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The way that society talks about women and their use of violence and force has grave implications for social policy and women's experiences in the criminal justice system. Society's cultural stereotypes about women and gender color the way professionals in law enforcement, the legal system, the courts, and social policy agencies treat women who commit violent acts of aggression. This article will attempt to shed some light on how gender stereotypes that continue to permeate our society create the very cultural discourses that people in positions of power and in the population at large use to talk about women and violence.

The way that we, as a society, talk about women and their use of violence and force has grave implications for social policy and women's experiences in the criminal justice system. In other words, society's cultural stereotypes about women and gender color the way professionals in law enforcement, the legal system, the courts, and social policy agencies treat women who commit violent acts of aggression. As Elizabeth Schneider (2000) made clear in *Battered Women and Feminist Lawmaking*, for example, law and, I would add, social policy

> does not exist outside culture but is reflected in popular consciousness, where it takes on a wide range of cultural forms and produces cultural meanings. Law is made, and works, both on the level of "grand" theory and visionary conceptualization and on the "ground" level in practice, not only in major law reform litigation but in individual cases. (p. 8)

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population at large use to talk about women and violence. It is these stereotypes and discourses that then often play into how such women are viewed, treated, and ultimately dealt with by the institutions that affect their lives. Although it has been made clear by recent research that many women who have been arrested for violent acts have committed those acts in the context of an abusive relationship, I am more interested here in women who use violence "in their own right" and how these "bad girls" are seen by others. What we shall discover is that similar to Foucault's (1979) multilayered discourse of sexuality as outlined in his celebrated *Discipline and Punish*, we, as a society, need a multilayered discourse of violence to explain the complexities arising from society's perception of gender and of women in particular.

Given a pervasive cultural belief in the virgin-whore duality, do most people believe that women cannot be violent or that they cannot be as violent as men? When a woman is violent, however, why are we so interested in and fascinated by her case, labeling her either as *mad* or *bad*? What are the discourses that we use to talk and write about such criminality? What pushes a woman to violence and against whom? Who is responsible for the violence that women do? A number of feminist theorists, historians, criminologists, sociologists, media experts, and legal scholars have addressed these important questions as they have tried to understand better what constitutes the discourses of female violence and how they relate to gender stereotypes in our culture at large.

These are also some of the issues that I shall be treating in this article. I shall first review the implications of the social construction of gender and violence: gender construction itself, the resultant differences between male and female aggression and why some women become violent, and additional causes and consequences of gender polarity. I shall then discuss some of the assumptions, myths, and stereotypes about feared violent women—both historically and contemporaneously—and the attempts to explain such behavior: the "blame-it-on-feminism" theory (including the related and current discussion of why it has come about that especially women who kill are seen as "in"), beliefs based on popular assumptions about the violent lesbian, and increasingly popular images of the "tough girl."

In all of these sections, my perspective remains constant: Society's stereotypical views of what a woman should be and how she

should act help create the very discourses that in turn continue these simplistic and yet dangerous stereotypes. We, as a society, cannot be satisfied with a unitary and thus potentially biased discourse about women and violence. We must instead develop and disseminate the aforementioned multilayered discourse so that professionals in areas of social policy, law enforcement, and the criminal justice system can better understand and treat the complexities of violent women.

THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF GENDER AND VIOLENCE

GENDER CONSTRUCTION[1]

In making a distinction between sex, a biological construct, and gender, a social construct, the form of which depends on a multitude of societal influences and messages, it is essential to talk about the range of different types of masculinities and femininities in our cultures and how they inform and are informed by our notions of gender hierarchy and power.

Why are we, as a society, often uncomfortable with other people until we have successfully placed them in a gender status, and why do we demand that gender be determined by a dichotomy? To what degree are our choices of gender self-determined, and is it easy or even possible to resist society's expectations of gender conformity? As Judith Lorber (1992) stated in *Paradoxes of Gender*, "In the social construction of gender, it does not matter what men and women actually do or even if they do the same thing. The social institution insists only that what they do is perceived as different" (p. 26). Carol Tavris (1992) continued this line of thinking in *The Mismeasure of Woman* when she discussed the conceptualization of gender as a culture, male as normalcy or the norm, and the intersection between gender and language. She questioned why we persist in using language that expresses differences between the sexes when the differences are not consistently demonstrated in research. She also wondered why our speech and behaviors change when in the company of men, of women, and of women and men. In other words, in what ways does context change one's behavior, and does that behavior change in sex-typed ways?

Because gender is socially constructed and because people tend to place individuals and groups into specific boxes to label and "understand" them, Nancy Chodorow (1999) explored and extended this tendency in chapter 3 of her latest book, *The Power of Feelings*. In it, she argued that each of us creates personal emotional meaning throughout life. She proposed the idea that

> an individual, personal creation and a projective emotional and fantasy animation of cultural categories create the meaning of gender and gender identity for any individual. Each person's sense of gender is an individual creation, and there are thus many masculinities and femininities. (pp. 69-70)

The gender called man, culturally defined in its manhood, often needs to reject the gender called woman, itself culturally defined in its womanhood, by distinguishing itself as strong, powerful, controlling, and often aggressive and violent. Judith Butler (1999) in *Gender Trouble* perhaps best summed up this nonbiological nature of masculinity and femininity and the possibility that violence and aggression (what Sherrie Inness, 1999, called toughness) are attached not to sex but to gender.

> To what extent do *regulatory practices* of gender formation and divisions constitute identity, the internal coherence of the subject, indeed, the self-identical status of the person? To what extent is "identity" a normative ideal rather than a descriptive feature of experience? And how do the regulatory practices that govern gender also govern culturally intelligible notions of identity? In other words, the "coherence" and "continuity" of "the person" are not logical or analytic features of personhood, but, rather, socially instituted and maintained norms of intelligibility. Inasmuch as "identity" is assured through the stabilizing concepts of sex, gender, and sexuality, the very notion of "the person" is called into question by the cultural emergence of those "incoherent" or "discontinuous" gendered beings who appear to be persons but who fail to conform to the gendered norms of cultural intelligibility by which persons are defined. (p. 23)

Violent women often fall into this category as "incoherent" or "discontinuous" beings who fail to conform to the gendered norms of our culture. What is missing, of course, is the attempt to understand that aggression and violence are often manifested differently in women and in men and stem from different causes.

MALE AND FEMALE AGGRESSION AND VIOLENCE

In her book, *Men, Women, and Aggression*, Anne Campbell (1993) wrote convincingly of what she sees as the "double standard of aggression" between men and women. Her thesis is clear:

> Maleness and aggression have become linked to the point where it is easy to forget about women's aggression. It takes place far less often than men's, and it rarely makes headlines.[2] It is private, unrecognized, and frequently misunderstood. It looks and feels different from men's. . . . Both sexes see an intimate connection between aggression and control, but for women aggression is the *failure* of self-control, while for men it is the *imposing* of control over others. Women's aggression emerges from their inability to check the disruptive and frightening force of their own anger. For men, it is a legitimate means of assuming authority over the disruptive and frightening forces in the world around them. (p. 1)

Campbell's (1993) work on these "cultural lessons in aggression" warrants further citing because it presents a fundamental approach that links with other researchers and theorists on violence and gender distinctions and especially raises questions related to the perceived recent rise in "real" female violence. She stated:

> If, in men's accounts of aggression, we are told what it is like to take control, in women's accounts we hear about what it means to lose control. For women, the threat comes from within; for men, it comes from others. For women, the aim is a cataclysmic release of accumulated tension; for men, the reward is power over another person, a power that can be used to boost self-esteem or to gain social and material benefits. For women, the interpersonal message is a cry for help born out of desperation; for men, it is an announcement of superiority stemming from a challenge to that position. For women, the fear of aggression is a fear of breaking relationships; for men, it is the fear of failure, of fighting and losing, or of not being man enough to fight at all. I call women's approach to their beliefs about their aggression *expressive*, and men's approach *instrumental*. . . . In the normal course of growing up, girls learn to respond to their aggression not with a sense of being purified and calmed but with a sense of shame. Aggression feels good to men but not to women. (pp. 7-8)

It is interesting to note that Campbell (1993) believed women rather than men experience a sense of shame after having acted

aggressively. In contrast, in his widely disseminated research after decades of work with violent criminals and the (predominantly male) criminally insane, psychiatrist James Gilligan (1996), in *Violence: Our Deadly Epidemic and its Causes*, stated that "the emotion of shame is the primary or ultimate cause of all violence" (p. 110), that the "purpose of violence is to diminish the intensity of shame and replace it as far as possible with its opposite, pride" (p. 111), and finally that a "central precondition for committing violence . . . is the presence of overwhelming shame in the absence of feelings of either love or guilt" (p. 113). One needs to add, however, that this overwhelming sense of shame in violent men is usually translated into a desire to control in order to assuage or negate this "feminine" sense of shame. Campbell's comments also relate to the work done by Gibson (1994) and Jeffords (1989) on masculinity, especially in the aftermath of the "national shame" of the American loss in the Vietnam War, when some men needed (and still need) to obliterate that sense of shame by fighting their own private war, thereby maintaining their sense of manhood. Echoing these same theories is Mann (1996), who in *When Women Kill* talked about the need to "save face" through the use of violence: "Saving face does not appear to be very influential for women who commit homicide" (p. 62).

Many women who commit violence, including homicide, are alone with their victims, whereas saving face usually involves humiliation and the attempted prevention of it in front of others. Private and public violence, then, is a significant factor in trying to understand gendered aggression. For Campbell (1993), men tend to express their violence more when there are onlookers; a male audience can encourage male aggression. But one sees the opposite effect on women: "Same-sex spectators . . . seem to remind her of the norms about restraint shared by the community of women" (p. 78).

For aggressive men, such restraint would thus be proof of their lack of masculinity and their taking on of female characteristics: Strong men take control, and weaker women are rescued and protected. In *The Violence Mythos*, for example, Barbara Whitmer (1997) analyzed the male hero who is caught in a double bind during his violent battle: He can rescue the world, but the world cannot rescue him. This forms a significant part of the portrait of the "New Warrior" set forth by Gibson (1994). For Gibson, this new

violent hero must remain alone, perhaps with his male buddies, but never emotionally attached to a woman or to a family. In any event, the woman would most likely turn out to be a "black widow," who could suck out his energy and destroy him—thereby making the woman the perpetrator—and a family might distract him from his aggressive duties. Whitmer saw this picture differently: The male human cannot survive in isolation; he needs his family to survive, although he is not to express such tender feelings. The trouble begins, however, when the "warrior" returns home, traumatized by "battle." He starts to see "his" woman as his rescuer, something that he cannot allow. She cannot rescue him because she would then become the hero, and he would turn into the victim. He then often "displaces the traumatic rage and rescue onto the woman" (p. 147).[3]

Whitmer (1997) also made use of Girard's (1972) concept of "lack of being," as she underscored some men's constant need to prove their masculinity. The control dynamic of the hero leads to the exploitation dynamic of the perpetrator. Violence becomes internalized in the (male) hero who angrily denies his need to be human, to trust and be trusted, and to rely on others. For Whitmer, "Girard's 'lack of being' stems from this damaged sense or lack of social connectivity and affirmation from the outer world" (p. 155).

An understanding of the importance of this lack of connectivity is essential if we are to understand gender differences in violence. Rhodes (2000) identified his own concept of "violentization" (brutality, belligerence, violent performance, and virulence) as the root cause of violence. He believed only those who have been "violentized"—often breaking any connective tie to others—commit violent acts. He further explored what he called "one of the enduring mysteries of criminal violence: Why so many fewer violent criminals are women then men" (p. 136). Rhodes theorized that women are evidently "discriminated against as candidates for violent coaching" (p. 136) and that when women do become dangerously violent, they have usually completed this process of "violentization" at a much later date than have men. "The patriarchal preference for subjecting males to violentization, and their physical advantage in achieving early successful violent performances, explains why men are much more likely than women to be seriously violent" (p. 320). Campbell (1993) agreed and believed that when women do experience lives of brutal

exploitation that destroy their faith in trust and intimacy, they too can be driven to commit aggressive and violent acts (p. 140), often in their own defense and in defense of their children. These acts, however, do seem to be qualitatively different from the kinds of violence to which Rhodes refers. Defensive and protective actions are not necessarily considered "violence" in absolute terms.

Campbell's (1993) work leads us to recent research and findings on women's use of violence and force to defend themselves against acquaintance and date rape and especially to defend themselves and their children in domestic violence cases—research that, as stated at the outset, is not the focus of my study but needs to be mentioned as a significant part of the perceived increase in female arrests and criminal activity. Although there have been studies (see Kimmel, 2002 [this issue], for a review) that report men and women use physical violence at equal rates in intimate relationships, other research has clearly shown that such claims fail to take into consideration the nature of the violence and the level of fear and injury experienced by each party (Brush, 1993; Cantos, Neidig,& O'Leary, 1994; Cascardi & Vivian, 1995; DeKeseredy & Schwartz, 1998a, 1998b; Hamberger & Guse, 2002 [this issue]; Stets & Straus, 1990). Similarly, although there has been an increase in the number of women arrested for domestic violence, some have attributed this increase to mandatory arrest policies where police cite evidence that both partners have engaged in some aggressive behavior and then make a dual arrest (or only arrest the woman), without taking into account which of the two people is primarily responsible for the aggression (Dasgupta, 2001; Lyon, 1999; Martin, 1997; Miller, 2001).[4]

Researchers such as Dasgupta (2001, 2002 [this issue]) and Miller (2001) have also recently pointed out that those who have been (erroneously) attempting to prove gender symmetry in family violence cases have used this increase in arrests of women as further evidence that women are as violent as men. Dasgupta (2001) questioned the "appropriateness of law-enforcement and judicial responses to women who have used violence against their heterosexual partners" and demonstrated "why we need to reshape current societal responses to changing notions of violence in intimate relationships" (pp. 1-2). She argued, as I do in this article, that "a broad theoretical perspective that considers the interactions of social [and one must add specifically socio-economic,

racial, and ethnic], historical, institutional, as well as individual variables in women's violence would provide a better understanding of it" (p. 5). In addition, contextualizing women's violence in this way will greatly aid practitioners as they work with women from diverse cultures, some of which do not suppress female violence as strictly as in Judeo-Christian cultures (Dasgupta, 2001).[5]

Jack (2001) has also undertaken interesting research into the causes of violent acts committed by women—that is, voluntarily and not necessarily or specifically as a result of fighting back in domestic violence situations. In her fascinating book, *Behind the Mask: Destruction and Creativity in Women's Aggression*, she begins with her thesis that women's aggression develops within a different social reality than does men's as follows:

> Throughout history, women have been punished for obvious displays of aggression; they have been forced to camouflage their intent to hurt others, their opposition, and even their positive forcefulness, to deliver their aggression in culturally sanctioned but more hidden ways. (p. 4)

Echoing Campbell's (1993) statement that boys learn early on that "aggression confers agency" (p. 32), Jack emphasized that boys are learning physical force as girls are learning the power and use of words and of manipulation, silencing any feelings of aggression. Pearson (1997) agreed: At around 10 or 11, girls "become aggressors of a different kind. They abandon physical aggression . . . and adopt a new set of tactics: They bully, they name call, they set up and frame fellow kids. They become masters of indirection" (p. 17). Basing her own work on that of the Finnish psychologists Bjorkqvist and Niemela (1992), Pearson saw this behavior as a "kind of social manipulation" that includes "'gossiping, exchanging nasty notes, trying to win others to one's side, and excluding from groups'" (p. 17).[6]

Jack (2001) felt that such female behavior stems from the cultural message that is given to young and adolescent girls as well as to adult women: They must not depart from the sanctioned cultural script. She sees the celebrated work done by Carol Gilligan (1982), for instance, on the greater morality of care, sense of connection with others, and level of empathy on the part of women as

too simplistic an explanation for their less frequent displays of aggressive behavior,

> an answer too rooted in stereotype and in the moral virtue society expects of women: Women do hurt others, at times with clear vision and at other times blindly. Though their aggression differs from men's in socially constructed ways and is often less physical, it causes harm. (p. 112)

For Jack, women's acclaimed empathy has been shaped by inequality, by the requirement that they serve as caretakers, and by the threat of violence against them. Women wear a mask that says they do not want to hurt, but that mask both protects and hides. It

> configures a woman's appearance to accord with a moral norm that is required of her gender more than of men. From the inside, the mask obscures the wearer's vision of the inequities and myths that work to stop her from taking action in the world. (p. 115)

As a substitution for agency, this mask, according to Jack, "most often is fashioned from a cloth of stereotypical feminine behavior such as sweetness, silence, and passivity. This strategic performance of femininity disguises women's intent to hurt, control, or oppose others" (pp. 236-37).

GENDER POLARITY

I shall soon consider these stereotypes of female behavior and observe how aggressive and violent women continue to be seen by much of society. I shall ultimately attempt to make sense of all of these theories on male and female violence and how they inform society's views of and potentially damaging discourses on men and women. But first, I would like to mention one additional observer of the human condition as defined by its gender polarity.

Kramer (1997) has written an intriguing and wise book of essays and musings, *After the Lovedeath: Sexual Violence and the Making of Culture*. In this text, which takes examples from both literature and music, Kramer postulated at the outset that many men are anxious about gender boundaries and express that

anxiety in both misogyny and sexual violence: "The basis of the cultural authority associated with the impossible position of absolute masculinity is precisely the threat of violence" (pp. 5-7). Kramer thus defined the resulting gender polarity as occurring when the duality, masculine-feminine, is constructed around a rigid boundary. The 19th century, as Foucault (1979) has shown, formed our modern oppositions of masculinity and femininity—and of heterosexuality and homosexuality—and its gender system set our agendas as subjects. Modern misogyny, for Kramer, is more vehement and virulent because of the historical change in the nature of masculine empowerment. With the demise of traditional patriarchy, where the king or prince held the position of absolute masculinity,

> the modern era turns the subject's failure to hold the absolute position into something intolerable. There is suddenly no reason the position should not be held. Thus it becomes the object of masculine quest, the modern form of the holy grail. (pp. 177-178)

Some men view sexuality as the conquest of women, who (conveniently) become associated with filth; at the same time, they are tortured by the terror of a female sexuality so great that it can dissolve their masculinity. As Kramer (1997) reminded us, "The logic of gender polarity is inflexible. Someone must always be castrated: which is to say, someone *else*. The man in an economy of lack needs women to embody that lack" (p. 102); a lack that the woman usually fills with adornments, props, and poses so that "the woman's lack is veiled by making her an eyeful" (p. 102). We return, once again, to Jack's (2001) concepts of the cultural masks of men and women. But ultimately, "Sexual violence is partly the product of the actual instability of gender polarity . . . perhaps even more damagingly, a product of a staged, fictitious instability, the aim of which is to enforce and reinforce what only appears to be buckling" (p. 261). In other words, it is all artificial, all constructed, perhaps buckling, perhaps not: masculinity, femininity, gender, power, control, sexuality, and violence. It is all based on the assumptions, the myths, and the stereotypes about men and women and the violence they do.

ASSUMPTIONS, MYTHS, AND STEREOTYPES ABOUT FEARED VIOLENT WOMEN

GENERAL DISCIPLINARY APPROACHES

As with all discussions of violence and gender, it is critical to include multiple disciplinary approaches when considering the role that culture and society play in the shaping of how we think about female violence and aggression. Basing her work on female criminality in fin-de-siècle Paris, the historian Shapiro (1996) believed that to understand modern assumptions made about women and crime, we need to look at the history of an expanded cast of dangerous women in the context of the fears of social and gender changes: "The perceived Otherness of women has, historically, allowed the metaphoric Woman to stand in for a wide and contradictory array of qualities, values, and meaning" (p. 4). The discourse of female criminality has thus betrayed anxiety over woman's traditional role in society—and indeed continues to do so. According to Shapiro, "born" female criminals (read: "female nature") can be seen as "careening between myth and misogyny" (p. 66) because they represent both order and disorder, with lesbians and feminists, especially, as cultural equivalents of criminality. In other words, if women's behavior is treated as a cultural marker and discursive sign, then "the criminal woman was [and is] like all women, only more so" (p. 66).

In their introduction to *No Angels: Women Who Commit Violence*, Myers and Wight (1996), both British media specialists, also saw women's behavior as a cultural marker and discursive sign as they speculated that excessive storytelling about women's violence is a symptom of society's anxiety over women's roles and their abandonment of traditional femininity; our reluctance to criminalize women betrays our fears of the falling apart of our social fabric. According to our rigid cultural gender polarity (see Kramer, 1997), violent women are seen neither as sane nor as women. Society needs to see violent women as different—either as mad or bad—because otherwise, we would need new discourses to understand that both men and women can be violent (Ballinger, 1996; Grindstaff & McCaughey, 1996).

> The fact that social tolerance for aggression is gendered reflects the cultural equation of violence and masculinity . . . women's aggression is seen as unnatural and therefore pathological . . . aggression is a primary marker of masculine/feminine difference, and construing women's aggression as unnatural helps mask the political character of gender inequality (indeed of gender itself). (Grindstaff & McCaughey, 1996, p. 150)

It is precisely the development and dissemination of these new discourses that reflect the complexities of violence and women that I am advocating.

For the journalist and feminist critic, Jones (1980), in her landmark book, *Women Who Kill*, the intimation that women are less violent than men either by nature or by socialization raises disquieting conclusions about the innate moral superiority of women or the need to improve society by bringing up men to be more like women. At the same time, women are seen as insane, hysterical, and weaker in every way and at every stage of life. Murder is therefore often situational, and given a certain set of circumstances, anyone of us might kill: "A murderess is only an ordinary woman in a temper" (p. 14). Concurrently, however, society is afraid of extremes—of female murderers, who like feminists, test established boundaries. If women are violent, can they truly be "feminine," or must female murderers be distinctly male, a masculine, monstrous freak?

How can one take these significant multidisciplinary comments and begin to make sense of the role that assumptions, myths, and stereotypes about violent women play in the "reality" of female violence? Or as put another way by Duggan (2000), this method of analysis and understanding must refuse "the separation of social life ('reality') from representations ('myth', or 'stereotype')" (p. 4).[7] We, as a society, may or may not be aware of how pervasive these assumptions, myths, and stereotypes about violent women (and indeed about women and gender in general) are as a result of beliefs that go far back into our historical past. Let us delve more into these powerful and complex assumptions that have deep historical roots and, unfortunately, have not disappeared in our modern era.

HISTORICAL EXAMPLES: THE TURN-OF-THE-CENTURY WOMAN

Jack (2001) described aggression as

> the bedrock upon which gender dualisms are erected: active/passive, warlike/peaceful, competitive/cooperative, separate/connected, and more. The thought of women's aggression arouses inchoate fears of an unnatural blurring of gender lines that have been drawn by evolution. If women are overtly aggressive, then gender, as our society has defined it, will no longer exist. (p. 30)

Jack's comments are written in the context of her discussion of the influence of both Darwin and Freud on our more modern fears of angry and violent women. One cannot overstate these influences because they have informed Western society's views of women as of the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

In his controversial *Evil Sisters: The Threat of Female Sexuality and the Cult of Manhood*, Dijkstra (1996) traced the development of American and Western European beliefs about women as they were influenced, in particular, by the medical science of the turn of the century—by biologists, gynecologists, psychologists, geneticists, and sociologists. Putting aside Dijkstra's often heavy-handed portrayals of both high and popular culture and his links between misogyny and racism later in the century, his inquiry sheds light on how women were increasingly seen as predators and as vampires who could destroy both men and civilization. According to Dijkstra (1996), between 1870 and 1911, a variation of the age-old "vital essence" theory was reactivated by such social Darwinists as Herbert Spencer and William Graham Sumner, by Augustus Kinsley Gardner, as well as by Gould and Dubois (1911) in *The Science of Sex Regeneration*. In this theory, each person has a carefully measured and modest allotment of "vital essence" (i.e., energy) that he or she can use at will. This energy or current is concentrated in the blood, of which sperm is considered the purest form. For women, the womb is the distillery of her "vital essence," but much of this blood is lost during menses. Therefore, 19th-century physicians renewed the medieval church fathers' belief in women's vicious hunger for men's precious seminal fluids, whereas other men, including several novelists and poets, convinced many English-speaking intellectuals that "every

woman . . . contained within herself the destructive potential of the woman-vampire, the sexual woman, the woman of death" (Dijkstra, 1996, p. 64). In other words, "the male was a container filled with vital fluids, and woman, the sexual animal, longed to gather these into her deadly womb" (Dijkstra, 1996, p. 66).

These men also argued for acceptance of a link between masculinity and evolutionary progress, between masculinity and the triumph of intellect over feminine nature. By 1910, Darwin's contemporaries, who advocated new and dangerous social variations, and medical researchers were extending the seminal–vital essence theory to theories of the brain: Women were "brain vampires" who could stop the advancement of men (Dijkstra, 1996). A fear of a return to repressed animal instincts and impulses in man became a fairly common obsession. Men could either advance by adding to their intellect or revert into a state of degeneration by squandering their vital essence. Influential men set out to demonize the concept of femininity: "They were determined to show the world that women were 'inherently evil,' that they represented nature's entrance into the cave of primal depredation" (p. 75). Men had to preserve their vital essence, their sperm, because each time they ejaculated, they died a little (as in "le petit mort" for the French).

Ejaculation was acceptable if the woman stayed within her prescribed role as nurturer. Paraphrasing the French surgeon and endocrinologist Voronoff (1928) in *The Conquest of Life*, Dijkstra explained that

> seminal irrigation would give a woman much more masculine "strength" than would be good for her. . . . Ordinarily a civilized woman should promptly ovulate and become pregnant. . . . However, women who diverted man's brain food to nonreproductive uses—women with a masculinized tendency toward primitive bisexuality—would, with each potent seminal infusion, become less motherly and more sexual. This clearly was the sliding scale between the virgin mother and the whore that science had been looking for: Excessive appropriation of the masculine orchitic elixir would tip the balance toward a "perversion of the maternal instinct." (p. 199)

If this sexual "black widow" woman (as in Gibson's [1994] scenario) went still further and took on even more masculine traits, she could become a criminal. In 1893, Lombroso, the period's

undisputed leader in phrenological research and the controversial father of criminal anthropology, stressed in *The Female Offender* that intellectual activity in a woman was a sign of criminal abnormality, a degenerate reversion to an earlier stage of human evolutionary development (Dijkstra, 1996). Masculinism was a sign of the bestial in women, just as effeminacy was a similar sign in men. Rigid gender polarity must be maintained for cultural and medical reasons.

Dijkstra's (1996) work on the historical context of the negative and dangerous myths and stereotypes of women in the 19th century can be viewed in light of more current theories such as Jack's "masks," Butler's "gender as performance," or Kramer's "veil." But if everyone wears a mask, performs a gender, and is in some sense covered by a veil, then why is it that much of society cannot accept these multiple facets of women even today? Why are women inevitably cast in an either/or role? It is this duality attributed to women that even today remains at the heart of any discussion of their gendered role in society; it is the denial or (fascinating) horror that inevitably surfaces when they act violently.

CONTINUING ASSUMPTIONS ABOUT WOMEN AND VIOLENCE

Theorists—even feminist theorists—from all disciplines may disagree on causes and how to change perception and beliefs, but they seem to agree on the prevailing assumptions that many people continue to make about women, especially violent women, even while seeing signs of some positive change. They all offer some variation of what Shapiro (1996), Jones (1980), and Myers and Wight (1996) have described, and as I have highlighted.

Campbell (1993) said that because "good girls don't fight" (p. 38), men see violent women as an oddity, comic, insane, or laughable. Aggression is in the domain of men, and because the power of science, the law, and the media are still predominantly in the hands of men, the picture of aggression and violence that is handed down to us is that of its male "instrumental" use to conquer, control, and humiliate. When women aggress and become violent, the system is at a loss as to how to handle them.

> Male judges—both official ones in the law courts and the unofficial moral entrepreneurs in the media—try to place a masculine and

> instrumental interpretation on women's behavior. . . . Her actions are forced into a masculine model of aggression, judged to be male, and the woman is seen as having violated not just the criminal law but the "natural law" of proper female behavior. . . . In the minds of many men, female aggression remains shrouded in mystery—capricious, irrational, arbitrary. If it cannot be explained in "rational" instrumental terms, then it cannot be explained at all; violent women must be either trying to be men or just crazy. (p. 144)

Jack (2001) expanded this view and found that the ideology of femininity—the myth that women are not aggressive—also intersects with certain ethnic, racial, and class stereotypes. Socially marginalized and poor, working-class women are often punished and caricatured for their more overt, sometimes antisocial and aggressive behavior. Many women simply learn to appear nonaggressive or less aggressive for their own safety because they have had to come to terms with the cultural message that says that female aggression is an anomaly, more deviant than a man's. They have learned these messages since childhood, when fairy tales have inculcated in them images of the beautiful and nonaggressive princess in contrast to the ugly and powerful witch. Jack saw aggression as "a set of relations based on force and power" (p. 29) as well as a set of social beliefs. She cited recent psychological studies that continue to state that women who are violent are merely acting like men because "real" women are not violent. Like Dijkstra (1996), she pointed to beliefs that women continue to be seen as castrating and dangerous vampires. Echoing Jones (1980), she worried about the view that women are morally superior because of their nurturing and caretaking "natures" so that when they exhibit violent tendencies, they lose that claim, become one of the boys, and thus negate "the social contract of chivalry that promises protection for specific types of women" (p. 33). In short, like the other feminist theorists mentioned previously, for Jack,

> Overt aggression by a woman is also a cultural transgression—threatening not only to the social structure but also to the mythology that separates women into demons and angels. If an angel suddenly turns into a demon, punishment can assume apocalyptic proportions. (p. 141)[8]

BLAME IT ON FEMINISM

One of the most frequently cited reasons for the increase in violence by these female "demons" is what, as of the 1970s, can be called "blame it on feminism." Campbell (1993) and Naffine (1996) both addressed this theory and dismissed it on psychological and criminological and/or economic grounds, respectively. For Campbell, as of the 1970s,

> The rise in female crime (particularly violence by young women) was attributed to women's liberation. As women achieved the same rights and responsibilities as men, it was argued, their behavior became more and more masculine. Or to put it another way, if women were taught their proper place they would stop committing crime and violence. Researchers took to the streets to measure the psychological masculinity of bad girls, with disappointing results. . . . A fundamental mistake was made: The assumption that violence equals masculinity. (p. 126)

As a feminist criminologist, Naffine (1996), in *Feminism and Criminology*, saw this issue somewhat differently.

> Perhaps the most time-consuming and fruitless exercise has been the endeavor to prove (and disprove) the thesis that "women's liberation" causes crime in women. This thesis was based on the assumption that if, as a result of the women's movement, women were acquiring the same opportunities as men, particularly economic opportunities, then one of the opportunities they would seize would be the opportunity to offend. The flaws in this thesis are not difficult to detect. To name but three: It assumed a simple, singular, reductive model of crime causation; it assumed, wrongly, that crimes associated with economic opportunity were rising dramatically among women; and it assumed that women are now financially emancipated, despite the considerable evidence of the feminization of poverty. (p. 32)

Finally, Artz's (1998) findings related to violent school girls showed that in contrast to any "blame it on feminism" cause,

> the judgments of women . . . do not arise because these girls are becoming more emancipated. Rather, this arises because within their life-worlds, they still apply narrow notions of male-focused behavior as the standard for what is right and good for women. (p. 201)

Unfortunately, this view of feminism and the women's liberation movement as the ultimate cause of an increase in crime and violence among women is alive and well. A well-meaning academic book, *Femmes et Criminelles* (*Women and Female Criminals*) by French professor of criminology Cario (1992), is a case in point. The jacket information starts the reader on this journey: "Women and Criminals? In its never talked about simplicity, the cover of this work is not far from producing an effect of shock" (Cario, 1992, back jacket).[9] To his credit, Cario does try to shed some light on the issue of female criminality, and he does contextualize his theory in a cultural and social framework. But he falls prey to some of the old and continuing assumptions, as discussed previously, that while trying to be fair and not condescending, end up by exposing both the sexist and paternalistic attitudes of a man writing today.

In effect, Cario (1992) stated that it is especially the poorer classes that are prone to criminal behavior and to the development of a criminal personality, whereas the dominant classes do not have the time to resort to crime. In the past, women remained at home, responsible for domestic matters and the well-being of children and their education so that they, too, did not have time for violence. He cited Lombroso and Ferrero (1893) and others who believed that in fact, some women have long been criminal but have been hiding it behind the scenes as "the hidden criminality of women," as "the feminine iceberg" (pp. 52-53).

More recently, according to Cario (1992), there seem to be two ways of looking at women's criminality. On one hand, he initially asked whether increasing equality between men and women in Western societies had caused a decrease in certain "traditionally observed particularities" (p. 46). He cited figures on female crimes in France between 1911 and 1985, with an emphasis on changes since 1975, to show the underrepresentation of women in crime. But, he stated, "The more that they participate in professional and social life, the more their criminality increases. . . . Inversely, their confinement to the home and to the education of children seems to keep them away from delinquency" (p. 176). We have here a 1990s version of "blame it on feminism."

On the other hand, Cario (1992) seemed to echo the "second shift" theory, in a criminological variation: Becasue women work

both outside and then inside the home, they have less free time for crime. Dominated by men and assigned specific social roles that are repetitive and not gratifying, women, surprisingly, are still underrepresented in crime; they appear destined to be satisfied with their lot. When they do turn to crime, their actions stem from what they see as the sole way to act on their environment. In summary, according to Cario,

> Thus, women are less represented in criminality because the social roles that are assigned to them, on the one hand, impose on them multiple domestic and educational tasks and on the other hand, cause in the home the consolidation of a specific type of personality, in such a way that they find themselves positively separate from criminality. (p. 274)

In one study, therefore, we have an antifeminist, an imposed cultural, and an innate nature argument for both the increase in female crime and the small numbers of female crime.

VIOLENT WOMEN ARE "IN"

When the news media announced in the late 1990s that violent women were now "in,"[10] Pearson's (1997) *When She Was Bad: Violent Women and the Myth of Innocence* was cited as proof. It is worth the time to review briefly Pearson's "findings" because they present a modern-day version of the worrisome "blame it on feminism" argument to explain female violence and its recent increase. Her approach may be at odds with most feminist researchers on this topic, but she has certainly received a lot of press. In Chesney-Lind's (2000) foreword to DeKeseredy's (2000) informative *Women, Crime, and the Canadian Criminal Justice System*, the highly regarded researcher on girls, women, and criminology called Pearson one of several "backlash journalists" who

> have managed to parlay women's crime into national prominence for themselves precisely by avoiding the realities of women's offending—choosing, instead, to sensationalize and sexualize women's violence. The demonization of women accused of crimes serves a number of powerful political interests, particularly when the argument is made that women's participation in crime, especially traditionally "male" crimes like murder, can be blamed on the women's movement. (p. v)

Pearson (1997) saw violence as the constructed province of men. Visible physical aggression is the result of a masculine display in which boys dress rehearse for gender posturing, much the same as Jack's (2001) cultural masks. The more indirect strategies of aggression that girls and women use "bestow upon women ignoble traits: hysteria, duplicitousness, manipulation, and cunning. . . . Female aggressive strategies are never valorous, for they are by necessity underhanded, and partly because of that, they run completely counter to the way women want to view themselves" (p. 21). This statement may partially "ring true," but it is also incomplete, for such aggressive strategies of women also run counter, especially, to the way many men view women; in addition, there is no single way women want to view themselves.

Pearson (1997) did aptly state that strategies of violence for both men and women stem from a "shared cultural repertoire," but she based this point on a more controversial one: It is not clear that women who slice their skin or turn their words into weapons will suddenly engage in overt violence against others, because

> that is why criminal women wind up so radically isolated from their own sex, cast out as sexual deviants, dykes, and witches. Feminist criminologists have tried to bring them back into the fold by recasting them as victims, arguing their violence away. (p. 24)

Pearson accused feminists of falling into the trap of seeing women as not capable of violence or, if violent, as victims rather than as perpetrators.

Pearson (1997) went on to describe quite accurately the reactions of much of the public to female violence: This aggression is seen as either too threatening or too trivial. She also attacked academics "who define the terms and interpret the data" as people who deny any female aggression because it would be suggestive of behavior "too alarmingly 'anti-feminist' to even suggest" (p. 31). Pearson cited figures to show that in the United States, young women now account for 18% of all violent offenses in their age group, and that since 1970, suicide rates by teenage girls have dropped by 50%.[11] Her remark about the change in suicide rates for girls suggests that girls and women, long seen as directing violence toward themselves while boys direct their violent aggression onto others, are becoming more like boys (see James, 1995).

What Pearson (1997) argued is that we cannot insist on the strength and competence of women in all traditionally male arenas and yet see them as powerless in areas of violence:

> How do we argue that we can be aggressive on every count . . . but never in a manner that does harm? How do we affirm ourselves to be as complex, desirous, and independent as men without conceding the antisocial potential in those qualities? (p. 32)

Pearson felt strongly that this belief in the antiviolent nature of women plays into our preexisting prejudices about female nature—that women are caring and peace-loving individuals who could never want to do any harm to others. In this view, women themselves tend to equate powerlessness with innocence. Despite her sensationalizing of the issue, Pearson also presented a view that blames culturally accepted gender roles that women internalize or use as an excuse.

Pearson (1997) admitted that women do often act in self-defense but that this is not the sole factor to consider when analyzing female violence.

> Whereas they once described violent women as lesbian, man-eaters and perverts, we have simply sailed to the other extreme, from whore to Madonna. The old fabric of misogyny blends seamlessly with new threads of feminist essentialism to preserve the myth that women are more susceptible than men to being helpless, crazy, and biddable. (p. 56)

Feminists, for Pearson, are the ones at least partially responsible for maintaining some of the myths that we continue to hold about women.

THE VIOLENT LESBIAN

Perhaps one of the most deeply held myths about violent women involves lesbianism. In her stunning study, *Fatal Women: Lesbian Sexuality and the Mark of Aggression*, Hart (1994) explained that in the eyes of society, if women exhibit violent tendencies, they are not women but rather masculinized, often lesbians. She cited Lombroso and Ferrero's (1893) *The Female Offender* (as all theorists on crime tend to do) as well as Ellis's (1890) *The Criminal*, which praised the work of Lombroso. These men maintained that

the "born" female offender is really not a woman but rather belongs more to the male than to the female sex. Hart brought these beliefs up to date:

> Masculinity theory pursues its circular reasoning by arguing that women are less likely to engage in criminal activity because they are not men. Boys will be boys, say the masculinity theorists; and girls will be girls, unless they do become criminals, in which case they are likely to be masculinized women." (p. 13)

For Hart (1994), the Freudian "enigma of woman and the riddle of her capacity for violence are interdependent" (p. 17) because the violent woman is not exceptional but a handy construct. Indeed, "in the figure of the woman as criminal the essence of femininity meets the alterity of the feminine. And they turn out to be the *same thing*" (p. 36). But again coming full circle to their duality, even when women present danger, they are, paradoxically, not seen as capable of carrying out aggressive acts.

We have, then, woman as innocent, gentle, caring, nurturing, and incapable of committing violence—the angel, the mother, the virgin, the Madonna, and yet still the "other." We also see woman as evil, sexual, dangerous, the vampire, the black widow, the whore, the vamp, the "other." A woman who is capable of aggression and violence becomes the masculine woman, the lesbian, the "other." As Van Gelder (1992) reminded us, "In many minds the leap from butch to butcher's knife is but a tiny one" (p. 82). The public is caught among these myths of women, and when they read or hear about a case in which a woman has committed horrific crimes, there is still shock and often statements that this is a "first."

Perhaps the most obvious example of these assumptions can be found in "revelations" about female serial killers. One fairly recent case sheds significant light on these accusations of lesbianism and on lesbians as dangerous to still-rigid gender polarity: the case of Aileen Wuornos. Dubbed "America's first female serial killer" and a "lesbian killer" by the press, Wournos is presently on death row in Florida for killing five men whom she said she killed in self-defense while working as a prostitute (Scholder, 1993). Branded as a man-hating, lesbian femme fatale who lured men into her lair, Wournos's case reflects the widespread fear that women, if released from traditional restraints, could wreak havoc

and mayhem on the world (see Scholder, 1993). For Hart (1994), "Whereas male serial killers are 'naturally unnatural,' as a woman Wuornos has committed *unnatural unnatural* acts" (p. 142). Women, by definition, are not violent, and if they exhibit violent tendencies and commit violent acts, then they are not women. Rather, they must be lesbians.

Duggan (2000) agreed. In her fascinating *Sapphic Slashers: Sex, Violence, and American Modernity*, she echoed much of what Hart (1994), Scholder (1993), Dijkstra (1996), and Shapiro (1996) had written. Her compelling account of an 1890s lesbian love murder case provided the impetus for a broader study of race, sexuality, gender, news reporting, and violence in America. She began by claiming that "the black beast rapist and the homicidal lesbian both appeared, in new cultural narratives at the end of the 19th century, as threats to White masculinity and to the stability of the White home" (p. 3). Women's crimes of violence raised issues of gender and sexuality more profoundly than did those committed by men because violent female criminals were seen as having crossed the line of gender to engage in "masculine" activity.

Duggan (2000) convincingly wrote that "assembled from French novels and Anglo-European sexology [as we have seen in Dijkstra's 1996 study] . . . the lesbian embodied a series of links from gender inversion, through sexual deviance, to violence" (p. 28). From the specific murder case that she investigated—the murder of Freda Ward by Alice Mitchell in Memphis, Tennessee, in 1892—Duggan extrapolated the growing belief at the time that any "abnormal" woman must be a homicidal lesbian who, in turn, must be judged as insane. Insanity, after all, was safer than immorality. At the turn of the century in the United States, criminal women were put into the same two boxes: either mad or bad. In either case, deviance was the key finding, a deviance that threatened gender polarity, boundaries, and the "normal" functioning of society.

FROM SAPPHIC SLASHERS TO TOUGH GIRLS

Finally, jumping back to our present time, I would briefly like to present a newer image of women in the making of popular culture in America that dovetails with changing gender definitions and,

in the process, places women right back into the same age-old dichotomy. Inness (1999), in *Tough Girls: Women Warriors and Wonder Women in Popular Culture*, focused her work on media images (in film, television, magazines, and comic books) of what she defined as the "new tough woman"—in body, attitude, action, and authority—as she confirmed that these images also represent "a culture in which real women are re-evaluating what it means to be tough" (p. 6). Like Duggan (2000), Inness refused "the separation of social life ('reality') from representations ('myth', or 'stereotype')" (p. 4).

Referring to the work of both Bordo (1993) and Butler (1999), Inness (1999) examined images of women whose toughness questions and undermines gender stereotypes. According to Inness, women who adopt a persona that is strongly coded as masculine are disturbing because they reveal the artificiality of femininity that is considered normal in our society. Tough and toughness (and one must add, violent and violence) are associated with man and masculine, but they really have little to do with the physical body:

> Associating toughness with gender rather than sex is threatening to the social order because it breaks down the essentialist argument that gender and sex are indissolubly linked. Instead, any subject who presents an effective performance of toughness can be tough, despite the body's sex. (p. 22)

Tough women, therefore, show that masculine characteristics are not biologically defined but are instead "a carefully choreographed performance that either a man or a woman might engage in" (p. 179). But as Inness (1999) concluded,

> If masculine attributes, such as toughness, and feminine attributes, too, are conceived as free-floating signifiers that refer to either a male or a female body, our whole culture is destabilized because it is based on what are perceived as the essential differences between men and women. . . . What must be considered, however, is whether it is desirable for women—either in the popular media or in reality—to ascribe to the same tough images as men. (p. 180)

If "tough women rewrite the script" in a culture in which women are usually considered the "natural" victims of men (Inness, 1999), they often remain caught in the same duality that defines them so simplistically, as they continue to shake the foundations of our still-standing gender polarity, thereby frightening men and some other women. Is there a way out of this dilemma of a pervasive dichotomy—either mad or bad—for modern women?

CONCLUSION

Until a wide spectrum of people, along with the cultural, social, legal, academic, religious, and linguistic "texts" that influence society, become more sensitized to the stereotypes they are disseminating and upholding about women and violence and until those cultural norms are expanded and partially overturned, there will be no way out of this dilemma of the simplistic duality in which women are caught, no matter how they act and what they do. Both theorists and practitioners will, at times unknowingly, continue to perpetuate such gender myths, and these stereotypical discourses will continue to label women as *bad* or *mad* if they commit aggressive acts. Returning to the work done by Schneider (2000) on feminist lawmaking, "Biases, myths, misconceptions, and personal experience can have a subtle but powerful impact on a lawyer's judgment" (p. 106). If the legal system, erected by and for men, is being used as a standard to assess female conduct, as Renzetti (1994) and Dasgupta (2001) have stated, then women's violence stands in contradiction to her gender role as a passive and helpless person (Dasgupta, 2001). As has been shown in this article, one must add that biased, "mythical," and misconceptualized discourses can have an equally subtle but powerful impact on those involved in law enforcement and social policy positions as well as on the public at large. If, as I believe, how we talk about women and violence has grave implications for social policy and the way women are treated in the criminal justice system, then we must break down and redefine that discourse and move toward a multilayered discourse of women and violence that will allow women to present and speak for themselves in such a way as to portray the complexities and realities of their lives.

NOTES

1. Part of this brief discussion on gender construction and the following discussion on the differences between male and female aggression are based on work researched and written by the author and Kimberly Eby for a text titled *Violence and Gender: An Interdisciplinary Reader*, to be published in 2003 by Prentice Hall. The author would like to thank Kimberly Eby for her equal contribution to these discussions as well as for her deep understanding of issues of violence and gender and, in particular, of domestic violence.

2. Women as killers do make news when it is a question of infanticide or serial killing.

3. The links to causes of domestic violence here are evident.

4. I would like to acknowledge the help I received in locating materials that counteract claims of gender symmetry in domestic violence cases and the benefit I gained from many discussions on these issues with my doctoral student in cultural studies at George Mason University, Molly Dragiewicz, who is writing her dissertation on domestic violence, discourse, and gender in reference to the fathers' rights movement.

5. In addition to Dasgupta (1999, 2001, 2002), some of the other researchers who have been working in the field of violence by women in domestic abuse cases and in date rapes are as follows: DeKeseredy (1988, 2000), DeKeseredy and Schwartz (1998a, 1998b), Dobash and Dobash (1992), Hamberger (1997), Hamberger and Guse (2002), Hooper (1996), Lyon (1999), Martin (1997), Miller (1994, 2001), Renzetti (1994), Saunders (1986, 1988a, 1988b, 1995), Straus (1993, 1997, 1999), and White and Kowalski (1994).

6. Note that a recent issue of the *New York Times Magazine* featured on its cover and in a major article by Margaret Talbot (2002) the topic, "Girls just want to be mean."

7. My larger study concerns literary representations of violent women so that I am ultimately dealing with myths, assumptions, and stereotypes of women as representations in society and as undergirdings for gender representations in literary texts.

8. Myers and Wight (1996) have entitled their collection of essays *No Angels: Women Who Commit Violence*.

9. All translations from Cario's work are my own.

10. For example, "Women who kill are in. Women who whine are out" (Scholder, 1993, p. 165).

11. She cited the FBI Uniform Crime Reports for 1992 as her sources for these figures.

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