

“This fascinating investigation into what makes abusive men tick is alarming, but its candid handling of a difficult subject makes it a valuable resource for professionals and victims alike.... Jargon-free analysis is frequently broken up by interesting first-person accounts and boxes that distill in-depth information into simple checklists. Bancroft’s book promises to be a beacon of calm for many storm-tossed families.”

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“Most books about abuse in relationships focus on women—how they’re hurt, why they stay. As important as these questions are, they can also distract us from the heart of the problem. Bancroft boldly asks—and brilliantly answers—the most important question of all: Why do so many men abuse women? What can be done about it? This book is desperately needed and long overdue.”

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—*Library Journal* (starred review)

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—Angela Browne, author of *When Battered Women Kill*

“An informative and necessary read.”

—Susan Weitzman, Ph.D., author of *Not to People Like Us: Hidden Abuse in Upscale Marriages*

Why Does He Do That?

Lundy Bancroft


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To the thousands of courageous women,

many of them survivors of abuse themselves,

who have created and sustained the movement

against the abuse of women, and to the many

men who have joined this struggle as allies.

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Acknowledgments

I HAVE HAD MANY, many teachers along my path to understanding the mentality and behavior of abusive men. Before I can name names, however, I need to thank above all the hundreds of female partners and ex-partners of my clients who have shared their stories with me and who have thereby shed light on the denial and distortions running through my clients' accounts of events. The survivors of abuse have been my greatest educators; if we could hear their voices much more, and the voices of the abusers and their allies much less, the world would move rapidly to eliminate the chronic mistreatment that so many women currently face in their intimate relationships.

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I owe tremendous gratitude to my agent, Wendy Sherman, who not only found a home for this

I owe tremendous gratitude to my agent, Wendy Sherman, who not only found a home for this book but also played a major role in forming the original concept and guiding its direction. A writer could not be in better hands. My appreciation also goes to Deb Futter at Doubleday, who led me to Wendy. My editor at Putnam, Jeremy Katz, has had unshakable faith in this project from the beginning and has helped me through several moments of anxiety or hesitation. It fell to Jeremy to let my wagonloads of text dump down upon him so that he could stir it all around and figure out how to shape it into a presentable whole. I also wish to express appreciation to other people at Putnam who supported and worked on this book, including AnnMarie Harris, Denise Silvestro, Marilyn Ducksworth, and Brenda Goldberg.

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Lundy Bancroft

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Note on Terminology

IN REFERRING TO angry and controlling men in this book, I have chosen to use in most cases the shorter terms *abusive man* and *abuser*. I have used these terms for readability and not because I believe that every man who has problems with angry or controlling behaviors is abusive. I needed to select a simple word I could apply to any man who has recurring problems with disrespecting, controlling, insulting, or devaluing his partner, whether or not his behavior also involves more explicit verbal abuse, physical aggression, or sexual mistreatment. Any of these behaviors can have a serious impact on a woman's life and can lead her to feel confused, depressed, anxious, or afraid. So even if your partner is not an abuser, you will find that much of what is described in the pages ahead can help to clarify for both of you the problems in your relationship and what steps you can take to head in a more satisfying, supportive, and intimate direction. If you are not sure whether your partner's behavior should be called *abuse* or not, turn to Chapter 5, which will help you sort out the distinctions.

At the same time, remember that even if your partner's behavior doesn't fit the definition of abuse, it may still have a serious effect on you. Any coercion or disrespect by a relationship partner is an important problem. Controlling men fall on a *spectrum* of behaviors, from those who exhibit only a few of the tactics I describe in this book to those who use almost all of them. Similarly, these men run a gamut in their attitudes, from those who are willing to accept confrontation about their behaviors and strive to change them, to those who won't listen to the woman's perspective at all, feel completely justified, and become highly retaliatory if she attempts to stand up for herself. (In fact, as we see in Chapter 5, one of the best ways to tell how deep a man's control problem goes is by seeing how he reacts when you start demanding that he treat you better. If he accepts your grievances and actually takes steps to change what he does, the prospects for the future brighten somewhat.) The level of anger exhibited by a controlling man also shows wide variation, but unfortunately it doesn't tell us much in itself about how psychologically destructive he may be or how likely he is to change, as we will see.

In addition, I have chosen to use the terms *he* to refer to the abusive person and *she* to the abused partner. I selected these terms for convenience and because they correctly describe the great majority of relationships in which power is being abused. However, control and abuse are also a widespread problem in lesbian and gay male relationships, and the bulk of what I describe in this book is relevant to same-sex abusers.

I HAVE BEEN WORKING WITH angry and controlling men for fifteen years as a counselor, evaluator, and investigator, and have accumulated a wealth of knowledge from the two thousand or more cases with which I have been involved. I have learned the warning signs of abuse and control that a woman can watch out for early in a relationship. I've come to know what a controlling man is *really* saying, the meaning that is hidden behind his words. I've seen clues to recognizing when verbal and emotional aggression are heading toward violence. I've found ways to separate out abusive men who are faking change from those who are doing some genuine work on themselves. And I have learned that the problem of abusiveness has surprisingly little to do with how a man *feels*—my clients actually differ very little from nonabusive men in their emotional experiences—and everything to do with how he *thinks*. The answers are inside his mind.

However, as delighted as I am to have had the opportunity to gain this insight, *I am not one of the people who most needs it*. The people who can best benefit from knowledge about abusers and how they think are *women*, who can use what I have learned to help themselves recognize when they are being controlled or devalued in a relationship, to find ways to get free of abuse if it is happening, and to know how to avoid getting involved with an abusive man—or a controller or a user—next time. The purpose of this book is to equip women with the ability to protect themselves, physically and psychologically, from angry and controlling men.

To prepare for writing this book, I first generated a list of the twenty-one questions that women most often ask me about their abusive partners, questions such as:

“Is he really sorry?”

“Why do so many of our friends side with him?”

“Is he going to hit me some day?”

and many others. I then built my explanations around these concerns, to make sure that women would be able to look here to find the information they urgently need. You will find these twenty-one questions highlighted as you go through this book; you might want to flip through the pages for a moment now just to grab a quick glimpse of where I have addressed the issues that are most pressing for you.

Another central goal of mine is to offer assistance to each woman who is struggling with how she is being treated in a relationship, regardless of what label she may put on her partner's behavior. Words like *control* and *abuse* can be loaded ones, and you may not feel that they fit your particular circumstances. I have chosen to use the term *abusers* to refer to men who use a wide range of controlling, devaluing, or intimidating behaviors. In some cases I am talking about physical batterers and at other times about men who use or insult their partners but never frighten or intimidate them.

and at other times about men who use or insult their partners but never frighten or intimidate them. Some of the men I describe in the pages ahead change moods so drastically and so often that a woman could never feel sure what they are like, much less attach a label. Your partner may be arrogant, or may play mind games, or may act selfishly over and over again, but his better aspects may make you feel that he is miles away from being an “abuser.” Please don’t let my language put you off; I have simply chosen the word *abuser* as a shorthand way of saying “men who chronically make their partners feel mistreated or devalued.” You can adopt a different term if you know one that fits your partner better. But whatever style of mistreatment your partner uses, rest assured that you will find in these pages the answers to many questions that have perplexed you.

If the person you are involved with is the same sex as you are, you have a place here too. Lesbians and gay men who abuse their partners exhibit much of the same thinking, and most of the same tactics and excuses, that abusive heterosexual men do. In this book I have used the term *he* for the abuser and *she* for the abused partner to keep my discussions simple and clear, but abused lesbian and gay men are very much in my thoughts, right alongside of abused straight women. Of course, you will need to change the gender language to fit your relationship, for which I apologize in advance. You will also find a section in Chapter 6 where I speak specifically about the similarities and differences of same-sex abusers.

Similarly, this book includes stories of men from a very wide range of racial and cultural backgrounds. Although the attitudes and behaviors of controlling and abusive men vary somewhat from culture to culture, I have found that their similarities greatly outweigh their differences. If your partner is a person of color or an immigrant, or if you are a member of one of these groups yourself, you will find that much of what this book discusses, or perhaps all of it, fits your experience quite well. While I have not specified race or ethnicity in the cases I describe in these pages, roughly one-third of the abusers whose stories I tell are men of color or men from nations outside of North America. I further discuss some specific racial and cultural issues in Chapter 6.

MY EXPERIENCE WORKING WITH ANGRY AND CONTROLLING MEN

I began counseling abusive men individually and in groups in 1987, while working for a program called Emerge, the first agency in the United States to offer specialized services for men who abuse women. For roughly the next five years I worked almost exclusively with clients who were coming to the program voluntarily. They generally attended under heavy pressure from their female partners, who were either talking about leaving the relationship or had already done so. In many cases, the woman had gone to court to seek a restraining order legally barring the man from the home and in many cases ordering him to stay away from the woman altogether. The men’s main motivation for seeking counseling was the hope of saving their relationships. It was common for them to feel some guilt or discomfort about their abusive behavior, but they simultaneously believed strongly in the validity of their excuses and justifications, so their feelings of remorse would not have been enough in themselves to have kept them in my program. In those early years, the clients I worked with were men who used far more verbal and emotional abuse than physical violence, although most of them had been physically intimidating or assaultive on at least a few occasions.

During the 1990s the legal system became much more involved than it had been in the past in responding to domestic abuse, with the result that court-mandated clients started at first to trickle and then to pour in the doors of our program. These men often had a much greater propensity for physical violence than our earlier clients, sometimes involving the use of weapons or vicious beatings resulting in the hospitalization of their partners. Yet we observed that in other ways these men were generally

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