

# **UCLA**

## **UCLA Women's Law Journal**

### **Title**

A Review of *Fighting Women: Anger and Aggression in Aboriginal Australia* by Victoria Katherine Burbank

### **Permalink**

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/5c40j3qd>

### **Journal**

UCLA Women's Law Journal, 5(2)

### **Author**

McCoy, Jennifer Cretcher

### **Publication Date**

1995

### **DOI**

10.5070/L352018054

### **Copyright Information**

Copyright 1995 by the author(s). All rights reserved unless otherwise indicated. Contact the author(s) for any necessary permissions. Learn more at <https://escholarship.org/terms>

Peer reviewed

**A REVIEW OF  
FIGHTING WOMEN:  
ANGER AND AGGRESSION IN  
ABORIGINAL AUSTRALIA  
BY VICTORIA KATHERINE BURBANK**

BERKELEY, CALIFORNIA: UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA PRESS,  
1994.

Jennifer Cretcher McCoy\*

INTRODUCTION

The current spotlight on domestic violence has led to inquiries into the causes of violence in the family and ways to protect women from what former Surgeon General Joycelyn Elders has identified as the nation's single largest cause of injury to women.<sup>1</sup> Experts differ on whether violence results from social conditioning, biological instinct, or a combination of factors.<sup>2</sup> In *Fighting Women: Anger and Aggression in Aboriginal Australia*, Victoria Burbank uses an extensive anthropological study to provide another explanation of the cause of domestic violence and to suggest how women can protect themselves from violence.

The goals of Burbank's study of women's aggression in Aboriginal Australia include: to examine how Aboriginal women experience aggression; to compare the experiences of aggression for Western women and Aboriginal women; and to investigate how the Western perception of female aggression contributes to our understanding of domestic violence.<sup>3</sup>

---

\* J.D. candidate, UCLA School of Law, 1996; B.A., U.C. Davis, 1993.

1. Lynn Smith, *Change Is Slow in Therapy Group for Men Who Batter*, L.A. TIMES, Aug. 11, 1994, at A1, A26.

2. *Id.* at A26, A27.

3. VICTORIA K. BURBANK, *FIGHTING WOMEN: ANGER AND AGGRESSION IN ABORIGINAL AUSTRALIA* 2 (1994).

In *Fighting Women*, Burbank investigates how women's equality might help prevent abuse by documenting reports of Aboriginal women's aggression in one community in Australia.<sup>4</sup> Burbank focuses her study primarily on Aboriginal women as aggressors rather than as victims.<sup>5</sup> She found that the Aboriginal women she studied frequently responded to aggression or expressed their own anger through both verbal and physical aggression. Burbank suggests that when women can be aggressive they are less likely to become victims in the face of violence.<sup>6</sup> She argues that aggression can sometimes be a "positive, enhancing act," and that denying women their aggressive tendencies might diminish their sense of self-worth.<sup>7</sup> Burbank notes that most authors tend to dismiss women's aggression as "minimal and insignificant."<sup>8</sup> Her study suggests that Western women seem to be less aggressive than men only because their aggression must be expressed in a means approved by the dominant culture, which encourages passivity in women.<sup>9</sup> Because Aboriginal women can withstand male aggression, their perceptions and experience of aggression should be considered when searching for ways to protect women from violence.<sup>10</sup> In light of the aggressive behavior of Aboriginal Australian women, Burbank contends that by adopting an aggressive stance, women can gain a sense of self-protection and effectively oppose violence.<sup>11</sup> Her suggestions, however, are limited by the lack of a good comparison between Aboriginal society and Western society, the failure to address the male role in domestic violence, and the impracticality of implementing her suggestions.

In Part I, I will discuss Burbank's description of the experience of aggression for Aboriginal women. Part II will examine Burbank's understanding of the Western experience and percep-

---

4. *Id.* at 190.

5. *Id.* at 1.

6. Although Burbank presents the women of Mangrove as aggressors, she emphasizes that these women can be victims too, and she does not want her findings used as evidence that women are unjustly aggressive and therefore deserve the violence directed against them. *Id.* at 184-85.

7. *Id.* Another author supports this theory, saying that expressing anger has positive purposes such as liberating a woman from silence about the injustices perpetrated against her. Sandra P. Thomas, *Introduction to WOMEN AND ANGER* 10-11 (Sandra P. Thomas ed., 1993).

8. BURBANK, *supra* note 3, at 2.

9. *Id.* at 3.

10. *Id.* at 19.

11. *Id.* at 186.

tion of aggression. In Part III, I will describe Burbank's comparison of the effects of male aggression in Aboriginal Australia and in the West as it relates to domestic violence. In Part IV, I will discuss the strengths and weaknesses of Burbank's study.

## I. ABORIGINAL WOMEN AND THEIR EXPERIENCE OF AGGRESSION

### A. *The Community of Mangrove*

Burbank performed her study in a community which she referred to as "Mangrove."<sup>12</sup> Mangrove, located in Arnhem Land in the Northern Territory of Australia, had about 600 residents in 1988.<sup>13</sup> Founded as a Protestant mission in the early 1950s, the missions and Western culture have affected the current culture in Mangrove.<sup>14</sup> Although the missions were originally founded with the goal of protecting the Aboriginal people, assimilation was later emphasized. Missionary efforts towards religious conversion and the creation of "proper" Australian citizens required education in Western lifestyles and morality and the discouragement of Aboriginal social practices.<sup>15</sup> Before missionization, the Aboriginal people were primarily nomadic, but now most live in European-style houses in towns. Automobiles, electricity, appliances, guns, and alcohol are some of the many Western items now available. More recently, the Aboriginal people have regained many rights and much autonomy and control of their own communities. However, the impact of the missions remains.<sup>16</sup>

Mangrove is a small, closely related community with flexible living arrangements; relatives can move among households, allowing for a generally harmonious atmosphere.<sup>17</sup> However, permanent houses and a year-round settlement make it less convenient for people to leave when tension arises than when they lived a nomadic lifestyle.<sup>18</sup> Even so, the close proximity of relatives and friends helps to regulate the level of aggression and violence in the community.

---

12. *Id.* at 193 n.1. Burbank gave the town and its residents fictional names to protect their privacy.

13. *Id.* at 23.

14. *Id.* at 23-24.

15. *Id.* at 24-25.

16. *Id.* at 27.

17. *Id.*

18. *Id.*

Nevertheless, Mangrove women are sometimes the victims of violence, some of which results from alcohol use.<sup>19</sup> Although Mangrove is a "dry" community and has fewer problems with alcohol abuse than other communities, the women in Mangrove associate intoxication with aggression.<sup>20</sup> One woman told Burbank, "When men drink they come back and bash their wives."<sup>21</sup>

### B. *Aboriginal Women's Conceptualization of Aggression*

To begin her analysis of aggression, Burbank defines aggression as acts based on socially produced emotions and motivated in part or whole by anger.<sup>22</sup>

Burbank explores the experience of aggression for Aboriginal women by accumulating women's own accounts of violence and aggression in their lives rather than by documenting violent or aggressive events as she observes them. In this way, Burbank attempts to learn about the Aboriginal women's conceptualization of aggression. Burbank records second-hand reports and stories heard during informal conversations.<sup>23</sup> Burbank focuses on reports of acts of aggression that result in physical harm.<sup>24</sup> Burbank believes that it is how aggression is viewed that is important, so she observed little actual aggressive behavior.<sup>25</sup> To discover what women's conflicts reveal about their culture and society, Burbank feels she must learn what Aboriginal women say about their own aggression.<sup>26</sup> Despite her effective use of Aboriginal women's own reports of their experience of aggression, the reader still perceives Aboriginal women's experience of aggression through Burbank's eyes.

Although the women of Mangrove do not perceive themselves as particularly aggressive, they view it as natural to express their anger through verbal or physical aggression.<sup>27</sup> When women at Mangrove get angry they can express their anger in a culturally prescribed and accepted way, thereby augmenting rather

---

19. *Id.* at 17.

20. *Id.* at 62-63.

21. *Id.* at 63.

22. *Id.* at 4-5.

23. *Id.* at 9.

24. *Id.* at 5.

25. *Id.* at 10.

26. *Id.* at 97.

27. *Id.* at 72. The women at Mangrove tend to take for granted their ability to fight for themselves.

than diminishing themselves through aggression.<sup>28</sup> There is no need for Aboriginal women to deny the validity of their emotions or to feel ashamed about expressing anger. The women benefit from aggressive behavior, but they also recognize that violence may be one of its costs.<sup>29</sup> Also, the women of Mangrove see many motives behind their aggression. They do not view the concepts of anger and aggression as separate entities; an angry woman will act aggressively.<sup>30</sup>

### C. *Aboriginal Women's Experience of Aggression*

Aggression is both encouraged and controlled in Aboriginal society. Although physical aggression is seen as a legitimate form of social control, it is monitored and controlled by living arrangements and social relationships.<sup>31</sup> In Mangrove, aggression is used for control or domination, for expressing anger or frustration, or for competition.<sup>32</sup> It can be caused by jealousy, tension in relationships, failure to perform duties, and sometimes by alcohol use.<sup>33</sup> Although the women of Mangrove do not appear to compete for resources, they often fight over men.<sup>34</sup> Burbank observes that in Mangrove aggression can be positive and demonstrates culture at work rather than cultural disintegration; aggression is a clearly structured activity that follows rules.<sup>35</sup>

While men more often use dangerous weapons, women often use sticks, called "nulla nulla," and they aim for arms and legs where they are not likely to cause serious damage.<sup>36</sup> Aggression can also take the form of verbal aggression, which is used

---

28. *Id.* at 184.

29. *Id.* at 132.

30. *Id.* at 55, 68.

31. *Id.* at 30–32. Aggressive retaliation is a major form of Aboriginal social control. It is appropriate to use physical aggression to punish those who misbehave.

32. *Id.* at 68–69.

33. *Id.* at 53, 58–61. A man may also respond aggressively when the brother-sister avoidance etiquette is violated by attention being called to his sister's sexuality or biological functions. *Id.* at 151–52.

34. *Id.* at 103–04. However, men are not considered a scarce or valuable resource because they are not essential for the well-being of women, as evidenced by a rise in the number of women who choose single motherhood over remaining with a man who causes her problems. A woman without a husband has one less rival for resources, and some women at Mangrove see men as a way to get pregnant but not as a means of support. In fact, women remark that when women fight over men they are "fighting for nothing." *Id.* at 118–20.

35. *Id.* at 4.

36. *Id.* at 35, 74.

more often by women than men.<sup>37</sup> Burbank recorded the following account of verbal aggression from one woman:

Yesterday [a married couple] had a row. She gave her son tucker but her husband didn't see her and growled at her to do so. She told him that she had. She went and got a nulla nulla and said she was going to hit him. "I'm tired of your grumbling and cheek all day. You go to [the outstation]. I'll come behind. I'm going to [another settlement] first where I've been growing up."<sup>38</sup>

Women, although willing to fight with men, tend to attack other women rather than men, because they are more likely to win and less likely to be hurt.<sup>39</sup> A woman may refrain from verbally assaulting a man either because he might respond with physical violence or because it is culturally more appropriate to attack a woman.<sup>40</sup> Also, because a woman may see little point in antagonizing an already problematic relationship with a husband or boyfriend, attacking her rival for the man's attention would have less serious consequences and a greater chance of success. Burbank noted one exception where a woman attacked her unfaithful husband rather than her rival, who was a white school teacher. Burbank suggests that the woman felt in this case it was safer to attack a man than a white woman, who was considered a powerful figure.<sup>41</sup>

The fact that Mangrove is a small and closely related community allows its residents to fight and risk conflict without destroying their relationships. Not only do their familial and social ties prevent fights from escalating too far, but because they know they must see each other again and get along, self-restraint in arguments can be very important.<sup>42</sup> The close proximity of many relatives ensures that few acts of aggression go unobserved; for instance, a husband and wife will usually live with several other relatives, with other relatives living nearby.<sup>43</sup> Therefore, a woman can rely on certain people coming to her aid and protecting

---

37. *Id.* at 36.

38. *Id.* at 136.

39. *Id.* at 120-24.

40. *Id.* at 122.

41. *Id.* at 124.

42. *Id.* at 92-93.

43. *Id.* at 94.

her from serious injury.<sup>44</sup> Burbank recounts one event that she witnessed herself:

I am awakened by Lily's sister leaping out of bed and the sound of yelling outside. I hear a woman, swearing, every other word is "fucking" said in a beautiful "proper" English accent. Her husband picks up a stick and goes toward her. She is standing in front of my neighbor's house. The husband's mother steps in her son's path. He swings at her, and she ducks out of the way. A man from the neighbor's house, the husband's "uncle," grabs him. While he is being held, his wife rushes at him. His mother goes after his wife, but she eludes her. The husband breaks out of his "uncle's" grasp. Both he and his wife bash at each other with sticks. The "uncle" grabs the husband again. . . . They tussle. The husband's mother goes over and tries to pull her son off his wife, but the wife is thrown to the ground. Her husband then kicks her. People shout for him to go. After kicking his wife several times, the husband leaves. Tina sticks her head in the caravan a few minutes later to say that the wife threw a stone at her husband because he was going fishing without her.<sup>45</sup>

A man who intends to seriously hurt his wife would have to isolate her to prevent others from interfering.<sup>46</sup> Fights usually occur outdoors in the view of family and neighbors, who can intervene and prevent serious injury.<sup>47</sup> One woman explained:

When husband and wife are fighting their children can stop them. Or the mother of the girl can grab her or the mother of the boy can grab him. Or their uncle can stop them. If their mother won't take notice, then their father's sister or mother's mother or father's mother or anyone of their real family can stop them. Somebody would always stop them.<sup>48</sup>

Because the public nature of fighting allows them some protection, the women of Mangrove realize that they probably will not be seriously hurt. Women may think twice before attacking a man and risking injury, but they "do not fear male aggression to the point of complete inaction" and they may stand up for themselves when they are angry.<sup>49</sup>

---

44. *Id.* at 124-27. These people include the woman's family, her husband's family, or other women. However, an unmarried woman fighting with a man would not be assisted because her affair is considered inappropriate.

45. *Id.* at 18-19.

46. *Id.* at 156.

47. *Id.* at 75.

48. *Id.* at 79.

49. *Id.* at 124. The public nature of fighting is a protection that compensates for the inequality in size, strength, and ferocity in fights between men and women. *Id.* at 156-57.



## II. THE WESTERN EXPERIENCE AND PERCEPTION OF AGGRESSION

Burbank also discusses the Western experience and perception of aggression. Burbank fails to define what she means by "Western," but it appears that she means the white middle-class culture of the United States. Although there is evidence that Western men are more aggressive than women, Western society may incorrectly assume that women's aggression is unnatural.<sup>50</sup> Burbank discusses her perception as a white middle-class woman that anger is reserved for the powerful and is an unnatural emotion for women.<sup>51</sup> Western women may suppress their anger and refrain from acting aggressively if they perceive that, as subordinates, it is wrong for them to express anger, and that others will consider them unstable if they lose their temper and behave aggressively.<sup>52</sup> Burbank emphasizes that we need to look beyond behavior and analyze the rules and responses for managing aggression, the meaning that men's aggressive acts have for women, and how acts of aggression affect women's self-concepts.<sup>53</sup>

Burbank notes that much of Western writing on male aggression towards women reflects the disapproval of "middle-class academics" and "activist women who see male aggression as an attack on women's rights and well-being."<sup>54</sup> Burbank suggests that the experience of battered women is influenced by Western beliefs, which give women a mixed message about aggression: aggression is wrong and should be suppressed, despite violence in the media, capital punishment, child discipline, and other male-dominated forms of prosocial aggression. Construction of aggression as wrong and unacceptable may cause a woman who is the victim of aggression to be ashamed and blame herself.<sup>55</sup>

There is evidence that Western women have attempted to use aggression to protect themselves. A 1975 study found that within American households, women were as violent against men as men were against women, but women more often acted in re-

---

50. *Id.* at 134. See also Thomas, *supra* note 7.

51. BURBANK, *supra* note 3, at 180.

52. *Id.* at 180-81.

53. *Id.* at 141-43.

54. *Id.* at 158.

55. *Id.* at 160.

taliation or in self-defense, and the consequences of their aggression were minor.<sup>56</sup>

Recent developments in the theory of battered woman syndrome suggest that some battered women believe they deserve violence and that they stay in these relationships because they are trained to be helpless by the recurring abuse.<sup>57</sup> Even in less extreme situations, Western society trains women to be helpless by discouraging them from responding aggressively even when they are being treated unfairly. Battered women rarely fight back with any success, and find little recourse for protection in the legal system, even though spousal abuse is against the law. Some men may regard their acts of domestic violence as normal and justified, but there is a general sense in Western society that aggression against women is wrong or deviant.<sup>58</sup>

### III. COMPARISON OF THE EFFECTS OF MALE AGGRESSION

Burbank compares aggression between men and women at Mangrove to battering in Western society in terms of the relation between male aggression and female subordination.<sup>59</sup> She suggests that women in Mangrove have a different experience and perception of male aggression than women in American society.<sup>60</sup> This may be due in part to the Western perception that aggression is wrong and socially destructive.<sup>61</sup> In Mangrove, male aggression may not be very effective in changing the attitudes and behavior of women that the men disapprove of because the women perceive the aggression as an expression of anger rather than an attempt at domination.<sup>62</sup> Burbank asserts that women are more likely to be subordinated by men if they

56. Murray A. Straus & Richard J. Gelles, *Societal Change and Change in Family Violence From 1975 to 1985 As Revealed by Two National Surveys*, 48 J. MARRIAGE AND FAM. 465, 470-71 (1986); See also Ellis Cose, *Truths About Spouse Abuse*, NEWSWEEK, Aug. 8, 1994, at 49.

57. See, e.g., LENORE E. WALKER, *THE BATTERED WOMAN SYNDROME* (1984). "Inequality between men and women impacts on the perceptions of violent behavior for the women so that they are unable to develop adequate skills to escape from the relationship. Such sexism also pervades society's institutions so that women feel that they are unable to receive any assistance to help them or their batterers." *Id.* at 151. See generally ANGELA BROWNE, *WHEN BATTERED WOMEN KILL* (1987).

58. BURBANK, *supra* note 3, at 159. See also ROBERT SIGLER, *DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IN CONTEXT: AN ASSESSMENT OF COMMUNITY ATTITUDES* 68 (1989).

59. BURBANK, *supra* note 3, at 133.

60. *Id.* at 158. Aboriginal women wonder why white women do not fight back.

61. *Id.* at 4.

62. *Id.* at 148-49.

view male aggression as a danger. Although the women in Mangrove experience the effects of male aggression, they are generally not victims. They do not feel that male aggression is a danger because they are able to protect themselves against it.<sup>63</sup>

Burbank asserts that Western society may encourage the type of aggression and violence that leads to a woman's loss of autonomy and to serious injury.<sup>64</sup> While women in Mangrove know that family members will step in to prevent serious injury, in Western society this kind of intervention is rare.<sup>65</sup> Despite agreement by other authors, Burbank provides little evidence to support her contention.<sup>66</sup> The only example of violence in Western society that she offers is the case of Hedda Nussbaum, a woman arrested for failing to protect her child from being beaten to death by her husband. It was later found that she had been so abused and injured by her husband that she was incapable of protecting her child. Her husband's abuse had created a cycle of violence and increased isolation that removed her from contact with any family members or friends who could have helped her.<sup>67</sup>

Burbank contrasts Hedda's story with the situation of a Mangrove woman called Sunny. When Sunny's husband stabbed her, her relatives saw her and came to her aid, calling the police, protecting her, and sending her to stay in safety with other relatives.<sup>68</sup> The society of Mangrove provides social support for victims of male aggression, and unlike in America, the women of Mangrove have other places to go. They can go to homes of relatives, or, if they already live with relatives, they only have to get their husbands to leave.<sup>69</sup>

63. *Id.* at 145-47. A woman's autonomy is reduced when her interests are made subordinate to a man's, when she is beaten or frightened into submission, or when in fearful anticipation of male aggression she does not act in her own interest.

64. *Id.* at 156-57. See also LINDA GORDON, *HEROES OF THEIR OWN LIVES: THE POLITICS AND HISTORY OF FAMILY VIOLENCE* 285-86 (1988). "One assault does not make a battered woman; she becomes that because of her socially determined inability to resist or escape: her lack of economic independence, law enforcement services, and, quite likely, self confidence." *Id.* at 285.

65. BURBANK, *supra* note 3, at 156-57. When batterers isolate women, the women are at greater risk because then it is less likely that someone will see the problem and try to help.

66. See, e.g., WALKER, *supra* note 57, at 43; Martha Minow, *Words and the Door to the Land of Change: Law, Language, and Family Violence*, 43 *VAND. L. REV.* 1665, 1671 (1990).

67. BURBANK, *supra* note 3, at 160.

68. *Id.* at 162.

69. *Id.* at 164. For women in Mangrove, life without a husband does not cause economic problems.

Burbank argues that even though women of Mangrove experience male aggression and violence, they are not necessarily subordinated or victimized. There are not many "battered women" in Mangrove.<sup>70</sup> The women are prepared and willing to fight back against men because they know others will help and make up for their lack of size and strength.<sup>71</sup> In light of this, Burbank argues that in Western society it is not physical injury that keeps women in abusive relationships, but rather Western "ideas about the relationships between men and women" as well as women's perception of aggression.<sup>72</sup>

#### IV. CRITIQUE OF BURBANK'S STUDY

One of the weakest points of Burbank's study, which she admits, is her failure to take into account other cultures that should be considered in Western perceptions of domestic violence. For instance, no mention is made of the possibly higher rate of domestic violence among African-American families or of variations within cultural groups based on factors such as socioeconomic status.<sup>73</sup> Other American groups, such as Korean-Americans, may well fit into Burbank's generalization, but the Asian cultural background is not "Western."<sup>74</sup>

Burbank also fails to provide sufficient evidence to support her stereotypes of Western women's experience of male aggression. Other authors have supported her contentions that isolation from family members increase a woman's chance of being seriously injured by an abuser;<sup>75</sup> however, the basis for her argument would have been much clearer had more emphasis been given to Western women's experiences.

Burbank's focus on women's role in domestic violence creates the impression that all the responsibility for domestic violence lies on the women's shoulders. Although it would have been difficult to incorporate the ways in which men contribute to domestic violence, there is limited value in addressing only the

---

70. *Id.* at 176.

71. *Id.* at 176-77.

72. *Id.*

73. ROBERT HAMPTON, *BLACK FAMILY VIOLENCE: CURRENT RESEARCH AND THEORY* 86-88 (1991).

74. Domestic violence may be a problem for Korean-American women, especially first generation immigrants, because their culture mandates their sexual inequality and trains them to be submissive. Leslie Berestein, *Center Counsels Koreans on Domestic Violence*, L.A. TIMES, Oct. 16, 1994 (City Times), at 3.

75. *See, e.g.*, WALKER, *supra* note 57, at 43.

women's role, since men are the primary actors in domestic violence situations. As society trains women to remain passive and suppress the natural response of anger, it is difficult for battered women to break the pattern of abuse and subordination. Also, there is evidence that expressing anger through aggression may not help all women. Women may be more seriously injured when they fight back. When a woman fights back against a man, the man may feel as if he is losing control and therefore may fight harder to regain his control of the woman.<sup>76</sup>

For the non-anthropologist, this book is heavily laden with data. Although Burbank presents some interesting arguments, they are not well tied together. The evidence that she provides from the Aboriginal culture is helpful to understand the causes of violence and to suggest possible solutions to the problem of domestic violence. Despite the lack of evidence of Western women's experience and aggressive behavior, Burbank has clearly presented a cultural variation. The aggressive behavior of the women of Mangrove suggests that all women have the potential for aggression. If Aboriginal women are really better able to oppose violence against them, perhaps other women have the ability to oppose the effects of male aggression. However, when culture tends to suppress aggression in women, there is no easy way to channel this aggression into combating the problem of domestic violence. It would be a phenomenal task to attempt to change cultural perceptions of women's aggression. A step in the right direction would be to begin to encourage positive aggression in women and to work towards altering perceptions about the appropriateness of women's aggression.

Another crucial matter is the importance of isolation. If the women of Mangrove are better protected by the close proximity of family, perhaps a better support system should be created for battered women in the United States. Encouraging contact with others and providing resources for the battered women could allow others to intervene before serious injury occurs.

As it is not feasible to restructure Western families and living situations, perhaps others should take the role of protecting women that is performed by Aboriginal families. The police and the courts could take more responsibility for protecting battered

---

76. See Smith, *supra* note 1, at A26. A counselor for men who batter stated, "The reality is all these men are very dependent on these women. . . . They come in believing women have the power. They sense they don't have control. When they act out is when they feel helpless and powerless." *Id.*

women rather than forcing the women to take action by themselves in a hostile legal system. Western society could perhaps better protect battered women if the police were to respond promptly to domestic violence calls and follow through by assisting women in obtaining restraining orders, helping them relocate, and if the courts ensured batterers could not gain access to the women or their families. Also, if battered women were not punished by the legal system when they appropriately defend themselves, women might feel better able to protect themselves and more willing to fight back than if aggression in women continues to be socially stigmatized.

#### CONCLUSION

Overall, *Fighting Women* is a potentially useful cross-cultural study. It looks at the root of the problem: the aggression that causes domestic violence as well as the aggression that could help women in the face of violence. Although its solutions are more theoretical than concrete, it is solid ground to work from in searching for means to assist women in preventing and surviving violence perpetrated against them.