

offers a portrait of a complex personality. This is what makes her feminism so twenty-first century—a refusal to settle for simple answers.

Valenti is at her best when discussing the “pornification of pop culture.” Dealing with the recent media frenzy that has been packaged for profit as “Girls Gone Wild,” for instance, she is careful not to come down either on the anti-sex or pro-porn side. She mulls over the ramifications of stripping for the cameras with a lot of hard questions about power politics. Admitting to her own youthful indiscretions helps support her sisterly perspective, so after surveying a number of viewpoints, she concludes “I guess what I’ve come to—and is what works for me—is that you have to find your own middle ground. There has to be space for young women to figure shit out on their own. And I think most times young women do figure it out” (48). Valenti is also very persuasive on sex education campaigns in the United States, her main audience, and the rise of “abstinence” programs and virginity pledges or chastity balls. She provides sources for these disturbing trends (many stories are found online) to ground her anger in current statistics. This is eye-opening stuff for mom/profs who do not have time to watch much television or surf the web.

Valenti also discusses abortion rights, politics, the U.S. women’s movement, the wedding industry, women and politics and the “third wave,” or multiple identity positions within feminism. Perhaps because of my own position, I found these chapters to be a bit thin. But in some ways, this book is an antidote to academic feminism/feminists, as chapter titles like “I promise I won’t call ‘Her-story’” suggest. Nevertheless, I read it with admiration for Valenti’s websurfing research skills and punchy style. Valenti makes her case for feminism with a compelling mix of girl-talk and up-to-date indignation. I think I’ll recommend her book to my students—and in a few years, to my daughters.

## **Obsession, with Intent: Violence against Women**

Lee Lakeman

Montreal: Black Rose Books, 2005

### **Reviewed by Deborah Davidson**

I received my review copy of Lee Lakeman’s *Obsession, with Intent: Violence against Women* just as Aqsa Parvez was murdered, allegedly at the hands of her father and brother in what has been called “an honour killing,” since the 15-year-old Aqsa was said to have refused to wear her head covering and to be engaged in behaviours typical of teenagers in the Western world. Debates emerged as to the place of culture in this teen’s murder. I would argue that

culture played the key role in her murder—the cross-culture of violence against women—and I suspect Lee Lakeman would agree. In a cross-culture of violence, women are sexually assaulted, degraded, battered, and murdered at the hands of their partners and relatives because they are women. As Lakeman reshapes national discourse on violence against women, she shows it to be rooted in gender inequality, where men and patriarchal institutions have power over women.

Lakeman avoids degendered, neutralizing terms such as “domestic violence,” “intimate partner violence,” or, even worse “IPV.” She understands violence against women as physical violence, as well as “broken psyches” and the “willful destruction of bodies and minds,” involving “cruelty quick and vicious and ... cruelty to captives, especially wives and daughters, carefully maintained over years” (vii).

How is it that Lakeman can speak so passionately and knowledgeably about violence against women? She writes out of her long association with the women’s movement and extensive experience (since 1973) as an anti-violence worker in Canada. She also describes the book’s long herstory. *Obsession, with Intent*, which began as “a story of a group of women over five years who try to enlist the Canadian government ... to aid women ... to face down, restrain, escape, and correct the violent abuses of power inflicted by the men in their lives,” became thirty years of work to “develop and experiment with strategies to end sexist violence that involved the state” (x). Thus, violence against women is exposed not only as individual acts by individual men, but as institutional and systemic.

Through her work with the Canadian Association of Sexual Assault Centres and interviews with one hundred women who sought help from the criminal justice system, Lakeman shows the perpetuation rather than prevention of violence against women. She describes the mishandling of emergency telephone calls, charges not laid, charges dropped, pleas bargained, bail granted, limited sentences, low rates of conviction, and high rates of attrition. She also describes race and class bias in policing and the courts, and the relationship between violence against women, poverty, and welfare erosion. She shows men getting away with violence and women abused and murdered.

Lakeman looks at violence against women through the lens of globalization and economic distribution as a function of the state. She tells of coalition and collaboration of women from various groups who work together against gender-based violence and in theory building. We hear her call for the criminal justice system to be aware of its practices and policies and to institute change.

This is an important and powerful book written for a general audience. I will introduce it to my students and share it with friends and colleagues. Anyone wanting to take part in an anti-violence against women initiative might want to send a copy to their elected officials—and don’t forget your local prosecutor.