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Women's Violence Toward Men Is a Serious Social Problem

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The first purpose of this chapter is to review research showing that women initiate and carry out physical assaults on their partners as often as do men. A second purpose is to show that, despite the much

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lower probability of physical injury resulting from attacks by women, women produce a substantial percentage of all injuries and fatalities from partner violence.

"Minor" assaults perpetrated by women are also a major problem, even when they do not result in injury, because they put women in danger of much more severe retaliation by men. They also help perpetuate the implicit cultural norms that make the marriage license a hitting license (Straus & Hotaling, 1980). It will be argued that in order to end "wife beating," it is essential for women also to end what many regard as a "harmless" pattern of slapping, kicking, or throwing something at a male partner who persists in some outrageous behavior and "won't listen to reason."

The chapter focuses on physical assaults, even though they are not necessarily the most damaging type of abuse. One can hurt a partner deeply—even drive them to suicide—without ever lifting a finger. Verbal aggression may be even more damaging than physical attacks (Vissing, Straus, Gelles, & Harrop, 1991). This chapter focuses exclusively on physical assaults because, with rare exception, the controversy has been focused on this type of violence by women. Detailed methodological and sociology of science analyses of the controversy can be found in Felson (2002) and Straus (1999).

❖ DEFINING AND MEASURING ASSAULT

The National Crime Panel Report defined *assault* as "an unlawful physical attack by one person upon another" (U.S. Department of Justice, 1976). It is important to note that neither this definition, nor the definition used for reporting assaults to the FBI (Federal Bureau of Investigation, 1995), requires injury or bodily contact. Nevertheless, injury will be considered in this chapter for two reasons. First, the presence of injury makes a difference in what the police, prosecutors, and juries do. Second, numerous studies show that a substantial proportion of serious injuries and homicides of partners are perpetrated by women.

❖ GENDER DIFFERENCES IN PARTNER ASSAULT AND HOMICIDE

Violence by women against male partners has been a difficult and controversial issue caused by differences in research methodologies

and in moral agendas (Straus, 1999). One of the major discrepancies in research is between what can be called "family conflict" studies, such as the National Family Violence Surveys, and "crime studies," such as the National Crime Victimization Survey. Family conflict studies ask respondents about problems and conflicts in their *family*, while crime studies focus on examining police reports or asking respondents if they have been victims of *crime*.

Without exception, family conflict studies find approximately equal rates of assaults by women and men (Archer, 2000; Fiebert, 1997). In comparison, and also without exception, crime studies find much higher rates of assaults by men. Family conflict and crime studies also yield extremely different answers to questions about the overall prevalence of assaults on partners: Crime studies find a fraction of the rates found by family conflict studies. Both the low overall rate of assault and the high percentage of assaults by men found in crime studies probably occur because crime studies deal with only the small part of all domestic assaults that study respondents experience as a "crime." Assaults perceived as crimes rather than as "family fights" occur relatively rarely and involve perpetration by men much more often than by women (Straus, 1999).

Family Conflict Studies

National Family Violence Surveys. These studies have obtained data from nationally representative samples of 2,143 married and cohabiting couples in 1975 and 6,002 couples in 1985. In both surveys, the rate of female-to-male assault was slightly higher than the rate of male-to-female assault (Straus & Gelles, 1986, 1990). Because the seeming equality in assault rates may occur because of a tendency by men to underreport their own assaults (Dutton, 1988; Stets & Straus, 1990), the assault rates were recomputed for this chapter on the basis of information provided by the 2,994 women in the 1985 National Family Violence Survey. The resulting overall rate for assaults by women was 124 per 1,000 couples, as compared to 122 per 1,000 for assaults by men *as reported by their female partners*. This difference is not great enough to be statistically reliable.

Separate rates were also computed for minor and severe assaults. The rate of minor assaults by women was 78 per 1,000 couples, compared with a rate for men of 72 per 1,000. The severe assault rate was 46 per 1,000 couples for assaults by women and 50 per 1,000 for

assaults by men. Neither difference is statistically significant. Since these rates are based exclusively on information provided by women respondents, the near-equality in assault rates cannot be attributed to a gender bias in reporting.

Other Family Violence Surveys. There have been more than 100 family violence surveys, which have used a variety of measures and reported similar results. This includes research by respected scholars such as Scanzoni (1978) and O'Leary, Malone, and Tyree (1994); and large-scale studies such as the Los Angeles Epidemiology Catchment Area study (Sorenson & Telles, 1991), the National Survey of Households and Families (Brush, 1990), the Dunedin, New Zealand, birth cohort study (Moffitt, Caspi, Rutter, & Silva, 2001), and a statewide survey conducted for the Kentucky Commission on Women.

The Kentucky study raises a troublesome question of scientific ethics, because it is one of several in which the data on assaults by women were intentionally suppressed. The existence of that data became known only because Hornung, McCullough, and Sugimoto (1981) obtained the computer tape and found that, among the violent couples, 38 percent were attacks by women on men who, as reported by the women themselves, had not attacked them. More often, the strategy to maintain the myth that partner assault is exclusively a male crime has been to omit questions that ask about violence by women, as for example in the Canadian National Survey of Violence against Women.

Samples of "Battered Women." Studies of residents in shelters for battered women are sometimes cited to show that it is only male partners who are violent. However, these studies display the pattern of deception and cover-up noted in the previous paragraph. They rarely obtain or report information on assaults by women; and when they do, they ask only about women's use of violence in self-defense. One of the few exceptions is Walker (1984), who found that 1 out of 4 women in battering relationships responded affirmatively when asked if she had "used physical force to get something you wanted" (p. 174). Giles-Sims (1983) also found that in the year prior to coming to a shelter, 50 percent of the women reported assaulting their partner, and in the six months after leaving the shelter, 41.7 percent reported an assault against a partner. Giles-Sims's case study data suggest that is not likely these assaults were in self-defense.

Dating Couples. Sugarman and Hotaling (1989) summarized the results of 21 studies of violence in dating relationships. They found an average assault rate of 329 per 1,000 for men and 393 per 1,000 for women; that is, a higher proportion of females than males self-reported perpetrating an assault on a dating partner. Other studies (Pirog-Good & Stets, 1989; Stets & Straus, 1990) further confirm the equal or higher rate of assault by women in dating relationships. The most extensive of these is the International Dating Violence Study. Preliminary results based on research on more than 8,000 couples at 33 universities in 16 countries show that the pattern of equal or higher rates of violence by women is a worldwide phenomenon (Straus & Members of the International Dating Violence Research Consortium, 2004).

Crime Studies

National Crime Victimization Survey. Conducted for the Department of Justice by the Bureau of the Census, the National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS) is an annual study of approximately 60,000 households. In comparison to family violence surveys, the NCVS finds a very low prevalence rate of assault: fewer than 10 per 1,000 couples. The NCVS rate for assaults by female partners was 11 per 1,000, and for male partners 77 per 1,000. Thus, according to the NCVS, the rate of domestic assaults by men is seven times greater than the rate of assault by female partners.

The extremely low rate of assaults by both men and women found by the NCVS may occur because the NCVS is presented to respondents as a study of *crime*. The problem is that it takes relatively rare circumstances, such as an injury or an attack by a former partner, to perceive an attack as a "crime" (Langan & Innes, 1986). This is probably why the NCVS produces such totally implausible statistics such as a 75 percent injury rate (compared with an injury rate of less than 3 percent in the family violence surveys), and more assaults by former partners than by current partners.

Police Calls. Data on calls to the police about domestic assaults are biased in ways that are similar to the bias of the National Crime Survey. Like the NCVS, at least 93 percent of the cases are missed (Kaufman Kantor & Straus, 1990), probably because there was no injury or fear of serious injury great enough to warrant calling the police. Since the cases for which police are called tend to involve injury, or chronic severe assault, and because that tends to be a male pattern, assaults by

women rarely are recorded in police records. Another reason assaults by women are rare in police statistics is that many men are reluctant to involve the police (Felson, 2002) and admit that they cannot "handle their wife." These artifacts produce a rate of assaults by men that is hugely greater than the rate of assault by women.

National Violence Against Women Survey (NVAW). Sponsored by the National Institute of Justice and the Centers for Disease Control, the NVAW surveyed 8,000 women and 8,000 men representing 16,000 households (Tjaden & Thoennes, 2000). The initially released results reported that men physically assaulted their female partners at three times the rate at which women engaged in such behavior. This was interpreted as evidence showing that domestic violence is a male crime. There were, however, several problems with this widely disseminated conclusion. First, although the rate of perpetration by men was three times greater, an unbiased interpretation would have also noted that women committed a third of domestic assaults—one-third of offenders cannot be ignored. Second, buried in publications released a year later was a table giving the past-year prevalence rates, as contrasted with the lifetime prevalence rates released earlier. Past-year prevalence rates are the most usual way of reporting crime statistics, and they are considered to be more accurate because they do not depend on recall of events long past. When past-year prevalence rates are used, women committed 39 percent of the partner assaults. Third, the NVAW survey was presented to respondents as a study of crime and personal safety, and therefore respondents were implicitly encouraged to restrict their reports to "real crimes," thus excluding most instances of assault by a partner, and especially "harmless" assaults by women. Thus, a study that, in my opinion, was carried out to refute the idea of gender symmetry in partner violence instead gave strong support to the conclusion that women physically attack partners at about the same rate as do men.

Partner Homicide Rates. Homicides are widely believed to be the most completely recorded crime and therefore to be relatively free from the reporting biases just described. Homicide rates published by the FBI show that only 14 percent of homicide offenders are women (Federal Bureau of Investigation, 1988). However, the percentage of women offenders varies tremendously according to the relationship between offender and victim.

Female-perpetrated homicides of *strangers* occur at a rate that is less than a twentieth the male rate. The female share goes up somewhat for murders of *acquaintances*. As for murders of *family members*, women commit them at a rate that is almost half the rate of men in the period 1976–79 and more than a third of the male rate during the period 1980–84. However, “family” includes all relatives, whereas the main focus of this chapter is couples. There are two gender-specific estimates of the rates for partner homicides (Browne & Williams, 1989; Straus, 1986). These two studies found that women murder male partners at rates that are 56 percent and 62 percent as great as the rate of partner homicides by men. This is far from equality, but it indicates that, in partner relationships, even when the assaults are so extreme as to result in death, a substantial proportion are committed by women, whereas as noted previously, for murders of strangers, the female rate is only a twentieth of the male rate.

❖ SHOULD INJURY BE PART OF
THE DEFINITION OF PARTNER VIOLENCE?

As pointed out elsewhere (Straus, 1980), female assault rates based on the Conflict Tactics Scales (CTS) used in the Family Violence Surveys can be misleading if the study does not also examine the purpose of the violence and the injuries resulting from assaults. The 1985 National Family Violence Survey included questions on who initiated violence and questions on injuries. The revised CTS (Straus, Hamby, Boney-McCoy, & Sugarman, 1996) includes supplemental questions on injury.

Injury-Adjusted Rates. Stets and Straus (1990) and Brush (1990) provide data that can be used to adjust the assault rates to take into account whether or not the assault resulted in an injury. Stets and Straus found a rate of 3 percent for injury-producing assaults by men and 0.4 percent for injury-producing assaults by women. Somewhat lower injury rates were found by Brush for another large national sample: 1.2 percent for injury-producing assaults by men and 0.2 percent for injury-producing assaults by women. An “injury-adjusted” rate was computed using the higher of the two injury estimates. The resulting rate of “injury-producing assaults” by men is 3.7 per 1,000, and the rate of injury-producing assaults by women is much lower: 0.6 per 1,000. Thus, the injury-adjusted rate for assaults by men is six times greater than the rate of domestic assaults by women.

Although the injury-adjusted rates highlight the greater injury inflicted by male offenders, there are several disadvantages to rates based on injury (Straus, 1990, pp. 79–83). One of the disadvantages, for example, is that the criterion of injury contradicts the domestic assault legislation and new police policies, which are major achievements in the efforts to end violence against women. These statutes and policies premise restraining orders and encourage arrest on the basis of attacks. The woman does not have to suffer an observable injury for action to be taken.

Another disadvantage of using injury as a criterion for domestic assault is that injury-based rates omit the 97 percent of assaults by men that do not result in injury but that are nonetheless a serious social problem. Without an adjustment for injury, National Family Violence Survey produces an estimate of more than 6 million women assaulted by a male partner each year, of which 1.8 million are “severe” assaults (Straus & Gelles, 1990). If the injury-adjusted rate is used, the estimate is reduced to 188,000 assaulted women per year. The figure of 1.8 million seriously assaulted women each year has been used in many legislative hearings and countless feminist publications to indicate the prevalence of the problem. If that estimate was replaced by 188,000, it would understate the extent of the problem and could handicap efforts to educate the public and secure funding for shelters and other services. Fortunately, that is not necessary. Both estimates can be used, since each highlights a different aspect of the problem.

❖ SELF-DEFENSE AND ASSAULTS BY WOMEN

For many years I explained the high rate of attacks on partners by female partners as largely a *response* to or a defense against assault by their partner. However, new evidence raises questions about that interpretation.

Homicide

For lethal assaults by women, some studies suggest that a substantial proportion are self-defense, retaliation, or acts of desperation following years of brutal victimization (Browne, 1987; Browne & Williams, 1989; Jurik & Gregware, 1989). However, Jurik and Gregware’s (1989) investigation of 24 cases in which women killed male partners found that the victim initiated use of physical force in 40 percent of the

cases, and that only 21 percent were in response to "prior abuse" or "threat of abuse/death." They also found that 60 percent of the women had a previous criminal record. Likewise, Mann's (1990) study of the circumstances surrounding partner homicides by women shows that many women who murder their partners are impulsive, violent, and have criminal records.

National Family Violence Survey

Female-Only Violence. Of the 495 couples in the 1985 National Family Violence Survey for whom one or more assaults were reported by a woman respondent, the man was the only violent partner in 25.9 percent of the cases; the female partner was the only one to be violent in 25.5 percent of the cases; and both were violent in 48.6 percent of the cases. Thus, a minimum estimate of violence by women that is *not* self-defense because she is the only one to have used violence in the past 12 months is 25 percent. Brush (1990) reports similar results for the couples in the National Survey of Families and Households and the National Comorbidity Study.

Perhaps the real gender difference occurs in assaults that are severe enough to carry a high risk of causing an injury, such as punching, kicking, and attacks with weapons. This hypothesis was investigated using the 211 women who reported one or more instances of a "severe" assault. The resulting percentages were similar: Both used violence in 35.2 percent, male only in 35.2 percent, and female only in 29.6 percent.

Regardless of whether the analysis is based on all assaults or is focused on dangerous assaults, about as many women as men attacked a partner who had *not* hit them during the one-year referent period. This is inconsistent with the "self-defense" explanation for the high rate of domestic assault by women. However, it is possible that, among the couples where both assaulted, all the women were acting in self-defense. Even if that unlikely assumption were correct, it would still remain that 25–30 percent of violent relationships are violent solely because of attacks by the female partner.

Initiation of Attacks. The 1985 National Family Violence Survey asked respondents, "Let's talk about the last time you and your partner got into a physical fight and . . . (the most severe act previously mentioned) . . . happened. In that particular instance, who started the physical conflict,

you or your partner?" According to the 446 women involved in a violent relationship, their partners struck the first blow in 42.3 percent of the cases, they hit first in 53.1 percent of the cases, and they could not remember or could not disentangle who hit first in the remaining 3.1 percent of the cases. Similar results were obtained by other studies (Archer, 2000).

Is the High Rate of Assault by Women Explainable as Self-Defense?

It is remarkable that when research does not preclude the possibility of women being the instigators of violence by omitting data on female perpetrators, every study finds that women initiate violence in a large proportion of cases. Let us assume that many of the assaults initiated by women are in response to fear derived from a long prior history of victimization. Even if that is the case, it is a response that tends to elicit further assaults by male partners (Bowker, 1983; Feld & Straus, 1989; Gelles & Straus, 1988, chap. 7; Straus, 1974) and therefore helps to perpetuate or increase partner violence.

❖ GENDER AND CHRONICITY OF ASSAULT

Although the prevalence rate of assaults by women is about the same as that for men, men may engage in more *repeated* attacks. This hypothesis was investigated by computing the mean number of assaults among couples for which at least one assault was reported by a female respondent. According to these 495 women, their partners averaged 7.2 assaults during the year, and they themselves averaged six assaults. Although the frequency of assault by men is greater than the frequency of assault by women, the difference is not large enough to be statistically dependable. If the analysis is restricted to the 165 cases of severe assault, the men averaged 6.1 and the women 4.3 assaults, which is a 42 percent greater frequency of severe assault by men and is just short of being statistically significant. If one disregards the tests of statistical significance, these comparisons support the hypothesized greater chronicity of violence by men. At the same time, the fact that the average number of assaults by men is higher should not obscure the fact that the violent *women* carried out an average of six minor and five severe assaults per year, indicating a repetitive pattern by women as well as men.

❖ CONTEXT, MEANING, AND MOTIVES

The symmetry between males and females in the number and severity of assaults, important as it is, ignores the context, meaning, and consequences of these assaults. Feminist scholars believe that there are important differences between men and women in the motivation for assaults on a partner. However, less injury seems to be the only difference that has been well documented by empirical research. A few studies suggest, but do not demonstrate, differences in context, meaning, or motives. For example, a meta-analysis of research on gender differences in aggression by Eagly and Steffen (1986) found no overall difference in aggression by men and women, but less aggression by women if the act would produce harm to the target. From this, one can infer that women are more reluctant to inflict injury. Greenblat (1983) interpreted her data as showing that men typically hit or threaten to hit in order to force some specific behavior on pain of injury, whereas women typically slap a partner or pound on his chest as an expression of outrage or in frustration from his having turned a deaf ear toward repeated attempts to discuss some critical issue. Despite the surface difference, both are uses of physical violence for coercion. One of the very few empirical studies to investigate the motives for partner violence by women found that the predominant explanation offered by the women in the study was to coerce the partners into doing something (Fiebert & Gonzalez, 1997). A careful review of the research by Felson (2002) led to the conclusion that there was no clear evidence indicating differences in the context, meaning, and motives for assaults by male and female partners. Moreover, even if there were differences in context, meanings, and motives, that would not indicate the absence of assault by women. Nor would it refute the hypothesis that assaults by women help legitimize male violence. Only empirical research can resolve that issue.

❖ FEMALE OFFENDERS CAUSE SUBSTANTIAL INJURY AND DEATH

It is important to realize that, although the rate of injury inflicted by women is lower, it is a large enough proportion of the injuries and deaths to be a severe social and public health problem by itself. Studies have found that 12–40 percent of injuries and homicides are inflicted by women. The NVAW survey found that women's violence led to

40 percent of all the past year's injuries, created 27 percent of the injuries requiring medical attention, and accounted for 38 percent of the victims who lost time from work and 31 percent of the victims who feared bodily injury (Tjaden & Thoennes, 2000). Other research has found that women's violence resulted in 12 percent of assault-related injuries requiring medical attention (Stets & Straus, 1990), 50 percent of injuries needing medical attention among a sample of high school students (Molidor & Tolman, 1998), 40 percent of injuries suffered by college student dating partners (Makepeace, 1989), and a third of all homicides of domestic partners (Rennison, 2000).

The fact that men inflict a larger percentage of the severe injuries and deaths does not diminish that the proportion perpetrated by women is a serious health, crime, and family problem.

❖ VIOLENCE BY WOMEN INCREASES THE PROBABILITY OF VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

There seems to be an implicit cultural norm permitting or encouraging minor assaults by women in certain circumstances. Stark and McEvoy (1970) found about equal support for a wife hitting a husband as for a husband hitting a wife; Greenblat (1983) found that both men and women are *more* accepting of women hitting husbands than of husbands hitting wives, and she suggests this is because female aggressors are far less likely to do physical harm. These norms tolerating low-level violence by women are transmitted and learned in many ways. For example, even casual observation of the mass media suggests that just about every day, there are scenes depicting a man who makes an insulting or outrageous statement and an indignant woman who responds by "slapping the cad." This presents an implicit model of assault as a morally correct behavior to millions of women.

Although the previous section of this chapter demonstrated that women are responsible for an important proportion of serious injuries and deaths of partners, I assume that most of the assaults by women fall into the "slap the cad" genre and are not intended to, and only rarely cause, physical injury. The danger to women is shown by studies finding that minor violence by women increases the probability of severe assaults by men (Bowker, 1983; Feld & Straus, 1989; Gelles & Straus, 1988, pp. 146–156). Sometimes this is immediate and severe retaliation. But regardless of whether that occurs, a more indirect and

probably more important effect may occur because such morally correct slapping acts out and reinforces the traditional tolerance of assault in marriage. The moral justification of assault implicit when a woman slaps or throws something at a partner for something outrageous reinforces the moral justification for slapping *her* when she is doing something outrageous, being obstinate, nasty, or "not listening to reason" as he sees it. To the extent that this is correct, one of the many steps needed for primary prevention of assaults on women is for women to forsake even "harmless" physical attacks on male partners and children. Women must insist on nonviolence by their sisters, just as they rightfully insist on it for men.

It is painful to recognize the high rate of domestic assaults by women. Moreover, the statistics are likely to be used by misogynists and apologists for male violence. My view of recognizing violence by women is parallel to Hart's (1986, p. 10) view on the importance of recognizing battering within lesbian relationships. It is painful, but to do otherwise obstructs a potentially important means of reducing assaults by men—raising the consciousness of women about the implicit norms that are reinforced by a ritualized slap for outrageous behavior on the part of their partners.

It follows from this discussion that efforts to prevent assaults by men must also include attention to assaults by women. Although this may seem like "victim blaming," there is an important difference: Recognizing that violence by women is one of the many causes of violence against women does not justify violence by men. It is the responsibility of men as well as women to refrain from physical attacks (including retaliation), at home as elsewhere, no matter what the provocation.

❖ GENDER DIFFERENCES IN TRENDS IN PARTNER VIOLENCE

The acceptability of hitting a partner and the actual rate of partner violence in the United States has been decreasing in the past 25 years. This decrease has been primarily in violence by male partners (Straus, 1995; Straus & Gelles, 1986; Straus & Kaufman Kantor, 1997). Yet despite the decrease, partner violence by both men and women remains the most frequent form of interpersonal violence in American society.

The fact that violence and approval of violence by male partners has decreased, whereas violence and approval of violence by female

partners has not, may reflect the fact that almost all programs to end partner violence were created by and continue to be a major effort of the women's movement. Consequently, they are based on the assumption that partner violence is perpetrated almost exclusively by men. The voluminous research summarized in this chapter shows that this assumption is false. Most partner violence is mutual. Therefore, as indicated previously, rather than ignoring assaults by female partners, primary prevention of violence *against* women requires strong efforts to end assaults *by* women. However, the needed change must be made with extreme care. First, it must be done in ways that simultaneously refute the idea that violence by women justifies or excuses violence by their partners. Second, although women may assault partners at approximately the same rate as men, assaults by men usually inflict greater physical, financial, and emotional injury. This means that male violence against women is typically the more serious crime. Thus, major focus on violence by women does not necessarily mean equal focus. Finally, in many societies women lack full economic, social, political, and human rights. In such cultural contexts, equality for women needs to be given priority as an even more fundamental aspect of primary prevention. Otherwise, focusing on partner violence by women can further exacerbate the oppression of women.

❖ CONCLUSIONS

Ending assaults *by* women needs to be added to efforts to prevent assaults *on* women for a number of reasons. Perhaps the most fundamental reason is the intrinsic moral wrong of assaulting a partner. A second reason is the fact that women inflict a third of the injuries and deaths from partner violence. Third, women who hit their partners "model" violence for children, and this is associated with an increase in psychological problems of children. The harm to children from assaults by women is at least as strong as from assaults by men (Holden, Geffner, & Jouriles, 1998; Jaffe, Wolfe, & Wilson, 1990; Straus, 1991). Fourth is the danger of escalation when women engage in "harmless" minor violence. Feld and Straus (1989) found that if the female partner also engaged in an assault, it increased the probability that assaults will persist or escalate in severity over the one-year period of their study; whereas if only one partner engaged in physical attacks, the probability of cessation increased. Finally, when women assault

their partners, it validates the traditional cultural norms tolerating a certain level of violence between partners and therefore helps perpetuate a system in which they are the predominant victims.

It should be emphasized that the preventive effect of reducing violence by women, including "harmless" minor violence, has not been demonstrated by the evidence in this chapter. It is a plausible inference and a hypotheses for further research. However, it is important not to wait for the results of such research before implementing steps to end partner violence by women because, as pointed out, it would be equivalent to ignoring the legal and moral wrong of such behavior, and ignoring the physical and psychological injuries to their partners and children. The steps can include posters and public service announcements, police arrest policies, treatment programs for female offenders, and school-based prevention programs addressed to girls as well as to boys (Foshee, 2004). These steps must be made with extreme care for a number of reasons, not the least of which is to avoid implying that violence by women justifies or excuses violence by their partners. Moreover, although women may assault their partners at approximately the same rate as men, the first priority in services for victims and in prevention and control must continue to be directed toward assaults by men because these tend to result in greater physical, financial, and emotional injury.

❖ RESPONSE TO LOSEKE AND KURZ

The objections that Loseke and Kurz (this volume) raise to my chapter reflect three major differences between us: theoretical differences, methodological differences, and differences in our moral agendas.

Theoretical Differences

The theoretical difference is epitomized in a single word in the titles to our chapters. My chapter refers to violence by women as "a" social problem, whereas their chapter asserts that violence against women is "the" social problem. I do not believe that either violence by men or by women is "the" problem. Society faces multiple and inter-related problems with violence, and the correction of one usually depends on dealing with the configuration of problems in which it is embedded. Thus, violence against women is *a* serious social problem,

but it is also only one aspect of the problem of violence in American, and many other, societies. From the theoretical perspectives that social problems are interrelated, and that violence is a multiply determined interactive event, an adequate solution to the problem of violence against women requires addressing the behavior of both participants in that interactive sequence, as well as addressing many other phenomena that increase the risk of violence.

The *single-problem* focus epitomized in Loseke and Kurz's title is part of a larger theoretical difference: a *single-cause* theoretical approach. A single-cause approach has long been rejected by social scientists. One exception, however, is the subgroup of feminist social scientists who assume that a patriarchal social system and male dominance and privilege explains almost all cases of violence against women.

It is appropriate and necessary for feminist scholars to focus their research on this one of the many causes of violence against women. Society is indebted to the feminists for bringing gender-based oppression and violence to the fore. At the same time, denying the importance of other causes of violence against women, such as stress, alcoholism, violent socialization, criminal propensities, and violence by women, is something that would be ridiculed and rejected if it came from social scientists of any other theoretical persuasion. The following section suggests why we accept this scientific error from feminists but not from others.

The Moral Agenda

One of the reasons social scientists and the public at large are willing to accept a single-cause approach advocated by feminists is the recognition of and indignation by most social scientists over past and continuing oppression and discrimination against women. As a result, there is a tendency to accept almost anything that will change this aspect of society. Liberal social scientists tend deliberately to close their eyes to excesses and incorrect statements by feminists because they do not want to undermine feminist efforts to bring about a more equitable society. Thus, avowedly feminist scholars have suppressed data on violence by women. Social scientists I know who do not claim to be feminists have also published only the part of their data that shows violence by men.

History is full of atrocities carried out in the service of a moral agenda. These make suppression and denial of evidence on female violence trivial by comparison. But to those like myself, for whom ending

all violence, from spanking by parents to nations engaging in war, it is as essential to confront violence by women against male partners as it is to confront the high rate of violence by men.

Both Loseke and Kurz and I are against all violence, and both they and I are against all forms of gender inequality. The difference between us is in priorities for research and action. I infer that they rank ending oppression of women as number 1. Ending all violence is also very important, but not number 1. On the other hand, I rank ending all violence as number 1 and ending oppression of women as also very important, but not number 1. They are willing to accept certain costs to achieve equality for women, and I am willing to accept certain costs to achieve a nonviolent society. For example, although domestic violence victims who need the services of a shelter are overwhelmingly women, I am willing to accept the cost of radical male advocacy groups misusing the results of my research to oppose shelters for domestic violence victims that do not provide the same services for male victims. I am willing to accept the rare instances in which they have been successful as a bearable cost, because there is no way of avoiding it without suppressing the evidence on female violence.

Violence by both men and women against a partner are criminal acts and morally repulsive, except in the rare cases of self-defense. The moral priorities of Loseke and Kurz represent a legitimate difference in assessing the long-run costs and benefits for women of recognizing that women assault their partners at about the same rate as men. I think my moral priorities promise a greater long-run benefit to women because, for the reasons given in my chapter, ending violence *by* women will help end violence *against* women. In addition to the other reasons in my chapter explaining why ending violence by women will help end violence against women, I should have pointed out that it will end the training in violence of the next generation of both men and women that is provided when children grow up watching their mothers hit their fathers. As my chapter shows, this occurs just as often as fathers hitting mothers, and mothers are the first to hit as often as fathers.

Methodological Differences

One key methodological difference is that I believe that feminist research, like all other research, cannot be limited to in-depth qualitative studies. Qualitative studies are essential, but so are large-scale surveys. Each has its own limitations, and each has the power to shed

light on a different aspect of violence between partners. Moreover, there is also something not quite appropriate when Loseke and Kurz reject the results of large-scale surveys showing symmetry in physical assault, but accept the results of large-scale surveys showing a predominance of male perpetrators in respect to sexual coercion.

As for the purported deficiencies in the CTS mentioned by Loseke and Kurz, none is correct. The space I have been given for this rejoinder does not permit me to respond to each of these purported deficiencies, so I respond to just the first of them. Readers can find the others on my Web site, <http://pubpages.unh.edu/~mas2>, by clicking on "Detailed Response to Loseke and Kurz."

Loseke and Kurz argue that "research based on representative samples [using the CTS] will *underestimate* the amount of extreme violence experienced by women because severely abused women will not participate in the survey" (italics in original). That is certainly true, but it is even more likely that male victims of female violence avoid participation in such surveys. Assaulting or being assaulted by a partner is shameful. It took a major and still continuing effort by feminists to get women to report such assaults to police. The same shame and reluctance to participate in surveys occurs for male victims. However, for men, there is the additional shame and reluctance stemming from the type of masculinity that expects a "real man" to be able to handle such situations, and that lead police to scoff at or laugh at men who do file a complaint (Mills, 2003).

Other Inaccuracies in the Loseke-Kurz Article

There are a large number of other incorrect statements in the Loseke-Kurz chapter. As in the case of the erroneous deficiencies of the CTS, the space available to me permits including only the first two of them. The others are on my Web site.

Loseke and Kurz claim that I "trivialize . . . the complex meaning of violence and its impact on the lives of women." Their demonstration of this, however, is a statement out of context, which reverses its meaning. They say I characterize "women's typical violence as motivated by their desire to 'slap the cad.'" On the contrary, the "slap the cad" phrase was not to show that this is typical. It was in a section of my chapter designed to show that even such trivial violence increases the risk of being attacked by a male partner. This is the opposite of failing to recognize the impact of violence on the lives of women.

Moreover, the sentence preceding pointed out that "the previous section . . . demonstrated that women are responsible for an important proportion of serious injuries and deaths of partners." This is not trivial violence.

Loseke and Kurz say that I do "not incorporate gender at the level of measurement." This is the opposite of what the record of my research shows. For example, the Conflict Tactics Scales (CTS) was designed to investigate gender differences in partner violence. In order to show that there is more violence by male than female partners, the CTS asks about assaults by both partners. My intention to show greater male violence was thwarted by the results. Other examples abound. I carried out the first empirical study of partner violence to *measure* (not just talk about) feminist concepts such as inequality in power and resources and social norms tolerating partner violence (for example, Straus, 1976).

In conclusion, I have always believed and acted on the belief that a feminist approach is both valid and necessary. By a "feminist approach," I mean taking into account phenomena that represent gendered inequality and oppression. That is why I have taken that approach in much of the research just cited. Feminist advocacy is needed and is critical to free society of its sexist structure. But it has gone beyond stimulating and motivating research to self-censorship and attempts to suppress the results of other researchers whose findings do not conform to the feminist assumption that only men assault partners. It undermined feminist credibility not just among researchers, but also among the general public. That is tragic.

It is necessary to recognize without delay and to alert women to the fact that violence against partners by women is prevalent and is one of the many causes of violence against women, just as violence by men is prevalent and is one of the many causes of violence by women. There is a difference between explanation and blame. The fact that violence by women is part of the interactive sequence of events that constitutes most partner violence does not excuse men any more than it excuses women. It is important to recognize this fact, primarily for the protection of women but also to protect the reputation of feminist scholarship. It is important for the protection of women because each cause that is identified provides an opportunity to develop programs to eliminate or reduce that cause, and therefore to reduce partner violence. Each cause that is identified and acted on adds to the effectiveness of the effort to prevent violence against women.

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