

## Uncharted Violence: Reclaiming Structural Causes in The Power and Control Wheel

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### Abstract

The “Power and Control Wheel” (“the Wheel”) is an iconic image in the anti-gender 1 violence field. On a single vivid page, it captures multiple layers of intimate partner abuse. In the Wheel’s hub are the words “power and control,” the fundamental motivation of an abusive partner. 2 Eight spokes emanate from the center, each representing a tactic of abuse designed to \*563 accomplish that goal, such as “coercion and threats” and “intimidation.” The rim of the wheel identifies “physical” and “sexual” violence as the actions holding together and fortifying the tactics of an abusive partner’s control. The Wheel sprung from activists’ focus group interviews with two hundred “battered women,” 3 conducted in the early 1980s. 4 First printed in a modest spiral bound manual with cover art drawn by a volunteer, the Wheel has been the predominant model of domestic violence in the U.S for thirty years. Advocates use the Wheel to explain domestic violence to people who experience abuse, people who are abusive, law enforcement, judges and juries, and the general public. The Wheel has spread around the globe, been translated into more than forty languages, and adapted to scores of distinct cultural contexts. What the world does not know is that the Wheel was originally accompanied by a chart. The “Institutional and Cultural Supports for Battering Chart” (“the Chart”), designed as a close companion of the Wheel, focused on structures outside the relationship that increase one partner’s capacity to abuse the other. Women in discussion groups would connect an intimate partner’s tactics (pictured in the Wheel) to institutions, cultural values, and beliefs (listed on the Chart). 5 Examples provided on the Chart

included “police, courts, media, medical, clergy, business, education, human services.” 6 According to Ellen Pence, one of the creators of the Wheel and Chart, this process of connection was one of women “bringing together the personal and the political.” 7 \*564 In sharp contrast to the Wheel’s ubiquity, the Chart has all but disappeared. Anthropologist Joshua Price, the only scholar to observe this phenomenon, argued that when stripped of the Institutional and Cultural Supports for Battering Chart, the Wheel neglects structural sources that support domestic violence. 8 Price goes further, arguing that when people who experience abuse, or the advocates who assist them, use the Wheel without the Chart, the Wheel masks structural violence by drawing attention exclusively to the individual, private violence encapsulated in the Wheel. 9 In 2020, white leadership of anti-domestic violence coalitions across the country formally acknowledged their history of indifference to institutional violence---particularly racialized institutional violence. 10 Because the disappearance of the Chart almost certainly contributed to the focus on individual rather than structural sources of domestic violence, it is imperative to understand how the original Wheel-Chart dyad was severed, losing its front and center interrogation of the role and responsibility of institutions, cultures, and beliefs. This Article maps the creation, use, disuse, and disappearance of the Institutional and Cultural Supports for Battering Chart, a subject previously unexplored in legal scholarship. It relies primarily on original sources--the words, captured in interviews and writings--from the Wheel-Chart’s creators. The Article proceeds in four parts. Part I demonstrates the ubiquity and influence of the Wheel and the obscurity of the Chart. Part II unearths the history of the Wheel and Chart, demonstrating that when created, the Wheel-Chart dyad was part of a political curriculum for battered women’s education groups that was intended to inspire not just personal, but institutional and \*565 cultural transformation. Part III uncovers factors that likely contributed to the Chart’s disappearance. Part IV explores the connections between this disappearance and three essential movement challenges that feminist activists and scholars have long identified. One is the lack of focus on structural causes of domestic violence. Second is the set of problems that flows from the professionalization of the movement, whereby people experiencing abuse are viewed as clients to whom services are delivered, rather than partners with whom activists forge new paths toward social change. Third is the movement’s reliance on criminal law and alliance with law enforcement to achieve its goals. The Article concludes with directions for future research.