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Patriarchal Terrorism and Common Couple Violence: Two Forms of Violence Against Women

This article argues that there are two distinct forms of couple violence taking place within families in the United States and other Western countries. A review of evidence from large-sample survey research and from qualitative and quantitative data gathered from women's shelters suggests that some families suffer from occasional outbursts of violence from either husbands or wives (common couple violence), while other families are terrorized by systematic male violence (patriarchal terrorism). It is argued that the distinction between common couple violence and patriarchal terrorism is important because it has implications for the implementation of public policy, the development of educational programs and intervention strategies, and the development of theories of interpersonal violence.

> You must go through a play of ebb and flow
> and watch such things as make you sick at heart.
>
> Nguyen Du (1983)

We are all too familiar with stories of women who are finally murdered by husbands who have terrorized them for years. In addition, the authors of the 1985 National Family Violence Survey estimate that over six million women are assaulted by their husbands each year in the United States. But are these really the same phenomenon?

This article argues that there are, in fact, two distinct forms of couple violence taking place in American households. Evidence from large-sample survey research and from data gathered from women's shelters and other public agencies suggests that a large number of families suffer from occasional outbursts of violence from either husbands or wives or both, while a significant number of other families are terrorized by systematic male violence enacted in the service of patriarchal control.

Sociological Perspectives on Violence Against Women in the Family

There are two major streams of sociological work on couple violence in families, one that is generally referred to as the *family violence perspective*, and the other of which may be called the *feminist perspective* (Kurz, 1989).

Work in the family violence perspective grew out of family scholars' interest in a variety of family conflict issues, and is generally traced to the early work of Straus (1971) and Gelles (1974). They came together in the early 1970s to develop

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a research agenda based on the use of interviews to elicit information regarding family violence from large random samples of the adult population of the United States, conducting national surveys in 1975 and 1985. Methodologically, work in this tradition has relied primarily on quantitative analysis of responses to survey questions, utilizing the strengths of random sample surveys in the production of estimates of prevalence, and causal analyses that rely on multivariate statistical techniques. Theoretically, the focus has been largely on commonalities among the various forms of family violence, such as the surprising frequency of violence, the instigating role of stress, and public adherence to norms accepting the use of some violence within the family context.

In contrast, research from the feminist perspective began with a narrower focus on the issue of wife beating, developing a literature that focuses on factors specific to violence perpetrated against women by their male partners (Dobash & Dobash, 1979; Martin, 1981; Roy, 1976; Walker, 1984). Methodologically, feminist analyses have relied heavily upon data collected from battered women, especially those who have come into contact with law enforcement agencies, hospitals, or shelters. Theoretically, the emphasis has been upon historical traditions of the patriarchal family, contemporary constructions of masculinity and femininity, and structural constraints that make escape difficult for women who are systematically beaten.

I do not wish to give the impression that the differences between these two literatures are absolute, although the often-rancorous debates that have gone on between the two groups of scholars seem at times to suggest that there is absolutely no overlap in methodology or theory (e.g., Dobash & Dobash, 1992, pp. 251–284). The truth is that family violence researchers do acknowledge the role of patriarchy in wife abuse (Straus, Gelles, & Steinmetz, 1980, pp. 242–243), and do make use of qualitative data obtained from battered wives (Gelles, 1974). On the other side, many feminist researchers utilize quantitative data (Yllo & Bograd, 1988) and acknowledge the role of factors other than the patriarchal structure of society in precipitating violence against wives (Martin, 1981). As will be seen in the next section, however, family violence researchers and feminist researchers do clearly disagree on some very important issues, and a case can be made that their differences arise from the fact that they are, to a large extent, analyzing different phenomena.

Violence Against Women in U.S. Families: Patriarchal Terrorism and Common Couple Violence

The findings of the two literatures discussed above lead to strikingly different conclusions regarding a number of the central features of family violence for which they both provide information (gender symmetry/asymmetry, per-couple frequency of violence, escalation of violence, and reciprocity of violence). While these findings suggest to each group of scholars that the other misunderstands the nature of such violence, they suggest to me that these groups are in fact studying two distinctly different phenomena.

The first form of couple violence, which I will call *patriarchal terrorism*, has been the focus of the women's movement and of researchers working in the feminist perspective. Patriarchal terrorism, a product of patriarchal traditions of men's right to control "their" women, is a form of terroristic control of wives by their husbands that involves the systematic use of not only violence, but economic subordination, threats, isolation, and other control tactics.

There are a number of difficult and important terminological issues here. The pattern of violence that I have just described is often referred to with terms such as *wife beating, wife battery*, and *battered women*. I have chosen to avoid these terms for two reasons. I avoid the restrictive term *wife* in order to acknowledge recent literatures that suggest that such a phenomenon may be involved in heterosexual dating relationships (Cate, Henton, Koval, Christopher, & Lloyd, 1982; Stets & Pirog-Good, 1987) and perhaps even in some lesbian relationships (Renzetti, 1992). I have chosen not to switch to a simple nongendered alternative, such as *partner*, because I am convinced that this pattern of violence is rooted in basically patriarchal ideas of male ownership of their female partners.

The terminology of *the battered wife* is also objectionable on the grounds that it shifts the focus to the victim, seeming to imply that the pattern in question adheres to the woman rather than to the man who is in fact behaviorally and morally responsible for the syndrome. The term *patriarchal terrorism* has the advantage of keeping the focus on the perpetrator and of keeping our attention on the systematic, intentional nature of this form of violence. Of course, the term also forces us to attend routinely to the historical and cultural roots of this form of family violence.

The second form of couple violence, which I will call *common couple violence*, is less a product of patriarchy, and more a product of the less-gendered causal processes discussed at length by Straus and his colleagues working in the family violence tradition (Straus & Smith, 1990). The dynamic is one in which conflict occasionally gets "out of hand," leading usually to "minor" forms of violence, and more rarely escalating into serious, sometimes even life-threatening, forms of violence.

Gender Symmetry/Asymmetry

The importance of the distinction between common couple violence and patriarchal terrorism is most forcefully illustrated in the heated debate over the extent to which women are perpetrators of couple violence. One of the surprising findings of Straus and his colleagues' national surveys was that women were evidently as likely to utilize violence in response to couple conflict as were men. One family violence researcher unfortunately chose to refer to these women's use of violence against their partners as "the battered husband syndrome" (Steinmetz, 1978a), suggesting that women's violence against men represented the same sort of phenomenon as the male violence that was being reported to women's shelters across the country. The feminist scholars strongly disagreed (Adams, Jackson, & Lauby, 1988; Berk, Loseke, Berk, & Rauma, 1983; Dobash & Dobash, 1992, pp. 251–284; Dobash, Dobash, Wilson, & Daly, 1992; Fields & Kirchner, 1978; Pleck, Pleck, Grossman, & Bart, 1978; Wardell, Gillespie, & Leffler, 1983). Unfortunately this debate has been structured as an argument about *the* nature of family violence, with both sets of scholars overlooking the possibility that there may be two distinct forms of partner violence, one relatively gender balanced (and tapped by the survey research methodology of the family violence tradition), the other involving men's terroristic attacks on their female partners (and tapped by the research with shelter populations and criminal justice and divorce court data that dominates the work in the feminist tradition).

The Steinmetz (1978) article that introduced the term *battered husband* to the literature relied primarily on data from large-scale survey research to make a case for the position that women are just as violent as men in intimate relationships, and that there was therefore a need for the development of public policy that would address the needs of men who were battered by their wives or lovers. Results from the Conflict Tactics Scale (CTS) used in the National Family Violence Surveys (NFVS)—both the 1975 study upon which Steinmetz relied and the 1985 replication—do indicate almost perfect symmetry in the use of violence by men and women against their partners. (For a thorough methodological critique of the CTS, see Dobash & Dobash, 1992, and Dobash et al., 1992. For earlier responses to many of those criticisms, see Straus, 1990a, 1990b. Although I am in essential agreement with many of the criticisms of the CTS, data presented below indicate that the patterns of violence discovered in shelter samples and national samples differ dramatically even when violence is assessed with the CTS in both settings. This provides strong evidence that the differences are not due merely to the deficiencies of the CTS.) For *any* use of violence, the 1975 national figures for men and women were 12.1% and 11.6%, respectively; in 1985 the comparable figures were 11.3% and 12.1%. For *serious* violence (a subset of the figures for any use of violence, including only acts judged to have a high probability of producing serious injury, such as hitting with a fist), the 1975 figures were 3.8% for men, 4.6% for women; in 1985 the comparable figures were 3.0% and 4.4% (Straus & Gelles, 1990, p. 118). In all cases, the gender differences are less than 2%.

These findings contrast dramatically with those from shelter populations, from hospitals, and from the courts. For example, Gaquin (1978) reported that National Crime Survey data (United States) for the period 1973–75 indicate that 97% of assaults on adults in the family were assaults on wives. Analyses of police files in the U.S. and Britain show similar patterns (Dobash & Dobash, 1992, p. 265; Martin, 1981, pp. 13–14). Kincaid's (1982, p. 91) analysis of family court files in Ontario, Canada, found 17 times as many female as male victims, and Levinger's (1966) study of divorce actions in Cleveland, Ohio, found 12 times more wives than husbands mentioning physical abuse (37% vs. 3%). Fields and Kirchner (1978, p. 218) reported that Crisis Centers in the New York City public hospitals counseled 490 battered wives and only two battered husbands during the last half of 1977.

The most likely explanation for these dramatic differences in the gender patterns of violence in the national surveys and in statistics collected by public agencies is not that one or the other methodology misrepresents the "true" nature of family vio-

lence, but that the two information sources deal with nearly nonoverlapping phenomena. The common couple violence that is assessed by the large-scale random survey methodology is in fact gender balanced, and is a product of a violence-prone culture and the privatized setting of most U.S. households. The patriarchal terrorism that is tapped in research with the families encountered by public agencies is a pattern perpetrated almost exclusively by men, and rooted deeply in the patriarchal traditions of the Western family.

Per Couple Frequency

With regard to the frequency of couple violence in "violent" families, we are fortunate to have data using the same data collection instrument (the CTS) with survey samples and shelter samples. According to Straus (1990b), among women who report to NFVS researchers that they have been assaulted by their husbands in the previous year, the average number of such assaults per woman was six ($n = 622$); for those in the sample who had used the services of a shelter, the average was 15.3 ($n = 13$).

In dramatic contrast, Straus cited studies of shelter populations in Maine (Giles-Sims, 1983) and Michigan (Okun, 1986), utilizing the same series of survey questions, that find an average annual number of incidents per woman in the 65 to 68 range! Although Straus argued that the NFVS probably "underrepresents" certain types of violence against women (among the 622 assaulted women in the sample, only four had been assaulted as many as 65 times), he evidently continued to think of this as just another point on a continuum of violence, referring to the missed cases as "cases of extreme violence" (Straus, 1990b, p. 85). Although Straus recognized and discussed the possibilities raised by this "underrepresentation" for resolving differences between the conclusions of shelter research and survey research, and even referred to the possibility of a "qualitatively different experience," he does not seem to have taken the next step, to suggest that perhaps we are dealing with decidedly different phenomena and should adopt a terminology that would mitigate against the mistaken assumption that common couple violence is merely less severe or less frequent than patriarchal terrorism.

Escalation

The two literatures also appear to uncover dramatically different patterns of behavior in terms of escalation. The evidence from the NFVS suggests that so-called minor violence against women does not escalate into more serious forms of violence. Feld and Straus (1990) reported data relevant to this question based on a 1-year follow-up survey of 420 respondents from the 1985 NFVS. My own reanalysis of their published data shows almost no tendency to escalation. For example, among husbands who had perpetrated no acts of minor or severe violence in Year 1 (the year prior to the 1985 interview), 2.6% had moved to severe violence in Year 2. Among those who had committed at least one act of only minor violence, only 5.8% had moved to severe violence; among those who had used severe violence in Year 1, only 30.4% had been that violent in Year 2. Thus, these data indicate that not only is there virtually no tendency to escalation (fully 94% of perpetrators of minor violence do not go on to severe violence), but that in most (70%) of the cases of severe violence there is, in fact, a de-escalation. Data on frequency show much the same pattern.

A very different pattern is observed in research with shelter populations. According to Pagelow (1981), "one of the few things about which almost all researchers agree is that the batterings escalate in frequency and intensity over time" (p. 45).

Why does patriarchal terrorism escalate while common couple violence does not? Common couple violence is an intermittent response to the occasional conflicts of everyday life, motivated by a need to control in the specific situation (Milardo & Klein, 1992), but not a more general need to be in charge of the relationship. In contrast, the causal dynamic of patriarchal terrorism is rooted in patriarchal traditions, adopted with a vengeance by men who feel that they must control "their" women by any means necessary. As one husband responded to his wife's protests regarding a violent episode during their honeymoon, "I married you so I own you" (Dobash & Dobash, 1979, p. 94). Escalation in such cases may be prompted by either of two dynamics. First, if his partner resists his control, he may escalate the level of violence until she is subdued. Second, even if she submits, he may be motivated not only by a need to control, but by a need to display that control, yielding a pattern observed by Dobash and Dobash (1979, p. 137), in which no amount of compliance can assure a wife that she will not be beaten:

> For a woman simply to live her daily life she is always in a position in which almost anything

> she does may be deemed a violation of her wifely duties or a challenge to her husband's authority and thus defined as the cause of the violence she continues to experience. (p. 137)

Reciprocity and Initiation of Violence

On the issue of reciprocity, the NFVS analysts report a pattern in which two-thirds of the families in which the husband has been violent also involve a violent wife, and in which "women initiate violence about as often as men" (Stets & Straus, 1990, p. 161).

Research with shelter populations provides quite a different picture. Pagelow, for example, reported that only 26% of her respondents say they fight back; another 16% indicate that they had once tried, but stopped when it made things worse (Pagelow, 1981, p. 66). She also suggested, although she is not entirely clear (Pagelow, 1981, pp. 65–66), that none of her respondents had initiated the violence in the incidents on which they reported. Giles-Sims's (1983, pp. 49–50) data for a shelter population show dramatic lack of reciprocity in the use of violence, as reported in response to the CTS. The five most severe forms of violence were roughly twice as likely to have been used by the men as the women, and in some cases the differences are even more dramatic (e.g., 84% of the men had beat up their spouse, as compared with 13% of the women), and this in spite of the fact that "the men had almost all abused the women seriously enough to cause injury. In many cases the beatings had been life threatening" (Giles-Sims, 1983, p. 50). The feminist scholars also point out that when women murder they are 7 times more likely than men to have acted in self-defense (Martin, 1981, p. 14). We may sum up the feminist research with testimony to the United States Commission on Civil Rights to the effect that "most women who have been violent towards their husbands have done so only as a last resort, in self-defense against longstanding terror and abuse from their husbands" (United States Commission on Civil Rights, 1978, pp. 450–453, cited in Dobash & Dobash, 1992, p. 257).

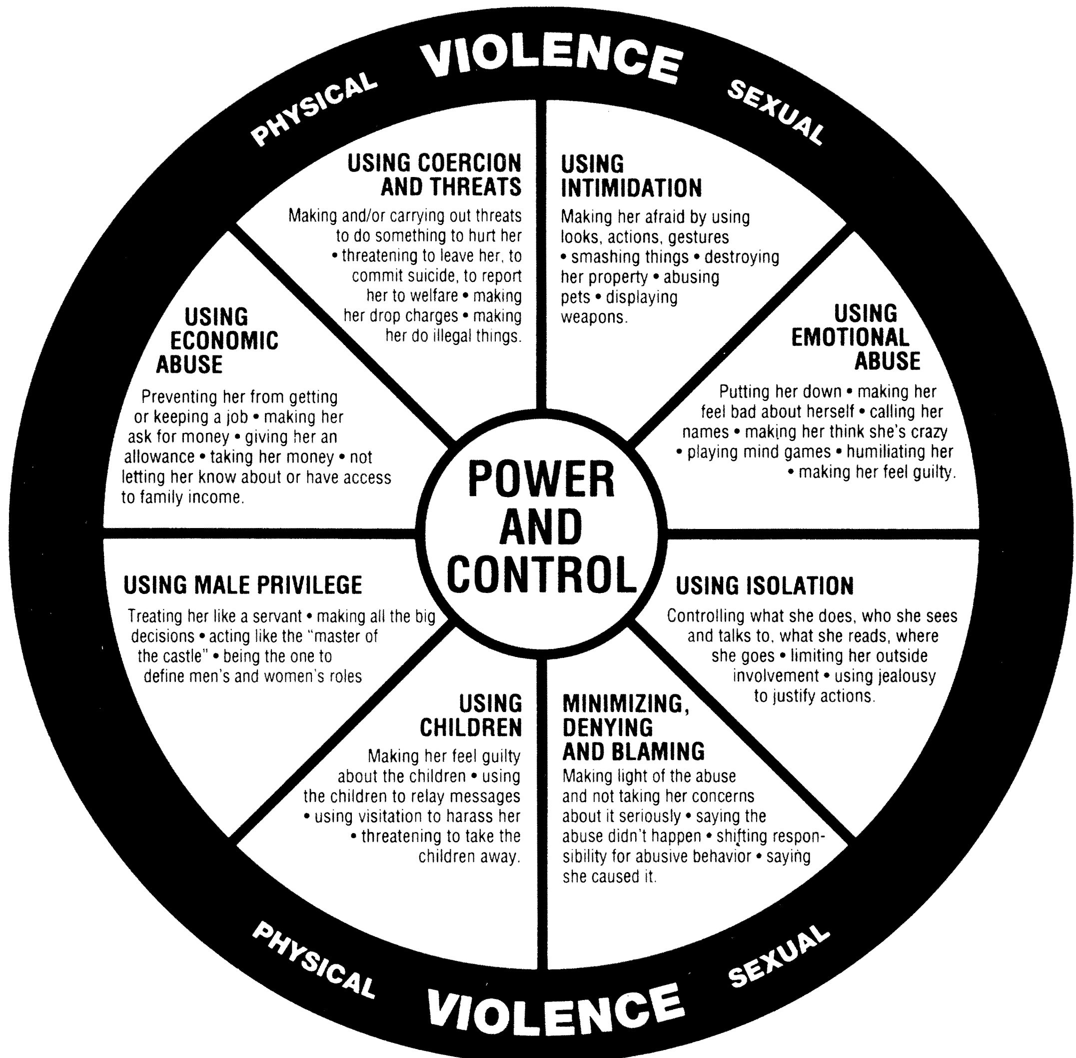
Patriarchal Terrorism and Common Couple Violence

The interpersonal dynamic of violence against women uncovered by the researchers working in the feminist tradition is one in which men systematically terrorize their wives, thus the term *patriarchal terrorism.* In these families the beatings occur on average more than once a week, and escalate in seriousness over time. The violence is almost exclusively initiated by the husband, most wives never attempt to fight back, and, among those who do, about one-third quickly desist, leaving only a small minority of cases in which the women respond even with self-defensive violence. These patterns have led researchers in the feminist tradition to conclude that violence against women in the family has its roots in the patriarchal structure of the U.S. family. The central motivating factor behind the violence is a man's desire to exercise *general* control over "his" woman.

It is important not to make the mistake of assuming that this pattern of general control can be indexed simply by high rates of violence. Although the average frequency of violence among cases of patriarchal terrorism may be high, there may well be cases in which the perpetrator does not need to use violence often in order to terrorize his partner. Feminist theorists and shelter activists argue that since patriarchal terrorism has its roots in a motive to exercise general control over one's partner, it is characterized by the use of multiple control tactics (Dobash & Dobash, 1979). The Duluth Domestic Abuse Intervention Project (Pence & Paymar, 1993) has developed a useful graphic representation of this pattern that captures the importance of not becoming overly focused on the violent control tactics that are only part of an overall pattern (see Figure 1). The patriarchal terrorist will use any combination of these tactics that will successfully (a) control his partner and (b) satisfy his need to display that control.

Researchers in the family violence perspective describe a dramatically different pattern of violence, one in which the complexities of family life produce conflicts that occasionally get "out of hand" in some families, incidents occurring in those families an average of once every 2 months. The violence is no more likely to be enacted by men than by women, and violent incidents are initiated as often by women as by men. In this common couple violence, there appears to be little likelihood of escalation of the level of violence over time. I would argue that this type of violence is usually not part of a pattern in which one partner is trying to exert general control over his or her partner. Although it is possible that a relatively infrequent, nonescalating use of violence is in some cases part of a generally successful use of other control tactics (the "success" precluding the need to use frequent or extreme violence), I will

FIGURE 1. POWER AND CONTROL WHEEL



Note: Reprinted from Pence and Paymar (1993).

argue next that it is more likely that the national surveys that uncover this pattern reach only populations in which violence is a relatively isolated reaction to conflict (common couple violence), while studies using data from shelters and other public agencies reach primarily victims of violent, but multifaceted, strategies of control (patriarchal terrorism).

SURVEY SAMPLES AND SHELTER SAMPLES

The debate that has arisen between the feminist researchers and the family violence researchers continues to be framed as a contention over the validity of two radically different descriptions of the nature of couple violence in the United States. The feminists have argued that the description of violence against women that is derived from family violence research is seriously flawed and simply cannot be reconciled with the results of feminist research.

I disagree, arguing that such apparent inconsistencies would be expected if the two literatures are dealing with different phenomena. I propose that the dramatic differences in the patterns of violence described by these two research traditions arise because the sampling decisions of the two traditions have given them access to different,

largely nonoverlapping populations, experiencing different forms of violence.

The Sampling Biases of Surveys and Shelters

One of Straus's (1990b) responses to feminist critiques of the NFVS was focused around what he called "the clinical fallacy," which arises "because women whose partners stopped assaulting them are unlikely to seek help from a shelter" (p. 86). The next, perfectly reasonable step in his line of thinking was to call into question generalization from shelter populations to "the general population." The problem is that he did not at this point acknowledge that survey research also misses a significant segment of the general population. Instead, his discussion of the "representative sample fallacy" fell into the trap of assuming not only that the shelter samples are not representative, but that a random sample is. He assumed that random sample surveys provide information regarding "the characteristics and experiences of the total population who manifest a certain problem" (Straus, 1990b, p. 86). I will argue that they do not.

The sampling bias in survey research comes in large part from the fact that even the best designed survey projects are unable to gather information from the total target sample, and nonrespondents may differ in important ways from respondents. For example, men who systematically terrorize their wives would hardly be likely to agree to participate in such a survey, and the women whom they beat would probably be terrified at the possibility that their husband might find out that they had answered such questions. Support for the argument that such families are not represented in the survey data may be found in the fact that among the 182 victims of so-called "wife beating" in the 1985 survey research sample, only four had been assaulted 65 times or more (the average for shelter populations). In contrast, if Straus and his colleagues are correct, and occasional family violence is normative in the sense of being expected and tolerated, if not accepted, then many, if not most, families involved in common couple violence may well agree to participate in a survey on family life.

What about the data sources for most of the feminist research—shelters, hospital emergency rooms, and the criminal and divorce courts? Certainly there are equally serious biases in these sources of data. It is likely, for example, that most families in which couple violence is only intermittent, an unusual response to family conflict, do not need or want such services. The woman or man who is struck or pushed by his or her partner a few times a year will not in most cases report the incident to the police, or go to a shelter, or file for divorce or need to seek medical treatment. Such sources of data are therefore heavily biased in the direction of providing access only to cases of patriarchal terrorism, and, even among those cases, biased in the direction of the most egregious cases.

The biases of shelter samples, although hard to document, are perhaps obvious. The biases of random sample surveys, however, may require a bit of documentation.

Do the Survey Numbers Seem to Include Patriarchal Terrorism?

Straus and his colleagues (Gelles & Straus, 1988; Straus & Gelles, 1990) have continued to make use of terminology that implies that their survey data include the phenomenon that is encountered in battered women's shelters, referring to severe violence against wives as "wife beating." However, there are data available from both the NFVS and from women's shelters regarding the number of women who have experienced patriarchal terrorism, data that produce estimates that are so divergent that we must conclude that the NFVS simply does not give access to this phenomenon.

Violence data. Straus (1990b) reported that, in the 1985 NFVS, four women reported a frequency of assaults equal to or above the average for shelter populations. Since this is the number of women above the average for shelter populations, if we assume a symmetrical distribution of frequency of violence for shelter populations, the total population should be projected from double that figure, or eight. The projection to the total U.S. population yields an estimate of about 80,000 women whose beatings fall into a frequency range comparable to that of shelter populations, and who might therefore seriously consider the possibility of moving to shelter housing.

We can compare this figure with an estimate of the number of women actually requesting housing in shelters in the United States. Although the National Coalition on Domestic Violence cannot provide such statistics, this source suggested that I contact the Pennsylvania Coalition on Domestic Violence for the best available statistical data; another source suggested Minnesota. In

1985–86, Pennsylvania shelters housed or turned away 6,262 different women (Pennsylvania Coalition Against Domestic Violence, 1995). Extrapolating that figure to the total U.S. population (i.e., multiplying by 19.20), we get an estimate of 120,230 women who actually tried to use shelter housing, a number roughly 1.5 times the 80,000 that the NFVS suggests might even consider such housing. The Minnesota data provide an even more dramatic contrast. According to the Minnesota Department of Corrections (1987), in 1985, 8,518 women were housed or turned away from shelters. Extrapolating to the U.S. population (i.e., multiplying by 57.72), we get an estimate of 491,659 women to compare with the NFVS estimate of 80,000.

If we take the shelter data as representing the absolute minimum number of women who consider using shelter services each year (they include, after all, only those women who not only considered such action, but took it), we would estimate that the NFVS reaches one-sixth to two-thirds of the victims of patriarchal terrorism in its target sample. However, given the difficulty most women find making the decision to seek help (Kirkwood, 1993), most shelter activists assume that there are at least five terrorized women in the community for every one that seeks shelter, suggesting that the NFVS may collect data from only 1/13 to 1/7 of such couples in its target sample.

Data on use of shelter services. There is another potential source of data on patriarchal terrorism in the NFVS. Straus (1990b) reported that there were 13 women in the NFVS who had used shelter services. That figure extrapolates to about 128,600 women nationwide. Unfortunately, the survey wording, referring to the use of the services of a women's shelter, is ambiguous. Most so-called women's shelters in the U.S. actually function as comprehensive resources for women who have been victimized by patriarchal terrorism (many also address issues of sexual assault and child sexual abuse). Most of the women who use the services of such organizations do not actually move into a shelter facility. I will, therefore, compare the figure of 128,600 derived from the NFVS with an estimate from shelters of the number of women who contact them annually regarding domestic violence.

The Pennsylvania Coalition Against Domestic Violence reported 41,425 domestic violence contacts with different women in 1985–86, which extrapolates to 795,360 nationwide. If we assume rough comparability of "domestic violence contacts" in the shelter data and "used the services of a women's shelter" in the NFVS data, we must conclude that the NFVS successfully interviewed about one-sixth of the users of shelter services in its target sample. The Minnesota Department of Corrections reported shelter contacts with 36,189 women in 1985, which extrapolates to about 2.1 million women nationwide, 16 times the extrapolation from the NFVS.

Certainly, there are a great many problems with the statistical manipulations presented above. Pennsylvania and Minnesota are certainly unusual states, having been in the forefront of the shelter movement. In addition, the meaning of "using the services of a shelter" and "shelter contacts" may be different in the two data sources, and there may be hidden problems of distinguishing multiple contacts with the same woman from contacts with different women. The extrapolations from the NFVS and shelter statistics are so divergent, however, that it is unlikely that any of these problems would alter the conclusion that the NFVS simply does not provide valid information regarding the prevalence or nature of patriarchal terrorism.

Response rates. This conclusion implies, of course, that a large number of the cases of patriarchal terrorism in the *target* sample fell into the category of nonrespondents. Were there enough nonrespondents in the NFVS to make this argument tenable? There are two ways to look at the number of nonrespondents in the NFVS. First, we can ask how many of the respondents who were screened as eligible did not complete the interview. According to Gelles and Straus (1991, p. 25), that number is 1,149, representing about 16% of those screened eligible, and providing the basis for the commonly reported 84% response rate in the NFVS. If we assume that roughly half of the nonrespondents are women, we get a figure of 574 female nonrespondents.

However, there is a second way to look at refusals, including as nonrespondents some portion of the 6,166 people whom Gelles and Straus listed as "unable to screen for eligibility." I presume that these are people who refused to answer even the screening questions, since people who were not reached after multiple attempts were listed separately in the discussion of the sampling methodology. Although it therefore makes sense to label these people as refusals, it is likely that only some of them were eligible for the interview

in any case, and we probably should not count all of them as refusals. Since 47% of the respondents who *were* screened for eligibility were deemed eligible, it seems reasonable to add 47% of the 6,166—or 2,898—to our pool of nonrespondents, yielding 4,047 nonrespondents and an alternative response rate of 60%, not the 84% usually reported. If we assume that roughly half of the nonrespondents are women, we have 2,024 female nonrespondents.

If we assume the worst, that the eight most severely abused women in the NFVS represent only 1/30 of such women in the target sample, the other 29/30—or 232—women would represent only 40% of the 574 female nonrespondents or 11% of the 2,024 female nonrespondents (the base depending upon your choice of definition of nonresponse). Similarly, if as suggested in the worst case scenario above, the 13 shelter clients who responded represent only 1/16 of such people in the target sample, the other 15/16—or 195—women (shelter clients who presumably refused to participate in the survey) would represent only 34% of the 574 female nonrespondents, or 10% of the 2,024 female nonrespondents. Although these percentages are not small by any means, there are clearly enough nonrespondents in the NFVS to cover even the worst-case estimate of underrepresentation of patriarchal terrorism.

Thus, I would argue that the sampling biases of shelter research and "random" sample research put them in touch with distinct, virtually nonoverlapping populations of violent families. On the one hand, shelter samples include only a small portion of the women who are assaulted at least once by their partner in any particular year. (For 1985, the NFVS estimate is six million such women, while the shelter extrapolations suggest that at most two million women contacted shelters, many fewer seeking services that would make them likely to show up in a shelter research sample.) Of course, this select group is likely to include only women who feel they must enlist help to escape from a man who has entrapped them in a general pattern of violence and control, that is, victims of patriarchal terrorism.

On the other hand, the extrapolations from the NFVS and the Minnesota and Pennsylvania shelter data indicate that survey research reaches only a small fraction of the women who experience severe violence or who make use of the services of shelters. The vast majority of NFVS respondents who experience couple violence have not contacted shelters and have not experienced the level of violence likely to lead them to consider seeking shelter. This select group thus includes only cases in which the women are not generally afraid of their partner—because they have not experienced a general pattern of control—that is, women who are victims of common couple violence.

Summary

Certainly, the case for two forms of violence, one relatively nongendered, the other clearly patriarchal, is not ironclad. However, I am not the first scholar to suggest the possibility that there are multiple forms of couple violence. In fact, at about the time she was developing her case for the "battered husband syndrome," Steinmetz (1978b) published an excellent article making a distinction that is quite similar to the distinction between patriarchal terrorism and common couple violence. More recently, Lloyd and Emery (1994) have emphasized variability in their review of the literature on couple violence. They present nine "tenets" that explicate the interpersonal and contextual dynamics of aggression in intimate relationships. Two of those nine tenets focus on the likelihood of multiple forms of couple violence, and in both cases the authors are able to cite relevant data to support their position (Lloyd & Emery, 1994, pp. 37–40).

Nevertheless, since the heart of the distinction between common couple violence and patriarchal terrorism is one of motivation, the evidence presented above can only be suggestive. What is required is research that can provide insight into motivation. One way to get at motivation would be to gather information concerning a range of conflict and control tactics from each couple. Patriarchal terrorism is presumed to involve acts of violence that are embedded in a larger context of control tactics. Common couple violence is presumed to show a less purposive pattern, erupting as it does from particular conflicts rather than from a general intent to control one's partner. A second approach to motivation is in-depth interviewing of couples who are involved in violence, eliciting interpretations of the psychological and interpersonal causes of specific incidents or patterns of control. The goal is to go beyond the behavioral description of particular acts to develop a narrative of each incident's development, as presented and interpreted by perpetrators and targets of violence. Both of these sorts of data are commonly collected in the work with shelter samples. However, we also need this kind of data from

samples that target populations that are more likely to include examples of both forms of violence.

Let me conclude with a partial list of the reasons for my belief that the distinction between common couple violence and patriarchal terrorism is important. The first, and most important, has to do with the role of scientific understanding in the shaping of social policy. The issue is perhaps best illustrated in the debate regarding the gender symmetry/asymmetry of couple violence. The failure to make a distinction between patriarchal terrorism and common couple violence has led some analysts to make the logical error of leaping from (a) the description of a few case studies of terrorism perpetrated against men and (b) frequency estimates of common couple violence against men from survey research to (z) the conclusion that there is a widespread "battered husband" syndrome. This erroneous conclusion may be used in campaigns against funding for women's shelters (Pleck et al., 1978), opponents arguing that shelters should not be funded unless they devote equal resources to male and female victims. Although it is indisputable that *some* men are terrorized by their female partners (I have worked with some at my local shelter), the presentation of survey data that tap only common couple violence as evidence that men are terrorized as frequently as women produces a dangerous distortion of reality.

A similar distortion occurs when stories of patriarchal terrorism against women are used to describe the nature of family violence, while numbers that probably apply only to common couple violence (survey extrapolations) are used to describe its prevalence. If the arguments presented above are correct, random sample surveys cannot produce estimates of the prevalence of patriarchal terrorism. We must develop methods of collecting and extrapolating effectively from shelter, hospital, police, and court data.

A second major problem arises when educational and therapeutic efforts targeted at prevention and intervention are governed by the assumption of one form of couple violence. For example, in women's studies texts and in training manuals at women's centers, one often finds the statement that couple violence always escalates. Unacceptable as any one incident of violence in a relationship may be, if the arguments above are correct, it is certainly not the case that escalation is an inevitable part of male violence, let alone an inevitable part of the violence in lesbian relationships, which is almost certainly more likely to be common couple violence, which does not generally escalate. Thus, advice that is based on a mistaken assumption of impending terrorism may do some women a great disservice. One can also imagine similar scenarios of misinterpretation and misplaced advice in family counseling or other therapeutic relationships. As in most areas of intervention, family practitioners will be most effective if they work with a set of alternative interpretive frameworks rather than with a single-minded assumption that every case of violence fits the same pattern.

The third area in which problems may be created by the conflation of different forms of violence is in theoretical interpretation. If the two forms of violence have different psychological and interpersonal roots, then theory development will either have to proceed along different lines for each, or move in the direction of synergistic theories that explicate the conditions under which particular combinations of the same causal factors might produce qualitatively different patterns of violent behavior. For example, we are beginning to try to develop an understanding of the dynamics of lesbian couple violence, a phenomenon that must seem somewhat mysterious if we assume that all violence within couples follows the pattern found in patriarchal terrorism. If we were to assume a unitary phenomenon, we would develop a theory of lesbian violence that focused heavily on the conditions under which some lesbians might fall into patriarchal family forms. It may be more reasonable to assume that the bulk of violence in lesbian relationships is of the common couple variety and involves causal processes that are very similar to those involved in nonlesbian common couple violence, having little to do with the taking on of patriarchal family values.

Alternatively, using the synergistic approach to theory development, we might note that (a) some, if not all, of the causal factors involved in patriarchal terrorism may also be involved in common couple violence and vice versa, (b) many of these factors are best conceptualized as continuous variables, and (c) although some of them are sex-linked, there is probably considerable overlap in the gender distributions (Taylor, 1993). The following partial list of causal factors may be used to illustrate these three points: (a) motivation to control, (b) normative acceptability of control, (c) inclination to use violence for control, (d) physical strength differences that make violence effective, (e) inclination to expressive violence, (f) victim deference, and (g) structural

commitment to the relationship. All could conceivably be involved in the generation of particular cases of either patriarchal terrorism or common couple violence, each can be conceived as a continuous variable, and all are likely to be at least imperfectly linked to gender. The behavior described in this paper as patriarchal terrorism, however, may develop only from the co-occurrence of high values on some particular subset of the causal variables. If all other combinations of the same variables produce either no violence at all or a pattern recognizable as common couple violence, this complex combination of weakly gender-linked, continuous variables would produce a strongly gender-linked pattern of two types of couple violence. Under such conditions, even relatively weak links of the various factors to gender might produce empirical patterns of patriarchal terrorism that occur almost exclusively among men in heterosexual relationships, accompanied by the occasional occurrence of a similar pattern among women—even in lesbian relationships—and in gay male couples.

Finally, we have to ask, "How on earth could two groups of social scientists come to such different conclusions about something as unsubtle as family violence?" We owe it to the families that are the focus of our work not to get so caught up in the defense of our initial positions that we fail to see important insights that can be gained from our disagreements. The social policy, educational, and therapeutic implications of what we do are too important for us to allow our deep moral aversion to violence to blind us to important distinctions. Yes, all family violence is abhorrent, but not all family violence is the same. If there are different patterns that arise from different societal roots and interpersonal dynamics, we must make distinctions in order to maximize our effectiveness in moving toward the goal of peace in our private lives.

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