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Abstract
This article reports the case of a young military police officer who murdered his fiancée. The dominant wisdom is that men kill their female partners as an expression of their power and control or because their power and control is ebbing. Employing a sociological imagination and Avery Gordon’s notion of haunting, the author draws on feminist and social psychological discourses to highlight the contextual importance of the power relations of gender and the central role of shame and humiliated fury in the killing. The contextual importance of power relations and the central role of shame and humiliated fury constitute necessary but not sufficient conditions for the commission of intimate-partner homicide because such killings also involve inexplicable forces. The author discusses some of the practical and theoretical implications of the findings.

Keywords
case study, interpretive sociology, emotion, shame, humiliated fury

Introduction

We had been driving for a good while through beautiful open country. From time to time small herds of antelope graced the grassland. Bison lived nearby,

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so I was told. The sky was immense and inviting, the air warm and dry, chilling off appreciably at night. My friend, Rex James, and I were about to participate in a two-day domestic violence fatality review of an intimate partner homicide (IPH). Rex is the coordinator of the statewide domestic violence fatality review team. As a researcher and writer in this field, I had worked with Rex’s team a number of years earlier. They took their reviewing of fatalities seriously but they also enjoyed each other’s company. I knew that we would have a stimulating and engaging few days, a tiny exercise in grassroots democracy.

At one point in our journey of several hundred miles, Rex drew my attention to the haunting presence of nuclear missile silos off in the distance. He humorously suggested that I could depart the vehicle, climb the perimeter fence, and see how close I might get to the missiles. I declined his offer, at the same time asking what might happen if I suddenly became so curious. Rex replied the military police would respond rather quickly, probably before I got anywhere near the missiles. Our light and frivolous conversation belied the reality that those missiles figured prominently amidst the muscularity of late modern American life; that vast parts of the open country had long since been cordoned off for military purposes; and that the once hunted and now much rarer bison had also been segregated, subject to rational regulation and conserved for the gas-guzzling tourist to ponder from a safe vantage point.

It just so happened that the fatality review Rex and I were about to participate in involved two young military police officers. The elite among this group of officers guarded the nuclear weapons near the Air Force base. One man who sought to join this elite group was the young Kevin Jones, nineteen. Kevin murdered his fiancée, Joanna Jenkins, twenty-two, after she apparently informed him she was breaking off their engagement because “there was no way she was going to marry an alcoholic.” Of course, the case involved much more than a strong young woman rejecting a lover she perceived as wanting too much control over her life, who had a serious drinking problem, and who could not control his hostility toward her.

Scenarios similar to this case are likely to play out increasingly across this country in the foreseeable future, as servicemen and women return from Iraq and Afghanistan, many reporting being haunted by the presence of the dead. Thus, the time is right to reflect carefully on some of the nuances and complexities of IPH.

In what follows, I examine the extant literature that attempts to make sense of IPH and, to a lesser degree, intimate partner violence (IPV), and I argue for an appreciation of the complexity of IPH. I contend that IPH is complex and driven in significant part by a perpetrator’s sense or feeling that
he or she has somehow failed to live up to the prescriptions or imperatives of
the gender regime or gender order and that perpetrators’ identities are igno-
miniously stigmatized as a result. I propose that many perpetrators inchoately
feel this deeply degraded sense of self rather than experiencing their shame
in a rational or readily discernible manner. Perpetrators incorporate broad-
ranging social and historical forces into their emotional styles—styles that
increasingly display what I refer to as “humiliated fury.” The negotiated or
interactional power relations of the gender order inform and fuel the accumu-
lation of ignominy and rage among perpetrators. However, perpetrators’
contested or contingent power over victims is of secondary rather than pri-
mary importance, acting distally rather than proximally, and we can best see
it as an indirect contextual and interpretive frame rather than a direct cause of
violence and murder.

After exploring the extant literature, I address some epistemological and
methodological issues, proposing that the use of in-depth case studies is a
powerful way of examining IPH. My case study draws on various discursive
themes and specialized languages that do not sit easily with each other. For
example, I deploy the language of clinical psychology alongside the jargon
of criminal justice interventions, the parlance of the sociological imagina-
tion, and the everyday words and feelings of family members and witnesses.
At times the dissonance is jarring and the juxtapositions unsettling. However,
I contend these tense juxtapositions arise persistently when fatality review
teams examine cases of IPH in depth. Finally, I discuss the relevance of my
interpretation to the study of IPH and the assessment of risk and danger.

The need for reframing the problem of IPV and homicide is urgent for at
least three reasons, two of them of recent origin, one with a longer-standing
history. First, the economic downturn means more people will lose their jobs
and a number of researchers point to links between unemployment and IPH
(Campbell et al. 2003; Websdale 2010). Second, as men return from Iraq and
Afghanistan with traumatic brain injuries and posttraumatic stress disorder
(PTSD), IPHs among military families will likely increase. Third, the antido-
mestic violence movement is divided deeply between those who pay closer
attention to the perspectives of female victims (Stark 2007) and those who
draw significantly on the emotional and psychological condition of male per-
petrators (Dutton 2006). The former includes a powerful feminist lobby and
the latter includes a number of influential psychologists. These divisions are
unfortunate. My review of Kevin Jones’s murderous behavior allows us to
draw on these antagonistic schools of thought, bringing us closer to the
cumulative emotional aspects of the case and their continuities with Kevin’s
eventual act of snapping.
The Problem of Making Sense of IPH: Observations on the Extant Literature

To date, the dominant model used to understand IPV and IPH is what many researchers, practitioners, advocates, and activists refer to as the power and control wheel. The wheel developed out of conversations and interviews between battered women, advocates, and feminist activists. Put simply, men use a variety of tactics against wives and partners including threats, intimidation, isolation, economic abuse, and the invocation of traditional and stereotypical notions of male privilege to dominate women. In the words of the Domestic Abuse Intervention Project (Duluth), battering “is characterized by the pattern of actions that an individual uses to intentionally control or dominate his intimate partner. That is why the words ‘power and control’ are in the center of the wheel” (DAIP 2009; italics mine). Indeed, we learn in the DAIP promotional literature advertising “NEW BIGGER power and control wheel posters” that the wheel has been “translated into over 40 languages and has resonated with the experience of battered women world-wide” (DAIP 2009).

In those cases where men kill women, many have assumed they do so as an expression of their power over them and their ultimate control of them. A variation on this theme is that men also kill women intimates because their power is threatened and their control is ebbing. Some feminist researchers have interpreted IPH as a final attempt by men to exert “their power and control over their wives” (Wallace 1986, 123) or as “the ultimate expression of men’s control over women” (Bean 1992, 43). Goetting (1999, 4) framed “battering” as a behavior engaged in by some men in their intimate relationships, defining it as “an obsessive campaign of coercion and intimidation designed by a man to dominate and control a woman, which occurs in the personal context of intimacy and thrives in the sociopolitical climate of patriarchy.” Here batterers appear as foot soldiers of the patriarchal order, designing their violence to dominate and control women.

Other feminist or profeminist writers appear less certain about men’s intent and what drives their acts of IPV and IPH. Campbell conceives of men’s aggression in general as a response to threats to their masculine pride, implying it is men’s failure to meet the ideological prescriptions of the gender order that informs their aggression. She comments that aggression constitutes, “a means of instilling fear and gaining power” (Campbell 1993, 72). Pence (1999, 29), one of the original designers of the power and control wheel, questioned the appropriateness of seeing men’s IPV as an expression of power and control. She comments, “Many of the men I interviewed did not seem to articulate a desire for power over their partner.”
We can glean much from the vast literature on violence and homicide. Feminist scholarship of many kinds figures prominently in these debates. I draw selectively from this literature to illustrate the complexity of IPH.

Recently, Hunnicutt attempted to resurrect the word “patriarchy” as an analytical tool for understanding violence against women. She argues, “Explanations of violence against women should center on gendered social arrangements and power” (Hunnicutt 2009, 554). At another point she contended, “Violence is an outgrowth of dominance hierarchies” (2009, 558). Hunnicutt discusses the relationship between patriarchy and men’s violence against women. For her,

The radical feminist argument that men use violence against women to uphold patriarchy is difficult to support. This position not only simplifies male perpetrators as tyrannical, power seeking abusers but also overlooks the fact that patriarchal systems can survive without violence. (Hunnicutt 2009, 561)

Like many feminist authors, Hunnicutt acknowledges that men’s violence against women is not meted out “consciously” as a means of reproducing gender hierarchies. Radical feminist models often “romanticized the oppressed and vilified the oppressor” simultaneously depicting female victims as “helpless and powerless” (Hunnicutt 2009, 565). Finally, Hunnicutt (2009, 569) argues, “understanding male violence means exposing how those men who use violence against women are victims of their own culture. It also means exploring men’s power as well as powerlessness.”

Employing a psychoanalytic feminist approach, Haaken (2008, 77) calls for a “rapprochement between psychoanalytic cultural theory and domestic violence politics.” Haaken (2008, 80) criticizes “stock scripts” that rely on “the standard melodrama of a virtuous female protagonist and a one-dimensional male villain” because such rhetoric “strips women of complex subjectivity.” Haaken’s (2008, 84) reservations about the Duluth power and control model are on point:

Women’s own actions, including abuse of children, are understood to be contingent and determined by social forces beyond their control, male actions are conceived as autonomous and non-contingent in nature. Women have no freedom; men have absolute freedom. Paradoxically, this model shores up the very conception of the self that feminism has sought to critique: the cultural fantasy of the autonomous male.
Haaken’s point resonates with my analysis of the life of Kevin Jones, a man who, as we will see, simultaneously negotiated but at the same time fell prey to the stock scripts of the gender order. Kevin clearly made choices but his choices and horizons were limited by the discursive parameters of what he understood a young man ought to be.

A number of third-wave feminists have also taken issue with the power and control model for its failure to conceptualize adequately IPV and IPH in communities of color. For example, the power of African American men over black women differs greatly from that of white men over white female intimates (Websdale 2001). Similar concerns have been raised among native women (Artichoker and Mousseau 2003). Indeed, as Haaken (2008, 87) puts it, “Women of color are more apt to preserve the idea that abusers are acting out histories not of their own making.”

On a global scale, men commit much more IPH than women and they do so for different reasons (Wilson and Daly 1992). Often men kill at the end of a long period of intimidating, isolating, tyrannizing, and emotionally attacking a wife or intimate partner. When women kill they usually do so out of self-defense or the defense of their children or as a pre-emptive strike, often feeling or perceiving they had no other choice. Put differently, the commission of IPH and the seeming motives behind these killings are gendered. However, there are many other aspects to these complex crimes that also warrant our attention. It is in that direction that I turn.

In addition to its gendered nature, sociologists and criminologists also recognize that IPH is patterned by race, ethnicity, and age with younger men of African American, American Indian and native Alaskan descent exhibiting the highest rates. Clearly, gender, race, ethnicity, and age are important structural or contextual frames for discussing IPH. Nevertheless, these structural forces are far removed from the immediate visceral reality of IPH. IPH is a rare offense and the majority of men, African Americans, Alaskan natives, and young men in general do not even assault female intimates, let alone kill them.

I contend if we are to understand IPH, we need to get closer to its emotional content and the emotional styles of perpetrators. Luckily, a number of writers and researchers have pioneered in this area. Their work warrants discussion because we can apply some of their insights to the study of IPH.

In his capacity as a psychiatrist, James Gilligan interviewed numerous violent offenders. He concluded that the rage of these offenders stemmed from feelings of shame and humiliation about their being disrespected at numerous points in their lives. For Gilligan (1997, 11), violence serves to “replace shame with pride.” Gilligan (1997, 110) adds, “The emotion of shame is the primary or ultimate cause of all violence, whether toward others
or toward the self. Shame is a necessary but not a sufficient cause of violence.” These painful feelings of shame and humiliation function to alienate and isolate the offender from mainstream society. Violence and homicide act as one means of temporarily dealing with the shame, briefly dissipating it. However, as Katz cautions, we ought not to treat the emotions of rage and shame as distinct from one another. He observes, “We should not err by treating rage as an escape from humiliation. There is an essential link between rage and humiliation. As a lived experience, rage is livid with the awareness of humiliation” (Katz 1988, 23). Borrowing from the work of Lewis (1971, 494), I employ the term “humiliated fury” to capture the coalescence of shame and rage and to introduce an analytical concept that offers important insights into the emotional style of Kevin Jones as he moved ever closer to killing Joanna Jenkins.

Related work by Scheff and Retzinger (1991) sheds important light on the role of shame and alienation in conflict between intimate partners. For these authors, unacknowledged, un-confronted, or masked shame and alienation generate conflict and violence. They comment, “Alienation and shame lead to violence only when they are repressed or disguised—that is, when they are not acknowledged” (Scheff and Retzinger 1991, xviii). Like Elias (1994), Scheff and Retzinger argue that shame is not only the master emotion in modern societies but also that this important emotion is progressively repressed and hidden as psychic restraints increase. Indeed, the bottling up of shame is an important component of familicides perpetrated by civil, reputable members of society confronted with major threats to their identities as fathers, providers, and lovers (Websdale 2010).

Denzin (1984, 483-84) sees domestic violence as “situated, interpersonal, emotional, and cognitive activity involving negative symbolic interaction between intimates.” For Denzin, “Emotionality lies at the core of violent conduct” (1984, 488). Perpetrators of domestic violence attempt to regain a sense of self-control or control over others, thus restoring a feeling of pride. Denzin recognizes that the perpetrator may achieve some physical control over his victim. However, as the abusive spiral develops, her love for him diminishes, meaning that he never succeeds in controlling her will.

These insights into the relationship between violence and emotion have great significance for our study of IPH. Rather than seeing many male perpetrators of IPH as powerful and controlling it is also possible to see them as fearful, vulnerable, and dependent in many ways on those they end up killing. According to Gilligan’s anecdotal prison research, many male prisoners hide their fear and shame. He comments, “This is a secret that many of them would rather die than reveal” (1997, 111). Indeed, it is possible to see male
perpetrators’ humiliated fury stemming from their failure to live up to the ideological imperatives of what Connell refers to as hegemonic masculinities or those versions of manhood that dominate in a particular society in a particular historical epoch (see Connell [1987]; Connell and Messerschmidt [2005]).

The Argument

Men’s power and control over women is not the primary or essential driving force behind IPH. Although it is not the focus of this article, I do not see men’s power and control as the principal root of IPV either. Rather, I contend perpetrators’ inchoate sense that they have failed to live up to the prescriptions of the gender order is a more immediate and primary influence on their murderous behavior. There are a number of homologies here between men’s IPV and abuse and the commission of lethal and nonlethal street violence. As a number of researchers have shown, street violence involves the furious dissipation of intense shame brought on by being disrespected or having one’s masculine identity or credentials seriously or even flippantly challenged (Anderson 1999; Gilligan 1997).

The inchoate sense or feeling to which I make reference is difficult to pin down. I suggest that one way of representing such a sense or feeling is metaphorically through the sociological language of haunting. To use Gordon’s (2006, 9) words, “Haunting is a vivid, sensual or embodied way of being made aware that what’s been contained or repressed or blocked is very alive and present, messing with our various ways of keeping the troublesome and disturbing at bay.” In cases of IPH, perpetrators’ growing humiliated fury figures prominently, a socially situated phenomenon linked to their masked or unacknowledged shame or inchoate sense they have failed to negotiate successfully the prescriptions and hazards of hegemonic masculinity.

We might equally well posit the existence of counter forces that restore a sense of pride, a sense of social standing and belonging, thus lessening the likelihood that budding perpetrators might engage in destructive and abusive IPV and tyranny. These counter or preventative forces are likely active in the lives of many that suffer the depredations of long-term humiliation and shame. We can imagine the integrative work of good friends, supportive family, an interested teacher, a social worker, a counselor, a pastor, and many significant others. Indeed, we might say such forces of social interaction and support provide sufficient force to mediate, obviate, or undermine the corrosive effects of humiliated fury.
The presence of humiliated fury comprises a necessary but not sufficient condition for the commission of IPH. Whether a victim of IPV ends up being killed may also depend on various circumstantial factors, such as the availability of emergency medical services. However, there are inexplicable forces at work in these cases that can also be represented through the language of haunting. These forces defy scientific logic and caution us against predicting from the large number of intimate partner assaults those that will result in homicide. The recognition of these inexplicable aspects of cases adds an entirely new layer of complexity in our pursuit of making sense of them.

The relationship between IPV, IPH, and men’s power and control vis-à-vis women is more complex than the power and control wheel suggests. As we have seen, such complexity is both implicit and, at times, explicit, in a number of feminist perspectives and among some of the seeming alternatives to these ways of interpreting IPV and IPH. In what follows, I adopt a case-study approach to explore this complexity. I contend such an approach will enhance our understanding of this disturbing phenomenon and improve safety planning for victims of IPV and those facing the possibility of lethal violence. It is in the direction of this methodology that I now turn.

The Case-Study Approach

The case-study method provides an excellent means of examining the phenomenon of IPH because it lends itself to the close inspection of a highly complex and nuanced event. Such an approach also invites new theoretical insights. My methodological approach is one that is well established in the field of sociological and ethnographic inquiry. Flyvbjerg (2006, 220), for example, sees case studies as a “detailed examination of a single example.” Thatcher’s (2006, 1631) rough intuitive definition sees a case study as “a piece of qualitative research that portrays a more or less well-defined event, organization, individual, group, or culture.” As Flyvbjerg observes, this does not mean case studies cannot contribute to our understanding of social phenomena in general. Consistent with my own approach, Flyvbjerg (2006, 223) recognizes that the case-study method and its closeness to real-life situations allow for the “development of a nuanced view of reality, including the view that human behavior cannot be meaningfully understood as simply the rule-governed acts found at the lowest levels of the learning process and in much theory.”

For my purposes, I needed a method which would allow me to question the dominant understanding that the behavior of perpetrators of IPH is best seen as being shaped primarily by the power relations of gender. My case-study method involved a variety of qualitative approaches including
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interviewing, participant observation, and document analysis. My preference would have been to conduct a series of interviews with Kevin Jones. However, Kevin is currently restricted to solitary confinement because of various disciplinary infractions at the prison that houses him, and I was only able to interview him once.

I carefully selected the Kevin Jones case because of its potential to challenge the dominant viewpoint that acts of IPH have as their primary cause or generative root men’s power and control over women. As I will argue, Joanna Jenkins’ emotional capital, maneuverability, and resistance to Kevin’s raging defy easy interpretation in terms of Kevin’s power and control.

As Flyvbjerg points out, the case-study method is well suited to “critical reflexivity” and falsifying more general propositions because of its in-depth approach (2006, 227-28). If, as Flyvbjerg notes, “one observation does not fit with the proposition, it is considered not valid generally and must therefore be either revised or rejected” (2006, 228). My case study of the Kevin Jones IPH is therefore a way of exploring the efficacy of the dominant proposition that IPH is best understood or theorized in terms of men’s power and control over women.

My approach drew on a variety of sources of information. Members of the fatality review team interviewed a number of people close to the case, including the family members and workmates of Kevin and Joanna. Her roommate in the military, Sumaya Carson, offered particularly rich insights into Joanna’s life. All interviews were transcribed and made available to team members and myself. Sumaya and Joanna’s immediate supervisor at the base attended part of the case review, gave evidence, and answered questions put to them by team members and myself. The twenty or so regular team members had all read the rich and detailed archival information regarding the Jones homicide. To summarize, the archival material included:

1. Witness statements taken by police from those involved in the case, including people who worked at the hotel where the IPH occurred, those who saw Kevin after he had killed Joanna, and a man who was staying in a neighboring room who heard some of the commotion in the room in which Joanna died.
2. The Pre-Sentence Investigation Report on Kevin Jones containing his personal identifying information, his background and social history, his criminal history, the circumstances of the offence, and Kevin’s own statement about his reasons for killing Joanna.
3. The report from Kevin’s defense attorney documenting his relationship with his parents and siblings and in particular the way his father shamed him repeatedly, his alcoholism, his loneliness and isolation, and the bullying he experienced in middle school.
4. The military investigation of the case, including witness statements, an interview with Kevin, the forensic investigation, a detailed timeline of events, and a detailed crime scene analysis.
5. Various law enforcement reports on the capture of Kevin Jones.
6. Numerous letters to the judge from Kevin and Joanna’s family, friends, and workmates.
7. A letter from Kevin to Joanna’s mother, explaining his behavior.
8. The prosecution files from the county attorney’s office.
10. A video recording of Kevin’s confession.
11. The psychiatrist’s report on Kevin.

In addition to all these rich sources of information, I also took extensive notes on the fatality review itself, a complex process of gathering information with a view to introducing new preventive interventions in cases involving IPV. The review team coordinator, Rex James, hired a professional facilitator to orchestrate the review and, in his words, to make sure the “trains run on time.” The facilitator guided the team through the construction of a timeline, a linear chronology of key case events; sought feedback from team members on the various red flags in the case, markers suggestive of a lethal or sub-lethal outcome; identified the involvement of various agencies and community members, including family members and friends of the parties, and, in particular, tried to establish what level of coordination and communication existed between these various entities; developed recommendations for future social action, based on the input of team members, witnesses, and others; and, finally, identified those aspects of the cases where information was missing.

I interviewed Kevin Jones in the presence of two other professionals (Rex James and a therapist, Malcolm Coombe). Cognizant of the caution that men who abuse and tyrannize women often minimize the impact of their violence and interpersonal terrorism, I started the interview by even-handedly letting Kevin know we had reviewed the files and discussed the case in great detail. The interview took the form of a semi-structured conversation, focused primarily on the case but not on the specific details of the killing. The oral report of our interview with Kevin formed part of the fatality review, with a number of team members later commenting how useful this information was to them.

The case study is therefore probative at a number of different levels. As noted, the eclectic array of information means that the language of psychiatry, social work, and criminology sits uneasily with the emotive language of family members and the everyday parlance of witnesses and others. I drew
on this wealth of information, focusing particularly on that information that: illuminated the facts of the case; spoke to key issues, such as the respective power of Kevin and Joanna; explored Kevin and Joanna’s emotional styles and early socialization; examined their romantic relationship; assessed Kevin’s seeming domination of Joanna; and shed light on Joanna’s maneuverability and emotional capital. It was this targeting of the substantive matter of the data that led me to my conclusions about the crucially important role of humiliated fury in Kevin’s murder of Joanna Jenkins. My data analysis was therefore systematic, and I did not ignore or disregard evidence that seemed to contradict my key arguments.

The Jones-Jenkins Case Study

Joanna and Kevin checked into Motel X at lunchtime on a Saturday in early summer. The young lovers of just a few months had been in the habit of going off base to have sex and enjoy alcohol. In the preceding weeks, Joanna became increasingly aware of Kevin’s excessive consumption of alcohol, his cloying attentiveness to the details of her life, and his emotional volatility and anger. By the time the fateful weekend rolled around, Joanna had serious reservations about proceeding with their marriage plans. Kevin had been pushing for a wedding date and she had been resisting.

The couple commenced drinking and lovemaking but Kevin quickly became intoxicated, consuming large amounts of Southern Comfort and eventually passing out drunk. Sunday morning Joanna confronted him about his drinking, saying words to the effect of “I don’t want to marry an alcoholic.” According to the transcript of Kevin’s interview with the prison psychiatrist, Joanna then threw Kevin’s engagement ring at him. The two argued further and Kevin reported, “Rage shot through my entire body. My fists balled up. My legs went numb. I was very angry.” In the midst of his continuing alcoholic stupor, Kevin then vomited on the motel carpet. Not wanting to incur the cost of the staff cleaning the carpet, Joanna called a friend, Mary Medill, to bring cleaning fluid to the motel. Mary obliged, helping Joanna refresh the carpet. Through the fog of his hangover, Kevin grunted “hi” to Mary a couple of times, before returning to sleep. After the clean up, Joanna asked Kevin if he would be okay if she and Mary went out for lunch. Kevin replied sarcastically that he would, and the two women left.

That Sunday afternoon Joanna shopped with Mary, Mary’s husband, and their daughter. Mary dropped Joanna back at Motel X around 3:00 p.m. On returning to the room, Kevin asked her if she intended to stay. Kevin reported later, “She did not give me a straight answer.” His concern at her seeming
evasiveness caused Kevin to imagine her with someone else. These imaginings typify the mindset of many perpetrators of IPH, speaking at once to their vulnerability and inability to trust. At this point, Joanna apparently lay down on the bed and Kevin put his hands around her neck. According to Kevin, Joanna said, “Oh, Kevin don’t.” She then apparently bit his finger. He then strangled her as she struggled, fought, kicked, and screamed. The couple rolled off the bed onto the floor, where Kevin finally killed her. He then placed her dead body back on the bed and attempted to make Joanna’s death look like an accident, something that happened during rough sex. His attempt at deception included slapping the face of her dead body, biting her nipple and breast, removing her clothing, and spreading her legs. He then digitally penetrated her vagina. During our interview Kevin reported feeling more shame about these violations of Joanna’s corpse than he did about anything else he had done.

Overwhelmed by the enormity of his misdeeds, Kevin left the motel room and took a cigarette break in the parking lot. He returned to her corpse, rifled through her purse to find her car keys and credit card, and left the room. He extended the couple’s stay at Motel X for another night, although he eventually checked himself into another motel. Kevin later told investigators he attempted suicide five times over the course of the next twenty-four hours or so. His fifth attempt involved driving Joanna’s car at an oncoming tractor-trailer on a rural highway. After Kevin fled the scene of this final futile suicide attempt, police quickly apprehended him and took him into custody. He confessed to killing Joanna and directed police toward her body.

During our prison interview with Kevin, Rex James, Malcolm Coombe, and I listened intently. At various points we asked probing questions where Kevin’s memory lapsed or seemed to deviate significantly from the written record. We did not ask these questions because we completely accepted the veracity of the official documentation or because we assumed Kevin was a con man. Rather, we knew the commission of extreme violence sometimes warps the memory, driving it into the dark recesses of the mind and making precise retrieval difficult. We did not record the conversation; neither did we take notes. The three of us envisaged a highly charged emotional climate and did not want to do anything to distract Kevin or indeed ourselves. Taking notes would have meant breaking eye contact and at least one of us perhaps not being entirely present. Tape recording the conversation was not possible to arrange in the time we had. Even if it had been possible we would have still chosen to rely on our memories and our collective ability to recall key elements of the conversation. Indeed, within a matter of a couple of hours, we brought our fresh recollections back to the review team in an attempt to enrich the analysis of the death of Joanna Jenkins. Having read the case files
the fatality review team was also able to elicit the interview exchange from us in great detail and in a way we felt was both accurate and complete.

The team learned a great deal from the Jones fatality review. In what follows, I use what C. Wright Mills (1959) referred to as the sociological imagination to make sense of Kevin Jones’s murder of Joanna Jenkins. In his original formulation, Mills stressed the importance of appreciating elements of human biography alongside the social and historical contexts within which those experiences emerge. At one point Mills (1959, 14-15) remarks, “The sociological imagination enables its possessor to understand the larger historical scene in terms of its meaning for the inner life and the external career of a variety of individuals.” Mills uses the language of the “inner life” to connote how people stand at the intersection of social forces, where, for example, socially and historically situated emotions ebb and flow, shaping character and at times creating what he simply refers to as “troubles.” Mills (1959, 14-15) observes, “Troubles occur within the character of the individual and within the range of his immediate relations with others.” Such a sociological analysis far transcends the rather atomized approach of some psychological and psychiatric accounts that tend to see individuals as asocial beings.

In particular, I explore Kevin’s life, his early socialization, his struggle to find intimacy, his hollow or Pyrrhic victory over Joanna, and Joanna’s maneuverability, agency, and emotional capital. I conclude with an analysis of what I refer to as Kevin’s humiliated fury, an insurgent array of emotions that speak not to Kevin’s power and control over Joanna but rather to a haunting violence-prone emotional state that was at once cumulative and explosive in its immediacy.

Early Socialization

A number of researchers remind us of the increased likelihood of early childhood trauma, disruptions in parental bonding, witnessing domestic violence, and other forms of abuse and neglect in the biographies of men who batter, tyrannize, and/or kill their intimate partners. Dutton (1995, 84) notes,

The biggest childhood contributors to wife assault, in order of importance, are feeling rejected by one’s father, feeling a lack of warmth from one’s father, being physically abused by one’s father, being verbally abused by one’s father, and feeling rejected by one’s mother.

Kevin Jones was no stranger to the kinds of trauma mentioned above. His childhood included considerable geographical, social, and emotional
isolation. He grew up on a farm and was homeschooled. The older men in Kevin’s extended family wrestled with alcoholism. Several of his uncles were alcoholics. The psychiatrist who examined Kevin in the wake of Joanna’s death described Kevin’s family as “dysfunctional.” Specifically, the psychiatrist’s report notes a “huge lack of social and emotional skills” in Kevin’s family. The psychiatrist reports “Kevin was teased and bullied at school and ridiculed and preached at while home.”

Kevin’s father, Wayne Jones, a Baptist preacher, had been a police officer and a salesman as well as having a career, like Kevin, in the Air Force. Apparently, the consumption of alcohol was one target of Wayne’s preaching, telling his children, “alcohol was from the devil.” Wayne drank alcohol sparingly, using his brothers’ alcoholism as the reason for his careful consumption. Kevin told us that his father also insisted on honesty and “whipped him” for being dishonest. Wayne was apparently a stern disciplinarian. Kevin told his public defender that his father would administer “verbal lashings and harsh putdowns” if he failed in his numerous work assignments. These work assignments were often to be completed while Kevin was alone at home at the isolated family farm.

In an interview after the murder, Wayne told investigators Kevin would “be crushed” if he felt he had displeased his father. Indeed, at the crime scene investigators found a note, perhaps originally written as a suicide note, from Kevin to his father, telling him, “I’m sorry I was a disappointment to you, but I love you.” The father also reported that Kevin grew slowly and was “harassed” by his peers because of his diminutive stature. Investigators also learned Kevin fell off a horse early in his life and subsequently walked with a limp. Like a number of other perpetrators of IPH, Kevin experienced shame about his seeming limitations as a young man. Indeed, Kevin would take these biographical and developmental feelings of shame, most of which went unacknowledged, into his early adult struggles to establish an intimate relationship with Joanna.

Kevin had a strained relationship with the schooling system and his peers. He attended public school from kindergarten until the third grade but was then homeschooled for the next three years. Kevin was apparently homeschooled because of his failure to do his homework. During his early years in school he was reportedly inattentive and did not socialize. Kevin said he was “bored.” In his later years Kevin said he attempted to integrate by participating in sports but noted he failed in these endeavors because of his “small size.” His father wanted him to go to college and felt disappointed when Kevin joined the Air Force instead.
It seems Kevin disapproved of several of his extended family members. He disliked the alcoholism of at least two of his uncles. He also seems to have had little liking or respect for one of his aunts from whom he stole a credit card and cash. Overall, Kevin reported great isolation from extended family. He also had problems fitting into wider society as evidenced by DUIs, speeding tickets, and a conviction for breaking into a vehicle. Kevin told us he began fighting around age fifteen. He began drinking alcohol at age fourteen, developing a destructive relationship with beer and whiskey, using them to temporarily soothe his anxieties, anger, and fear. In some ways Kevin’s minor delinquencies evince an involvement with or commitment to a somewhat rebellious adolescent masculinity that often inverts traditional middle-class values. However, his actions, as he himself acknowledges, also put him at a disadvantage in terms of moving up the career ladder, pursuing a successful military career, and fitting into wider society.

In short, Kevin developed a rather limited sense of social belonging, what I will refer to as a \textit{nominal sense of self}. Difficulties finding his place in the world stemmed in part from the shame he felt about his small stature, his limp, dishonesty that attracted the wrath of his father, his criminal transgressions, and his excessive alcohol consumption. Kevin was enraged by what he saw as his own failure to become a successful young man. His psychiatrist diagnosed him with Borderline Personality Disorder, a diagnosis present in only 1 to 2 percent of the general population. Kevin struggled with bouts of rage and self-destructive behavior. Another way of framing this psychiatric diagnosis is simply to acknowledge Kevin was an extremely isolated young man who presented as if he was one of the boys. Doubtless his attenuated bonding caused him considerable anxiety, fear, and anger. Indeed, Kevin told investigators that when he got angry he would take his “12-gauge out to my back pasture and just shoot something like the end of the stock tank or whatever.” He also noted he “would just beat the shit out of something—not somebody.”

In addition to focusing on Kevin’s socially situated emotional style, it is essential that we explore the emergence of his highly compromised sense of masculinity. Kevin’s emerging masculinity included a rather skewed relationship with anger, with him exploding with rage from time to time. Kevin was also isolated both geographically and socially; aspects of his emerging character that made it increasingly difficult to get close to fellow human beings, especially women. Kevin was the youngest sibling with three older sisters. His father situated Kevin’s relationship with women amidst broader currents of southern paternalism. Wayne reported, “Kevin was raised with good southern manners” and was explicitly told, “not to hit women.” Indeed,
we see Kevin’s paternalism in the words of a former female friend who spent a lot of time with him growing up. Leslie Bond wrote the judge who presided over Kevin’s case that she had known him since he was twelve or thirteen. Leslie reported that when he got his driver’s license,

Kevin would take me home so I would not have to walk alone. The days Kevin did not have his vehicle, he would walk with me home. During the summer after graduation, Kevin and I started going out a lot and were always together. He was always a gentleman. Every time we went somewhere, Kevin would always pay, no matter what. I would always argue with him about it, he would just tell me “stop arguing you are not paying, so get over it.”

We learn much less about Joanna’s early socialization. Her sister reported that Joanna “never had a strong relationship with her father,” although her father would later assure the fatality reviewers that he loved his daughter and that he wanted to see Kevin pay for what he had done. Joanna’s parents divorced when she was very young and she grew up looking out for her two younger sisters. Witnesses reported Joanna’s father drifted out of her life in the aftermath of the divorce, although to what degree is not clear. The drift did not comprise a total break as Joanna’s mother told the reviewers that Joanna moved in with her father in her senior year of high school, eventually graduating and moving out. We learn, too, that Joanna and her mother “butted heads” when Joanna was in junior high school. Differences with her mother contributed to her decision to move in with her father. Once Joanna graduated, she became closer to her mother, talking frequently with her on the phone. During these approximately two years, Joanna lived on her own before joining the Air Force.

It is perhaps significant that Kevin was the youngest of four siblings and Joanna the eldest of three. Joanna was used to caring and looking out for those close to her who were younger and more vulnerable. As the youngest sibling and only male, Kevin grew up to expect a certain level of attention from his three older sisters, something he acknowledged later that added to his self-centeredness. These emotional expectations would continue into Joanna and Kevin’s own intimate relationship.

The Search for Intimacy

*The lure of romance.* During our prison interview, Kevin reported he had had sex with only two women. The initial sexual relationship was with his
first girlfriend, Kirsty Keeler, the second with Joanna. Kevin shared this information with us as part of a longer conversation about how he felt Joanna was more sexually sophisticated and generally much more mature than him. Indeed, Kevin told his psychiatrist he was very jealous around Joanna, “always feeling inadequate around her.” At another point, Kevin told the psychiatrist he was afraid she would “see my weakness, my lack of worth, and leave me.”

Kevin also reported having two nonsexual relationships with young women both of whom turned out to be lesbians. He expressed the concern that it may have been some inadequacy on his part that “turned these girls to lesbianism.”

As noted, Kevin joined the Air Force against the advice and wishes of his father. After enlisting, Kevin completed seven weeks of basic training and nearly four months of technical school before being assigned to the security forces at a rural Air Force base. During basic training, he met and eventually began dating Joanna. The two young lovers were assigned to the Air Force base at the same time.

The lure of romance was particularly strong and Kevin and Joanna’s relationship developed with alacrity. After just one month of what Kevin would later describe as “intensive dating,” he asked her to marry him. Joanna agreed and they became engaged. Kevin noted that he pressured Joanna about setting a date for their marriage because he was worried she would discover he was immature, irresponsible, and “not very capable.” One friend of Joanna’s, Jessie Bolden, described Kevin as “clingy” in his rapidly evolving relationship with Joanna. Jessie remembered one incident in which Kevin was angry with Joanna because, “she did not want to spend the weekend at a hotel drinking and having sex.” Apparently, Joanna told Jessie that Kevin “always wanted sex.” Joanna would tell her mother that Kevin wanted to have sex and she would not. Joanna reported the same thing to her friend, Mary Medill, who told an interviewer Joanna and Kevin, “had sex all the time even when Joanna didn’t want to.”

*Rage, sexual jealousy, and attempts to control.* Kevin admits attempting to control Joanna, particularly in regard to setting a date for their wedding. Although there was no official history of domestic violence in this case, witnesses attested to one incident where Kevin shoved Joanna against a wall and another in which he harangued her for several hours. Joanna’s mother told the fatality review team that about two months into Joanna’s assignment at the Air Force base Joanna called her to complain that Kevin had berated her, yelled profanities at her, and punched a wall. It seems his anger was never far from the surface. With Joanna, it seems he bristled quickly and with
increasing frequency. Kevin was extremely jealous of Joanna’s former boyfriend, Mike Wilce. On one occasion when Mike telephoned Joanna while she and Kevin were at dinner, Kevin seized the phone and shouted obscenities at Mike. On another occasion, Kevin found Mike’s sunglasses in Joanna’s car and threw them out the window in a fit of anger. However, the more Kevin raged about Mike Wilce and tried to control Joanna’s access to him, the more Joanna regrouped and resisted him.

Kevin’s extreme jealousy is highly significant. Indeed, the research literature consistently identifies obsessive or morbid jealousy as a prominent theme in IPHs. This research is cross-cultural in nature. For example, Daly and Wilson (1988, 202-05) pointed to the role of male sexual proprietariness in homicides in India, Uganda, the Belgian Congo, and Samoa. Daly and Wilson (1988, 189) contend “men the world around think and talk about women and marriage in proprietary terms. Men strive to control women and to traffic in their reproductive capacities, with varying degrees of success.”

Citing numerous studies of IPH, Daly and Wilson identify sexual jealousy as the most important reason that men kill their spouses and partners.

Joanna did not acquiesce passively to Kevin’s extreme jealousy and attempts to control her. Her biography is that of a strong, independent woman. According to witnesses, Joanna Jenkins became a police officer in the Air Force to see the world. She developed her interest in law enforcement as a result of working as a police dispatcher after graduating from high school. Her roommate, Sumaya Carson, told us Joanna was a very positive influence in her life. Sumaya described Joanna as being “excited and highly motivated” about her career. A number of witnesses confirmed Kevin’s own declarations that he idealized Joanna. Kevin saw her as far more competent, sexually experienced, and more mature than him. We learn from a number of sources that Joanna advised Kevin to seek help for his problematic use of alcohol. However, at the same time as identifying Kevin’s drinking problem, Joanna continued to buy alcohol for her underage intimate partner and drink with him when they took weekend breaks off base.

Not one witness knew if Kevin ever hit or assaulted Joanna. Her mother, who spoke with Joanna up to three times a day, told investigators “he never hit her.” The mother added, “We wouldn’t have tolerated that. She was brought up to not let anyone hit you.”

**Pyrrhic Victory**

A Pyrrhic victory is one that comes at such a high cost as to amount to a form of defeat. I employ the term in the context of the Jones-Jenkins case to reflect
the fact that the more Kevin sought control and domination, the more Joanna slipped from what he perhaps thought or fantasized to be his grasp. As in many cases of IPV, Kevin fought this slippage, often conveying the impression of an easygoing young man. In fact, Kevin’s *impression management and bluster* belied his uncertainty and insecurity in his intimate life. Indeed, his inner self sensed his relationship was unraveling and his coercive tactics escalated in an attempt to assert some control, the control he had learned a man might expect to exert over a fiancée. The other side of Kevin’s Pyrrhic victory was what I refer to as Joanna’s *maneuverability, agency, and emotional capital*.

Kevin found Joanna’s emotional capital and sensibilities threatening, perhaps even things to be envied. To ignore Joanna’s strength in this regard or to frame her emotional acumen as a stereotypical trait associated with women’s (subordinated) modern era roles as sole or principal nurturers in increasingly isolated nuclear families understates her personal power. Put simply, the review identified Joanna’s autonomy and strength as important aspects of the ebb and flow of emotion in this case, traits inconsistent with an interpretation that Kevin controlled her will or indeed her physical movements.

*Impression management and bluster.* Kevin carefully managed his public image. Joanna’s father, Ted Jenkins, told investigators he met Kevin once during Kevin’s visit to Appleville with Joanna. The father never noticed any excessive consumption of alcohol or problems with Kevin managing his anger. Larry Skeen, the ex-boyfriend of Joanna’s sister, told investigators he had known Joanna for several years. During Kevin and Joanna’s visit to Appleville, Larry spent a considerable amount of time with the couple. Larry described Kevin as a “nice guy.” On one occasion when the two of them were wrestling in the yard of the Jenkins home in Appleville, Larry accidentally “slammed Kevin into the ground very forcefully.” On this occasion Kevin “did not display any anger.” A number of people saw Kevin as easygoing. Indeed, this was how Kevin presented himself to us as we listened to his story. Kevin also liked to let people know he was sexually active. Mary Medill reports, “There were a few times that the guys would be around Kevin and they would talk about how he got action all the time.” Kevin did not necessarily brag about this “but let it be known that they had sex often.”

Kevin reserved nearly all his anger for Joanna, although most of the individuals interviewed in the wake of the murder did not know this. However, underneath his bluster and sexual puffery, Kevin suffered considerable anxiety. Marlene Simpson, a friend of Joanna’s, described Kevin as “very tightly wound.” Kevin told Marlene that one of his goals was to become a Technical Instructor in the Air Force. He told her, “Getting in people’s faces and screaming at them was exactly what he wanted to do.”
Kevin’s self-acknowledged anger, anxiety, and fear that Joanna would discover the full extent of his immaturity all contributed to his excessive consumption of alcohol. Kevin was literally using alcohol to soothe these negative emotions. Put differently, Kevin’s bluster belied his acute vulnerability, his dependency on Joanna, and his emotional clinginess. Kevin presented as a robust, sexually active young man with aspirations about guarding nuclear weapons. It is easy to mistake this posturing for power, his desire to work as a Technical Instructor manifesting the aspirations of a man very much in control of himself and perhaps others. As we will see in the next section, reality was quite different.

**Joanna’s maneuverability, agency, and emotional capital.** I employ the word “maneuverability” to refer to Joanna’s negotiation of her social, physical, and emotional options. Recognition of Joanna’s maneuverability is entirely consistent with recent analyses of domestic violence and other forms of interpersonal tyranny that oppose positing victims as possessing little or no agency or choice and being subject to the intense control of those victimizing them. Well-established concepts such as battered woman syndrome and Stockholm syndrome imply a greater passivity on the part of victims than complex cases such as Jones-Jenkins evince.

The concept of battered woman syndrome was once widely used as a way of explaining the common experiences and behaviors of battered women. However, as Dutton (2009, 1) points out, the concept is “misleading and potentially harmful.” Specifically, Dutton challenges the understanding that battered women are passive to the extent their passivity constitutes learned helplessness. Rather, Dutton (2009, 2) points out, “Some women who have been battered may appear helpless or intentionally use ‘passive’ behavior to stay safe.”

We find similar skepticism in the recent research into Stockholm syndrome, a term that refers to the supposedly positive bond some kidnap victims apparently form with their captors. Namnyak et al.’s (2008) systematic literature review identified large gaps in the research into the Stockholm syndrome and found very little evidence of its actual existence. They comment, “Most of the ‘diagnoses’ of ‘Stockholm syndrome’ have been made by the media,” and they conclude that “labeling the hostage victim with a psychiatric syndrome makes their story more readable and more likely to boost media circulation” (Namnyak 2008, 10).

By emotional capital, I refer to a socially valued ease or facility in the arena of feelings and sensibilities, including the ability to love, care, nurture, and give time to others. Nowotny (1981) seems to have coined this term originally, as she developed the ideas of Pierre Bourdieu. Nowotny defines
emotional capital as “knowledge, contacts and relations as well as access to emotionally valued skills and assets, which hold within any social network characterized at least partly by affective ties” (Nowotny 1981, 148). The data in the Jones-Jenkins case identifies Joanna as a young woman with considerable emotional capital, far more perhaps than the man who mistreated her. Indeed, Joanna does not emerge from the fatality review as a victim devoid of agency or as a helpless person. Rather, like many battered women, she emerges as someone displaying what Gordon calls complex personhood. Gordon (1997, 4) reminds us, “Those who live in the most dire circumstances possess a complex and oftentimes contradictory humanity and subjectivity that is never adequately glimpsed by viewing them as victims or, on the other hand, as superhuman agents.” She continues, “At the very least, complex personhood is about conferring the respect on others that comes from presuming that life and people’s lives are simultaneously straightforward and full of enormously subtle meaning” (Gordon 1997, 5).

Joanna’s maneuverability, agency, and emotional capital identify her as a woman with considerable interpersonal acumen, who, in the final analysis, misjudged the raging and violent potential of her lover. Interviews with Joanna’s family tell us she complained about Kevin’s temper but never once expressed fear for her safety. While we ought not assume that failure to express such fear speaks to an absence of trepidation, Joanna’s emotional demeanor reminds us of her courage and poise in the face of intimidation and attempts to control her life.

Even in conversations about things sexual, Joanna seems to have stood her ground. Airman Paul Maxwell had lunch with Kevin and Joanna every day. He mentioned that many of their conversations revolved around sex. During these conversations Kevin shared he was curious to try “new things like anal sex.” Joanna, on the other hand, did not say anything to suggest she was “into any unusual sexual practices.” Joanna also told Paul in Kevin’s presence that “she could not afford to get pregnant at this stage of her life.” On another occasion, Paul reported that Kevin became upset with Joanna because she mentioned that Kevin’s previous girlfriend “was a lesbian.” Paul added that Joanna was “not trying to provoke” Kevin but “just made a statement.”

Joanna’s assertiveness regarding sexual matters seems to have been mirrored on those occasions when she was confronted by Kevin’s hostility, threats, and violence. Sumaya Carson told the review team that roughly three weeks before the murder she heard Joanna yell at Kevin, “Don’t you ever grab my face like that again.” Sumaya then observed Kevin running out of Joanna’s room, slamming the door behind him. When Sumaya asked Joanna
if she was all right, Joanna complained that Kevin “had become childish” since the couple arrived at the Air Force base.

Even in the lead up to the murder, Joanna’s maneuverability remains a prominent theme in this case. Other than Kevin, Mary Medill was the last person to see Joanna alive. Her testimony provides us with further insights into the events leading up to the tragic killing.

By the time the weekend of the killing arrived, Mary was well aware that Joanna was becoming increasingly dissatisfied with Kevin. That fateful Sunday Mary brought the cleaning fluid to the motel and helped Joanna clean the carpet. Kevin was lying in bed. He had apparently been drinking most of the preceding night and had consumed even more alcohol that morning. Eventually Mary asked Joanna if she wanted to get lunch. The two picked up food from Wendy’s and took it back to Mary’s house. Joanna told Mary that she was ending her relationship with Kevin because of his drinking and immaturity. According to Mary, Joanna did not seem “too upset about a possible breakup.” That afternoon, Joanna went shopping with Mary and her husband, asking Mary to drop her back at the motel just after 3:00 p.m. As Joanna exited Mary’s car, she told Mary she would call her later that day. Around 5:00 p.m. Mary called Joanna who was reportedly “not very talkative.” Mary would later report, “It sounded like I interrupted her, like they were in the middle of talking.”

Interviewed after the killing, Mary told investigators she did not observe any marks or injuries on Joanna when they were together that Sunday afternoon. Neither did Joanna “mention anything about getting hit.” Put differently, Joanna appears to have made a clear-headed decision to leave Kevin in their room at Motel X to sleep off a hangover. Joanna’s behavior at that time was consistent with much of her earlier behavior with Kevin. She was clear about what she wanted from the relationship and equally emphatic about what she would not tolerate. Her mother would later report other episodes of Joanna setting limits with Kevin. For example, Joanna had earlier told Kevin she would not marry a man who smoked cigarettes. On another occasion, Joanna telephoned her mother about an unpleasant experience with Kevin regarding their possible wedding date. Kevin had been screaming at Joanna that he wanted to marry her fairly soon. He even specified the day he thought they should marry. Joanna compared his behavior to that of a superior officer who might yell in the face of a new military recruit. Joanna reported to her mother that she told Kevin, “You have to leave.” Joanna also told him, “You’re not going to give me that kind of ultimatum.”

Other witnesses provided testimony implying it was Joanna’s assertiveness and emotional strength of purpose that contributed to Kevin’s decision
to strangle her to death. The detective who skillfully elicited Kevin’s confession asked him if he “got a rush” from strangling Joanna. Kevin replied he did at first, “but at the end I really did want to let go but I knew I couldn’t ‘cause she’d have jumped up and went straight to you.”

With the benefit of hindsight it is easy to see Joanna’s decision to return to the motel to pick up her things as a mistake. It was between 5.00 and 6.30 p.m. on that Sunday that Kevin strangled her. We might speculate that she would never have returned to the motel if she realized Kevin was capable of murdering her. Likewise, would Joanna have confronted him so vehemently about his alcoholism if she had known the kind of rage such comments might elicit? Speculative questions like these may appear inappropriate, bordering on blaming Joanna for precipitating her own demise. My point in raising them is not to imply Joanna was in any way responsible for her own murder. Rather, I raise these questions because they speak to the persistence of Joanna’s own agency and maneuverability in her dealings with Kevin. Rather than reading the meaning of Kevin’s homicidal behavior from the power relationships between men and women and Kevin’s control or eroding control over Joanna, I suggest Kevin’s humiliated fury and his inchoate sense he had failed at manhood provides the necessary but not sufficient conditions for his IPH.

**Making Sociological Sense of the Jones-Jenkins IPH**

I contend that Kevin Jones’s humiliated fury lies at the root of his murderous behavior, his snapping. In short, the young military recruit, a man who wanted so much to guard nuclear weapons, who boasted of his sexual activity and who longed to marry Joanna Jenkins, was anything but a powerful figure. Joanna’s rejection of him further undermined his tenuous sense of self, a precarious masculine identity, honed in a culture of southern paternalism, blighted by some of the indignities of his childhood, and soaked in a level of alcohol consumption subconsciously or consciously directed at soothing his fear, rage, and anxiety. Kevin’s desire to guard nuclear missiles was a metaphor for his passage into manhood, a way of coming of age, and a means of meeting the demands of hegemonic masculinity. His lust for Joanna, his desire to corral her, to marry her, and to control her paralleled his military aspirations.

Joanna’s own power was linked to her emotional capital, her ability to care for and look out for her partner. These sources of power stand in stark contrast to Kevin’s own immaturity and neediness. The evidence does not support the argument that Kevin controlled Joanna, even though he clearly wanted to do so. Joanna may have miscalculated Kevin’s potential for
homicide when she returned to the room they shared at Motel X. However, she returned on her own terms, not because he necessarily coerced her into returning. Neither is it accurate to see Kevin’s abusive behavior as controlling her thoughts, feelings, and actions. Such an interpretation, as I have argued, is at odds with Joanna’s agency, resistance, and emotional strength as much as it exaggerates Kevin’s power.

I am not suggesting that Kevin’s shame increased evenly or in proportion to the intensity of his attempts to control Joanna. Neither am I concluding that Kevin’s power varied in inverse proportion to his humiliation. Rather, my point is that the ebb and flow of emotion in cases such as these defy easy quantification and the construction of simple cause-and-effect models. Indeed, the articulation, on the one hand, between Kevin’s apparently diminishing sense of personal power and his frantic attempts to control Joanna, and, on the other, his humiliated fury, is complex, uneven, and at times paradoxical. At times both sought to control the other, although Kevin’s attempts to control were clearly more desperate and threatening.

Reflecting on the way he rolled Joanna off the bed and strangled her on the floor of their motel room, Kevin comments, “She indicated she wanted nothing to do with me anymore. I was scared, angry, and nervous. As a snap-action I choked her until she died. Then I set the room up to make it look like an accident because I was so scared.” At another point in the same presentence investigation interview Kevin observes, “I was intoxicated and my fiancée (whom I love and was planning my life with) was leaving me. I was heartbroken and scared.”

It is silly to suggest we do not see the immediate workings of Kevin’s physical power and control over Joanna in the act of killing. During their military training, Joanna and Kevin were taught how to apply chokeholds and how to defend against such holds. Indeed, the autopsy revealed the extent to which Joanna unsuccessfully attempted to fend off Kevin’s stranglehold. However, other than the physical domination of Joanna, the workings of power are contextual and indirect in this case, and, I would add, in many others. As far as Kevin’s deployment of violence, I invoke Arendt’s (1970, 56) observation that “power and violence are opposites; where the one rules absolutely, the other is absent. Violence appears where power is in jeopardy, but left to its own course it ends in power’s disappearance.” Put differently, as Kevin’s hostility grew to the point of his act of strangulation, his personal power seems to have diminished unevenly in fits and spurts.

My interpretation of the extensive evidence in this case is that Kevin’s shame reached unbearable levels, not that he was necessarily aware of this deeply disturbing emotion or its immediate visceral expression as humiliated
fury. Such an interpretation implicates Kevin’s own body, to use Connell and Messerschmidt’s (2005, 851) language, as “a participant in generating social practice” and that bodies in general “are both objects of social practice and agents in social practice.” While shame and humiliation are emotions of social disconnection, their effects are felt at the level of the body and human physiology. Indeed, Kevin’s compromised masculinity, his humiliated fury, and, in the end, his act of strangulation and sexual mutilation are indistinguishable and the social and the visceral are one and the same.

As Lewis (1971, 16-17) contends in her pioneering studies of shame, “At least in our culture, shame is probably a universal reaction to unrequited or thwarted love. By its nature, it is a state with which it is easy to identify, and at the same time it is painful.” Kevin bypassed his shame, replacing it with a rage that quickly and temporarily restored a sense of pride and a sense of control. His act of killing temporarily dissipated his anxiety and fear, rather like violence can fleetingly solve the fight-or-flight dilemma.

My analysis of the Jones-Jenkins IPH offers another way of interpreting this disturbing form of intimate violence and tyranny. I have drawn on the work of a number of scholars and it bears restating that my observations about Kevin Jones’s humiliated fury parallel the arguments made by authors such as Elijah Anderson, Jack Katz, and James Gilligan, all of whom have provided invaluable insights into the phenomenon of street violence and homicide. We can benefit from exploring the similarities between what is sometimes referred to as private or intimate violence, on the one hand, and public or stranger/acquaintance violence on the other. We can also benefit from further exploring the continuities and homologies between so-called private and public violence rather than merely emphasizing their distinctive etiologies and ecologies. One way of accessing these two seemingly distinct forms is through the sociology of emotion and the notion of humiliated fury, itself steeped in the stuff of history and the language of socially situated interactions and negotiations rather than the monolithic articulation of power relations.

It is largely taboo in the antidomestic-violence movement to interpret men’s homicidal violence in terms of them snapping, going past the point of no return. Rather, as noted, researchers have tended to dwell on how IPHs are the end products of long processes of abuse, escalating violence, tyranny, and interpersonal terrorism. Killings often occur during the process of one party, usually the female victim, attempting to exit the relationship. Perpetrators become increasingly obsessed with controlling the women who seem to be slipping from their grasp. Sexual jealousy is a common theme in these cases. Indeed, as these so-called red flags surface with increasingly onerous potency,
the danger seemingly increases and a very small proportion of violent, tyrannical men actually do kill their female intimates.

Part of the reason it is so tempting to theorize women’s plight in these cases solely in terms of men’s power and control is that many female victims face significant barriers to escaping cleanly from dangerous relationships. Victims of male intimate-partner terrorism face enormous difficulties finding safe, affordable, independent housing. Mothers are most often the parents who take ultimate responsibility for any shared children. Likewise, because of their disproportionate commitment to and involvement in child rearing, they face more difficulties than men in finding rewarding, fulfilling paid labor. As noted, many abused women also possess more emotional capital than their abusive partners and therefore often hold out hope that love will return and that the family will remain together. These vulnerable and abused women often acutely feel the inertia of entrapment, a negative energy that keeps them in place. Entrapment, like rising sexual jealousy, escalating violence, and intensifying obsessive behavior, changes over time, contributing further to our understanding of IPH as cumulative rather than a phenomenon evidencing the visceral immediacy of snapping.

By concentrating on Kevin’s rising shame and his inchoate sense that he failed at love and manhood, we can see IPH involving rising shame and rage and snapping. Put simply, the rising ignominy and the act of killing are best seen on a continuum rather than as mutually exclusive phenomena.

The rise of humiliated fury to the point of murder is a profoundly gendered process. Men reach this homicidal emotional condition much more often than women. Space precludes a detailed analysis of why men commit much more IPH than women. However, we might briefly note that it is an albeit relatively small number of men much more so than women, who are subject to feelings of intense shame that they seem unable to recognize, acknowledge, address, or discharge by means other than violent, tyrannical, or terrorizing behavior directed at their loved ones. I am not arguing that women are incapable of reaching states of humiliated fury from which they murder male intimates. Nor am I arguing that women are incapable of tyrannizing and terrorizing men. Rather, men’s socialization, their greater individuation under conditions of modernity, their more intense separation from their mothers as they establish their independence and self-identity as infants leave men generally more emotionally disconnected than women. It is in part because of men’s emotional frailties and isolation that they are more prone to humiliated fury. Therefore in the midst of Kevin’s sporadic use of violence and intimidation, bluster and posturing, fantasies about guarding nuclear weapons, threatening behavior, frantic attempts to control Joanna, and
frequent efforts to soothe his soul with alcohol and/or drugs, we also witness searing levels of personal vulnerability, powerlessness, dependency, and fear of abandonment.

Modern-era prescriptions about parenting reproduce these emotional divergences between the genders. Chodorow (1999) contends it is largely mothers who nurture the young. Although this differs significantly by race and class, many fathers serve as principal material providers, keeping more of an emotional distance from children. Boys and girls individuate to different degrees with the former doing so more abruptly and painfully. Significantly, boys tend to repress their feminine qualities and push away from their mothers. This gendered process of individuation happens consciously and subconsciously, creating modern men who increasingly value independence, autonomy, and competition as opposed to emotional connections and cooperation. Chodorow (1999, viii) observes, “Women experience a sense of self-in-relation that is in contrast to men’s creation of a self that wishes to deny relation and connection.” Modern-era mothering therefore contributed greatly to the creation of self-made men well suited to the competitive rigors of an increasingly alienating capitalist economy.

Chodorow also addresses why men commit so much more serious and homicidal violence than women. Her observations are directly relevant to my observations about Kevin’s failed masculinity. Chodorow (1998, 35) comments, “Humiliation may also in some way adhere more to men than to women.” This possibility is related to men’s greater sense of independence and isolation and the potential vulnerability this creates. She is well aware that women use violence. Indeed, she comments that among her female patients, “the women most prone to feeling humiliated are also those most liable to outbursts of rage” (Chodorow 1998, 35). Chodorow’s observations from her clinical practice comport with those of James Gilligan (1997), whose pioneering work also notes the important connection between shame and gender.

In her work on mothering and violence, Chodorow does not theorize emotion or shame and humiliation as intra-psychic phenomena, characteristic of individuals. Rather, shame and rage are socially and historically situated emotions, forged in the midst of grinding social inequalities and historical developments such as the rise of capitalism. Put differently, shame is the emotion of social disconnection, reflecting a loss of pride in people’s contributions to their communities and families. In modernity, men have become particularly susceptible to shame, and especially vulnerable to the imperatives of discourses on masculinity that identify successful men as sole or principal providers in their nuclear families.
Kevin’s decision to carry on strangling Joanna in the face of her resistance was strongly influenced by his knowledge that she would definitely report his violence to authorities. Put differently, Kevin’s certainty about Joanna’s resolve to report him meant for sure that he would never guard nuclear missiles, never become a Technical Instructor, a leader among young men. Kevin’s grasp of the undoing of his manhood was inchoate rather than consciously thought through in the heat of the moment. His humiliation at that point was unbearable and his subsequent act of holding Joanna by the throat for what he reported to be “six to eight minutes” temporarily discharged this shame through the physical release of pent-up tension. Thus, it is possible to see Kevin’s act of killing as an emotional manifestation of his inchoate realization that he had failed to live up to the prescriptions of hegemonic masculinities. We see such a sense of failure in many cases of IPH.

In proposing an important role for the notion of humiliated fury, I am not suggesting that the power relations of gender are irrelevant to the study of IPH. Rather, I suggest power is of great significance as an indirect contextual frame that limits options and creates prescriptions about what is, for example, a successful modern-era intimate partner, husband, wife, or father or mother. It is also at the heart of the marital bargain that prescribes different degrees of entitlement for men and women and an unfair sexual division of labor. Joanna first assented to such a bargain but she later withdrew from the engagement, citing Kevin’s drunkenness and immaturity as the reasons. This is not to say that all modern-era marriages and romantic attachments assume this form, although many still do so.

My analysis of the Jones-Jenkins case therefore posits a primary role for Kevin’s humiliated fury and a secondary or contextual but nevertheless highly important role for the power relations of gender. These primary and secondary roles are necessary but not sufficient for understanding IPH. The dynamics of the Jones-Jenkins case are by no means unique but are enough to raise serious doubts about explanations of IPH that hitherto posit a man’s power and control as the primary root of the killing. I am not proposing a replacement interpretation or model (humiliated fury) that itself might be subject to falsification. Rather, the Jones-Jenkins case study reminds us of the haunting presence of the inexplicable in these killings, curious forces that defy our understanding; in short, a perplexing tangle of social circumstance and emotion.

In closing, I return to Avery Gordon’s work. She describes haunting as “an animated state of existence and perception in which a repressed or unresolved social violence makes itself known to you, sometimes very directly, sometimes more obliquely” (Gordon 2006, 9). Kevin’s inability to rein in, subdue,
or repress his rage at being abandoned by Joanna marked his failure to successfully navigate the painful pitfalls of modern-era hegemonic masculinity. As numerous historians attest (Stearns and Stearns 1986; Elias 1994), such navigation requires the guarded control and selective deployment of anger and rage and the careful regulation of emotion in general. Kevin’s killing was informed proximally by his humiliated fury and distally by the power relations of the gender order. But, it was also characterized by the ghostly presence of inexplicable forces, and what Gordon (2006, 9) refers to as the modus operandi of haunting, something that “unsettles and defies detached reasoning.”

Practically, when assessing the dangers posed by a violent, controlling, tyrannical partner we would do well to ask about his sense of power, his feelings of being in control, his inchoate sense of ignominy, and his growing humiliated fury. However, we cannot accurately predict lethal outcomes. Indeed, our attempts to identify risk factors as countable, scientific variables seem at odds with the haunting presence of inchoate feelings of ignominy and humiliated fury. They are most certainly at odds with the haunting presence of the inexplicable.

Dedication

This article is dedicated to the memory of Judy Wang, a prosecutor who worked tirelessly on behalf of victims of domestic violence and whose life was cut short in a tragic automobile accident.

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Notes

1. I use pseudonyms throughout this article.
2. IPH refers to the murder or non-negligent manslaughter of a person by her or his intimate or former intimate partner. Domestic violence fatality review entails the identification of those homicides, suicides, and other deaths caused by, related to, or somehow traceable to domestic violence. Reviews increase our understanding of these tragedies and offer the possibility of introducing new preventive interventions.
3. For a discussion of the inequalities of the gender order, see Epstein (2007); Stark (2007).
4. In defeating the Romans at Heraclea in 280 BC and Asculum in 279 BC, King Pyrrhus’s army suffered enormous losses that could not be replaced. Pyrrhus’s hollow victory contained the seeds of long-term failure.

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Domestic Abuse Intervention Project. 2009. New Wheel Posters and answers to frequently asked questions.


Bio

Neil Websdale is Professor of Criminology and Criminal Justice at Northern Arizona University and Director of the National Domestic Violence Fatality Review Initiative. He has published work on domestic violence, the history of crime, policing, social change, and public policy. His social policy work consists of helping establish a national network of domestic violence fatality review teams. He trained as a sociologist at the University of London, England and currently lives and works in Flagstaff, Arizona.