

# Toward a Gender-Inclusive Conception of Intimate Partner Violence Research and Theory:

## Part 1 – Traditional Perspectives

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Some three decades after the first shelters for battered women were established in England and the United States, public discourse and public policy on intimate partner violence (IPV) has framed the problem in terms of male perpetration and female victimization. Ideally, policy ought to be informed by unbiased research. However, IPV research has, until very recently, almost exclusively been concerned with the physical and psychological abuse of women by their male partners, and has ignored or marginalized alternative lines of research that suggest female-perpetrated partner abuse is a significant social problem. The reluctance to investigate these issues in an objective and scientific manner has been due to the prevailing *patriarchal conception* of intimate partner violence, a paradigm based on radical feminist sociopolitical ideology. In this paper, neglected lines of research are reviewed, including studies conducted in the 1980s and 1990s on offender personalities, self-defense, the effects of IPV and other contextual factors, emotional abuse and control, and the dynamics of high-conflict and violent couples.

*Keywords:* intimate partner violence (IPV), female perpetrators, male victims, patriarchy, personality types

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In December 2005, the United States Congress passed legislation reauthorizing the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA), originally enacted in 1996. As its name suggests, this legislation has funded programs that help female victims of intimate partner violence (IPV). The new version finally acknowledged that men, too, can be victims, and allows funding to be made available for this population (Young, 2006). This was only possible, however, because of persistent lobbying by men's rights groups, over the strenuous objections of battered women's advocates. Unless this resistance

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can be overcome, however, there is a strong possibility that the new legislation will have only a marginal impact on future prevention and intervention efforts with men.

The resistance comes from adherents to a particularly extreme form of feminist ideology who have shaped public attitudes and intervention policy over the past three decades by disseminating what many consider misleading and false information on IPV. Thus one finds on the official website of the National Coalition Against Domestic Violence (2006) the statement that 85 percent of IPV victims are women, while the American Bar Association's Commission on Domestic Violence puts the percentage at 90-95 percent (American Bar Association, 2006). On the VAWNET website ([www.vawnet.org](http://www.vawnet.org)), we are told that "women use violence for a variety of reasons, but a common one is to defend themselves. Men typically use violence to control their female partners" (Dekeseredy, 2002, p. 3).

Actually, men and women assault one another at approximately equal rates (Archer, 2000) and do so for similar reasons (Medeiros & Straus, 2006). These findings are either disbelieved or ignored, and consequently domestic violence policy consists of arresting male perpetrators and mandating them to psycho-educational batterer intervention program (BIP) groups, many of which have been shown to be only marginally effective (Babcock, Canady, Graham, & Scharp, 2006), while providing supportive services to their female victims, despite the reality that many of them are co-perpetrators in the relationship. Men are arrested for intimate partner violence at far greater rates than women, and make up the vast majority of BIP participants. Men who have merely been *accused* of domestic violence may find themselves denied their parental rights (Heleniak, 2005). Finally, out of nearly 1,800 shelters in the United States, only the Antelope Valley Oasis Shelter in Southern California (Ensign & Jones, 2006) and perhaps one or two others accept male residents.

### The Beginning of the Domestic Violence Movement

Wife abuse has always been prosecuted in the United States under existing assault and battery statutes. Not until the 1880s did various states enact laws specific to domestic violence, but those statutes were weakly enforced. By the 1960s and 1970s, the preferred police response to domestic disputes, including those involving physical violence, was mediation (Young, 2005). Mental health professionals often put victims in danger by not distinguishing between less serious, mutually abusive cases from those involving life-threatening attacks by a dominant, predatory partner (Hansen & Harway, 1995; Pagelow, 1981). The battered women's movement represented a grassroots response to this state of affairs (Martin, 1976; Pizzey, 1974). Initially made up of victims and their supporters, the movement was soon joined by academic feminists interested in the general advancement of women's rights. Citing victim accounts of highly controlling husbands, these feminists began to define spousal abuse as a gender issue, and provided the movement with a ready-made theory both to explain the problem and to provide a blueprint for change (see Table 1). In this patriarchal conception, "the correct interpretation of violence between husbands and wives conceptualizes such vio-

lence as the extension of the domination and control of husbands over their wives” (Dobash & Dobash, 1979, p. 15).

Table 1  
*The Patriarchal Conception of Domestic Violence*

	Patriarchal conception: 1970s – present
Theory and research	<p>Domestic violence defined as “wife battering.” Ninety-five percent of domestic violence perpetrated by men. Male victims primarily gay, assaulted by other men.</p> <p>Abuse caused by patriarchal system that sanctions men’s dominance over women, rather than psychopathology, anger or communication problems.</p> <p>Conception based on feminist sociopolitical theory. Draws from crime studies and clinical data from battered women shelters.</p> <p>Conflict Tactics Conception: Dissenting model focuses on broader problem of family violence. Causes in violent role modeling, individual pathology, poor conflict and communication skills. Fifty percent of violence perpetrated by women, but assumed to be primarily in self-defense. Women suffer seven times more physical injuries.</p> <p>Alternative: Based on large-scale representative surveys. Draws from conflict, family systems and social learning theories.</p>
Policy and treatment	<p>Arrest policies target male perpetrators. Same-sex education groups for men (for example, the Duluth model), victim services and outreach services for women.</p> <p>Alternative: Same sex cognitive behavioral groups for men. Possibility of couples counseling with victim’s consent. Focus on man as perpetrator.</p>

Rather than rely on interviews with abused women in shelters, the team of Straus, Gelles and Steinmetz (1979) gathered data from large representative national sample surveys, asked *both the male and female respondents* about their abuse, and inquired about rates of child abuse as well as interparental violence. In contrast to the sociopolitical feminist analysis, they conceptualized partner violence within the context of interpersonal conflict. The results, indicating that in intimate relationships men and women physically assault one another at approximately equal rates, were roundly criticized. Many feminists favored women’s personal accounts over statistical analyses they construed as inherently male-centered, while others criticized Straus et al.’s

methodology, noting, for example, the obvious limitations of a study which did not seek information about who initiated the violence, or their reasons for doing so (Yllo, 1988). “A kick with an open-toed sandal,” wrote Pagelow (1981), “administered under a bridge table and an angry kick from a pointed western boot are vastly different in both the aggressor’s intent to cause injury (the social meaning behind the act) and possible injury sustained” (p. 25). The not-so-subtle point, with references to western boots and sandals, is not simply that different individuals may be motivated to aggress for different reasons (which is, of course, true), but that only men intend to cause harm.

By the mid-1980s, given the growing battered women’s movement and media interest in high-profile public policy on domestic violence, intervention means were changing rapidly. One by one, various states enacted legislation making spousal assaults a crime. In lieu of or in addition to incarceration, perpetrators were also mandated to participate in rehabilitation programs, known as batterer intervention programs. These generally followed the model set forth by the Duluth Intervention Project (Pence & Paymar, 1993), based on personal accounts of abuse from shelter women and infused with patriarchal ideology, which insists that the man is entirely responsible for interpersonal violence because he is automatically presumed, by virtue of being a male in a patriarchal society, to be the *dominant* partner. “When women do use violence against their spouses or cohabitants,” according to Dobash and Dobash (1988), “it is primarily in self-defense or retaliation, often during an attack by their husband” (p. 60). Poor impulse control and personality factors are dismissed as excuses, there is no such thing as mutual abuse, and only one dynamic exists—the three-phase cycle described by Lenore Walker (1983). According to this scenario, (1) the man experiences internal tension, the fearful woman tries to accommodate his increasingly controlling and emotionally abusive behaviors, but she is unable to prevent (2) the inevitable explosion of violence. Relieved of the tension and recognizing that his partner might leave him or alert the police, (3) the man becomes remorseful, giving her renewed hope that he will change. But the tension mounts once again, and the cycle begins anew.

### *Limitations of the Patriarchal Conception*

Proponents of the patriarchal conception present what at first glance seems to be plausible evidence in support of their position: From early childhood males are more outwardly aggressive than females, and as adults they commit the preponderance of violent crimes (Archer, 2004). Even in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the status of women as a whole has yet to reach parity with that of men. Men account for the great majority of elected officials, as well as the top business executives, and would therefore be presumed to have the greater share of institutionalized power. Using socioeconomic measures, Yllo and Straus (1990) found that the most “patriarchal” states, in which men as a whole had the greatest amount of power, also reported the highest rates of male-on-female partner abuse. The 1975 National Family Violence Survey found that the number of male-dominant households (measured according to “who has the final say” in decisions regarding having children, whether a partner should go to work, etc.) exceeded the

number of female-dominant households and that marital conflict was highest among the former (Coleman & Straus, 1990). Similar findings have been garnered from general population samples from South Korea (Kim & Emery, 2003) and Hong Kong (Su Kom Tang, 1999), and college students in the United States (Fitzpatrick, Salgado, Suvak, King, & King, 2004).

Notwithstanding these data, support for the patriarchal conception is tenuous at best, and certainly does not warrant the gender-biased arrest and intervention policies currently in place. For example, the research previously cited by Yllo and Straus (1990) indicated that male-on-female partner assaults were also high in the *least* patriarchal states. The National Family Violence Surveys (Coleman & Straus, 1990) did find a higher proportion of male- versus female-dominated households in the mid-1970s, but the differences were, even for that era, rather negligible, with only 9.4 percent of the households male-dominant, and 7.5 percent female-dominant. The rest were either divided-role or egalitarian power arrangement. The most significant finding was the correlation between high-conflict and physical violence in *both* male and female-dominant relationships.

Patriarchal explanations are also contradicted by other research findings. First, most men are neither physically assaultive nor controlling (Dutton, 1994; Yllo, 1993). Second, women are as victimized in same-sex relationships, where patriarchal structures should not exist, as in heterosexual ones (Coleman, 1994; Lie, Schilit, Bush, Montagne, & Reyes, 1991), and violent lesbians include “feminine” as well as “butch” types (Renzetti, 1992).

Some studies of battered women have identified conservative gender attitudes among violent husbands (Coleman, Weinman, & Hsi, 1980; Rosenbaum & O’Leary, 1981), while others (Neidig, Friedman, & Collins, 1986) have found no such link. In Sugarman and Frankel’s (1996) comprehensive review of studies on patriarchy and partner violence, significant correlations were found between pro-violent attitudes and assaults against female partners, but traditional gender role attitudes (for example, that the woman should let the man make all the decisions and not work outside the home) did not differentiate violent from non-violent men. And surprisingly, the violent men measured *lower* on measures of masculinity, including goal-directed and instrumental (stereotypic masculine) versus expressive (stereotypic female) behaviors.

Feminist theorists have not yet explained *how* patriarchal power translates into personal power in most relationships. One might suppose that a prominent businessman who is well-connected politically in a small town would have an advantage over an uneducated wife, especially if she lacked a network of influential friends. But most men are not so well-connected. Also, the feminist focus on institutional power ignores other forms of power that are more germane in the home setting. These include (1) the *personal power* that comes from having a dominant personality and (2) *relationship power*, which can be measured by the extent to which one person is needed by his or her partner (Felson, 2002). Thus a strong-willed woman who is ready to use whatever tactics are necessary to get her way and is married to a passive man who is emotionally dependent on her will have the power in the relationship, no matter how “patriar-

chal” the society is in which they live. Ironically, it is partly due to the patriarchal code of chivalry that most men are reluctant to hit their female partners, even when subjected to physical abuse (Cook, 1997; Fontes, 2006).

A review by Archer (2004) of cross-cultural research on general aggression found, as expected, far higher rates of physical aggression and somewhat higher rates of verbal aggression by men. Measures of anger and hostility, however, revealed few differences between the genders (Averill, 1983; Archer, 2004). Females of all ages engage in indirect aggression against peers, co-workers, and others (Bjorkqvist, 1994; Frieze, 2005), and adolescent girls use indirect forms of aggression at significantly higher rates than boys (Archer, 2004). Studies have shown that women, when feeling justified to do so, may engage in direct aggression if they think they will remain anonymous (Frodi, Macaulay, & Thome, 1977; Richardson, 2005).

While women may feel inhibited from displaying aggression outside the home, societal norms excuse female aggression *in* the home, where women seek to defend their interests as mothers and homemakers (Straus, 1999). The minimization of female-perpetrated abuse is perpetuated by clinicians, who rate abusive and controlling behaviors as “more abusive” when perpetrated by a man regardless of the context (Follingstad, DeHart, & Green, 2004), and who are unable to predict at greater than chance levels violence by women released from a psychiatric emergency room (Skeem et al., 2005).

Scrutinized in terms of empirical findings, one detects a number of holes in the patriarchal theory argument. Why, then, did it “take hold” so quickly, and why does it continue to shape public policy on domestic violence?

As the NFVS indicated, a great many men were victims of IPV at the start of the battered women’s movement. In fact, there have always been male victims and while past law-enforcement responses to partner violence were certainly inadequate in cases of female victims, they were hardly vigorous in protecting males, who were doubly victimized by public ridicule (see George, 2003, for a discussion of public shaming rituals of abused men, such as the “Skimmington procession”<sup>1</sup>). But, as previously noted, it was primarily *women* who took up the cause of helping domestic violence victims. On the other hand, because of their socially conditioned need to present a façade of strength and downplay their victimization, abused men did not spontaneously gather in comparable numbers, and although some advocates early on cautioned against the politicization of domestic violence (Pizzey, 1997), the movement was inevitably co-opted by what Sommers (1994) calls *gender feminists*, whose radical ideology could not allow for the existence of male victims.

“Angry over a history of domination,” writes Linda Kelly (2003), “feminists have discredited female violence in order to give women a secret way to strike back” (p.

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<sup>1</sup> These took various forms. Accounts from England tell of the husband victim and his wife paraded before the townspeople accompanied by musicians playing drums and bagpipes. A French custom involved having the beaten husband ride a donkey backwards.

822, citing Straus). This is not the only explanation. Many are undoubtedly “enthralled with the power that comes with having one’s philosophy hold sway and the control they feel from influencing criminal justice policy. Ironically, they often attribute these very power and control motives to abusive men” (Dutton & Corvo, 2006, p. 31). Front-line workers, many of whom had been previously battered themselves (Loseke, 1992) may be forgiven for their ignorance and tendency to over-generalize from their personal experiences, but as Dutton and Nicholls (2005) suggest, patriarchal theory has persisted due to groupthink and the fear engendered among those who might otherwise challenge it. Especially among academics and policy-makers, one would suspect revenge as equally plausible an explanation as any for the callous, cynical disregard gender feminists have had for the truth.

### Alternative Research Trends: The 80s and 90s

During the 1980s and 1990s, a substantial increase in domestic violence research yielded a body of often flawed, sometimes illuminating findings. These served to broaden the discussion, fuel the ongoing debate over issues of methodology and the role played by women in family violence, and undermine patriarchal theories of causation.

#### *Personality Research and Male Batterer Typologies*

From extended interviews with a sample of 400 battered women in Colorado, Walker (1983) identified a personality profile for men who batter, featuring lower socioeconomic status (SES) than their mates, chauvinistic attitudes, and a propensity toward alcohol abuse, insecurity, emotional dependence, possessiveness, and jealousy. Using the Cattell 16-Personality Factor (16PF) test and the Michigan Alcoholism Screening Test, Scheuriger and Reigle (1988) found high levels of violence among men in BIP groups were associated with anxiety, depression, poor self-esteem, alcoholism, and social nonconformity, including poor impulse control. Browning and Dutton (1986) theorized male batterers use violence to both reduce tension and create emotional distance from their partner out of fear of emotional intimacy or losing control. Dutton and Strachan (1987) found that violent men demonstrated a greater need for power, due to low self-esteem and feelings of powerlessness, compared to non-violent men. In a later paper, Dutton (1994) wrote:

Patriarchy does not elicit violence against women in any direct fashion. Rather, it may provide the values and attitudes that personality-disordered men can exploit to justify their abuse of women. This distinction is an important one: It explains why the majority of men remain nonviolent and how they differ in at least one essential and nontautological aspect from violent men. (p. 176)

Data on the personalities of violent men came primarily from victim reports, as in the Walker study, or from clinicians without the benefit of control groups. Neidig et al.



(1986) attempted to correct for this shortcoming by interviewing and extensively testing 119 military men who had perpetrated at least one act of IPV in the previous year, as well as a nonviolent control group matched for demographic variables. The physically abusive men were not found to exhibit a significantly greater degree of chauvinistic attitudes or to lack empathy for their partners. The only significant difference between the groups was that the violent men recorded lower scores on the Coopersmith Self-Esteem Inventory. The authors concluded that personality and attitudinal factors are not as important as stress and marital discord in predicting violence. They speculated that the men were not batterers in the classic sense but rather “hitters” whose violence was of the “expressive” type, largely influenced by stress and relationship dynamics, as opposed to the “instrumental” violence exhibited by more controlling types of men.

Hamberger and Hastings (1986), recognizing that men arrested for spousal abuse did not uniformly exhibit the same degree of violence or psychopathology, categorized this population according to a cluster of distinct personality characteristics. From this work and a review of the literature, Holtzworth-Munroe and Stuart (1994) proposed a now-famous typology of male batterers consisting of (1) family-only, (2) dysphoric-borderline, and (3) generally violent antisocial types. The family-only types were regarded as the least dangerous, with low levels of psychopathology and less serious domestic violence histories. In Jacobsen and Gottman’s (1998) schema, *Pit Bulls* represented the dysphoric-borderline types in their intense dependency needs and desire to control their partners. Akin to generally violent, antisocial men, “cobra” types exhibited less emotional dependency, but had poor impulse control (with histories of criminal activity and substance abuse) and were capable of perpetrating severe violence, including the use of weapons. Others have attempted typologies of their own, among them Dutton (1988, 1998), whose early two-dimensional model characterized intimate abusiveness as impulsive or instrumental on one axis, and undercontrolled or overcontrolled on the other.

### Research on Contextual Factors

Because the 1975 National Family Violence Survey did not inquire about rates of initiation and self-defense, findings of comparable assault rates by men and women were easily dismissed. In the 1980s and 1990s, however, a small number of studies examined the context of IPV.

#### *Mutuality and Initiation Rates*

A second National Family Violence Survey was conducted in 1985, with a sample exceeding 6,000 respondents. To eliminate the problem of male underreporting, Straus (1993) examined the data provided by the wives and found that in 48.6 percent of assaults, both partners were violent. The husband was the sole perpetrator in 25.9 percent of the cases and the wife was the sole perpetrator 25.5 percent of the time. A survey of 200 military couples to whom the police had responded to a domestic violence



call (Langhinrichsen-Rohling, Neidig, & Thorn, 1995) reported an 83 percent rate of mutual assaults. In a longitudinal study of 1,037 New Zealanders (Moffitt & Caspi, 1999), most cases of partner violence among young adults were deemed to have been mutual.

Rates of mutuality only tell us that both partners were violent. They do not indicate which partner initiated the assaults or what percentage of aggressive behavior was in self-defense. In the second National Family Violence Survey (Straus, 1993), the wives reported that they initiated the violence 53.1 percent of the time, their husbands 42.3 percent of the time. Those who could not remember who started the violence accounted for the remaining 3.1 percent of cases. The National Youth Survey (Morse, 1995), drawing on data from 1,725 respondents in the Eastern United States, yielded similar results, with 61.3 percent of the men and 54.2 percent of the women reporting that the female partner had initiated the violence in their last serious argument. A dating population study of 865 students at four universities in the South by DeMaris (1992) determined that it was the female partner more often than not who initiated the physical violence. Of the women reporting violence in a representative sample of 707 adult respondents in Alberta, Canada (Dutton, Kwong, Bartholomew, & Kim, 1999), 67 percent identified themselves as the initiator. High rates of female-initiated violence have also been found among couples in which the man had been court-mandated to a BIP group. In the Austin, Texas, study by Shupe, Stacey, and Hazlewood (1987), the woman initiated the assault one-third of the time. In Gondolf's (1996) multi-site study of men's BIP groups, during a treatment follow-up period, the female victims reported they initiated the violence in 40 percent of the cases.

The following sections of this paper explore in greater detail the broader context in which domestic violence occurs. They include a discussion of self-defense, the use of emotionally abusive and controlling behaviors, and various abuse dynamics found among couples observed in laboratory studies.

### *Self-Defense and Other Motives*

In a study by Saunders (1986), 39 percent of the battered women interviewed said they had used severe violence exclusively in self-defense, while 42 percent reported that self-defense was the motive at least half the time. These findings suggest that even among such a highly victimized population, self-defense is used in less than half the cases. Representative sample surveys have found self-defense to be far less significant in the vast majority of instances of IPV. In one survey of dating couples (Follingstad, Wright, Lloyd, & Sebastian, 1991), 17 percent of the men and 18 percent of the women said they had hit in self-defense. Only 10 percent of partner-violent women and 15 percent of partner-violent men reported they had used physical aggression in self-defense in Sommer's (1994) Winnipeg, Canada study. Of the 62 partner-violent spouses in marital counseling studied by Cascardi and Vivian (1995), only 5 percent of the wives and 10 percent of the husbands identified self-defense as a motive for their use of mild physical aggression. More wives endorsed self-defense as a motive for severe physi-

cal aggression (20 percent), a significantly higher percentage than what severely aggressive husbands reported (none), yet still quite low overall.

Among the 1,978 respondents to a British national survey who reported to have engaged in partner violence, 17 percent of the women and 21 percent of the men claimed to have done so because they “thought [the other] was about to use a physical action against me.” As reported in Carrado, George, Loxam, Jones, and Templar (1996), approximately 21 percent of the women and 27 percent of the men said they were “getting back at [the other] for some physical action [the other] had used against me.” This might be interpreted as self-defense, but probably also indicates retaliation, in which the abused party engages in violent behavior to punish the partner or to vent anger, rather than strictly to protect himself or herself from immediate harm.

In Felson and Messner’s (1998) analysis of 2,000 intimate partner homicides, self-defense (defined as protecting oneself from bodily harm) accounted for 9.6 percent of female-perpetrated killings but only .5 percent of male. A definition that included retaliation for previous physical attacks yielded rates of 46.2 percent and 11.1 percent for women and men, respectively. Sixty percent of the women killers had claimed self-defense as reported in Mann’s (1988) study of spousal murders in several large urban areas. However, 58 percent of the murders were determined to have been premeditated. Furthermore, 30 percent of the women killed their partners when those partners were incapacitated (either drunk, bound, or asleep), yet the majority of these women (60 percent) also claimed self-defense.

Assaultive individuals report several other motives for their violence besides self-defense, with most studies finding few differences along gender lines. In a large survey of dating university students conducted in several states ( $N = 2,338$ ) by Makepeace (1986), the women reported a far greater use of self-defense than the men (35.6 percent vs. 18.1 percent), unusual for a non-shelter sample. Only 6.8 percent of the women reported intimidation as a motive, compared to 21.3 percent of the men. However, more women than men said their intent was “to harm” the other (8.3 percent vs. 2.4 percent), and comparable percentages of women (24.2 percent) and men (28.3) said their violence was due to “uncontrollable anger.” In Cascardi and Vivian’s (1995) marital counseling study, the women reported anger more often than the men did as the motive for violence, but the men reported higher rates for the combined motives of anger and coercion (57 percent vs. 40 percent for severe aggression).

Are we to interpret these studies as evidence that women’s violence is more “expressive” and men’s primarily “coercive” or “instrumental”? In fact, the line between “expressive” and “coercive” intentions may not be so clear. “A violent act,” writes George (2003), “to cause a partner to ‘get away from me’ and ‘leave me alone’ is equally interpretable as goal directed and instrumental reasoning forcing the victim to surrender their position in an argument and force them to leave the scene, room, or house” (p. 50).

The women in Follingstad et al.’s (1991) dating survey were more likely than the men to report having assaulted a partner “in retaliation for emotional hurt” (55.9 percent vs. 25.0 percent), “to show anger” (57.6 percent vs. 37.5 percent), and “to get con-

trol over the other person” (22.0 percent vs. 8.3 percent). In the Carrado et al.’s (1996) study, the most frequently endorsed motives were (1) attempts to communicate (“I thought it was the only way to get through to him/her”), reported by 53 percent of the women and 64 percent of the men and (2) retaliation (“Was getting back at him/her for something nasty he/she said or threatened to do to me”), reported by nearly identical percentages of women and men (52 percent vs. 53 percent). Attempts to communicate motivated a high percentage of the partner-abusive women in the Fiebert & Gonzalez (1997) Southern California survey: 44 percent wanted to “get partner’s attention,” while 43 percent said their partner was “not listening to me.” Reflecting society’s tolerance for women’s IPV, 38 percent said that they “did not believe my actions would hurt my partner.” Overall, partner violence would thus appear to be driven by a variety of motives.

### *Emotionally Abusive and Controlling Behaviors*

As with female victims of IPV, male victims have also given testimonials of their experiences of being abused by partners who seek to assert power and control over them.

She called him “cock sucker” and “prick.” She chose what clothes he could wear to work, arguing that certain ties or shirts would attract his female colleagues. If he disregarded her choices, he came to find his wardrobe burned to ashes. She insisted . . . that he couldn’t go out with his friends. If he did, she locked him out of the house for the night. He wasn’t permitted to read the *Toronto Sun*, because the tabloid carries daily photos of a woman in a bikini—the “Sunshine Girl”—and that was evidence that he lusted after other women. When she started a fight, she would follow him from room to room in their house, keeping up all night: “I’m not *finished* with you!” Exhausted, he came late to work too many times and got fired. (Pearson, 1997, p. 124)

A key tenet of gender-feminist patriarchal theory is the male batterer’s need to control his partner and assert male privilege. In addition to the use of physical force, the batterer is said to use a variety of emotionally abusive and controlling behaviors, visually represented on the now-ubiquitous “Power and Control Wheel” (Pence & Paymar, 1993)<sup>2</sup>. In the 1980s and 1990s, numerous studies were published that examined men’s use of these non-physical tactics, such as intimidation, emotional abuse, isolation,

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<sup>2</sup> The “wheel,” based on interviews with female victims in a shelter setting, identified eight power and control tactics used by male batterers: intimidation, emotional abuse, isolation, minimizing, denying and blaming, using children, using male privilege, economic abuse, and using coercion and threats.

tion, and male privilege. Only a handful of studies sought to determine the extent to which women also engaged in such behaviors, starting with the National Family Violence Surveys (Straus et al., 1980; Straus & Gelles, 1990), which reported comparable gender rates for not only physical assaults but also *verbal* abuse. Rouse, Breen, and Howell's (1988) survey of 130 dating and 130 married students found women are more likely than men to engage in isolation behaviors, such as "monitors time," "discourages same-sex friends" and "discourages opposite sex friends." The male and female respondents in Stets' (1991) study of dating students reported equivalent rates of controlling behaviors (for example, "I keep my partner in line") as well as psychological abuse (for example, "I degraded him/her"). In a study of 1,625 university students (Kasian & Painter, 1992), male respondents reported higher rates of received abuse on a modified version of the Psychological Maltreatment of Women Inventory, which measures for control, jealousy and isolation, verbal abuse, and withdrawal of affection. There were no gender differences in rates of received emotional abuse.

Higher rates of victimization than perpetration were reported by the male subjects in Stacey, Hazelwood, and Shupe's (1994) study of men in batterer treatment on four of the 13 items from the CSR Abuse Index ("deny rights to privacy," "deny access to family," "withdraw emotions to punish," and "withhold sex to punish"). Although the men reported lower rates of victimization than females on the other nine items, the differences were usually not large. For example, "deny freedom of activities" was cited by 71 percent of men and 72 percent of women; "deny access to friends" was cited by 57 percent of men and 63 percent of women; and "censor phone calls" was reported by 53 percent of men and 60 percent of women. One would have expected much larger differences from this population, considering the men had been arrested and deemed "batterers" while their female partners were deemed "victims."

### *Stalking and Sexual Coercion*

The National Violence Against Women Survey (NVAWS), drawing on a sample of 16,000 men and women, reported that 26 percent of the male victims were stalked each year by a current or former intimate, and 77 percent of the female victims, a ratio of 3 women for each man victimized (Tjaden & Thoennes, 2000). However, studies drawn from community samples have indicated comparable rates, depending on how "stalking" is defined. Spitzberg and Rhea (1999) examined a variety of stalking subtypes, collectively known as obsessive relational intrusion (ORI). Results from their sample of college students in Texas revealed a 54 percent rate of male-perpetrated ORI's, versus 46 percent for females. The college survey by Langhinrichsen-Rohling and her colleagues asked respondents to report on their own ORI behavior, as well as incidents of ORI victimization (Langhinrichsen-Rohling, Palarea, Cohen, & Rohling, 2000). There were no overall differences in stalking rates. A major difference between the genders was that men made more unwanted visits to homes and apartments, whereas women left the greater share of unwanted phone messages. Women were also four times as likely to report having been physically threatened.

In the NVAWS (Tjaden et al., 2000), 3.8 percent of the men reported to having been raped the previous year. More than four times as many women (20 percent) said that this had happened to them. As with stalking rates, however, rates for coercive sexual behaviors narrow considerably between the sexes when an expanded definition of rape is employed and when the interview is not framed within the context of a crime survey (Muehlenhard & Cook, 1988; Waldner-Haugrud & Magruder, 1995).

### *Laboratory Studies of Couples*

Another line of research has investigated the relationship dynamics in couples with an abusive husband using direct observation of subjects in the laboratory. The results were a far cry from Walker's (1983) three-phase cycle (tension build-up, battering event, contrition). Margolin, John, and Gleberman (1988), for instance, found that negative communication by abusive husbands was reciprocated with negative communication by the wives. Cordova, Jacobsen, Gottman, Rushe, and Cox (1993) observed, "the women are continuing the conflict engagement, even though they have histories of being subjected to physical abuse" (p. 563).

In a study by Burman, John, and Margolin (1992), wives of abusive husbands responded to both negative-offensive statements (for example, criticism and insult) and negative-defensive statements (for example, disagreement or "yes, but ..." statements) with negative-offensive statements of their own. The husbands, however, typically responded to negative-offensive statements with negative-defensive ones. Babcock, Waltz, Jacobsen, and Gottman (1993) found violent husbands and their wives were equally likely to make demands of the other or to withdraw in response to their partner's demands, thus making continuation of the conflict as well as further resentments and power struggles more likely. Jacobsen, Gottman, Waltz, Rushe, Babcock, and Holtzworth-Munroe (1994) observed the husbands to be more domineering and defensive, but the wives were rated as more angry, belligerent, and contemptuous. In spite of the self-selective nature of the sample (all the men had perpetrated either several acts of serious violence or at least one act of very serious violence in the past year), the authors noted that half the wives would have qualified for batterer treatment.

### Conclusions

These studies, together with the data contradicting patriarchal theories of etiology of partner intimate violence, and emerging research on personality factors among violent men and contextual variables such as self-defense, cannot be ignored. A convincing body of evidence had established that women (1) initiate physical violence as often as, or more often than, men; (2) rarely assault strictly in self-defense, but rather, like their male counterparts, are driven by a variety of motives; (3) engage in comparable levels of emotionally abusive and controlling behaviors as men, with the exception of rape and physical intimidation; and (4) generally participate as active agents in abuse dynamics, rather than react passively.

Although the patriarchal paradigm has continued to inform the making of public policy, its theoretical foundations are beginning to fall apart and the way is being paved for radically new perspectives on the causes and treatment of intimate partner abuse, among them the author's gender-inclusive conception (Hamel, 2005). In this first decade of the new millennium, amidst continuing debate and controversy, it is becoming more and more evident that IPV is truly a human problem, and not simply one of gender.

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# Toward a Gender-Inclusive Conception of Intimate Partner Violence Research and Theory:

## Part 2 – New Directions

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In an article previously published in this journal (Hamel, 2007) the author contradicted the patriarchal paradigm which has guided domestic violence research, intervention and policy for the past three decades. The current article critically examines the two major alternative models, beginning with the post-patriarchal/asymmetry paradigm, which acknowledges that most intimate partner abuse consists of “situational” or “common couple” violence, which is conflict-driven, has relatively minor consequences, and is initiated by women as well as men. However, this model incorrectly assumes that men perpetrate the overwhelming majority of severe abuse, known as “battering” or “intimate terrorism.” The article concludes with a discussion of the gender-inclusive model, which holds that intervention and policy should draw upon *all* of the available data. According to the latest research, most domestic violence is mutual, men and women emotionally abuse and control one another at approximately equal rates, intimate terrorists are equally likely to be male or female, men suffer one-third of physical injuries, and males and females are equally affected by emotional abuse. In short, domestic violence is a human and relational problem, not a gender problem. Implications of these findings are discussed with respect to prevention, intervention and policy.

*Keywords:* intimate partner abuse, intimate terrorism, battering, domestic violence, gender inclusivity

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The patriarchal conception of intimate partner violence (IPV) contends that IPV is perpetrated by men who are motivated by a need to dominate their female partners and maintain male privilege. When women are violent, it is assumed to be in self-defense and its consequences, if any, are thought to be negligible (Dobash & Dobash, 1979; Pagelow, 1981; Pence & Paymar, 1993; Walker, 1979). Recently, the author (Hamel,

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2007a) presented preliminary evidence drawn from research conducted in the 1980s and 1990s on male personality and batterer typologies, contextual factors, and relationship variables as measured in the laboratory, evidence that contradicts the patriarchal model of IPV.

Recently, many of the statistics on IPV and its theoretical underpinnings have been challenged by researchers, policy-makers and intervention providers, giving birth to a new model of IPV theory and treatment. In this article, an overview is given of the *post-patriarchal/asymmetry paradigm* of IPV, a research trend that represents to some extent an improvement over the patriarchal model.<sup>1</sup> The article concludes with a discussion of the *gender-inclusive* model, one that eschews simplistic, ideologically-driven explanations, promotes evidence-based practice, and seeks to more efficiently reduce domestic violence in the community.

### The Post-patriarchal/Asymmetry Paradigm

Some feminist gender theorists early on conceded that male batterers could be driven by both instrumental and expressive motives (Yllo, 1993), a “finding” that Goldner (1998) incorporated in her conjoint model of feminist therapy for couples with a violent man. By the end of the 1990s, Pence (1999), one of the founders of the Duluth Intervention Project had begun to rethink some of her own views:

I found that many of the men I interviewed did not seem to articulate a desire for power over their partner. Although I relentlessly took every opportunity to point out to men in the groups that they were so motivated and merely in denial, the fact that few men ever articulated such a desire went unnoticed by me and many of my coworkers. Eventually, we realized that we were finding what we had already predetermined to find.

... Activists have for years faced the accusation that women who “claim” to be battered are often lying about the abuse .... For more than a decade, the DAIP and shelter advocates reacted to this constant undercurrent of “women are liars” by arguing that “women are saints.” In many ways, we turned a blind eye to some women’s use of violence, their drug use and alcoholism, and their often harsh and violent treatment of their children. (pp. 29-30)

In her carefully-worded acknowledgement that only “some” women use violence, Pence clearly was not about to endorse anything close to a gender-inclusive model, but it was a sign that the accumulated data had over time eroded the monolithic patriarchal paradigm, making inevitable the ascendance of a new model of domestic violence theory and treatment.

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<sup>1</sup> The author gratefully acknowledges Kathleen Malley-Morrison for suggesting the term “post-patriarchal.”

At the center of what this author calls the *post-patriarchal/asymmetry conception* is a typology proposed by sociologist Michael Johnson, who sought to reconcile the accumulated research with the prevailing paradigm, promising to resolve the raging dispute regarding which gender is “more violent” (see Table 1). Unlike previous typologies, Johnson’s included mutual and female-perpetrated violence (Johnson, 2000; Johnson & Leone, 2005). An examination of survey data, he proposed, leads one to conclude that women assault as often as men, and for similar reasons. The type of violence revealed by this data Johnson categorized as *common couple violence* (also known as situational violence). Representing the majority of domestic assaults, it arises

Table 1

*The Post-patriarchal/Asymmetry Concept of Domestic Violence*

Post-patriarchal/Asymmetry Concept: 1995 – Present	
Theory and Research	Use of the term “intimate partner violence” acknowledges dating and cohabitating violence, same-sex violence, and violence by heterosexual women.
	Attempt to reconcile patriarchal and conflict tactics models. Acknowledgement of diversity in violence; for example, “family only” vs. “dysphoric/borderline” and “antisocial.” Proliferation of research on typologies; emergence of “postmodern feminist” views.
	Recognition that most violence is “common couple” violence, conflict-driven and initiated by both men and women. “Gendered violence” involves male perpetrators. Men perpetrate the vast majority of severe abuse, known as “intimate terrorism.” Men are more controlling and emotionally abusive. Emphasis on asymmetry of violence between the genders.
	Outcome research on men’s batterer intervention programs focusing on reducing recidivism by male perpetrators. Studies on female batterers interpret women’s violence as reactive, men as the “dominant aggressors.”
	Proliferation of research examining the impact of domestic violence on children, focused on father’s abuse towards the mother.
Policy and Treatment	Women arrested in greater numbers and referred to same-sex batterer programs. Groups formed for gay or lesbian perpetrators.
	Victim services include children’s groups, parent-child therapy. Growing support for intervention to include structured couples counseling, based on feminist theory and focused on male-perpetrated battering.



within the context of escalating conflict by mutual combatants who are motivated to communicate and/or express anger rather than to control, and involves lower-level violence and negligible injury. The violence here would be characterized as *symmetrical*.

Data from crime surveys and battered women, he proposed, are about severe, injury-causing and *asymmetrical* violence, and support the theory that battering is perpetrated almost exclusively by men seeking to exercise control and male privilege over their partners. Johnson first labeled this type of violence “patriarchal terrorism,” then later “intimate terrorism.” Another category, “mutual violent control,” was created to account for the small number of couples who were mutually violent *and* controlling, what Jacobsen and Gottman (1998) called “Bonnie and Clyde” couples.

One drawback of Johnson’s scheme was that it did not incorporate the impulsive *and* severe violence characteristic of those with borderline personality disorder (Dutton, 2005). A more significant problem was that it ignored contradictory data and reached its conclusions from biased samples. For example, Riggs, O’Leary, and Breslin (1990) found a strong correlation between having a dominant and aggressive personality and IPV for both men *and* women. There was also a significant correlation in Cano, Avery-Leaf, Cascardi, and O’Leary’s (1998) study of high school boys and girls dating between the use of jealousy and dominance tactics and physical assaults. In support of his theory, Johnson cited data gathered in Pittsburgh, claiming that men represent 97 percent of intimate terrorists (Johnson, 2000), and research by Graham-Kevan and Archer (2003) as evidence for an 87 percent rate (Johnson, 2005) of male intimate terrorism. However, the majority of the women surveyed in the Pittsburgh sample had come from shelters, and the Graham-Kevan and Archer sample involved battered women and male prison inmates. Johnson failed to mention that a follow-up study (Graham-Kevan & Archer, 2005a), drawing upon a community sample of university students and faculty in Lancashire, England, found rates of 13 percent for female intimate terrorists and 9 percent for male intimate terrorists, based upon the same criteria Johnson used.

Johnson’s typology has been quite appealing to those who continue to frame domestic violence as a gender issue, but understand the limitations of the theory-driven patriarchal conception. Moreover, its wider scope provides clinicians with more flexible treatment options. Unfortunately, it has confused rather than clarified the issue of women’s violence. The same can be said for the National Violence Against Women Survey (NVAWS) (Tjaden & Thoennes, 2000) which, despite its hybrid crime survey methodology that would inhibit reporting of male victimization (Straus, 1999), nevertheless found that 36 percent of IPV victims are men.

Subsequent to the Johnson and NVAWS studies, research has proliferated within the typologies/asymmetry framework. Some of this research is seriously flawed, while some represents a genuine advancement in domestic violence research, with conclusions that one might debate only on points of emphasis and interpretation; for example, the extent to which abuse might be thought as “symmetrical” or “asymmetrical.” However, in light of further developments in the field, the time would seem right for another alternative to the gender-feminist patriarchal model.

At the heart of the *gender-inclusive conception* (see Table 2) are the assumptions that IPV theory and intervention policy ought to be derived empirically from the full range of available research data, and that the purpose of intervention is to reduce family violence by the most effective means possible (Hamel, 2005a; 2007b).

Table 2  
*The Gender-inclusive Concept of Domestic Violence*

Gender-inclusive Concept: 2000 – Present	
Theory and Research	<p>Theory and treatment draws upon <i>all</i> of the available research data, which suggest that intimate partner abuse is a human and relational problem, not a gender problem. Distinction between victims and perpetrators are de-emphasized. Emphasis is placed on mutual and systemic nature of violence. Recognition of the importance of attachment styles. Concern with all types of abuse, not only physical violence.</p> <p>Women initiate domestic violence as often as men. Self-defense is a minor motive for both genders. Men and women verbally and emotionally abuse one another at approximately equal rates, and except for rape engage in similar levels of power and control. Effects of physical abuse are greater on women, but overall effects of abuse are the same for both genders.</p> <p>Men cause two-thirds of physical injuries and are better able to physically intimidate, but women are equally capable of emotional intimidation. “Gendered violence” can be perpetrated by men or women. Some men claim “male privilege” (for example, being entitled to sexual favors and having the final say in decisions), while women may claim “female privilege” (for example, as inherently superior parents, their own abusive behavior should be excused and men should support them financially.)</p> <p>Domestic violence and child abuse correlate with both male and female perpetrators. Children are as likely to suffer internalizing and externalizing symptoms and to perpetrate abuse as adults when they have witnessed Mom hit Dad, in contrast to when Dad hit Mom.</p>
Policy and Treatment	<p>Gender bias should be eliminated from public education and outreach, and from arrest and prosecution policies. Need for more dual arrests or alternatives to incarceration (for example, citations). Shelters must provide services to all victims of abuse.</p> <p>Need for more flexible treatment alternatives, including intensive individual therapy, structured couples counseling, mixed-gender perpetrator groups, family therapy, and restorative justice approaches. Treatment should always be guided by a thorough assessment, rather than by ideology.</p>

## Recent Research Trends

Over the past few years, IPV research has built on previous data to provide further evidence for much greater gender symmetry than previously had been believed to exist. Some of this research comes from interest in the increasing numbers of women mandated to batterer intervention programs (BIP), a consequence of mandatory arrest policies (Mills, 2003), while some has come from follow-up studies of Johnson's typologies and re-analyses of the NVAWS data. One, by Coker, Davis, Arias, et al. (2002), found lifetime male victimization rates of 10.5 percent for experienced verbal abuse and jealousy/possessiveness, and 6.8 percent for imposition of power/control, compared to rates of 5.2 percent and 6.9 percent for women. Particularly illuminating have been longitudinal studies and attachment research, as well as emerging data on the effects of IPV on children.

### *Etiology and Risk Factors*

The causes of intimate partner abuse are far more similar between the genders than they are dissimilar. There is evidence that male gender role stress and gender-role conflict are correlated with male-perpetrated partner abuse (Jakupcak, 2003). Patriarchal beliefs may also be a contributing factor in some male-perpetrated partner abuse, but are less important than harboring pro-violent attitudes (Hamel, 2007a), which is a risk factor for both genders (Follingstad, Wright, Lloyd, & Sebastian, 1991; Simmons, Lehmann & Cobb, 2004). In their review of the risk factor literature, Medeiros and Straus (2006) found no significant gender differences in the relationship between partner violence and 72-73 percent of the major IPV risk factors. The same direction of effect was found in 99 percent of the total number. Risk factors found in male populations that have also been found among females include (1) growing up in a violent home (Babcock, Miller, & Siard, 2003; Sommer, 1994; Straus & Smith, 1990), (2) certain personality traits such as dependency and jealousy, which are common among both heterosexual and lesbian offenders (Coleman, 1994; Shupe, Stacey, & Hazlewood, 1987), (3) and conditions that either meet the criterion for a DSM Axis II personality disorder (borderline, antisocial, or narcissistic) (Henning, Jones, & Holdford, 2003; Johnston & Campbell, 1993; Kalichman, 1988; Simmons, et al.) or are characterized by a generally aggressive personality (Ehrensaft, Moffit, & Caspi, 2004; Felson, 2002; Follingstad, Bradley, Helff, & Laughlin, 2002; O'Leary, 1988; Sommer, 1994). In the study by Henning et al. (2003), which compared men and women participants in batterer intervention programs, the women scored higher on the Millon Clinical Multiaxial Inventory III for 8 of the 14 maladaptive personality subscales measured, including compulsive, histrionic, narcissistic, paranoid, borderline and sadistic traits. Whether these elevated traits mean that partner assaultive women are more pathological than partner assaultive men in general, or that it takes a pathological woman to come to the attention of a law enforcement system predisposed to arrest males, was not determined by the study.

Similar correlations have been found for men and women between perpetration of IPV and proximal risk factors such as unemployment and low socioeconomic status (Magdol, Moffitt, Caspi, Fagan, & Silva, 1997), being under 30 years of age (Morse, 1995; Sommer, 1994; Straus, Gelles, & Steinmetz, 1980), or being in a dating or cohabitating relationship. The review by Medeiros and Straus (2006) also identified relationship conflict as a significant risk factor for both genders. Partly due to the negative communication dynamics discussed earlier, conflicted couples are at risk for physical violence. Once there is abuse by either partner, there is a greater risk of continued reciprocal abuse. Stets (1991) found a high correlation for both genders between psychological abuse victimization and perpetration. The greatest risk factor for physical violence perpetration in the White, Merrill and Kos (2001) study of 2,784 Navy recruits was physical or psychological victimization by one's partner. A recent study by Graham-Kevan and Archer (2005b) of 358 female students and staff at an English university found no correlation between fear and a woman's use of severe violence. Significant effects, however, were found for reciprocal violence as a means of retribution or as the result of a desire to control one's partner.

These studies suggest that intimate partner abuse is a complex phenomenon, driven by factors inherent in the individual (including culturally-derived attitudes and beliefs), situational variables, and the particular dynamics of the relationship. Recent studies on adult attachment are especially promising. As was the case with personality characteristics, research on attachment focused first on men (Dutton, 1998), and only later expanded to a consideration of the attachment styles of *both* partners and the interplay between them. Now we know that relationships in which one partner fears intimacy (avoidant or fearful attachment) and the other fears abandonment (preoccupied or fearful attachment) are at higher risk for physical abuse (Bartholomew, Henderson, & Dutton, 2001; Bookwala, 2002; Roberts & Noller, 1998), and that violence may be initiated by individuals with different attachment styles, and by either gender.

Longitudinal studies have found that many partner-abusive women, like men, bring to the relationship a history of aggressive tendencies, thus undermining the notion that their violence is always reactive. Capaldi, Kim, and Shortt (2004) followed a sample of 206 men in Oregon from adolescence, interviewing them in their mid-20's and their intimate partners. The women were found to have been more violent than the men, based on self-reports and partner reports as well as from observation of the couples as they discussed a contentious topic. In the experimental situation, the women initiated more of the abuse (including physical assaults) and those with a history of previous antisocial behavior were the most abusive. A community cohort ( $N = 543$  men and women) in upstate New York, which had been followed since childhood, was interviewed again at a mean age of 31 (Ehrensaft et al., 2006). Existence of DSM-IV Cluster A (paranoid, schizoid, schizotypal) or Cluster B (antisocial, borderline, histrionic, narcissistic) Axis II personality disorder symptoms at mean age 22 predicted perpetration of IPV at age 31, for both men and women.

In their New Zealand study, Ehrensaft, Cohen and Johnson (2004) re-interviewed a birth cohort ( $N = 980$  men and women) at age 24-26. Aggressive personality and con-

duct disorder in childhood predicted female-to-male adult IPV as well as male-to-female adult IPV. Given that the study examined both non-clinical and clinical cases and that men and women were equally represented in the latter, their findings directly contradicted Johnson's view that men make up the overwhelming number of clinical cases. In the clinically abusive group consisting of subjects who had been injured and/or sought services (for example, called police, or sought medical attention or mental health counseling), the men were more likely to have been previously arrested, but the genders did not differ from each other in seeking help, or the extent of their reported victimization or perpetration.

Johnson's findings were challenged most recently and convincingly by a massive Canadian study involving 25,876 respondents (Laroche, 2005). In addition to questions on physical assaults, the survey also asked respondents about victimization from the following psychologically abusive and controlling behaviors by their partner (similar to those in the Duluth Power and Control Wheel<sup>2</sup>): "Limits your contact with family or friends," "Puts you down or calls you names to make you feel bad," "Is jealous and doesn't want you to talk to other men/women," "Harms or threatens to harm someone close to you," "Demands to know who you are with and where you are at all times," "Damages or destroys your possessions or property," and "Prevents you from knowing about or having access to the family income, even if you ask." Approximately 3 percent of the surveyed women and 2 percent of the men were counted as victims of severe intimate terrorism, defined as having experienced severe and frequent physical violence and high levels of psychological abuse and control, and who would fit Ehrensaft et al.'s (2004) "clinical abuse cases," characterized by injuries sustained, fear expressed, and use of police and other services. This means that men represent fully 40 percent of intimate terrorism victims (an underestimation considering the study's methodology, akin to the NVAWS study in that its questionnaire framed IPV in terms of personal safety rather than conflict, thus suppressing male victimization rates) and "the inadequate assessment of controlling behaviors suffered by men" (Laroche, 2005, p. 11).

### *Impact of Abuse on Partners*

The literature on the physical and psychological impact of partner abuse is germane to any inquiry regarding symmetry versus asymmetry in IPV. In the 1985 National Family Violence Survey (NFVS) (Straus & Gelles, 1990), 3 percent of physically assaulted women said they had suffered physical injuries severe enough to seek medical attention. The rate reported by men was 0.4 percent, which is seven-and-a-half times less. These statistics are often interpreted as evidence that men are rarely injured in do-

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<sup>2</sup> Based on interviews with female victims in a shelter setting, the "wheel" identified eight power and control tactics used by male batterers: using intimidation, using emotional abuse, using isolation, minimizing, denying and blaming, using children, using male privilege, using economic abuse, and using coercion and threats.

mestic violence incidents. However, the data refer to the number of individuals who sought medical attention, not necessarily those who needed it. Men are less inclined to seek medical help in general or to admit to having been injured by a woman (Archer, 2000). Also, the data reflect only severe injuries, not injuries in general. In the National Violence Against Women Survey (Tjaden & Thoennes, 2000), 41.5 percent of the female and 19.9 percent of the victims reported injuries. The total number of individuals injured by their partners, according to Archer's comprehensive review of the literature (2000), included 62 percent women and 38 percent men, a ratio somewhat less than 2:1. In Straus' (2004) sample of students at 31 universities in 16 countries, the men incurred 43 percent of the physical injuries. The 2001 National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health, with a sample of more than 11,000 young adults between the ages of 18 and 28, found that in reciprocally-violent relationships men incurred the majority of the physical injuries. Overall, women incurred more physical injuries, but the difference was quite small (Whitaker, Haileyesus, Swahn, & Saltzman, 2007).

The NFVS (Straus & Gelles., 1990) found correlations for both men and women between assaults suffered and psychological injury, including days at home due to illness, high stress, psychosomatic symptoms, and depression. The effects were greater for the women, but statistically significant only for depression. Follingstad et al.'s (1991) study of dating couples reported three times greater fear and anxiety by assaulted women than assaulted men. Fifty-six and one-half percent of the women and 38.8 percent of the men reported being emotionally hurt. The incidence of sadness or depression was more equal, reported by 34.7 percent of the men and 35.5 percent of the women. Depending on what year they were interviewed for the National Youth Survey (Morse, 1995), 9.5-13.5 percent of the men said they "felt in physical danger," compared with 29.0-30.1 percent of the women. A survey of 2,027 adults in the United Kingdom (Graham, Plant, & Plant, 2004) found similar results, with women reporting fear at twice the rate as men, especially when the man was the sole perpetrator and had been drinking. However, the actual psychological distress suffered by men may be higher than the data tell us on reported levels of fear. Society socializes men to suppress feelings that render them vulnerable. Men tend to under-report assaults against them and are highly reluctant to being perceived as victims (Archer, 1999; Follingstad et al., 1991).

Anecdotal data suggests that when men admit to being victimized by their wives, they are often met with ridicule and scorn (Cook, 1997). Hines and Malley-Morrison (2001) point out that most research on the effects of violence focus on internalizing symptoms, such as depression, which are typically reported with greater frequency by women, and they recommend that research also look at externalizing symptoms. There also appear to be minimal differences between the genders when the impact of emotionally-abusive and controlling behaviors is considered. As Hines and Malley-Morrison found, emotionally abused men are more likely to evidence symptoms of posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and problem drinking than those who have not been abused. A recent analysis of the NVAWS data (Pimlott-Kubiak & Cortina, 2003) found high correlations for both genders between having incurred physical and/or psy-

chological abuse and depression, chemical dependency, and physical illness. In a pioneering study of 57 partner violent couples who had come to a clinic for counseling (Vivian & Langhinrichsen-Rohling, 1994), men and women rated the impact of receiving psychological abuse equally negatively, and reported “similar and elevated levels of depressive symptomology” (p. 118). Harned’s (2001) college dating sample reported that received emotional abuse (insults, humiliation, degradation), isolation, intimidation or threats and economic abuse predicted more types of psychological distress (depression, anxiety and PTSD) than physical aggression, for both male and female IPV victims.

According to Hamberger (2005), discrepancies in experienced fear are important because fear changes the dynamics of a relationship and promotes gender asymmetry:

A number of scholars in the field have identified fear induction as the primary mechanism through which partner achieves control ... that is, the victim is fearful of injury, death, or some other untoward consequence of the violence, and strives to bring their behavior into compliance with the demands of the abuser to end the violence or threat. (p. 133)

Because women report more fear, men are presumed to exercise more control. This is true to some extent, but the point may be overstated. First, as noted above, men are reluctant to express vulnerability of any kind, especially fear. Second, because of their greater ability to protect themselves, men generally have less reason to fear *physical* harm. However, considering that assaultive women often attack their partners when they are intoxicated, asleep or otherwise not expecting it (Mann, 1988), this point, too, is overstated. Moreover, there is no reason to believe that men are not equally afraid of *emotional* harm. The reader is asked to consider which partner’s behavior is the most inhibited, the woman who keeps quiet after her husband punches a hole in the wall and glares at her, or the man who keeps quiet out of fear that his wife will call him a “loser” in front of his friends, ridicule the size of his penis, or threaten to leave and take the children with her. The extent to which the use of emotional abuse and control actually inhibits a partner’s behavior or disrupts their daily activities is a question that has yet to be empirically investigated.

### *Minimization of Female-Perpetrated Violence*

In spite of the convincing evidence so far presented, many researchers minimize abuse against men, often drawing conclusions that seem unrelated to their own data. As discussed earlier, the women in Henning et al.’s (2003) study of BIP participants scored higher than the men on 8 of 14 Axis II personality disorders, many of them associated with IPV perpetration. The researchers did not ask the clients or their partners about assault rates or their motives for violence. They did ask about relationship satisfaction, which emerged as a factor for both the male and the female offenders. Based on this finding, and the male and female partners’ similar histories of childhood origin of abuse, the researchers came to this rather curious conclusion:



Although the rate of dissatisfaction was similar between the men and the women, it is possible that the reasons for their low relationship satisfaction are different. Female offenders are more likely to have been dually arrested than males (Henning & Feder, in press), and many of the women in reality may be victims rather than primary aggressors in their relationships. (p. 851)

In a study by Swan and Snow (2002) of 108 partner-violent women, the subjects admitted to having been more physically and emotionally assaultive than their partners, yet the authors determined that only 12 percent of these women were the aggressors. This dubious conclusion was reached because the authors accorded equal weight to isolation-type control tactics and acts of physical violence. As reported by the women, men used such tactics 75 percent more often. The women's use of violence and emotional abuse was not regarded as "coercive." The authors admit that the instrument used to gauge coercive control, the Psychological Maltreatment of Women Inventory, was designed to measure men's behaviors (for example, "Get upset if housework was not done when you wanted," and "Demand partner stay home and take care of the children"), and recommend that "a new scale particular to women's violence is needed" (p. 312). Despite this caution, they determined that the women were victims of abuse at a rate three times that of men. Women who assaulted and emotionally abused their mates were deemed "violent resisters" to male abuse. Self-defense is assumed, even though the women were never asked about it. "Women's violent behavior," the authors concluded, "can only be understood when placed in the context of their male partner's violence against them" (p. 310).

In the broader sense, they are correct. Consider the study by Langhinrichsen-Rohling, Neidig, and Thorn (1995), which found that 83 percent of men arrested for battering had been involved in mutually violent relationships, or the high rates of physical and psychological abuse by the female partners noted in the research by Stacey, Hazelwood, and Shupe (1994) on male batterers. With their study, Swan and Snow (2000) merely confirm the fact that most partner violence is mutual.

In the April, 2005, special issue of the journal *Violence and Victims*, Feder and Henning (2005) reported on a study of 317 couples dually arrested for IPV, most of them African-American. Criminal justice data revealed no differences between the partners in injuries inflicted or weapons used. Interview data revealed no differences in incidence of physical assault. Women were more likely to use a weapon, but to suffer slightly higher rates of injuries (19.6 percent vs. 15.0 percent). There were no gender differences in overall psychological abuse or coercive control tactics. However, because the men had more serious arrest records and history of substance abuse, and had engaged in higher rates of sexual coercion, the authors concluded:

The above findings could be used to argue that many of these dually arrested women might have been engaged in mutual combat but were instead defending themselves. While the design of the present study cannot ultimately answer whether the women were acting in self-defense, our

findings are consistent with past research indicating greater defensive aggression on the part of females. (p. 167)

Some of the women undoubtedly were acting in self-defense, but this study is more in line with past research, reviewed earlier in this paper, that found self-defense to be not a primary motive. The reader will note that the authors did not speculate as to whether many of the *men* may have been acting in self-defense.

In another article from that special issue, Kernsmith (2005) reported on a study which compared male and female participants in batterer treatment. Unlike the studies discussed above, this one specifically asked the subjects about self-defense. No significant differences were found between the genders in the frequency that each group reported self-defense as a motive for their violence. The women were more likely than the men to aggress for reasons of retaliation, to “discipline” their partner (“Get your partner to do what you wanted,” “Punish your partner”), and to exert power and control. Retaliation, however, was a more common motive for women than a desire to exert power and control. “These findings,” the authors concluded, “may indicate that females are not generally the primary aggressor in the abusive incidents and may, instead, be responding to a partner’s aggression” (p. 179). They do not mention that the men, too, were more likely to endorse retaliation over coercion.

### *Impact of Abuse on Children*

A number of researchers have investigated the effects that witnessing IPV has on children’s emotional development. Child witnesses have been found to be 5-7 times at greater risk to develop internalizing symptoms (depression, anxiety, PTSD) and externalizing symptoms (conduct disorder and academic problems) than other children (Cummings & Davies, 1994). Until very recently, this research has examined only the impact of father’s violence. Easy access to shelters, which serve exclusively female residents and their children, in combination with the stifling effects of the dominant patriarchal paradigm, no doubt accounted for this selective sampling. Fathers who hit their spouses were also found to be at greater risk for abusing their children and their violence was found to have a “spillover” effect on the family system, because the mother, stressed and depressed as a result of the beatings, sometimes neglected or abused the children herself (Wolak & Finkelhor, 1998).

In the past few years, a handful of studies have examined the role of both parents as perpetrators of IPV and child abuse. Witnessing IPV by either parent predicted dating violence in a study of 1,965 middle and high school students in rural North Carolina (Foshee, Bauman, & Linder, 1999). A sample of 232 families with an adolescent referred to a mental health clinic (Mahoney, Donnelly, Boxer, & Lewis, 2003) yielded significant correlations, based on mothers’ reports, between both father-to-mother and mother-to-father IPV and defiant, antisocial behavior by the adolescent. Based on adolescents’ reports, significant correlations were also found between parental IPV and adolescent internal distress. Moretti, Odgers, and Obsuth’s (2006) study of 112 delinquent juveniles found correlations between previous exposure to interparental aggres-

sion initiated by the mother and perpetration of dating violence by both boys and girls. There were no such effects for father-perpetrated IPV. An analysis of the first NFVS found that child witnesses to parental IPV also are at risk for assaulting their parents, especially the mothers, but only in families in which the IPV is either bidirectional or unilaterally perpetrated by the mother (Ullman & Straus, 2003). Research with adults disputing child custody (Johnston & Roseby, 1997) found other negative consequences of father- or mother-perpetrated IPV on the family, such as the blurring of boundaries between the parental and child subsystems.

Partner-assaultive mothers and fathers are equally likely to hit their children (Margolin & Gordis, 2003; Straus & Smith, 1990). Slep and O'Leary's (2005) representative sample study of 453 couples with young children in New York found that bi-directional partner aggression occurred in 65 percent of the families, and that 51 percent of couples engaged in both partner and child abuse. The "battering dad" pattern in which the father assaults the mother, and one or both parents physically abuse the child, accounted for only 2 percent of families with severe violence. Which type of abuse is most traumatic on children?

The domestic violence literature generally finds greater effects for witnessed IPV (Kitzmann, Gaylord, Holt, & Kenny, 2003). Some Child Protective Services (CPS) studies have found the opposite (Salzinger, Feldman, Ing-mak, Mojica, Stockhammer, & Rosario, 2002). English, Marshall, and Stewart (2003) reported on a cohort of 261 children and their mothers referred to CPS for parental abuse and neglect. The mothers were asked about IPV, perpetrated and received, as well as the extent to which they physically abused their children, to determine their effects on the children's adjustment as measured by the Child Behavior Checklist. Neither mother's depression nor levels of perpetrated or received IPV were significantly correlated with psychopathology in the child. But echoing similar findings from Moore and Pepler (1998), a significant effect *was* found for mother's verbal abuse of the child.

The effects of having grown up in a violent home, in which *either* of the parents is abusive, have a lasting impact on a child, increasing the likelihood that he or she will perpetrate IPV in adulthood. Both the partner-abusive men and partner-abusive women interviewed in Kaura and Allen's (2004) study of dating students had grown up in violent homes. The women were more likely to have experienced child abuse at the hands of their father, and the women to have experienced such abuse at the hands of their mother. Sommer's (1994) Winnepeg survey also found correlations between witnessing interparental abuse and adult intimate partner violence, as did Jankowski, Leitenberg, Henning, and Coffey's (1999) study of 1,576 dating college students. Research by Straus (1992) actually found higher IPV rates among adults who had witnessed mother-perpetrated violence, compared to violence perpetrated by fathers.

### The Future of IPV Research and Policy

Theoretical works by Felson (2002), Mills (2003), Dutton (2006) and others (see Hamel & Nicholls, 2007) call for radical changes in IPV theory and intervention. New clinical manuals (Hamel, 2005a; Hamel & Nicholls, 2007) offer alternative, research-

based intervention strategies that seek to more fairly and effectively address the problem of intimate partner abuse in the community. Additional research, according to Holtzworth-Munroe (2005) should

begin to consider the complex interrelationship and dyadic interactional processes between female and male violence within a relationship, hopefully leading to better understanding of the relationship between these two forms of aggression. Finally, others in the field may choose to study only female violence, as there is a strong need for the development of theories and the gathering of data regarding female aggression .... We should not have to continue work comparing violent males and females (in our attempt to prove that male violence is worse); rather, some researchers should now feel free to study female aggression as a topic in its own right. (p. 258)

We would also call for further research on the effects of IPV on the family system. In the meantime, however, it has become evident that “the science has moved well beyond the policy. It is time for the policy to change” (Dutton & Corvo, 2005, p. 32). There is no doubt that women are physically affected more by IPV than are men, suffering a greater share of injuries, especially those that are life-threatening. Because of this and women’s greater fear of physical harm, it cannot be said that “domestic violence is the same” between the genders. However, in light of similar etiology, the comparable rates of both physical and psychological abuse and coercive tactics, and how they affect men and women, the consequences of mother-perpetrated IPV on children, the family system, and the intergenerational transmission of violence, women’s higher rates of injuries ought not be cited as an excuse to maintain the status quo. Women suffer greater physical injury not because men are meaner or more privileged, pathological or controlling, and “not necessarily because men strike more often, but because men strike harder” (Morse, 1995, p. 269). That men strike harder means that safety planning should be a relatively greater concern for female victims and that women will require the greater share of shelter beds. It does not, however, justify the disproportionately high rates of arrest and mandatory treatment for men relative to women (Hamel, 2005b; Price & Rosenbaum, 2007), or the scant availability of services for male victims (Young, Cook, Smith, Turteltaub, & Hazlewood, 2007). Surely, we can do better.

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