

## Protecting One's Commitments: Integrity and Self-Defense

Sylvia Burrow

### Abstract

Living in a culture of violence against women leads women to employ any number of avoidance and defensive strategies on a daily basis. Such strategies may be self protective but do little to counter women's fear of violence. A pervasive fear of violence comes with a cost to integrity not addressed in moral philosophy. Restricting choice and action to avoid possibility of harm compromises the ability to stand for one's commitments before others. If Calhoun is right that integrity is a matter of standing for one's commitments then fear for safety undermines integrity. This paper extends Calhoun's view through arguing that integrity further requires *resiliency* to protect one's commitments. My account shows that self-defense training is a key source of this resiliency because it cultivates self-confidence. The practical point is that self-defense training directly counters fear and other passive responses to violence that undermine integrity. The theoretical significance is that violence against women is a social condition threatening integrity. Hence, integrity requires self-protection for more socially minded reasons than moral theorists have previously recognized.

### Introduction

We consider it an expression of integrity to be able to communicate emotions, beliefs, values or principles to others without feeling the need to modify, distort or deny one's commitments for fear of harm to the self. Cheshire Calhoun takes this approach in arguing that integrity is a matter of standing for something before others and hence, protecting one's commitments.<sup>1</sup> I plan to build upon Calhoun's view to show that cultivating integrity under threatening social conditions calls for a certain *resiliency* in protecting one's commitments. We have resiliency if we are willing to stand for our commitments before others. Drawing limits demonstrates to others that some commitments are worth it, not just as part of maintaining integrity, but because *these* are the sorts of commitments no one should question or threaten. Commitments to safety and

security seem exactly those sorts of commitments. These are basic commitments in the sense that our ability to have any sort of project, aim, or goal requires a certain level of security that we will not suffer harm in their pursuit. In this paper I point to violence against women as a source of harm to the resiliency needed to stand for one's commitments before others. While social and legal resources are increasingly available to address violence against women, I have not seen any recognition or response to the point that women's possibility for integrity bears a significant cost. This paper offers that recognition and highlights the practical response of self-defense training as a key means of protecting the self and hence, one's commitments.

I suggest that fear of violence compromises women's possibility to stand for commitments because women routinely alter choices in what to do, where to go, or when to act to avoid the possibility of personal harm. Women are further encouraged to engage in passive precautions such as carrying pepper spray or keys in their hands, avoiding certain parking lots or streets, not walking alone, and so forth. Such prevention strategies aim to protect women's safety and security but do not reduce women's fear of violence. Moreover, socialization in such precautions emphasizes women's susceptibility to stranger violence, subverting attention from the fact that the majority of assaults are committed by male acquaintances. Thus, women's fear of violence is encouraged as a form of misplaced public vigilance. The pervasive awareness of vulnerability to assault bears a serious consequence for the ability to maintain integrity. Fearing assault is a good reason to avoid certain activities or places or even to avoid defending certain judgments to prevent altercations, disputes, or disagreements. So long as violence against women continues to be a threatening backdrop of women's lives, we should not be surprised that women restrict choice or action because of a concern for personal safety. But such restrictions sabotage possibilities for integrity. If it is impossible to avoid fear of violence then we might wonder how

it is ever possible to develop integrity. My account of self-defense training aims to address this worry. Self-defense training demonstrates an active form of resistance against a pervasive threat of violence. Cultivating skills of self-defense furthers confidence in women's ability to defend against harm and this is an important source of the resiliency necessary to standing for commitments in a culture of violence. The practical point is that self-defense training directly counters fear and other passive responses to violence that undermine integrity. The theoretical significance is that my account shows violence against women is a social condition threatening integrity. Hence integrity requires self-protection for more socially minded reasons than moral theorists have previously recognized.

### **Integrity**

Calhoun points out that on current accounts of integrity what one stands for will vary, whether it is standing for that which one will not do; standing for that which integrates the self; or standing for who one is.<sup>2</sup> All three views evidence a proper relation to the self because each holds that a person with integrity is someone who stands for something before others. For the sake of my autonomy, my character, or my agency I stand by my best judgments and in doing so, demonstrate integrity. Since standing for one's commitments is done to protect some valued feature of the self, integrity is largely self-protective. But integrity is not a wholly personal matter. In standing for something before others, one treats one's own commitments as ones that matter, or ought to matter, to other co-deliberators. So having integrity is tightly tied to regarding oneself as a member of an evaluating community and caring about what that community endorses. I uphold this social view and consider it compatible with my focus on the self-protective nature of integrity. My view is that protecting one's commitments requires resiliency – not just resiliency against the claims of particular others, but resiliency to withstand a certain sort

of social context within which one forms and stands for one's commitments. I consider losses to integrity occurred by threats of violence to fall into a different category than other failures to protect one's commitments since violence against women is an inescapable social context. We need a broader view of integrity to capture the idea that living in a culture of violence introduces restrictions to one's possibility for integrity, which I draw out in what follows.

Restrictions to the ability to stand for one's values, beliefs, or judgments before others threaten integrity. Both internal and external obstacles can undermine integrity. Internal obstacles include self-deception, deceiving others, hypocrisy, weakness of will, self-indulgence, arrogance, insincerity, and insecurity. Each internally challenges integrity through challenging one's commitment to one's own commitments. Other persons pose external threats to one's integrity in equal or worse ways. Calhoun lists contempt, ostracism, penal sanctions, job loss, relationship breakdowns, and others' judgments of oneself as difficult, confrontational, overly sensitive, or just plain wrong as outside pressures working against integrity. Sometimes we need to stand by our commitments and *not* call them into question even though we are pressured from others to do so. Otherwise we are prone to compromises, exceptions, and trade-offs that at some point reveal a loss of integrity. Calhoun suggests such failures might occur because one trades one's own views too cheaply for gain, status, reward, approval, or for escape from disapproval, penalties, or threats from others. We can describe the former as people who sell out. The latter, if they compromise to avoid others' disapproval or minor penalties, can be called crowd-pleasers. Selling out and crowd-pleasing seem to constitute cases of too easily acting against one's commitments for the sake of others.

Compromises for the sake of well-being or safety are different from crowd-pleasing or selling out. Crowd-pleasers and those who sell out necessarily lack self-respect and self-worth

because of their easy acquiescence. They willingly forego their commitments for the sake of others and so they do not value their commitments enough to consider them worth standing for before others. Cases of persons who forego commitments because of threats of harm are a different sort. Under ordinary circumstances, commitments to safety and wellbeing are always worth protecting and defending, so it is an act of integrity not to compromise these commitments. Persons with integrity stand by such commitments even when pressured by others not to. Integrity is evidenced in precisely those instances in which we are vulnerable to others' threats, coercion, manipulation, guilt-trips, and undue reproaches, and yet we do not cave to these pressures. These sorts of external pressures can threaten our basic commitments, those judgments that are important to our life's projects and which we consider worth protecting. Protecting our commitments falls under Carolyn McLeod's description of integrity as *protective of one's agency* because withstanding pressures against integrity at once withstands pressures against one's ability to act.<sup>3</sup> I show elsewhere that a threat of personal violence undermines agency and autonomy.<sup>4</sup> This paper shows that a threat of violence erodes possibilities for integrity. Integrity is very much like autonomy in this respect. Autonomy requires resistance to counterforces because otherwise we may be left with no guiding principles, values, or beliefs with which to govern our lives; integrity requires resistance to counterforces to form core commitments in the first place that are worth protecting.<sup>5</sup>

Those who compromise commitments in the name of self-protection do not, in the end, stand for their commitments and so they suffer a loss of integrity. Now it might seem that a forced compromise occasions no loss of integrity because it is, after all, forced. Force, coercion, and threats resulting in a failure to uphold one's commitments each evidence unwilling concessions for the sake of avoiding penalties. And so, unwillingly giving up commitments to

avoid harm to the self might not seem to occasion a loss of integrity. Just as we say that choices are no longer autonomous if they result from coercion, force, or threat, we might be tempted to say that compromises made under such circumstances do not evidence lack of integrity. While I agree that unwilling concessions are not autonomous choices, integrity still pays the price: but for the threat of penalties, one would uphold one's commitments. Safety and security seem not just basic commitments but commitments upon which one's ability to stand for other commitments hinges. And I doubt one can stand for any commitment without some measure of safety and security (I say more about this in the next section). So if one upholds a commitment to personal safety and well being then compromise to this or any other commitment in the name of self-protection necessitates a loss of integrity.

My account allows that in exceptional cases persons display integrity by putting their lives on the line or at least their safety and security. Consider the case of former Afghan MP, Malalai Joya, who is widely recognized in Afghanistan as a tireless defender of women's human rights. At the first Parliament sitting in more than 30 years she criticized the presence of members who were ex-Mujahideen fighters, many of whom were implicated in human rights abuses. In response to her objection she was suspended from Parliament, experienced objects thrown at her, threats of rape, death threats, and assassination attempts. She expects to be killed for protesting against the conditions of Afghan women.<sup>6</sup> We say such persons display integrity because they put themselves on the line for their cause. Sometimes risks to one's wellbeing are worth it for the sake of a greater cause and doing so stands out as an exceptional display of integrity. But not just any instance of putting oneself at risk for one's cause deserves an ascription of integrity. One might trade one's life or sanity too cheaply for progress, in which case the progress is insignificant relative to the loss incurred or could have been achieved in a less harmful way.<sup>7</sup> If

lobbying the government will just as well produce a change in policy, lying in front of a bulldozer no longer seems like a noble act of integrity. So in ordinary circumstances, safety and security are worth protecting above all other commitments. That we think so reflects the value we expect people to have toward themselves, evidenced in healthy attitudes of self-worth and self-respect. I suggest that self-respect and self-worth each afford the sort of resiliency I regard as necessary to integrity.

Self-respect and self-worth are closely connected attitudes significant to standing for something before others. Self-respect requires that one regard oneself as having equal worth and dignity among others, thus self-respect expresses one's value of oneself as a person with intrinsic worth. Robin Dillon describes this valuing as *basal self-respect*, an unconditional and intrinsic valuing of oneself that is the basis of self-worth.<sup>8</sup> Self-worth is more than an abstract conception of one's worth as a person with rights and privileges among equals because it underwrites one's conception of one's life as itself worthwhile. Self-respect and self-worth are connected attitudes that each afford resiliency against the claims of others. Dillon describes such resiliency in terms of not acquiescing willingly to that which undermines one's rights or is demeaning or humiliating. While Dillon focuses on the resiliency of self-respect and self-worth in the context of autonomy, it easily extends to integrity. Because self-respecting persons have self-worth, they *value* their own beliefs, principles, and desires; so they are not willing to acquiesce to others' demands. Acquiescing willingly to external pressures or demands, even if that acquiescence does not undermine one's rights or cause humiliation, indicates a loss of integrity. Expressing self-worth and self-respect before others *matters* to those who regard themselves as members of evaluating communities. Standing for one's commitments demonstrates self-respect and self-worth before others, whether these commitments are an expression of one's identity, essential to

the integration of the self, or delineate what one will not do. Since demonstrating self-worth and self-respect is socially significant to individuals as members of evaluating communities, it is central to the social value of integrity. Thus we can say that the social value of integrity lies in standing for one's commitments before others not just as a fellow co-deliberator, as Calhoun suggests, but because doing so also expresses self-worth and self-respect.

Resilience against threat of harm can be crucial to integrity. We saw earlier that introducing a threat of harm through putting one's life on the line for the sake of standing for something is an exceptional expression of integrity. In more ordinary cases, one cares about one's well-being and safety and commitment to this value is ordinarily worth protecting more than other commitments. Compromises to other commitments for the sake of safety evidence some loss of integrity: but for the threat of harm, one would stand for what one believes in. At the same time, protecting bodily integrity expresses one's *value* for oneself. Doing so requires resilience.

Resilience demonstrates self-respect and self-worth because it shows that one values and respects oneself enough to withstand physical harm. Resisting the everyday threat of violence against women is vital for women to develop and maintain integrity. But protecting one's body against threat of harm need not occasion compromise to any other commitment and indeed may facilitate protection of other commitments, which I hope to illustrate through my account of self-defense training. Before turning to that point I want to first outline how the everyday threat of violence undermines women's possibility for developing and possessing integrity.

### **Threat of Violence**

Living within a society posing routine danger to safety and security introduces a fear of violence not attached to any one person but which forms the backdrop of women's social condition. To see why, we need to recognize that the experience and threat of violence against women together



create a culture of violence within which women live. A recent survey of over 16,000 persons in the United States shows that 1 in 5 women are raped in their lifetime compared to 1 in 71 men; and that 1 in 3 women were raped in the year preceding the survey.<sup>9</sup> Women reporting sexual assault in major cities reveals rates of 15% in Canada, 22% in Nicaragua, 23% in England, and 25% in Zimbabwe; women reporting physical assault include 22.1% in the United States, 29.0% in Canada and 34.4% in Egypt.<sup>10</sup> To appreciate the frequency of physical and sexual violence against women we need to bear in mind that many women do not report assault. The experience of violence leaves its mark. Physical or sexual violence can result in bruises, sexual dysfunction, infertility, strains, dislocations, broken bones, and death; and the psychological harm of post traumatic stress disorder indicated by disassociation, nightmares, intrusive memories, excessive startle responses, and agitation.<sup>11</sup> Threat of violence is both direct and indirect. Direct threat of violence includes intimidating or threatening postures, words, or actions. These are direct threats because they often lead to personal assaults.<sup>12</sup> Indirect threat of violence is not attached to any one person, action, or behavior but is seen in women's general concern for their safety and security. Women commonly experience this indirect threat, which is measured in "fear of crime" research as a fear of harm due to criminal violence.

Research in fear of crime over the last 20 years shows that women's fear for safety far outweighs that of men: controlling for other factors, gender is the most stable predictor of a person's fear of crime.<sup>13</sup> Fear of crime research focuses on public safety, reflected in the most common question on victimization surveys: "How safe do you feel walking alone in your neighborhood?" In answer to this question, women report fear levels three times higher than men.<sup>14</sup> Women are fearful of stranger assault because of the fear of rape; physical assault is not feared most in itself but because it might occur during sexual assault.<sup>15</sup> Most women have a well

developed sense of their fear of stranger assault and engage in a number of precautions to keep themselves safe. Depressingly, women's fear of violence by strangers is misplaced. Women are more often assaulted by intimates. A recent World Health Organization study across ten countries shows that between 15% and 71% of women report physical or sexual violence by a husband or partner.<sup>16</sup> It is estimated that intimate partner violence affects more than 32 million women in the United States alone.<sup>17</sup> The Council of Europe states that domestic violence against women is *the major cause of death and disability* for women between the age of 16 and 44.<sup>18</sup> Heterosexual women are most vulnerable since personal violence by male partners is the most common form of violence against women.<sup>19</sup> Why are women most threatened by stranger violence when intimate partner violence is the predominant source of violence against women?

Women's fear of stranger violence is strongly encouraged publicly and privately. A concern for girls' safety begins early in life and is expressed in a concentrated focus on girls' awareness and prevention of attacks by strangers. Girls are socialized within the family early in life to fear strangers and public spaces.<sup>20</sup> Increasingly, educational systems and media campaigns focus on horrific physical and sexual assaults committed by random strangers. Such sources of socialization overemphasize risks of assault from strangers and greatly underplay intimate partner violence.<sup>21</sup> This socialization in fear of public assault seems to skew women's fear responses toward strangers. Even if women experience assault at the hands of intimates or acquaintances, that experience is associated with an increase in fear of stranger assault.<sup>22</sup> Routine experiences of sexual harassment are also correlated with women's heightened fear of strangers.<sup>23</sup> Centering fear on strangers, rather than all men, seems to be a way of managing risk and minimizing its effects on women's daily interactions.<sup>24</sup>

Socialization in fear of male strangers seems successful: on a daily basis, women engage in

strategies to prevent stranger violence. Women employ a large range of prevention strategies including *avoidance* strategies such as avoiding certain places at night, avoiding particular events, and restricting activities; and *defensive* strategies such as owning a gun, burglary alarm, or having a watch dog.<sup>25</sup> Advice in police advice literature and government campaigns typically consist of offering such prevention strategies, focusing on personal prevention strategies to avoid stranger assault.<sup>26</sup> Such advice encourages women's own responsibility for preventing harm to the self: you are responsible for your safety among strangers so avoid public spaces where violence might occur and when at home arm yourself well. I challenge this view of fear management. Women are not responsible for violence against women, perpetrators are. My approach also challenges typical prevention strategies because these strategies do little to address women's fear of violence.

Typical avoidance and defensive behaviors emphasize women's vulnerability to violence and so do not counter women's fear of violence. I suggest that women's possibility for integrity lies at stake. To illustrate, consider the case of Jasmine, who wishes to stick by her commitment to be there for her friends in need. One evening, a good friend cracks open her books to begin her philosophy essay and calls Jasmine to return a text she desperately needs. As a member of a group routinely targeted with violence, Jasmine's possibilities to stick by her commitments are limited by her concerns for her safety and wellbeing. She is worried to wait for the bus at this time of the evening, it might be unsafe. Like most women, Jasmine's fear of physical assault is overshadowed by fear of sexual assault. Cars often go by with suspicious characters and she has sometimes seen lone men loitering about the path near the bus stop. It's early autumn, and the bushes are still thick and high behind the sidewalk. Will waiting even ten minutes be risky? Might someone target her for an assault or abduction while she is waiting? The timing of the bus

is unreliable so she might miss it if she doesn't leave at least ten minutes to wait. Perhaps she should see if a friend is available to go with her? But the time it will take to sort that out means she will most likely miss the bus, and with it this evening's opportunity to see her friend in need. If she declines to stand for her commitment to help her friend in need because of a fear for safety then Jasmine loses an opportunity for uphold her commitment.

Jasmine faces difficulties in standing for her commitment *because* she experiences the threat of personal violence. It restricts her choices and hence, her possibility to demonstrate integrity. Now some women have it better than Jasmine (not needing to take a bus, for example), but Jasmine does not represent an extreme case. Some women are aware that a woman travelling alone is seen as *asking* for male overtures or assault, and some are further aware that such an attitude is deeply embedded in social institutions so that, for instance, a women walking alone at night in a skirt might be accused of "provoking" an assault. While some women may have fewer worries than others, in general women are likely to be fearful or intimidated by any circumstances in which they perceive themselves vulnerable to personal violence. If a culture of violence against women combines with socialization in stranger fear to limit women's opportunities to stand for their commitments then a culture of violence against women diminishes women's possibilities for having and maintaining integrity.

My stance on integrity should not be taken to suggest that men enjoy more integrity than women because men have increased possibilities for integrity. This approach is misguided since possibilities for integrity do not so strictly correlate to having integrity. Having more opportunities to develop one's integrity, like opportunities to develop one's fitness or friendliness, need not entail that one actually does so. My point is that the very ability to form and stand for commitments is threatened in a culture of violence against women. The point is not

that women simply *decline* to take a certain risk, say walking alone at night, in a manner akin to declining to fly on an airplane. Were women's restrictive choices made autonomously relative to specific cases, no test to integrity would be readily apparent. My account indicates that violence against women is a social context undermining integrity very much as it undermines autonomy, namely through introducing pervasive conditions undermining the very possibility of making certain choices or upholding certain commitments. Hence, my account points to relational and intersubjective conditions relevant to integrity. Now one might object that social conditions testing women's integrity in fact provide *more* opportunity for developing integrity. If it is correct that integrity is most often displayed under conditions pressuring one to cave in one's commitments, then one might think that those who face the most pressures have the most opportunities to develop integrity. But to endorse this view is to take too lightly that violence is a pressure against one's commitments. Tests to integrity do not always encourage the development of integrity because some circumstances are too intimidating or threatening for it to be worth sacrificing one's safety or wellbeing. This is precisely the point my account draws out. Violence against women is no light threat: women's fear for basic security and well-being leads to restrictions in daily choices that can compromise the ability to stand for one's commitments. This is not to suggest that integrity is *necessarily* diminished. Women do not need to engage in passive restrictions in choice and action as a response to the continual threat of stranger violence. Women have opportunities for actively countering limits to integrity posed by a culture of violence, which my account of self-defense training develops.

### **Self-Defense Training**

My discussion of self-defense in this paper encompasses both traditional martial arts and self-defense classes, including feminist self-defense classes. *Traditional martial arts* emphasizes

long-term training as a means of acquiring skills of self-defense. A traditional approach educates students in respect, awareness, mental concentration and focus (both physical and mental) in conjunction with physical training. Physical training in a traditional karate class typically begins with simple, direct front punches and kicks and advances to more sophisticated forms of side, roundhouse, and back kicks; punches targeting more precise points on the body; and combinations of various punches and kicks following more advanced forms of blocking or body evasion. Specific self-defense moves in response to certain sorts of attack are included in each form (*kata*) and may be disguised through abbreviated or omitted movements. Certain defensive techniques are usually practiced in sparring or in applying throws and takedowns embedded within *kata*. *Self-defense classes* focus on learning specific techniques of self-protection that are usually derived from traditional martial arts but are oriented toward specific sorts of practical application.<sup>27</sup> Classes aim at learning a specific series of punches, strikes, kicks, takedowns, locks, or holds (or combination thereof) in a sort time frame such as 12 or 20 weeks. *Feminist self-defense classes* include the above but also situate physical techniques within an overall curriculum responding to women's threat of sexual violence, attending to verbal assertiveness and psychological or emotional issues at stake for women.<sup>28</sup> The aim of each form of self-defense class is to cultivate two sorts of skills: (i) *physical* abilities and techniques needed to prevent personal violence; and (ii) related *attitudes* and *emotional dispositions* enabling the successful execution of those physical skills.

Self-defense training appears to increase self-confidence in self-protection, or "self-defense self-efficacy," and overall self-confidence. Self-defense self-efficacy is a person's confidence in her ability to ward off an assault. Learning self-defense skills fosters confidence to identify danger and defend oneself against it.<sup>29</sup> A growing body of recent research shows that both self-

defense classes and traditional martial arts training increase this form of self-confidence.<sup>30</sup> Even a 10 week course in self-defense training produces an overall increase in self-defense self-efficacy.<sup>31</sup> Multiple studies of women's ability to avoid rape and assault correlates learning physical and verbal self-defense strategies with averted rape and reduced victim injury.<sup>32</sup> Women are more effective in their ability to avoid sexual assault in stereotypical threat situations after taking feminist self-defense classes, as these participants reveal:

I was followed at night by this old drunk guy. He started asking me a question, "Do you want to hear a story?" I looked him in the eye and said no. Then he said, "Don't be scared, little girl." I looked at him and said, "I'm not scared." And I kept walking. He left me alone after I told him I wasn't scared.

I was walking to a bar to meet some friends. Some of them were already in the bar.... A man who was strung out on something passed us and said to me, "You dykes are going to get your asses kicked out here." I felt threatened. He followed us back to the bicycle rack in front of the car. He tried talking to me and started yelling "What's your problem?" I told him to leave me alone. He left.<sup>33</sup>

Increased self-efficacy is associated with women's reduced fear of stranger violence.<sup>34</sup> Instead of employing the sort of avoidance and prevention strategies we discussed above, women undertaking self-defense training show a preference to employ judicious choices about which strategies would be most effective in a given situation and not a fear-driven "more is always better" approach.<sup>35</sup>

I am not suggesting that self-defense skills amount to rash, foolish, or aggressive displays of one's ability to defend the self. Self-confidence in skills of self-defense is not the same as aggression, arrogance, or foolishness. The latter are excesses of confidence failing to acknowledge vulnerability. Excess self-confidence can undermine the ability to protect oneself as much as a lack of self-confidence. Lack of self-efficacy self-confidence is far easier for women because of negative assumptions about women's power. It is not uncommon to hear that a woman who thinks she can defend herself against a man, particularly one physically larger or stronger than her, is sorely mistaken. Such responses presume that women are not really capable of defending themselves because of physical weakness or some other supposedly inherent inability. This thinking reflects a gender dichotomy supposing strength is the domain of men and weakness the domain of women. But women are not inherently less incapable of physically defending themselves against men. Most likely this has to do with the point that successful self-defense relies on adopting specific awarenesses and capabilities that have less to do with brute strength and more to do with finessing particular techniques.<sup>36</sup>

Self-efficacy self-confidence is a positive outcome of self-defense training that leads to overall self-confidence. A number of studies show that traditional martial arts training has a favorable impact on overall psychological wellbeing and offers further benefits for stress reduction, family development, conflict management, and self-regulation.<sup>37</sup> Similar benefits come with feminist self-defense classes:

“All in all I feel more justified in my feelings whatever they may be, and I speak my mind more than I ever did in the past. I am less self-conscious of appearing rude.”



“My partner knows that when something offends or upsets me I will say something about it.”

“With my boyfriend I have learned to be more assertive and use the assertive voice.”

“Friends count on me in situations – they see my confidence.”<sup>38</sup>

Why does training in self-defense improve women’s overall self-confidence? One suggestion is that self-defense training challenges gender norms through generating positive feelings about one’s body and creating an overall sense of empowerment and self-worth.<sup>39</sup> Another suggestion is that through challenging feminine socialization in passivity, self-defense training increases freedom of movement and decreases passive prevention strategies.<sup>40</sup> Sorting out an explanation of *why* self-defense training increases overall self-confidence is worth further research. But it is enough for the purposes of this paper that we recognize self-defense training is associated with improved overall self-confidence. In the next section I argue that this self-confidence is a key source of protecting one’s commitments in a culture of violence against women.

### **Resiliency**

Earlier I identified resilience as necessary to integrity. In this section I develop the view that resilience demands both resistance and resolve, attributes which require some measure of self-confidence. Resistance and resolve in self-defense requires confidence that one can recognize legitimate threats of harm and respond to those threats if required. The ability to recognize legitimate threats in the first place is integral to self-defense training and this recognition cultivates confidence in one’s ability to respond to threats before they become full-fledged

attacks.<sup>41</sup> Since self-defense training equips women with the means to protect the self against possible harm and cultivates overall self-confidence it is a form of active resistance to the threat of harm. I suggest that such active resistance counters fear of violence and associated passive restrictive and avoidance behaviors. If this is correct then self-defense training promotes the ability to develop and sustain integrity in a culture of violence against women.

Resistance and resolve together form the resiliency necessary to developing and exercising the capacity to stand for one's commitments before others. Resiliency is compromised if the boundaries on actions one is willing to do, or to withstand, are compromised. Integrity requires a resiliency of the self against the pressures of others to indicate both that one's commitments are worth protecting and that one values oneself enough to protect those commitments. Successfully withstanding opposition hardly seems possible if one has little or no confidence in one's capacities to protect one's commitments. Without confidence that one can follow through on one's commitments it is unlikely that one will do so, precisely because lack of confidence opens up doubt, indecision, and a myriad of similar internal challenges to integrity. One cannot freely choose to draw boundaries on one's interactions with others if one does not consider it safe to leave, disagree, stand silent, or otherwise reject others' demands – especially if those demands involve threatening displays of aggression or superiority. Resiliency is essential for integrity in a culture of violence since either the experience or threat of harm undermines women's possibility to protect their commitments.

Self-defense training offers women resiliency through increasing self-confidence. Consider Karen, a person lacking confidence to protect herself from harm. Like most women, Karen engages in passive avoidance and restrictive behaviors. She avoids the right places at the right time, has a good security alarm at home and carries pepper spray in her purse. But Karen's

boyfriend has already demonstrated physically aggressive behavior, bruising her and spraining her wrist. Karen is vulnerable in his apartment and is aware that she is. She worries about an impending argument, thinking that if she asserts herself it might escalate an attack. Under such conditions she has less opportunity to draw lines of commitments she is not willing to violate. Since she is in an abusive relationship, her fear of violence is likely accompanied by low self-esteem and feelings of helplessness or hopelessness.<sup>42</sup> Now consider Juanita, who possesses both self-efficacy self-confidence and overall self-confidence because of her training in self-defense. Juanita is able to draw lines demonstrating those commitments she is not willing to violate even while threatened with harm. As a person skilled in self-defense Juanita might judge it wise to become verbally assertive when threatened either by her boyfriend or a stranger. She is aware that demarcating her boundaries may prevent an attack but even if it does not she is prepared to continue acting in self-defense. If her attacker attempts to assault her she is prepared to deliver a counter strike or block and leave the situation as soon as possible. She is not willing to sacrifice her commitment to safety and well being for the sake of anything else. And if Juanita is to protect *any other* commitment it requires confidence she can prevent harms arising from taking that stand, which she possesses because of her self-defense training. On this basis alone Juanita has more possibilities for integrity than Karen.

Increased self-confidence produced through self-defense training correlates with increased self-worth and self-respect, each of which are essential to resiliency. Self-confidence is integral to one's ability to take a stand before others to do that which one sees as worthwhile for oneself. In learning to defend the self, one values one's worth. Threatening or enacting violence against another is inherently degrading and devaluing since doing so is an expression of another's lesser worth. The pervasiveness of violence against women indicates that women are commonly at risk

of attitudes and actions aimed at diminishing their worth before others. The willingness to protect basic commitments to safety and well-being, despite others' threats of harm, expresses the worth one accords to oneself as a person deserving others' regard. Self-worth is evidenced in persons who regard themselves as able to respond to their own and others' expectations of themselves.<sup>43</sup> A person who is secure in her own worthiness can respond to her failures, flaws, and setbacks while being prepared to act constructively, so that she is better able to resist harmful attitudes others might have towards her.<sup>44</sup> I add to this view that confidence to resist harmful *actions* aimed at oneself accords value to the self as an expression of self-worth. Self-defense training promotes confidence in one's worth because it implicitly develops the attitude that what one is defending is *worth* defending. We saw earlier that self-worth is tightly tied to self-respect. Because one values oneself, one regards oneself as having equal dignity and worth among others and this regard expresses respect toward oneself. Developing confidence to defend the self from harm is a form of respecting oneself since it expresses the value one accords oneself. Hence, confidence to respond to the threat of violence with self-defense is a significant way in which women evidence self-worth and self-respect.

My claim is that self-defense training counters threats to integrity because it develops resistance and resolve, capacities central to the resilience needed to stand for and protect one's self – and thus, one's commitments. Self-defense training contributes to maintaining integrity because one is less susceptible to external pressures to back down from one's commitments for the sake of protecting safety and security. Possessing the confidence to stand against physical harms, if it is to be well-placed, requires both having and recognizing that one has the sort of physical and psychological skills enabling one to prevent that harm. These skills foster resilience to protect one's commitments despite the possibility of harm. Another's anger or agitation may

be enough to silence those who fear further repercussions, especially those who have experienced psychological harms followed by physical or sexual assaults. The ability to remain strong in the face of adversity and to calmly maintain one's position is a result of confidence in oneself to respond well to such challenges. Women who undertake self-defense training develop those physical and psychological abilities to reject certain expectations as inappropriate – even if that rejection prompts intimidating words or gestures – because they are prepared to defend themselves. Hence, self-defense training is a fitting means for women to protect not just basic commitments to safety and security but any other commitment relying on a sense of security.

### **Standing for One's Commitments**

We have seen that threats to integrity are part of a culture of violence against women since the threat of violence undermines women's possibility to take a stand for or protect their commitments. Given this threat of violence, I have argued that self-defense training is a significant source of self-confidence and hence resiliency needed to maintain integrity in a culture of violence against women. One might object by asserting that a non-violent, passive approach to cultivating resiliency is a much better route to fostering integrity. This approach defies the need for self-defense training by asserting that people can passively stand for their commitments in peaceful and non-violent ways. Take the case of the Dalai Lama, who encourages compassion and harmony between individuals. He passively stands for his commitment to peace and in doing so, demonstrates integrity. We can compare this case to that of the person who refuses to laugh at racist jokes; her lack of laughter is exactly what demonstrates her commitment to her principle of respect for other persons. Just as standing for one's commitment to certain principles can be expressed through passive non-action, standing for one's commitments can be expressed through peace or compassion. If passive, peaceful

stands best express integrity then self-defense training may simply conflict with fostering integrity. But my account does not reject the possibility of peaceful or compassionate stands against threats to integrity. A person skilled in self-defense may still take a gentle approach to protecting her commitments and indeed may be better situated to do so if she is secure in her ability to protect herself should she feel threatened.

One might propose that other means of defending oneself such as owning a gun, pepper-spray, or other weapons might be better forms of self-protection. Accordingly, one might argue that these self-protective measures promote integrity. Such an approach is sorely misguided. While women often encounter worrisome or threatening situations in the course of daily life, and while arming oneself at all times offers self-protection, it is not the sort of self-protection that promotes integrity in any meaningful way. Simply stated, carrying weapons does not develop qualities of resistance and resolve in the individual. Moreover, possessing weapons does not develop self-confidence in ways contributing to the development self-worth and self-respect that contribute to protecting one's commitments as integrity demands. I allow that training in use of weapons, such as firearm training or traditional martial arts weapons training, may develop self-confidence in ways that self-defense training does. But in these cases confidence is placed in one's use of the weapon and not in *oneself*. If the weapon is taken away, one has to rely on whatever resiliency of the self one possesses to defend oneself. Traditional martial arts weapons training usually is an extension of empty-hand training and so removing weapons need not detract from reliance upon self-defense skills. But in cases in which persons carry weapons because they are *not* skilled in self-defense, taking away the weapon takes away the key means of resistance. Hence, arming oneself with weapons need not confer the same qualities of resistance and resolve I have argued are cultivated through self-defense training.

My account does not require that integrity is developed through self-defense training since it does not exclude other sources of resiliency. Other sources of developing resolve and resistance allow persons to stand for their commitments despite pressures working against integrity. And so capacities of resistance and resolve may arise from sources other than self-defense training.<sup>45</sup> Confidence in one's judgments, beliefs, and values is essential to resilience in the face of pressures working against one's ability to maintain integrity. Women and girls should be encouraged to take opportunities to counter social forces working against self-confidence and so, self-respect and self-worth. A strong character or healthy dose of anger may often be enough to dispel others' criticisms, reproaches, admonishments of, or threats to, one's commitments. But strong characters, passive resistance, or angry displays may do little to counter women's physical vulnerability to threats of personal violence. Training the body through competitive and non-competitive sports and many forms of dance are examples of how women may acquire self-confidence. But these other forms of athletics need not develop self-efficacy self-confidence, or confidence in one's ability to protect the self. So self-confidence fostered through other athletic training may do little to prevent compromise in commitments to avoid the possibility of harm. Thus while I allow that women might draw on sources other than self-defense training to develop self-confidence I maintain that these avenues are not the best response to the threat violence against women poses to integrity.

Without self-defense training, women may still be forced to compromise commitments due to fear of violence. We saw earlier that threat of personal harm can threaten, coerce, or force others to do acts violating commitments worth standing for before others. While it may be a reasonable practical solution to prefer violating other commitments for the sake of protecting one's commitment to safety and security, it is not what one would otherwise choose to do.

Because self-defense training fosters both self-efficacy self-confidence and overall self-confidence in threatening situations, self-defense training fosters confidence in one's ability to stand for one's commitments despite threats of harm. Now, self-defense training does not *guarantee* one can continue to stand for one's commitments. Neither does it guarantee success in defending oneself. One might err in one's capability to defend oneself and bear the cost of trying to do so. Fallibility is consistent with my account of self-defense training since the point is that self-defense training promotes the capacity to stand for one's commitments in a culture of violence against women – and not that self-defense training guarantees either self-protection or integrity. But no other means of responding to threat of violence speaks so directly to women's fear of assault apart from self-defense training. Self-defense training is a proven intervention to prevent violence against women and to counter fear of stranger or acquaintance violence.<sup>46</sup> I am not suggesting that it is always necessary or even wise to stand for commitments under threat of harm; or that self-defense is a moral or practical requirement. My view is that self-defense training is the best response to threats against integrity posed by a culture of violence against women.

## **Conclusion**

My account shows that self-defense training improves self-confidence and so fosters the resiliency necessary to protecting integrity under threat of violence. The practical significance is that self-defense training directly counters fear and other passive responses to violence that undermine integrity. My account is theoretically significant since it extends a social and relational view of integrity by pointing to violence against women and socialization in fear of stranger violence as constraining social forces that can be addressed through self-defense training. In an ideal world, women will not fear violence or experience it as a member of a group



routinely targeted with violence. But given our current (and longstanding) state of affairs, women cannot escape the threat of violence. Self-defense training directly counters fear of violence through cultivating a confidence in physical and psychological skills of defense that is correlated with overall self-confidence. This correlation is not surprising since self-defense training demonstrates to others that one considers oneself worth protecting. Not compromising commitments, even under threat of harm, demonstrates value and respect for oneself. Of course, one might judge compromise the best move in any particular instance and this proves no incompatibility with my account. A person seasoned in her skills of self-defense may decide not to take a stand for what she values even though she is quite capable of protecting herself – because she is so confident in her skills of self-defense she can choose to walk away as a person secure in her own worthiness and in the worthiness of her commitments.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> See Cheshire Calhoun, "Standing for Something" *The Journal of Philosophy* 92, 5 (1995): 235-60.
- <sup>2</sup> See respectively Lynne McFall, "Integrity" *Ethics* 98, 1 (1987): 5-20; Harry Frankfurt, "Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person" *The Journal of Philosophy* 68, 1 (1971): 5-20; Gabriele Taylor, "Integrity" *Aristotelian Society: Supplementary Volume* 1 (1981): 143-59; and Bernard Williams, *Moral Luck* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981).
- <sup>3</sup> Carolyn McLeod, "Integrity and Self-Protection" *Journal of Social Philosophy* 35, 2 (2004): 216-32.
- <sup>4</sup> Sylvia Burrow, "Bodily Limits to Autonomy: Emotion, Attitude, and Self-Defence" In *Agency and Embodiment*, edited by Letitia Meynell, Sue Campbell and Susan Sherwin. Philadelphia: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2009.
- <sup>5</sup> Carolyn McLeod, "How to Distinguish Autonomy from Integrity" *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 35, 1 (2005): 107-33.
- <sup>6</sup> Tom Coghlan, "Afghan MP says she will not be silenced," BBC News. Online: [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south\\_asia/4606174.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/4606174.stm). 27 January 2006; and Kim Sengupta, "Afghan MP expelled for calling parliament 'worse than a zoo,' The Independent. Online: <http://news.independent.co.uk/world/asia/article2567969.ece>. 22 May 2007.
- <sup>7</sup> McLeod, "Integrity and Self-Protection"
- <sup>8</sup> Robin Dillon, "Self-Respect: Moral, Emotional, Political" *Ethics* 107, 2 (1997): 226-49.
- <sup>9</sup> M.C. Black, K.C. Basile, M.J. Breiding, S.G. Smith, M.L. Walters, M.T. Merrick, J. Chen, and M.R. Stevens. "The National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey (NISVS): 2010 Summary Report." Atlanta, GA, 2011.
- <sup>10</sup> "World Report on Violence and Health". 2002.
- <sup>11</sup> The harms of post-traumatic stress disorder are more fully discussed in Ehlers, Hackman, and Michael Anke Ehlers, Ann Hackman, and Tanja Michael, "Intrusive Re-Experiencing in Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder: Phenomenology, Theory, and Therapy" *Memory* 12, 4 (2004): 403-15.
- <sup>12</sup> Research on violence indicates that these perceptions seem to be accurate: for example, most physical attacks on women are preceded by psychological violence, including threatening or assaulting words, gestures, or actions AVAW, "Assessing Violence against Women: A Statistical Profile" *Federal-Provincial-Territorial Ministers Responsible for the Status of Women* <[http://www.swcfc.gc.ca/pubs/0662331664/200212\\_0662331664\\_e.pdf](http://www.swcfc.gc.ca/pubs/0662331664/200212_0662331664_e.pdf)> (2002).
- <sup>13</sup> David May, Nicole Rader, and Sarah Goodrum, "A Gendered Assessment of the "Threat of Victimization": Examining Gender Differences in Fear of Crime, Perceived Risk, Avoidance, and Defensive Behaviors" *Criminal Justice Review* 35, 2 (2010): 159-82.
- <sup>14</sup> Elizabeth Stanko, "Women, Crime, and Fear" *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 539, Reactions to Crime and Violence (1995): 46-58.
- <sup>15</sup> Jennifer E. Cobbina, Jody Miller, and Rod K. Brunson, "Gender, Neighborhood Danger, and Risk-Avoidance Strategies among Urban African-American Youths" *Criminology* 46, 3 (2008): 673-709.
- <sup>16</sup> William R. Downs, "Women's Use of Physical and Nonphysical Self-Defense Strategies During Incidents of Partner Violence" *Violence Against Women* 13, 1 (2007): 28-45.
- <sup>17</sup> Patricia Tjaden, and Nancy Thoennes. "Full Report of the Prevalence, Incidence, and Consequences of Violence against Women: Findings from the National Violence against Women Survey" Washington, DC, 2000.
- <sup>18</sup> "Amnesty International Report 2006: The State of the World's Human Rights". London, UK: Amnesty International Publications, 2006.
- <sup>19</sup> G. Erlick Robinson, "Introduction: International Perspectives on Violence against Women" *Archives of Women's Mental Health* 6 (2003): 155-56.
- <sup>20</sup> Stanko, "Women, Crime, and Fear"
- <sup>21</sup> R Pain, "Whither Women's Fear? Perceptions of Sexual Violence in Public and Private Space"

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*International Review of Victimology* 4, 4 (1997): 297-312.

<sup>22</sup> May, Rader, and Goodrum, "A Gendered Assessment of the "Threat of Victimization": Examining Gender Differences in Fear of Crime, Perceived Risk, Avoidance, and Defensive Behaviors"

<sup>23</sup> Cobbina, Miller, and Brunson, "Gender, Neighborhood Danger, and Risk-Avoidance Strategies among Urban African-American Youths"

<sup>24</sup> Pain, "Whither Women's Fear? Perceptions of Sexual Violence in Public and Private Space"

<sup>25</sup> May, Rader, and Goodrum, "A Gendered Assessment of the "Threat of Victimization": Examining Gender Differences in Fear of Crime, Perceived Risk, Avoidance, and Defensive Behaviors"

<sup>26</sup> Stanko, "Women, Crime, and Fear"

<sup>27</sup> Amy J. Angleman, Yoshihiko Shinzato, Vincent B. Van Hasselt, and Stephen A. Russo, "Traditional Martial Arts Versus Modern Self-Defense Training for Women: Some Comments" *Aggression and violent behavior* 14, 2 (2009): 89-93

<sup>28</sup> Hollander, ""I Can Take Care of Myself""

<sup>29</sup> Julie Weitlauf, Ronald Smith, and Daniel Cervone, "Generalization Effects of Coping-Skills Training: Influence of Self-Defense Training on Women's Efficacy Beliefs, Assertiveness, and Aggression" *Journal of Applied Psychology* 85, 4 (2000): 625-33.

<sup>30</sup> Kimberly Ball, and Jeffrey Martin, "Self-Defense Training and Traditional Martial Arts: Influences on Self-Efficacy and Fear Related to Sexual Victimization" *Sport, Exercise, and Performance Psychology* 1, 2 (2011); L. Hinkleman, "Women's Self-Defense Training: An Examination of Assertiveness, Self-Efficacy, Hyperfemininity, and Athletic Identity" *Dissertation Abstracts International* 65 (2004); M E Madden, "Attributions of Control and Vulnerability at the Beginning and End of a Karate Class" *Perceptual and Motor Skills* 70 (1990) M McCaughey, *Real Knockouts: The Physical Feminism of Women's Self-Defense* (New York: New York University Press, 1997)

<sup>31</sup> Hinkleman, "Women's Self-Defense Training: An Examination of Assertiveness, Self-Efficacy, Hyperfemininity, and Athletic Identity" ; Hollander, ""I Can Take Care of Myself"" ; Madden, "Attributions of Control and Vulnerability at the Beginning and End of a Karate Class" ; McCaughey, *Real Knockouts: The Physical Feminism of Women's Self-Defense* ; Ball, and Martin, "Self-Defense Training and Traditional Martial Arts: Influences on Self-Efficacy and Fear Related to Sexual Victimization"

<sup>32</sup> Melissa Williams, and Michelle Hebl, "Warding Off the Attacker: Self-Defense in Theory and in Practice" *Journal of Applied Social Psychology* 35, 2 (2005): 366-82.

<sup>33</sup> Hollander, ""I Can Take Care of Myself""

<sup>34</sup> Ball, and Martin, "Self-Defense Training and Traditional Martial Arts: Influences on Self-Efficacy and Fear Related to Sexual Victimization" ; Hollander, ""I Can Take Care of Myself"" ; Jocelyn A. A. Hollander, "Challenging Despair: Teaching About Women's Resistance to Violence" *Violence Against Women* 11, 6 (2005): 776-91; Williams, and Hebl, "Warding Off the Attacker: Self-Defense in Theory and in Practice"

<sup>35</sup> Hollander, ""I Can Take Care of Myself""

<sup>36</sup> Angleman, Shinzato, Van Hasselt, and Russo, "Traditional Martial Arts Versus Modern Self-Defense Training for Women: Some Comments"

<sup>37</sup> Marc Theeboom, Paul De Knop, and Jikkemien Vertonghen, "Experiences of Children in Martial Arts" *European Journal for Sport and Society* 6, 1 (2009): 19-35.

<sup>38</sup> Hollander, ""I Can Take Care of Myself""

<sup>39</sup> Jocelyn A. Hollander, "The Roots of Resistance to Women's Self-Defense" *Violence Against Women* 15, 5 (2009): 574-94

<sup>40</sup> Ball, and Martin, "Self-Defense Training and Traditional Martial Arts: Influences on Self-Efficacy and Fear Related to Sexual Victimization"

<sup>41</sup> Amy J. Angleman, Yoshihiko Shinzato, Vincent B. Van Hasselt, and Stephen A. Russo, "Traditional Martial Arts Versus Modern Self-Defense Training for Women: Some Comments" *Aggression and violent behavior* 14, 2: 89-93.

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<sup>42</sup> G. Erlick Robinson, "Violence against Women in North America" *Archives of Women's Mental Health* 6 (2003): 185-91.

<sup>43</sup> Paul Benson, "Free Agency and Self-Worth" *Journal of Philosophy* 91, 12 (1994): 650-68.

<sup>44</sup> Robin Dillon, "'What's a Woman Worth? What's Life Worth? Without Self-Respect!': On the Value of Evaluative Self-Respect" In *Moral Psychology: Feminist Ethics and Social Theory*, edited by Peggy DesAutels and Margaret Urban Walker. Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2004.

<sup>45</sup> I make a similar argument in {Burrow, 2009 #363}.

<sup>46</sup> Hollander, "The Roots of Resistance to Women's Self-Defense."