



Coercive Control: How Men Entrap Women in Personal Life

Evan Stark

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Description

Despite its great achievements, the domestic violence revolution is stalled, Evan Stark argues, a provocative conclusion he documents by showing that interventions have failed to improve women's long-term safety in relationships or to hold perpetrators accountable. Stark traces this failure to a startling paradox, that the singular focus on violence against women masks an even more devastating reality. In millions of abusive relationships, men use a largely unidentified form of subjugation that more closely resembles kidnapping or indentured servitude than assault. He calls this pattern coercive control. Drawing on sources that range from FBI statistics and film to dozens of actual cases from his thirty years of experience as an award-winning researcher, advocate, and forensic expert, Stark shows in terrifying detail how men can use coercive control to extend their dominance over time and through social space in ways that subvert women's autonomy, isolate them, and infiltrate the most intimate corners of their lives. Against this backdrop, Stark analyzes the cases of three women tried for crimes committed in the context of abuse, showing that their reactions are only intelligible when they are reframed as victims of coercive control rather than as battered wives.

The story of physical and sexual violence against women has been told often. But this is the first book to show that most abused women who seek help do so because their rights and liberties have been jeopardized, not because they have been injured. The coercive control model Stark develops resolves three of the most perplexing challenges posed by abuse: why these relationships endure, why abused women develop a profile of problems seen among no other group of assault victims, and why the legal system has failed to win them justice.

Elevating coercive control from a second-class misdemeanor to a human rights violation, Stark explains why law, policy, and advocacy must shift its focus to emphasize how coercive control jeopardizes women's freedom in everyday life.

Fiercely argued and eminently readable, Stark's work is certain to breathe new life into the domestic violence revolution.

Reviews

“Coercive Control is compelling in the way it frames woman-battering as a web of coercive controls and enforcement. Evan Stark provides a rich history of the refuge/shelter movement and a powerful critique of the criminal legal system. This path breaking exploration of the entrapment of women in intimate partnerships, with its important exploration of social context and critical focus on male social and economic privilege, is a must read - a crucial addition to the literature.”— Barbara J. Hart, Senior Policy and Legal Advisor, Battered Women’s Justice Project

“Evan Stark’s brilliant book will transform our understanding of violence against women and place the anti-abuse campaign squarely in the center of the feminist revolution and the movement for universal human rights. In Stark’s new paradigm, we see that physical violence is only the tip of an iceberg of intimidation, isolation, and deprivation of daily necessities that amounts to a denial to women of personhood and full citizenship. Every human rights theorist, advocate, and jurist needs to read this landmark volume and use it to reinvigorate the movement toward true equality for women. If every law enforcement officer, shelter provider, social worker, and legislator would also read the stories Stark tells about women’s everyday struggles in hostage-like relationships, society’s approach to the abuse of women would be immeasurably strengthened.”— Heidi Hartmann, Institute for Women’s Policy Research and the George Washington University

“Evan Stark has written a momentous work conceptualizing abuse of women by their intimate partners as a major human rights violation. Dr. Stark has explicated the concrete deprivations and structural restraints which are the daily realities of women who have abusive intimate partners. He shows how these abuses create hostage-like living conditions and constrain women’s ability to function as fully free citizens in society. Coercive Control is essential reading for everyone in the mental health and legal professions who treat and represent women. It will help us grasp the oppression suffered by women who may not have visible, physical injuries so that we may help them achieve safety and freedom.”— Marjory D. Fields, J.D., family law and human rights lawyer in private practice and retired Justice, New York State Supreme and Family Courts

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About the Author(s)

Evan Stark, Associate Professor, School of Public Affairs, Rutgers University

Dr. Evan Stark was a founder of one of America’s first domestic violence shelters, the New Haven Project for Battered Women. He has worked in direct service provision for victims of domestic violence, as an advocate for the rights and needs of victims and as a researcher. He co-directed the first major federal research program on domestic violence in health-care settings and identified domestic violence as a leading cause of female injury and the context for multiple medical and mental health problems. Dr. Stark has written extensively on the issue of domestic violence and health and is co-author of *Women at Risk: Domestic Violence and Women’s Health* (1996).