be able to name, which come from an unspeakable place inside us – a place of horror. They are feelings that make us want to scream, or smash things, or lash out at the person who has caused this, or hurt ourselves, or disappear.

One moment we were afloat; the next moment we are drowning.

Examples of Power-Under

The expression of powerless rage is like the flailing of someone who is literally drowning. The survivor, who is reenacting the moment (or many moments) of trauma, is caught up in a desperate struggle for psychic survival. Someone in such a state cannot possibly gauge the impact of their actions on others. And to someone who is feeling powerless, acted upon, and profoundly victimized, it is typically inconceivable that we could be posing any threat or danger to others.

Yet the flailing of a drowning person poses a very real danger to anyone who approaches, and so can the expressed rage of a survivor in a traumatic state. The subjective experience of enraged trauma survivors is that we have been deeply wronged and we are desperately attempting to protect ourselves and regain

some semblance of equilibrium. But the experience of those affected by the survivor's enraged behavior is often that *they* are being treated unfairly, that the person is impossible to deal with, and in some cases that the survivor is acting dangerously or abusively. The irony is that someone acting from an internal state of sheer powerlessness can have an enormously powerful impact on anyone in their path. This is the dynamic that I am calling *power-under*.

I first developed the concept of power-under about 15 years ago, based largely on my encounters in mental health settings with adults labeled as having "borderline personality disorder." From the point of view of the professional service providers these were always the most troublesome clients, *not* because they were more disturbed than others with major mental health problems, but because of their behavior. They tended to be both self-destructive (in the form of suicide attempts, suicide gestures, and self-mutilation) and explosively angry, especially toward service providers. Their pattern was to split between some service providers whom they identified as good and others identified as bad, to direct their rage against the "bad" treaters, and to attempt to enlist the "good" treaters as allies against the "bad" ones.

I began to notice a stunning contrast between the power position of "borderline" clients and the effect they had on the professionals they encountered. As chronic mental patients, objectively they were in a severely subordinate position relative to their professional treaters. Moreover, the "borderline" clients were predominantly women, further minimizing their objective claim to power. Subjectively, they were entrenched in positions of helplessness, powerlessness, and victimization. Their chronic complaints and explosive anger were almost universally self-defeating. They became locked into power struggles with service

providers that they could not possibly win and had no expectation of winning. I worked with one client who week after week would go through litanies of her mistreatment by other service providers and then instructed me that there was nothing I could say or do which could possibly change or improve her situation.

What was remarkable was the effect of these clients on treatment providers. They evoked severe discomfort, fear, helplessness, contempt, and not infrequently counter-rage[47] from professionals at all levels. The mere mention of the term "borderline" drew (and continues to draw) a palpable shudder from most clinicians. There is no other psychiatric label I know of which elicits this kind of reaction. The negativity associated with the "borderline" diagnosis is so pronounced that Judith Herman describes its practical use in the field as a "sophisticated insult."[48]

One of the hallmarks of power-under is that the expression of powerless rage so often renders its target *subjectively* powerless. In the case of "borderline" clients, mental health professionals are objectively in a dominant position, and almost always have a range of options at their disposal for dealing with the client in a way which may be helpful to at least some degree. But the subjective response that is commonly evoked among professionals is that the "borderline" client is hopeless and the treating professional is helpless – a response which has become encoded in the "borderline" label. Dusty Miller notes that "[m]any mental health professionals believe that the damage done to the borderline's sense of self is irreparable."[49] "Borderline" clients, acting from a position of extreme subjective powerlessness, make professional treaters feel profoundly powerless.

At the time that I first made these observations, I had no inkling that there was any connection between the "borderline" diagnosis and trauma. In the last 15

years there has been increasing recognition in the mental health field that severe trauma is a primary antecedent of "borderline personality disorder."[50] The need to identify a proximate villain, the splitting of their world into sharply defined figures of benevolence and malevolence, their utter conviction that they are being acted upon and victimized, their patterns of self-abuse, and their chronic expression of powerless rage all are indicators of unhealed trauma.

Nor did I have an understanding 15 years ago of myself as a trauma survivor, or that "power-under" was a concept that might apply to me personally. Since then I have come to recognize and acknowledge my own susceptibility to powerless rage.

One of my responses when triggered is to emotionally withdraw. In the milder form of the pattern, I become cold, abrupt, and distant. In more extreme form I go into a stone-like state in which I stop communicating for an hour or more. This happens almost exclusively within intimate relationships. The triggering event may be part of a pervasive problem in the relationship, but it can also be a seemingly trivial comment or physical gesture that catches me off guard and makes me feel attacked or betrayed.

My subjective experience in these traumatic states is that the situation is impossible and there is nothing I can do to make it better. Nothing I could say would possibly be understood by the other person the way I really mean it; and saying it would not help to resolve the situation anyway, because it would be a statement of despair. There is no way for me to express my feelings, which are unbearable. I have an incredible sense of physical heaviness, which makes any kind of physical action also feel impossible. Meanwhile my mind races with thoughts that circle back upon themselves, leading nowhere. I feel totally weighed down and immobilized by my thoughts, my physical

heaviness, and my sense of being utterly alone in the world. All I want is to be left alone; yet I desperately wish for understanding and soothing, which I know to be impossible. I'd like to disappear, which seems the only possible solution to my condition, and in some cases this leads to more focused thoughts and feelings of wishing to die. But since I know I will not act on my suicidal thoughts, this circles back into another layer of futility.

Usually I am not consciously enraged in the midst of these stone-like states. It is only later, after I have managed to emerge from my immobilized condition, that I realize that the triggering event made me incredibly angry, and that my rage, which I have not been able to express or vent in any direct way, has been at the core of my unbearable feelings, my physical heaviness, and my immobility. My condition in these traumatic states is one of implosion.

The effect of my stony withdrawal is to render the other person totally helpless. There is absolutely nothing they can do with me. Questions go unanswered; statements are not responded to; efforts to approach me with kindness and concern are silently rebuffed; expressions of frustration and anger from the other person drive me even further away. My partner, who relies on me for emotional support and connection, is abandoned. None of this is my conscious intention. In the stranglehold of internal forces that are far beyond my control, I am simply unable to do anything other than what I am doing. My helplessness becomes my partner's helplessness.

I now believe that power-under behavior, which is visible in such pronounced form among "borderline" clients, and which I have learned to identify in my own triggered states, is a common and widespread phenomenon. It does not only apply to a sub-category of stigmatized mental patients, but is found in varying

forms among all kinds of people who experience powerlessness, as I will try to illustrate with the many examples which follow.

Bruno Bettelheim

When people in subordinate positions act out powerless rage, as in the case of psychiatric patients, the effects on targets who hold power over them is striking – but is still constrained in many ways by the objective power relations in the room. But power-under in the hands of someone in a dominant position knows no such constraints, and therefore can wreak an extraordinary amount of damage.

Consider the example of a famous Holocaust survivor: Bruno Bettelheim. Nationally known as the head of the University of Chicago's prestigious Orthogenic School, a residential treatment facility for autistic and emotionally disturbed children, Bettelheim wrote several classic books about his treatment program.[51] He also wrote about his own experience in two German concentration camps,[52] where he spent a combined total of about one year prior to being released from the Buchenwald camp and coming to the U.S. in 1939.

After Bettelheim's death by suicide in 1990 at the age of 86, former students of the Orthogenic School began to come forward publicly with accounts of Bettelheim abusing them when they were children under his care. The accounts indicated that Bettelheim physically attacked children and verbally berated them, and that the attacks were not isolated events but were a pattern of behavior.

In Richard Pollak's exhaustive biography of Bettelheim, *The Creation of Dr. B*,[53] he reports on his interviews with 30 former students who were treated at

the Orthogenic School during Bettelheim's tenure, as well as interviews with former staff members who worked under Bettelheim.[54]   The former students describe episode after episode in which Bettelheim hit, punched, slapped, and spanked them, strapped their bare buttocks with his belt, and dragged them by the hair. He also verbally attacked and derogated children. These accounts of Bettelheim's behavior by the ex-students were corroborated by a number of the former staff members Pollak interviewed. Bettelheim was also described as "losing it" and verbally attacking staff who worked under him on a regular basis. Three of the ex-students, all women, reported that Bettelheim sexually abused them.

It is unclear what Bettelheim really believed about his own conduct.   In his many books about the treatment approach at the Orthogenic School there is no reference to corporal punishment or screaming at kids as part of the program. And in a chapter of *A Good Enough Parent* entitled "Why Punishment Doesn't Work," Bettelheim wrote, "Punishment, particularly if it is painful or degrading, is a very traumatic experience… I believe it is always a mistake to punish a child…"[55]   In Pollak's biography, he cites numerous other instances in which Bettelheim wrote or spoke publicly against the use of corporal punishment with children.[56]

However, Pollak also reports many other instances revealed in his interviews in which Bettelheim privately justified his behavior: telling kids that he hit them because he loved them; telling staff that he was the "superego" of the school; and writing to a friend that slapping children helps them to deal with the antagonism they feel toward their parents.[57] It is hard to believe that someone of Bettelheim's intellectual agility could take these justifications seriously as

anything more than transparent rationalizations for his out of control behavior. At the very least, it seems clear that Bettelheim's ideas and values about corporal punishment were grossly fragmented.

It seems equally clear that Bettelheim *was* repeatedly out of control. In his dealings with both children and staff, he is described by Pollak's sources as flying into rages, having tantrums, and "losing it." His behavior was totally out of keeping with his public persona as a brilliant healer. An account by a former staff member is particularly telling.

Nina Helstein, who had been a teacher under Bettelheim, recounted to Pollak an incident in which a seven-year-old girl was upset because an older boy was being sent away from the school after his treatment there proved unsuccessful. Helstein was sitting with the girl at lunch when Bettelheim came into the room. Helstein told Bettelheim that the girl had been upset for hours about the boy having to leave the school. "Bettelheim exploded and, in front of the children and staff in the dining room, began slapping the child across the face. 'I'd seen him lose it with staff members, be absolutely outrageous at staff meetings; but I'd never seen him hit the kids. It was shocking, it was terrible.'" At a staff meeting afterward, Bettelheim asked Holstein what she thought was going on with the girl he had hit; Helstein responded that she felt the girl was anxious about the older boy leaving the school. "Bettelheim said: 'That's right. So, when a child is upset, *why would you have me hit her*?' Helstein…managed to say: 'Dr. B, you do not hit children because I tell you to, *you* did that.' She said he was enraged by her effrontery."[58]

This vignette not only captures Bettelheim, probably triggered by his sense of failure about the boy whom the school had been unable to successfully treat, lashing out physically at a little girl and verbally at a young

female staff member; it also captures his lack of agency. His disclaimer that it was Nina Helstein who directed him to hit the upset girl, and his fury when Helstein insisted that the assault was his responsibility, reveal a man who was overwhelmed by rage. It is a portrait of subjective powerlessness.

The accounts in Pollak's biography describe a Holocaust survivor who was chronically subject to fits of traumatic rage. When Bettelheim was triggered, which apparently happened frequently, he had temper tantrums. In those moments he was no longer the famous psychologist, the renowned educator, the eloquent author, the driving force behind an innovative and remarkable treatment program: he was small and helpless, a victim who could not contain his rage and was lashing out at the readily available proximate targets. This is consistent with other manifestations of traumatic stress which Pollak reports Bettelheim suffered during his Orthogenic School years – chronic depression, recurring nightmares about the concentration camps, and suicidal thoughts. The picture of Bettelheim that emerges is of someone who never recovered from his terrible trauma, who suffered deeply and chronically, and who also chronically acted out his rage.[59]

It could be objected that Bettelheim was not acting from a position of powerlessness, but from a position of supreme power. Undoubtedly there *were* times when Bettelheim acted dispassionately as the man in charge, in control and consciously using his power. There is no question that all of the objective measures – age, gender, physical prowess, status as an expert, and his position as head of the school – made Bettelheim a dominant authority. And it is true that Bettelheim's position of authority enabled him to act out his rage on children and staff, and to do so with impunity.

But that does not mean that when triggered, in his

many moments of rage, he was *subjectively* acting from a place of strength and power, or that this could remotely be termed empowered behavior. If he had spoken publicly in favor of corporal punishment, and if he had written that slapping and spanking and berating kids were part of the Orthogenic School's treatment philosophy, then a case could be made that this was subjectively dominant behavior. But this was not the case. In his moments of rage, Bettelheim was simply out of control. Externally he was dominant; internally he was powerless – powerless to contain his own rage, and powerless to mend the trauma which was triggered by the children he treated.

Bettelheim offers a vivid and chilling example of the danger posed by someone in a position of objective dominance who suffers from chronic and severe traumatic rage. If Bettelheim had been a patient at the Orthogenic School, he would have had frequent outbursts of rage which would have frightened other patients and staff, and at times he probably would have hurt others physically; but there would have been staff in a position of power over him who would have placed external restraints on his behavior, hopefully in a benign and caring way. If Bettelheim had been a counselor at the Orthogenic School, he would still have been prone to outbursts of rage; but he would have feared for his job if he went out of control, and might well have lost his job if his outbursts were frequent or involved physical violence. But as head of the school, in a position of supreme authority, there were no restraints, and he became the perpetrator of innumerable acts of abuse toward both children and staff. It was thus the combination of Bettelheim's subjective state of powerless rage and his objective position of supreme authority which set the stage for his unrestrained abusive behavior.

Other Holocaust Survivors

In *Children of the Holocaust*, Helen Epstein chronicles the childhood experiences of adults raised by parents who were Holocaust survivors.[60] Epstein provides vivid portraits of her own parents, both survivors of concentration camps. She writes about her father, "His expectations…and our behavior often collided. When he was tired, when his optimism was worn down by worries about money or my mother's health, a terrible anger erupted from him. His face grew dark and when he began to shout, his fury was like a sudden hailstorm."[61] Epstein describes her mother as someone beset by chronic medical problems and severe depression. "All the rage my father spent on…other people who did not treat him with appropriate respect, my mother turned inward. It festered inside her…"[62]

Epstein recounts a typical dinner scene during her childhood when her younger brother was playing with his fork rather than eating his meal. Her father began to yell. "'*Hajzel!*' he shouted. *'Svine!'* The words meant 'toilet' and 'swine.' He seemed to be in another world, raging at people we could not see. Our misbehavior was just a trigger that released a rage that was there all the time, locked inside like my mother's pain. Once unlocked, it spurted out of him lavalike and furious, impossible to restrain…" Her father goes on yelling at both Helen and her brother, calling them pigs and brats, then exclaiming, "'Do you know what we would have given for a meal like this! Seven hundred calories a day we were given!…Eat!' he ordered. 'Or do you want a slap in the face!'"[63]

Meanwhile Epstein's mother, when upset and depressed, would barricade herself in the bathroom for hours at a time. Epstein describes how she would

knock on the closed bathroom door, needing reassurance, and ask her mother if she was all right. Her mother would tell her to leave her alone; then, crying, would say to her daughter through the door, "'I don't want to go on anymore. I can't stand it.' I listened hard. I thought I could somehow leach the pain from her by listening. It would leave her body, enter mine, and be lessened by sharing. Otherwise, I thought, it would one day kill my mother. She could kill herself easily behind the closed door."[64]

Epstein's parents could not gauge the effect of their actions on others – in this case, their own children. They were too overwhelmed by trauma and, in particular, by their rage. For Epstein's father, watching his children fail to eat triggered his concentration camp experience so severely that he experienced it as a threat to his own survival; in such a state, he could not possibly see how his "lavalike" rage could terrify Helen Epstein and her younger brother. Nor could Epstein's mother, overwhelmed by her own pain, grasp the terror she evoked in her daughter when she abandoned Helen by locking herself in the bathroom and threatened to abandon her forever when she cried, "I don't want to go on anymore." But from Helen's point of view as a child, she was raised by a father who was a bully and by a mother who any day might kill herself.

Al, another child of survivors, similarly describes growing up with his parents' traumatic rage: a father who "stared into space" and a mother who screamed at him and his brother. He recounted to Epstein, "'When we disobeyed her, she would yell at us: *Enemy of Israel! Enemy of the Jews!* She yelled in Yiddish. That I was not a Jew because I didn't obey her. Boy did I hate that. Because I knew what she was talking about. I knew she meant it in the same way as she talked about the Germans.'"[65]

Made to feel powerless by her children's disobedience, this mother became totally immersed in and overwhelmed by her rage at the Nazis. But there were no Nazis at hand – only her son, who absorbed the full force of her rage and who even as a boy understood that he was being treated as a surrogate German. This once again plays out a classic power-under scenario in which the mother, in a state of sheer subjective powerlessness, lashes out in a desperate expression of powerless rage which overwhelms and terrifies her child. Al in turn is rendered powerless and traumatized; he goes on to develop standard symptoms of traumatic stress, alternately dissociating – at nineteen "I was so numb you could have banged *nails* into me and I wouldn't have felt it"[66] – and acting out violently, driven by his own powerless rage.

Children of Holocaust survivors, in addition to bearing the brunt of their parents' traumatized behavior, also experienced the trauma of the Holocaust itself through growing up in families so saturated with its presence. Al told Epstein, "'Look, when they talk to you about the camps and the torture and they show you pictures of the dead relatives, they don't have to tell you they're angry. You *feel* it. It's in the air. But at the age of ten, what are you going to do with that?'" All that he could do was to absorb his parents' powerless rage: "'When they talked about the family I got enraged that they were all *dead*. That stands out in my mind. The fact that they were all dead, and I couldn't do *anything* about it.'"[67]

Another child of survivors talked to Epstein about traveling to Eastern Europe as a young adult and visiting the town in Hungary where his father grew up, evoking overwhelming feelings. He told Epstein, "'[W]hen you live after the fact, you feel an impotent rage. One of my fantasies today, something I still have at the age of twenty-nine, is getting my hands on a

Nazi. I think of all of them as one person who killed my family. I would like to torture him and mutilate him. It scares me when I have thoughts like that. It shocks me because I am not a violent person. In normal circumstances I can't imagine myself doing violence to any other human being."[68]

Even a generation removed, the unspeakable trauma of the Holocaust provokes "impotent rage." It overwhelms "normal circumstances," confronting the child of survivors – in a real sense also a survivor himself – with terrifying feelings for which he has no apparent outlet. Immersed in the experience of massive victimization, powerless to do anything about it, he fantasizes about releasing his rage against some tangible target who could absorb all of the blame for the horror with which he must live.

Male Batterers

Examples drawn from the experience of Holocaust survivors vividly illustrate power-under behavior in cases where the traumatic antecedents are unmistakable. But since the Holocaust created the most extreme types of trauma, these examples could be considered as unrepresentative of common experience. "Borderline" clients could similarly be dismissed as severely disturbed people who are too far toward the end of the continuum to indicate that power-under is a typical part of everyday life.

Male battering offers another set of examples which cannot be so easily dismissed in this way. As previously noted, Neil Jacobson and John Gottman in their book *When Men Batter Women* describe domestic violence against women as "a problem of epidemic proportions."[69] Jacobson and Gottman's study offers striking evidence of power-under in the behavior and

subjective experience of many men who assault women.

Jacobson and Gottman studied heterosexual couples who reported battering as a regular event in their relationships. The couples were observed having verbal arguments in a laboratory setting; during the arguments their physiological responses were electronically monitored. The men and women were also interviewed individually about their histories and their attitudes and feelings regarding their current relationships.

Eighty percent of the batterers are described as men who perceive themselves as victims even though they are perpetrators. Jacobson and Gottman label these men "Pit Bulls." Many of them also reported childhood trauma, with 51% having grown up in violent homes. Jacobson and Gottman observe that "when Pit Bulls enter into marital conflict, they become physiologically aroused. Their heart rates increase, for example…Pit Bulls *do* seem to fly into unintended rages."[70]

A man they call Don is identified as typical of the Pit Bulls in their study. Don reports growing up with a father who would beat him "so severely with a belt that he would beg for mercy," and who also humiliated him verbally.[71] As an adult, Don does not recognize himself as a dangerous person, even though he repeatedly and severely beats his wife, Martha, with at least 20 serious battering incidents in the previous year. Jacobson and Gottman note that despite the stunning intensity of Don's temper and violent behavior, "Don also felt emotionally abused by Martha, even though the incidents that produced these feelings in him were not abusive by any reasonable definition of the term. When Martha attempted to cut off a volatile conversation by asking, 'Can't we just drop it for now?' Don saw her question as abusive…Don would argue that Martha provoked a violent altercation by slapping him after he had slapped her."[72]

This portrayal of a typical batterer offers another illustration of an extraordinary gap between the objective power position and subjective experience of a traumatized person. Jacobson and Gottman write, "Perhaps the most striking memory of Don and Martha was the contrast between the way Don saw himself and the way he actually behaved in the relationship. Despite his obvious violence and cruelty, which we observed, he acted like a victim of battering, and we believe he really *saw* himself that way…[Don] felt so helpless in the wake of his explosions that he didn't consider himself responsible for them."[73] Another Pit Bull, Dave, is described as being in a state of "childlike helplessness…. A true Pit Bull, he thought of himself as the victim in this marriage."[74]

It is significant that Jacobson and Gottman view the Pit Bulls' subjective experience of victimization as valid, even though the authors steadfastly do not accept this as objectively accurate or as an excuse for the batterers' behavior. To a degree which is rare among psychologists and social scientists, Jacobson and Gottman openly state their values, sympathies, and political perspective: they view battering as primarily the result of patriarchal power relations, and their sympathies are with battered women. They display no bias which would lead them to draw sympathetic portraits of batterers, and they repeatedly contend that battering is a conscious choice which should be dealt with as criminal activity. Nevertheless, Jacobson and Gottman conclude that when Pit Bulls describe themselves as victims, it is an accurate expression of their subjective experience, not a conscious rationalization or manipulation.

While the sample of batterers was not randomly or scientifically drawn, the fact that a large majority of the men in the study were Pit Bulls strongly suggests that it is not rare for male violence against women to result

from power-under dynamics on the part of batterers. The violence of these male batterers is a function of much more than their traumatic histories and powerless rages, which could also be expressed and acted out in many other ways. Patriarchy places men in dominant roles, and there is an enormous amount of socialization which leads men to view violence against women as legitimate or justifiable behavior. What Jacobson and Gottman's study shows is how subjective powerlessness fits into this larger picture.

We tend to readily assume that dominant behavior is matched by subjective or conscious dominance. Pit Bulls illustrate a very different scenario: men who exercise dominance but are subjectively powerless. Their dominance is made more lethal by their subjective powerlessness; because their conscious intent is to defend themselves, and because they lack conscious agency, they have no sense of the effects of their behavior on its targets. In turn, power-under is made lethal by objective dominance. Where the raging of "borderline" clients may cause their treatment providers to experience distress and helplessness, the raging of men at their partners causes enormous physical and emotional harm. The difference is that because Pit Bulls are objectively in dominant positions relative to women, there are far fewer constraints on their expressions of powerless rage, which they act out in the form of abuse.

It is important to note that not all of the men in Jacobson and Gottman's study fit the "Pit Bull" profile. About 20% of the male batterers – labeled by the authors as "Cobras" – were in fact consciously dominant, and these men also reported histories of severe childhood trauma. Later in this chapter I will discuss the relationship between trauma and subjective dominance. For here it will suffice to emphasize that while subjective powerlessness and associated

expressions of rage are significant results of traumatic experience, they surely are not the only type of result. And power-under is not the only contributor to lethal dominant behavior.

Other Examples of Male Dominance Driven by Subjective Powerlessness

The tendency of men to exercise dominance from a position of subjective powerlessness can be found in many other social contexts. I recently nudged the bumper of the car in front of me while maneuvering into a parking space; a man got out of the car, came up to my window and announced that if I touched his car again he would beat me unconscious. One can only imagine the ways in which this man has been violated, particularly as a boy, almost certainly including gross physical brutality. The brutality of his own behavior toward me also betrayed his massive vulnerability. He was responding to his bumper being touched as an intolerable physical violation of his own person. Triggered, acted upon, made to feel powerless to an unbearable degree, he was lashing out with what was perhaps the only means available to him to try to defend himself (which of course does not justify or excuse his behavior). Here, in the midst of everyday life, we find the lethal combination of dominant behavior and subjective powerlessness.

I have heard men complain vehemently about being the victims of restraining orders and divorce decrees, and complain about how much power women have over them. Warren Farrell's book *The Myth of Male Power*[75] is a polemic for the position that men are powerless victims. Based on the core statement that "[i]n this book, I define power as having control over one's own life,"[76] Farrell describes men as pervasively powerless (having little control over their own lives) and victimized. Farrell is right when he argues that

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power over others does not necessarily indicate power over self; and some of his assertions of ways that men lack power over themselves are reasonable, for example that men are subjected to wartime drafts and military combat, or that men are socialized to accept physically hazardous work and to value income over the quality of work.

Other assertions are amazingly distorted, particularly his claims of ways in which women hold advantages over men. Farrell argues that life expectancy is "the best measure of who [has] the power."[77] He then cites life expectancy rankings by gender and race which not only show that white women on average live longest, but also that black women have longer life expectancies than white men – which by Farrell's logic would lead to the inexplicable conclusion that African American women have more power than white men. Farrell similarly claims that the intrinsic quality of "women's work" is significantly higher than the quality of "men's work" and that women are paid less because their jobs are more satisfying: "[O]ccupations which employ more than 90 percent women almost always have in common… characteristics mak[ing] the job high in desirability – so high that an employer has more than enough qualified applicants and, therefore, does not need to pay as much."[78] Farrell of course would be hard pressed to find this view verified by waitresses, cleaning women, receptionists, and other women holding "desirable" low wage jobs.

The core distortion in Farrell's book is his belief that because men don't have power to control their own lives, whatever power they hold over others simply does not matter. By defining power *only* as power over self, Farrell either minimizes or makes invisible men's power over others, sometimes waffling between minimization and denial of male dominance on the

same page: In one breath "[m]en's victimizer status camouflages men's victim status"; in the next, "the ideology of female-as-victim…blinded us to how the underlying issue between men and women was not the *dominance of one* sex over the other, but the *subservience* of *both* sexes to the real master – the survival needs of the next generation."[79] According to Farrell, "murder, rape, and spouse abuse, like suicide and alcoholism, are but a minute's worth of superficial power to compensate for years of underlying powerlessness. They are manifestations of hopelessness committed by the powerless, which is why they are acts committed disproportionately by blacks and by men."[80]

From this perspective, men's powerlessness is all that really matters; the exercise of dominance is so "superficial" that it hardly counts as power at all. On the other hand, any power that women hold apparently counts a great deal, and thus white women are implicitly seen as so powerful that they do not need to manifest powerlessness by resorting to acts of violent crime. This is power-under driving an analysis of gender relations and male behavior.

Perhaps the most telling statement in Farrell's book is his assertion that sex between people in unequal power positions is problematic because it shifts power to the person in the *subordinate* position: "When it is consensual, employer-employee sex has one of the same problems of parent-child incest: it undermines the ability of the employer to establish boundaries because the employer often feels needy of the employee. It is this same problem that is at the core of parent-child incest: parental authority becomes undermined because the child senses it has leverage over the parent."[81] From the constricted perspective of a victimized man, even incest can be seen as interfering with the perpetrator's authority by giving too much power to the

child.

The value of Farrell's book is that it so vividly demonstrates the distortions in our perceptions of power relations that follow when someone in a dominant position sees the world entrenched in subjective powerlessness. He cannot conceive of the power that a perpetrator holds over a child in the act of sexual abuse, or of the power that men hold over women in their many acts of domination. From the point of view of men as victims, it is only the ways that men are acted upon that have substance for Farrell.

While Farrell's statements are the views of a single author, I believe that they resonate with the often unarticulated assumptions of many men, and with the ways that men either rationalize their dominating behavior or excuse themselves from recognizing their own domination. The real powerlessness in men's lives, which I believe is particularly rooted in childhood trauma (as I discuss in Chapter Three), becomes a link in the chain of objective male dominance through the distorted lens of power-under.

Simultaneous Subordinate/Dominant Roles

Many of the examples which I have used so far to illustrate power-under present a *sequence* of oppression over time in which the historical traumatization of people currently holding dominant roles contributes to their oppressive and abusive behavior in the present through the acting out of powerless rage. In these cases people who were in subordinate roles in the past are in dominant positions in the present, but remain subjectively powerless due to trauma. Thus the situations of male batterers, abused as boys and dominant as men in relation to their female partners; and the situations of Holocaust survivors in positions of authority as parents or, in the example of Bruno Bettelheim, as expert and boss.

But in many other cases trauma survivors occupy *both* subordinate *and* dominant roles simultaneously in the present. Consider for example the position of many women who were sexually and/or physically abused as children and/or as adults, who have been oppressed in myriad other ways by patriarchy, and who in the present are in subordinate positions vis-à-vis male partners but assume dominant roles vis-à-vis their children. In these cases trauma may be both historical and the result of contemporary events, such as battering; and a woman's powerless rage may be directed at her children when her historical trauma is triggered, or it may be directed at her children in reaction to her contemporary abuse,[82] or her rage may be directed at her male partner but still affect children who are not its intended targets. In this kind of situation the survivor may act out power-under as both a subordinate and a dominant literally in the same breath.

This is illustrated by an example from my own history. One memorable weekend when I was about ten years old, my parents got into an argument while I was sitting at the kitchen table eating lunch. My father was also sitting at the table reading the Sunday *New York Times* when my mother asked him to help her with some household chore. He put her off and kept reading the paper; she persisted with demands for his help. This quickly escalated into a screaming match, with my parents freely hurling insults and accusations and swearing at each other. All this was taking place directly in front of me, my father still sitting across the table from me and my mother standing a few feet away.

So far the argument was following a familiar pattern, one that by the age of ten I had witnessed probably hundreds of times. But at a certain point my mother stormed over to the table, grabbed the newspaper that my father had been reading and started

tearing it to shreds. A screaming argument between my parents was a normal event in my family, but physical aggression of any sort by either of my parents was not. I had never seen my mother behave like this; I was startled, and I was scared.

My mother proceeded to stand in the middle of the kitchen and shred the entire Sunday *New York Times*. As she did this she was shrieking at my father, saying things like "I'll be goddamned if you're going to treat me like shit and then sit there and read your fucking *New York Times*." At points she just made wailing noises or grunts that punctuated each motion as she tore up the paper and flung pieces to the floor. She was in a frenzy, a state of uncensored and unrestrained rage. Stymied by my father's insistence on reading his paper, triggered to the core of her being by her inability to control the situation and by her husband's disregard for her needs, she exploded with powerlessness. In her state of extreme traumatization, she reached for the one thing that was literally within her grasp – the newspaper – in a desperate effort to assert some kind of control and to take some kind of action against the person in the room who was the proximate cause of her unbearable pain.

My mother's rage was plainly directed at my father, not at me. As a housewife in the late 1950s, my mother was unequivocally in a subordinate role in relation to my father. Her behavior that Sunday morning surely had a powerful effect on my father – it stopped him cold, ended the argument, and undoubtedly provoked all sorts of emotional distress, including his own feelings of powerlessness. But as the person in the dominant position, objectively my father had a range of options available to him by which he could respond to my mother's outburst to protect himself and to assert counter-control. He could still refuse to do what my mother had asked of him; he could leave the house; he

could buy another newspaper; he could drink; he could have an affair; he could threaten divorce. My mother's subordinate position relative to my father placed some limits on the impact of her power-under behavior upon him.

At the same time, my mother was in a dominant position in relation to me. While I was not the target of her rage, I was profoundly affected by it. As a child, I lacked the resources and options available to my father. I relied on my mother as my primary caretaker. For me, seeing her totally out of control was overwhelming and terrifying. I was trapped in the kitchen, in between my warring parents; my conscious experience was that I had no choice but to sit where I was, frozen to my spot at the table, and stay as still and quiet and inconspicuous as possible. It was impossible for me to stop the argument or stop my mother's frenzy, which is what I wanted and needed. It did not occur to me that I might try to leave the room or get out of the house. The one choice that I consciously experienced was to shut off my feelings as quickly and completely as I could – the traumatic response of going numb.

My mother was consciously trying to retaliate against my father, though she was so immersed in subjective powerlessness that she almost certainly could not gauge the actual effects of her behavior upon him. But I believe that she was completely unaware of how her behavior affected me. From a position of overwhelming subjective powerlessness, she could not conceive of herself as having enough power to harm her child; overpowered by her own rage and terror, she could not begin to see the effects of her behavior on her child. In a context which is quite different from battering or from an active assault against a child, power-under once again proves lethal when enacted from a dominant position.

Power-Under in the Struggles of Oppressed People

Power-under inevitably is played out in families and intimate relationships; because these are the settings within which so much abuse takes place and so much trauma is experienced, it is here that subjective powerlessness and traumatic rage are readily reenacted. The privacy of intimate relationships, the yearnings and vulnerabilities that they evoke, and the cultural acceptability of expressing rage and behaving violently at home and in private all conspire to bring power-under to the fore in this arena. These are of course also political events, both in the sense that oppression is enacted and that oppression is socially reproduced from one generation to the next.

But power-under is also a significant force in any number of public political contexts. There are many ways in which traumatic rage can, paradoxically, both spark and undermine the public efforts of oppressed people to achieve social change. Rioting is probably the most dramatic example, and also the one in which power-under is most clearly embodied. I think that rioting can be sensibly viewed as resulting from the mass triggering of collective trauma. It is an unfocused expression of suffering and rage on a mass scale, rooted in the powerlessness that people experience when they are chronically and relentlessly violated and when nonviolent or "legitimate" means of protest are perceived as futile.

Rioting is a collective lashing out in response to unbearable conditions, driven by unbearable pain. But like power-under at the individual level, rioting has no strategic dimension; it therefore is not a viable basis for sustained struggle.[83] Lacking a sense of agency, people who engage in rioting lose sight of the destructive impact of their behavior and in the same way lose sight of the humanity of their targets. In turn, unfocused violence cannot serve as a moral basis for

social transformations which would expand our capacities to value human life.

Power-under contributes to an array of broader problems which plague social change efforts in ways that go far beyond the psychology of rioting. These include our tendencies to demonize and dehumanize the oppressor; our reluctance or inability as oppressed people to also recognize our own oppressor roles; the competitions in which we chronically get tangled over the validity and relative importance of different oppressions, and the related and daunting problems we encounter attempting to build coalitions among oppressed constituencies; and the polarized conflicts and splintering that repeatedly occur within social change organizations.

Each of these tendencies is either shaped or exacerbated by subjective powerlessness and traumatic rage. When we are entrenched in the identity of victim, acutely aware of the ways that we have been acted upon and violated, it becomes extraordinarily difficult psychologically to recognize the humanity of our oppressors or to acknowledge the possibility that we ourselves could hold the kind of objective power, agency and capacity to do harm associated with oppressor roles.[84]

In our constricted moments of traumatic powerlessness and reenactment, the world divides into malevolent perpetrators and innocent victims; from that perspective it can become inconceivable that our oppressors may also have been oppressed, or that the suffering of other groups or identities could in any way compare to our own. This in turn creates imposing challenges and obstacles in efforts to forge coalitions between traumatized constituencies who may perceive each other as oppressors. Our need as traumatized people for proximate villains is also one of the factors that can contribute to the kinds of internecine conflicts

that too often erupt within our movements and stand in the way of efforts to achieve social change. In Chapter Four I will explore each of these issues at greater length.

Power-under can also challenge and at times completely derail democratically run meetings, which are one of the basic building blocks of progressive social change movements. On the one hand, subjective powerlessness can readily lead us to shut down, withdraw, feel silenced, and perceive that decisions have been imposed upon us without our true participation or consent. On the other hand, subjective powerlessness can lead us to hyper-participate in efforts to make ourselves heard or defend positions which we feel are under attack. While monopolizing air time is objectively a kind of domination, and undoubtedly is in some instances part of a conscious intention to control a meeting, I believe that there are also many instances in which people dominate meetings out of a subjective sense of victimization or helplessness, without any conscious awareness of their effect on others or on the capacity of the meeting to maintain a democratic process.

In its most destructive form, power-under erupts at meetings in the form of personal attacks, blaming, and related kinds of lashing out in which traumatic rage can immobilize an entire group. A striking example of this occurred at a meeting of a social change organization I belonged to when a woman who had attended several previous meetings asked for and received the opportunity to address the group. The woman spoke with intensity and urgency about her situation as the mother of a young child struggling to raise her son, survive on welfare, go to college, and effect meaningful change as a welfare reform activist. Then she complained that our organization was useless. She went on at great length, with palpable anger, about how

we accomplished nothing. She gave many examples of our political futility, and while she did not single out anyone in the group for personal attack, her speech to the group was deeply personal in the sense that she always came back to her fundamental complaint: "You people are of no use to me!"

The effect on the group was intense. Some people cried; some responded angrily; many of us were at a loss as to how to respond. After the woman finished speaking, a number of people did try to respond to her from many different perspectives, all of which she argued with or dismissed. The meeting ended in disarray, with nothing accomplished via dialogue and with a palpable sense of futility. The woman, acting from and expressing her own sense of helplessness, had rendered the entire room helpless.

Mutual Power-Under

Most of the examples I have used to illustrate power-under so far have focused on the behavior and subjective experience of an individual trauma survivor. While this has been useful to show what power-under means and how it manifests itself, it has also presented a somewhat simplified picture by sidestepping the ways that our powerless rages collide with each other. In practice it is common for traumatized people to interact with each other in all sorts of social and political contexts. This is true first of all because of the prevalence of trauma, which (as I have argued in Chapter One) is almost universally experienced in childhood and is also generic to oppression. In addition, partners of trauma survivors may experience "secondary traumatization" in which they are traumatized by the survivor's behavior. Dennis Balcom notes that "[t]he partner experiences the trauma indirectly or vicariously and comes to share the same, complementary, or parallel traumatic experience and

symptoms of distress as the survivor."[85]

When both partners are traumatized – either because both have trauma histories pre-dating the relationship or because one has been traumatized by the other in the course of their relationship – and both are expressing traumatic rage, each new expression of powerless rage can trigger the other partner's previous traumas and at the same time re-traumatize the partner in the present. This is power-under running amok. It is like a cancerous spreading of the original trauma, which duplicates and re-duplicates itself with each new instance of abuse and counter-abuse. Consider these examples, both drawn from clinical practice:

> Todd, an amputee who periodically needs to reenter the hospital for treatment of his stump, reexperiences the original loss of his arm, the physical and emotional pain of repeated surgeries, plus the loss of personal power and privacy as he reenters the patient role. Joan, his wife, berates him and states that she wishes he had died in Vietnam. Todd responds by withdrawing and consuming excessive amounts of street drugs, which reminds Joan of her alcoholic and physically abusive father.[86]

> The typical ritual argument for Lyle and Jill begins with an accusation of blame. One accuses the other of intentionally trying to control, harm, or dominate. Lyle immediately slips into his unresolved memory of being physically beaten by his parents. Jill recalls the neglect and abuse by her mother following the divorce of her parents when she was 7 years old. No one protected either of them. In the midst of their argument, Jill responds to Lyle as though he is going to violate or neglect her. Lyle believes that Jill is going to attack him physically.

Ironically, their fighting duplicates their family-of-origin experiences. Lyle neglects Jill by storming out of the house, and Jill frightens Lyle by throwing dishes at him.[87]

In both of these case examples, each partner is deeply entrenched in a victim state. Understandably, each of them can only relate to the ways in which s/he is being acted upon and wronged by the other. For each, their own wound is primary and is so large and so deep that it does not allow recognition of and compassion for the other's wound. Each is doubly wronged: because their partner does not acknowledge and soothe their historical trauma, and because their partner is abusing them in the present. Both partners are trying desperately to protect themselves and to give expression to their intolerable feelings. In the process, each behaves in a deeply uncaring and abusive way toward the other, further provoking the partner's victimization and rage, the expression of which in turn further provokes their own victimization and rage. Both partners are supremely powerless. Mutual power-under guarantees the most vicious lose-lose cycle.

At the level of large scale politics, the same vicious cycle is played out in chronic unresolved conflicts in which both sides routinely engage in terrorist acts. Each fresh atrocity committed by one side serves as the trigger and the justification for the next atrocity committed by the other side. Each side portrays itself as the victim of a vicious, dehumanizing enemy; each side claims to be acting in self-defense. Decades of conflict between Catholics and Protestants in Northern Ireland, and between Israelis and Palestinians, are prominent examples of self-perpetuating cycles of abuse and counter-abuse in a visible political context. They are examples of mutual power-under writ large.

I don't mean to suggest that every individual involved in these conflicts has suffered personal trauma

or has acted out traumatic rage. I could not possibly know this to be the case. On the other hand I do assume that many people – particularly ordinary people on both sides who are directly and deeply affected by bombings, sniper attacks, and raids which result in the killing and injuring of innocent people with whom they identify – *do* suffer personal traumas in these situations. In addition there are historical traumas of enormous magnitude: the Holocaust and centuries of anti-Semitism in the case of the Israelis; and for the Palestinians what Edward Said calls "the festering wound of 1948," when the Israeli state drove two-thirds of the Arab population out of historical Palestine, and "the collective punishment of 3 million people" since the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza in 1967.[88] Mass support for organized terror, to the extent that it exists, is almost certainly fueled by traumatic rage among other factors.

The pattern of terror and counter-terror also precisely replicates the pattern of rage and counter-rage that occurs between individuals when power-under prevails. Each side is in a constant, self-perpetuating state of victimization. Each side's terrorist acts constantly reinforce the other side's victimization and in the same breath provoke the other side's terrorist acts, which reinforce its own victimization. To each side, its own victimization is all that matters.

It is important to state emphatically that mutual power-under does *not* mean that both sides are in equal objective power positions. To the contrary: Israel is in a position of extreme dominance over the Palestinians; Protestants have similarly held enormous power over Catholics historically in Northern Ireland; and, at the level of personal heterosexual relationships, men are in structurally dominant positions vis-à-vis their female partners. But in the midst of these objective power imbalances, there is a bizarre kind of equality or parity

of subjective powerlessness. To the extent that power-under holds sway (which is surely not the case of all actors in all circumstances in large-scale political conflicts), the dominants lose sight of their objective power and experience the world as victims; and the subordinates are so entrenched in their victimization that they lash out in ways that are profoundly self-defeating. When both sides are driven by subjective powerlessness, they inevitably become locked in a lose-lose paradigm.

Trauma and Conscious Domination

While power-under is a significant and common consequence of trauma, it is by no means universal among traumatized people. Another outcome which is particularly worth mentioning is its seeming opposite, subjective dominance – unbridled power-over. Neil Jacobson and John Gottman offer clear evidence of this in their book *When Men Batter Women*, which I have previously cited for their account of traumatized batterers who are subjectively powerless ("Pit Bulls"). Jacobson and Gottman report that one-fifth of the men in their study, who were brutally abused as children, have become consciously and intentionally abusive as adults. These are male batterers who do not perceive themselves as victims and do not feel powerless; they know that they are in positions of power over women and consciously use their power, as brutally as necessary, to achieve their aims.

As already noted, Jacobson and Gottman studied couples who reported battering as a regular event in their relationships. The couples were observed having verbal arguments in a laboratory setting; during the arguments their physiological responses were electronically monitored. Stunningly, Jacobson and Gottman found that 20% of the men identified as batterers had *decreased* heart rates as they became more

verbally aggressive. "These men looked aggressive, they sounded aggressive, and they acted aggressively: yet internally they were calming down."[89] Jacobson and Gottman label these men "Cobras." They observe that the Cobras "knew that they were not victims, and they didn't care that [their wives] *were*."[90]

Based on interviews with the male batterers in their study, Jacobson and Gottman report that the Cobras "almost invariably came from childhoods that were quite traumatic, with violence manifesting itself in a variety of ways";[91] they found that the Cobras' childhoods were more severely traumatic and chaotic than the other batterers they studied. Jacobson and Gottman conclude that the "Cobras had come from backgrounds that more seriously crushed something very fragile that every child begins life with, a kind of implicit trust that despite all their limitations, parents have the child's best interest at heart."[92] Grotesquely dominated and severely traumatized during childhood, these men in turn grotesquely and consciously dominate others. In their case trauma has not produced a chronic victim state with outbursts of subjectively powerless rage; instead these men achieve a state of chronic dominance and the conscious enactment of power-over. "Cobras know that they are dangerous. They just don't care."[93]

Conscious domination as a response to having been dominated and emotionally crushed fits with the well known psychological concept of identification with the aggressor. Bessel van der Kolk writes that when traumatized people "have been victims of interpersonal abuse, they often identify with the aggressor and express hate for people who remind them of their own helplessness…Reenactment of one's own victimization seems to be a major cause of the cycle of violence."[94] Alice Miller similarly notes "the effort…to rid

ourselves as quickly as possible of the child within us – i.e., the weak, helpless, dependent creature…When we reencounter this creature in our children, we persecute it with the same measures once used on ourselves."[95]

There are many complexities not taken into account by sweeping statements about identification with the aggressor when it is viewed as a purely psychological question, and not also as a political question. Gender politics are obviously relevant: thus men are socialized to identify with aggressor roles in relation to women, children, and other men; whereas if women identify with the aggressor at all, it is likely to be in the much more circumscribed (but still significant) role of parent. Above all, it is the living presence of structures of oppression that puts us in positions to *act* as aggressors by conferring the objective power to do so and by legitimizing a wide range of aggressive behavior.

There is further complexity which raises an issue of considerable political significance: false consciousness. When traumatized people defend themselves by becoming consciously dominant, as is palpably the case with Jacobson and Gottman's Cobras, this inescapably leads to the notion of *unconscious powerlessness*. I think it strains plausibility to assume that people who have been viciously abused and dehumanized are able to resolve their internal experience of powerlessness through their identification with the aggressor. The alternative explanation seems straightforward and sensible: that these are people whose response to trauma does not allow them to tolerate any conscious awareness of helplessness or vulnerability, and that conscious dominance is a mechanism by which they dissociate from or split off profound feelings of powerlessness. The fact that the Cobras were the men in Jacobson and Gottman's study who had the most severely traumatic childhoods supports this explanation.

The concept of unconscious powerlessness is an

argument for a type of false consciousness: the Cobras and other aggressors with traumatic histories are not conscious of their own deep feelings of powerlessness, and they use their conscious awareness of power over others to shield themselves from something that is true and basic about their own experience and their own selves. That is an assertion by an outside observer that I know something about these conscious aggressors which they do not know about themselves.

This is the tip of a larger dilemma. Almost every aspect of trauma theory raises issues about conscious awareness and the unconscious processing or storing of traumatic experience. Basic concepts including dissociation (in all of its forms), constriction, freezing, hyper-arousal, and traumatic reenactment all involve the notion that trauma overwhelms our capacities to consciously process or integrate intense suffering and violation, and that a common response to unbearable pain is to block it from consciousness. All of the many issues that arise among trauma survivors involving blocked and recovered memories, as well as common experiences with the triggering and reenactment of traumatic material, offer strong empirical evidence of the tendency to "split off" intolerable suffering. *This necessarily raises the concept of unconscious experience.*

The difference between Cobras and Pit Bulls, or more broadly between traumatized people who are conscious aggressors and others who are subjectively powerless, is *not* that one group has unconscious trauma and the other doesn't. The difference is how tightly their unconscious traumatic experience has been sealed. In the case of Pit Bulls and many other survivors who are susceptible to power-under, traumatic powerlessness may be split off or blocked from conscious awareness at many points in time; but this defense against helplessness is not air tight, and

when we are triggered helplessness floods our awareness, overwhelming us with subjective powerlessness. In these triggered states, the conscious experience of powerlessness overwhelms conscious agency, leaving us feeling victimized and helpless despite our desperate efforts to assert control and despite the objective power that we actually wield. In the case of Cobras and other traumatized aggressors, conscious domination overwhelms subjective powerlessness, leading them to feel in charge and triumphant.

In this sense, power-under and conscious domination as responses to trauma are variations on the same theme. Both result from efforts to defend oneself against the overwhelming pain of helplessness caused by gross violations. And both involve the use of psychological mechanisms to block that pain from consciousness, with one variant doing so more completely (and at greater human cost) than the other.

The dilemma in my view is that *politically*, claims of false consciousness – as political theory and as an organizing tool – are profoundly undemocratic. Such claims set up a kind of elite class who assume the knowledge and ability to define other people's needs and interests for them. This involves a type of top-down politics that violates people's integrity and their responsibility to actively define their own interests, which is the starting point for democratic process and egalitarian arrangements of power. As a practical matter, most people don't like being told that someone else knows them better than they know themselves.[96] However valid the psychological description of unconscious trauma, and however much it resonates with the experiences of trauma survivors, I think we need to resist the temptation to inform or instruct people about their unconscious experience or needs as part of political organizing.

Ultimately the problem with false consciousness is not that it necessarily describes people inaccurately, but that it is used in ways that make invidious distinctions and stratify power. Some people ("us," organizers, left political theorists) assume the prerogative to describe others ("them," targets of organizing, the working class, trauma survivors) as unaware of their own true interests or feelings – and exempt ourselves from the same analysis, assuming that we know better about "them" and also about ourselves. The more sensible, and certainly more democratic, assumption is that we all have something to learn about ourselves – that "we" are as susceptible to false consciousness and self-deception as "them." We surely are more likely to learn something about ourselves from dialogue than from unilateral instruction.

The value of trauma theory as a political tool is not to instruct, but to be used as a basis for dialogue and common understandings. One of the reasons that the concept of power-under is potentially useful politically is that it does in fact speak to many people's conscious subjective experience. No one needs to instruct Pit Bulls that they feel like victims; they are saying that for themselves. No one would have needed to tell my mother that she felt victimized and powerless as she stood shredding the *New York Times* in the middle of our kitchen; she was all too aware of her powerlessness, whether or not she would have consciously connected it to traumas she had suffered in the past. People's consciousness of powerlessness is a starting point for dialogue, and I believe it can be an important one.

This of course has been recognized for a long time regarding "the oppressed,"[97] but it has hardly been recognized at all regarding people in dominant roles. Power-under is a tool which can be used to challenge our too-easy assumption that people's subjective states match their objective power positions – particularly the

assumption that people in dominant roles also *feel* dominant.

In this regard it is important to note again that 80% of the male batterers in Jacobson and Gottman's study subjectively experienced themselves as victims; and while their sample was not randomly drawn, this suggests that subjective powerlessness and power-under dynamics are far more common among dominating men than we commonly suppose. If we can also recognize that there is generally not a clear distinction between oppressed and oppressors – that when we speak of the subjective powerlessness of many people who have suffered oppression and the subjective powerlessness of many people in dominant roles, *we are often talking about the same people* – then we may be in a position to engage in dialogues about trauma and powerlessness that embrace the complexities of people's lives. This means not only other people's lives, but also our own.

Other Reasons for Subjective Dominance
There are many reasons for subjective dominance other than trauma and efforts to defend against unconscious powerlessness. Lethal dominant behavior is over-determined in a society organized around values of inequality, competition, material accumulation, exploitation, and domination itself. It would be grossly inaccurate to claim that traumatic experience is the sole or primary cause of dominant behavior and consciousness. For example, when Bill Clinton ordered the bombing of Yugoslavia, it seems beyond doubt that he was consciously aware of exercising power, and I do not believe that it necessarily had anything to do with trauma he may have experienced as a child at the hands of his alcoholic step-father. It is not my intention to try to reduce intelligent political analysis of power dynamics at any level to the question of people's traumatic histories. My goal is to *add* trauma as one of

many relevant factors.

There is a long list of factors which influence dominant behavior. They include over-arching societal values, cultural norms, institutional structures, and patterns and practices of socialization, as well as personal histories and the ways that each individual internalizes or reacts against her or his societal, cultural and personal history.[98] When parents hit their children, they may do so because they believe it is the right thing to do; because they believe it is what is expected of them as parents; because they are reenacting their own upbringing; because they are guided by common parental practices and don't know what else to do; because they have the size, strength, power, and legal right to do so; because they feel powerless and lash out; or because they consciously enjoy physically dominating their children. Many items on the list may come into play at the same time. When U.S. policy makers decide to use organized violence as a foreign policy tool, a strikingly similar list of factors may be involved, replacing "policy" for "parental."

Power-Under in the Aftermath of 9/11

The September 11 terrorist attacks created a mass experience of annihilation among Americans. A number of critical factors conspired to make this a traumatizing event of extraordinary proportions:

- The scale of destruction, in terms of both loss of thousands of lives and the utter destruction of the gigantic World Trade Center towers.
- The vivid and incessant television images showing planes crashing into the towers, the fiery explosions, the buildings imploding, smoke billowing over the Manhattan skyline, and so on. Media coverage made this event feel like a first-hand experience for almost everyone, amplified by the playing and replaying of the moments of attack for days and weeks

on end.

• The attacks came without warning. One moment life was normal; the next moment buildings were crumbling and thousands were dead. This created intense vulnerability and terror – what Ronnie Janoff-Bulman has described as the kind of shattering of normal expectations for safety and security in daily life that causes traumatization.[99] No one knew what would happen next, and a bone-deep fear of another terrorist attack continues to hang over the American public.

• The symbolism of the buildings attacked further heightened people's experience of vulnerability. The World Trade Center and the Pentagon were the vital centers of what was commonly perceived to be the U.S.'s financial and military strength. That these bastions of supposed strength could be devastated by a rapid succession of blows created the sense that there were *no* safe places, that everyone was exposed to attack everywhere, and – critically – that America's strength was not sufficient to protect its citizens.

September 11 impacted a public already saturated with traumatic experience, as I have tried to show in Chapter One in my discussion of the prevalence of trauma. Our mass encounter with annihilation was not only traumatizing in itself; it also was intensely triggering for many people who carry layers of festering and often unacknowledged psychic wounds.

Predictably, the result of mass traumatization has been what James Carroll describes as "social panic"[100] in the aftermath of September 11. The political and media establishments have framed public discourse in ways that consistently fan the flames of social panic and power-under. George W. Bush's depiction of our response to terrorism as a contest between "good" and "evil" unerringly plays to the tendency of trauma survivors to split the world between malevolent

perpetrators and innocent victims, though he and his advisers surely do not consciously understand the relation of their rhetoric to trauma. The incessant focus on larger-than-life demonic figures – first Osama bin Laden, then Saddam Hussein – has constantly reinforced people's sense of themselves as powerless victims at the mercy of an inhuman, malevolent Other. The media's handling of the anthrax scare and sensationalized reporting of potential biological, chemical, and nuclear terrorist threats has helped to sustain the public's sense of vulnerability and traumatic helplessness.

The events of September 11 have brought the micro and macro levels of politics together with unusual clarity. The mass experience that persists is that Americans are victims on the world stage. Intensely personal encounters with violation, helplessness, terror and rage are cancerously feeding the large scale political forces that wreak mass destruction and counter-mass destruction. As Patricia Williams recently noted, "much of the American public's enthusiasm for war" can be attributed to "traumatized emotionalism."[101]

The sense of victimization and subjective powerlessness that so many Americans understandably feel in the wake of September 11 stands in stark contrast to the overwhelming dominance that the U.S. actually wields globally in the economic, political and military spheres. The fact that the U.S. was shockingly vulnerable to a terrorist attack has in no way diminished our objective power over other countries, our control and consumption of global resources, our military clout, and the concrete impacts of our policies and actions on the lives of literally billions of people globally. Objectively, the U.S. remains the world's sole superpower. The terrorist attacks, far from undermining that position, have provided a pretext for

the further consolidation and exercise of power.

The aftermath of September 11 offers yet another illustration of the lethal pairing of subjective powerlessness and objective dominance, in this case played out on the stage of world politics. "Nothing more dangerous," Ariel Dorfman writes, "[than] a giant who is afraid."[102] It's not that most people are now unaware of the United States' position as sole superpower; it's that many people don't *feel* that power – and, even more to the point, don't feel sufficiently protected by the country's power.

I think that what a large number of people *feel* is that any day there could be a new terrorist attack, coming in any number of forms (biological, chemical, nuclear, and so on), that it could happen anywhere, and that they or their loved ones could be killed without warning and without any means of defense. That kind of sense of being acted upon, and the levels of terror and rage that it evokes, simply drown out the relevance or significance of American dominance for many people. In turn, the intolerable sense of subjective powerlessness that underlies traumatic terror and rage creates an exceedingly fertile base for popular support of counter-aggression that can be defined as self-protection and self-defense.

This is not to say that everyone is feeling powerless. Among the major actors in American politics, I assume that many and probably most are acting from a position of conscious dominance. Dick Cheney, Donald Rumsfeld and many other administration and congressional leaders strike me as being perfectly aware of the kind of power they hold (though I am not so sure about Bush himself). Paul Wolfowitz, John Bolton, Stephen Cambone, and several other Bush administration officials were co-authors of "Rebuilding America's Defenses," a strategy paper written a year

before the September 11 attacks which "reads like a blueprint for current Bush defense policy" and advocates a U.S. "global empire."[103] These members of the political elite are, in Jacobson and Gottman's terms, the Cobras of global politics: consciously dominant, eager to expand and maximize their power, and unconcerned about the human impact of their aggression.   What kinds of hidden suffering and unconscious powerlessness they carry, and the forces in their own lives that have cut them off from the humanity of the faceless others over whom they wield power, one can only speculate.

Nor do I believe that subjective powerlessness is the only factor that is shaping or driving public opinion in the aftermath of September 11. What people do with unbearable feelings of helplessness, terror and rage depends on their values, on their psychological and social resources, and above all on the political contexts that shape and legitimize public expressions of traumatic experience. Racism and xenophobia surely have been significant factors in public willingness to support war against Muslim targets. The media plays a major role regarding both access to information and defining the range of "legitimate" views. A slew of values and ideological stances associated with capitalism, acquisitiveness, militarism, patriotism, the importance of "winning" and "being number one," and so on predispose many people to reflexively support war.

On the other hand, there has been significant opposition to the war response to September 11, first when the U.S. attacked Afghanistan and to a much greater extent regarding the threat of war on Iraq. At this writing (March 2003), there is burgeoning public awareness that the Bush administration is using fear of terrorism as a pretext for invading Iraq, and there is a

rapidly growing and highly visible anti-war movement. The stunning emergence of a new and vigorous peace movement surely indicates that there is a segment of the public whose values, beliefs and political context create possibilities for responding to terrorism without embracing violence – and create possibilities to experience the annihilation of 9/11 without losing sight of the continuing realities of U.S. global dominance. The larger significance of this is that it is possible to respond to terror and trauma outside of the power-under paradigm.

But to the extent that there *is* popular support for war, I believe that it cannot be fully understood without taking power-under into account. This has critical implications for our efforts to build the new peace movement. The more we are able to speak to people's experience of vulnerability and powerless rage in the aftermath of the terrorist attacks – not instead of, but in addition to a critique of American dominance in the world – the better our chances of reaching people and persuading them of the wisdom of peaceful responses to terrorism. We need to keep speaking truth to power – but we also need to learn to attend to the truth of powerlessness, and attend to the relationship between subjective powerlessness and objective dominance in U.S. politics.

Implications of Power-Under for Building Social Change Movements

The aftermath of September 11 is one of many areas in which power-under is directly relevant to progressive social change efforts. I have argued that the acting out of powerless rage is a common and widespread feature of people's traumatic responses to oppression. This poses a whole range of challenges to our efforts to mount effective social change movements. It affects

our ability to mobilize rage toward constructive ends to the extent that power-under drives us toward destructive expressions of our traumatic experience. It challenges our ability to maintain and expand social change organizations and to build progressive coalitions, as power-under exacerbates the many forces which divide oppressed people from one another and leads us to direct our rage at one another. And it challenges our ability to negotiate a maze of interlocking oppressions in which most of us are simultaneously dominant and subordinate, oppressors and oppressed.

How to respond effectively to these challenges has to be worked out in practice, and must emerge from dialogue and, inevitably, from trial and error. But the first step surely is to surface the issue of powerless rage and to raise questions about its political impact. These are some preliminary ideas for movement building suggested by the analysis of power-under I have developed:

- *Acknowledge trauma as a political issue*. Aurora Levins Morales, drawing on Judith Herman, writes that "it is only in the context of social movements opposing oppression that psychological trauma can really be examined."[104] That is because the forces that lead to the minimizing, denial and silencing of trauma – social and political as well as psychological forces – are so strong and relentless. I am suggesting a corollary: *examining psychological trauma contributes to the capacities of movements opposing oppression to achieve lasting social change*. It is only by unmasking trauma as a major factor affecting social change efforts that we can develop the tools we need to address it on anything like a consistent basis.

The first step, both simple and incredibly daunting, is to name the issue. This means identifying the connections between every kind of oppression and the

traumatization of individuals on a mass scale. It means a willingness to recognize trauma in the lives of those we identify as oppressors. It requires the same kind of willingness to examine trauma in our own lives, in whatever configurations "we" are set off against "them." It means recognizing traumatic rage as a force of enormous political magnitude, and the posing of myriad strategic questions about the mobilization of that force. And it means recognizing the destructive face of traumatic rage, its role in the social reproduction of oppression, its impact on our social change efforts, and its place in our own lives.

- *Develop a common language and framework for identifying political manifestations of trauma.* The concept of "power-under" is a proposal along these lines. But a *common* language can only develop out of dialogue around an acknowledged issue which large numbers of people view as politically relevant. Until the end of the sixties, "sexism" was not a household word among activists, and there was no common framework for understanding patriarchy as major political issue – much to the detriment of social change movements that were riddled with male dominance. The emergence of the women's movement created a common language which enabled us to begin to address power relations between men and women in society at large *and* within left organizations. A common language is similarly needed if we are to address the political effects of trauma in any kind of organized and strategic way.

Power relations exist in every social situation. Just as we can only seek to constrain and transform domination if we are able to name it, we will be able to constrain and transform subjective powerlessness and traumatic rage only if we have language to name them. Terms such as dissociation, triggering, power-under, and traumatic rage – or other, better kinds of language

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that could emerge from dialogue and active grappling with these issues – need to be seen and used by activists as practical political tools.

- *Celebrate and support healthy responses to abuse and trauma*. The personal dysfunction caused by trauma does *not* constitute anything close to a full description of trauma survivors. Standing alongside powerless rage and the entire range of debilitating effects of trauma, most survivors display a stunning capacity for healthy functioning.[105] Helen Epstein describes her parents getting up each morning, their psychological resources somehow replenished, able to take on the new day with energy and vigor.[106] Bruno Bettelheim, in addition to being someone in a position of power who behaved destructively, was also a prolific writer who produced a body of literature that made real contributions to the sensitive treatment of disturbed children. Ellen Bass and Laura Davis in their classic book *The Courage To Heal*[107] offer countless examples of the human capacity to recover from trauma.

Recognition of trauma and of powerless rage as political issues *must* be balanced by the celebration of our capacities to resist abuse and to achieve constructive expressions of rage if it is to serve as a stepping stone toward taking effective action on our own behalf and in the service of social justice.[108] It is for that reason that that last part of this book by focuses on constructive rage as a framework for liberation strategies. Someone like Nelson Mandela, who is rightly regarded as a heroic figure for the integrity and psychological fortitude he displayed in the face of 27 years of brutal imprisonment, exemplifies possibilities for constructive resistance to abuse which I believe are within the grasp of ordinary people (as I discuss at length in Chapter Five).

• *Approach trauma strategically.* One of the reasons that power-under behavior can have so much impact is that it often seems to come out of nowhere. Traumatic rage can be triggered with astonishing abruptness, catching everyone off guard, including the person who has been triggered. We need to recognize that *trauma is a living presence within social change organizations*, learn how to anticipate eruptions of powerless rage in various political contexts, and learn how to planfully cope with them. This can happen at many different levels.

As individuals, we can develop personal strategies for recognizing our own triggers and for organizing our psychological resources and the external supports that will enable us to contain destructive expressions of powerless rage. This means that as individuals we actively take responsibility for what we do with our rage in our political work.

At the organizational level, we need strategies for *maximizing individual and collective safety* within social change organizations and alternative institutions. This can include specific guidelines for tackling the most vigorous disagreements through nonviolent dialogue, *without* engaging in personal attacks, vilification, or other types of lashing out which are produced by power-under. Linda Stout describes the internal process of the Piedmont Peace Project exactly along these lines (though without explicit reference to power-under): "We have developed guidelines for talking to each other. For example, no one can criticize someone else's work without offering a recommendation. We try to use only 'I' statements. And we remind people by putting our guidelines down on paper and creating new ones for each group before every meeting."[109]

The potential impact of trauma underscores the critical importance of having resources for democratic

process which are as resilient as possible,[110] and of developing our tools and skills for cooperative (or "win-win") conflict resolution.[111]   Activist support groups, which can be useful for all sorts of reasons, could focus particularly on strategies for mutual support to cope with our moments of triggering, reenactment, and powerless rage.

We need strategies to address the kind of mutual power-under that too often is played out between different oppressed constituencies, each claiming the primacy of their own victim status, at the expense of opportunities to build robust coalitions. Mutual power-under thrives on *mutual invisibility of the Other's experience of oppression*. We need to create safe spaces to listen to each other's stories of violation and oppression. That means both being able to speak freely *and* to listen freely. We need to cultivate ways to express suffering, and to link such expressions to an analysis of structural oppression, without personally attacking others who occupy dominant roles, and without treating every person in a dominant role salient to our experience of oppression as if he or she were our personal perpetrator. To exactly the same extent, we need to cultivate ways of listening to personal stories of victimization and oppression in which we recognize and acknowledge our dominant roles and the ways that those dominant roles are structurally related to individual stories of abuse. If our stories need to be told without personal attack, they need to be heard without self-justification or defense.

Finally, we need to develop strategies for *mobilizing the wellsprings of traumatic rage in society toward progressive rather than reactionary ends*. We need to make personal suffering visible through public testimony, on as many fronts as possible, and to show the links between trauma and structural oppression.[112] But we also need to understand the lures of vilification

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and demonizing as mechanisms that provide ready targets for traumatic rage and thus fuel right wing populism. To craft alternatives to right wing populism, we will have to find ways to talk to people who do not currently identify as "oppressed" about their experiences of powerlessness and rage. And we need to promote constructive expressions of rage, and to explain as clearly as we can why social equality can serve people's interests better than the intertwining of powerlessness and dominance.

- *Develop tools for understanding the complexity of oppression.* One of the central lessons of the politics of trauma is that the world does not divide neatly between oppressors and the oppressed, between perpetrators and victims. We need to articulate this complexity across a broad spectrum of political issues and social change efforts. Every oppressed constituency other than children includes adults of both genders who hit their kids. Every oppressed group other than women includes men, many of whom are physically or sexually violent and virtually all of whom practice some form of male privilege. Every oppressed constituency that includes white people is rife with racism. Every oppressed grouping that cuts across class lines is internally divided by class oppression.[113] Every oppressor category encompasses people who have been oppressed and traumatized as children. "Men" include victims of racism, homophobia, and class brutality. "Whites" include women, children, gay and poor people. We are *immersed* in complexities that place all of us in simultaneous oppressor and oppressed roles, and which fill our political landscape with traumatized victims *and* traumatized oppressors.

One of the ways that we can make the complexity of oppression more visible is to tell stories that portray the richness and depth of people who are too easily pigeonholed into a single political category. This for

example is what Eli Clare does in her splendid account of white working class loggers, replacing their one-dimensional depiction by some environmentalists as "dumb brutes" with a textured description of their desperate economic position, their love for the very forests they are destroying, as well as their racism, homophobia, and in some cases sexual violence.[114]

We also need to be able to tell our own stories with depth and complexity – to be able and willing to recognize the multiplicity of oppressor and oppressed roles in our own lives. This requires the creation of safe political spaces for personal exploration and disclosure. It also means finding ways to fit together our judgments of the oppressor and our compassion for the oppressed, since if we look hard enough we will find both within ourselves.

• *Put judgment and compassion onto the same page*. We need *both* critical judgment and compassion in order to respond coherently and humanely to the complex intertwining of oppressor and oppressed roles. Neither judgment nor compassion standing alone is adequate. Judgment without compassion can lead us to lose sight of the oppressor's basic humanity, paving the way for further cycles of dehumanization,[115] and to ignore or disregard the ways in which many oppressors have also experienced oppression and trauma. Compassion without judgment can lead us to excuse violent or destructive behavior by the victims of oppression, and to deny or disregard the ways in which many oppressed people also occupy dominant roles. It is only by integrating judgment and compassion that we can face the daunting political challenges posed by victims in dominant positions, by traumatized oppressors, and by the lethal combination of subjective powerlessness and objective dominance. This means facing the excruciating reality that an enormous amount of abuse is enacted by people who themselves have

suffered profound violations and have been crushed by oppression and trauma.

It does not follow that the abuse of power should be excused or forgiven, or that its political significance should be minimized. It does mean that abuse of power is understandable in human terms. We need to find ways to take clear and unequivocal stands against abuse and domination without demonizing or vilifying human beings who are the proximate agents of oppression. We likewise need to hold in balance our understanding of how people become victims of toxic social environments with the insistence that as individuals we are all responsible for our own actions.

This balancing of judgment and compassion is important not only so that we can frame strategies addressing "others" who are at once oppressors and oppressed, but also so that we can acknowledge our own dominant roles and our own capacities to abuse power. *Social change means personal change, not only for "them" but also for "us."* If "the oppressor" is a term of utter derogation or vilification, and the notion of "occupying oppressor roles" is construed as an attack, then emotionally we will defend ourselves against complexity. In order to reach critical judgments about ourselves, and to use them in the service of personal change toward equality and shared power, we need compassionate understanding of the roots and sources of our own dominant behavior.

• *Recognize the subjective powerlessness of people in dominant roles*. Ultimately, successful social change in egalitarian directions requires people to reject privilege in favor of equality on a massive scale and across the multiple continua of class, race, gender, sexual orientation, age, ability, and the exploitation of the earth itself. Power politics – the mounting of forces and counter-forces which determine social policies based on calculations of narrow self-interest defined in

terms of "costs" and "benefits" – necessarily plays a major role in struggles against ruling elites. But in a society in which *majorities* hold privilege along many individual lines of oppression, and a huge majority holds privilege of one type or another, victories won through the use of political force and coercion cannot possibly achieve fundamental and enduring transformations without corresponding changes in how people in dominant roles understand their own self-interest.

The power-under paradigm suggests that many people, driven by their histories of traumatization, *feel* powerless when they act out of their dominant identities. I believe that recognizing and addressing the subjective powerlessness of people in dominant roles needs to be an important part of our strategies to convince them to reject privilege in favor of equality. For example, in Chapter Three I will argue that boys and men are emotionally crushed by patriarchy, and that there are untapped possibilities for winning men's support for gender equality that must take into account how men are *both* traumatized and dominant.

This type of approach also applies to anti-racism organizing among whites, efforts to organize straight support for gay liberation, efforts to persuade people to reject class privilege and excessive accumulations of wealth, and so on. In each case we need to look at how people in dominant positions have been violated and injured by the very system that offers them crumbs (or more than crumbs) of privilege, and try to engage them in reflecting on their own felt experiences of violation and injury. This is not instead of, but in addition to, taking clear stands against the actions of people in positions of dominance that violate and injure others. What we can offer people, in place of a system that creates chronic subjective powerlessness and chain reactions of destructive behavior, is a vision and

program for social transformations that promote subjective empowerment (through expanded opportunities to control our own lives) and shared power.

The same set of considerations applies to the single most critical challenge facing progressives at this writing: the building of a peace movement in the face of the war response to 9/11. The grossly inaccurate depiction of the U.S. as a force of "good" in the world plays on and reinforces the need of traumatized people to see the world in terms of us and them, innocence and malevolence, victim and Other. In order to build the peace movement, we need to find ways to persuade people to move beyond those simplistic dichotomies – to recognize the complexity that Americans are both victims of 9/11 and dominants on the world stage, and that acts of U.S. global dominance increase our vulnerability to terrorism. In order to engage in this kind of dialogue I think that we need to take seriously, at the deepest possible level, the ways in which people have experienced victimization, powerlessness and rage in response to 9/11.

• *Use trauma theory as a source of hope.* The sheer volume of traumatic experience in our society creates an enormous potential for political and social unrest. The rage of oppressed people cannot indefinitely be kept at bay, and cyclically mass unrest does break out,[116] driven by economic and social dislocations that bring festering wounds to the surface and evoke public and political expressions of the unbearable pain that so many people harbor. The traumatic rage of Allen Ginsberg's early poetry – "America…Go fuck yourself with your atom bomb"[117] – written at the heart of the silent fifties, at the time appeared to stand at the farthest fringes of U.S. politics and culture. A scant decade later our politics and culture were exploding with expressions of this type of

outrage.

If even a significant fraction of the traumatic rage in our society were mobilized into a politics of resistance and active struggle for egalitarian transformation, it would shake the established order to its foundations. I think that to an extent this *is* what happened during the sixties. The fact that neither the sixties nor previous periods of mass unrest produced structural or revolutionary change says something about the resilience of the prevailing order, and also says something about the challenge of giving a constructive face to outpourings of unrest. But trauma tells us that the raw material for social upheaval is everywhere. If there is no guarantee that upheaval leads to lasting change, it seems reasonably certain that there *will* be a next period of mass unrest, and that it will at least create another round of possibilities for radical social change.

It is true that these will only be possibilities, and the destructive force of traumatic rage is one of many factors that can defeat us. That is a central point of this book. It is important to maintain hope and at the same time to assess our prospects realistically. One of our many tasks is to learn what we can about trauma and about rage, and to apply those understandings to the shaping of the new struggles that will emerge.

Chapter Three

TRAUMA AND GENDER

Trauma is commonly portrayed in the literature as an issue particularly affecting women through their experience of sexual abuse. To the extent that men are recognized as trauma victims and survivors, it is typically localized to male experience as soldiers and to the issue of combat shock.[1] In the trauma literature, and I believe in the popular conception of the issue of trauma, men appear primarily as perpetrators and women primarily as victims.

Feminist analysis offers a comparable dichotomy, framed in political terms: patriarchy is a system of male domination and the oppression of women. This broad perspective encompasses power relations at many different levels and subsumes a vast range of political, economic, and social issues, of which trauma is only one. It does however offer a focused lens for understanding male sexual violence against girls and women, and male battering, as specific manifestations of patriarchy.[2]

The uncovering of male violence against girls and women over the last 30 years has been of enormous social and political significance, as has feminist analysis of patriarchy. But I believe that there is a more complex reality to the intersection of trauma and gender – a reality which includes boys and men as trauma victims on a scale which goes far beyond military experience, and a reality which under certain circumstances includes girls and women as perpetrators as well as victims. In political terms, this means that men as well as women are oppressed by patriarchy, and that women as well as men have the capacity to act as oppressors – a capacity which is particularly driven by

the experience of trauma. My purpose in this chapter is to flush out this more complex account of how trauma affects both genders. In the process, I will use trauma as a focal point for developing a more textured picture of how sexism operates and how power relations play out in a patriarchal society.

The analysis of trauma and gender which I develop in this chapter has distinct and practical implications for building social change movements. Naming the ways in which men are traumatized by patriarchy creates new possibilities for building a pro-feminist men's movement, and for building awareness that gender equality serves men's interests as well as women's. An understanding that patriarchy creates conditions in which men are both oppressed and oppressors, and in which women under certain circumstances act as oppressors as well as suffering oppression, also creates the basis for a new kind of dialogue between women and men who are committed to gender equality. By this I mean a dialogue in which we maintain full awareness of systemic male dominance, but in which we recognize and explore commonalties of experience and interests between men and women which have typically been overlooked. Finally, an analysis which humanizes the oppressor, and which narrows the gap between victim and perpetrator, lays the groundwork for a process of social change that can yield humane results and can produce a political and social restructuring that humanizes power relations at all levels.

Nevertheless, there are three very significant dangers to the argument that men and women are both oppressed and oppressors. The first is that by focusing on ways in which boys and men are victims, the onslaught of male violence against girls and women will be minimized, or worse that it will be implied that trauma is of true or heightened significance because it affects males. The second and even greater danger is

that the identification of men as victims and women as perpetrators could serve as the basis for contentions of "reverse sexism" which would totally distort reality and could only serve the perpetuation of patriarchy. The third danger is that the notion that men as well as women are oppressed by patriarchy could obscure the real nature of sexist power relations, collapsing feminist analysis into the vague and probably useless notion that "we're all oppressed by patriarchy."

Naming these pitfalls is important but is not by itself enough to avoid them. There are specific, key aspects to the analysis I develop in this chapter which I want to emphasize at the outset, because I believe that they are pivotal to an understanding of trauma and gender which holds in view *both* the reality of male domination and the reality of male victimization:

• *Males are oppressed, victimized, and traumatized primarily during childhood*. Feminism correctly identifies boyhood as a period of training and socialization into the role of dominant and into predatory behavior. But childhood is also a period of immense vulnerability during which boys are oppressed and traumatized in ways and to an extent that is typically ignored across the spectrum of political and social analysis. While I will argue that some types of traumatization also occur during adulthood for men, childhood is the primary arena in which males are oppressed and traumatized by patriarchy. The victimization of boys stands alongside – and in many ways is critical for understanding – the dominant roles of men.

• *Childhood trauma endures into adulthood*. Almost 20 years ago I wrote, "A man who oppresses women may well have been oppressed as a *child* (an instance of ageism) in ways which have blocked his ability to relate emotionally and have set him up to compulsively dominate…But none of this means that as

a *man* he is oppressed by *sexism*."[3] My assumption at the time was that the oppression of boys has nothing to do with sexism, and that childhood experience has nothing to do with adulthood that is of significance for understanding oppression dynamics. I now believe that both of those assumptions are wrong.

One of the important things we can learn from the study of trauma is that childhood traumatic experience can and often does have lifelong effects, and this is as true for men as for women. The reality of embedded male trauma during adulthood as a legacy of childhood experience – typically unarticulated and unrecognized – stands alongside the reality of male domination.

- *Subjective experience does not necessarily match objective power relations*. I have argued for this point at some length in Chapter Two – and even more specifically for the possibility that trauma survivors can be subjectively powerless but objectively dominant in the present, a combination which I have described as lethal. The juxtaposition of subjective powerlessness and objective dominance is of particular relevance to the situation of men; it is also relevant to women to the extent that they occupy dominant roles, such as the role of parent. The power-under paradigm is a tool for making sense of the dual realities of victim and perpetrator, or oppressed and oppressor, which I believe patriarchy creates for men and, to some degree, also for women – and to do so without obscuring or collapsing our understanding of sexist power relations between men and women.

I will develop an analysis of trauma and gender by systematically considering girls and boys, women and men in turn as victims and as perpetrators. Some of this material is repetitive of ground covered previously (particularly in the section on prevalence of trauma in Chapter One); and all of the essential points dealing with girls and women as victims of male domination

reiterate well-established feminist understandings. I include this material in order to place my discussion of boys and men as victims, and of girls and women as perpetrators, into an accurate and balanced context. My aim is to chart how patriarchy in its totality traumatizes both genders, as well as how it spawns perpetrators – and to do so without distorting or skewing the basic reality that men hold far more power than women in society.

Reality is always more complex than an analysis of broad social and political patterns can convey. Assertions that girls are socialized to submission or that boys are socialized to predatory sexual behavior cannot possibly capture all of the individual circumstances of every child, including circumstances (such as anti-sexist families and sub-cultures) which may mitigate these broad social forces. Nor can a discussion of gender as an isolated issue capture what Aurora Levins Morales calls the "interpenetration" of different systems of oppression.[4] But broad social forces involving trauma and gender do exist and do have a massive influence on individual lives, and it is these forces which I try to depict.

The world of trauma is populated by perpetrators and victims; the world of patriarchy by oppressors and oppressed. But there is a larger universe of possibilities, including recovery from trauma and the capacity of people to share power and act as equals. When I categorize girls and boys, women and men as victims and perpetrators, my intention is not to reduce all experience to these categories, but rather to try to show how patriarchy shoves people in these directions. The entire point is to develop a map which not only charts the patterns of abuse and victimization created by patriarchy, but which also points toward the paths out of these patterns.

Girls as Victims

An accurate charting of trauma and gender must start with the staggering prevalence of sexual violence against girls. I have previously cited studies finding that between 27% and 38% of women interviewed report having been sexually abused during childhood, with the figure climbing above 50% when broader criteria for sexual abuse are used.[5] The experience of violation, profound powerlessness, devaluation and worthlessness related to being used as the means to the perpetrator's pleasure – all directly related to trauma – is thus a cultural norm for girls in the U.S.

It is a norm which also surely affects girls who are not themselves sexually abused, but who witness or hear accounts of sexual violence, or who in any number of other ways may become aware of the banality of predatory male behavior, and who therefore grow up in an atmosphere of insecurity and fear which in itself can be traumatizing. The personal, social and political significance of the enormity of sexual violence against girls cannot be overstated.

Girls also grow up subject to physical violence. The use of corporal punishment by parents on all young children – girls as well as boys – is nearly universal.[6] Murray Straus in his analysis of National Family Violence surveys reports that parents are only slightly more likely to hit boys than girls; he notes that "the unexpectedly small size of difference between boys and girls suggests that the principle of hitting children 'when necessary' is so firmly established that it largely overrides the principle of bringing up boys to be real men and girls to be ladies."[7] In addition, given the prevalence of battering,[8] many girls witness or in other ways become aware of male violence against women, most poignantly when their mothers are battered by their fathers, step-fathers, and boyfriends. I am not

aware of any studies which explore the psychological effects on girls of witnessing violence against their mothers and other women, but common sense suggests that this can be seriously traumatizing.

Witnessing the ways in which their mothers and other women are subjected to male brutality and dominance is also part of an overarching social reality which continues to socialize girls to submission. Despite real gains won by the women's movement, girls grow up in a society in which the political and economic elites are still overwhelmingly male; in which vast economic disparities between men and women remain; in which the media and popular culture are saturated with images and depictions of the sexual objectification of women; in which violence against women remains a cultural norm; and in which domestic power relations continue to display myriad acts of male domination to girls in the course of daily family life.

Patriarchy is in the air that girls breathe, creating countless concrete experiences by which they are demeaned and devalued in relation to their capacity to act powerfully in the world. It is true that feminism has to some extent created a social counterforce, present to varying degrees in the lives of girls, which gives them a message of equality and personal power. But for most girls the rhetoric of gender equality is contradicted by the continuing realities of male dominance and of socialization to stereotyped feminine roles.

As Meda Chesney-Lind observes, "gender-specific socialization patterns have not changed very much, and this is especially true for parents' relationships with their daughters."[9] The result is a classic set of mixed messages: be equal, but learn to submit; be peaceful, but expect to be the object of violence; be powerful, but expect the most important leadership positions to go to men; prepare for a career, and prepare to be the primary parent; be assertive, but be silent when you are sexually

abused by your father or uncle or neighbor. Rachel Simmons notes that "[o]ur culture [is] telling girls to be bold and timid, voracious and slight, sexual and demure";[10] Simmons' recent book *Odd Girl Out* chronicles the ways in which the impact of this mixed message both harms girls and leads them to behave destructively by distorting their expressions of anger and aggression.

I believe that the experience of growing up as a second class citizen in itself can be traumatizing. It is immeasurably more traumatizing in conjunction with the onslaught of sexual and physical violence that girls experience. The sexual objectification of women in popular culture not only socializes girls for adult gender roles but also, in the case of girls who have been sexually abused, mirrors and reinforces their actual traumatic experience. Contrived images of female beauty not only teach girls that their bodies cannot possibly measure up, but also reinforce the worthlessness, self-hatred, and dissociation from one's body which are common symptoms or results of trauma.

The constriction of girls' capacity to express or even consciously experience anger, one of the cornerstones of female socialization,[11] reinforces the splitting off of traumatic rage, leading to physical illness, depression, substance abuse, and the type of chronic subjective powerlessness which I have described as power-under in Chapter Two. Societal messages that girls cannot act powerfully in the world reinforce the powerlessness which stands at the core of traumatic experience.

Boys as Victims

Boys are sexually abused in such large numbers that, if the problem were acknowledged and the public health implications were recognized, it could easily be called an epidemic. A national telephone survey of

1,145 men conducted in 1985 found that 16% stated that they had been sexually abused as boys.[12] William Holmes and Gail Slap, in a 1998 review of 166 studies conducted between 1985 and 1997, state that "[t]he sexual abuse of boys is common, underreported, underrecognized, and undertreated."[13]   While there were wide variations in the rates of abuse reported in the studies, presumably resulting from differences in definitions and methodology, the *Boston Globe* reports that "Holmes said a review of the studies leads him to believe that 10 to 20 percent of all boys are sexually abused in some way."[14]

There is reason to believe that the actual incidence of sexual abuse of boys may be even higher, given vast societal pressures on boys and men to deny that they are victims,[15] and given that sexual touching short of intercourse which would be considered abuse if done to girls often is not identified as sexual abuse when done to boys.[16] There is in addition the uncharted terrain of covert sexual abuse, a term which Judith Herman uses regarding father-daughter relationships,[17] but which I believe is applicable to emotionally exploitive and sexually charged parental relationships with boys as well.

Regardless of findings in studies and periodic media reports of the sexual abuse of boys, the ideology and core social myths of patriarchy forge widespread denial and resistance to the recognition of boys as victims. Of course there are also social forces which lead to denial – historically massive denial – of girls as victims of sexual abuse; but with the breaking of that silence over the last 30 years, the notion of girls as sexual victims can fit into the popular conception and stereotype of girls and women as passive sexual objects. Not so with boys. The concept of victim casts boys into a starkly feminine role, and the role of *sexual* victim associates

them with both femininity and homosexuality.[18]   The social forces leading boys not to report sexual abuse are compounded and reinforced by pervasive unwillingness in our society to see it.

The sexual abuse of boys, despite (and in many ways because of) its invisibility, is as damaging as the sexual abuse of girls, with the same range and severity of traumatic symptoms. Neal King describes the effects of boyhood sexual abuse as "paralyzing confusion, lonely rage (often directed at one's self), suffocating shame and deep, unspeakable, private, seemingly unshakable pain…[T]he survivor can feel sentenced to a private nether world of secrecy, isolation, and powerlessness."[19]   Mike Lew lists over 60 psychological harms experienced by male survivors of childhood sexual abuse, including nightmares, flashbacks, fear, shame, anger, guilt, helplessness, sexual dysfunction, self-abuse, frozen emotions, addiction, feelings of unreality, and wanting to die.[20]

Boys are almost universally the objects of physical violence. As previously noted, more than 90% of all pre-school children are hit by their parents, and for most children corporal punishment continues at least until adolescence.[21]   While Straus, in his otherwise comprehensive account of corporal punishment in *Beating The Devil out of Them*, notes that boys are only slightly more likely than girls to be hit, he unfortunately gives no data on the severity of corporal punishment by gender. However, it seems likely that on average boys are beaten more severely than girls. Dan Kindlon and Michael Thompson observe anecdotally that "[m]any parents acknowledge that they use a more severe disciplinary style with their sons than with their daughters…Harsh discipline is presumed to help make a man out of a boy: he needs tough treatment to whip him into shape."[22]   It is also common for boys to be

subjected to physical violence from older and stronger boys.

In addition to concrete acts of sexual and physical violence, boys are also traumatized by what William Pollack calls the "gender straightjacket" which, from infancy and throughout childhood, teaches them to deny their vulnerability and to mask the full range of emotional experience associated with vulnerability behind the stereotyped persona of the strong, self-sufficient male.[23] This is the flip side of the same overarching social reality that socializes girls to submission and sexual objectification; and it is here, perhaps most poignantly, that patriarchy in the same stroke oppresses boys as well as girls. It is a largely unexamined fact of patriarchy, perhaps even more invisible than the sexual abuse of boys, that boys are traumatized by the very process that socializes them to dominance and to predatory behavior.

The expectation of aggressive male strength and aversion to "feminine" emotions is conveyed in the posturing and pronouncements of male leaders, in the images of men in all aspects of popular culture and the media, in the homophobia which continues to pervade our society, in the behavior and demeanor of fathers and other men in boys' lives, and in the explicit and implicit messages boys receive from parents, teachers, and other significant adults. The same message is also assimilated early and fiercely into boys' peer culture, in which boys routinely deride and shame each other for any vulnerable emotional expression which is construed as weak, girl-like, or gay.

This is what Kindlon and Thompson describe as a culture of cruelty: "Among themselves boys engage in continuous psychological warfare. Older boys pick on younger boys – dominating them by virtue of their greater size – and younger boys mimic them, creating an environment that pits the strong against the weak,

the popular against the unpopular, the power brokers against the powerless, and the conformity driven 'boy pack' against the boy who fails in any way to conform with pack expectations."[24] It is in the air that boys breathe that weakness, fear, hurt, sadness, the urge to cry, and the entire array of dependency needs inherent to childhood are unacceptable – not only to express, but also unacceptable to consciously acknowledge or experience as internal realities.

A vignette in Michael Ryan's memoir *Secret Life* illustrates both the communication of male bravado and some of its effects on a young boy who is not yet "toughened." He describes the recurring humiliation he suffered when his father would call him over to where he was sitting and then abruptly grab his wrists and start squeezing them. "The idea, he said, was to see how long I could keep standing, to see how tough I was. The first time I lasted about three seconds and it probably would have been less had I not been so surprised I was being hurt. I screeched for him to stop, which he did after I fell at his feet with my face in the rug."[25]

To the boy this was simply an assault at the hands of someone with overwhelming power. But his father presented it as a "lesson" in how to overcome vulnerability: "I was crying, my face was hot with tears, but he wasn't about to console me. He said I better get much tougher if I wanted to be a man, that as I grew up there was going to be plenty of pain, this was nothing. He told me how supremely important this was, that he wasn't punishing me but teaching me to be strong."[26]
Socialization to what Pollack calls the "mask of masculinity" traumatizes boys through discrete incidents, such as the one Michael Ryan describes, in which they are overpowered by sadistic adult behavior rationalized as "teaching a lesson," or in which they are

publicly shamed and humiliated for failing to adhere to the masculine code. Boys are also cumulatively traumatized by the constriction of their emotional life. Boys inherently posses the capacity for a full range of feelings and have deep emotional needs which are systematically denied and crushed by gender stereotyping in a sexist society. The result is a deep and invisible powerlessness which strips boys of the critical ability to experience and express emotions (other than anger, as I will discuss later in the section on boys as perpetrators) and strips them of the ability to develop mutually empathic relationships.

Pollack repeatedly uses the term trauma to describe the impact on boys of emotional straightjacketing and the "premature separation" which denies their need for emotional dependence and support.[27] Pollack emphasizes the degree to which boys experience shame for their perceived weaknesses and unacceptable feelings, in direct proportion to the ridicule, derision and shaming with which they are assaulted if they display vulnerability or emotion, or which they see directed at other boys who manifest vulnerabilities that they must desperately deny in themselves. Since shame is itself a sign of vulnerability, steeped in feelings of inadequacy and worthlessness, it must be denied as quickly and thoroughly as possible, or else (or in addition) projected outward onto others perceived as weak, inadequate, and worthless. The masculine code thus creates in boys a vicious circle of powerlessness, denial, shame, and further denial in which emotional life is literally crushed.[28]

Just as girls develop shame and hatred for their bodies when they cannot measure up to a scripted and bogus feminine ideal, boys develop self-hatred when they inevitably fall short (in their eyes) of the masculine ideal with its equally bogus depiction of strength and its

hyper-constriction of emotional life. Pollack catalogs other harms suffered by boys, including disconnection, intense isolation, depression, acting out, and self-alienation. Running through or related to many of these harmful effects is what can aptly be called *dissociation*, a classic symptom of trauma. Boys graphically dissociate from their feelings and emotional needs. Emotional numbing becomes a critical survival skill in typical male development – one which, like virtually all childhood adaptations to trauma, operates at great cost in the long run.

As with girls, male socialization not only traumatizes boys in its own right, but also severely compounds the effects of sexual and physical abuse. The shaming of male vulnerability leaves boys particularly unequipped to cope with or even acknowledge the powerlessness and extreme vulnerability created by sexual abuse[29] and physical brutality, and multiplies the shame which is commonly experienced by trauma survivors. Dissociation and emotional numbing are mutually reinforced by the masculine code and by the trauma caused by sexual and physical assault. Homophobia, which is central to the masculine code, can cause intolerable shame and self-loathing for boys who are sexually assaulted by men.

The constriction of emotional expression, which makes it difficult or impossible for many boys to process even mundane life events in healthy ways, leaves them helpless to respond to physical and emotional violation with anything but denial or displaced traumatic rage. The supreme irony is that the gender straightjacket of scripted masculinity, which above all else prizes strength and demeans vulnerability, renders boys emotionally helpless and magnifies their vulnerability to trauma.

Girls as Perpetrators

It is relatively rare for girls to engage in acts of serious violence. In 1994, 3.4% of all girls' arrests were for serious crimes of violence.[30] Crime statistics reflect an enormous disparity in violent behavior between girls and boys. In 1994, the arrest rate per 100,000 for murder and nonnegligent manslaughter was 0.5 for girls, 8.1 for boys; for forcible rape, 0.3 among girls, 12.7 among boys; for aggravated assault, 36.2 among girls, 151.0 among boys; for weapons charges, 11.7 among girls, 128.5 among boys.[31] Adolescent violence that reaches the level of legally defined delinquency is overwhelmingly a male phenomenon.

Nevertheless, it is not as rare for girls in our culture to act as perpetrators as many of us tend to believe. Meda Chesney-Lind observes that "[o]ur stereotype of the juvenile delinquent is so indisputably male that the general public,…experts…in criminology…and those practitioners working with delinquent youth, rarely, if ever, consider girls and their problems."[32] Chesney-Lind goes on to note that "girls and women have always engaged in more violent behavior than the stereotype of women supports; girls have also been in gangs for decades."[33]

In her research, Chesney-Lind found that girls' participation in gangs was a strategy for self-protection in the context of their experiences of victimization, including sexual violence. "For girls, fighting and violence is a part of their life in the gang but not something they necessarily seek out. Instead, protection from neighborhood and family violence was a consistent and major theme in the girls' interviews."[34] Chesney-Lind points to the complex interplay of victim and perpetrator roles in these girls' lives: "Either girls in gangs are portrayed as victims of injury or they are portrayed as 'liberated,' degendered

gangbangers. The truth is that both perspectives are partially correct and incomplete without the other."[35] There are other instances in which girls are violent outside of gangs and in ways that aren't necessarily reflected in crime statistics. Veronica Chambers, in her memoir about growing up in Brooklyn, recounts physical aggression between teenage girls as a routine event. "The older I got, the more fighting I had to do….It wasn't about right or wrong. It was about somebody wanting to kick some ass and your name working its way to the top of the list."[36]

Rachel Simmons' *Odd Girl Out*, a study of girls' aggression, includes a classic example of power-under driving violent behavior. Bonnie (fictitiously named), whose mother had "multiple violent relationships with men, including a husband who beat Bonnie and her sisters," describes herself as fighting repeatedly during adolescence. She says, "*I was not the aggressor. I protected myself…*" Yet she goes on to report that she and her sisters "knocked the shit out of these girls."[37]

Bonnie describes one incident in which she beat up her best friend because she had "hooked up" with Bonnie's boyfriend. Simmons quotes Bonnie saying, "I didn't want to…but people had known that I said that [I would kick her ass], and I had a reputation to protect. I was forced to. I had no choice but to put my hands on her."[38] Bonnie, like many of the male batterers discussed in Chapter Two, believes that she is a victim acting in self-defense in the very process of attacking others. Her perception that she lacks agency – that she does not want to beat up her friend but has no choice – is a hallmark of traumatic powerlessness.

Another way that some girls act as perpetrators is in their treatment of younger children. There is some evidence of girls committing acts of sexual abuse when they baby-sit;[39] and while this appears to be a rare

event, it is the nature of sexual abuse that it often goes unreported, making the actual prevalence hard to assess.[40] What is probably of more significance is the situation of teen mothers, among whom Murray Straus reports the highest rate of corporal punishment of all mothers of young children.[41] There is every reason to believe that other manifestations of parental abuse of power, such as arbitrary use of authority and verbal abuse, are also commonplace among teen mothers.

Finally, Simmons describes a culture of covert aggression among girls from white middle class backgrounds. Simmons writes that these girls "hurt each other in secret. They pass covert looks and notes,…turn their backs, whisper, and smile. These acts, which are intended to escape detection and punishment, are epidemic in middle-class environments where the rules of femininity are most rigid."[42] Clique behavior, exclusion and scapegoating are commonly used by girls to bolster their own social standing at the expense of targeted victims. Simmons explicitly identifies girls who engage in this kind of behavior as perpetrators and offers testimony of lasting psychological harm experienced by victims.

Here too, there are intricate connections between oppression, trauma, and abusive behavior. As Simmons notes, the ground rules laid out by patriarchy for girls who identify with feminine stereotypes preclude direct expressions of anger and create expectations for "niceness" and passive behavior which are impossible to meet. Covert aggression serves the dual purpose of maintaining the appearance of conformity with prescribed feminine behavior and at the same time giving some form of expression to inevitable feelings of anger, jealousy and resentment.

At another level, Simmons presents story after story of girls who have been victimized and in turn victimize others. "I always thought there was something wrong

with me," Simmons quotes one girl saying. "I was either a dork for being the victim or a mean, horrible bitch for being the bully."[43]   Another says, "For all the times I'd been excluded and cried, I wanted her to know what it felt like to cry."[44]   Simmons observes that girls who were perpetrators "framed their behavior in terms of avoiding injury and maximizing security. In other words, they bullied because they felt threatened, because in their minds they had no other choice."[45]

Though Simmons does not discuss it in these terms, in my view trauma screams out from the pages of *Odd Girl Out*. Simmons says of the girls she interviewed that "their feelings stew and fester before boiling to the surface and unleashing torrents of rage."[46]   She attributes this to the lack of opportunity to develop social skills for directly expressing anger and other negative feelings, which is surely one contributing factor. But "torrents of rage" are also indicative of the traumatic experience of girls whom we know to be victims of sexual and physical abuse in epidemic numbers, and who are pervasively traumatized by the systemic effects of patriarchy.

The kind of demonization that takes place when a targeted girl is scapegoated and excluded by other girls is likewise symptomatic of the need of traumatized people to identify proximate villains and to split the world into "us" and "Other."   Simmons' pages are filled with stories of girls who are driven by desperation for social approval, terror of their own exclusion, and powerless rage.

While the ways that girls act as perpetrators are important and should be taken seriously, there is little question that there are very significant constraints on girls' violence and other-destructive behavior. These constraints include the socialization of girls to submissiveness, along with the related tendency in

traumatized girls to "act in" by expressing rage through self-destructive behavior (such as eating disorders or self-injury) rather than through violent behavior.[47] Another related factor is the network of cultural norms, expectations and messages which teach that girls do not express themselves through violence, do not own or use guns, and so on.[48]

But it is also critical to look at the objective power that girls do and do not hold in order to understand both the limits on their destructive behavior and the ways in which girls do assume perpetrator roles. To the considerable extent that girls do not occupy dominant roles, they are simply not in a position to act as perpetrators, regardless of their socialization and regardless of the values and norms that they identify with. Abuse requires some degree of power over someone else. Without that objective power, girls are precluded from being perpetrators.

On the other hand, to the extent that girls *do* hold power over others, socialization to submission does not preclude abusive behavior. By and large there are two ways that girls assume positions of dominance: over younger children, particularly when older girls assume socially defined positions of authority as baby-sitters and teen parents; and over other girls who are physically weaker or socially vulnerable through scapegoating and exclusion. In some cases girls enact dominance via physical aggression, in other cases through the power of numbers by acting in cliques, and in other cases through both violence and numbers by acting in gangs.

When girls occupy dominant positions and roles, the combination of objective dominance and subjective powerlessness once again proves lethal. The related themes of traumatic powerlessness and self-protection run through many of the examples of girls acting as perpetrators that I have cited. This is the case from

girls in gangs who say that their prime motive is to protect themselves against family and neighborhood violence to girls in cliques who are desperately striving for social acceptance. As with many perpetrators in many contexts, girls are propelled by their own experiences of victimization and traumatic rage to act abusively toward other, less powerful children.

I think it is reasonable to conclude that when a girl holds power over another life, and when her socialization and cultural norms teach her that the exercise of dominance is acceptable and expected (whether through overt or covert aggression), she is no less susceptible than anyone else to the social and psychological forces which lead people to perpetrate abuse.

Boys as Perpetrators

None of the factors constraining abusive behavior in girls applies to boys. Males are socialized to dominant roles and predatory behavior, and it is no surprise that this manifests itself in concretely abusive and predatory behavior well before adulthood. Societal messages at all levels inform boys that male aggression and violence are expected and, at least under certain circumstances, acceptable. It is true that most boys also receive a variety of conflicting messages about violence and at times are punished for aggressive behavior – but the very means of their punishments are often violent and model the types of behavior they are being instructed are wrong. Homophobia teaches boys to fear, hate and attack "feminine" traits in themselves and in other males. Boys are specifically socialized to sexual aggression, objectification of girls and women, and predatory sexual behavior. Boys also learn, via everything from war toys and children's television to street behavior and rampant militarism, that the ownership and use of guns is a male prerogative.

The socialization of boys to aggression and dominant behavior is both paralleled and reinforced by the role of anger as the one acceptable feeling in the masculine emotional code. William Pollack notes that "studies show that…boys are pressured to express the one strong feeling allowed them – *anger*."[49] Pollack observes that boys learn to use anger to "mute…the full range of emotional responsiveness they would otherwise exhibit" and "use their rage to express the full range of their emotional experience."[50] Anger, as the one outlet for the pressure cooker of all other unexpressed and unacknowledged feelings, readily becomes linked to aggression and violence, which are already scripted as expected male behavior.

For many boys, it is not simply anger which is channeled into and expressed through dominant behavior, but traumatic rage. The very forces specific to patriarchy that traumatize boys – the shaming of "weakness" and crushing of emotional life – lead them toward aggressive and predatory behavior. The unacceptability of normal feelings which are defined as "weakness" in boys leads them to project and attack signs of perceived weakness in others; domination becomes a defense against intolerable internal vulnerability. As Pollack suggests, "it is through anger…that most boys express their vulnerability and powerlessness."[51]

Emotional numbing and the loss of capacity for empathic human relations – both specific aspects of traumatic stress for many boys – are core psychological ingredients or preconditions for dehumanizing others. This has been well understood for a long time by the architects of military training (though surely not through the conceptual framework or language of trauma), which routinely uses the brutalization and humiliation of young men as tactics to prepare them psychologically to vilify, brutalize and kill others

defined as the enemy without regard to their status as human beings.

The treatment of boys under patriarchy, while usually not as extreme as military training, commonly includes brutality and humiliation of "softness" and vulnerability. This generates traumatic rage, which in turn is channeled into socially scripted expressions of suitably "masculine" anger, aggression, and dominant behavior. Traumatic rage and the masculine script conspire to lead boys to disregard the humanity and core value of others defined as weak and feminine – girls, women, gays – or who are vilified as enemies, particularly via racism.

Unlike girls, boys *do* pervasively occupy and identify with socially-defined dominant roles from early ages. As males in relation to girls, as older kids in relation to siblings and other younger children, as straight-identified in relation to gays, and as males relating competitively to other males, boys emerge into any number of socially constructed roles from which to exercise power over others perceived or defined as weak and vulnerable.

The social construction of dominance is of considerable importance for understanding these male roles. While there are many instances in which boys are able to dominate because they are physically stronger, there are many others in which physical strength is not the basis for the power imbalance, such as sexual behavior between boys and girls where the boy may not be physically dominant, or may be physically less powerful, but there is an assumption of scripted sex roles which puts the boy in a dominant position. The socialization to dominance thus blends seamlessly into the social reality of dominant roles for boys. In turn, and critically, it is the existence of dominant roles which enables boys to channel traumatic rage and the other traumatizing effects of their

socialization into dominating and abusive behavior.

The result of all this is a long list of ways in which boys act as perpetrators, ranging from date rape, sexual harassment, and gay bashing to hazings, street violence, and in extreme cases the mass shootings which have occupied so much media attention – and which, as Gloria Steinem points out, are exclusively male phenomena.[52]

A vignette from Neal King's *Speaking Our Truth* captures the viciousness that many boys begin to display (in many forms) from relatively early ages. A male sexual abuse survivor recounts an "internecine gang war" in which "my cousins are asserting their power over me." When he tries to cross the side yard of the building in which they all live, he is confronted by three of his cousins, who block his path. "At the end of this confrontation Jimmy [the oldest cousin] will take me out behind the neighbor's garage and force me to suck his cock. I am electrified with terror throughout this episode, one which will be repeated with many variations, over and over…"[53]

The expression and assertion of power over others becomes critical to the self-esteem and masculine identity of most boys. In the above example it is expressed through sexual assault; in other extreme cases it is expressed through shooting and other life-threatening violence. But the most extreme instances of sexual and physical violence, which themselves are far from rare, stand at one end of a continuum of behavior in which others are used as means to the boy's ends.

Daily life is saturated with more mundane instances of boys exhibiting aggressive and intimidating behavior. This includes sexual behavior which may not be defined as rape or assault, but which is coercive or at best inattentive to the other's wishes and needs; social behavior organized around jockeying for power and prestige; and countless interactions in which put-down,

ridicule, and other ways of diminishing the other serve as the basis for the boy's sense of worth and value.[54] Kindlon and Thompson observe that "[a] boy lives in a narrowly defined world of developing masculinity in which everything he does or thinks is judged on the basis of the strength or weakness it represents: you are either strong and worthwhile, or weak and worthless."[55] It remains a societal norm for boys to behave in ways which do not regard others as anything close to fully human, and which to many different degrees are abusive.

What emerges appears to be a dual reality for boys as both victims and perpetrators – oppressed and oppressors – from relatively early in childhood. On the one hand boys are the victims of patriarchy. They are subjected to domination and brutality in the form of physical violence and, far more commonly than we recognize, sexual abuse. Through the mechanisms of gender straightjacketing and scripted masculinity, their emotional life is decimated and they are stripped of their capacity for emotional connection. In all of these ways boys are traumatized by power relations that are specific to patriarchy.

On the other hand, boys learn to identify with the aggressor and, long before adulthood, they assume dominant roles and act as perpetrators through the scripted, predatory male behavior to which they are socialized. Powerless before the specific adults and older boys who wield power in their lives, and powerless before the systemic sexism which imposes the masculine code upon them, they in turn wield power over anyone who is weaker and more vulnerable.

But in my view these two faces of male development – boy as victim and boy as perpetrator – are interrelated pieces of a single reality: the traumatization of boys is an integral part of their socialization to dominance. It is impossible to

understand the dominant behavior of boys without also understanding how fragile boys are psychologically, and the extent to which aggression serves to mask intolerable feelings, to deny and project vulnerability, and to express powerless rage. What looks from the outside like hyper-powerful behavior is internally a desperate effort to maintain equilibrium and precarious self-esteem which is built on a house of cards.

William Pollack notes the intense loneliness and alienation of boys whose true feelings and internal experience must at all costs be shielded from exposure to anyone.[56] What must be shielded is the fractured true self[57] of a little boy, wounded beyond recognition by baffling and overpowering social forces which do not allow him to cry or give any other authentic expression to his pain, but which permit and often encourage him to channel his rage into destructive and dehumanizing behavior.

It is the availability of dominant roles and the objective capacity to exercise power over others which enables boys to act as perpetrators, and the social scripting of masculinity which molds distinct types of aggressive and predatory behavior. But it is the internal reality of unarticulated and unresolved trauma which is the driving force that compels boys to act as perpetrators, and which so distorts their emotional life that they seek to meet their needs at the expense and through the abuse of others.

Women as Victims

Women are susceptible to the role of victim by history and by their current circumstances. Women who have histories of childhood trauma are vulnerable to the lifelong effects of that experience, which can include physical illness, depression, substance abuse, self-injury, eating disorders, dissociative disorders, other types of mental illness, traumatic rage, and

chronic subjective powerlessness. For women who suffer these long term effects, I think it is accurate and valid to say that they are on-going victims of the trauma that they suffered as children.

As adults, women continue to be the objects of male violence and to be affected by cultural, institutional, and structural sexism. Rape, sexual harassment, and battering remain common events; the banality of violence against women creates a threatening social environment for all women, whether or not they are directly affected. The objectification of women in popular culture goes on unabated. Men's participation in child rearing and domestic tasks remains minimal. Male domination is a continuing reality at every level of social, economic, and political life.

The gains of the women's movement have been in the arena of awareness and in the forging of new opportunities and new privileges for some women (particularly white middle- to upper class women), but they have not made much of a dent in the old threats from male behavior or in the stranglehold of patriarchy as a social system. Women are still at risk, on a daily basis, of being the victims of discrete acts of male violence or domination, and are still exposed to the systemic insults of second class citizenship imposed by patriarchy.

The historical and present-time aspects of victimization of women merge into a single, textured reality. There is a continuity and consonance of childhood and adult experience – a chronicity of being devalued and overpowered. For a woman who was sexually assaulted as a child by her father or uncle or neighbor, the catcalls of a man on the street are not a new or isolated event; they recapitulate and expand a lifelong experience of being treated as the vehicle for male gratification, and they are one of many factors which can make the historical trauma a living reality in

the present. For a woman who was not assaulted as a child and is raped or battered as an adult, there has been a lifetime of preparation for this event; there have been years of exposure to the objectification of women and to violence against women as cultural norms which have already left some kind of mark – a mark which is now gouged into an open wound.

In the face of the massive social forces that place women in victim roles, feminism is a counterforce which creates possibilities for recovery, resistance, self-protection, and safety. At the individual level, this is the agenda of feminist therapy, survivors' support groups, and battered women's shelters. At the cultural level, feminism has influenced the way a segment of the U.S. population lives our daily lives and takes seriously the values and principles of nonviolence and social equality. At the political level, social movements against violence against girls and women have given women a sense of power and solidarity. Aurora Levins Morales writes compellingly about the political importance of stepping out of victim role, what she calls "the need and obligation to leave victimhood behind."[58]

It is therefore important to say explicitly that women are not automatically or universally victims, and that victimhood does not have to be a life sentence. In any case victimhood, whether transcended or not, does not describe a whole person, but only one aspect of an always larger and more complex personal reality. It is possible and common for the same person to be both victim and perpetrator, as I argue repeatedly in this chapter and throughout this book. It is also possible to maintain pockets of psychological victimhood and to function in many aspects of one's life as an equal. There is a dual reality of oppression and resistance, both sides of which need to be named.

Men As Victims

The legacies of childhood trauma persist into adulthood for men no less than for women. While there are sources of trauma in men's lives – such as racism and class oppression – that are not gender-specific, on a broad scale it is the enduring effects of childhood experience which in my view make men victims of patriarchy.

The crushing of emotional life that takes place for boys has lasting effects. As adults, men do not somehow jettison their childhood socialization and gain access to a full range of emotional experience. All of the aspects of childhood that make boys victims of the male code – the constriction of emotional life, shaming and humiliation for any signs of weakness or vulnerability, alienation from and hiding of the true self, emotional disconnection and deep loneliness, and powerless rage – persist into adulthood on their own momentum. Nothing happens when a boy turns 18 or 21 or any age associated with maturity to reverse any of these aspects of male socialization.

To the contrary, the masculine code remains in full force. The same societal messages and expectations – from popular culture, from economic and political life, from other men, and from one's own internalized reality and identifications – reinforce for men all of the boyhood lessons about weakness and strength, about acceptable expressions of emotions, and about definitions of self-worth organized around scripted masculinity.

It is true that men have options, which most boys do not have, to step outside of the male code; and there are subcultures in which men, influenced by feminism and by gay liberation, have done so. But no man can opt out of his own history. Even men who consciously reject scripted male roles have to struggle with the emotional and psychological wounds that we carry

from childhood – wounds inflicted by a social system that taught us not to cry, not to show any feeling but anger, not to connect, not to experience compassion for others, and not to acknowledge or embrace our own deepest selves.

For men who do not think critically about scripted male roles, there is simply a continuity and deepening of destructive experience from childhood into adulthood. This means a deepening of every contour of unnamed and unarticulated childhood traumas. It particularly means a deepening of the intolerable dichotomy between forbidden internal weaknesses and impossible expectations for strength and masculine performance.

Men, who as boys have been acted upon to the core of their beings, who have had their emotional capacities devastated by forces beyond their control, who have had their true selves shamed and rendered helpless by the very code that teaches them that shame and helplessness are forbidden – the same men are expected and expect themselves to be actors in the world, to be in charge, to be tough and impenetrable. The only way to try to meet these impossible expectations is to bury the true self even further, to evade and deny all feelings associated with weakness and vulnerability, to attack what is construed as weakness in others – and thus to re-enact and reinforce the historical traumas. Men who do so remain the victims of their childhoods, and victims of patriarchy. They are quite literally at the mercy of forces beyond their control.

For men who were sexually abused as boys – perhaps as much as 20% of the adult male population – the enduring effects of childhood trauma are predictably exacerbated. Other particulars of some men's histories – severe beatings, sibling abuse, extreme emotional cruelty, covert incest, gay bashing, and so on – each add their own layer of unresolved

wounding to the traumas imposed almost universally by the male code. Men who are in the military, in prison, are gay-bashed, or are subjected to other aspects of male-on-male violence, are also traumatized in the present by various tendrils of patriarchy.

Superman as a Story of Unresolved Childhood Trauma

Superman is an enduring icon of popular culture, and the character stands as an idealized representation of the masculine code. He has superpowers, superhuman strength, is incorruptible and impenetrable (bullets bounce off his body), and uses his manly power for the common good: the Man of Steel who stands for truth, justice and the American Way.

The story line plays on themes of weakness and strength, vulnerability and invulnerability in ways clearly designed to capture the imagination of boys yearning to achieve the masculine script. Superman's secret identity as a wimpy reporter inverts the reality of male experience so as to offer the ideal solution to the problem of hidden, intolerable weakness and vulnerability: weakness is the facade in the persona of Clark Kent, mild mannered reporter; massive, unconquerable strength is the internal reality, the Superman insignia beneath the reporter's drab clothes. Little wonder that successive generations of boys have grown up identifying with this fantasy figure.

It is therefore interesting – and I believe of some cultural significance – that embedded in the Superman script there is also an uncanny depiction of childhood trauma. Superman was born on Krypton, a distant planet literally about to explode. Only his parents, insightful scientists, were able to face the reality of the impending apocalypse. Determined that their child (still a baby) will survive, they build a rocket ship, aim it (somehow) toward the distant planet Earth, and as the

rumblings signaling the death of Krypton begin, they launch the rocket with the baby bundled safely inside.

Krypton explodes, shattering into zillions of tiny fragments, as the rocket hurls through space and brings the baby as planned to Earth, where it lands in a remote field and is stumbled upon by the Kents, who find the baby and take him in to raise as their foster son. Because of differences between the two planets and the characteristics of their inhabitants, the child, who would have been normal on Krypton, has superpowers on earth – normal flesh on Krypton becomes steel on Earth, and so on – and grows to become Superboy and then Superman.

This twist of the plot is needed to explain the hero's superpowers – but it is also a story of childhood annihilation. The baby's world literally explodes. His loss is total, a loss of parents, family, place, culture, identity, and any semblance of rootedness. His loss is also absolute, with no possibility of return to a place of origin which no longer exists. Beneath the superhuman strength which the Earth grants him, there is a hole in the center of his life, a history of unspeakable loss and total devastation. Beneath the "internal" reality of invulnerability, there is an even deeper internal reality of primal trauma and terror.

Not only trauma, but unresolved trauma. Superman lives a life of supreme isolation. The splitting off of a secret identity means that he lives a divided, fragmented life, cutting him off from intimacy and any kind of meaningful human connection. He compulsively guards his true identity, fears exposure, and retreats for solace to his Fortress of Solitude somewhere near the North Pole.[59] These are scripted male defenses against suffering and loss.

But there is another twist to the plot, a force against which Superman's defenses are useless. Of the zillions of fragments of the planet Krypton, a small number

manage to make their way to Earth and land as meteorites. These rocks, called Kryptonite, are harmless to Earthlings, but to Superman they are lethal. When exposed to even the tiniest sliver of Kryptonite (which happens every so often when a piece falls into a villain's hands), the hero's superpowers completely unravel; he becomes weak, disoriented, and – at least momentarily – helpless; he is overpowered, at risk of being killed by this toxic fragment of his history. It is the chink in the armor, the moment of poignant vulnerability for the Man of Steel.

With extraordinary precision, the Kryptonite twist in the script portrays the drama of unresolved childhood trauma. The annihilation of Superman's early childhood, represented and embodied in a piece of rock, is unbearable. He can't afford to touch it, look at it, approach it, or face it in any way. If it is forced upon him it strips him of all powers, all strength, all of his idealized masculinity; the man of supreme invulnerability is revealed as supremely vulnerable at his core. A fragment of his place of origin brings the devastation of his childhood into the present, threatening to devastate him with his history of intolerable pain and loss. Kryptonite reveals Superman's childhood trauma, which has never gone away but has only been split off, and makes it a living reality in the moment. Superman, a survivor of childhood trauma, has been triggered, rendered powerless in the blink of an eye by the unbearable truth of his childhood.

This reading of the Superman script was surely not the conscious intention of the writers who developed the story line. I presume that the intention behind the Kryptonite twist was to add dramatic tension to the plot (and of course Superman always somehow manages to get away from the Kryptonite and to prevail against the crooks). But whatever the intention of its creators, the

trauma subtext is there, only a fraction of an inch below the surface.

I'm sure that too much could be made of this, and it is not my purpose to veer off into notions of a collective unconscious. What I think is important about the trauma theme in Superman is simply that it is so transparently there. It reflects and echoes the transparency of male vulnerability and the legacies of boyhood trauma, fractions of inches below the masculine surface of strength and dominance, which are visible everywhere in the real lives of men if you have the eyes to see them. Which happens if you have the language, conceptual framework, emotional capacity and compassion to recognize the suffering of men. Male trauma is not a hidden reality in the sense that it is subtle or difficult to understand; it is hidden because powerful political, social, cultural and psychological forces conspire to deny and obscure something which is actually quite obvious.

As a little boy, *Superman* was my favorite TV show, and while I understood the irony when I heard that George Reeves, the actor who played Superman, in real life committed suicide, I certainly didn't make any connections about male vulnerability. I read Superboy and Superman comics avidly and uncritically until I reached adolescence. As an adult I watched boys I worked with play at being Superman, and I simply saw it as a normal part of boyhood that I could identify with. As a pro-feminist man, for many years I could have ticked off an analysis of Superman as an emblem of sexism. It was only in the course of writing this book that the "obvious" subtext of childhood trauma in the Superman story came into focus for me. I think there is something instructive and hopeful in this: that the language and politics of trauma create a lens through which realities of male experience, at once obvious and hidden, become visible.

Trauma as a Path to a New Men's Politics

For most men there is not yet a social or political context which would allow or support the naming of the traumas in their lives, or which could nourish recovery and resistance. Aurora Levins Morales writes, "Only when there is adequate political support can we create a context in which we are able to hold the reality of oppression and a sense of our own power to oppose it. When that support doesn't exist, we avoid whatever events – in our own lives, in the lives of others or in our history – would lead us to intolerable truths."[60]

To the extent that feminism has touched men's lives in useful ways – and there are many men for whom this has not been the case – it has by and large moved men to think of ourselves as pro-feminist allies and rejecters of male privilege, but not to think of ourselves as having been deeply wounded by patriarchy. The concept of men as victims is taboo among men and women: for women, understandably, because men are the aggressors; for men, understandably, because the acknowledgment and display of vulnerability is above all else forbidden by the male code.

We are just beginning to see the breaking of that taboo in the emergence of literature by and about male survivors of sexual abuse,[61] and literature portraying boys as psychological victims of the male code.[62] The more we are able to talk publicly about trauma as a men's issue, the more it becomes possible that we could see the emergence of a radical men's movement rooted in *both* self-interest and principled opposition to male privilege. Such a movement could support the flourishing of men's consciousness raising groups and male survivors' groups. It could support the development of the functional and political equivalent of feminist therapy for men – one that would address the ways men are wounded by patriarchy and proclaim

values of social equality. A men's movement which would name patriarchy as a force that traumatizes boys and men, and in the same breath fully recognize the privilege granted to men by patriarchy and the roles played by men as perpetrators and oppressors, could for both reasons nurture a culture and a politics of men's resistance to patriarchy.

Women as Perpetrators

Patriarchy assigns child rearing to women, and not much has changed in this regard in the last 30 years. The primary roles of parent and teacher are still overwhelmingly assumed by women, and these are roles which in our culture contain very significant elements of dominance. Levins Morales describes children as a "constituency of the oppressed";[63] if children are an oppressed group, then their caretakers (women and men) form a constituency of oppressors. (I say this as a parent, and in the same spirit in which I recognize myself to be a member of other oppressor constituencies based on my race, gender, sexual orientation, and class background.) With dominance comes the capacity to perpetrate abuse, though it does not automatically mean that parents use their power abusively.

Up to a certain point in a child's development, adult power over the child is inherent in differences in size, strength, and physical and psychological capacities. But to a much greater extent, adult dominance is a function of the social construction of childhood and cultural norms for power relations between adults and kids. In a society organized around values and principles of inequality, those values are inevitably expressed and reflected in how we treat our children.[64] Society assigns women (and men in different ways) the task of dominating children, no matter how much this is couched in the rhetoric of love and nurture.[65] This is

the case despite the genuine love and good intentions that I believe virtually all mothers feel toward their children, and despite the subjective powerlessness that parents may experience in the very moment of abuse.

The clearest and most pervasive way that women act as perpetrators is by hitting their children. Murray Straus, in his review of a multitude of data on parental attitudes and behavior, reports that "[s]tudy after study shows that almost all Americans approve hitting children…[T]he General Social Survey of 1,470 adults found that 84 percent agree that 'It is sometimes necessary to discipline a child with a good hard spanking.'"[66] Though not broken down by gender, the 84% total necessarily includes a large majority of women.

Three decades of national surveys have found that parents report the actual practice of hitting toddlers to be "just about universal,"[67] with corporal punishment common for all ages of children. The virtually universal practice of corporal punishment again means that it is mothers as well as fathers who hit their children on a routine basis. In fact, Straus found that slightly more mothers than fathers hit their children, though he hastens to add that "if fathers had as much responsibility as mothers for the care of children, the rate of hitting by fathers would be vastly higher."[68] The point is *not* that mothers as a group are more abusive than fathers, but that most mothers take for granted their prerogative to physically attack their children in the name of proper child rearing.

Not only do almost all mothers hit their children; most mothers also hit their young children frequently. Straus reports that in the National Longitudinal Study of Youth, for which researchers interviewed mothers in their homes, "more than 7% of the mothers of children under six hit their child right in front of the interviewer." In addition, when asked if they had

spanked their children during the last week, "[t]wo-thirds of mothers of children under age six said they had found it necessary that week, and they did so an average of three times. If that week is typical, it means that these children were hit an average of more than 150 times during the year…"[69] This is a staggering volume of violence against children, perpetrated by women.

There are many other aspects of what Alice Miller calls "the power game of child-rearing"[70] – verbal abuse, derogation, humiliation, arbitrary use of authority, and so on – for which no statistics are available as far as I am aware. But common sense and even the most casual observation suggests that these, like corporal punishment, are virtually universal parenting practices in our culture. There is almost no social or cultural context which equips parents to distinguish legitimate from illegitimate authority. Levins Morales notes that children experience "systematic subjugation, humiliation and control – even those who were not treated with cruelty as children, who had loving parents with good parenting skills, still experienced arbitrary decisions, disrespect, patronization, ridicule, control over our eating, involuntary confinement."[71] As primary parents, it is women who routinely exercise arbitrary authority over children as a cultural norm.

The incidence of women sexually abusing children stands at the other end of the spectrum in terms of cultural norms, and probably in terms of prevalence. But we know that it does occur, both from the testimony of survivors[72] and from somewhat ambiguous survey data.

In 1984 David Finkelhor and Diana Russell estimated that 20% of the sexual abuse of boys and 5% of the sexual abuse of girls was committed by women.[73] Holmes and Slap, in their survey of 166

studies of the sexual abuse of boys from 1985—1997, found that "[l]arge -sample studies reported that 53% to 94% of perpetrators were men"[74] – meaning that 6% to 47% of the perpetrators were women or teenaged girls. This is an enormous range, suggesting that our knowledge base regarding women as sexual perpetrators is tenuous at best. On the other hand, given the enormous prevalence of child sexual abuse, if even a small percentage of perpetrators are women, this is still a significant number.[75] It is also reasonably likely that sexual abuse by women is under-reported, given gender-scripted assumptions of women as sexual objects. As Michelle Elliott argues, "Previous statistics indicated that child sexual abuse was rare, even by males. That has since been shown to be untrue. Statistics are based on what we are told and may give a false picture if some victims are not talking."[76]

We know even less about the prevalence of covert sexual abuse by women. Covert sexual abuse is a concept which Judith Herman developed to describe adult behavior toward children which is sexually charged and emotionally invasive and exploitive, but which does not involve overt sexual contact.[77] Herman identifies this as a type of father-daughter incest, but I believe that the term can apply equally to the behavior of mothers. I speak from my own experience, since this was my own deep experience of how my mother treated me. The core of my experience was that my mother looked to me to meet her needs at the level of a lover relationship, and in disregard of my needs and of who I was as a separate person. I can at the very least testify as a survivor that this type of abuse, with a woman as perpetrator, does exist.

We have no way of knowing how commonly mothers look to their children to meet the mother's primary emotional needs at the child's expense, because

(as far as I am aware) there are no studies which have posed this question. But there is reason to believe that it is not unusual.[78] There is a strong cultural norm and context for women to emphasize emotional connection, and in an egalitarian society, this would take an egalitarian form with children.   But in a society organized around inequality, and acting from a position of dominance, it is all too possible for mothers to seek connection with their children in ways which deeply disregard the child as a separate person with legitimate and basic needs for autonomy, self-expression, and a wide range of feelings which do not center on gratifying the parent.

If a mother does not tolerate and affirm her child's need to cry, to freely explore the environment, to make messes and cause disorder, to express curiosity, to direct anger and frustration at her, to display other feelings which are distressing or disruptive – because these and other expressions of the child's own self do not gratify the mother's emotional needs – then the relationship becomes abusive.   The abuse is compounded if the child's behavior is shaped around actions and expressions and types of self-control (such as early toilet training) whose purpose *is* to gratify the mother's needs.

There are numerous other social realities which lead mothers in a direction which spans from emotional abuse to covert sexual abuse. The social isolation of the nuclear family (whether with one or two parents) sets mothers up to look within their families to meet their deepest emotional needs, and it removes parents from the regulation and support created when children are raised in community. When a mother's needs are not addressed by her partner, and when she herself is the object of domination and violence from her partner, she can all too easily turn to her children to meet her primary needs. There are in addition the deprivations

and overloads of parenting, particularly the parenting of infants and young children, which typically leave parents – meaning primarily mothers – depleted and in drastic need of solace, soothing, and emotional caretaking.

The dynamic of power-under plays a central role in the vulnerability of mothers to becoming perpetrators with their children. I believe it is overwhelmingly the case that when women act abusively, it is from a position of subjective powerlessness. As a matter of socialization, and from lifelong concrete experiences as the objects of domination and sexual and physical violence, powerlessness remains a core psychological and social reality for most women.

This is compounded by the fact that parenting is rife with the potential for making the active caretaker feel powerless – particularly in the beginning stages when the tenor and content of the parent-child relationship take hold. Sleep deprivation, task overload, illness, a baby who won't stop crying or won't go to sleep – all standard events during infancy – can leave mothers feeling drastically out of control, acted upon, and unable to attend to their own basic needs for sleep, relaxation, pleasure, and love. Social isolation, a partner who is literally or emotionally not present (or who if present is demanding and abusive), and the lack of any meaningful recognition or valuing by society – also standard events for mothers – deepen the experience of powerlessness even further.

As kids gets older, power struggles become explicit when children test the extent of their autonomy and capacity to explore the world, and parents inevitably have to set limits. Many parents have a hard time setting limits in a way that is both caring and effective. Limit setting is an intrinsically difficult task. It is made immeasurably more difficult by the fact that for most adults, their primary exposure to parental limit setting –

their own upbringing – was both harsh and ineffective; and most parents have had little or no opportunity to learn more effective alternatives.

The result can be both parent and child feeling out of control: the parent because the child tantrums, disobeys, tests annoyingly, and in countless ways fails to conform to expectations of a "good," compliant child; the child because s/he is not able to explore, self-direct, and develop a sense of efficacy within a framework of safety and affirmation. "Parent" once again overwhelmingly means mother as the primary caretaker; and when the mother is already operating from a core psychological position of powerlessness, she is immeasurably more vulnerable to becoming overwhelmed and feeling profoundly helpless and out of control with her child.

In jarring contrast to the subjective powerlessness which women are so likely to experience, the objective position of mothers in relation to infants and young children is one of overwhelming, dominating power. It is true that a mother may not be able to make her baby go to sleep or stop crying, or to make a feisty toddler reflexively obey her commands. But she is in a position to inflict whatever harm on the child she chooses. Young children are utterly dependent on their caretaking parent for all basic needs and for their physical and psychological survival. Psychologically mothers are in a position to have an enormous impact on the child by giving or withholding love, affection, approval, affirmation, and so on.[79] Particularly within the context and cultural tradition of the isolated nuclear family, the power imbalance between parent and child could hardly be more pronounced.

The result is mothers who hit and in other ways lash out at their children physically; mothers who seek any available means to control their children; mothers who, in the name of love, seek nurture from their children in

ways which are exploitive and violating; and, at the far end of the continuum, mothers who overtly sexually abuse their children. All of this is done unwittingly, from the position of an adult who has been victimized, acted upon, and is struggling desperately for her own psychological survival and equilibrium – from a state of traumatic stress. Many mothers poignantly enact the dual roles of victim and perpetrator. In a society whose values overdetermine the domination and abuse of children, power-under surely is not the only reason that women act as perpetrators, but I believe it is one of the most important ones.

Men as Perpetrators

While the arena in which women act as perpetrators is largely confined to child rearing, the arena in which men act as perpetrators is as broad as society itself. This includes epidemic levels of physical and sexual violence against women and children; other predatory and dominating behavior directed against women and children; male-on-male violence; and a host of mundane behaviors organized around the assertion of male privilege and power.

FBI crime statistics reflect the fact that violent behavior is an overwhelmingly male phenomenon in our society. In 1994, men accounted for 89% of arrests for murder and nonnegligent manslaughter; 99% of arrests for forcible rape; 91% of arrests for sex offenses other than forcible rape and prostitution; 84% of arrests for aggravated assault; 92% of weapons charges; and 86% of arrests in an aggregate category of "violent crime."[80] It is true that arrest statistics do not necessarily reflect the actual rates of violent behavior – because innocent people are sometimes arrested and particularly because of discriminatory police practices in the arrests of African American men. But distortions in the FBI statistics are much more likely to be in the

direction of race and class than gender; and even if the statistics overstated male violence by as much as 5 to 10%, which seems improbable, this would be more than offset by the vast amount of male predatory and violent behavior – particularly sexual behavior and domestic violence – which never results in arrests.

Men – overwhelmingly white men – are also the architects and overseers of every type of structural and institutional oppression in our society. As politicians, diplomats, military brass, owners, executives, and holders of vast wealth, white men continue to constitute the power elite of our society. It is the men at the top who call the shots that name racism a thing of the past and decimate affirmative action, that slash welfare and subsidize corporate greed, that set policies which exponentially shift wealth to the top, that exploit resources and people around the globe, that destroy the environment, that build and market weapons of every sort, that tout "military might" and bomb convenient targets at will – and so on and so on. Each item in that long list, which could be much longer, sets in motion cascades of concrete activities by which individual human beings are devalued, exploited, violated, abused, and killed. The powerful men who call these shots, from Henry Kissinger to George W. Bush, are perpetrators writ large.

All of these realities about men as perpetrators are well known. It is particularly important to state them here in order to place the preceding discussion of women as perpetrators into perspective. The extent to which women act as perpetrators constitutes a small fraction of the full volume of abuse, aggression, and destructive activity in a society built on values of domination and which assigns dominant roles and privilege in vastly disproportionate numbers to white men. The ways in which women do act as perpetrators remain significant, both because each individual act of

abuse is of essential and lifelong importance to its victim, and because the oppression of children plays a critical role in sustaining and re-creating all types of oppression.[81]   But identifying women as perpetrators can only be useful if this is placed into the much larger context of a total gender system in which domination is primarily a male prerogative.

Of course, there are also enormous gradations in privilege and power among men, particularly based on race and class. The white male power elite in most respects lives in a different world from all other men; the power position of white professional-managerial men differs in many significant ways from that of African-American men and white working class men; and so on. But there *is* a common denominator, rooted in the historical practices of patriarchy which named women and children chattel and granted men ownership rights over them[82] – a common denominator which cuts across class and race, and which links Bill Clinton, Clarence Thomas, and millions of ordinary men who commit sexual and physical violence against women and children.

In the face of the overwhelming realities of male dominance – which mean staggering levels of battering and brutality and rape and sexual assault committed by men – the notion that men are victims as well as perpetrators seems intuitively wrong and counter-productive. How could such overwhelming power be rooted in anything other then dominance? How could it be understood as anything other than unbridled power-over?   And how could it possibly further sexual equality to portray men as victims, if doing so shifts attention away from the brutal realities of male domination?

In order to hold together the intolerable reality of men acting as perpetrators and the hidden reality of men as victims, we need what Aurora Levins Morales

calls double vision[83] – the capacity to identify and make sense of complexity and contradiction. In this case it is the complex and seemingly contradictory relationship between power and powerlessness that we need to hold in view. If it were true that we could recognize men as victims of patriarchy only by losing sight of men as oppressors, then it would not be worth the cost. But I believe that it is entirely possible to use a lens which expands the picture to hold *both* truths in full view – the truth that staggering numbers of men act as brutal perpetrators, and the truth that staggering numbers of men are traumatized by patriarchy.

This is particularly important because there is actually one integrated truth, in which the seeming contradiction between men as perpetrators and men as victims resolves into a single, complex, textured reality. Understanding the ways in which men are victims can deepen and amplify our understanding of the ways in which men act as perpetrators. "Victim" and "perpetrator" do not represent separate and unconnected pieces of male experience: the socialization to dominance *requires* the crushing of men's emotional capacities; and the experience of powerlessness and trauma, together with societal values and structures which place men in dominant positions, has a direct bearing on male violence, brutality, and predatory behavior. I have already argued that the powerlessness and traumatization experienced by boys are part and parcel of their dominant behavior. This is no less true for men.

In order to view men through the single dimension of power-over, we have to find a way to factor out the truth that all men were once children, that as children they were helpless and vulnerable and acted upon, that some were sexually abused and nearly all were physically abused, that their capacities for empathy and human connection were systematically uprooted, that

they were ridiculed and shamed for any display of vulnerability and any non-aggressive emotional expression. In order to factor out this truth, either we need to leave it out of the story, and describe boyhood as a simple path to power; or else we need to believe that childhood experience has nothing to do with adult experience, and that the traumas suffered by boys somehow stop at the door when they reach a certain age or a certain social standing. Either version achieves a simple understanding of male dominance by distorting reality and by mistaking a part – men as the holders of privilege and power, as perpetrators and oppressors – for the whole.

If instead we are willing to ask why and how men become perpetrators and oppressors, we are led back to the fuller reality which includes their childhoods, the ways in which they were abused and oppressed, and the deep and enduring traumas they have experienced. This is the type of question which Alice Miller asks in her extraordinary essay on Hitler's childhood,[84] and which Aurora Levins Morales asks in her extraordinary essay on torturers.[85] Both essays trace the roots of the most extreme acts of dehumanization to the deep suffering of perpetrators.

The point of recognizing the victimization of perpetrators is not to excuse, forgive, or in any way diminish the destructiveness of their actions, but rather to develop an accurate understanding of how oppression works and how it is sustained and re-created. If it is true, as Levins Morales states, that "[t]orturers are made, not born,"[86] then it is of the utmost importance to identify *how* they are made. We are surely in a better position to try to transform the systematic abuse of power if we have a fuller understanding of how it works.

As long as the recognition of men as victims is part of a larger description of patriarchy – one that includes

the full reality of men as perpetrators and of sexist power relations – it is an idea which subverts patriarchy and promotes gender equality. The notion that men are profoundly vulnerable, that they have deep emotional needs and are susceptible to lifelong damage when those needs are trampled, flatly contradicts the scripted male code. If men begin to become conscious of the ways that sexism has traumatized and oppressed us, and if we start to seriously believe that we benefit from the expression of a full range of emotions and from the capacity for empathy and for emotional connection, we could begin to dismantle some of the lynch pins of male domination.

It is also true that the notion of men as victims, used uncritically and divorced from a larger understanding of patriarchy, can be seriously counterproductive.[87] When men portray themselves as victimized by women who take out restraining orders against them, or believe that they are victims of "reverse discrimination" because women take jobs previously reserved for men, or feel globally threatened by feminism, they obviously are attempting to assert (or in their eyes re-assert) male privilege and dominance.

Men's contentions of victim status can all too easily blur into misogyny, with women's claims of any type of power perceived as threatening and oppressive. The extreme examples of this are the male batters whom Neil Jacobson and John Gottman describe as "pit bulls"[88] – men who feel victimized by women in the very process of physically attacking them. I think that there are many other men who are not batterers but who experience women's power as threatening and who, to the extent that they feel victimized by women, use this as a rationalization for various types of counter-attacks.

Underneath this distorted sense of victimization sit the real traumas of men's childhoods, typically unarticulated, unacknowledged, and festering. In that

state, male trauma becomes a bottomless source of rage, with women and children the all-too-available targets. Misogyny sets women up as proximate villains for many men; patriarchy creates dominant roles from which men act out their rage against women and children. In some cases men consciously assert power-over when they act as perpetrators (Jacobson and Gottman's "cobras" who, it is worth remembering, were the men with the most deeply traumatic childhoods in their study[89]); in many other cases they identify as victims and act out of subjective powerlessness; and my guess is that large numbers of men vacillate between the two.

We need to identify the links between the real ways that men have been victimized and crushed during childhood and the epidemic levels at which men act as perpetrators during adult life. We need to make these connections as vivid and accessible as possible, and try to engage men in dialogue about their inner lives and subjective realities. Above all, we need to develop a political understanding that when men act as perpetrators, it is part and parcel of our own oppression and traumatization, and that patriarchy as a *system* in the same breath gives men inordinate privilege *and* traumatizes men through its relentless effects on our emotional lives. This is an understanding which charts a path toward gender equality for men based not only on response to women's demands or on conscience and principle – though all of those factors remain important – but also based on a deep sense of self-interest.

Implications for Building Social Change Movements
In this chapter I have developed an analysis of trauma and gender which describes ways in which women and men are both victims and perpetrators, in the context of a total system which continues to place men in dominant roles. This multidimensional analysis

of patriarchy has a number of specific implications for building social change movements:

- *We should build a men's movement rooted in understandings of men as both oppressed and oppressors under patriarchy.* There have been many obstacles to the emergence of a robust pro-feminist men's movement in the U.S. One of the obstacles surely has been how to articulate in any kind of compelling way why the dismantling of male privilege and dominance would serve men's self-interest. I think that many pro-feminist men have understood intuitively for a long time that supporting gender equality involves aspects of self-interest as well as principle for men – but we have not been able to translate this into effective organizing with other men.

An analysis of how boys and men are traumatized by patriarchy could begin to fill this gap. There are enormous opportunities for consciousness raising among men regarding our childhood mistreatment, the trampling of our emotional lives, our experience of shame and isolation, and the entire range of suffering which the male code imposes on boys and men. The links between male privilege and male suffering can serve as an important organizing tool for dialogues among men about how acting as dominants and as perpetrators comes at our expense as well as at the expense of women.

- *We should name and oppose child abuse by women as part of the struggle against patriarchy.* While child abuse is an issue of public concern, it typically resides in the domain of human service professionals and is raised in a depoliticized context. To the extent that child abuse had been politicized as a feminist issue, it has been confined to the sexual abuse of girls by men. In fact, women are set up by patriarchy to act as perpetrators in the one arena in which they systematically hold power-over, as the caretakers of

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children. We need to look honestly at the reality that the overwhelming majority of mothers physically attack and in other ways abuse their kids, and we need to address this as a significant political issue in its own right and as one of the mechanisms by which patriarchy is sustained. As with men, we need to find ways to straightforwardly oppose the abuse of power by women while maintaining compassion for women who act as perpetrators. In turn, we need to articulate the links between women's subjective powerlessness and their susceptibility to acting abusively when they (particularly as mothers) are in positions of dominance.

- *We need a new kind of dialogue between progressive men and women who are committed to achieving gender equality*. I struggled long and hard with the preceding paragraph, trying to figure out how to articulate what I believe to be an important issue without seeming to dictate to women. As a man, I have no business telling the women's movement to add child abuse by mothers to the feminist agenda. But as a former child and as a trauma survivor who was abused by my mother, it ought to be possible for me to enter into dialogue with women about this issue. I think that dialogue is the key.

If we can develop shared understandings of the ways in which men as well as women are traumatized and oppressed by patriarchy, and ways in which women as well as men act as perpetrators, it should become possible for men and women who are committed to gender equality to openly explore issues and strategies together as allies and as equals. This needs to be done with full sensitivity to men's positions as dominants and with vigilance about breaking patterns of male domination – and at the same time with room for women and men to speak openly about the truth of our experience, and about the political implications we draw from our experience. In the very process of

creating this kind of dialogue, we are building part of the framework for equal power relations between men and women.

- *Treating oppressors as fully human helps to build more effective social change movements.* There is an exceedingly understandable tendency among trauma victims, and generally among women and men who oppose patriarchy, to view perpetrators and all men who identify with dominant roles as Others – as enemies who have nothing in common with "us." But that kind of view of an "enemy," no matter how understandable, limits the capacity of any social change movement to ultimately succeed in creating conditions of equality. Defining the enemy/Other as less than human, or failing to open ourselves to the full human experience of perpetrators and oppressors, sets the stage for new cycles of dehumanization and oppression when movements "succeed" in the sense of achieving political and social power. As Levins Morales writes, Either we are committed to making a world in which all people are of value, everyone redeemable, or we surrender to the idea that some of us are truly better and more deserving of life than others, and once we open the door to that possibility, we cannot control it…If we agree to accept limits on who is included in humanity, then we will become more and more like those we oppose. Do we really need to name the list of atrocities committed by people who claimed to act in the name of human liberation?[90]

By humanizing oppressors – both men and women whose abusive behavior has roots in their own traumatic experiences – we lay the groundwork for social change which can succeed not only in the sense of a shift in power from one group to another, but also in the sense of humanizing the ways in which power is organized and people actually treat each other. By narrowing the gap between victim and perpetrator,

between "us" and "them," we enhance our ability to expand the sphere of political and social relations in which there are neither perpetrators nor victims.

Chapter Four

TRAUMA AND OPPRESSION: IDENTIFYING AS THE VICTIM

Trauma is a psychological dimension of oppression. This is true not only in relation to patriarchy and gender, where the traumatic effects of oppression have been most widely explored, but in relation to all forms of oppression. James Baldwin's famous statement that "to be Black in the United States is to be in a constant state of rage" is an expression of the psychological reality that oppression is constantly traumatizing. In turn, the effects of trauma – particularly chronic identification as victim and powerless rage – create a range of obstacles to social change. These are obstacles which we need to identify and understand in order to develop more effective social change strategies.

Oppression, which is the systemic abuse of power, renders people powerless. In turn, powerlessness is the hallmark of traumatic experience. It is therefore inevitable that trauma will be pervasive in a society organized around domination, both because oppression creates countless discrete acts of domination and because institutionalized oppression in itself creates powerlessness and trauma.

This is the case with every organized system of privilege, power and inequality: racism, xenophobia, class oppression, ableism, homophobia, and ageism as well as patriarchy. The breadth and depth of domination in our society generates an extraordinary volume of recurring traumatic experience. Virtually everyone routinely runs up against forces on one continuum of oppression or another – individuals in dominant positions, images, written words, institutional

arrangements, cultural norms, laws, policies – which demean or degrade or devalue or humiliate or violate or arbitrarily constrain them, and in the face of which they have no sense of efficacy or control. This happens at work, at home, at school, on the streets, in stores, in the media, and in the macro-structures of economic and political power. The result is endless, chronic opportunities for people to experience themselves as victims and to experience traumatic rage.

Traumatic rage is both valid and inevitable, and identifying as the victim of oppression is an absolutely essential step in the political awakening of any oppressed person. But when people become entrenched in victim status and in the expression or acting out of power-under, traumatic rage defeats social change. This happens when our identification as victim prevents us from recognizing our own oppressor roles. It happens when unfocused expressions of rage lead us into acts of dehumanization. It happens when we succumb to competition over the legitimacy or importance of different oppressions, and to organizational in-fighting. At the other end of the spectrum, identification as victim creates vast opportunities for right-wing populism, which is a crucial mechanism for sustaining the status quo.

We have considerable discourse on the important concepts of "identification with the aggressor" and "blaming the victim." In this chapter I explore the political costs of static or chronic identification as the victim. This analysis in turn points toward strategies for making victimhood a transitional identity, for finding constructive expressions of traumatic rage, and for a process of change which can achieve liberation.

Identifying as Victim: Obscuring Oppressor Roles

One of the distinctive features of our social/economic/political system is the way in which it

parcels out privilege and power-over. While there are enormous concentrations of wealth, status and power at the top, there are also infinite gradations of economic, social and political standing throughout the rest of the society. The result is that while virtually everyone is oppressed in some significant way, almost everyone also has access to some type of privilege and to one or more oppressor roles.[1] This is an aspect of what Aurora Levins Morales calls the "interpenetration of institutional systems of power."[2] The kinds of complexity I have explored in Chapter Three on the continuum of gender – the ways that patriarchy creates conditions under which both men and women are both oppressed and oppressors – are mirrored and multiplied when we broaden our scope to include class oppression, racism, homophobia, ageism, ableism, and so on.

Consider for example the positions of:

- white women;
- men of color;
- white working class men;
- gay professional men;
- upper class children.

Each of these examples combines an aspect of privilege and an aspect of oppression in the situation of the same person. Thus the example of a white woman, dominant by race and oppressed by gender, or a man of color, oppressed by race and dominant by gender – and so on. But even these examples vastly over-simplify real life power relations and people's actual experience. Gender by itself can contain both oppressor and oppressed roles, as I have argued at length in Chapter Three. So can class, with hierarchies that create many middle-level workplace roles in which the same person is at once a boss and a subordinate,[3] and a social structure in which people who are nowhere near the top of the ladder learn to define their worth by their

superior standing relative to those on the lower rungs: professionals who look down on working class people, who in turn look down on the welfare poor. So can race, with rankings which assign different degrees of stigma to people in different "non-white" categories (Latino, Haitian, Asian, Native American, African-American, and so on) and "shadings" which rank people of color within the same group based on skin tone and based on the extent to which they adopt "white" language and cultural mannerisms.[4]

Each continuum of oppression, complicated in its own right, interacts with every other continuum of oppression in the experience and social standing of each person. Thus it is misleading to speak of a white woman who is oppressed by gender and dominant by race because so much is left out of the picture: a white woman of what class position? of what sexual orientation? of what age? of what physical ability? of what ethnic background? A white welfare mother and Hillary Clinton are both "white women." A woman who is a WASP country club member and a Jewish woman who is a Holocaust survivor are both "white women."

The same kinds of questions need to be asked about people in each of the categories I listed before – and about anyone – if we want to locate people on a political map that charts the full realities of their power relations and social standing, their experiences of privilege and their experiences of victimization. A man of color of what class background and current class position? Of what sexual orientation? A professional gay man of what race and age and physical ability? By speaking only of "women" or "people of color" or "gay people" or "trauma survivors" we too readily narrow our focus to the ways in which people are oppressed and victimized. Broadening the focus to look at where each person stands on each continuum of oppression

enormously complicates the picture. But it is a complexity which is indispensable if we are to understand the totality of oppression and assess the obstacles we face in achieving political and social change.[5]

A narrow focus also too readily identifies one-dimensional enemies and oppressors. Eli Clare illustrates this nicely in her discussion of loggers in the Pacific Northwest.[6] Environmentalists have portrayed loggers as enemies in their struggle to save old growth forests and endangered species – as accomplices of the timber companies whose narrow interests are captured in the bumper sticker reading, "Save a logger, kill a spotted owl."[7] Clare also notes the racism, homophobia, and sexual violence prevalent among the white male loggers. Yet she insists on the complexity of these men and their situation, which not only includes their economic exploitation as workers, their poverty, and their desperation when their jobs are threatened, but also their intimate knowledge of the forests and the deep connection that many of them have with their threatened environment:

> A few of these loggers and mill workers write about their work to complete assignments my mother gives them [at the community college]. She says some of the essays break her heart, essays written by men who love the woods and the steep hills of the Siskiyous, who fell and buck the trees, and know the tension between their work and their love. They also know the two aren't diametrically opposed. Their long days outside, the years of trudging up and down impossibly steep hills, chainsaws balanced over their shoulders, feed their love. And in turn their joy at the morning fog lifting off the trees, the sound of woodpeckers and gray squirrels, bolsters their willingness to do the dangerous,

body-breaking work of logging.   Other essays make my mother grind her teeth: pieces about conquest, the analogy between felling a 300-year-old Douglas fir and raping a woman only thinly veiled, both acts to be bragged about…All these loggers are fighting poverty, struggling to pay the rent, the mortgage, the medical bills on a paycheck that has vanished.[8]

Looked at either from the point of view of oppressed constituencies or oppressor constituencies, simple distinctions between "us" and "them" – between dominant and subordinate, perpetrator and victim, ally and enemy, oppressor and oppressed – continuously break down. In their place we have a maze of criss-crossing, interpenetrating oppressions: loggers who love and destroy forests; exploited white workers who are racist and homophobic; victims of racism who commit acts of sexual domination; victims of patriarchy who have class and race privilege; abused women who abuse children; white gay men who hold class, race, and gender privilege; white male executives whose emotional capacities have been decimated by abuse and who in turn practice domination economically, politically, and socially at all levels.

Within this maze, how people identify is of crucial importance for maintaining the existing social/political/economic order or for creating possibilities for transformation. When people identify with their privilege – or with their aspirations for privilege – it is obviously a major factor that legitimizes and perpetuates the status quo. We probably see this most clearly in the case of class and wealth, where dreams of upward mobility and identification with the rich have always been driving forces in American economic life.

But there are also prevailing tendencies for people to identify with privilege and with dominant roles along

every continuum of oppression – surely among the people who occupy the dominant positions, and also in significant ways among oppressed constituencies. Thus not only do white people identify with all of the spoken and unspoken superiorities attributed to "whiteness" by racism; but people of color learn that virtually any kind of social, economic, or political success in the dominant culture requires that they assume white language,[9] mannerisms, and cultural assumptions. And thus the position of women who aspire to succeed by climbing into the traditional male roles of boss and breadwinner.

What is crucial about this kind of identification with privilege and power is that it does *not* mean consciously identifying as an oppressor. Doris Lessing observes that "the ruling strata of a country, a state, are identified with their own propaganda…they are identified with their own justifications for being in power, always self-deceiving ones. When has any ruler said 'I am a wicked tyrant'?"[10] I believe that Lessing's observation applies not only to people at the top, but also to ordinary people who hold crumbs (of various sizes) of power-over and identify with the system that allocates some degree of power and status and wealth to them. Most white people and most heterosexuals and most able-bodied people and most people who hold wealth beyond their needs simply think of themselves as normal, and think of their privileges as something that they have earned or that they deserve or that give them some modicum of social value and self-respect. People from oppressed constituencies who aspire to privilege and dominance surely do not think in terms of aspiring to become oppressors, but in terms of achieving statuses and positions from which they have been categorically excluded.

At the other end of the spectrum, when people identify as victims of oppression, it can all too easily block their willingness or ability to recognize the ways

in which they also hold privilege and dominant roles. Levins Morales writes that in her organizing efforts, "I kept encountering the same desperate refusal of most people to examine the places in their lives where they were privileged. The easier place by far was the place of rage…[t]he high moral ground of the righteously angry victim…"11

There is an over-abundance of reasons why this would be so. To begin with, it is difficult for any of us to acknowledge in ourselves statuses and categories that carry pejorative labels and that we associate with our political enemies: privileged, dominant, oppressor. Or even more pointedly: racist, sexist, homophobe. It is true that for a long time it has been conventional wisdom in white anti-racism organizing and education that all white people, no matter how consciously committed to racial equality, carry racist attitudes and assumptions. But I don't think this has been widely accepted or internalized, even among progressive white people, or that it has transferred to any significant extent to other continua of oppression – such as men acknowledging their sexism or people acknowledging and examining their class privilege.   So the understandable tendency is that when you try to talk to people about their racism or privilege or dominant roles, they feel attacked and respond by defending themselves.

It is equally understandable that people who do identify as oppressed become preoccupied with their conscious experience of oppression. The recognition that you belong to a constituency which is systemically and institutionally treated as inferior – and that your inferior status is constantly reflected and re-enacted in your treatment by members of the dominant group in the course of daily life – creates a psychological reality of enormous magnitude. It is a reality that does not easily integrate with an awareness that there are also

ways that you have access to privilege and dominance, and that you have the capacity and means to act as an oppressor.

There is also virtually no political or cultural context to support people to identify as both oppressed and oppressors, as both subordinates and dominants, as both victimized and privileged. To the contrary, our culture and our politics are saturated with the tendency to split and dichotomize, to think in terms of enemies and Others, and to define our identities and identifications without consciousness of complexity.

This tendency to dichotomize and to see the world in terms of identified victims and enemies, or as neatly divided into oppressed people and oppressors, is significantly compounded by the effects of trauma. The essence of victimization is that you are acted upon against your will. In the moment of trauma, as victims we experience no agency, no capacity to act effectively. We are forced to rely on desperate survival mechanisms, such as "freezing"[12] and dissociation,[13] which both reflect and reinforce a state of profound immobility. In the moment of trauma, the victim's world *is* constricted into a stark and unbearable dichotomy between the passive recipient of injustice and a malicious oppressor – whether the oppressor is a specific perpetrator, an institution, or a social or economic or political structure.

To the extent that "the moment of trauma" persists as an active reality in the lives of oppressed people, it stands as a huge obstacle to achieving any kind of recognition that we could also act as perpetrators or oppressors. In order to acknowledge yourself as a dominant or an oppressor, you have to see yourself as an actor – as someone with the capacity to act upon others. If the essence of your experience is that you are *acted upon* in the world, it becomes difficult or impossible for you to conceive of yourself as having

anything like this kind of capacity. If the essence of your psychological reality is that you are small and powerless, how could you possibly hold the power or the sense of agency to be able to dominate or harm anyone else?

In fact trauma victims are all too capable of acting as perpetrators and oppressors when we occupy dominant positions, as I have argued repeatedly and have tried to show with examples ranging from Holocaust survivors to traumatized batterers to mothers who hit their kids. But the psychology of trauma severely obstructs the capacity of survivors to recognize our dominant roles and behaviors. The extreme example of this is the situation of the male batterers described by Neil Jacobson and John Gottman who feel victimized in the very act of assaulting their partners.[14] But it is also true in less dramatic ways and to varying degrees among the entire range of trauma survivors whose experience of victimization remains a core subjective reality. Raising social consciousness about the effects of trauma is therefore critical to promoting a broad-based political awareness that almost all of us occupy both oppressed and oppressor roles.

Identifying as Victim: Left-Wing Dehumanization

One of the most daunting problems faced by left politics is how to succeed in seizing power and fostering structural transformation without re-creating top-down power relations, new elites, and renewed structures of oppression. In relatively mild (though still problematic) forms, the re-creation of political inequality by the left has meant socialist countries with leaders-for-life and associated entrenched ruling structures. In extreme forms it has meant totalitarian states and the massive destruction of human life.

Achieving a level of political success which could

create possibilities for abuses of power may seem so far removed from the current state of the U.S. left as to render this issue hopelessly academic. But it is important for two reasons. One is that the seeds of the abuse of power are planted long before power is achieved. The other is that a significant obstacle to successful left organizing in the U.S. is a widespread fear of left-wing totalitarianism among ordinary people.

I think that many people associate socialism with the authoritarian imposition of economic and political constraints by central government and party elites on the large majority of the people. This perception surely is one of the legacies of the enormously effective anti-Communist propaganda strategies of the cold war, one aspect of which was to reduce all forms of socialism to Stalinist assaults on individual freedom and human dignity. But there has been enough reality to left authoritarianism that the issue cannot be dismissed as only a matter of propaganda. In any case, one of the major challenges for the left is to articulate a program for economic and social equality which can convince ordinary people that "equality" would not paradoxically be jammed down their throats, that left politics are not antithetical to personal freedom, and that the enactment of a left program would mean the humanization of economic and political life rather than massive dehumanization.

Left wing dehumanization and its alternative, radical humanization, are issues of enormous significance and scope, and traumatic victimization is only one piece of this much larger puzzle. But it is a piece of some importance, and one that has received little attention as far as I am aware. What is at issue here is how as progressives or leftists we characterize and behave toward the Others whom we identify as enemies and oppressors, as the flagbearers and agents of the status quo. I believe that when we treat our political

adversaries as anything less than full human beings, we lose sight of the interpenetration of different types of oppression and lose important opportunities for organizing and coalition building. Even more critically, when we treat our adversaries as Other we also are committing small but significant acts of dehumanization – acts which are cumulative in nature, which plant seeds that can ultimately corrupt social change efforts, and which also defeat the emergence of a radically humane left program and politics in the present.[15]

Entrenched identification with victim status can lead quite directly to this kind of dehumanization of the adversary. I want to offer some examples of this tendency, which I believe abounds in U.S. politics (both left politics and across the political spectrum). I will start with an example of my own behavior that illustrates how readily we can lose sight of the humanity of our adversaries through our identification as the victim and through the acting out of traumatic rage.

Almost 30 years ago I worked in a group home for emotionally disturbed children which was part of a larger treatment center. The parent agency was a traditionally run, hierarchical organization; but the group home was run as a collective, and for a period of time we had enough autonomy to function as tiny alternative institution within the larger conventional structure. My own identification was as what Barbara and John Ehrenreich called a "radical in the professions."[16] I believed that the development of radically egalitarian counter-institutions was one of the key ways to achieve social change, and I understood my work not only in terms of the services we were providing to the disturbed kids, but also as a political effort to create workplace democracy.

As a tiny alternative institution we were deeply

vulnerable to the established power structure, both within the parent organization and in our relations with the larger human service system. This was played out in a number of ways, eventually including a decision by the executive director of the parent agency to remove our autonomy and to put us under the direct control of an administrator who practiced an explicitly top-down approach, effectively defeating our effort to achieve workplace democracy.

Shortly before this decision was made, we had a particularly nasty run-in with a social worker from a funding agency who overrode our approach to working with the mother of one of the kids in the program and ordered us not to allow the kid to have visits with his mother. At a long, unproductive meeting in which we attempted unsuccessfully to appeal this decision, I felt that the social worker from the funding agency treated me with great disrespect and at the same time complained that I did not respect her essentially because I was disagreeing with her. A psychologist from our parent agency, whom I had invited to the meeting to support our position, wound up siding with the social worker from the funding agency.

For a variety of reasons, this run-in became a focal point for my rage. An approach which I had known to be effective in many other cases was being proscribed by administrative fiat, leaving me and my co-workers powerless to do our work in the way that we believed was right. This violation of our ability to control our own work became fused with the much larger violation of the entire character of our workplace in the decision which followed on its heals to strip us of our autonomy and to impose a conventional hierarchical structure on the group home. In both cases I felt that my co-workers and I were the victims of professionals in power positions who used their power to impose top-down decisions on us that violated my basic values and

beliefs.

Eight months after my run-in with the social worker from the funding agency, and shortly after I had quit my job in protest against the centralized administration of the group home, I wrote a long letter to the social worker expressing my outrage at her actions and at the decision she had dictated to us. Near the beginning of the letter I summarized her positions and cited some of her statements at our meeting; then I wrote,

> You finally told me that what really made you 'bullshit' was that I didn't respect you. At that point I baled out, realizing belatedly after three dreadful hours that you held all the cards – so many cards that you could even afford to be honest with me. (Honest to a point. You never said how much *you* disrespect *me*.) I could not afford to be honest then; now I can. You were right. I honestly don't respect you. In fact, I think your head is so far up your ass it's coming out your lungs.

At the time I understand this episode in explicitly political terms. Later in my letter I wrote about power relations and hierarchy, and I argued that decisions should be made "by those who actually do the clinical work." I described the social worker as an oppressor, and described myself as "trying to create an existence which is neither exploited nor exploitative." I had no inkling that this goal, which really did express my deepest values, was starkly contradicted by telling an "oppressor" in a state of rage that "your head is up your ass." To the contrary, I saw this as a small act of militance, something which I was proud of.

It did not dawn on me that I might be acting destructively toward the social worker, or that there was another dimension of this interaction which involved me as a man talking abusively to a woman, or that treating another person this way could not possibly be a

step of any sort toward reducing the amount of exploitation in the world. I could only see myself as the social worker's victim, and could only see her as someone in a power position who had used her power arbitrarily and destructively. To me the social worker had become a figure, not a person, and my letter to her was a small but real act of dehumanization.

It was in the same breath an acting out of my traumatic rage. It is too simple, and misses an important part of the point, to say that the social worker's behavior toward me had triggered my childhood abuse at the hands of my mother, and that in my behavior I was acting out my rage at my mother. There is considerable truth to that way of looking at what happened, but it is not the whole truth. In fact the social worker *was* in a power position, did use her power arbitrarily and destructively, and did traumatize my co-workers and me by making us powerless. Present-time power relations do not reduce to triggers or re-enactments of childhood trauma; they often are triggers, but are also important – and can also be traumatizing – in their own right.

But what is also true is that I had no understanding of myself as a traumatized person – either regarding my childhood trauma or in terms of what was taking place in the present; and I had no understanding of how my unresolved childhood trauma was affecting and in many ways guiding my reactions and responses to the present-time events. There is a difference between identifying as a political victim and identifying as a trauma victim or survivor. A political identification as victim without a corresponding recognition of trauma can itself be a trigger which unleashes (or helps to unleash) the unfocused and destructive expression of rage – the treatment of adversaries as Others, as political figures rather than human beings – and this was certainly the case in my situation.

Unfortunately, my behavior in this episode is far from unusual. It is all too easy to find examples of the politicized expression of rage in which our adversaries are reduced to something less than full human beings. This has been done quite literally with the political use of the term *pig* – as a name for the police, as a term for chauvinist men, as a description of capitalists, and so on. By calling people pigs we are explicitly transforming them into a non-human status, paving the way for any kind of treatment of them which serves the expression of our rage and of our sense of victimization.

The same is true of the famous slogan that was current at the height of the Black Power movement, "Up against the wall, motherfucker" – a motherfucker, not a person. During that same period I remember seeing two left-identified women literally jumping for joy when they heard that J. Edgar Hoover had died. A letter published in a recent issue of *Z Magazine* refers to one political adversary as "an asshole" and to the "slobbering ass-kissing" of another.[17] Eli Clare writes about environmentalists who "use language and images that turn the loggers into dumb brutes. The loggers are described as 'Neanderthal thugs' and 'club-wielding maniacs'…To clearly and accurately report unjust, excessive, and frightening violence is one thing; to portray a group of people as dumb brutes is another."[18]

The dehumanization of the oppressor by victims of oppression is both understandable and, to some degree, inevitable. Why wouldn't African Americans, with a legacy of 500 years of the most extreme subjugation, brutality and dehumanization at the hands of white people – not to mention the specific history of white men raping Black women – in turn characterize white people as motherfuckers? Why wouldn't women think of men as pigs? The seething rage which is generated when people are chronically violated and

made powerless expresses itself in these and similar terms of counter-contempt. To expect victims to spontaneously humanize their oppressors – to spontaneously treat their oppressors with compassion, deep respect, and understanding of the causes of their oppressive behavior – is unrealistic unless there are political, social, and psychological contexts and supports which can enable us to do so.

But in the absence of such contexts, the unchecked and dehumanizing expression of powerless rage cannot possibly lead in the direction of a more just and humane society. In its milder forms it results in name calling, in the alienation of potential allies, in lost opportunities for mutually respectful dialogue, and in polarizations in which the more powerful segments of society are likely to prevail. In more extreme forms it leads to unfocused violence, rioting, and to the conscious use of violence as a means to an end – to the destruction of human lives because they are not valued as fully human; because they are characterized as pigs or motherfuckers or assholes or brutes or thugs or as other reduced political categories rather than as people.

Understanding ourselves as trauma victims and survivors, and developing understandings of how trauma affects us, is a first step toward countering tendencies to dehumanize our adversaries from the position of the victim. It is not by itself enough, because we also need strategies and methods for the *constructive* expression of rage – ways to defend ourselves from attack, ways to stand up for ourselves and to oppose oppression in all its forms which at the same time enable us to maintain compassion and full respect for the humanity of those whom we identify as oppressors (including at times ourselves) and those whom we oppose in any given struggle.

But identifying and understanding trauma in our own lives is an important first step because it can give

us language and a conceptual framework to be able to name the process that leads the victims of oppression to respond by dehumanizing the oppressor: the language and framework of traumatic rage and power-under. These understandings can also help us to build the political and psychological contexts which could support the constructive mobilization of rage, in ways that I explore in Chapter Five.

Identifying as Victim: Competitive Oppressions and Organizational In-Fighting

Disunity and fragmentation are major obstacles faced by progressive and radical social change movements. Divisions – or the potential for division – are everywhere and are constantly impeding our capacity to build and sustain major movements that can have real and lasting political impact. The fault lines within and between left-identified movements and organizations mirror and re-enact every significant form of oppression; and so we have deep distrust and inability to communicate based on differences of race, class, gender, sexual orientation, age, physical ability, and so on. There are important moments when alliances are built that enable us to act effectively, such as the mobilizations of activism against globalization and the current anti-war movement – but always with a degree of tenuousness which threatens, and too often defeats, the viability of social change movements.[19]

There are many reasons why this would be so. Given a dominant culture and economy which foster competition, individualism, and social fragmentation, it is hardly surprising that these tendencies are played out in left organizations and movements (as they are played out across the political spectrum and in all of our social and economic institutions). The kind of concentrated wealth and power which holds together the major political parties, and which to some degree also fuels

the more extreme right, is not available to (or desirable for) the left.

The varying ideological bases and social change traditions of the left – Marxism, anarchism, feminism, pacifism, the labor movement, the civil rights / Black Power movements, the anti-war movement, the environmental movement, and so on – inevitably create tensions and conflicts in political analysis, in vision and goals, in organizing strategies, and in approaches to building movement organizations. The multiplicity of oppressions is certain to cause divisions, compounded by the tendency which I have already discussed for people to identify variously with their privilege and with their oppressed status in ways which constantly reinforce these divisions. There is also the strategic use of tactics by elites to create and exacerbate splits among actual or potential social change constituencies, particularly when movements become strong enough to actually threaten powerful interests.

In the context of this entire range of factors, traumatic identification as the victim also plays an important role. In the constricted world of a trauma victim, there can be little or no room to take in the reality or the magnitude of the suffering of others who are perceived as fundamentally different from you. As victims we are understandably preoccupied with our own experience of being acted upon in utter disregard for our worth as human beings. Our suffering unavoidably fills up our entire psychological landscape and – to the extent that we are politically conscious of oppression – our political landscape. The overwhelming impact of trauma can make it difficult or impossible to believe that the suffering of other oppressed groups could be as serious or as profound as our own.

This is compounded by an all-too-acute recognition of dominant roles of members of other oppressed

groups. For example, a straight man of color may look at a white gay man and see a white person; a white gay man may look at a straight man of color and see a heterosexual. If as a traumatized person you perceive someone who claims to be oppressed as *your* oppressor or potential perpetrator, it becomes that much more difficult to respect his or her claims of oppression.

When the entrenched, unbearable suffering caused by trauma is understood and expressed through conscious political identification as the victim of oppression, it readily translates into the belief that the type of oppression from which you (or those you identify with) suffer is the most fundamental, pervasive, and destructive and therefore is *the* political root of what must be changed or dismantled. From this perspective other oppressions are at best secondary, do not deserve the same degree of political attention and action, and will necessarily crumble when the root oppression is overturned. The psychology of trauma thus feeds ideological competition and divisions over the relative importance of different oppressions. What is probably even more important is that trauma impedes the capacities of oppressed people to bridge differences, to engage in constructive dialogue, to notice commonalities and build coalitions, and to affirm the validity of the suffering of others.

Trauma also feeds the tendency toward in-fighting in left organizations. As I have observed in Chapter Two, it commonly serves the immediate psychological needs of traumatized people to identify and lash out at a *proximate* villain – someone who is known, who is within reach, and who can be blamed for the intolerable pain and sense of injustice that the survivor experiences. Within movement organizations, it is fellow-activists who can readily become the objects of our rage – over heated ideological or strategic differences; over the more mundane frustrations and

conflicts that arise in any organization; and, perhaps most poignantly, when we believe that people with whom we thought we held shared values are acting outside of those political principles.

The sense of being betrayed by those we had trusted to any degree is enormously evocative and triggering for trauma survivors. In the context of social change organizations this can lead to truly internecine and irresolvable conflict, to vicious circles of rage and counter-rage: the "enemy," who was supposed to be out there in the larger society, is suddenly perceived as being in the room.

One prominent example of this kind of internecine conflict was the struggle for control of Pacifica Radio between 1999 and 2001. While the substance of that conflict was significant, for here the relevant point is how venomous it became. According to a recent account, "Some activists attacked each other at every possible opportunity, especially on email…and displayed an insensitivity to diversity issues that left the movement constantly open to race-baiting by Pacifica board hijackers. Members of listener groups berated staff, staff disrespected listeners…."[20]

The intensity and viciousness with which activists attack each other can understandably appear baffling or incomprehensible – and can also be incredibly frustrating and demoralizing. Thus one observer writes about being "fed up with folks at Pacifica seeing each other as the enemy and smearing each other endlessly."[21] Another activist, commenting on the Pacifica imbroglio, laments that "the most troubling thing to me has been the incredible willingness of other leftists to slash throats of each other behind each others' backs….[W]hy is it that other leftists who slightly disagree with us become the devil?"[22]

An understanding of trauma and the dynamics of power-under can, at the very least, make this kind of in-

fighting and mutual vilification among activists more comprehensible. This can help us not to be taken by surprise when internal conflicts erupt and are waged in the manner that occurred at Pacifica. More important, consciousness of trauma can help us to develop strategies for overcoming divisions and building unity on the left – so that venomous in-fighting is prevented or, if it does occur, we have better tools and resources for dealing with it.

If I identify not only as a victim of oppression but also as a traumatized person, it may give me a new perspective on my reactions and feelings toward members of other oppressed groups. This may be as simple as being able to recognize that it is hard for me to appreciate the suffering of other oppressed identities at least in part because of my own traumatic experience. If I identify as a traumatized person and have some understanding of the psychological effects of trauma, I may be able to take a step back from my rage and sense of betrayal at (for example) the dominating behavior of other activists and note that my reaction has to do with my own history of trauma as well as with their behavior.

This does not mean that I should accept dominating behavior, but rather that I can respond to it more effectively if I am not overwhelmed by traumatic rage. Consciousness of trauma does not necessarily prevent rage or the impulse toward divisiveness; but it can temper these responses by offering us a conceptual framework that gives us a new perspective on them. It can also offer a basis for dialogue, and a language to dialogue *with*, among oppressed constituencies and within splintered movement organizations.

Identifying as Victim: Right-Wing Populism

Wilhelm Reich's *The Mass Psychology of Fascism*,[23] written from a left perspective when the

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Nazis came to power in Germany, asked how it could be understood that fascism had achieved greater mass appeal than communism. Reich tried to explain why members of the working class and large segments of the lower-middle class supported a reactionary ideology that was antithetical to their own class interests. His answer was that deep underlying psychological forces needed to be taken into account.

I think that the left faces a similar kind of question today – not in the extreme form raised by the political triumph of fascism, but at a time when mainstream U.S. politics have moved steadily to the right. The last 20 years have seen both major parties embrace reactionary policies, ranging from the decimation of welfare and affirmative action to the massive upward redistribution of wealth; from globalization and the re-establishment of military intervention as an acceptable tool of U.S. foreign policy to the expansion of prisons and the death penalty. This swing to the right has taken place with the support and through the active efforts of a large and highly mobilized reactionary popular movement, as Jean Hardisty documents in her recent comprehensive account of the resurgence of the right during the last quarter of the twentieth century.[24] As Hardisty suggests, it is important "to take the right seriously [as] a mass movement."[25]

How to explain the success of right wing politics over the last quarter century?

One answer is that values and attitudes remain widespread which lead people to tolerate or actively support the right – racism, xenophobia, class contempt directed variously at the working class and the welfare poor, sexism, homophobia, ableism, contempt toward children, and so on. But this answer invites the same basic question: why do so many people who are themselves oppressed in significant ways tolerate or endorse the domination of others, and identify with

values and politics which maintain intact a total system rooted in oppression and domination?

Conventional left explanations focus on extreme concentrations of wealth and power, which in turn place control of the electoral political process and of the media and other vehicles for propaganda in the hands of economic and political elites. The ideological legacies of anti-communism, and the political impact of the fall of Soviet empire, have further bolstered a climate in which capitalism is portrayed as the only economic option and the U.S. as the only legitimate superpower. Intricate gradations in the distributions of wealth and power are also enormously effective in sustaining center-right politics, giving large majorities some kind of material and psychological stake in the status quo and confining abject misery to a minority that is small enough to relatively easily be kept politically invisible and powerless. All of these explanations are valid and important.

Trauma also has something to tell us about the appeal of right-wing populism in U.S. politics. People's sense of victimization is commonly played out politically through the mobilization of fear, hatred, and scapegoating of targeted groups (or institutions or nations) who in various ways are identified as threats to their well-being and as sources of their victimization. The major actors on the right surely understand the vulnerability of traumatized people to populist appeals for mass scapegoating – though undoubtedly they would not describe their politics in these terms. The manipulation of traumatic victimization into political expressions of rage and hatred downward at stigmatized and relatively powerless targets – rather than upward at power elites and at structures of domination and oppression – is one of the lynch pins that sustains the status quo.

Consider for example the politics and the

psychology of the anti-abortion movement, which has been a mainstay of the right for the last 30 years. Defining fetuses as human beings, anti-abortion activists have repeatedly dehumanized women seeking to exercise reproductive rights and health care workers offering services related to abortion, with tactics ranging from verbal harassment to threats and acts of violence.[26]   While it is a fringe of the anti-abortion movement that engages in or actively supports the use of physical violence, acts of verbal violence and intimidation are considerably more common; and the demonization of pro-choice women and health care providers is pervasive among the right's popular base.[27]

The attitudes of this movement toward women – and toward children once they are born – as well as the widespread use of verbal violence and sporadic physical violence all flagrantly contradict the professed devotion to the sanctity of life as represented by the fetus. I don't doubt that in part this reflects hypocrisy and demagoguery among right wing politicians and "pro-life" movement leadership.

But what about the ordinary people – women as well as men – who comprise the popular base of the anti-abortion movement? I take at face value that by and large these are people who honestly and deeply believe that abortion is the murder of a human being. If that is the case, how can people so passionately value human life (in the form of fetuses) and in the same breath so passionately *devalue* human life (in the form of women, children, and health care workers)? One part of the answer surely has to do with the values and ideology of the Christian fundamentalism that informs and inspires large segments of the anti-abortion movement and the resurgent right as a whole.[28] But I believe that another important and overlooked piece of the answer rests in the politics of trauma.

Anti-abortion activists deeply identify with a perceived victim who is tiny, totally helpless, and at the mercy of forces of annihilation. This is the basic theme of traumatization.   For these right-wing activists, abortion is a personal issue – it becomes their own violation. Of course I cannot know with certainty how many of these people have been abused and traumatized, and are playing out their own experience of trauma through their identification with the threatened or annihilated fetus; but trauma is such a pervasive experience in our society (as I have tried to show in Chapter One) that it is reasonable to believe that something of this sort is true for many of them. Even apart from projecting their own experiences of helplessness and victimization onto the fetus, deep identification with a class of victims can create a kind of secondary traumatization, which I think many leftists have also experienced in our identifications with groups of oppressed people.

It is a very short step from identifying with the victim – or identifying *as* the victim – to dehumanizing the perpetrator. For a moment let's take this question out of the context of abortion and identification with the fetus, and place it into the context of situations in which *we* are being acted upon, malevolently and brutally, against our will.   In the moment of trauma, it is virtually impossible for any of us as victims to maintain a sense of the perpetrator's humanity. Through the eyes of the victim, the perpetrator is not acting like a human being. How can those who rape two year-olds, or who make lamp shades from human skin, or who in countless other ways commit atrocities which strip every vestige of humanity from their victims be viewed by the victim with any degree of compassion or understanding – as anything but the malevolent Other? Even in cases of less "extreme" violation, I believe that for trauma victims the same question applies.   When

someone makes you powerless and denies your humanity, the natural and understandable tendency is to view the perpetrator as inhuman.

If we now return to the anti-abortion movement, the framework of trauma helps to make sense of the political stance and actions of "pro-life" activists. *What is blatantly inconsistent or contradictory rationally is coherent psychologically and subjectively.* If you honestly believe that women who have abortions and the health care workers who perform or facilitate abortions are murderers, and furthermore murderers of the most innocent, vulnerable and powerless forms of human life, it follows all too easily to define those associated in any way with these "murders" as inhuman monsters – *not as human beings*.

If in addition you carry your own legacies of being brutalized and acted upon against your will, your own festering traumatic rage finds a readily available target in those who would annihilate the unborn children with whom you so deeply identify. Subjectively, the unleashing of this rage is entirely about self-protection and the protection of the helpless and defenseless fetus against overpowering destructive forces. It is difficult to overstate the extent to which the imagery of abortion captures and evokes the themes of traumatization – the experience of being small, helpless, powerless, violated, coerced, overpowered, annihilated – given the premise of the fetus as human life.

The same theme of traumatization runs through many of the right's staple populist appeals. The attack against "big government," which has always been a smokescreen for an agenda of *shifting* federal priorities from social welfare to the military and to the active promotion of corporate interests, has played well politically in part because it resonates so deeply with so many people's experiences of being overpowered by "big" forces that are beyond their control. The same is

true of attacks against "tax and spend liberals" who are portrayed as victimizing over-taxed working people.

The old depictions of the communist menace, replaced in recent years by "rogue states" and particularly since September 11 by the demonic figures of Osama bin Laden and Saddam Hussein – appeal in very similar ways to our fears of being victimized and overwhelmed by malevolent Others. Reaction against affirmative action has portrayed white people as "victims" of "reverse racism"; no matter how bogus these claims, they are effective politically not only because they give a legitimate face to white racism, but also because they offer ordinary white people a place to direct the rage that is rooted in the real ways that they have been victimized and made powerless in their lives. In situations where government policies really do make white people powerless, such as forced school busing, the venom unleashed against people of color has been sharply focused and brutal.

It is the genius of right wing populism to politically manipulate traumatic rage into support for reactionary policies by *mobilizing people around causes that direct their rage downward at oppressed and scapegoated groups*. As Jean Hardisty observes, "[w]hen the right mobilizes intolerance against a minority or an out-group…, it blames and demonizes the hated group and, at the same time, draws anger away from the real sources of social ills. By displacing anger onto such decoys, the right allows for greater dominance by elites, while creating the impression of increased empowerment for those expressing their intolerance."[29]

The targets of right wing populist appeals are people of color (including immigrants), the welfare poor (also stereotyped as non-white), third world countries (also largely non-white), gays, women exercising reproductive rights. In each case, there is an enormous amount of social training, political

propaganda and fundamentalist religious ideology which predispose people who identify in varying ways as mainstream (white, non-poor, male, straight, Christian and so on) to define these groups as the Other and to gain some sense of legitimacy or self-validation from their dehumanization. But these reactionary appeals are emotionally compelling because they resonate so deeply with so many people's actual experiences of victimization and trauma.

While the specific claims of these appeals are bogus, they tap themes and images – of being small and powerless, of being acted upon against your will, of being threatened by alien and malicious forces – which evoke the real (and often unacknowledged) traumas in people's lives. If it is true, as I have argued, that virtually everyone has been abused and traumatized as a child, and that childhood trauma is compounded and reinforced by lifelong experiences that make people devalued and powerless through a criss-crossing maze of institutional and interpersonal domination, this creates an almost endless potential for the political scapegoating set in motion by right-wing populism. Despite widespread public cynicism about politicians, when they present themselves as standing up for "little people" against Them – people of color, foreigners, big government, terrorists – the appeal is strong because it gives many people a legitimated outlet for their for rage, a sense of being able to act on their own behalf, and the illusion of protection against the overwhelming forces that threaten them.

To build more effective social change movements, we need to develop a much more sophisticated understanding of why right-wing populism has been so successful. It is critical to expose the demagoguery of U.S. domestic and foreign policy – to show whose interests are really being served, and what values and principles are really being enacted. But it is equally

important to understand the psychology of appeals to racism, xenophobia, class hatred, and other types of political scapegoating. What is probably most important is to develop programs and strategies for addressing the real powerlessness in people's lives, and to do so in ways that don't play to and manipulate power-under, but that engage people in dialogue and critical thinking, and that offer them ways to express rage and to gain a sense of power and safety that is not at the expense of Others.

I think that any strategy for countering right-wing populism needs to take into account the breadth and depth of traumatic experience in our society. The challenge for the left is to develop a populist politics which can resonate with people's experiences of victimization and trauma, but can do so in ways that direct rage upward at the real forces that make people powerless and devalued, and which offer people options for the constructive expression of their rage.

Linda Stout's account in *Bridging the Class Divide* of the organizing efforts of the Piedmont Peace Project in North Carolina identifies the lures of channeling rage downward at scapegoated groups and describes a straightforward approach to address it. Stout writes, "As well as silencing us, internalized oppression can also lead us to blame others who are oppressed. For instance, some poor whites blame poor blacks when they can't get jobs; some African-Americans blame Asians for controlling small businesses in black communities; some working-class people blame people on welfare as the cause of high taxes."[30]

The strategy of the Piedmont Peace Project is "to deal with oppression up front. We talk to folks in the community about how our own oppression can destroy us as a mobilized force moving toward social change." Before beginning an organizing project, organizers are "up front" with people in a community that they make

links between oppressions based on class, race, gender, and sexual orientation. They anticipate the ways in which one oppressed constituency may scapegoat another, and they work proactively to raise critical awareness of potential divisions in order to prevent them. "We have full discussions and only then do we go forward with the work. We include some kind of training on oppression and internalized oppression at every gathering, at every board meeting, at every conference."[31]

"Victim" as a Transitional Identity

Radical politics are only possible if enough people become aware of themselves as victims of the existing political, economic and social structures that shape their lives. But, as I have tried to show, the victim identity is severely double-edged, because it can so readily lead to destructive behavior and to counter-productive results. Without a left perspective – by which I mean an understanding of how the concentration of wealth and power leads in myriad ways to the domination and victimization of individuals – identification as victim feeds right-wing populism, is expressed through the political scapegoating of disenfranchised groups, and bolsters the status quo.

But even with a left perspective, chronic identification as the victim is unlikely to serve as the foundation for social transformation in the direction of equality and radical humanization. It is a stance in the world which is too prone to unfocused rage and dehumanization; too self-absorbed and too preoccupied with suffering to build inclusive coalitions and embrace the suffering of others; too entrenched in being acted upon to act constructively and effectively in the world; too insistent on the innocence of the victim and the malice of the oppressor to accept and work with the

complex political reality that virtually everyone houses both oppressed and oppressor roles. In the language I have developed in this book, power-under – no matter how understandably and inevitably it emerges from traumatic experience – cannot serve as an effective mechanism for social change.

What is needed is a political context which enables people to move *through* consciousness of victimization as a transitional identity. But transitional to what? You do not stop oppression in your life, or the traumatic effects of oppression, by simply saying that you no longer think of yourself as a victim. Nor is identity necessarily a matter of the words we use to describe ourselves. The kind of transition in identity that I am thinking of has to do with making a shift from being acted upon to being an actor; from subordinate to equal; from power-under to power-with.

In order to move beyond the victim identity, we need resources that enable us to act constructively at every level – psychological, personal, social, organizational, and political. It is the task of Chapter Five to explore strategies for developing these resources.

Chapter Five

TRAUMA AND NONVIOLENT SOCIAL CHANGE

"The world is simultaneously infinitely horrible and infinitely wonderful, and…one truth does not cancel out the other."

-Jennifer Freyd[1]

The Buddhist concept of turning poison into medicine[2] – or what Thich Nhat Hanh calls "turning garbage into flowers"[3] – captures the spirit of the strategic approach to trauma that I aim to develop in this chapter.

Oppression is a social toxin which, through the mechanism of trauma, literally makes people sick.[4] It is a sickness that causes massive personal suffering, and when left to its own devices it is self-perpetuating and severely impedes efforts to achieve social change. We need to understand how groups of people who have been traumatized by oppression can harness our traumatic experience in ways which enable us to build effective social change organizations and movements. We particularly need to find ways to transform traumatic rage into a constructive force – one which can serve both individual recovery and societal transformation.

I will propose the concept of *constructive rage* as a framework for addressing this challenge. I attempt in this chapter to present strategies for how to *contain* the destructive potentials of traumatic experience and power-under, and how to *harness* the power of traumatic rage as a force for liberation.

There is always an interrelation between individual

change and social change, and between individual and organizational process. This is certainly true in the area of trauma. The capacities of our social change organizations and movements to act effectively rest on the capacities of the individuals who make them up; and the abilities of individuals to collaborate effectively, to sustain activism, to resolve differences and to act in the world in ways that can change hearts and minds rest on the strength, cohesion, and politics of our organizations.

I therefore will try to address both individual and organizational behavior and attitudes that are affected by trauma. The same need to contain and harness traumatic rage exists in the privacy of our homes and in every kind of public and political expression of unrest, and any strategy which can mobilize people's traumatic experience toward constructive ends will be mutually beneficial for individuals and for social change organizations.

Nonviolence stands at the heart of the strategies I propose. If we are to act constructively with our rage, we need to fully grasp the humanity of those who too easily become defined or treated as Other. The fundamental principle of nonviolence is that the basic value and integrity of each human being are non-negotiable. Commitment to that principle, and to the practices that flow from it, offers a starting point for turning the poison of power-under into something medicinal.

In the wake of September 11, our need for strategies to transform traumatic rage into a constructive force is starkly defined and urgent. This is true in society at large, where mass experiences of victimization and powerless rage are being manipulated to generate support for war, global empire, and the deep erosion of civil liberties. But strategies for the constructive mobilization of trauma are also pointedly needed within

progressive social change organizations and movements, which continue to be vulnerable to internal divisions and fragmentation either caused or exacerbated by the dynamics of power-under.

We are in a political moment when there is a crying need for the emergence of a powerful and more unified left. Developing strategies for dealing with the impact of trauma on our social change efforts is one of the ways that we can try to build a robust and effective progressive movement.

Constructive Rage

It is neither realistic nor desirable to seek to eliminate rage from radical politics. Outrage at the profound injustices created by existing conditions has to be a wellspring of social change movements. The key question is not whether rage will continue to play a pivotal role in radical politics, but whether and how we can consciously shape our expression of rage to serve social change.

I have argued that rage is a natural and inevitable response to the trauma of powerlessness – but that in its raw and often unconscious form, powerless rage defeats effective movement building and can lead to destructive behavior ranging all the way from substance abuse and self-injury to rioting and dehumanization of the oppressor.

There is no way to legislate against power-under, and as long as oppression exists it is inevitable that powerless rage will be present and will be expressed in a variety of ways within social change movements (and throughout the society). The open questions are with what frequency we encounter power-under, what resources we have to respond to and contain it, and to what extent the constructive expression of rage can serve as a counter-force.

What does rage look like when it is expressed and

organized constructively? Key factors include:

- We express rage nonviolently and humanely.
  - Our expression is focused and strategic, allowing us to maintain awareness of the effects of our actions on others and to consciously assess the possibilities that our actions will produce desirable outcomes.
  - Our means are consistent with our ends. We are ethically and practically committed to not acting abusively, regardless of – and in resistance against – how we have been abused.
  - We maintain compassion for ourselves *and* compassion for others,[5] despite our unflinching awareness of our own capacities to act as oppressors, and despite our unflinching awareness of the volume and magnitude of abuse and oppression enacted by others.
  - Our actions are linked to positive visions and programs. We affirm the validity of our outraged "*no*" in reaction against our own mistreatment and in reaction against broader conditions of social and political injustice. But we also take responsibility for translating that "*no*" into ideas and possibilities for a more just society and world. At every step we try to remain conscious of the need for positive alternatives and to pose ourselves this practical question: How can my actions improve the conditions against which I am enraged?
  - We act from a subjective sense of power. Knowing that this is far easier said than done, we consciously struggle for clarity that we are not powerless in the present, despite the ways that we have been overpowered by abuse and trauma. We seek to maintain awareness that, as adults, we can *always* exercise options.[6]
  - We act from a commitment to equal power relations. Our conscious goal is to share power to the greatest extent possible – to step outside of the oppression

paradigm which constantly places people in subordinate and dominant roles.

Nonviolence From the Head and From the Heart

In previous drafts of this section, I wrote about principled nonviolence and how it serves the transformation of traumatic rage into a more contained and constructive force. I analyzed the impact of values on behavior. I talked about the cornerstones of nonviolent political theory – consistency of means and ends, nonviolent non-cooperation. I looked at questions of political strategy and argued for the practical effectiveness of principled nonviolence.

All of these are valid, even indispensable points of analysis. But after each successive draft, I found myself dissatisfied with how I was approaching the question of nonviolence – for me a core political issue in this book. I finally realized that I was coming too much from the head, and not enough from the heart.

Commitment to nonviolence is something I feel in my bones. When I learned of the terrorist attacks on 9/11, my first reaction was stunned horror. My next reaction was to be terrified of what the U.S. government would do in response – of the cascade of violence that this event could unleash. And my next reaction, which I remember saying out loud, was that the only sane response to the horror of those attacks was nonviolence. That the only way to reduce violence in the world is to practice nonviolence.

I know that last line sounds like a political slogan. And it's true that it came out of many years of political thought and action, out of my own identification with nonviolent politics. But the point is that it was a gut reaction, a felt response – a heart response as well as a head response.

At a very different level of politics, I don't hit my child because I feel so deeply that it would be wrong. It

is the *depth* of my values that makes hitting or any kind of physical attack not an option for me, no matter how desperate and out of control, how victimized and powerless I feel – and I have felt all of these things as a parent a lot more often than I wish were the case. My commitment to nonviolent parenting, which certainly is something I have thought out and analyzed at great length, *lives* in my body.

I could say that when I don't hit my kid in moments of rage, it's an act of love, and it would be true. But there are many, many parents who love their kids as much as I do – and who hit their kids. Nonviolence shapes the way I'm able to use my love for my child. It gives me a very tangible resource for containing the most destructive potentials of power-under, in the moments when I am most at risk from the lethal combination of subjective powerlessness and objective dominance.

What I am trying to describe is an *impassioned* commitment to nonviolence. Something that includes rational analysis, but that also pierces the surface of ideas to the depths of how we define ourselves and how we want to be in the world. I think it takes something at this kind of depth to counteract or re-shape the enormous force of traumatic rage.

At the level of personal identity, nonviolent resistance allows us to channel our rage into an impassioned determination *not to act like the people who have hurt and oppressed and traumatized us, and not to let our oppressors turn us into destructive people, even in the ways that we struggle against them or in our attitudes toward our perpetrators*. Aurora Levins Morales offers a moving example of the effective use of this kind of non-cooperation to maintain personal and political integrity in the face of torture:

> As a child…[f]or a period of several years, without the knowledge of my parents, I was

periodically abused by a small group of adults who practiced physical, psychological and sexual tortures, mostly, though not exclusively, on children. It was clear that their treatment of me had several goals. They deliberately confused and intimidated me so I would not reveal what was happening, but they also were attempting to reproduce themselves in me and the other children, to separate us from our own humanity enough to turn us into torturers as well.

Because I was already a highly politicized child by the time they got hold of me, because I already knew about political torture and resistance to it, I was able to develop a strategy that defeated them. They managed to keep me from telling, but I did not continue the cycle of abuse. I figured out that I was powerless to prevent what they did to my body but that I could safeguard my spirit. I understood that the first step in becoming like them was to learn to dehumanize others and that part of the goal of their cruelty was to make us hate them, make us want to hurt them, make us see them as monsters we would be willing to torment. To plant in us the seeds of their own pain.

Part of the way I prevented this was to envision my abusers as young children, before they became this cruel. I would imagine that imprisoned within the adult bodies that hurt me were captive children who had themselves been tortured. I would pretend that I could catch their eyes, send them signals of solidarity to give them courage. Imagine how horrified they were at the actions of their grown-up selves. This was what enabled me to survive spiritually.[7]

Levins Morales, a "highly politicized child," was clearly using her ability to analyze her situation and

apply her political values to her struggle for self-protection. But her understanding enabled her to act from the place of her deepest humanity. Knowing that she could not protect her body, her struggle was for her spirit. Knowing that dehumanization destroys the human spirit, she developed an impassioned determination to connect with the mangled humanity of her torturers – enabling her to break a cycle of violence. This stands as an extraordinary expression of nonviolence coming from the head and from the heart.

At the level of movement politics, I think we saw that same quality of impassioned commitment to nonviolence in the civil rights movement. Nonviolence was a critical part of the civil rights movement's strategy. But it was also part of the movement's spiritual bedrock. This is particularly significant if we are willing to recognize that African-Americans were massively traumatized by Jim Crow practices in the South and by the entire legacy of slavery.

The civil rights movement achieved extraordinary success in mobilizing traumatized people to act constructively in the face of terror and rage. I think that this is largely attributable to the power of nonviolence as a response to trauma – not only as a principle, but as a living and breathing practice that people feel is connected to their own integrity as human beings. I will return to the civil rights movement at more length later in this chapter as an important example of constructive rage.

In my view, nothing short of a radical re-emergence of this kind of nonviolent politics can stem the cycles of terror and counter-terror that have been unloosed in the world.

Nonviolence as Self-Protection

Aurora Levins Morales, as a child in the hands of torturers, knew that though she could not protect her

body, she could protect her spirit. I take this to mean that she could take active measures to protect her human integrity, what was most essential and important about her as a human being. Her strategy for self-protection was to actively exercise nonviolence – to recognize, to fully respect and value the human core of her torturers. This was a conscious act of resistance. Levins Morales understood that her torturers wanted not only to attack her body, but also to crush her capacity for human connection. She fought them, and fought for herself, by staying connected to her own humanity and to theirs.

Self-protection is the precise spot where the politics of trauma and the politics of nonviolence intersect. The experience of abuse, violation, and traumatic powerlessness inevitably raises a core and enduring question in the lives of trauma survivors: how can we act effectively to protect ourselves? All too often, in the throes of traumatic reenactment and subjective powerlessness, we believe the answer is that we can't. As chronic victims, the ability to act effectively on our own behalf is what we most deeply want and need, and yet our subjective experience is that it remains beyond our grasp. Our need for self-protection, fueled by rage and distorted by traumatic powerless, too often is expressed in the kind of desperate lashing out I have described as power-under.

Violence is readily understood as a means of self-defense, and it is undeniably true that physical violence is one way of trying to protect ourselves from physical attack. Because we live in a society that legitimizes many forms of violence in many contexts, the seemingly straightforward notion of using physical violence in self-defense merges seamlessly with the use of verbal violence in self-defense, with the "pre-emptive" use of violence, with acts of retaliation and revenge, with many types of aggressive and predatory

behavior, and with all forms of dehumanization and oppression.

Wherever we find violence, we find people subjectively trying to protect and defend themselves. This runs the gamut from parents hitting kids to expressions of racism and homophobia; from male batterers who experience themselves as victims to justifications for U.S. aggression in the name of protection against terrorists. It is impossible to overstate people's fear of the Other, the need for self-protection evoked by that fear, and the damage caused by the legitimation of violence as a means of self-protection.

What's less obvious is the damage caused to *ourselves* by acts of violence. I am using violence in the broadest sense of acts and attitudes that treat people as Other, that dehumanize, that reduce people to objects, and that fail to recognize and affirm the core human value of the Other. In the process of treating others as less than human, we violate something essential about our own humanity.[8] Thich Nhat Hahn writes that "[d]oing violence to others is doing violence to yourself."[9] This is exactly what Aurora Levins Morales realized in the hands of her torturers: that her human integrity was at risk from the impulse to dehumanize those who were dehumanizing her.

Even at the level of self-defense against physical attack, violence is a precarious strategy at best. If the attacker is physically bigger, stronger, and more aggressive, which is often the case, violent self-defense is likely to fail. Even worse, violent responses often evoke escalating violence from the attacker, placing the victim at greater risk. What passes for self-defense is often an impulse for retaliation in the aftermath of an attack, rather than an action which could actually ward off the attack and protect the victim.

In many cases nonviolent measures are more likely

to protect the victim physically. These range all the way from fleeing or hiding to calling for help to talking calmly to the assailant to the use of nonviolent physical self-defense techniques that aim to stop an attack without hurting the assailant. Once I was approached menacingly by a man who, holding a lit cigarette, came up very close to me and asked me if I fight. We were in a narrow hallway and I could not possibly have gotten away from him. I answered, simply and honestly, that I did not fight. He looked baffled and said, incredulously, "You don't fight?" I again told him that I didn't. He regarded me, hesitated, then turned and walked out the door.

In many other circumstances, no self-defense strategy will stop an attack. It may happen so abruptly and be over so fast that there is no time to respond in self-defense. (If the man who approached me had put the lit cigarette onto my face or punched me, rather than trying to intimidate me verbally, I would have been defenseless.) The imbalance of physical strength and force may be so overwhelming that physical self-protection is simply impossible, as is particularly the case when adults abuse children. The perpetrator may use means of violence – a gun, a bomb, an airplane crashing into a building – against which there is no feasible physical defense.

This is particularly important because most violence committed in the name of self-defense actually happens after the fact of the attack to which we are responding. This may be a matter of seconds: Someone tells me, "Fuck you"; I say "Fuck you" back. I may think that I'm responding in self-defense, and I may honestly be trying to protect myself. But what I'm really doing is counter-attacking. By the time I respond, the verbal attack against me is done. No amount of violence on my part, verbal or physical, will undo it. I may believe that by saying "Fuck you" back I'm protecting myself

against a further attack. In fact I'm much more likely to be provoking a further attack.

The gap between the moment of attack and the use of violent self-defense is often much longer. Examples range from acts of personal retaliation or revenge to the state's use of the death penalty; from the cycles of terrorist attacks and counter-attacks by Palestinians and the Israeli government to acts of war by the U.S. in response to 9/11. When violence is used in the name of self-defense after the fact, its object may or may not be the original perpetrator. The longer the gap between the original attack and the violent response, the more likely that the violence is being displaced onto someone other than the original perpetrator – with examples ranging from a child who evokes your own childhood trauma to the spurious linking of Iraq to 9/11.

In all cases when violence is used as a strategy for self-protection after an attack is an accomplished fact, it cannot possibly succeed in protecting the victim from an attack that has already happened. This seems so obvious that it would not need to be said – except that so many of us are driven so relentlessly to try to defend ourselves against the violations we have experienced in our pasts.

This is critically related to the dynamics of unresolved trauma. One of the key lessons from the study of trauma is that the effects of traumatic powerlessness long outlive their causes. As I have tried to show in Chapter Two, internalized powerlessness is a living reality for many trauma survivors. Subjectively, the moments of trauma are *not* simply "violations we have experienced in the past" – we experience them as an on-going reality in the present. This makes the use of violence to try to defend ourselves against traumatic powerlessness understandable. But it does not make it functional or effective.

If we are willing to expand the question of self-

protection to include personal integrity – the safeguarding of human spirit and our capacity for human connection[10] – the futility of violence becomes blatant. The more we dehumanize the other in the name of self-defense, the more we diminish our own humanity.

Even in the moment of attack, the question of how as victims we can protect our humanity is vitally important – not in place of, but in addition to the question of how we can best protect ourselves physically. But in the aftermath of attack, the challenge of self-protection shifts decisively to the area of personal integrity, of wholeness of spirit and the humanization of our experience. Whatever has been done to us physically cannot be undone. Counter-attack (verbal or physical) is likely to make us more vulnerable to future attacks. What we *can* do, in conscious resistance to our abuse, it to take active steps to treat others – both perpetrators and those who might become the displaced objects of our rage at our perpetrators – as full human beings. By doing that we actively and effectively protect our own humanity.

This is the realm in which nonviolent resistance is extraordinarily relevant to the situation of trauma survivors. In most cases the lasting, major damage caused by abuse is not physical but emotional and psychological – the crushing of human spirit. Efforts at self-protection by trauma survivors that demonize or dehumanize the Other – through physical violence, verbal violence, or other acts and attitudes that diminish the human value of those we experience as threats – unwittingly and tragically compound the damage to our own spirits. A central challenge faced by trauma survivors is how to resist malevolence and violation by valuing rather than diminishing human life.

Nonviolence redefines the terms of self-protection. It poses an entirely new set of questions: How can I

safeguard my human spirit? How can I try to defend and protect myself physically without compromising or crushing my own humanity? How can I resist acts of abuse and oppression without dehumanizing my oppressors? Or anyone else? How can I maintain human connectedness in the face of overwhelming malevolence? How can I take in and let myself feel the pain of what has been done to me rather than evading or numbing that pain through an act of violence? How can I take in the almost intolerably complex truth that I have been abused, demeaned and disregarded by valuable human beings?

The strategy for self-protection that these questions point us toward is as relevant to mass politics as it is to personal recovery from trauma. For example, imagine a collective response to September 11 along the lines of Aurora Levins Morales' response to her torturers:

We understood that there was nothing we could do to prevent the mass destruction caused by attacks that had already taken place. But we figured out a way to safeguard our collective human spirit. We tried to envision and let ourselves feel the human suffering that could lead people to become terrorists and could allow them to destroy human life on such a massive scale. We particularly understood how much they were diminished by not valuing the humanity of the people they destroyed. We committed ourselves to not letting the attacks diminish or destroy our own capacities to value human lives as broadly and as deeply as possible. We understood that this was how we could defeat terrorism.

The ability to actually use nonviolence as a means of self-protection – either personally or at the level of mass politics – is a matter of struggle. I write this as someone who has done my share of diminishing the human value of the Other over the years. The very forces of trauma that make nonviolence such a

compelling strategy for self-defense are constantly moving us in the direction of violence. Dissociation, traumatic reenactment, terror, and unyielding subjective powerlessness *are* the crushing of human spirit and lead directly and incessantly to demonization and dehumanization in the name of self-protection.

Simply saying that nonviolence protects us better does not make it so. Nonviolence is something we need to learn to open our hearts to, and that is a long and hard-fought personal journey, and one which above all requires the willingness and the capacity to open ourselves to our own pain and to the pain of others.

For nonviolence to become a living and breathing reality – something that comes from the heart as well as from the head – also requires cultural, social and political support. One of the reasons that the civil rights movement was able to mobilize the traumatic rage of African-Americans so effectively in the service of constructive social action was that the movement made the values of nonviolence so visible and prominent as a political force. It created a public context, something that people could readily grasp and take hold of.

I believe that we need to rebuild that kind of visibility and political articulation of nonviolence as a force for both personal and political change. September 11, both despite and because of its horror, has created an opportunity for a new dialogue about breaking cycles of violence. How to protect ourselves from violence is a conscious, urgent question for virtually everyone. The more we are willing to publicly discuss and explore nonviolence as a resource for self-protection, the more possible it becomes for people to entertain it as a value system, as a guide to actual behavior, and as a way of coping with traumatic rage.

Nonviolence and the Health
of Social Change Organizations

Imagine progressive social change organizations in which:

- There are no personal attacks.
- There are no opposing camps.
- No one is treated as an enemy.
- In the face of disagreements, we maintain full respect for each other as valued human beings.
- People listen well to each other and actively consider the possible validity and value of other perspectives – *particularly* the perspectives of those with whom we disagree.
- People have effective conflict resolution skills.
- There is a robust capacity to deal with differences based on class, race, gender, sexual orientation, age, and other kinds of life experiences.
- Even when confronted with behavior we believe to be oppressive, dominating, or in other ways unacceptable, we maintain full respect and resist that behavior nonviolently and with compassion.

This of course is an ideal description of a healthy social change organization – one that realistically is not entirely achievable. The practical question is how close we can come to achieving it, and what kinds of resources can enable us to come close enough to have robust, well-functioning organizations and movements.

To develop useful resources along these lines, we need to identify the sources of organizational dysfunction. Trauma – particularly in its expression as power-under – is one of the major obstacles to the healthy functioning of social change organizations (as I have tried to show in Chapter Four). I am thinking specifically of the ability of our organizations and movements to weather crises, to resolve in-fighting, to forge wider alliances and coalitions, and to humanize our adversaries.

It is important to remember that traumatic stress is not a steady state. It flares up at critical moments when we are triggered by events which evoke our deepest experience of powerlessness and violation, and which therefore lead us to states of traumatic reenactment in which our subjective experience of powerlessness is vivid and overwhelming. It is in these triggered, actively traumatized states that we are most at risk for power-under behavior and the expression of powerless rage.

In the lives of social change organizations, it is at moments of strategic floundering or defeat, moments of internal conflict or impasse, and moments of direct confrontation with identified enemies (internal or external) that we are most likely to be triggered and thus most likely to engage in destructive expressions of powerless rage. While this virtually never results in physical violence, it is all too likely to result in name calling, insults and other highly personalized attacks, in splits between polarized camps and positions, in the cutting off of dialogue, in activists walking out on organizations and movements, and thus in the diversion and draining of organizational energies, resources and momentum.

It is in these kinds of circumstances that commitment to the *practice* of nonviolence *within* our social change organizations has the potential to constrain and to reshape powerless rage. If there is a shared understanding among activists that "nonviolent social change" means a program of life-affirming behavior and action that guides how we treat each other and run our organizations, it can help us to maintain mutual respect, foster dialogue and the willingness to listen to disparate perspectives and to the truth of others' experience, and to curtail personal attacks and other destructive behavior.

It is surely the function of the stated principles of

social change organizations not only to serve as the foundation for political action, but also to guide the internal development and growth of the organization. By espousing the practice of nonviolence, our social change organizations can serve many purposes, one of which is to create internal conditions that maximize (though they cannot guarantee) the constructive expression of rage.

This would particularly be the case if the practice of nonviolence were combined with conscious attention to trauma as a movement building issue. The kind of awareness of power relations that feminism has brought to social change organizations could be broadened to include awareness of traumatic reenactment and powerless rage. Many of us have been attempting for the last 30 years to monitor and curtail dominating behavior and patterns in meetings and in all aspects of organizational life. We could develop within our organizations the same kind of effort to monitor and curtail power-under, with a common language and evolving understandings of the power relations set in motion when people act out subjective powerlessness.

Principled nonviolence could serve as the basis for creating concrete strategies within organizations for responding to power-under. These could include non-cooperation with personal attacks and other abusive behavior, structured dialogue aimed at mutual understanding of people's subjective experiences, specific conflict resolution techniques,[11] explicit appeals for adherence to established guidelines for the expression of rage, and a range of empathic responses to the traumatic experience underlying power-under behavior.

This is comparable to familiar strategies for dealing with domination within organizations, such as leadership rotation and meeting facilitation techniques which aim for broad participation and shared power.

These strategies surely don't eliminate all possibilities of domination, but they do enable us to name the issue and give us a reasonable set of tools for trying to do something about it. I envision the same kind of capacity within social change organizations to try to do something about power-under, based on shared understandings and values and using a common language of power relations by which to name and address the issue.

If nonviolent strategies can be of particular value for trauma survivors dealing with conflict within social change organizations, trauma is one of the factors that can make it particularly difficult to actually put this approach into practice. Resolving differences based on common interests is not conceptually difficult, but there is a huge gap between our knowledge of cooperative negotiation and our practice, which too often locks us into entrenched positions, camps, in-fighting, personal attacks, and unresolved conflicts. In addition to all of the generic difficulties that we encounter when we try to shift from a competitive to a cooperative paradigm, cooperative conflict resolution is *emotionally* challenging, in large part because of the effects of trauma.

We have been traumatized historically in situations that are totally contrary to the conditions necessary for the cooperative resolution of differences. Negotiation with a perpetrator is impossible. There is a drastic imbalance of power, and the notion of common interests either does not apply or is rendered hopelessly abstract by the imposition of the perpetrator's will upon the victim. Unilateral action for self-protection, to whatever extent this is possible, is the only reasonable and practical response to abuse.

In their classic *Getting To Yes*, Roger Fisher and William Ury acknowledge that it is not always possible to achieve a win-win outcome, and they discus the

importance of having a "best alternative to a negotiated agreement" when cooperative negotiation breaks down or is not feasible.[12] In more political terms, there are individual and institutional oppressors with whom we need to non-cooperate rather than trying to negotiate.

The problem is that when we are triggered in the present, we can much too readily act as if we are dealing with a perpetrator with whom negotiation is impossible. One of the enormous challenges for trauma survivors is sorting out our historical experience of trauma from our present circumstances.

The survivor's emotional need for a proximate villain, which I have discussed in Chapter Two, can lead us too quickly to conclude that the other party or opposing faction in a conflict is to blame, has betrayed our trust, and is impossible to deal with. The profound vulnerabilities created by trauma can make it unbearably difficult to stick out a process which requires listening to and engaging with others whom we experience as threats. This is made considerably more complicated by the fact that abuse *can* happen in the present, and that it is entirely valid for us to protect ourselves from others, including political allies, who actually are acting as perpetrators in the moment.

One of the things that this means is that we need to pay conscious attention to maintaining personal safety in order to have any chance of widely utilizing a cooperative or nonviolent approach for resolving differences. This is equally the case in personal relationships and in social change organizations. We need guidelines and agreements about unacceptable behavior, such as personal attacks, as well as guidelines and conscious attention to our procedures for resolving conflict.

We need to talk to each other about how to sort out when it is appropriate to resort to a "best alternative to a negotiated agreement" and when it's worth the effort of

sticking out a demanding conflict resolution process. We need to develop cultures within our organizations which foster this kind of dialogue and mutual support around issues of conflict and trauma. We also need the skills to implement cooperative negotiation, which means attention to training and to learning from each other and from our own successes and mistakes.

Nonviolence as Political Strategy

There is of course a long and well-developed tradition of principled nonviolence as a strategy and ethos for organized political action.[13] I have attempted to build on that tradition by looking to nonviolence as a strategic resource for containing traumatic rage and transforming it into a constructive force.

I want to briefly address the larger question of nonviolent political strategy as it relates to the ability of the left to achieve greater unity. Doctrinaire disputes about issues like nonviolence are classic fault lines along which the left is constantly dividing and fragmenting. I have suggested that adherence to nonviolence can help to build more robust and less fragmented progressive movements. Yet my own passion for nonviolence has a decidedly doctrinaire edge to it.

As a practical matter, I think it is widely recognized throughout the left at present that violence is a hopeless social change strategy in the U.S. Violent tactics and rhetoric at the end of the sixties (for example by the Weather Underground and by some parts of the Black Power movement) fractured the left, provoked massive government repression, and achieved no useful results. Since then U.S. social change movements have almost universally employed nonviolent means of protest. When violence has appeared in left actions – for example, on the fringes of anti-globalization

protests – it has been immediately seized upon and grossly exaggerated by the media and other establishment forces to try to divide and discredit the movement.

But in many social change organizations, the use of peaceful protest has not been accompanied by explicit endorsement of the principles of nonviolence. And in regard to foreign policy, in recent years there has been considerable disunity within the left about the legitimacy of U.S. armed interventions in Kosovo and, post-9/11, in Afghanistan. Even among those who have opposed these U.S. war efforts, probably most have not based their opposition on adherence to nonviolence as a matter of principle. Likewise, the currently burgeoning anti-war movement in response to the threat of a U.S. war against Iraq could not possibly be construed as a movement broadly based on nonviolence in the manner of the Civil Rights movement or Gandhi.

A new Gandhian-type movement is in fact exactly what I think we need. In my view, nonviolence is uniquely consistent with the goal of creating a just society in which the value of all human life is recognized and affirmed. This is a matter of deceptive importance. No matter how remote the prospects appear for the left to gain political prominence and achieve fundamental change, I think we have to proceed on the belief that social justice can be achieved. Otherwise we doom ourselves to falling short of our most important goals.

If we take seriously the possibility that we can radically transform our society, then we also need to take seriously the relationship between our means and our ends. There is overwhelming evidence that violent means produce violent results, at every level from spanking children to violence between nations. Consistency between nonviolent means and nonviolent ends is a practical strategy for long term success, if our

goal is to achieve a peaceful society in which all people are equally valued.

But I also think that those of us who deeply believe in nonviolence can advocate for it without becoming needlessly divisive or sectarian. What we most need is a nonviolent process for discussing and, when necessary, disagreeing about strategic questions of the legitimacy of violence.

Part of what can help this to happen is the honest recognition of practical realities that cut across doctrines and "correct" lines. On the one hand, I have known activists (myself included at times) who have espoused nonviolence in theory but who have acted in ways entirely inconsistent with nonviolent practice – including personal attacks, unwillingness to consider opposing perspectives, and the acting out of traumatic rage in ways that vilify, diminish, and dehumanize targeted human beings.

On the other hand, there are activists who assert the validity of certain kinds of strategic violence, but whose personal practice is respectful and constructive. This is the case for example with Nelson Mandela (whom I will discuss at length later), who advocated violent struggle but whose practice was almost entirely consistent with nonviolent principles and yielded enormously constructive results.

Nonviolence is not an all-or-nothing proposition. Lots of people who believe in the legitimacy of violent self-defense under certain circumstances are nevertheless open to the validity and practical value of nonviolent resistance in a wide variety of other contexts. We desperately need to cultivate areas of common ground and respectfully talk about our differences, rather than letting differences about the validity of any use of violence under any circumstances becomes yet another wedge that needlessly divides us.

There are always valid questions that can be raised

about the impact of theory and values on practice – and practice is what matters most. To the extent that individuals and organizations do *not* espouse principled nonviolence but are able to enact their personal and political rage constructively, their practice is far more important than ideological quibbles, and we have lots to learn from them. Constructive rage is a practical issue, and what we need is open dialogue and exploration of what works.

Humanizing the Oppressor

Nonviolence and humanizing the oppressor are mutually enhancing principles. One of the cornerstones of principled nonviolence is the belief that all humans – including those identified as adversaries or oppressors – are intrinsically valuable. One of the results of recognizing the full humanity of oppressors is that it becomes difficult or impossible to intentionally inflict harm on them.

Violence and other forms of abuse virtually require the objectification and dehumanization of their targets; this is the function of the enormous range of derogatory names and labels that we apply to our enemies, giving them non-human status before we attack or kill them. If we insist on the human status of the oppressor, it means that we can no longer view him or her as "the Other" – as an object or figure with whom there is no possibility for human connection. This fundamentally changes what is possible in how we approach and behave toward "the oppressor," who is now a person. It constrains tendencies toward violence and counter-abuse; it points toward strategies for struggle and non-cooperation which maintain full respect for our adversaries; and it also opens us to recognizing our own capacities to act as oppressors.

I have described nonviolent resistance as a determination not to be like the people who have

oppressed and traumatized us – and thus a refusal to dehumanize our dehumanizers. The paradox is that part and parcel of my determination "not to be like them" is my acknowledgment that there are ways that I *am* like them. This is a tension and a complexity which we do not have to resolve, but simply live with. If we carry our resolve not to be like our dehumanizers to the point of insisting that we have absolutely nothing in common with them, then we begin to treat them as the Other – as inherently different, and inevitably less valuable, than us. In fact, nothing could distinguish me more effectively from a dehumanizer than my willingness to acknowledge that I have the capacity to dehumanize, since consciousness of my destructive capacities is the first step toward controlling and containing them.

Humanizing the oppressor is important not only as a strategy for containing powerless rage and for making the means of liberation struggles consistent with our ends – it is also important because liberation requires self-transformation as well as structural transformation. All of us unavoidably internalize major aspects of our social conditions, including the capacity to dominate. The oppressor within[14] is not simply a theoretical construct; it is a living reality in virtually everyone's life forged by the multiplicity of available oppressor roles, by social experience which is saturated with patterns of domination that we internalize, and for many of us by the dynamics of powerlessness and traumatic rage.

Dehumanizing the oppressor forces us to deny the oppressor within, to insist that "I could never possibly be like Them," and thus prevents us from undertaking the kinds of personal transformations that are indispensable steps on the path to liberation. When we humanize the oppressor, it enables us not only to recognize the oppressor within us, but also to maintain compassion for ourselves as we struggle to contain and

transform our own destructive capacities and potentials.

Awareness of Dominant Roles

Liberation from oppression requires more than a global recognition of our capacities to behave destructively; it also requires a much more specific, finely tuned analysis of the dominant roles that each of us occupies. As a white, heterosexual, professionally trained, middle-aged man I am set up to dominate along lines of race, sexual orientation, class, age, and gender: I hold the privilege, the means, and the societal legitimization to exercise power-over in concrete ways in each of these areas in the course of my daily life. As a trauma survivor, I face multiple challenges if I am to consciously work toward self- and structural-transformation around each of these types of domination:

- *Being traumatized by oppression does not cancel out dominant roles*. I must resist the understandable urge to declare myself an Oppressed Person to the exclusion of any dominant roles – the temptation to convince myself that the depth and tenacity of the suffering caused by my traumatic experience somehow neutralizes or renders irrelevant my access to dominance. I must recognize and hold onto the complexity of dual truths: that I have been profoundly and brutally oppressed, and that society has put me in the position to act as an oppressor in specific and concrete ways.

Humanizing my oppressors is a step toward achieving this kind of awareness, but it also requires on-going political analysis and dialogue, rooted in a compassionate determination to name and understand every political dimension to everyone's life conditions. I say *compassionate* because the transformation of dominant roles requires both awareness and self-compassion – a theme to which I will return later in this

chapter.

• *Maintaining awareness of dominant roles in the moment of rage.* It is one thing to be able to dispassionately analyze and reflect on our access to privilege and dominance; it is quite another to maintain this awareness under circumstances that trigger our traumatic experience and make us feel powerless. As a trauma survivor, I am always at risk of being triggered in this way. If I allow my subjective experience of powerlessness to overwhelm my rational understanding of my dominant roles – even briefly – then in that moment the stage is set for the lethal combination of subjective powerlessness and objective dominance which I have described repeatedly in this book.

An enormous amount of damage can be done in brief moments of unconstrained traumatic rage, when our world constricts to the experience of powerlessness and we completely lose sight of the real power that we hold over anyone who is in a subordinate role in relation to us. These are the moments when we are at the greatest risk of acting abusively, both because of the force of our rage and because we have no sense of how powerfully our behavior impacts others.

We need to develop conscious strategies for maintaining awareness of our dominant roles and our access to power-over in the moment of rage, and for using that awareness to constrain our expressions of rage. One piece of such a strategy *is* the dispassionate analysis of our dominant roles when we are not enraged, without which we cannot possibly be aware of our dominance when we become enraged.

A second step is to anticipate and plan for our moments of rage before they occur. One of the hallmarks of traumatic experience is being taken off guard and suddenly overwhelmed by forces beyond our control. To the extent that that we are able to develop understandings of what is likely to trigger us and of

what is likely to happen to us when we get triggered, we can prepare ourselves for these moments and develop specific coping mechanisms to be used in the moment.[15]

For example, for several years I have carried pieces of paper in my wallet that list specific things that I can do when I lose it with my child and when I lose it with my partner. These include simple measures such as reminding myself that I expected that I could get triggered in this way, taking a time out, going back and apologizing for ways that I have over-reacted to the situation, and finding non-destructive ways to express my feelings. (Obviously each person's coping measures need to be tailored to her or his specific life conditions.)

The next step is to actually use the plan in the moment of rage. In my case, if the piece of paper stays in my wallet when I get triggered – which certainly has happened at times – then the plan has not worked. On the other hand, when I am able to take the piece of paper out of my wallet, this simple act has an enormous impact on my awareness and on my behavior. It forces me to step outside of my rage far enough to remember how my behavior affects others and to reconnect me to the values and to the consciousness that I need in order to stop myself from acting destructively, as well as giving me concrete alternatives to power-under behavior.

There are probably hundreds of variations on this strategy, involving all sorts of cues and devices that make coping mechanisms available in the moment of rage. But the essential features remain the same:
• having a plan that realistically anticipates our psychological states when triggered;
• having a way to actually access the plan when we get triggered;
• and having simple options that we are actually able

to make use of that constrain our destructive behavior in the moment of rage.

We also need to develop a collective approach to strategies for maintaining awareness of our dominant roles in moments of rage. Isolated individuals waging an internal struggle that is socially and politically invisible are far less likely to succeed than groups of people who can offer each other mutual validation, support, and constraint. I am thinking not only of support groups for self-identified trauma survivors, but also of a much wider range of social and political contexts – from couples and families to workplaces and social change organizations – which form the real-life settings where power-under is acted out.

This would mean developing a common language and framework among lovers, friends, parents and children, co-workers, and political allies which name trauma as a key psychological reality. It would mean reaching common understandings of the susceptibility of traumatized people to power-under behavior and of the particular damage caused when we act out powerless rage from dominant positions. And it would mean dialogue, strategizing, and conscious collective struggle to develop and implement plans for containing powerless rage.

The type of strategy that I have proposed to anticipate and plan for moments of traumatic rage is logically straightforward, but it is extremely difficult both psychologically and politically. It is difficult psychologically because we can so easily be overwhelmed by traumatic rage. It is difficult politically because there is so little existing context for understanding trauma as a political issue, *and* because there is so little existing context for recognizing that people can be simultaneously oppressed and oppressors, and that people in dominant roles can be subjectively powerless.

It is hard enough to persuade people to acknowledge their dominant roles, and to make sense of the multiplicity and complexity of dominant and subordinate roles – let alone to add the further complexity of trauma and subjective powerlessness. If people are reluctant to identify as dominants, they are even more reluctant to recognize their own feelings of powerlessness.

Yet without these understandings and recognitions, the lethal combination of objective dominance and subjective powerlessness will go on unabated and will continue to reproduce itself. It will go on not only "out there" – in mainstream economic, political and social life – but also "in here," in the relationships and families and alternative institutions and movement organizations of people who are trying to achieve social change.

I do not know how realistic it is to suppose that we could develop a common language and shared understandings of the politics of trauma at any time in the foreseeable future. But surely the first step is to start talking about trauma in political terms. More than anything else, my goal in this book has been to advance such a dialogue.

Dialogue – rather than monologue or pronouncement – is crucial. The politics of trauma are rife with possibilities for claims of false consciousness – for those who "know" about trauma to instruct those who are "unaware" about the "realities" of their traumatization and about subjective states that they themselves do not identify. This kind of top-down approach could not possibly move us toward liberation, and it is certainly not among the strategies I am suggesting for constraining destructive rage. There may well be times when it is necessary and useful to tell people that they are behaving destructively; but it is another thing entirely to pronounce that I know better

than you do what you are really feeling, or how you are psychologically affected by oppression, or that you are "triggered" and are acting out traumatic experience that you yourself do not acknowledge.

What is needed is a political climate in which the issue of trauma, and the ways in which trauma interacts with power relations in every type of social and political environment, can be openly discussed and explored, with people really listening to each other. Those of us who identify as trauma survivors should be able to name both the personal and political dimensions of our own traumatic experience. To the greatest extent possible we should lead by example, including the public recognition of our capacities for traumatic rage and of the importance of individual and collective strategies for constraining our rage, particularly when we occupy dominant positions and roles.

Those who do not identify as trauma survivors can participate in this dialogue as allies and sources of support – and to the greatest extent possible with the willingness to inspect their own experience for signs of trauma. While we cannot instruct others that they have been traumatized, we can challenge and encourage them to re-examine their histories, their internal landscapes, and particularly to explore the psychological effects of their experiences of oppression. We can also challenge ourselves to learn from the experience and ideas of those with whom we are in dialogue. Consciousness raising in the best sense is always mutual, not unilateral, and that is how it has been practiced most successfully around issues of gender, race, class, homophobia, and so on. This is the type of open dialogue that we need about the politics of trauma.

Paradigm Shift: Subjective Power /
Objective Equality or Constraint

The practice of constructive rage leads to a paradigm shift which stands at the heart of liberation from oppression. The oppression paradigm continuously creates and recreates experiences of subjective powerlessness, and at the same time endlessly proliferates subordinate and dominant roles. When we occupy subordinate positions, and are both subjectively *and* objectively powerless, we are at the mercy of the forces of oppression and are constantly at risk of being overwhelmed and traumatized. When we occupy dominant positions, but carry the legacies of trauma and subjective powerlessness, we are constantly at risk of acting out our powerless rage on those over whom we hold power, reproducing cycles of oppression and trauma.

The liberation paradigm reverses both sides of this equation. One of the cornerstones of liberation is surely that people experience a sense of power and efficacy, and have the ability to control their own lives in a range of meaningful ways. There are both subjective and objective aspects of this process of liberation.

Subjectively, liberation from oppression involves a straightforward progression from powerlessness to empowerment. Where oppression overwhelms our capacity to cope with forces beyond our control, in a liberated state we *subjectively experience* a deep and secure sense of control – over our own bodies, over significant life choices and directions, and over key aspects of our environment. At every turn there is an awareness of options and of our capacity to make choices and to shape our lives in a social and political atmosphere of respect and dignity. Without this kind of subjective empowerment, there is no freedom.

Objectively, the path from oppression to liberation is more intricate and complex. The key is shared

power, and whether this means "empowerment" or constraints on excessive power depends on where we are coming from on the continuum of power relations. In fact, most of us are coming from multiple places on that continuum at the same time.

To the extent that we occupy subordinate positions and roles, liberation means objective as well as subjective empowerment. To the extent that we occupy dominant positions and roles, liberation means placing constraints and reductions on our objective power. In both cases the goal of liberation is a balance of personal autonomy, shared social and political control, and mutual regulation – what could also be characterized as individual and collective self-determination.

The aspect of liberation that involves increased subjective *and* objective power is familiar from the point of view of "us"—oppressed people and those identified with the liberation struggles of the oppressed. The aspect of liberation that involves constraining and reducing the objective power of dominants is familiar when applied to "them" – the oppressors and power elites. What is not at all familiar is the notion that liberation may require the same person to increase power in some ways and decrease or constrain power in others – and that this complexity may apply broadly throughout society.

There are complexities within complexities. Take for example the situations of a white woman and a man of color (examples which are already artificially simplified because they do not take into account class, sexual orientation, age, physical ability, mental health, and so on). Objectively, on the continuum of race, the white woman's power needs to be constrained, the man of color's power increased; on the continuum of gender, the man of color's power needs to be constrained, the white woman's power increased.

But both the man of color and the white woman may

experience an overarching subjective powerlessness, based on lifelong traumatizations which do not necessarily fit neatly into the expected categories of oppression, and which in any case affect their behavior and their politics in their dominant roles as well as in their subordinate roles. In this kind of situation, the reversal of the lethal combination of subjective powerlessness and objective dominance requires that people *simultaneously* become *subjectively more powerful* and *objectively less powerful*.

This only sounds like a paradox. To the same degree that subjective powerlessness sets the stage for explosions of traumatic rage by people in dominant roles, subjective empowerment is one of the key factors which can enable us to constrain our objective power over others. To the extent that we feel powerless and at the mercy of malevolent forces beyond our control, we are more likely to be unaware of the power that we hold over others and far more likely to use that objective power-over, blindly and destructively, in desperate attempts to regain some semblance of equilibrium and control over our own lives. To the extent that we are aware of our own power, and maintain a sense of mastery and control over our own lives and environments, we are more likely to realistically assess our power relations with others; we are less prone to desperation of any sort, less likely to lash out, and far less susceptible to traumatic rage; and we are also less likely to seek to meet our own needs by dominating others.

I do not claim that subjective empowerment by itself is enough to constrain or reverse the exercise of domination.   There are people who are both subjectively empowered and objectively dominant. The constraint and reversal of domination is a function of any number of factors, including values, socialization, cultural norms,[16] many aspects of our economic and

social conditions, and above all political struggle. But I do believe that without subjective empowerment, the constraint of objective dominance is virtually impossible.

There are all sorts of examples which illustrate this. The tenacity of racism has everything to do with the extent to which most white people do not experience a sense of control over their own lives – because of how they were overpowered and traumatized as children, because of class and gender oppression, because of alienation at work, because of social fragmentation, and so on. Similarly, one of the critical roots of male domination is the subjective powerlessness experienced by boys and men, as I have discussed at length in Chapter Three. Parenting practices which dominate, brutalize and traumatize children are often manifestations of power-under by parents who are overwhelmed by their own traumatic histories and by the realities of parenting. In each of these broad areas, subjective empowerment needs to go hand in hand with any effort to curtail domination.

As far as I know, our social change movements have not paid much attention to this critical interconnection between subjective empowerment and the constraint of dominance. I think that this is one of the things that has limited our effectiveness in moving people to give up privilege and power-over. For example, when we tell men that they should stop dominating women because it is wrong – or because women will not stand for it anymore – but fail to recognize how many men already feel powerless at the deepest level of their experience, we are simply operating at cross purposes with the profound internal reality of dominating men. We are asking them to give up excessive power (objective dominance), but to them it is a demand to concede the crumbs of control that they hold in their lives (from the perspective of subjective powerlessness).

Without taking into account the subjective part of this equation, feminist politics may succeed in exacting some concessions in the form of behavior changes from men, but it cannot win men's hearts and minds – and I think that this is a fair description of what has happened over the last 30 years. It is only when we can start talking openly and with compassion about men's internal realities, and when objective power sharing can be coupled with the subjective empowerment of men, that the paradigm could possibly begin to shift from patriarchy to sexual equality for large numbers of men. Subjective empowerment is needed for men to come to believe that it is in our interest to dismantle patriarchy.

I believe that the same holds true for each continuum of oppression. You can take out "men" and substitute white people, or heterosexuals, or parents, or anyone whose class position gives her/him power over people lower on the class ladder, and in each case it is only when people attain a subjective sense of their own power that they can approach the possibility of limiting or giving up their power over others.

One of the lessons of power-under is that in many discrete acts of domination, people are not making conscious choices to behave oppressively or abusively. They are overwhelmed, driven by internal forces beyond their control – the psychological legacies of having been overwhelmed so many times in their lives by external forces beyond their control – and unleash their desperation and rage on those over whom they hold power. It is only when we experience a sense of control over our own lives, and believe at a deep level that we have options and can make meaningful choices about our lives and our relations with others, that we are in a position to control our rage and to make conscious choices about our access to privilege and power-over.

We know what it means for people to gain or

concede power on the objective side of the equation. We can be quite clear about whether or not people have the right to vote, or to sit in the front of the bus; about who has the prerogative to give orders at work, and who is required to follow them; about who acts violently and who is on the receiving end; about who controls the economy and the government, and who is affected by their decisions and policies; and so on. Even where the objective power relations are less formal, we have reasonably clear ways of analyzing and describing who is dominating a meeting or a marriage or a social interaction, and we know what it looks like when these subtler power relations become more equal.

We know much less about what subjective empowerment looks like. This is the case partly because it is an internal reality, but also because there is no organized political framework to discuss and analyze and promote it.

One of the reasons that we have not distinguished between subjective and objective empowerment is that it's so easy to assume that people's subjective states match their objective power positions. When oppressed people gain power objectively, it seems obvious to assume that they also are subjectively empowered – though even this seemingly reasonable assumption does not necessarily hold, depending on the depth of someone's traumatization and the extent to which they do or do not consciously address it. But what does it mean to become subjectively more powerful and at the same time objectively less powerful? How can we know what the subjective part of this looks like, let alone promote it?

I think that the place for each of us to start to explore this question is with ourselves. It is important to insist once again that the challenge of constraining and transforming dominance is not only "out there" – among flagrant racists and homophobes, batterers and

child abusers, the economic and political power elites, and so on – but also "in here," in the lives and very personal struggles of every kind of ordinary person, of social change activists, of writers and readers of books about trauma and politics. It is above all in the course of our own struggles to establish and nurture shared power in every possible aspect of our lives that we can – and need to – explore and describe the kinds of internal empowerment which enable us to reject privilege and dominance, and which in the same breath enable us to emerge from the stranglehold of traumatic rage and power-under.

This is necessarily a collective as well as an individual struggle, not only because power-with can only happen in social and political contexts, but also because our emergence from traumatic rage can only happen with support and through the breaking of the terrible isolation that is endemic to trauma and powerlessness. To the same degree, the naming and analyzing of subjective empowerment needs to be both an individual and collective process.

The concept and practice of constructive rage are of particular importance for achieving the paradigm shift from subjective powerlessness / objective dominance to subjective empowerment / objective constraint. The process of expressing and using rage constructively addresses both the subjective and the objective sides of the equation. Subjectively, we are challenged to recognize that we are never completely powerless. We always have options and the capacity or potential to make choices regarding our self-definition, values, and behavior that is consistent with our values. Regardless of how abusively we have been treated, we have the option and the ability to behave constructively in the world.

Objectively, we are challenged to attend to the real effects of our behavior on others, to pay attention to the

power (including power-over) that we do hold in the world and to regulate our expressions of rage so that they do not cause harm or perpetuate cycles of abuse.

Of course, saying this is not the same as doing it. "Constructive rage" is shorthand for any enormously difficult and deceptively complex struggle to make creative use of traumatic experience – to transform it into a source of energy and motivation for crafting positive personal and social change. But it is a useful shorthand to the extent that it helps us to chart a course in the direction of this kind of transformation, and thus helps us move in the direction of liberation.

Examples of Constructive Rage

People practice constructive rage all the time in the course of everyday life. Each time parents who have experienced trauma in their own lives get angry or exasperated with their children and manage to resolve the problem without resorting to physical or verbal abuse, and maintain respect for the child's physical and emotional integrity, they are making constructive choices and are constraining the power that they hold over the child. Each time trauma survivors are able to negotiate the resolution of conflicts by listening to each other and finding ways to respect and balance the legitimate needs of each, they are constructively managing their rage. Each time traumatized people resolve never to treat anyone the way they have been treated, they are mobilizing their rage in the service of genuine social change. The same is true each time oppressed people mount any kind of nonviolent political action and struggle.

Burt Berlowe, Rebecca Janke, and Julie Penshorn in their book *The Compassionate Rebel: Energized by Anger, Motivated by Love* have compiled the stories of 50 people "using anger as a constructive force to change the perceived injustices they have

experienced."[17] These stories encompass people who have experienced physical and sexual abuse, combat trauma, and many types of oppression who have become social change activists using nonviolent means to promote social justice.

Berlowe, Janke, and Penshorn note that "the majority of the acts of compassion" chronicled in their book "stemmed from anger. When we created the psychological free-space for people to talk about their lives as peacemakers and then worked backwards toward the catalysts for their actions, we found tremendous amounts of anger."[18] They contend that our ability to achieve social change is maximized when "the capacity for rage against injustice and capacity for love are fully joined."[19]

I think it is particularly useful to look at two prominent and remarkable examples of sustained constructive rage at the level of organized political struggle: the U.S. civil rights movement; and the prison years of Nelson Mandela. Both of these examples illustrate the human capacity to mobilize rage constructively in the face of the most brutally oppressive and traumatizing conditions, and illustrate many of the characteristics of nonviolent rage that I have described in this chapter. There are also significant differences, especially around stated commitment to principled nonviolence, which are useful to look at as well.

The Civil Rights Movement
The nonviolent character of the civil rights movement from the early 1950s to the mid-1960s, as well as its many victories in overturning legal segregation and Jim Crow practices in the South, are well known and do not require elaboration.[20] But as far as I know there has been little if any analysis of the

civil rights movement as a *nonviolent response to trauma*, and that is what I want to focus on here.

The conditions out of which the civil rights movement sprang – also well known – included every possible assault on the value and dignity of African Americans. The unavoidable human response to such conditions was terror, rage, and the most profound trauma. A vignette from Richard Wright's classic *Black Boy*[21] captures some of the horror that was a routine part of daily life during the pre-civil rights era.

Wright describes an incident that took place when he was 16 and living in Memphis in 1926. He worked at an optical shop where the white foreman and other white men goaded him to fight with another Black teenager named Harrison. Wright and Harrison refused, and finally the white men offered to pay them five dollars apiece to box four rounds. Wright wanted to say no, feeling that he was being treated like an animal. But Harrison was eager for the money and convinced Wright to accept the offer with the understanding that they would stage the fight so as not to actually hurt each other.

Wright recounts that as soon as the fight started he realized that "[n]either Harrison nor I knew enough about boxing to deceive even a child for a moment." Within seconds he and Harrison were hitting each other hard and drawing blood. "The fight was on, was on against our will. I felt trapped and ashamed….The shame and anger we felt for having allowed ourselves to be duped crept into our blows and blood ran into our eyes. The hate we felt for the men whom we had tried to cheat went into the blows we threw at each other." By the time the fight ended, Wright says, "I hated [Harrison] and I hated myself.…I felt I had done something unclean, something for which I could never properly atone."[22]

This incident, which of course was only one out of

an incalculable volume of violations of the basic humanity of African Americans, captures some of the incredible depth of suffering and psychological harm caused by Jim Crow conditions. Wright and Harrison, unable to resist what they knew to be manipulation by the white men, became the agents of the whites' sadistic racism, literally doing the work of white violence against them. Overwhelmed by powerlessness, shame, and a sense of defilement, Wright exploded with hatred which he directed indiscriminately against himself, against Harrison, and against the whites. His experience constricted into the straightjacket of traumatic rage, and his rage against the whites who dominated and duped him was channeled into violence against the only available target – another Black boy.

If we multiply this one example by the incalculable number of similar instances of utter degradation and powerlessness spawned by Jin Crow conditions, it begins to bring into focus the extent to which those conditions created obstacles to any sort of constructive expression of rage, and created obstacles to political unity among African Americans.

Looked at from this perspective, the sustained unity and nonviolence of the civil rights movement for close to 15 years was an extraordinary achievement. All of the critical aspects of principled nonviolence were present: an explicit organizational commitment to nonviolence; active resistance and the strategic use of non-cooperation; a clearly articulated positive program; a persistent, visible determination not to replicate the hatred and brutality of white racists; and a public refusal to demonize or dehumanize the oppressor.

How could this possibly have been achieved given the psychic legacies of hundreds of years of slavery and savage dehumanization, and in the face of white violence, repression, and a wide range of terror tactics in response to the movement?

One answer is surely that historical conditions in the aftermath of World War II created a climate in which African Americans could grasp the possibility of social change as a tangible reality in their lives, and could grasp nonviolent struggle as a feasible and effective strategy for achieving change. This was a period in which independence movements by people of color against white oppressors were emerging throughout the colonial world, and in which Gandhi demonstrated the enormous political potential of a mass nonviolent movement. The 1954 U.S. Supreme court decision ordering school desegregation, itself the result of both changing conditions and political struggle, became a historical benchmark which ignited hope – perhaps to an unprecedented degree – among Black people and their allies. It seems clear that a climate of hope and possibility can enable people to mobilize and transform traumatic rage into constructive action.

Many other factors helped to sustain constructive rage in the civil rights movement. The commitment of movement organizations to nonviolent struggle was clearly and continuously articulated. There was a strong sense of community and solidarity, fostered particularly by the central role of Black churches in the movement.[23] The movement identified achievable goals and won a series of victories which progressively dismantled legal segregation in the South, and which repeatedly validated principled nonviolence as both an ethical and practical means of struggle. The indisputable claims of the civil rights movement to morality and social justice, coupled with its repeated successes, surely created optimum conditions for sustaining a movement in which means were consistent with ends and in which destructive outpourings of rage could be contained.

But there were also forces of enormous magnitude which could just as easily (or perhaps more easily) have

triggered the self-defeating dynamics of power-under. The use of violence, repression and degradation by whites at all levels of power was so pervasive and so deeply established that African Americans had every reason to experience terror and powerlessness at every turn. There is something intangible about human spirit and potential – beyond any of the specific factors that I have cited – which was harnessed and nurtured by the civil rights movement and which enabled so many traumatized people to withstand terror, to contain their powerless rage, to mobilize hope, to identify options for constructive behavior, and to maintain the discipline of nonviolent protest. I can do no better than to call this a life-force, and I think it is the same force that enables victims of all kinds of brutality and violation to survive, to struggle, and in some cases to thrive.

I do not mean to idealize the civil right movement. Its politics were limited regarding economic equality and were not even on the map regarding gender equality. Its internal structure was hierarchical, with an entrenched leadership and excessive reliance on the charismatic appeal of Martin Luther King. But none of these limitations and flaws diminish the extraordinary success of the civil rights movement in channeling the most profound traumatic experience into sustained, constructive nonviolent struggle. It is a piece of our history which places flesh and bones onto the concept of constructive rage.

Nelson Mandela on Robben Island

Nelson Mandela's 27-year imprisonment under the apartheid regime in South Africa is by now almost universally recognized as a breathtaking triumph of both political and psychological integrity; it has also been recognized as a triumph over traumatizing conditions.[24] Mandela's account[25] of his stay on Robben Island (20 of the 27 years) gives us an

extremely helpful illustration of constructive rage in practice. It is also useful for exploring the relationship between principled nonviolence (to which Mandela did *not* adhere) and constructive rage.

Mandela describes Robben Island as "without question the harshest, most iron-fisted outpost in the South African penal system….[W]e were face to face with the realization that our life would be unredeemably grim."26 Mandela, along with a small group of political prisoners, was placed in a "prison within a prison." He had an individual cell with damp walls, "blankets so flimsy and worn they were practically transparent," and a straw mat. "I could walk the length of my cell in three paces.…I was forty-six years old, a political prisoner with a life sentence, and that small cramped space was to be my home for I knew not how long."27

The political situation in South Africa in 1964, when Mandela entered Robben Island, hardly offered the atmosphere of hope and possibility which nurtured constructive rage during the U.S. civil rights movement. The African National Congress had been declared illegal, and its leadership decimated by imprisonment and repression. The white Afrikaner regime had created a police state which faced no significant international opposition.

Mandela's response to these circumstances was to develop a conscious strategy for survival and resistance. His goal was to remain intact and "undiminished," to maintain his dignity in the face continual, frontal assaults on his integrity by the prison authorities. The clarity of his beliefs and the enormous strength of his determination were the lynchpins of his ability to resist effectively. Mandela also writes eloquently about the importance of social and political solidarity among the segregated ANC prisoners: "We supported each other and gained strength from each other. Whatever we

knew, whatever we learned, we shared, and by sharing multiplied whatever courage we had individually."[28]

Mandela also was able to construct personal and political meaning in his prison activity, viewing it (as it turned out accurately) as connected to the total struggle against apartheid. "We regarded the struggle in prison as a microcosm of the struggle as a whole. We would fight inside as we had fought outside. The racism and repression were the same; I would simply have to fight on different terms."[29]

Critically, Mandela developed and maintained a *strategic* approach to resistance during his prison years. This presents itself on page after page of his account of Robben Island. Consider these examples:

- Mandela and a few other prisoners were lined up for photographs. Mandela, who was aware of regulations requiring written authorization from the commissioner of prisons for prisoners to be photographed, asked the warder to show the authorization. "It was always valuable to be familiar with regulations, because the warders themselves were often ignorant of them and could be intimidated by one's superior knowledge." The warder could not produce the required document. He threatened to punish the prisoners if they refused to have their pictures taken, but Mandela and the other prisoners insisted that prison regulations be followed, and the warder backed down.[30]

- The ANC prisoners "were always looking for ways to stand up to the authorities," and one of the ways that Mandela as an attorney was able to do this was by filing written complaints when prisoners were beaten. In one case, Mandela got word through the prison grapevine of a beating suffered by a non-political prisoner named Ganya. Mandela sent a letter of complaint to the commissioner of prisons. In response he was called to the Robben Island Head Office. "In

the same breath [the prison officials] denied that the beating had occurred and wanted to know how I had heard about it. I insisted that the warder who had beaten Ganya be removed from the island. They refused, saying that there was no evidence against him. But shortly afterward the warder in question was transferred off the island."[31]

- On one occasion when the ANC prisoners were working at the island's quarry, the commanding officer showed up, unexpectedly accompanied by his superior officer, Brigadier Aucamp. "I decided that Aucamp's unexpected appearance was a singular opportunity to present our grievances to the man who had the power to remedy them." Mandela approached the two officers, aware that doing so was against prison regulations but choosing to take the risk in order to speak to Aucamp. The commanding officer ordered Mandela to go back to work. Mandela ignored him and addressed Aucamp, "saying I had taken this extraordinary action because our complaints were being ignored." Aucamp refused to listen to Mandela, told the warders to charge him, and he was put in isolation for four days.

Mandela writes that he learned from this incident "a lesson I already knew but had disobeyed out of desperation" – that publicly challenging an official's authority was not likely to achieve positive results, and that a superior officer was particularly unlikely to override his subordinate in public. "The best way to effect change on Robben Island was to attempt to influence officials privately rather than publicly. I was sometimes condemned for appearing too accommodating to prison officials, but I was willing to accept the criticism in exchange for the improvement."[32]

- In 1966 the minister of justice arranged to have the Transvaal Law Society file a motion to have Mandela disbarred because he was a convicted

criminal. "[T]hey were seeking to punish me at a time when they assumed I would be unable to defend myself….They had reckoned I would not have the initiative or wherewithal to defend myself; they were mistaken." Mandela made a series of requests for conditions and materials he would need in order to prepare his defense – to be excused from working at the quarry, to be given a table and chair in order to be able to write his brief, to have access to a law library in Pretoria, and so on. "My strategy was to overwhelm the prison authorities and the courts with legitimate requests, which I knew they would have a difficult time satisfying." After a flurry of letters over a period of several months, the case was dropped.[33]

• Through smuggled notes, Mandela provided legal advice to prisoners in the general section, many of whom had been convicted without legal representation. He was able to obtain records of cases, identify procedural irregularities and other grounds for appeal, and write appeals which were smuggled back to the prisoners. "I enjoyed keeping my legal skills sharp, and in a few cases verdicts were overturned and sentences reduced. These were gratifying victories; prison is contrived to make one feel powerless, and this was one of the few ways to move the system."[34]

What stands out for me throughout Mandela's prison account is his constant awareness that he had options, that his choices mattered, and that he could and did take constructive action which had positive results. Pinned at the epicenter of the most repressive regime in the world, there was every opportunity for Mandela to feel utterly powerless and to lapse into unfocused traumatic rage. In fact he consciously refused to adopt a position of powerlessness, and in the process he demonstrated the extent to which strategic resistance – the ability to exercise consciously constructive choices in the face of brutality and domination – can serve as a

path out of trauma and toward liberation.

Some of Mandela's victories were purely subjective, consisting of his awareness of his own integrity and self-validation. Others were objective, when he used knowledge of the legal system and his tactical brilliance to out-maneuver and baffle his captors. But in many ways the most telling example was Mandela's response to tactical defeat. When he was put in isolation for defying the commanding officer at the quarry, Mandela could so easily – and so understandably – have focused on the futility of his actions, and could so easily have concluded that he was the victim of an impenetrable system of injustice and abuse. Instead, while never losing sight of the intolerable injustices he faced, Mandela analyzed the system for cracks, viewed his action at the quarry as a tactical mistake, and devised an alternative – and ultimately more successful – strategy.

If Mandela demonstrated the psychological *and* political power of strategic resistance, he also exemplified what I have called humanizing the oppressor. He says repeatedly that he hated apartheid, not the people who administered or benefited from it. Regarding the 1966 assassination of South African Prime Minister Verwoerd he writes, "Although Verwoerd thought Africans were beneath animals, his death did not yield us any pleasure. Political assassination is not something I or the ANC has ever supported. It is a primitive way of contending with an opponent."[35] Upon his release from prison in 1990, Mandela asserted his "belief in the essential humanity even of those who had kept me behind bars for the previous twenty-seven and a half years."[36]

Mandela's humanism was undoubtedly rooted in his core values and politics. But I think it was also made possible by his subjective empowerment. When we are powerless at the hands of our oppressors – in the moment of trauma or in its aftermath – it becomes

virtually impossible to view the perpetrator as a full human being with complexities and vulnerability, and with her or his own story which may well include suffering and oppression. It is only to the extent that we retain (or regain) a sense of our ability to exercise options and to act effectively in the world – and therefore can deeply believe that we have not been utterly devastated by our oppression – that we are in a position to take in the perpetrator's humanity.

This does not necessarily have anything to do with forgiveness, and it certainly does not mean excusing or minimizing the brutality of domination. But it does mean exercising some degree of compassion, and recognizing that oppression and domination are carried out by people who are not fundamentally different from "us." This recognition is an important part of the integrity that is needed to truly survive trauma and to move in the direction of liberation.

Nelson Mandela's unshakable belief in his own human value and in his ability to resist his oppressors – reinforced by a long series of tactical victories under seemingly impossible conditions – enabled him to affirm the human status and value of his oppressors. I suspect that the converse was also true – that humanizing his oppressors made it more possible for Mandela to think clearly and strategically about how to resist them.

I have identified principled nonviolence as a cornerstone of constructive rage – and yet Mandela openly advocated violent struggle. It is true that Mandela (and the ANC) emphasized sabotage of military targets which would avoid or minimize the loss of human life, and that eventually he aggressively pursued negotiation, concluding that a military victory was unlikely and that "[i]t simply did not make sense for both sides to lose thousands if not millions of lives in a conflict that was unnecessary...It was time to

talk."[37] Nevertheless, while tempered by deep concern for human life, Mandela's stance simply cannot be equated to principled nonviolence – a position which he explicitly rejected.

What is more to the point is that Mandela *practiced* nonviolent resistance at Robben Island. Regardless of his views on the moral legitimacy and tactical value of armed struggle in South Africa at large, Mandela clearly recognized that for prisoners at Robben Island, violent resistance was not an option that could possibly have resulted in anything other than overwhelming counter-violence and repression. In his account there is no indication that he and the other political prisoners ever entertained the possibility of the strategic use of violence within prison.

In practice, the day-to-day strategic options that were available to Mandela were all nonviolent, involving various types of non-cooperation – work slow-downs, disobeying unauthorized commands, legal appeals, demands for improved conditions, private overtures to the authorities, and so on. The nonviolence of Mandela's concrete actions at Robben Island was fully consistent with the constructive character of his resistance.

While I have argued that there is much to be gained from organizational commitment to nonviolence on principle, practice is always more important than stated principles. (Another way of saying this is that principles are important to the extent that they inform and influence practice.) Nelson Mandela's practice at Robben Island stands as an extraordinary illustration of the power of nonviolent resistance as a political tool *and* as a path for mobilizing constructive rage in the face of the most dehumanizing conditions.

Mandela's account teaches us that we always have options and the capacity to determine a course of action that can affirm our own human value and that can be

calculated and designed to achieve positive results – even if the only such result is that we are not allowing our oppressors and perpetrators to define our identities and our values. Nothing could be more critical in the struggle to liberate ourselves from the stranglehold of trauma. Powerlessness – being utterly without options -- stands at the heart of trauma. Options mean power, and thus are the first step out of trauma.

I think that we need to resist the understandable temptation to describe, and in a sense write off, Nelson Mandela as an exceptional individual. I say this despite the obvious reality that many of his achievements *were* exceptional, and despite the fact that many of the personal attributes that were instrumental to Mandela's successful resistance – such as his standing as an attorney, his intricate knowledge of the South African legal system, and his tactical brilliance – cannot be generalized to victims of oppression at large.

Nevertheless, to characterize Mandela as an exceptional *person* (as opposed to a person with certain highly useful attributes) is to excuse ourselves from looking at our own capacities to act constructively under traumatizing conditions. The "exceptional" label is not valid partly because Mandela continuously acted in solidarity with other political prisoners and as a member of the ANC, not as an isolated individual – a point which he himself emphasizes but which is easy to disregard. But at a deeper and even more important level, Mandela embodies a capacity for constructive resistance that we all possess.

It is true that under certain circumstances there are particular types of resistance which require technical knowledge and skills that most people don't have. And it is all too true that oppressive social and political conditions constantly impinge upon our ability to resist effectively. But there does exist in each of us the capacity to act constructively in the face of the most

brutal conditions. By this I mean the ability to recognize that we have options, to sort out the options and seek to choose the ones that cause the least harm and do the most good; the tenacity to maintain our own integrity and self-regard; the determination to maintain human connections and regard for others; and the capacity to treat others, including our oppressors, as full human beings.

This potential for constructive response to oppression is not a function of specialized skills or tactical brilliance. It is part of the range of the human condition. If we need to acknowledge our capacities to oppress and dehumanize in order to contain them, then we also need to acknowledge our capacities to act constructively and to humanize in order to achieve them.

Perhaps the most striking thing about human beings is the range in our potential to destroy or to affirm life. This is not a new observation, but we usually think of this range in terms of people who act one way or the other – for example the political and moral distance between someone like Hitler and someone like Mandela. So we externalize the range of human potential by associating the extremes of destructive and constructive behavior with individuals outside of ourselves, and by calling some people monsters and others saints.

We begin to close this gap and to externalize less when we shift our focus to political and economic systems, to social and cultural conditions, which have decisive impacts on individual attitudes and behaviors – conditions which cultivate or suppress inherent human potentials. But the most difficult thing to really believe and accept is that the full human range to do harm and to do good exists as a set of potentials and capacities *within each of us*.

This means taking seriously the notion that each of

us has a potential Hitler *and* a potential Mandela within us; that Hitler had the potential to become a Mandela, and Mandela the potential to have become a Hitler. No one stands outside the range of human possibilities. This is what Thich Nhat Hanh expresses in his poem "Please Call Me By My True Names": "I am the child in Uganda, all skin and bones, / my legs as thin as bamboo sticks, / and I am the arms merchant, selling deadly / weapons in Uganda. / I am the 12-year-old girl, refugee / on a small boat, / who throws herself into the ocean after / being raped by a sea pirate, / and I am the pirate, my heart not yet capable / of seeing and loving."38

Describing oppressors as the Other and labeling Nelson Mandela as exceptional are two sides of the same coin. Both sides of the coin shield us from our own truths. One side shields us from the intolerable reality that we are capable of doing terrible things; that structural oppressions create innumerable perches from which to dominate others; and that destructive social conditions cultivate everyone's capacity to behave destructively, among other things through the mechanisms of traumatic stress and powerless rage. By shielding ourselves from this reality, we exponentially magnify the risk that we will in fact behave destructively – behavior which when it actually occurs we must either deny or attribute to forces beyond our control.

The other side of the coin (Mandela as exceptional) shields us from the intolerably daunting task of trying to realize our best potentials. It excuses us from taking control over our own lives and helps to lock us in a perpetual victim state. The path from trauma to liberation requires us to embrace, with clarity and compassion, the full range of our own human capacities to destroy and to build life, and to exercise conscious choices that constrain destructive behavior, that

minimize our participation in structural domination, and that contribute to the creation of humanized social conditions and power relations from the personal to the global.

Toward a Politics of Self-awareness, Compassion, and Personal Responsibility

The politics of hatred are built on the psychology of dissociation. In order to hate "them," whether "they" are a scapegoated group or an oppressor class, we have to believe that "they" are fundamentally not like "us." This requires us to deny, disown and split off anything within ourselves that we in fact have in common with these other human beings – and thus to dissociate important parts of our own humanity. In order to hate women, men have to deny everything within themselves associated with femininity – vulnerability, softness, most of our capacity for emotional experience. In order to hate gay people, heterosexuals have to deny our natural capacity for same-sex intimacy. In order to hate our oppressors, we have to deny our own inevitable capacity to dominate and oppress.

To avoid the pitfalls of destructive rage and to move toward liberation, we need to reclaim these split off parts of ourselves. A compelling image which captures the spirit of this idea is the notion advanced by Ken Martin that to combat racism, white people need to find the "person of color within." Martin, an African American, was responding to his experience of white activists relating to him as if he were a kind of honorary white person. He argued that in order for whites to stop treating people of color as the Other, they need to connect with the parts of themselves "which might be nurtured by the cultures of people of color. One has not truly discovered the humanity of 'those others' until one has found those others within oneself."[39]

The startling idea that white people have a "person

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of color within" challenges the socially constructed conceptions of race[40] which divide "us" from "them." It also challenges us to locate our fear and hatred of the Other within ourselves – as a projection of something we can't tolerate to face in ourselves rather than having *anything* to do with the human beings defined as Others.

It is a huge stretch for oppressor groups to begin to acknowledge the characteristics of the oppressed within themselves – for men to recognize their "feminine" traits, for whites to start thinking about having a person of color within them, and so on. But I think it is even more challenging for people who identify as oppressed to acknowledge the oppressor within themselves. And yet, as I have argued repeatedly, the recognition of our own capacities to dominate and oppress is crucial: because everyone occupies some kind of dominant role at some time in some area of their life; because traumatic rage sets us up to blindly dominate when we do not recognize our privileged positions and our capacities to oppress; and because humanizing the oppressor plays a critical role in social change strategies which can lead to more equal power relations and more humane social conditions.

We need to achieve the kind of political and emotional self-awareness that can move us beyond denial and dissociation – allowing us to transcend socially constructed divisions and make human connections in all political directions. This means that from our privileged perches we could look "down" and see that we are not fundamentally different than the people over whom we hold power, and from our oppressed places we could look "up" and see that we are not fundamentally different than our oppressors. In order to do this we need a politics of compassion.[41]

Compassion is a reasonably straightforward concept when we direct it toward the oppressed (though it is not

necessarily easy to practice, and can too easily become distorted into condescension and *noblesse oblige*). But the idea of compassion for our perpetrators and oppressors is anything but straightforward. It is difficult conceptually because the politics of resistance and opposition to oppression do not readily integrate with something as "soft" as compassion. It is far more difficult emotionally, because of the intensity of our reactions to the brutality of perpetrators, and because of the enormous weight of our traumatic rage.

For me compassion does not mean excusing or forgiving the acts of perpetrators. There are many acts which in my view are neither excusable nor forgivable. Compassion asks a different kind of question, not about whether to excuse or forgive (and certainly not about whether to forget), but a question about how any particular person has come to *be* a perpetrator. Not about what the perpetrator has done, but about what has been done to the perpetrator.

Embedded in this there is also a question about myself: can I imagine being born this person who has become a perpetrator (even *my* perpetrator)? Can I imagine that if I had experienced exactly the same life conditions to which he or she has been subjected, I could have responded the same way and could have committed the same acts? If I seriously believe that the perpetrator and I are both human beings, that we are not of different species or made up of fundamentally different stuff, then I have to answer this question *yes*. And that is the root of my compassion for the oppressor.

Let's take Adolf Hitler as an extreme example. One view is that Hitler was among a category of human beings who are genetically programmed to become mass killers – an assumption for which there is no scientific basis, and which itself ironically mirrors fascist ideology about genetic inferiority and can only

lead in the direction of totalitarian repression. The alternative is to believe that Hitler was shaped by his social conditions, by a culture saturated with fear and hatred of Jews, and by the brutality of his own treatment as a child, for which there is considerable evidence.[42] If we can stretch ourselves further to imagine Adolf Hitler as a new-born, we would see an innocent human baby, full of life and possibility, deserving of love and affirmation, whose potentials encompassed the full range of human capacities.

What was done to Hitler, by a toxic social environment and by his particular experience of abuse and degradation, annihilated his own potential for compassion and human connection, for kindness and mutual respect, and distorted his need for a sense of power into the psychology and politics of an exterminator.[43] What happened to Hitler is qualitatively similar to what has happened to the most vicious male batterers, described by Neil Jacobson and John Gottman as "Cobras," who "had come from backgrounds that more seriously crushed something very fragile that every child begins life with…"[44]

My compassion for Hitler rests on my willingness to entertain the very real possibility that if I had been born to Hitler's circumstances, I could have become a mass killer (just as if I had been born in Austria I would have grown up speaking German, no matter how "natural" it seems to me that I speak English). Hitler and I share a common humanity, and I am not immune to the damage and distortions wreaked by dehumanizing conditions. What is even more certain is that if Hitler had been born in a humane culture, raised with regard and acceptance and with egalitarian values, he would have become an amazingly different kind of person, one whose potential to affirm life would have had every opportunity to flourish.

One of the reasons why it is important to locate and

own our links to the humanity of the oppressor is that without it, we stand little chance of locating compassion for ourselves. To the extent that we view perpetrators as "them" – as fundamentally different from "us" – it becomes virtually impossible for us to inspect and acknowledge the ways in which we also act from positions of privilege and engage in dominating behavior.

I am not speaking here only of potentials and capacities to enact oppression (which also are important to acknowledge), but of our actual behavior, which inevitably involves some degree of participation in structures of domination and abuses of power. I am thinking of the multiplicity of ways – both structural and face-to-face – in which white people enact racism; straight people enact homophobia; men enact sexism; people on various rungs of the class ladder enact classism; adults exercise arbitrary power over children; people considered physically or mentally "normal" enact ableism; and so on and so on. This laundry list includes *all* of us acting as oppressors in one way or another at some time in our lives.

Compassion for the oppressor makes it possible for us to locate and acknowledge the oppressor within ourselves – and then to try to do something about it. The more we are able to put our outrage at perpetrators on the same page as compassion for their suffering and for the brutalization which has stripped their capacity for human connection and led them to become perpetrators, the more we will be able to face without self-loathing the ways in which *we* occupy dominant roles and have the capacity to act as oppressors.

The point of this kind of self-compassion is not to excuse our bad behavior or to excuse us from struggling to transform and overcome our dominant roles and behaviors. The point is just the opposite: it is only if we can tolerate the truth of the oppressor within that we

can struggle to contain and transform these parts of ourselves. If I am right that many traumatized people occupy dominant roles, and that subjective powerlessness and objective dominance are a lethal combination which account for many concrete acts of oppression and abuse, then compassionate self-awareness of our power over others and how we use it is critical for both personal and structural change.

If compassion does not mean excusing oppressive and dehumanizing behavior, it also does not negate a politics of personal responsibility. While all of us are affected and shaped and too often distorted by our social conditions, we retain the ability to make choices. Another way of saying this is that people also have the capacity to withstand and react against their social conditions; otherwise social change could not possibly happen. There is a tension between the belief that people are shaped by their circumstances and the belief that people can overcome their circumstances, but I think that both are true.

Children's Liberation

Aurora Levins Morales writes that "[t]he oppression of children is the wheel that keeps all other oppressions turning. Without it, misery would have to be imposed afresh on each new generation, instead of being passed down like a heritage of disease."[45] In the long run, our ability to achieve a humane, life-affirming, egalitarian society rests on our ability to raise our children without traumatizing them.

Some pieces of children's liberation are considerably clearer than others. There are first of all the areas where children's rights to safety, physical integrity, and recognition of their basic human worth need to be established and enforced. Flagrant abuses of adult power over children – sexual abuse, physical

assault, verbal derogation – simply need to stop. While we have a very long way to go to win hearts and minds and to change adult behavior in these areas, the issues and goals are not hard to define; and there is growing public attention to the issues.

Likewise the issue of children's material conditions – the soaring rates of children growing up in poverty, hunger and malnutrition, without access to health care and to reasonable educational opportunities, and so on – are at least on the political map, though enormous challenges remain to move the political climate in directions which would improve these conditions for children.

There is also an established tradition and body of work exploring radically egalitarian approaches to education, from A.S. Neill[46] and Ivan Illich[47] to Alfie Kohn.[48] Here too we have a reasonably clear idea of the issues and the directions we need to move in, which involve making education culturally relevant and personally meaningful for kids and above all involve affirming and nurturing children's capacities to self-direct their learning and to freely explore the topics, issues, materials and activities to which they are drawn. While this is hardly the prevailing view in the world of education, it is at least a recognized counterforce, not only as theory but also as a developing practice in a range of alternative schools and classrooms.

Where the issues become much less clear (at least in my mind) – and where in many ways children's liberation has not even hit the political map – is in the area of egalitarian parenting. Public dialogue about child rearing is dominated by "experts" as a technical psychological issue or in popular literature in the form of advice books for parents. While there is a longstanding debate about authoritarian versus non-authoritarian approaches to parenting, what passes for "non-authoritarian" usually means not much more than

refraining from spanking and giving reasons for limits and rules – both of which are valid and important, but do not go very far toward a truly egalitarian practice of raising kids. Given the enormous power that parents hold over their children, and given the amount of damage that is done to children at home, parenting is an area in which there is a crying need for radical voices and visions, and what we have now is virtually a blank page.[49]

There are many reasons for this silence. The intense privacy in which child rearing takes place reinforces its invisibility as a political issue. The devaluation of children insinuates itself even into radical consciousness, making it difficult for us to recognize parenting as an issue which occupies the same level of seriousness and importance as U.S. foreign policy or patriarchy or racism or class. When child rearing does come under a radical lens, it tends to be in the form of a radical critique of current practices, and not with a focus on the development of egalitarian alternatives.[50]

We need to start talking, in as many forums as possible, about how we think we should raise our kids – not just what is wrong with prevailing practices, but what are the right ways to do it – and we need to frame this as a political issue of critical importance. It is political not only because how we raise our children has so much bearing on future political directions and possibilities for liberation, but also because parenting involves power relations every bit as much as patriarchy and racism and class. This seems like an obvious point, considering the extreme power imbalance between adults and kids, but it is one which our cultural blinders keep hidden from view to a remarkable degree.

We need to take the risk of engaging in public dialogue and advocacy about radical child rearing even though at first it may seem that we don't know what

we're talking about. What *are* "egalitarian" parenting practices? The concept of self-direction may be clear and straightforward when it comes to educational activities, but what does it mean when you're trying to get your seven-year-old to brush her or his teeth? There are hundreds of examples at this mundane level which parents and children struggle with every day and which collectively go to the heart of power relations between parents and kids once we have managed to clear away gross abuses of power such as sexual and physical assault.

We can't wish away the power imbalance between adults and kids, and even if we believe that at a certain age (what age?) kids should be able to decide for themselves whether to brush their teeth, it is still the adults who are allowing the kids this choice. If we say (as I think we should) that children are equal *in worth* to adults, and if we envision parenting as a process of moving step by step from the absolute power that adults hold over new-borns to the achievement of equal power relations as kids reach maturity, then an incredible volume of practical details need to be filled in about how to shepherd that process.

As parents, it is overwhelmingly in private that we struggle with the details. We need robust public dialogue about how to raise children as equals – not only at the level of mutual support and exploration, which is crucial, but also in print, at conferences, through teach-ins, and so on. This is a dialogue that needs to include children's voices as well as those of parents and other adults. I am thinking for example of multi-generational books about child rearing in which kids and adults collaborate or with separate sections by kids and by adults; of books, articles and media projects by children exclusively addressing their political situation; and of conference panels that include kids of various ages speaking for themselves.[51]

Finally, I think that any serious dialogue about parenting needs to come back to the issue of trauma – not only how to keep from traumatizing our kids, but also how trauma affects parents. My own experience is that there is nothing in my life that comes close to parenting as a continual trigger for my own childhood trauma, and I believe that this is not unusual. Given how many parents have experienced childhood trauma, and the extent to which parenting evokes our own traumatic histories, trauma emerges as a primary issue that must be addressed if we are to raise our children differently. It is in parent-child relationships, perhaps more poignantly than anywhere else, that the lethal combination of subjective powerlessness and objective dominance plays itself out.

If oppressed people need to find ways to contain and constructively mobilize their traumatic rage in order to build effective social change movements, the same is surely true for traumatized parents to be able to rear our children without abusing them, and rear kids in ways which enable them to flourish. No less than with social change activists, we need parents who are subjectively empowered and objectively constrained – parents who are aware of their options at all times, who recognize that they are in positions to dominate their children and make conscious choices not to do so, and instead choose to nourish their children's capacities to take charge of their own lives.

Trauma as a Movement Issue

What might happen if growing numbers of social change activists openly identified as trauma survivors? How could we benefit politically – not only in terms of bolstering our capacities to constrain and harness traumatic rage, which I have tried to address in this chapter, but also in terms of setting new political

directions and increasing the effectiveness of the left?

I think that an immediate benefit is that we could expand public awareness of the ways in which toxic social conditions cause personal suffering and debilitate the quality of life for a vast range of people. Traumatic stress is by now a familiar concept. To the extent that we can show how trauma is associated with conditions that affect virtually everyone in our society, we can add in significant ways to a critique of the status quo.

Of course, for me to say that a vast number of people experience trauma in a wide range of political and social situations does not move us very far politically. What we need is public personal testimony and "bearing witness"[52] of traumatic experience. In the case of women and combat veterans, this has been happening to varying degrees over the last 30 years. In other cases, such as people of color, gay men and lesbians, and working class and poor people, there has been plenty of testimony about the experience of oppression, but with little connection to trauma that I am aware of. And in other cases still, such as that of men and boys, and in some ways of children in general, we have barely any public awareness of either oppression or trauma.

The point of adding the dimension of trauma to our testimony and our public dialogue about oppression is that it conveys the depth of suffering caused by current conditions. During a historical moment which is touted by mainstream forces as marking the "success" of capitalism as the only viable economic system, when the soaring wealth of the upper strata is equated with prosperity, when poverty is ignored and the welfare poor are being decimated, when racism is declared a thing of the past and the destruction of the environment is constantly minimized and left unchecked, there is a crying need for public testimony which makes tangible and accessible how deeply people are injured by the

prevailing order.

Of course, there are compelling reasons why trauma has *not* been widely associated with oppression and with a wide range of existing social conditions. Trauma *means* unbearable pain. As Judith Herman points out, there will always be a confluence of forces acting to keep this level of pain out of view[53] – not only the self-protective voices of perpetrators instructing their victims never to tell anyone, but also the self-protective psychological mechanisms of trauma victims which lead us to dissociate and to deny our unbearable pain. But there are also psychological and political counterforces which create possibilities for us, individually and collectively, to overcome our dissociation and our denial and to speak the truths of our experience.

35 years ago women were not speaking publicly about sexual abuse and trauma, and sexual violence was not on the political map. This changed through the emergence of the women's movement, which created a political climate that enabled women to speak out – and in turn, women's public testimony about incest and other forms of sexual abuse served as a building block of the movement. We can at least imagine similar possibilities for public testimonies about our personal experiences of abuse and trauma across the spectrum of oppressions, in part because we have the experience of the women's movement to build on and the demonstrated courage of large numbers of individual women to draw on.

Traumatic suffering may be a particularly accessible issue in a post-September 11 world. Vulnerability, powerlessness, and terror are now part of almost everyone's conscious history, making trauma an issue that large numbers of people can personally relate to, and I think that this is not likely to quickly fade. While the tendencies to dissociate and deny overwhelming

pain will continue to operate, the extraordinary prominence and visibility of 9/11 create a public context in which it is possible to raise the issue of trauma and have people recognize it in their own experience.

The challenge is to make links between the suffering caused by 9/11 and the suffering caused by the oppressions that are woven into the fabric of our society. To make links between the terror so many of us felt watching planes crashing into tall buildings and the terror so many of us have experienced when we were attacked as children; links to the powerlessness so many of us experience in so many different ways when we are attacked because of race, gender, class and so on. There is a related challenge to make connections between the suffering caused around the world by U.S. policies and by globalized capitalism and the emotional and spiritual suffering experienced by the U.S. population that materially benefits from those policies. We need to find ways to make vivid and accessible Thich Nhat Hahn's insight that when we do violence to others, we do violence to ourselves.

The eruption of a global peace movement in response to (at this writing) the threatened U.S. invasion of Iraq also is creating possibilities for critiques of the status quo that can stimulate new explorations of personal experience and suffering. Large numbers of people are becoming increasingly aware that U.S. policy is built on deception, dominance, and brutality. As Arundhati Roy writes, the peace movement has "laid siege to Empire….We have made it drop its mask. We have forced it into the open."54

When this kind of critical awareness of power politics happens on a mass scale and is sustained for a sufficient period of time, it has ripple effects. These can include people's willingness to critically reexamine their own experiences of oppression, and to attend more

deeply and more empathically to the suffering of others. It is far from certain that the peace movement can be sustained at its current level, much less that it will broaden and deepen in ways that lead people to connect their opposition to U.S. foreign policy to acknowledgements of personal suffering. But it is possible.

There are many established formats in which public testimony can take place, from organized speak-outs and teach-ins to consciousness raising groups and community-building dialogues that take place within our movement organizations. My hope is that we can find the personal and political will to use these well-established formats for people who have suffered *any* type of oppression to speak out about the depth of the suffering they have experienced, and to make connections between our suffering and the structures of oppression that are responsible for it. In the process we could develop a much broader understanding of the extent to which not only the personal is political, but personal pain is also political.

There is a staggering amount of personal pain in our society. The natural human tendency to deny and to dissociate from deep traumatic experience is constantly reinforced and compounded by socially promoted mechanisms for numbing, ranging from alcohol use to addictive consumerism, from zoning out in front of the TV to the compulsive accumulation of material wealth. Our prospects for building movements which can achieve radical social change rest as much as anything else on finding effective strategies for tapping the breadth and depth of our societal pain. This means public dialogue which creates contexts within which people can critically reexamine their life circumstances, can learn from each other, and can actively participate in naming their suffering. It also requires that we find ways to channel traumatic rage into constructive action,

which brings us full circle to the agenda of this chapter.

One place to start this kind of dialogue is for people who have experienced oppression to publicly self-identify as trauma survivors and to talk about what this has meant in our lives. A simple way to focus such disclosures is to try to give clear and searching answers to this basic question: "How have we experienced abuses of power in our lives, and how have we been affected?" We need to pay vigilant attention to the emotional safety of the people who choose to go public with their suffering, which in some cases may mean events that are limited by gender or race or cultural background, and in others may mean creating safety through numbers, and in all cases should mean trauma survivors taking active measures on our own behalf to educate each other and those not identified as survivors about our vulnerabilities and what we need in order to disclose safely.

To the greatest extent possible, the disclosure of traumatic experience should happen with conscious attention to strategies for subjective empowerment and constructive rage, so that what is unleashed is activism and creative forces which could define new political directions. In the long run it is the awareness that existing conditions cause personal suffering which, as much as anything else, fuels people's commitment to fundamental change.

My process while working on this book may be instructive about how possibilities can be opened up when we surface trauma as a public and political issue. When I started writing I was very clear about the concept of power-under; I had a well-formed analysis of the connections between trauma and oppression politics, and I strongly believed that these understandings could be of value to people interested in or committed to social change. I also knew perfectly well that a book linking trauma to oppression needed to

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have something significant to say about liberation – and I had absolutely no idea what that might be.

At some point when I was writing about the power-under paradigm, it struck me that in order to move beyond all of the destructive potentials of powerless rage, we have to find ways to make our rage constructive. There was an obvious logic to this, but it also resonated emotionally; and it was more the emotional appeal than the logic of "constructive rage" that began to open me up to actively exploring what this really meant and how it might be achieved. Then I began to connect the idea of constructive rage to my background and beliefs about nonviolent struggle, and I started thinking about the civil rights movement in the context of trauma; later I read Nelson Mandela.

By the time I started writing this closing chapter, which had been a blank page at the end of my outline, I had lots of ideas and a totally different emotional attitude than I had started with. This is not to say that all of the ideas will necessarily prove to be useful, but the point here is a different one: that taking trauma on as a political issue can lead us in new directions, and can open up dialogues that go beyond analysis and critique and pain, and that lead us to entertain possibilities and strategies for positive change.

There is certainly a level at which writing this book has been a healing experience for me as a trauma survivor. The difficulty I encountered at first in trying to imagine how a political analysis of trauma could possibly lead in the direction of liberation had everything to do with my "stuff" – my pain, my own experience of powerlessness, and the kind of deep pessimism and despair that trauma commonly evokes. Writing and the dialogues that accompany it have been a way for me to move through some (surely not all) of that stuff and grasp more possibilities in my own life for options and a sense of subjective power and the risk

of entertaining some degree of hope. But it has also meant political growth – the development and expansion of my understanding of how social change can happen.

We need to cultivate this kind of synergy between personal healing and political process. Individual recoveries are not enough by themselves to change the structures of oppression, but they are indispensable to social change when they are linked to political consciousness and activism. We need to make as many of these kinds of links as we can, which means finding as many ways as we can to tap our unbearable pain and use it to expand the boundaries of what we had imagined to be possible, personally and politically.

NOTES

Notes to Chapter One

1. Aurora Levins Morales, *Medicine Stories: History, Culture and the Politics of Integrity* (Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 1998), p. 13.
2. Starhawk, *The Fifth Sacred Thing* (New York: Bantam Books, 1993), p. 164.
3. See for example Michael Albert, "What Are We For?" *Z Magazine* 14:9 (September 2001), pp. 51-56.
4. See Steven Wineman, *The Politics of Human Services* (Boston: South End Press, 1984) for proposals for revitalizing communities around principles of mutual aid, and proposals for political and economic decentralization.
5. Regarding win-win conflict resolution, see Roger Fisher and William Ury, *Getting to Yes: Negotiating Agreement Without Giving In* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1981) and Roger Fisher and Scott Brown, *Getting Together: Building Relationships as We Negotiate* (New York: Penguin Books, 1989).
6. Ruth Benedict, "Synergy—Patterns of the Good Culture," *Psychology Today*, 4:1 (1970), pp. 53-77.
7. Riane Eisler, *The Chalice and the Blade: Our History, Our Future* (San Francisco, CA: HarperSanFrancisco, 1995).
8. C.f. Allan Wade, "Small Acts of Living: Everyday Resistance to Violence and Other Forms of Oppression," *Contemporary Family Therapy* 19:1 (March 1997), pp. 23-39.
9. See for example Bessel van der Kolk and Alexander McFarlane, "The Black Hole of Trauma," in Bessel van der Kolk, Alexander McFarlane, and Lars Weisaeth, eds., *Traumatic Stress: The Effects of Overwhelming Experience on Mind, Body, and Society* (New York: Guilford Press, 1996).

10. Margaret Randall observes that "the sexual invasion of a child's body and the political invasion of a nation's sovereignty" are "profoundly related." *Walking to the Edge: Essays of Resistance* (Boston: South End Press, 1991), p. 115.

11. Sandra Bloom and Michael Reichert, *Bearing Witness: Violence and Collective Responsibility* (Binghamton, N.Y.: The Haworth Maltreatment and Trauma Press, 1998), pp. 9 ff.

12. See for example Judith Herman, *Trauma and Recovery* (New York: Basic Books, 1992).

13. Levins Morales, *Medicine Stories*, p. 4.

14. See Jean Hardisty, *Mobilizing Resentment: Conservative Resurgence from the John Birch Society to the Promise Keepers* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1999).

15. Personal communication.

16. See for example Linda Stout , *Bridging the Class Divide* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1996), especially Chapter 5, "Why Aren't We Winning?"

17. Wade, "Small Acts of Living: Everyday Resistance to Violence and Other Forms of Oppression," p. 23.

18. Neil Jacobson and John Gottman, *When Men Batter Women* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1998), report that vast majority of male batterers in their study presented histories of childhood brutalization and trauma.

19. See Alice Miller, *The Drama of the Gifted Child* (New York: Basic Books, 1990)*, For Your Own Good (New York: Farrar Straus Giroux, 1984), Thou Shalt Not Be Aware* (New York: Penguin Books U.S.A., 1986)*, Banished Knowledge* (New York: Doubleday, 1990)*,* and *Breaking Down the Wall of Silence* (New York: Penguin Books U.S.A., 1993) regarding the link between traumatization and abusive parenting. See Murray Straus, *Beating the Devil out of Them: Corporal Punishment in American Families* (New York: Lexington Books, 1994) regarding the

prevalence of physical violence against children by both mothers and fathers.

20. See for example Levins Morales, *Medicine Stories;* Eli Clare, *Exile and Pride: Disability, Queerness, and Liberation* (Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 1999); Barbara and John Ehrenreich, "The Professional-Managerial Class," in Pat Walker, ed., *Between Labor and Capital* (Boston: South End Press, 1979); Barbara Smith, ed., *Home Girls: A Black Feminist Anthology* (New York: Kitchen Table: Women of Color Press, 1983); Stout, *Bridging the Class Divide*; and Wineman, *The Politics of Human Services*, Chapter 5.
21. C.f. Levins Morales, "Class, Privilege and Loss" in *Medicine Stories*, pp. 93-95.
22. Thich Nhat Hahn, *Anger: Wisdom for Cooling the Flames* (New York: Riverhead Books, 2001).
23. Levins Morales, *Medicine Stories*, p. 122.
24. Diana Russell, *The Secret Trauma: Incest in the Lives of Girls and Women* (New York: Basic Books, 1986), pp. 60-62.
25. David Finkelhor, Gerald Hotaling, I. A. Lewis, and Christine Smith, "Sexual Abuse in a National Survey of Adult Men and Women: Prevalence, Characteristics, and Risk Factors," *Child Abuse & Neglect* 14: 19-28 (1990).
26. See Russell, *The Secret Trauma*, Chapter Two for a discussion of her methodology and its advantages relative to telephone surveys.
27. Mary Koss, "Hidden Rape: Sexual Aggression and Victimization in a National Sample of Students in Higher Education," in A.W. Burgess, ed., *Rape and Sexual Assault II* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1988), cited in Jennifer Freyd, *Betrayal Trauma: The Logic of Forgetting Childhood Abuse* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996).
28. Jacobson and Gottman, *When Men Batter Women*, p. 26, citing Mary Koss et. al., *No Safe Haven*

(Washington, D.C.: American Psychological Association Press, 1994).

29. Jacobson and Gottman, *When Men Batter Women*, citing unpublished data collected by Gottman and (separately) by Dr. Thomas Bradbury at UCLA, as well as published studies by K. Daniel O'Leary, "Physical Aggression Between Spouses," in V.B. Van Hasselt et. al., eds., *Handbook of Family Violence* (New York: Plenum Press, 1988); and by Kenneth Leonard and Marilyn Senchak, "Prospective Prediction of Husband Marital Aggression Within Newlywed Couples," *Journal of Abnormal Psychology* 105: 369-380 (1996).

30. Jacobson and Gottman, p. 26.

31. Finkelhor, Hotaling, Lewis, and Smith, "Sexual Abuse in a National Survey of Adult Men and Women: Prevalence, Characteristics, and Risk Factors."

32. William Holmes and Gail Slap, "Sexual Abuse of Boys: Definition, Prevalence, Correlates, Sequelae, and Management," *Journal of the American Medical Association*, 12/2/98, pp. 1855-1862.

33. See Lois Shea, "Fewer Males Will Report Sexual Abuse," *Boston Globe New Hampshire Weekly*, 7/16/95, p. 1.

34. See William Pollack, *Real Boys: Rescuing Our Sons From the Myths of Boyhood* (New York: Random House, 1998) and Dan Kindlon and Michael Thompson, *Raising Cain: Protecting the Emotional Life of Boys* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1999).

35. Judith Herman, *Father-Daughter Incest* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981).

36. Herman, *Father-Daughter Incest*, p. 109.

37. Miller, *The Drama of the Gifted Child* (New York: Basic Books, 1990).

38. Miller, *Thou Shalt Not Be Aware: Society's Betrayal of the Child*, p. 6.

39. Herman, *Father-Daughter Incest*, p. 125.

40. Miller, *The Drama of the Gifted Child*, p. 21.

41. Reported in Barbara Meltz, "Spanking's Punishing Lessons," *Boston Globe*, 2/4/99, p. F1.

42. Straus, *Beating the Devil out of Them,* p. 3.

43. Jacobson and Gottman, *When Men Batter Women*, p. 94. The authors do not cite any source and do not define "violent home."

44. David Gil, *Violence Against Children* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1970)

45. Miller, *Banished Knowledge*; *Breaking Down the Wall of Silence*.

46. Straus, *Beating the Devil out of Them*

47. David Gil, "Holistic Perspective on Child Abuse and its Prevention," in *The Challenge of Social Equality* (Cambridge, MA: Schenkman, 1976) and "Societal Violence and Violence in Families," in *Beyond The Jungle* (Cambridge, MA: Schenkman, 1979).

48. Miller, *The Drama of the Gifted Child*, Chapter 3.

49. Straus, *Beating the Devil out of Them*, pp. 9-10.

50. Stout, *Bridging the Class Divide*, p. 25.

51. bell hooks, *Sisters of the Yam: Black Women and Self-Recovery* (Boston: South End Press, 1993), p. 10.

52. hooks, *Sisters of the Yam*, p. 54.

53. hooks, p. 12.

54. See Louise Armstrong, *Rocking The Cradle of Sexual Politics: What Happened When Women Said Incest* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1994).

55. See Freyd, *Betrayal Trauma*.

56. Armstrong, *Rocking The Cradle of Sexual Politics*.

57. See Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, Chapter 1.

58. David Finkelhor, "Improving Research, Policy and Practice to Understand Child Sexual Abuse," *Journal of the American Medical Association*, 12/2/98, pp. 1864-1865, citing C. Wang and D. Daro, *Current Trends in Child Abuse Reporting and Fatalities: The Results of the 1997 Annual Fifty State Survey* (Chicago: Center on Child Abuse Prevention Research, 1998).

59. Diana Russell's survey of 930 women found a

statistically significant relationship between both the severity and frequency of incestuous abuse and the degree of trauma reported. See Russell, *The Secret Trauma*, pp. 142, 145. Russell reports inconsistent findings in other research regarding the severity of sexual abuse and the degree of trauma. Russell's own approach to assessing the degree of trauma is in my view problematic, as she relies on self-reporting regarding how upset women were by their experiences of sexual abuse and to what extent it affected their lives.

60. Bloom and Reichert, *Bearing Witness*, p. 99.

Notes to Chapter Two

1. See Allan Wade, "Small Acts of Living: Everyday Resistance to Violence and Other Forms of Oppression," *Contemporary Family Therapy* 19(1): 23-39 (March 1997).

2. See Bessel van der Kolk, Alexander McFarlane, and Lars Weisaeth, eds., *Traumatic Stress: The Effects of Overwhelming Experience on Mind, Body, and Society* (New York: Guilford Press, 1996). Ronnie Janoff-Bulman (citing van der Kolk, *Psychological Trauma* [Washington, D.C.: American Psychiatric Press, 1987]) refers to traumas as "overwhelming life experiences" and states that traumatic events "are directly experienced as threats to survival and self-preservation." Janoff-Bulman, *Shattered Assumptions: Towards a New Psychology of Trauma* (New York: The Free Press, 1992), p. 53.

3. Judith Herman, *Trauma and Recovery* (New York: Basic Books, 1992), p. 33.

4. Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, p. 34. See also Sandra Bloom and Michael Reichert, *Bearing Witness: Violence and Collective Responsibility* (Binghamton,

N.Y.: The Haworth Maltreatment and Trauma Press, 1998), "The Fight-or-Flight Response," pp. 108-109.

5. Herman, p. 34.

6. Herman, p. 34.

7. Bessel van der Kolk and Alexander McFarlane, "The Black Hole of Trauma," in van der Kolk, McFarlane, and Weisaeth, eds., *Traumatic Stress*, p. 6.

8. Peter Levine with Ann Frederick, *Waking the Tiger: Healing Trauma* (Berkeley, CA: North Atlantic Books, 1997).

9. Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, p. 42.

10. Levine, *Waking the Tiger*, p. 99.

11. Levine, p. 100.

12. See Daniel Goleman, *Emotional Intelligence* (New York: Bantam Books, 1995), Chapter 13. See also Bessel van der Kolk, "The Body Keeps Score: Approaches to the Psychobiology of Posttraumatic Stress Disorder," in van der Kolk, McFarlane, and Weisaeth, eds., *Traumatic Stress*; and Marilee Strong, *A Bright Red Scream: Self-mutilation and the Language of Pain* (New York: Penguin Books, 1999), Chapter 5.

13. Goleman, *Emotional Intelligence*, Chapter 13, cites Joseph LeDoux, "Indelibility of Subcortical Emotional Memories," *Journal of Cognitive Neuroscience*, 1: 238-243 (1989); Dennis Charney et. al., "Psychobiologic Mechanisms of Posttraumatic Stress Disorder," *Archives of General Psychiatry*, 50: 294-305 (1993); Roger Pitman, "Naloxone-Reversible Analgesic Response to Combat-Related Stimuli in Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder," *Archives of General Medicine*, June 1990; and interviews conducted by Goleman with John Krystal and Charles Nemeroff.

14. Goleman, *Emotional Intelligence*, p. 203.

15. Goleman, p. 204.

16. Francine Shapiro, *Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing* (New York: The Guilford Press, 1995), p. 40.

17. Bloom and Reichert, *Bearing Witness*, p. 109.

18. Bessel van der Kolk, "The Complexity of Adaptation to Trauma," in van der Kolk, McFarlane, and Weisaeth, eds., *Traumatic Stress*, p. 202.

19. William Pollack, *Real Boys: Rescuing Our Sons From the Myths of Boyhood* (New York: Random House, 1998), p. 57.

20. See my discussion of "The Prevalence of Trauma" in Chapter One.

21. Alice Miller, *For Your Own Good: Hidden Cruelty in Child-rearing and The Roots of Violence* (New York: Farrar Straus Giroux, 1984), p. 58.

22. Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, p. 37.

23. Van der Kolk and McFarlane, "The Black Hole of Trauma," in *Traumatic Stress*, p. 8.

24. Dusty Miller, *Women Who Hurt Themselves* (New York: Basic Books, 1994), p. 99.

25. See Dusty Miller's discussion of dissociation in *Women Who Hurt Themselves*, pp. 99-108. See also Bessel van der Kolk, Onno van der Hart, and Charles Marmar, "Dissociation and Information Processing in Posttraumatic Stress Disorder" in *Traumatic Stress*.

26. Jennifer Freyd, *Betrayal Trauma: The Logic of Forgetting Childhood Abuse* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996).

27. Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, p. 47.

28. Janoff-Bulman, *Shattered Assumptions*, p. 95.

29. Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, p. 47.

30. Alice Miller, *The Drama of the Gifted Child: The Search for the True Self* (New York: Basic Books, 1990). C.F. R.D. Laing, *The Divided Self: A Study of Sanity and Madness* (London: Tavistock Publications, 1960).

31. Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, p. 49.

32. Mike Lew, *Victims No Longer* (New York: HarperCollins, 1990), pp. 14-15.

33. See D. Miller, *Women Who Hurt Themselves*, and

Strong, *A Bright Red Scream*.

34. Van der Kolk reports, "Numerous studies of family violence have found a direct relationship between the severity of childhood abuse and later tendencies to victimize others." "The Complexity of Adaptation to Trauma," in van der Kolk, McFarlane, and Weisaeth, eds., *Traumatic Stress*, p. 199. See also A. Miller, *For Your Own Good*.

35. Aurora Levins Morales, *Medicine Stories: History, Culture and the Politics of Integrity* (Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 1998), p. 124.

36. Wade, "Small Acts of Living: Everyday Resistance to Violence and Other Forms of Oppression."

37. See Nelson Mandela, *Long Walk to Freedom: The Autobiography of Nelson Mandela* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1995).

38. Levins Morales, *Medicine Stories*, p. 112.

39. Levine, *Waking the Tiger*, pp. 26-27.

40. Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, p. 42.

41. Suggested to me by Marilyn Hajer in a personal communication.

42. Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, p. 39.

43. Van der Kolk and McFarlane, "The Black Hole of Trauma," in *Traumatic Stress*, p. 7.

44. D. Miller, *Women Who Hurt Themselves*.

45. Herman says that "[r]eliving a trauma may offer an opportunity for mastery…" *Trauma and Recovery*, p. 42.

46. Herman, p. 41.

47. See van der Kolk, "The Complexity of Adaptation to Trauma," who notes that "borderline" patients "generally become the focus of therapists' rage and frustrations." *Traumatic Stress*, p. 204.

48. Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, p. 123.

49. D. Miller, *Women Who Hurt Themselves*, p. 160.

50. See Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*; van der Kolk, "The Complexity of Adaptation to Trauma," in

Traumatic Stress; D. Miller, *Women Who Hurt Themselves*; and Janoff-Bulman, *Shattered Assumptions*.

51. Bruno Bettelheim, *Love Is Not Enough* (Glencoe, Ill.: Free Press, 1950); *Truants From Life* (Glencoe, Ill.: Free Press, 1955); *The Empty Fortress* (New York: Free Press, 1967); *A Home For The Heart* (New York: Knopf, 1974).

52. Bruno Bettelheim, "Individual and Mass Behavior In Extreme Situations," *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology*, 38: 417-452 (1943); *The Informed Heart: Autonomy in a Mass Age* (Glencoe, Ill.: Free Press, 1960); *Surviving And Other Essays* (New York: Knopf, 1982).

53. Richard Pollak, *The Creation of Dr. B: A Biography of Bruno Bettelheim* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1997).

54. Pollak, Chapter 8, "The Big Bad Wolf."

55. Bruno Bettelheim, *A Good Enough Parent* (New York: Knopf, 1987)*, pp. 124-125.

56. Pollak, *The Creation of Dr. B*, p. 191.

57. Pollak, p. 208.

58. Pollak, pp. 196-197; italics added for "why would you have me hit her?".

59. Pollak quotes Jacquelyn Sanders, who worked under Bettelheim for 13 years and then succeeded him as head of the Orthogenic School, as saying that "a lot of what he did could be considered acting out, but I don't think he was aware of it." Pollak, p. 210.

60. Helen Epstein, *Children of the Holocaust: Conversations With Sons and Daughters of Survivors* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1979).

61. Epstein, *Children of the Holocaust*, p. 56.

62. Epstein, p. 59.

63. Epstein, pp. 56-58.

64. Epstein, pp. 59-60.

65. Epstein, p. 226; italics in the original.

66. Epstein, p. 230; italics in the original.

67. Epstein, p. 228; italics in the original.

68. Epstein, p. 31.

69. Neil Jacobson and John Gottman, *When Men Batter Women* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1998), p. 26.

70. Jacobson and Gottman, *When Men Batter Women*, p. 121; italics in the original.

71. Jacobson and Gottman, p. 110.

72. Jacobson and Gottman, p. 114.

73. Jacobson and Gottman, pp. 116, 121.

74. Jacobson and Gottman, pp. 127-128.

75. Warren Farrell, *The Myth of Male Power: Why Men Are the Disposable Sex* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1993)

76. Farrell, *The Myth of Male Power*, p. 48.

77. Farrell, p. 30.

78. Farrell, p. 117.

79. Farrell, p. 357; italics in the original.

80. Farrell, p. 215.

81. Farrell, p. 298.

82. Regarding reactive violence, c.f. David Gil, "Societal Violence and Violence in Families," in *Beyond the Jungle* (Cambridge, MA: Schenkman, 1979).

83. It is true that riots sometimes induce concessions from power elites. But the purpose of the concessions is to restore public order, and once it is restored those in power typically roll back whatever has been given as soon as it is politically expedient to do so. See for example Francis Fox Piven and Richard Cloward, *Regulating the Poor* (New York: Pantheon, 1971) regarding the historical cycles by which, over a period of centuries, public assistance has been expanded in response to mass unrest and then rolled back after the unrest has subsided.

84. Levins Morales observes, "The easier place by far [is] the place of rage. The high moral ground of the righteously angry victim is in some ways a comforting

place, but a place of far greater power is the willingness to examine and dismantle our own privileges…" *Medicine Stories,* p. 94.

85. Dennis Balcom, "The Interpersonal Dynamics and Treatment of Dual Trauma Couples," *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy*, 22(4): 431-442 (1996); quoted from p. 434. Balcom also cites Z. Solomon, M. Waysman, G. Levy, B. Fried, M. Mikulincer, R. Benbenishty, V. Florian, and A. Bleich, "From Front Line to Home Front: A Study of Secondary Traumatization," *Family Process*, 31: 289-302 (1992) describing the same phenomenon.

86. Balcom, "The Interpersonal Dynamics and Treatment of Dual Trauma Couples," p. 434.

87. Balcom, p. 438.

88. David Barsamian, "Intifada 2000: The Palestinian Uprising," *Z Magazine* 13:12 (December 2000), pp. 52, 55.

89. Jacobson and Gottman, *When Men Batter Women*, p. 28.

90. Jacobson and Gottman, p. 74; italics in the original.

91. Jacobson and Gottman, p. 95.

92. Jacobson and Gottman, p. 94.

93. Jacobson and Gottman, p. 110.

94. Van der Kolk, "The Complexity of Adaptation to Trauma," in van der Kolk, McFarlane, and Weisaeth, eds., *Traumatic Stress*, pp. 197, 199.

95. A. Miller, *For Your Own Good*, p. 58.

96. C.f. Barbara and John Ehrenreich, "The Professional-Managerial Class," in Pat Walker, ed., *Between Labor and Capital* (Boston: South End Press, 1979).

97. For example, Frances Fox Piven noted in a 1963 essay, "Low-Income People and the Political Process," that "*those who are without power feel and think themselves to be powerless and act accordingly.*" In Richard Cloward and Frances Fox Piven, *The Politics of Turmoil: Essays on Poverty, Race, and the Urban*

Crisis (New York: Pantheon Books, 1974), p. 78. (This essay was first published in 1974. Italics in the original.)

98. C.f. David Gil, "Holistic Perspective on Child Abuse and its Prevention," in *The Challenge of Social Equality* (Cambridge, MA: Schenkman, 1976).

99. Ronnie Janoff-Bulman, *Shattered Assumptions: Towards a New Psychology of Trauma* (New York: The Free Press, 1992).

100. James Carroll, "Threshold of a New Era," *Boston Globe*, 10/17/02, p. A15.

101. Patricia J. Williams, "But Fear Itself," *The Nation* 275:13 (10/21/02), p. 9.

102. Ariel Dorfman, "Letter To America," *The Nation* 275:10 (9/30/02), p. 22.

103. Jay Bookman, "The President's Real Goal in Iraq," *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, 9/29/02.

104. Levins Morales, *Medicine Stories*, p. 16.

105. According to van der Kolk, "High levels of competence and interpersonal sensitivity often exist side by side with self-hatred, lack of self-care, and interpersonal cruelty." "The Complexity of Adaptation to Trauma" in *Traumatic Stress,* p. 196.

106. Epstein, *Children of the Holocaust*.

107. Ellen Bass and Laura Davis, *The Courage To Heal* (New York: Harper & Row, 1988).

108. C.f. Wade, "Small Acts of Living: Everyday Resistance to Violence and Other Forms of Oppression."

109. Linda Stout, *Bridging the Class Divide* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1996), p. 103.

110. See for example Virginia Coover, Ellen Deacon, Charles Esser, and Christopher Moore, *Resource Manual for a Living Revolution: A Handbook of Skills & Tools for Social Change Activists* (Philadelphia: New Society Publishers, 1985).

111. See Roger Fisher and William Ury, *Getting to Yes:*

Negotiating Agreement Without Giving In (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1981) and Roger Fisher and Scott Brown, *Getting Together: Building Relationships as We Negotiate* (New York: Penguin Books, 1989).

112. C.f. Margaret Randall's observation that "the invasion of a body and the invasion of a nation are sad reflections of one another." *Walking to the Edge: Essays of Resistance* (Boston: South End Press, 1991), p. xii.

113. See Stout, *Bridging the Class Divide*, for a compelling discussion of how classism is played out within progressive movements and organizations.

114. See Eli Clare, *Exile and Pride: Disability, Queerness, and Liberation* (Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 1999). I discuss this example at more length in Chapter Four.

115. C.f. Levins Morales, "Torturers," in *Medicine Stories*, pp. 111-114.

116. See Piven and Cloward, *Regulating the Poor*.

117. Allen Ginsberg, "America," in *Howl and Other Poems* (San Franciso: City Light Books, 1980 printing; originally published in 1956), p. 31.

Notes to Chapter Three

1. For example, see Judith Herman, *Trauma and Recovery* (New York: Basic Books, 1992).

2.   See for example Judith Herman, *Father-Daughter Incest* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981); Louise Armstrong, *Rocking The Cradle of Sexual Politics: What Happened When Women Said Incest* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1994); Diana Russell, *The Secret Trauma: Incest in the Lives of Girls and Women* (New York: Basic Books, 1986); and Neil Jacobson and John Gottman, *When Men Batter Women* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1998).

3.   Steven Wineman, *The Politics of Human Services*

(Boston: South End Press, 1984), p. 186.

4. Aurora Levins Morales, *Medicine Stories: History, Culture, and the Politics of Integrity* (Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 1998), p. 122.

5.   See Chapter One, "The Prevalence of Trauma." The studies cited are Russell, *The Secret Trauma,* and David Finkelhor, Gerald Hotaling, I. A. Lewis, and Christine Smith, "Sexual Abuse in a National Survey of Adult Men and Women: Prevalence, Characteristics, and Risk Factors," *Child Abuse & Neglect* 14: 19-28 (1990).

6. See Barbara Meltz, "Spanking's Punishing Lessons," *Boston Globe*, 2/4/99, p. F1; and Murray Straus, *Beating the Devil out of Them: Corporal Punishment in American Families* (New York: Lexington Books, 1994).

7. Straus, p. 31.

8. See Jacobson and Gottman, *When Men Batter Women*.

9. Meda Chesney-Lind, *The Female Offender: Girls, Women, and Crime* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1997), p. 24.

10.   Rachel Simmons, *Odd Girl Out: The Hidden Culture of Aggression in Girls* (New York: Harcourt, 2002), p. 115.

11.   See Simmons, *Odd Girl Out*.

12.   Finkelhor, Hotaling, Lewis, and Smith, "Sexual Abuse in a National Survey of Adult Men and Women: Prevalence, Characteristics, and Risk Factors."

13.   William Holmes and Gail Slap, "Sexual Abuse of Boys: Definition, Prevalence, Correlates, Sequelae, and Management," *Journal of the American Medical Association*, 12/2/98, pp. 1855-1862.

14.   Tammy Webber, "Sexual Abuse of Boys Estimated at One in Five," *Boston Globe*, 12/2/98, p.A3.

15.   Lois Shea, "Fewer Males Will Report Sexual Abuse," *Boston Globe New Hampshire Weekly*, 7/16/95, p. 1. Also see Mike Lew, *Victims No Longer*

(New York: HarperCollins, 1990) and Neal King, *Speaking Our Truth: Voices of Courage and Healing for Male Survivors of Childhood Sexual Abuse* (New York: HarperPerennial, 1995).

16.   See Holmes and Slap, "Sexual Abuse of Boys: Definition, Prevalence, Correlates, Sequelae, and Management."

17.   Judith Herman, *Father-Daughter Incest* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981). I discuss covert sexual abuse in Chapter One under "The Prevalence of Trauma."

18.   Shea, "Fewer Males Will Report Sexual Abuse."

19.   King, *Speaking Our Truth*, pp. 5-6.

20.   Lew, *Victims No Longer*, pp. 14-15.

21.   See Meltz, "Spanking's Punishing Lessons," and Straus, *Beating the Devil out of Them*.

22.   Dan Kindlon and Michael Thompson, *Raising Cain: Protecting the Emotional Life of Boys* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1999), p. 53. Kindlon and Thompson also cite research reported by J. Gregory, "Three Strikes and They're Out: African-American Boys and American Schools Response to Misbehavior," *International Journal of Adolescence and Youth*, 7: 25-34 (1997) finding that boys are much more likely than girls to be hit in school, with African-American boys the most likely to be hit.

23.   William Pollack, *Real Boys: Rescuing Our Sons From the Myths of Boyhood* (New York: Random House, 1998). See also Kindlon and Thompson, *Raising Cain,* whose analysis of the emotional damage done to boys by the masculine code is almost identical to Pollack's.

24.   Kindlon and Thompson, *Raising Cain*, p. 73.

25.   Michael Ryan, *Secret Life* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1995), p. 34.

26.   Ryan, *Secret Life*, p. 34.

27.   Pollack, *Real Boys*.

28.   See also Kindlon and Thompson, *Raising Cain*.
29.   Andrew Young, a therapist interviewed by Lois Shea, "said that because boys are socialized to be tough and strong, they often feel great shame at not being able to fend off their attackers. 'When a 5-year-old is victimized and he didn't protect himself, he's feeling, "Gee, I'm not a man,"' Young said." Shea, "Fewer Males Will Report Sexual Abuse."
30.   Chesney-Lind, *The Female Offender*, p. 39. Chesney-Lind suggests that even this figure may be inflated by trends to re-label "incorrigible" behavior by teenage girls toward parents as "assaults," for example in cases of "police officers advising parents to block the doorways when their children threaten to run away, and then charging the youth with 'assault' when they shove past their parents." (p. 39)
31.   Chesney-Lind, pp. 40-41, citing FBI crime statistics for 1994.
32.   Chesney-Lind, p. 10.
33.   Chesney-Lind, p. 57.
34.   Chesney-Lind, p. 54.
35.   Chesney-Lind, p.56.
36.   Veronica Chambers, *Mama's Girl* (New York: Riverhead Books, 1996), p. 78.
37.   Rachel Simmons, *Odd Girl Out: The Hidden Culture of Aggression in Girls* (New York: Harcourt, 2002), pp. 179-180; italics in the original.
38.   Simmons, *Odd Girl Out*, 182.
39.   Holmes and Slap in their survey of research on the sexual abuse of boys state, "Large-sample studies reported that 53% to 94% of perpetrators were men, with up to half of female perpetrators being adolescent aged babysitters." Holmes and Slap, "Sexual Abuse of Boys," p. 1857.
40.   See Kathryn Jennings, "Female Child Molesters: A Review of the Literature," in Michelle Elliott, ed., *Female Sexual Abuse of Children* (New York: The

Guilford Press, 1994), who notes that girls under 16 "also commit sexual offenses against children for which they remain undetected. Their behavior usually occurs while they are trusted to look after a child." Jennings cites F. Knopp and L. Lackey, *Female Sexual Abusers* (Orwell, Vt.: Safer Society Press, 1987); she does not offer statistics or explain how information has been collected about "undetected" cases.

41. Straus, *Beating the Devil out of Them*, Chapter 4, chart 4-3.
42. Simmons, *Odd Girl Out*, p. 22.
43.   Simmons, p. 138.
44.   Simmons, p. 139.
45.   Simmons, p. 139.
46.   Simmons, p. 88.
47.   See Dusty Miller, *Women Who Hurt Themselves* (New York: Basic Books, 1994).
48.   See for example Gloria Steinem, "Supremacy Crimes," *Ms.*, 9(5): 44-47 (1999).
49.   Pollack, *Real Boys*, p. 44 (emphasis Pollack's). See also Kindlon and Thompson, Chapter 11, "Anger and Violence."
50.   Pollack, p. 44.
51.   Pollack, p. 44.
52.   Steinem, "Supremacy Crimes."
53.   King, *Speaking Our Truth*, p. 65. This vignette is one of many testimonies in King's book contributed by male survivors of childhood sexual abuse.
54.   See Kindlon and Thompson, *Raising Cain*, Chapter 10.
55.   Kindlon and Thompson, p. 79.
56.   Pollack, *Real Boys*.
57.   Regarding the concept of a hidden true self, c.f. Alice Miller, *The Drama of the Gifted Child: The Search for the True Self* (New York: Basic Books, 1990) and R.D. Laing, *The Divided Self* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1960). This concept is also consistent

with Pollack's description of male childhood experience in *Real Boys*.

58.   Levins Morales, *Medicine Stories*, p. 118.

59.   Kindlon and Thompson draw a connection between this aspect of the Superman story and the intense isolation that is part of male socialization. See *Raising Cain*, Chapter 7, "Inside the Fortress of Solitude."

60.   Levins Morales, *Medicine Stories*, pp. 45-46.

61.   See for example Richard Hoffman, *Half the House* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1995); Lew, *Victims No Longer*; Ryan, *Secret Life*; and King, *Speaking Our Truth*.

62.   See Pollack, *Real Boys,* and Kindlon and Thompson, *Raising Cain.* Neither of these books explicitly addresses patriarchy as an issue or draws out the political implications of the psychological effects of the masculine code on boys' development; but, to me at least, radical implications are jumping off of the pages.

63.   Levins Morales, *Medicine Stories*, p. 51.

64.   See David Gil, "Holistic Perspective on Child Abuse and its Prevention," in *The Challenge of Social Equality* (Cambridge, MA: Schenkman, 1976).

65.   C.F. Alice Miller, *For Your Own Good: Hidden Cruelty in Child-rearing and The Roots of Violence* (New York: Farrar Straus Giroux, 1984).

66.   Straus, *Beating the Devil out of Them*, p. 20; Straus also cites Betsy Lehman, "Spanking Teaches the Wrong Lesson," *Boston Globe*, 3/13/89, p. 27.

67.   Straus, p. 23. See also Barbara Meltz, "Spanking's Punishing Lessons," *Boston Globe*, 2/4/99, p. F1.

68.   Straus, pp. 54-55.

69.   Straus, p. 25.

70.   Miller, *For Your Own Good*, p. 76.

71.   Levins Morales, *Medicine Stories*, p. 51.

72.   See King, *Speaking Our Truth*, and Elliott, ed.,

Female Sexual Abuse of Children.

73.   David Finkelhor and Diana Russell, "Women as Perpetrators," in Finkelhor, ed., *Child Sexual Abuse: New Theory and Practice* (New York: Free Press, 1984), cited in Michelle Elliott, "What Survivors Tell Us – An Overview," in Elliott, ed., *Female Sexual Abuse of Children*.

74.   Holmes and Slap, "Sexual Abuse of Boys," p. 1857.

75.   See Kathryn Jennings, "Female Child Molesters: A review of the Literature," in Elliott, ed., *Female Sexual Abuse of Children*.

76.   Eliot, What Survivors Tell Us – An Overview," in Elliott, ed., *Female Sexual Abuse of Children*, p. 8.

77.   See Herman, *Father-Daughter Incest*.

78.   Alice Miller describes this type of mother-child relationship in *The Drama of the Gifted Child* (New York: Basic Books, 1990).

79.   See Miller, *The Drama of the Gifted Child* and *Thou Shalt Not Be Aware* (New York: Penguin Books U.S.A., 1986).

80.   Chesney-Lind, *The Female Offender*, p. 102, citing FBI crime statistics for 1994.

81.   See Levins Morales, "The Politics of Childhood" in *Medicine Stories*.

82.   See Armstrong, *Rocking The Cradle of Sexual Politics*.

83.   Levins Morales, *Medicine Stories*, p. 79, in her essay "What Race Isn't."

84.   Miller, "Adolf Hitler's Childhood: From Hidden to Manifest Horror," in *For Your Own Good* pp. 142-197.

85.   Levins Morales, "Torturers," in *Medicine Stories*, pp. 111-114.

86.   Levins Morales, p. 111.

87.   See Warren Farrell, *The Myth of Male Power: Why Men Are the Disposable Sex* (New York: Simon

& Schuster, 1993) for an example of an analysis of men as victims which, to say the least, is seriously counterproductive; see my discussion of Farrell's book in the section on "Examples of Power-Under" in Chapter Two

88.   Jacobson and Gottman, *When Men Batter Women*; see my discussion of this material in Chapter Two, "Examples of Power-Under."

89.   See Chapter Two, "Trauma and Conscious Domination."

90.   Levins Morales, *Medicine Stories*, p. 113.

Notes to Chapter Four

1. I have developed a detailed analysis of interlocking oppressions in *The Politics of Human Services* (Boston: South End Press, 1984), Chapter Five.
2. Aurora Levins Morales, *Medicine Stories: History, Culture, and the Politics of Integrity* (Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 1998), p.122.
3. See Barbara and John Ehrenreich, "The Professional-Managerial Class," in Pat Walker, ed., *Between Labor and Capital* (Boston: South End Press, 1979).
4. See for example Michelle Cliff, "If I Could Write This In Fire, I would Write This in Fire," In Barbara Smith, Ed., *Home Girls: A Black Feminist Anthology* (New York: Kitchen Table: Women of Color Press, 1983).
5. C.f. Levins Morales, "Circle Unbroken: The Politics of Inclusion," in *Medicine Stories*.
6. See "Clearcut: Brutes and Bumper Stickers" and "Clearcut: End of the Line," in Eli Clare, *Exile and Pride: Disability, Queerness, and Liberation* (Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 1999).
7. Clare, p. 45.
8. Clare, p. 50.
9. See June Jordan, "Nobody Mean More to Me Than You And the Future Life of Willie Jordan," in *On Call:*

Political Essays (Boston: South End Press, 1985). Linda Stout, in *Bridging the Class Divide* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1996), describes a similar discrepancy between working class language and "acceptable" middle class language, and her need to learn to speak middle class language in order to be taken seriously by middle class progressive activists.

10. Doris Lessing, Afterward to *The Making of the Representative for Planet 8* in *Canopus in Argos: Archives* (New York: Vintage Books, 1992) p. 1032.

11. Levins Morales, *Medicine Stories*, pp. 93-94.

12. See Peter Levine with Ann Frederick, *Waking the Tiger: Healing Trauma* (Berkeley, CA: North Atlantic Books, 1997).

13. I discuss dissociation at length in Chapter Two.

14. Neil Jacobson and John Gottman, *When Men Batter Women* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1998); see my discussion in Chapter Two.

15. C.f. Levins Morales, "Torturers," in *Medicine Stories*.

16. Barbara and John Ehrenreich, "The Professional-Managerial Class."

17. *Z Magazine* 13:4 (April 2000), p. 2.

18. Clare, *Exile and Pride*, p. 46.

19. For example, see Robin Hahnel, "Speaking Truth To Power: Speaking Truth To Ourselves," *Z Magazine* 13:6 (June 2000), pp. 44-51, for a discussion of the challenges faced by the movement against corporate globalization to forge and maintain unity.

20. Andrea Buffa, "Pacifica Radio Crisis is Settled," *Z Magazine* 15:4 (April 2002), p. 20.

21. Susan Douglas, "Is There a Future for Pacifica," *The Nation* 274:14 (4/15/02), p. 21.

22. Quoted in Buffa, "Pacifica Radio Crisis is Settled," p. 20.

23. Wilhelm Reich, *The Mass Psychology of Fascism* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1970 [originally published in 1933]).   Reich was an extremely supple

political thinker who grappled with crucial questions about both the rise of fascism in Europe and the degeneration of the Soviet Union into a totalitarian state under Stalin. Unfortunately, Reich's explanation of the psychological underpinnings of fascism rests on (in my view) an exceedingly reductionist analysis of sexual repression. There are other problems, including Reich's blatant homophobia. I cite *The Mass Psychology of Fascism* for the critical importance of the questions it raises about the relationship between psychology and reactionary politics.

24. Jean Hardisty, *Mobilizing Resentment: Conservative Resurgence from the John Birch Society to the Promise Keepers* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1999).
25. Hardisty, *Mobilizing Resentment*, p. 8.
26. See for example Bill Berkowitz, "RU-486," *Z Magazine* 13:12 (December 2000), 11-13.
27. See Hardisty, *Mobilizing Resentment*.
28. See Hardisty for an analysis of the relationship between Christian fundamentalism and the right-wing popular movement.
29. Hardisty, p. 51.
30. Stout, *Bridging the Class Divide*, p. 90.
31. Stout, pp. 102-103.

Notes to Chapter Five

1. Jennifer Freyd, *Betrayal Trauma: The Logic of Forgetting Childhood Abuse* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996), p. 194.
2. Most of what I know about Buddhism I have learned from Elisabeth Morrison.
3. Thich Nhat Hanh, *Anger: Wisdom for Cooling the Flames* (New York: Riverhead Books, 2001), p. 30.
4. See the section on "Trauma as Overwhelming Experience" in Chapter Two.

5. See Burt Berlowe, Rebecca Janke, and Julie Penshorn, *The Compassionate Rebel: Energized by Anger, Motivated by Love* (Scandia, MN: Peacemaker Products, 2002), who similarly argue that effective activism needs to integrate anger at injustice with compassion, and also emphasize the importance of focusing on positive alternatives and programs.

6. C.f. Aurora Levins Morales, *Medicine Stories: History, Culture and the Politics of Integrity* (Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 1998), p. 124.

7. Levins Morales, *Medicine Stories*, pp. 111-112.

8. C.f. Mab Segrest, *Born to Belonging: Writings on Spirit and Justice* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2002), Chapter 7, "Of Soul and White Folks."

9. Thich Nhat Hanh, *Anger*, p. 70.

10. Judith Herman identifies disconnection as one of the key psychological harms caused by trauma. See *Trauma and Recovery* (New York: Basic Books, 1992), Chapter 3.

11. By now we have a considerable body of knowledge about how to resolve conflict cooperatively. The approach which has been popularized by Roger Fisher and his colleagues holds significant promise as a tool for radical social change because it is built on the subversive premise that people can resolve differences for mutual gain. See Roger Fisher and William Ury, *Getting to Yes: Negotiating Agreement Without Giving In* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1981) and Roger Fisher and Scott Brown, *Getting Together: Building Relationships as We Negotiate* (New York: Penguin Books, 1989).

12. Fisher and Ury, *Getting to Yes*.

13. See (out of many examples) Louis Fischer, ed., *The Essential Gandhi: An Anthology of His Writings on His Life, Work and Ideas* (New York: Vintage Books, 1962); Clayborne Carson, ed., *The Autobiography of*

Martin Luther King, Jr. (New York: IPM/Warner Books, 1998); Susan Gowan, George Lakey, William Moyer and Richard Taylor, *Moving Toward a New Society* (Philadelphia: New Society Press, 1976); Pam McAllister, ed., *Reweaving the Web of Life: Feminism and Nonviolence* (Philadelphia: New Society Publishers, 1982); and Robert Irwin, *Building a Peace System* (Washington, DC: ExPro Press, 1989).

14. Paolo Freire writes about the "housing of the oppressor"; see *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York: Seabury Press, 1970).

15. Herman writes about the importance of coping mechanisms in a somewhat different context in *Trauma and Recovery*.

16. See Ruth Benedict, "Synergy—Patterns of the Good Culture," *Psychology Today*, 4(1): 53-77 (1970) regarding the impact of cultural norms on social equality and inequality.

17. Berlowe, Janke, and Penshorn, *The Compassionate Rebel*, p. 5. (Full cite at note 5.)

18. *The Compassionate Rebel*, p. 5.

19. *The Compassionate Rebel*, p. 4.

20. See for example Carson, ed., The Autobiography of Martin Luther King, Jr.

21. Richard Wright, *Black Boy: A record of Childhood and Youth* (New York: Harper and Row, 1966 [originally published in 1945]).

22. Wright, *Black Boy*, p. 266.

23. I am grateful to Dorie Krauss for a conversation in which she emphasized the role of the Black churches.

24. See Bessel van der Kolk, Alexander McFarlane, and Lars Weisaeth, eds., *Traumatic Stress: The Effects of Overwhelming Experience on Mind, Body, and Society* (New York: Guilford Press, 1996), p. xxi.

25. Nelson Mandela, *Long Walk to Freedom: The Autobiography of Nelson Mandela* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1995).

26. Mandela, *Long Walk to Freedom, p. 387*.
27. Mandela, pp. 383-4.
28. Mandela, p. 390.
29. Mandela, pp. 390-391.
30. Mandela, pp. 394-395.
31. Mandela, p. 408.
32. Mandela, pp. 416-417.
33. Mandela, pp. 426-427.
34. Mandela, p. 469.
35. Mandela, p. 431.
36. Mandela, p. 562.
37. Mandela, p. 525.
38. Thich Nhat Hanh, "Please Call Me By My True Names," in *Call Me By My True Names: The Collected Poems of Thich Nhat Hanh* (Berkeley, CA: Parallax Press, 1999), p. 72. I am grateful to Susan Klimist for showing me this poem.
39. Martin wrote about "the person of color within" in a 1986 article in *The Grapevine*, the internal newsletter of Movement for a New Society, which disbanded in 1988.
40. C.f. Levins Morales, "What Race Isn't: Teaching Racism," in *Medicine Stories*, pp. 79-82.
41. See Pema Chödrön, *When Things Fall Apart: Heart Advice for Difficult Times* (Boston: Shambhala, 1997) and Thich Nhat Hanh, *Anger* for Buddhist perspectives on compassion which, though not rooted in political analysis, are in many ways compatible with the ideas I develop here. See also Berlowe, Janke, and Penshorn, *The Compassionate Rebel*.
42. See Alice Miller, "Adolf Hitler's Childhood: From Hidden to Manifest Horror," in *For Your Own Good: Hidden Cruelty in Child-rearing and The Roots of Violence* (New York: Farrar Straus Giroux, 1984). pp. 142-197.
43. Aurora Levins Morales has suggested to me in a personal communication that it is useful to see

destructive behavior as coming from people's "impulse to shape their experience," distorted by trauma.

44. Neil Jacobson and John Gottman, *When Men Batter Women* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1998), p. 94.

45. Levins Morales, *Medicine Stories*, p. 51.

46. A.S. Neill, *Summerhill: A Radical Approach to Child Rearing* (New York: Hart Publishing, 1960.

47. Ivan Illich, *Deschooling Society* (New York: Harper & Row, 1971

48. See for example Alfie Kohn, *Punished by Rewards: The Trouble with Gold Stars, Incentive Plans, A's, Praise, and Other Bribes* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1993).

49. Alfie Kohn does address some parenting issues in *Punished by Rewards*; see particularly Chapter 12, "Good Kids Without Goodies."

50. The emphasis on critique rather than vision is also true in areas which occupy much more attention on the left. See Z Staff, "This Yawning Emptiness," *Z Magazine* 13:6 (June 2000), pp. 4-5.

51. C.f. Levins Morales, "The Politics of Childhood," in *Medicine Stories*, pp. 51-54.

52. Levins Morales, *Medicine Stories*, p. 3.

53. Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*.

54. Arundhati Roy, "Confronting Empire," *The Nation* 276:9 (3/10/03), p. 16.

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