

THE ABUSER IN HETEROSEXUAL COUPLE VIOLENCE IS MALE?

Why is it Naturally Assumed That The Abuser in Heterosexual Couple Violence is Male?

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### **Abstract**

This review is an attempt to unearth the rationale fueling the misnomer involving most cases of domestic violence or intimate partner violence (IPV) where women are automatically presumed to be the victim. Predicated on the fact that an enormous amount of legislation still needs to be past to protect battered woman, men who embody the principles of chivalry deserves protection as well. Therefore, women as perpetrators will be discussed. Then, research completed regarding gender inclusivity in IPV and their outcome will be explored.

This literature review also proposes to create an awareness of societal presumptions based on traditional ideology that plague the overall judgement of instances of intimate partner violence so that future cases may be viewed more objectively.

Keywords: intimate partner violence (IVP), domestic violence, gender inclusivity, perpetrator, traditional ideology.

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### **Introduction**

When men and women in a heterosexual relationship become engaged in domestic violence or intimate partner violence (IPV), many times the presupposition by public, policymakers and feminine activist organizations are skewed toward the idea of females as the only victim in such cases. In IPV cases, where a woman physically assaults her male partner, many times the assumption is the action was initiated by a male counterpart and the response was an act of self-defense. While various cases of IPV do often involve the male as the perpetrator, women have been found to be the aggressor in some of these instances. However, historically this fact tends to be marginalized in our society by traditional ideology. Tradition posits that women are the weaker of the two sexes and are physically incapable of defending themselves against their stronger male counterparts. While some women may not be as strong in stature, they are many who are just as powerful and dominant in personality as men. More recently, traditional ideology has now been coined patriarchal ideology.

### **Women as Perpetrators – Implications on the Man**

Clinton Flynn specifically, analyzes the implications of women's use of violence against their male partners in his article entitled "Relationship Violence by Women: Issues and Implications. [ CITATION Fly90 \l 1033 ] He contends that very little attention was previously focused on battered husbands by the public, policymakers, media, feminist or researchers. In 1977-78 Steinmetz published an article called, "The Battered Husband Syndrome"(Steinmetz, 1977-78a: Flynn, et al.,1990). This article drew a lot of media attention but sparked a contentious debate

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between researchers and feminist. The feminist were concerned that the interest level raised would negatively impact their efforts to protect battered women and the data would be used against abused women in the court of law. The violence against these men were often dismissed due to the fact that they were physically stronger than their partners, so they could restrain their spouses to prevent the assaults. In addition, economically, the men were able to leave the relationship if the spouse was deemed abusive, so they had ample recourse (Pagelow,1984; Steinmetz, 1987; Struas,1980; Flynn, et al.,1990).

The argument proposed, in the case of an abused women she would not be privy to the same opportunity. Incidentally, battered men were subject to humiliation and embarrassment due to society's traditional views of male-female relationships (Gelles & Cornell,1985; Flynn, et al.,1990). Flynn clearly recognizes that research does prove that the rate of battered women are much higher than battered men (husbands were violent in 27% of cases whereas, wives were violent in 22% of such cases). It is has also been determined that the women suffers more serious injuries than men who are IPV victims. The concern is that without recognition, funding, prevention and treatment for these men will cease to exist[ CITATION Fly90 \l 1033 ] .

### **Gender Inclusivity of IPV & Patriarchal Ideology**

In this article, "Toward a Gender-Inclusive Conception of Intimate Partner Violence Research and Theory: Part 1 – Traditional Perspectives", John Hamel highlights how public discourse over battered women lead to the creation of IPV policies for what would become termed "male perpetrator and female victimization" [ CITATION Ham07 \l 1033 ] . With

very little research, female perpetrator abuse continued to be ignored. This issue led to the conceptualization of the

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patriarchal concept of intimate partner violence. Patriarchal conception was originally based on traditional ideology of men being the head of the household, and the bread winner while women were to be submissive, but was reframed by radical feminist sociopolitical ideology. The patriarchal ideology insisted that men are solely responsible for the violence in IPV cases because the woman's role in society is patriarchal placing the man in a dominant role over her. It further states, when women are violent in such cases, it is self-defense or retaliation due to an act of violence against her. This thought process derived from the personal experiences relayed by women who were victims of IPV living in the battered shelters. Although research contradicted this ideology, it was discovered that most men are not physically assaultive nor controlling in their marriages (Dutton, 1994; et al., Hamel, 2007). Some studies have linked men who were violent with their partners to personalities such as non-masculine stereotypes, borderline personality disorders, low socio-economic status, and drug/alcohol abuse (Sugarman, 1996; et al., Hamel, 2007). In addition, women were being victimized more in same-sex relationships more than heterosexual relationships were the patriarchal structure should not be an issue (Coleman, 1994; et al., Hamel, 2007).

Various legislation was reenacted in 1996 such as the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) that helped women however, it also acknowledged abused men (Young, 2006, et al., Hamel, 2007). Yet, patriarchal theories continued to shape public policy regarding IPV and a great many men continued to be victimized suffering public ridicule and shaming referred to as the "Skimmington procession" (George, 2003; et al., Hamel, 2007).

## New Direction

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This article is the sequel to “Toward a Gender-Inclusive Conception of Intimate Partner Violence Research and Theory: Part 1-New Directions” by John Hamel. It holds the same title but is “Part-2 – New Directions”. New Directions picks up where Part-1 left off in presenting evidence from research conducted that contradicts the patriarchal model with hopes of moving toward gender inclusivity in IPV policies. Hamel defines domestic violence as not just a gender problem but a human problem and relational problem that should be addressed with respect to prevention and intervention where policy is concerned (Hamel, 2009). The author hopes to spark a research trend that will promote an improvement over the patriarchal model. Hamel does this by exploring other models as well as the policy and treatment proposed. [ CITATION Ham09 \l 1033 ]

The fears that have fueled feminist activist over the years were accusations that women who had reported being battered were then in turn called “liars”. Advocates in shelters argued that these women were “saints”. They also admitted that many times they turned a blind eye to some women’s use of violence, harsh /violent treatment of their children and drug/alcohol abuse (Pense, 1990: et al., Hamel, 2009). After the much thought, Pense, feminist activist/founder of the Duluth Intervention Project, went on to acknowledge that “some” women do use violence but did not endorse the gender-inclusive model (Pense, 1990: et al., Hamel, 2009). In an effort to put this patriarchal /asymmetry concept of domestic violence to rest, Hamel looks at two models. The first is the post- patriarchal/asymmetry concept introduced by Michael Johnson. The

Johnson model attempts to rectify the conflict tactics of the patriarchal model through acknowledgment of diversity in violence. His research centered around intervention programs

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that focus on the reduction of male perpetrators as reoffenders and on female batterers who were violent in reaction to men as a dominate aggressor. The second, Hamel's own gender-inclusive model which asserts that gender biases should not be present in public policy, outreach, public education, arrest and prosecution policies [ CITATION Ham09 \l 1033 ].

According to Hamel, anecdotal data indicate that men experience emotional problems including depression, posttraumatic stress disorder and alcoholism due to ridicule and scorn. These outcomes are synonymous with battered women (Cook, 1997; Hamel, 20009) ( Hines, 2001; Hamel, 2009). Therefore, the future of IPV research and policy is in need of radical change to incorporate interventions that fairly and effectively address IPV instead of trying to prove which sex is more violent.

#### **Relationship between Articles**

Flynn and Hamel both express compassion for the importance of the continued fight to protect female victims of intimate partner violence. All of the articles raised some very critical points about IPV. For instance, injuries to female victims are far more severe, than injuries incurred by battered men. Many female related IPV cases end in death. These facts should never be minimized or undermined. However, there is an underlying tension that has been brewing among feminist theorist, researchers, policymakers and the public regarding how legislation should go forward fairly. Almost all of the researchers references links the feminist activist to the

creation of the ideology that only men can be perpetrators in IPV cases. This has been clearly reverberated by the feminist community in all of the studies, policies and legislation. This

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misnomer that only men are batterers have framed laws, policies behaviors and the mindset of the public globally and caused significant injustices to battered men.

Although Flynn and Hamel are both passionate about change in legislation and reconciliation of the patriarchal conception, Hamel seems to raise a more challenging case for change to occur. Hamel analyzes various models in an effort to evoke justice and make improvements. He openly challenges the thought process behind the feminist ideology, then notes when the founders of a feminist movement, Duluth Intervention Project actually acknowledges her own misconception. While Flynn, on the other hand, approaches this topic more from a relational and systemic point of view. His concern focuses on the causes for violent behavior. Hamel candidly, contradicts the patriarchal paradigm and seeks to debunk the negative stigma attached to gender related IPV.

#### **Conclusion**

Not all men seek to control, dominate and abuse their partners. Many want a balanced relationship. In addition, the majority of men do not believe in hitting women, namely their wives. When struck by a women, these men will not strike back. There are some strong willed women who will abuse this type of man. Male victims of IPV have been ignored and dismissed by the public, legal system, feminist and policymakers. They often face humiliation and ridicule upon reporting an assault which results in men failing to report. This reluctance to submit a claim

of abuse impacts the accuracy of research, funding for treatment, criminal and medical records. As a result, female perpetrators go unprosecuted, untreated therapeutically, free to repeat the

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offense and many abuse their children as well[ CITATION Ham09 \l 1033 ].

Like Hamel, I desire to take nothing away from the work that has been done for female victims of IPV. In fact, I do believe more should be done to protect the lives of women from their abusive partners. Stricter laws that involve arrest of a partner who physically abuses a spouse would save countless lives. However, the man that has been raised never to put his hands on a women deserves to be treated with the utmost respect, dignity and receive justice. Reportedly, most of these men are not even looking to have their mates arrested, they just want them to get some professional help (Steinmetz, 1977-78a; et al., Flynn, 1990). Going forward, I'd like to see what other research has been done, if any regarding dispelling the patriarchal ideology and more recent legislation passed for battered women which also includes gender-inclusivity conception of intimate partner violence. If gender inclusivity is successful, perhaps the assumption that the male is always the perpetrator in intimate partner violence will no longer exist.

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