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Violence Against Women 2010 16: 981

DOI: 10.1177/1077801210378978

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Violence Against Women
16(9) 981-984

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Jeffrey L. Edleson¹



I wanted to title the introduction to this special issue “What’s the Punch Line?” but *punch* is too violent and Ellen Pence would tease me no end if I did that, and she’d do it in front of a large audience, I am sure of it! But I do think of punch lines when I think of Ellen. She loves to tease people and tell humorous stories. Most people get a wide grin on their face when you mention Ellen’s name because she’s hilarious. Her dry, sarcastic humor and teasing make her a comedienne extraordinaire, and it is the *weapon* she most often uses to *disarm* people who may not want to hear what she has to say.

Ellen and I have lived in the same state for almost three decades. Our paths have crossed many times, most often outside Minnesota. Like so many others, I’ve been inspired by her innovative thinking, the object of her teasing, and the beneficiary of her humor. It is through Ellen’s introduction that I met Susan Schechter, who was sitting with her at a conference in Minneapolis. This act of Ellen’s was the spark that generated Susan’s and my long collaboration on children’s exposure to domestic violence. I am sure Ellen has made many more connections like Susan’s and mine that inspired new thinking and movements in the effort to end violence against women and children.

The single most important quality of Ellen is the way she sees systems. She is an incredible thinker or maybe a rethinker and the “Pence Line” of thinking is always a major influence in our field. In fact, I think the Pence Line is nicely expressed in Leonard Cohen’s chorus for the song “Anthem” where he suggests forgetting the perfect because everything has a crack in it and that is how the light shines in. Ellen takes institutional structures we assume to be set, deconstructs them, and then re-envisioning how they might be rebuilt in a way to increase safety for women and children. In essence, she shines the light through the cracks.

Ellen’s contributions to the movement to end violence against women have been many and important. We often associate an individual leader in our field with one particular effort, say batterer intervention programs, advocacy, or family justice centers. Ellen, the contrarian she always has been, is a leader in not only one area but in at least three by my count. Ellen and her colleagues have elaborated the concept of batterer intervention as part of a coordinated community response to the point that it is now commonplace, rethought approaches to supervised visitation, and developed safety and accountability

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audit protocols that are now being widely used. Each essay in this special issue celebrates these enormous contributions of Ellen to our efforts to end violence.

The Duluth Model, Power and Control, and Coordinated Community Response

Ellen—working with many colleagues, including Michael Paymar—developed one of the earliest efforts to intervene with men who batter. The Duluth model, as it is usually called, is most often thought of as an educational curriculum for men who batter that includes a diagram called the Power and Control Wheel. Shamita Das Dasgupta's and Edward Gondolf's essays that open this special issue describe the Duluth model, the importance of the Power and Control Wheel, how critics of the model have missed the mark, and the impact of Ellen and this advocacy model on the field. In addition, Scott Miller has edited an interview of Ellen by Luis Aravena that reveals her thinking on how the Duluth model's curriculum was developed and the importance of its various components.

No one, *absolutely no one*, who has taken a training or course on domestic violence in the past 30 years would be able to complete it without studying a Power and Control Wheel and the many, many variations of it that have appeared over the years. There is even an online gallery of wheels, wheels for different populations and in multiple languages. The effect of this wheel is that it keeps us all focused on the patterned use of coercive control in its various forms.

The Duluth model's educational curriculum for men who batter is really only a small part of the entire Duluth model. The strength of Ellen's work in Duluth is that it evolved beyond a men's program and into a multisystem collaboration to hold men accountable. Ellen pioneered formal collaborative agreements that publicly committed key institutions in a community to work together to support victims and hold abusers accountable. Both Shamita Das Dasgupta's and Edward Gondolf's essays speak as well to this larger contribution by Ellen.

Supervised Visitation

Another major contribution by Ellen has been her work with colleagues, including Martha McMahon, on supervised visitation. Martha's and Ellen's publication titled *On Safety's Side* is one of the clearest arguments in favor of a rethinking of supervised visitation in cases of domestic violence. Melissa Scaia and Laura Connelly, Ellen's collaborators located at the Advocates for Family Peace in Grand Rapids, Minnesota, have written an essay outlining these major contributions to rethinking and restructuring supervised visitation. Melissa and Laura, as well as Shamita, discuss the formation of Praxis International and its role as an early national technical assistance provider for the federally funded Safe Havens grants program. As Melissa and Laura state,

Ellen Pence created a vision, principles of practice, and a framework for the intersection of domestic violence and supervised visitation. The timing of her presence in

the field of supervised visitation allowed her to essentially provide the leadership on an emerging social service. (2010, p. 1023)

Ellen has always provided leadership through a vision translated into principles of practice, not only in the areas of coordinated community responses and supervised visitation but also the methods we use to understand what needs to change. This is the focus of the next part of this special issue.

Safety and Accountability Audits

The list of Ellen's contributions to ending violence against women and children would be incomplete without discussing her conceptualization and work on safety and accountability audits. Jane Sadusky, Rhonda Martinson, Kristine Lizdas, and Casey McGee, all long-time collaborators with Ellen, describe safety audits and how Ellen introduced institutional ethnography as a method for understanding and designing major restructuring of institutions critical to women's and children's safety in our society. In describing a safety audit, the authors write,

The safety audit explores how the lived experience of a person who is processed as a case is retained, altered, or erased in the case handling. More specifically, the Safety Audit reveals to what extent safety and accountability are incorporated into daily routines and practices of workers who act on that person's case. (2010, p. 1033)

The dozens of audits of criminal justice, law enforcement, child welfare, and other institutions in our society have created concrete, evidence-based (in the best sense of the term) guidelines for major institutional change.

The safety audit method is one of Ellen's most important contributions to date and has wide application across many institutions that come into contact with battered women and their families. Wide application of Ellen's ideas and methods has not been contained in our domestic borders, as the final section of this special issue so clearly indicates.

International to Individual Impact

Ellen could practically see Canada from her house in Duluth so why wouldn't she have an international impact? The Pence Line of thinking has touched many and only a small portion are in the United States. Coordinated community responses have been created across the globe, from New Zealand to Europe. The series of letters to Ellen collected by Rebecca and Russell Dobash from colleagues across Britain and Europe attest to only part of her global influence. It certainly reaches well beyond Europe to many other parts of the world.

Finally, all these powerful ideas of Ellen's really come back to their impact on individuals. Shamita Das Dasgupta started this special issue with an essay on her personal connection to Ellen and so we also end the issue with a personal essay titled "Ellen's Hand," by Lt. Mark Wynn on how Ellen's work has influenced his entire career in law enforcement

and transformed the way he and many other professionals in the field view domestic violence and their roles in stopping it.

These powerful changes in our way of thinking, assessing, and collaborating are only some of the extraordinary contributions Ellen Pence has made to date. To paraphrase Leonard Cohen, the light Ellen has shined into the cracks of our not-so-perfect world has revealed many new paths to safety for all of us and for the many, many women, children, and men whose lives have been dramatically changed for the better, now and long into the future.

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Bio

Jeffrey L. Edleson is a professor in the University of Minnesota School of Social Work and Director of the Minnesota Center Against Violence and Abuse (<http://www.mincava.umn.edu>). He is one of the world's leading authorities on children exposed to domestic violence and has published more than 100 articles and 10 books on domestic violence, group work, and program evaluation. He has recently coedited (with Oliver J. Williams) the book *Parenting by Men Who Batter: New Directions in Assessment and Intervention* (Oxford University Press, 2007), (with Claire Renzetti) the multi-volume Encyclopedia of Interpersonal Violence (Sage, 2008) and (with Claire Renzetti and Raquel Kennedy Bergen) the *Sourcebook on Violence Against Women*, 2nd Edition (Sage Publications, 2010).