

25-26). Men's physical violence against women is accompanied by a range of other coercive and controlling behaviors. Domestic violence is both an expression of men's power over women and children and a means through which that power is maintained. Men too are subject to domestic violence at the hands of female and male sexual partners, ex-partners, and other family members. Yet there is no "gender symmetry" in domestic violence; there are important differences between men's and women's typical patterns of victimization; and domestic violence represents only a small proportion of the violence to which men are subject.

Domestic violence was first placed on the public agenda through the activism of the women's movements. The term *domestic violence* refers to interpersonal violence enacted in domestic settings, family relationships, and intimate relationships, and is most readily applied to violence by a man to his wife, or female sexual partner or ex-partner. However, *domestic violence* is used also to denote violence between same-sex sexual partners, among family members (including siblings and parent-child violence either way), and by women against male partners. Three other terms commonly applied to some or all of these forms of violence are *family violence*, *men's violence against women*, and *intimate violence*, while newer terms include *relationship violence* and *partner violence*. Each of the six terms excludes some forms of violence, is accompanied by certain theoretical and political claims, and is subject to shifting meanings in the context of both academic and popular understandings.

Focusing on domestic violence, many definitions center on violence between sexual partners or ex-partners, excluding parent-child, sibling-sibling, and adolescent-parent violence (Macdonald 1998, 10). "Domestic" violence often takes place in nondomestic settings, such as when young women experience dating violence in a boyfriend's car or other semipublic place. Definitions of domestic violence or partner violence may ex-

Domestic Violence

Investigations of domestic violence reveal significant relationships between interpersonal violence, masculinity, and gendered power relations. One in five women and one in fourteen men has been physically assaulted by a current or former intimate partner in their lifetimes (Tjaden and Thoennes 2000,

(pp. 234 - 239)

clude violence in relationships where the sexual partners have neither married nor cohabited (Jasinski and Williams 1998, x). Domestic violence is often understood as distinct from sexual violence, but the two often are intertwined in violence against women by male partners or ex-partners. While the phrase "family violence" more clearly includes violence against children and between family members, its utility is affected by how one understands the term "family" (Macdonald 1998, 12-13). Some feminists criticize both the terms *domestic violence* and *family violence* for deflecting attention from the sex of the likely perpetrator (male), likely victim (female), and the gendered character of the violence (Maynard and Winn 1997, 180). Yet the alternative phrase *men's violence against women* excludes violence against children or men and by women. The names chosen to describe and explain forms of interpersonal violence will never perfectly contain the phenomenon (Macdonald 1998, 36), and any act of naming involves methodological, theoretical, and political choices.

The word *violence* refers in the first instance to any "act carried out with the intention or perceived intention of causing physical pain or injury to another person" (Gelles 1997, 14). It may be tempting therefore to define domestic violence in terms of the presence of physically violent behavior by an individual to another person with whom they have or have had a sexual, intimate, or familial relationship. This approach is adopted by one school within domestic violence research, "family conflict" studies, in which domestic violence is measured using a tool titled the Conflict Tactics Scale (CTS). The CTS asks one partner in a relationship whether, in the last year, he or she or his or her spouse has ever committed any of a range of violent acts toward the other such as hit with a fist or an object; slapped, shaken, or kicked.

In one sense, any physical aggression between sexual partners or ex-partners rightly

can be named domestic violence, as this communicates the message that such violence is unacceptable. However, this definition can obscure important variations in the meaning, consequences, and context of violent behaviors in relationships. Some heterosexual relationships suffer from occasional outbursts of violence by either husbands or wives during conflicts, what Johnson (1995) terms "common couple violence" (284-285). Here, the violence is relatively minor, both partners practice it, it is expressive in meaning, it tends not to escalate over time, and injuries are rare. In situations of "patriarchal terrorism" on the other hand, one partner (usually the man) uses violence and other controlling tactics to assert power and authority or to restore them when they are perceived to be breaking down. The violence is more severe, it is asymmetrical, it is instrumental in meaning, it tends to escalate, and injuries are more likely.

In the typical situation of male-to-female domestic violence, the man's physical aggression is accompanied by a wide range of other abusive, controlling, and harmful behaviors. He threatens his partner with the use of violence against her or their children, sexually assaults her, and intimidates her with frightening gestures, destruction of property, and showing weapons. He isolates her and monitors her behavior, which increases his control, increases her emotional dependence on him, and makes it easier to perpetrate and hide physical abuse. He practices insults, mind games, and emotional manipulation such that the victim's self-esteem is undermined and she feels she has no other options outside the relationship. Finally, he minimizes and denies the extent of his violent behavior, disavows responsibility for his actions, and blames the victim for the abuse (Gamache 1990, 74-79). Such efforts, while certainly not always successful, make it more likely that the woman will follow his rules and even act against her own best interests.

Recognition of such patterns informs some feminist authors' argument that do-

mestic violence or intimate partner abuse can be best understood as chronic behavior that is characterized not by the episodes of physical violence that punctuate the relationship but by the emotional and psychological abuse that the perpetrator uses to maintain control over his or her partner. In fact, many female victims report that the physical violence they suffer is less damaging than the relentless psychological abuse that cripples and isolates them.

Why do some men use violence against women? Feminist scholarship rejects traditional explanations in terms of the actions of "sick" or "deviant" individuals, in which men's violence is pathologized and individualized (Maynard and Winn 1997, 182-184). Instead, domestic violence is seen to be perpetrated by normal men in normal families. In fact, men's violence against women is "normalized" in some contexts, in that it is the expression of violence-supportive cultural values, gendered power relations, and gender roles.

Feminist scholarship also rejects victim-blaming accounts in which women are said to "provoke" or "precipitate" violence against them by their actions, inaction, dress, or other characteristics. Instead, responsibility for violent behavior rests with the perpetrator. Feminist discussions are critical of accounts of domestic violence in terms of men's uncontrollable rage and failure to "manage their anger," pointing to the fact that men who abuse their partners choose with great care where, when, and how they will be violent (Pringle 1995, 101).

Feminist explanations of domestic violence have centered on male dominance, patriarchal ideologies of male supremacy and entitlement, and constructions of masculinity as aggressive and sexist. However, there is a growing emphasis on multivariate explanations, in which it is assumed that men's violence against women is "a multifaceted phenomenon grounded in an interplay among personal, situational, and sociocultural factors" (Heise 1998, 263-264). While such frameworks doc-

ument empirical relationships at multiple levels of the social order between the organization of masculinity and violence, they also begin to integrate biological, psychological, and interactional risk factors for domestic violence, synthesizing what has been a fragmented literature (O'Neil and Harway 1999, 220-230).

Violence against women is more likely in cultures in which manhood is culturally defined as linked to dominance, toughness, or male honor. In contexts where "being a man" involves aggressiveness, the repression of empathy, and a sense of entitlement to power, those men who are violent are acting out the dictates of what it means to be a "normal" male. Men with more traditional, rigid, and hostile gender-role attitudes are more likely to practice marital violence (O'Neil and Harway 1999, 192; Heise 1998, 278). Further predictors of domestic violence include a male sense of ownership of women, cultural approval for physical punishment of women, and the condoning of violence as a means to settle interpersonal disputes.

At the level of social networks and communities, social isolation is both a cause and a consequence of domestic violence, with higher rates of violence in contexts where family and community members do not intervene, husband-wife relations are seen as private, and women have poor family and friendship networks. Poverty increases the risk of abuse by providing fodder for relationship disagreements, making it harder for women to leave, and involving crowding, hopelessness, and stress (Heise 1998, 273-277). Especially among young men, attachment to male peers who encourage and legitimate woman abuse is a significant predictor of domestic violence (Heise 1998, 277).

At the level of the immediate context in which domestic violence takes place, there are further relationships between masculinity, power, and domestic violence. Cross-culturally, male economic and decision-making

dominance in the family is one of the strongest predictors of societies showing high levels of violence against women (Heise 1998, 270–271). Wife abuse is more likely in couples with a clearly dominant husband and in societies in which men control the wealth, especially the fruits of family labor (Heise 1998, 271).

Domestic violence is also shaped by race, class, sexuality, and other social divisions. The lives of female victims who are poor, of color, lesbian, disabled, or in prostitution are seen as less “valuable” or “innocent” than the lives of women who are privileged, white, heterosexual, and so on (Russo 2001, 11–12). In turn, male perpetrators are more likely to be held accountable and criminalized if they are poor or men of color. Media and public discourses represent domestic violence by black men in terms of the interrelations of violence, blackness, and criminality, while white men’s crimes are depicted as individual and unique (Russo 2001, 147–162). Histories of colonization, marginalization, and the disintegration of family and community structures shape interpersonal violence in general and domestic violence in particular in indigenous communities and ethnic group families (Sanchez-Hucles and Dutton 1999). Racism and classism are the context for the greater scrutiny, control, and criminalization by the police and the criminal justice and welfare systems to which poor people and people of color are subjected, and limit the ability and willingness of individuals and communities to report or respond to domestic violence.

Debates regarding the “gender symmetry” of domestic violence are an important focus of recent scholarship. Crime victimization studies (based on large-scale aggregate data from household and crime surveys and police statistics) find that men assault their partners and ex-partners at rates several times the rate at which women assault theirs and female victims greatly outnumber male victims (Tjaden and Thoennes 2000, 25–26). On the other hand, family conflict studies measuring aggressive behavior in married

and cohabiting couples find gender symmetries in the use of violence (Archer 2000).

The contrast between these findings is the product of differing samples and particularly of different definitions and measurements of domestic violence. The claim that domestic violence is gender-symmetrical is supported primarily by studies using the Conflict Tactics Scale (CTS). Yet the CTS is widely criticized for not eliciting information about the intensity, context, or meaning of the violent act, ignoring who initiates the violence, assuming that violence is used expressively (e.g. in anger) and not instrumentally (to “do” power or control), omitting violent acts such as sexual abuse, stalking, and intimate homicide, ignoring the history of violence in the relationship, neglecting the question of who is injured, relying on only one partner’s reports despite poor interspousal reliability, and omitting incidents after separation and divorce, which is a time of increased danger for women.

Comparative data from Canada and Australia further illuminate both apparent gender symmetries and actual asymmetries in experiences of domestic violence. While the Canadian General Social Survey found that 7 to 8 percent of both women and men experienced some form of family violence, both this and a recent Australian study also documented that women were far more likely than men to be subjected to frequent, prolonged, and extreme violence, to sustain injuries, to fear for their lives, and to be sexually assaulted (Kimmel 2001, 19; Bagshaw et al. 2000). The Australian study noted, too, that men subjected to domestic violence by women rarely experience postseparation violence and have more financial and social independence. Female perpetrators of domestic violence are less likely and less able than male perpetrators to use nonphysical tactics to maintain control over their partners (Swan and Snow 2002, 291–292). As with female victims of domestic violence, research among male victims finds that forms of emotional, verbal, and psychological abuse are perceived

to be at least as harmful as physical violence (Hines and Malley-Morrison 2001).

Women's physical violence towards intimate male partners is largely in self-defense, according to studies among female perpetrators (DeKeseredy et al. 1997; Hamberger et al. 1994; Swan and Snow 2002, 301) and men presenting to hospital emergency departments with injuries inflicted by their female partners (Muelleman and Burgess 1998, 866). On the other hand, women's intimate violence can also be motivated by efforts to show anger and other feelings, and a desire for attention or retaliation for emotional hurt, jealousy, and control (Hamberger et al. 1994), and CTS-based studies find significant proportions of couples characterized by female-only violence (Hines and Malley-Morrison 2001, 78–80). It is inadequate to explain women's violence simply in terms of their own oppression and powerlessness, and naive to assume that women are immune from using violence to gain or maintain power in relationships (Russo 2001, 16–19).

Some authors argue that men are likely to underestimate and underreport their subjection to domestic violence by women, because admitting such vulnerability is emasculating (George 1994, 149; Stockdale 1998, 63). There is no evidence, however, that male victims are more likely to underreport than female victims. In fact, men tend to overestimate their partner's violence and underestimate their own, while women do the reverse (Kimmel 2001, 10–11).

Men are victims of domestic violence also in gay male relationships, and such violence has distinctive dynamics in the context of a homophobic society (Vickers 1996). Theorizations of domestic violence in gay male relationships tend to draw on frameworks for understanding men's domestic violence against women, stressing the similarities between gay and heterosexual male batterers. For Cruz (2000, 77–79) and Island and Lettelier (1991, 50–51), gay men's abusive behavior is an expression of the social in-

tertwining of masculinity with aggressive domination, in which men "doing gender" means enacting power, toughness, domination, and control.

Further shifts in recent scholarship include the theorization of the agency of and strategies of management and resistance used by women living with domestic violence, more complex typologies of perpetrators, and greater attention to the ways in which criminal justice systems and other institutions do and should respond to domestic violence.

Michael Flood

See also Batterer Intervention Programs; Battering; White Ribbon Campaign; "Wife Beaters"

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A Social, Cultural, and
Historical Encyclopedia

Volume I: A—J

*Edited by Michael Kimmel
and Amy Aronson*

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