

## **Examining Women's Intimate Partner Violence: A Utah Example**

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### **Abstract**

Intimate partner violence (IPV) has emerged as one of the United States' most salient social problems. While historically this problem has been framed as men's violence towards women, more recently, scholars have begun to examine the nature of women's violence towards men. This paper summarizes the literature related to women's violence in interpersonal relationships and then presents findings from a study of rural couples in treatment for domestic violence. The findings and conclusions support the idea that females who commit IPV differ from male IPV offenders in significant ways.

### **Introduction**

Within the past three decades the problem of intimate partner violence (IPV) has emerged from the shadows of private lives to the forefront of public policy and debate. As the IPV movement has gained momentum, battered women's advocates have successfully urged lawmakers to hold perpetrators accountable for their behavior. Simultaneously, advocates, and other health and mental health professionals have developed programs intended to help abusers and their victims.

IPV offender treatment programs—often referred to as batterer treatment or batterer intervention programs—represent one such response to the problem of IPV. Treatment groups for offenders have become the most common and accepted approach to batterer intervention in the United States (Gondolf, 1997; Geffner & Rosenbaum, 2001). Programs numbering in the thousands are now functioning across the United States (Edleson & Syers, 1990; Chalk & King, 1998). These programs aim to improve the safety of victims and to provide judges with an alternative to incarceration (Dutton, 1995; Dutton & Sonkin, 2003).

Since the enactment of mandatory arrest laws in the U.S. during the late 1980's, there has been a significant increase in the number of *women* who are charged with IPV and subsequently mandated to batterer treatment programs (Martin, 1997; Miller & Melay, 2006). According to Carney and Buttell (2004), this "unintended consequence" (p.249) of the mandatory arrest movement has stirred theoretical debate over the nature of women's use of violence in intimate relationships and raises the question of how to respond to this reality in terms of appropriate therapeutic and police/judicial action.

This paper summarizes the literature relevant for examining women's use of violence in intimate relationships. More specifically, it looks at what the research tells us about women who abuse their intimate partners, what theoretical frameworks for understanding women's IPV exist, and how these frameworks are supported by the evidence. Since the primary focus of this paper is on examining the experiences of the white women in the sample (the population in this rural area of Utah is primarily white) the authors are unable to discuss issues related to race and ethnicity. Like other researchers, however, the authors recognize the importance these variables have for making more sweeping or valid generalizations about domestic violence IPV than the present study can claim (Belknap, 2001). In order to discuss the implications of the present study for the design of helping interventions, which is one of the present study's objectives, the findings of a comparative study of 32 female and 165 male individuals who participated in a batterer treatment program operating in Utah are reported. Given their experience, the authors are inclined to believe that the typology Johnson (1995) developed helps explain why women's traditional aversion to the use of physical violence appears to have changed. More specifically, they suggest that the violence manifested in common couple violence (Johnson's term), which may be the most prevalent form of IPV, illustrates an emerging cultural consensus that it is okay for women to use violence when necessary.

The authors surmise, that, in a larger sense, the gendered construction of male-female violence has—ironically and unfortunately—become more egalitarian with respect to tolerance for both male and female violence as an approach to problem solving and even self expression. Interventions aimed at helping women who are violent in intimate

relationships might also, then, seek to raise awareness of the problems associated with using violence to solve their problems, much as early treatment work with IPV focused on raising awareness about women's rights in the first place.

## The Nature of Women's Participation in Violent Encounters

The growing body of evidence that women also perpetrate IPV has led researchers in several directions. In particular, literature subsequent to the observed increases in the arrest of female perpetrators has spawned a debate between "family violence in general" researchers, who typically frame IPV as a "human problem" and researchers adopting a feminist theoretical perspective, who view IPV as a problem that men have because of institutionalized sexism and patriarchal norms (Johnson, 2001; Dutton & Nicholls, 2001; Yllo, K.A., 1993; Kurz, D., 1997). Related to the family violence in general perspective are studies that attempt to replicate findings related to how, why, and in what ways women are violent in the context of intimate partnerships. This perspective includes extensive discussions about methodology (Miller & Meloy, 2006). This literature has been especially useful in establishing a basis for categorizing various dimensions of women's violence as contrasted to that of men and has contributed meaningful generalizations about women perpetrators as defending themselves or acting out of frustration; as being "driven over the edge" (Belknap, 2001). A second group of researchers emphasizes the ways in which women and men differ in their violence. These differences have been captured in studies measuring *motivation* (the why of the violence), *methods* (the how of the violence), *context* (e.g., environmental variables considered crucial to revised perspectives on understanding women's IPV), and *consequences* (the actual physical, psychological, and economic consequences of the violence) (Belknap, 2001). Of particular importance for the theoretical perspective adopted in this review is theory and evidence suggesting that, in contrast to "patriarchal violence", (Johnson's term) it may be that "common couple violence" may be even a more typical dynamic in intimate partner relationships (Johnson & Ferraro, 2000; Johnson, 2001; Henning, Jones, Holdford, 2005). If Johnson's typology hypotheses are valid—and the present study may actually lend weight to their credence—then these typologies are capable of complementing both family violence and feminist perspectives in advancing the notion that motivation and context, as well as behavior, may play a significant role in IPV analysis, especially in which mutual, or reciprocal, violence is involved.<sup>1</sup>

Prevailing studies aver that men and women are not equally as violent as a general rule—that is, that women are almost never quite as forcibly violent as their male counterparts, and tend to suffer greater physical damage (Dutton & Nicholls, 2001; Melton & Belknap, 2003). This consensus makes sense in that both men's and women's dispositions toward violence can be understood as gendered. Both, that is, are the product of sex role gender socialization and are socially constructed over time to lay down fairly rigid expectations for gender referent behaviors (Feder & Henning, 2005; McMahan and Pence, 2003). In the case of male violence, for example, society has historically supported violence as a legitimate problem solving response (Gilligan, 1996). The obverse, however, can be said to be true for women, thus setting the parameters for the development of engendered problem solving skills that dispose women to choose peaceful rather than violent solutions to their problems, no matter what the contexts. From the perspective of social work, for example, it is women who have been expected to be the peacemakers, and, like Jane Addams, Frances Perkins, or Eleanor Roosevelt, have often carried U.S. society's mandate to that effect.

In more recent times, however, popular culture, in particular, has fostered the idea that women are expected to defend themselves, even to the extent of being proactively violent when their well-being or sense of self is threatened. Films like "The Burning Bed" and "Thelma and Louise" are cases in point. So are the stylized portrayals of women warriors now common in Hollywood films. If these cultural influences, which increasingly legitimate the use of violence by women are taken into account, then a case can be made for explaining contemporary female violence as a function of cultural values change; that is, for—a "new" social construction of woman as "kick ass"—as not merely responding to male violence, but as capable of initiating it in the name of justice, self-expression or some other motive not necessarily directly related to self-defense (Barling, 1987; Flynn, 1995; Dobash et al, 1992; Kimmel, 2002; Archer, 2000).

It is from the vantage point of noting how cultural values are changing in relation to expectations for women that Johnson's definition of "common couple violence" makes the most sense. This type of violence, he points out, occurs

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<sup>1</sup> Johnson's typology is of sufficiently recent origins (1995) that tests of it are fairly scant. Researchers who have tested the typology, however, report that the categories tend to be verified by their results (Miller & Meloy, 2006, pp. 101 ff.; Graham-Kevan & Archer, 2003; Milardo, 1998)

infrequently—that is, women as initiators of violence is not yet a pervasive value—and is reciprocal in nature in that both men and women exchange blows where women are no more passive than men. But, because it is becoming more common, as well as more legitimate, for women to initiate violence, especially in attempting to resolve their issues with IPV, common couple violence will probably become more visible than it has been.

While more empowered women has long been a major goal of the women's movement, Belknap (1996, 2001) argues that consequently—and problematically—it will also be easier to define women's asocial behavior as criminal—an outcome which is the opposite of what *liberation* theorists envisioned would occur (Alder, 1975). In a way this consequence is to be expected in that it is both ironic with respect to gaining greater freedoms for women, *and* another example of the societal double standard with which women are already familiar. For example, Belknap (1996, 2001) points out that it is not uncommon to arrest women for violating gender roles and not only for breaking the law (the "evil woman" hypothesis). Thus, for better or worse, gaining normative legitimacy for women's violence will be much more difficult than has been acknowledging legitimacy for violence in men. To date, for example, women involved with interpersonal violence may receive lighter sentences from law enforcement officials who are still behaving in accordance with traditional norms and expectations regarding women's behavior by not fully and/or seriously taking these cultural shifts into account.

### **Evidence of Women's Violence**

There is increasing evidence that women can and do behave with violence when faced with IPV. What is not as clear is the extent to which women may actually *initiate* abusive or self-defensive violence. The distinction is an important one because to date the majority of studies have argued that violence from women is solely reciprocal or in some immediate sense, anticipatory, rather than pro-active—that is, planned or "premeditated".

Straus and Gelles (1986) and Straus (1999), and others have produced research showing that violence by women in intimate partnerships has increased. These researches were inspired first by crime victimization surveys like the National Crime Survey of the United States (U.S.) Department of Justice, the National Family Violence Survey, the Conflict Tactics Scale (CTS) measures developed by Straus and Gelles, the National Violence Against Women Survey, and later replications of the Straus and Gelles methodology (Saunders, 2002; Belknap & Melton, 2005).

Other evidence related to the use of violence by women comes from researchers who point out the role played by motivation and context in interpersonal violence. Dasgupta (2002), for example, argues that contextualizing those incidences where women are violent requires knowing what is going on in their lives, ecologically. For instance, she points out a situation in which an immigrant woman throws a pot at her husband who has just destroyed her passport and conditional residency status card—a potentially devastating problem for this woman because the elimination of her proof of legitimate residency may cost her job, result in deportation, and/or loss of custody of her children. In this example, frustration, fear of retribution AND a violated sense of justice are predictable, although as yet poorly understood functions of gender violence, i.e., as typical of retaliatory behavior exhibited by women who are historically economically dependent on male partners. Thus, feminist critics point out that the intersections of individual, community institutions, and societal proscriptions are essential to understanding the motivation of women to initiate or respond with violence. These examples, like those of women seeking revenge for past abuse as portrayed in the media (e.g., *The Burning Bed; Enough*), illustrate growing societal tolerance for the idea that women should seek justice for themselves or otherwise take matters into their own hands, ironically, in a manner reminiscent of frontier justice as carried out by men. These more recent studies, showing that women are sometimes violent, typically underscore the reciprocal nature of women's violence, rather than emphasizing the degree of mutual combativeness that may be involved in relation to common couple violence and the possible initiation of violence by women (Archer, 2000; Nichols, 2001; Brinkerhoff and Lupri, 1988; Busch and Rosenberg, 2004; Swan and Snow, 2002).

Brinkerhoff and Lupri (1988), for example, observe that violence in the home is pervasive. They write, "Conjugal violence is rarely a one-time occurrence: once violent acts are committed by either partner or both they often are repeated... Thus violence between partners who are married or living together becomes highly patterned; it persists" (p. 419). Although it is becoming increasingly evident that common couple violence exists it is still not clear—as in the examples above—to what extent or in what ways violence by women is either reciprocal in nature, or pro active. The authors hope that further research will help to clarify these questions.

### **Similarities and Differences in Male-Female Violent Behavior**

Researchers are finding that male-female violence is essentially different or, according to Das Dasgupta (2002), inherent within the ecological reality of these couples (Busch & Rosenberg, 2004; Hamberger & Potente, 1996; Das Dasgupta, 2002; Kimmel, 2002; Hamberger & Guse, 2002). The findings of the present study (reported below) seem to support this assertion. The authors are interested, however, in pointing out that this research, while it establishes that women are sometimes violent in defense of themselves and their interests, it is less clear when and if women are also initiators of violence.

It is well documented that women are typically more severely traumatized by IPV and sustain more serious injuries than do men (Abel, 2001; Archer, 2000; Basile, 2004; Cascardi & Langhinrichsen, 1992; Munoz, 1998; Fiebert & Gonzalez, 1997; Johnson & Leone, 2005), lending credence to the contention that because they are generally not as strong, women are more likely to receive violence than to initiate it. And while “Men perpetrate familicidal massacres, killing spouse and children together...hunt down and kill wives who have left them...kill wives as part of planned murder-suicides...kill in response to revelations of wifely infidelity” much more frequently than women (Dobash et al, 1992: 81), it appears that they are increasingly more able and willing to sometimes respond in kind. In other words, although the research to date supports the dominance of Johnson’s “patriarchal terrorism” model, it may be that women are “catching up”, thus making it more likely that factors other than patriarchal values and traditions are making a decisive difference in women’s increasing disposition to violence in intimate relationships—factors like post-modern cultural values change, for example.

In another study Jones et al. (2002) found that not only do women who use violence live in “alarmingly violent environments” (p. 452) they are more likely to be violent because they themselves have learned to deal with abuse by being abusive and/ or are part of environments so chaotic they must use abusive tactics to survive. As Johnson (1995, 2001) also suggests, women sometimes use violence to break out of abusive relationships, for self defense, for retaliation and out of fear or frustration, consonant with the expectations of traditional female sex role gender socialization—at least up to a point—while men are more likely to be exhibiting the dominating and controlling behaviors that have been consonant with traditional male sex role gender socialization expectations for centuries in Western civilization (Flynn, 1990; Hamberger & Potente, 1996; Hamberger & Guse, 2002; Kimmel, 2002; Ridley & Feldman, 2003).

Johnson’s typologies of, “intimate terrorism”, “violent resistance”, “common couple violence” and “mutual violent control” do much to help us understand how much and what kinds of violence can be attributed to women and men respectively, especially when they can be viewed as converging with separate studies pointing out how women acquire a violence ethos through non traditional cultural socialization (Johnson, 1995, 2001; Miller & Meloy, 2006). Thus, from a theoretical perspective, Johnson’s typologies enable us to see that where violence from women was once viewed as aberrant, in contemporary context it becomes a somewhat legitimated means not only of self-protection but also of self-expression. Overall, gender symmetry in IPV studies might thus also be understood as the logical expression of egalitarian gender construction over time (Gilbert, 2002; Kimmel, 2002; Feder & Henning, 2005). Ironically enough, while women have greater permission to use violence, at least since the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century, men have at the same time experienced social pressure to manage their violence through conflict resolution and anger management rather than physical violence (Steinmetz 1977-78, 1987; Straus 1993).

Finally, as Nolet-Bos (1999) concludes, “Men and women are [still] cast in mutually exclusive polarized gender roles, which encourage them to identify with idealized images of masculinity and femininity and to disown those qualities that do not fit the idealization. The idealized image of woman as nurturing, relational and inherently non violent...reinforces women’s tendency to disown their destructive impulses, to project them onto men, or to act them out in indirect ways” (p. i). The increasingly frail cultural injunction that women should not practice violence is apparently giving way before the greater permission society has also given women to be themselves, defend themselves, and to enter professions that practice legalized forms of violence as with careers in law enforcement and military service.

IPV researchers are just beginning to develop studies designed to test the idea that violence is both a cultural norm and socialization dynamic in society (Cook 1997; Johnson, 2005). Unlike Dobash and Dobash (1977), who appropriately first formulated the issue of IPV in feminist terms and thereby greatly succeeded in raising the value of the issue politically, present day theorists have the opportunity, after 20 years, to apply a more refined theoretical perspective to the issue. Although plenty of evidence for both family violence and feminist perspectives has been generated, neither side appears to have “won” so that, gradually, the dichotomized debate is being replaced with the much more promising approach that violence can be expected from both men and women (Dutton, 2006; Hampton et

al., 1999; Giles-Sims 1983; Das Dasgupta 2002; Fiebert & Gonzalez, 1997; Hamberger et al. 2002; Goodyear-Smith & Laidlaw, 1999). As stated above, research that examines how values change may affect gender role socialization holds promise for helping to determine to what extent the newly documented violent responses of women in abusive relationships may be a function of self defense or violent pro activity and thus as much a function of relationship history and context as of gender.

The idea that violence might be understood as the function of interaction, of relationship, or of the transactions that occur in the intersections of individual action with environmental sanctions and constraints is referred to by Brinkerhoff and Lupri (1988) as the dialectical notion that love and affection exist simultaneously with conflict and violence. They go on to suggest a number of family and spousal dynamics that might be converted into measures for the additional study of these issues: 1) the frequency of interaction related to increased risk of conflict or violence, 2) the context of family activities, decision-making, and task assignment conducive to opportunities for disagreement, tension, and dispute, 3) the existence of tensions related to establishing and maintaining intimacy—being vulnerable, 4) the extent to which the family is a traditional, hierarchical, and patriarchal structure related to issues of power and dependence, and 5) the cultural-legal fact of the family as a private entity, shielded from public view related to secrecy and the exercise of secretive behaviors (Ridley and Feldman 2003; Steinmetz 1987). Such studies should help to further the thesis that violence is a value that can be taught and learned or unlearned by either gender when social and cultural milieus are right for what the authors might regard as both the negative and positive aspects in the pursuit of egalitarian social change.

### **A Study of Women and Men in Treatment for Intimate Partner Violence in Utah**

As a basis for facilitating discussion on the treatment of women who are violent towards their intimate partners, the authors report the findings of a comparative study of 32 female and 165 male IPV offenders who participated in an IPV offender treatment program operating in rural Utah. The data for the study reported below were collected as part of a comprehensive program evaluation of an IPV offender treatment program. This program serves three counties with a combined population of approximately 50,000 and was at the time the data were collected the only program available in the area.

As part of its assessment process, the program routinely collects treatment-relevant information about clients including social, criminal (self-report and law enforcement report), child abuse, substance abuse, mental health (including psychiatric diagnosis if applicable), and health histories. Except for data related to program completion, which was entered into the file when clients exited the program, and recidivism, which a research assistant obtained from law enforcement agencies and courts during a two-month period, all of the data was obtained directly from clients during clinical intake-assessment interviews led by licensed clinical social workers who met the qualifications to provide IPV treatment in Utah. These qualifications include completing 24 hours of approved IPV training, a graduate degree and professional licensure pertaining to that degree, and 16 hours of annual domestic violence training. Some client information was also obtained from other agencies in the area that clients were involved with (e.g. substance abuse, mental health, probation, etc.) as part of the initial program intake process. A research assistant was responsible for extracting the data from program and police/court records and entering it into SPSS.

#### ***Method***

The sample consisted of 197 batterers (32 females, 165 males) who participated in the program between 1994 and 1998 (See Table 1 for sample characteristics by gender). These individuals represented all of the offenders served by the program during that time. They took part in a 24-week psycho-educational program that incorporated cognitive and skills-based interventions as well as elements of the feminist approach utilized in the Duluth model—the most common approach to IPV offender treatment (Pence & Paymar, 1993; Tolman & Edleson, 1995). The curriculum included five primary components: 1. recognizing abusive behaviors using the Duluth Power and Control Wheel, 2. identifying positive relationship behaviors using the Duluth Equality Wheel, 3. identifying relationship thinking errors, 4. learning anger management and problem-solving skills, and 5. developing positive communication skills. Group sessions lasted between 60 and 70 minutes and were led by clinical social workers who, at a minimum, have completed the required state-mandated training for batterer treatment providers. During the course of treatment, clients progress sequentially through the five components in varying order depending on at what point they began treatment.

In the beginning, female offender services were modeled after the services provided to male offenders. Program staff soon discovered, however, that the women were somewhat resistant to the psycho-educational approach employed with the men. Instead, the female group sessions gravitated to a more psychotherapeutic group process characterized by high levels of self-disclosure and group member support—qualities which appear to be historically and developmentally more characteristic of women’s outlook and behavior than of men (Miller & Pierce-Stiver, 1997; Brizendine, 2006).

Program staff at first resisted adapting their treatment modality because the approach favored by the women departed from the conventional structured approach typically used by batterer intervention programs. In time, however, the staff became convinced that the needs of the women in the group were distinctly different than those of the men and were inclined to try a more discursive, disclosing, and relational approach. Unfortunately, at that time, the literature provided very little in the way of guidance about how female and male perpetrators of IPV differed. The literature also failed to provide any evidence-based or empirically derived approach for intervening with female offenders. Thus, adaptations were implemented in an effort to better deal with the perceived differences and similarities between the men and women in the program and to guide the development of forms of intervention that would better meet the needs of women.

Male and female participants were compared on a number of variables. The selection of these variables was informed by a comprehensive literature review (See Tollefson, 2001), but was necessarily limited by the information contained in the archival data set. Notwithstanding this limitation, the collection of variables listed in Table 1 is quite extensive. The variables are organized under headings developed by Tollefson (2001). Information regarding variable operationalization is provided in Table 1 or in footnotes.

Table 1. Variables Examined by Gender with Significance Values

	Males	Females	p
<b>Client-Specific Factors</b>			
Age- Years (mean/sd)	32.7(8.6)	30.7(7.3)	ns
Race- Percent Minority	12.7%	3.1%	ns
Employment Status- Percent Unemployed	33.9%	71.9%	>.01
% Working in Blue Collar vs. Other Jobs	81.8%	0%	>.01
% Graduated High School or Received GED	43.6%	56.2%	ns
Monthly Income (median)	\$1000	\$0	>.01
% Reporting Substance Abuse Problems at Intake	46.9%	34.4%	ns
% Reporting DV in Family of Origin	92.3%	87.1%	ns
% Reporting Child Abuse in Family of Origin	29.3%	41.9	ns
% Reporting a Psychiatric History	25.8%	43.8%	>.05
% Reporting Current Clinical Disorder (DSM-IV Axis I)	24.4%	43.8%	>.10
% Reporting Current Personality Disorder (DSM-IV Axis II)	17.3%	12.5%	ns
<b>Relationship-Specific Factors</b>			
% Reporting Active Protection Order	32.2%	21.4%	ns
% Reporting Partner Arrested/Cited At Time of Incident	16.9%	75%	>.01
% Reporting Self as Primary Aggressor	91.5%	12.5%	>.01
% Married to Victim (vs. Cohabiting)	67.9%	45.2%	>.05
Current Relationship Length in Years (mean/sd)	6.4(5.3)	5.2(3.2)	ns
% Reporting History of Abuse in Current Relationship	16.1%	36.7%	>.05
Number of Past Relationships Reported (mean/sd)	.42(.72)	.46(.68)	ns
% Reporting History of Abuse in Past Relationships	18.5%	39.3%	>.05
<b>Program-Specific Factors</b>			
Number of Sessions Attended (mean/sd)	12.9(9.2)	11.3(7.9)	ns
Number of Months Involved in Treatment (mean/sd)	5.4(3.9)	6.2(4.8)	ns
% Completed Treatment Missing >5 Weeks	44.4%	34.6%	ns

% Completed Treatment <sup>2</sup>	53.9%	59.4%	ns
% Re-offended During /After Treatment Participation <sup>3</sup>	22.5%	13.8%	ns
<b>System-Specific Factors</b>			
% Arrested Following Incident (vs. Cited)	84.7%	64%	>.01
% Referred by Local Agency/Court (vs. Out of Area)	76.6%	78.6%	ns
% Referred by Justice Court (vs. District Court)	69.4%	86.4%	ns
% Mandated to Treatment	95.4%	86.7%	ns
Number of Days Jail Time Ordered (mean/sd)	69.7(8.8)	27(8.1)	>.05
Number of Days Jail Time Served (mean/sd)	10.2(64.6)	0(0)	ns
% on Supervised Probation (vs. Unsupervised or None)	12.9%	0%	>.05
Probation Length in Months (mean/sd)	11.9(6)	11.3(2)	ns
Court Fine Amount (mean/sd)	\$648.8(\$444.6)	\$422.1(\$251)	>.10
Months Elapsed Between Incident and Intake (mean/sd)	1.5(.50)	1.5(.51)	ns
% Currently Involved With Child Protective Services	25.9%	25%	ns
% Involved With Child Protective Services in Past	18.7%	22.6%	ns
<b>Violence-Specific Factors</b>			
% Referred for Non-Physical Abuse (vs. Physical/Sexual)	8.6%	3.1%	ns
% Under Influence of Substance(s) at Time of Incident	39.6%	37.5%	ns
<b>Child-Specific Factors</b>			
% Whose Children Witnessed DV Incident	44.4%	41.9%	ns
% Self-Report Child Abuse at Intake	22.9%	18.8%	ns

The data were initially analyzed through a series of cross-tabulations and statistical tests (Chi Square, Phi, Independent t-test/Mann-Whitney U) to determine the nature, strength, and significance of the relationships between gender variables and the variables listed above. As is often the case with studies that use existing data, challenges with missing data were encountered because of problems with the agency's filing system, which resulted in incomplete records. Consequently, the "N" for each statistical procedure varies. The number of subjects for which data related to treatment completion/attrition was available is 179—representing 90% of the total sample recruited. All 32 women are included in this number. The number of subjects for which data related to recidivism was available is 197, or 100% of the initial sample of records. However, thirty (15%) of these individuals (all males) were not included in the recidivism analyses because they were either known to have been incarcerated for long periods of time during the follow-up period or to have left the area making it impossible to obtain reliable follow-up data for them, leaving a sample size of 167 for which data regarding re-offense was available. The "N" for the remainder of the variables examined will be reported for the significant statistical tests reported below. All cases with missing data are males; no missing data exists for the any of the females in the sample.

## Findings

The men and women did not differ significantly with respect to age (men = 33, sd= 8.6, N= 160; women = 31, sd= 7.3, N= 32) or race, nor was one group more likely than the other to complete treatment or re-offend during or following participation in treatment. Men and women did differ in a number of other ways, however. The most striking differences were found in employment rates and income. The women were much more likely to be unemployed ( $\chi^2= 16.05$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $N= 195$ )—72% (23/32) of the women were unemployed compared to one-third (56/163) of the men. Of those individuals who were employed at intake, women reported significantly less monthly income ( $z= -4.76$ ,  $p <$

<sup>2</sup> Clients who completed treatment had met their therapist's expectations concerning progress instead of completing some predetermined number of sessions. However, in most cases, clients were required to complete a minimum of 20 sessions and rarely did the number of sessions exceed 26.

<sup>3</sup> Recidivism was measured exclusively by police and court records. To compensate for these restricted indicators for measuring recidivism, any police or court activity related to intimate partner violence was counted as a re-offense, regardless of whether the charge was eventually dismissed. Because the present study included former program clients who participated in treatment over five years, intervals between intake and follow-up vary from as little as seven months to as long as 58 months. The mean follow-up period for the sample was 25 months.

.001, N= 143) with women and men reporting mean monthly incomes of \$273 (sd= \$382, n= 26) and \$1242 (sd= \$1218, n= 117), respectively. This discrepancy is likely due, in part, to the fact that all of the women who were employed worked in low-wage service sector jobs. The obvious implication, of course, is that economically dependent women can be expected to remain in abusive relationships well beyond the initial onset of abuse—an assertion that is supported by the finding that women remained in abusive relationships even though they were much more likely than the men to be cohabiting with their partners rather than being more formally tied to them through marriage ( $\chi^2= 5.84$ ,  $p < .05$ , N= 187).

The women were much more likely than the men to be living with abusive partners. Seventy-three percent (23/32) of the women lived with partners who were mutually combative, as evidenced by their partners' being arrested/cited and subsequently referred to the program, compared to just 17% (28/165) of the men ( $\chi^2= 46.2$ ,  $p < .001$ , N= 197). As well, 79% of the sample, including 13% (4) of the women and 92% (152) of the men, self-identified as primary aggressors as opposed to mutual combatants. Women also reported more problems with IPV in past relationships than did the men. Forty percent (13/32) of the women reported abusive behavior in former relationships compared to 21% (31/147) of the men ( $\chi^2= 5.79$ ,  $p = .023$ , N= 179). Moreover, 16% (24/147) of the men reported prior problems with IPV in their current relationships compared to 37% (12/32) of the women ( $\chi^2= 6.71$ ,  $p = .01$ , N= 179). Evidently, as the literature indicates, women tend to repeat abusive partnerships, which lends credence to the observation that traditional cultural values reinforce dependent behaviors for women no matter how harmful they may be. It is only as women develop a stronger sense of self and of their own competencies that they are likely to view alternatives to the abusive relationship as possible.

Differences were discovered between the men and women in terms of psychiatric histories. Forty-four percent (14/32) of the women reported experiencing psychiatric problems in the past compared to 26% (40/156) of the men ( $\chi^2= 4.23$ ,  $p = .05$ , N= 188). A trend for women to more frequently be given a psychiatric diagnosis at intake was also identified. ( $\chi^2= 2.29$ ,  $p < .10$ , N= 188). No differences were discovered, however, with respect to psychiatric diagnosis. That is, women were no more likely than men to be diagnosed with depression or any other mental health problem. One possible inference here is that women offenders are more psychologically distressed, or are more likely than male offenders to ask for help when they experience emotional or psychological distress by discussing their problems with program staff.

Other noteworthy differences between the men and women related to the response of the criminal justice system were discovered. As indicated in the literature review, these findings show that police appear to respond differently to IPV perpetrated by women, perhaps for reasons related to gender bias. Women, for instance, were more likely to receive citations for their crimes (37% or 12/32 vs. 15% or 22/145), whereas the men were more likely to be arrested ( $\chi^2= 7.1$ ,  $p = .008$ , N=177). Differences in sentencing patterns were also identified. Judges ordered men (n= 42) to spend an average of 20 more days in jail than the women (n= 32) ( $z= 1.98$ ,  $p = .047$ , N=74). In addition, although the differences only represent a trend ( $p = .097$ ), it is nevertheless interesting to note that men were fined over \$200 more on average than the women. Significantly, none of the women in the sample was on supervised probation—usually an indication of a lengthy and serious criminal history—whereas 18 of the 165 (13%) males were under a probation officer's supervision. Again, as is well established in the feminist literature, women have historically been taken far less seriously—as a threat to society, for example, than have men.

## Discussion

Our study implies that men and women mandated to IPV treatment differ in a number of ways. Compared to men, women were more likely to be unemployed and earn less money, affirming research that indicates that women experience more challenging—and therefore dependency inducing—socioeconomic circumstances. Economic dependence forces women to remain in abusive relationships because they lack the resources necessary to function independently of male providers. Given the uniquely engendered character of this dependence, it would seem that differential treatment responses that recognize this reality are warranted.

Women were also more likely to be cited for their crimes than arrested, more likely to receive “lighter” court sanctions, and less likely to be placed on supervised probation. This differential treatment by the criminal justice system might be the result of traditional perceptions held by police and judges that women are not as violent by nature as are men, thus resulting in more lenient treatment. As well, gendered perceptions concerning women and their role as the primary nurturer of children may influence police and court behavior, particularly with respect to arrest differences since an arrest would result in her removal from the home, perhaps depriving children of their maternal caregiver.

Another possibility regarding leniency may also be that women are committing less serious offenses than are the men. Finally, women often have lesser criminal histories than men which make them eligible for more lenient treatment. Unfortunately, these questions were not able to be addressed given the limitations associated with the analysis of the data available. Further research aimed at understanding women offenders' own perceptions of leniency would be instructive in this regard, especially in view of the author's thesis that the traditional norms that have governed male-female behavior are changing (Fleury-Steiner et al., 2006).

While the present study's findings are consistent with conventional thinking which suggests that women IPV offenders' violence is generally reactive, the authors also feel that there is room to speculate that these behaviors may be changing in response to cultural values changes that are legitimating much more proactive roles for women in society, thus justifying a more violent aggression on the part of women than has historically been true (Feld & Strauss, 1989; Murphy & O'Leary, 1989; Bowker, 1983; Gelles & Straus, 1988; Giles, Giles, & Sims, 1983). In addressing these issues, treatment providers will become aware that they need to consider holding women accountable for their own violence while at the same time affirming their different experiences with violence as a response to life circumstances. IPV offender treatment programs could also be sensitive to the different mental health needs of men and women; they should consider thoroughly screening for mental health problems and, if necessary, ensure that appropriate services or referrals are offered (Leisring, et al., 2003). Finally, that women tend to be relational and to prefer more discussion-oriented and supportive treatment approaches, and that they seem more willing to discuss their psychological distress, suggests that programs treating women should allow for detailed discussions of their feelings and home circumstances.

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