Sex Roles, Vol. 52, Nos. 11/12, June 2005 (© 2005)
DOI: 10.1007/s11199-005-4204-x

Theorizing Gender in Intimate Partner Violence Research

Kristin L. Anderson[1,2]

Research findings of sex-symmetry in the perpetration of intimate partner assaults have sparked vigorous debate about the appropriate definition and measurement of intimate violence. A neglected but central issue in this debate is the conceptualization and measurement of gender. This article first examines the often unstated theoretical perspective on gender that underlies the research on sex-symmetry in intimate partner violence. This perspective treats gender as an individual characteristic of persons. Next, I describe challenges to the individualist model of gender from two emerging theoretical perspectives—interactionist and structuralist gender theories. The article concludes with suggestions for research on intimate partner violence that are informed by these new gender theories.

KEY WORDS: gender theory; sex differences; intimate partner violence; typologies; physical aggression.

Connections between gender and intimate partner violence have become complicated in recent years. The classic feminist argument that battery represents a manifestation of patriarchal power is under attack in the political sphere (Currie, 1998; Worcester, 2002). Rancorous debates between scholars who identify gender and power as the key processes in partner violence and those who view gender as just one component of the problem have dominated the literature during the past decade (Dobash, Dobash, Wilson, & Daly, 1992; Johnson, 1995; Kurz, 1993; Straus, 1993; Yllo, 1993).

The controversy was initiated by a 1977–78 research study entitled "The Battered Husband Syndrome" that reported survey research findings of sex-symmetry in husbands' and wives' self-reported partner assaults (Steinmetz, 1977–78). Although the methodology of this study was immediately criticized, findings from more than 30 additional studies have corroborated Steinmetz's early report (Currie, 1998; Straus, 1993). These sex-symmetry findings have been regularly cited to challenge feminist constructions of partner violence as a problem of gender and power (Currie, 1998). Men's rights groups have used these findings to support their claim that feminist activists and scholars have hidden the problem of husband-abuse from public view (Messner, 1998). Researchers in the family violence tradition have proposed that domestic violence perpetrated by women is a social problem worthy of greater attention and investigation (Stets & Straus, 1990; Straus 1993). The sex-symmetry findings have also been used to divert funding from battered women's shelters (Currie, 1998).

Within the academy, debate about the sex-symmetry findings has centered on the definition and measurement of intimate partner violence. Discussions about the validity and reliability of the Conflict Tactic Scales (CTS), the dominant measure of partner violence among survey researchers, have appeared as regular features in social science publications during the last 15 years (Straus, 1992). Critics of the CTS argue that this measure of partner violence is flawed because it measures the acts of violence rather than consequences, fails to examine motives for violence, and ignores the larger context of gender inequality (Currie, 1998; Dobash et al., 1992; Kurz, 1993). Moreover, they note that women are vastly overrepresented among victims of partner assaults in studies of battered women's shelters, emergency

[1]Western Washington University, Bellingham, Washington.
[2]To whom correspondence should be addressed at Department of Sociology, Western Washington University, Bellingham, Washington 98225-9081; e-mail: Kristin.Anderson@wwu.edu.

rooms, and clinical populations (Dobash et al., 1992; Kurz, 1993; Stark & Flitcraft, 1996).

More recently, Johnson (1995) proposed an influential methodological explanation for the sex-symmetry finding. Johnson argued that national surveys are not representative with regard to partner assault because most violent couples will refuse to participate in such surveys. National surveys thus measure "common couple violence"—a form of partner assault that is "gender-balanced" and less severe than the type of partner assault encountered by researchers who study clinical populations, which Johnson termed "patriarchal terrorism" (Johnson, 1995, p. 286). Johnson and Ferraro (2000) proposed that researchers should focus their attention on distinguishing the distinct types of partner assault uncovered by different sampling techniques. According to this argument, the sex-symmetry debate reflects the failure to separate these distinct types of violence rather than the inadequate measurement of violence; family violence and feminist researchers are simply studying different populations that engage in distinct types of intimate violence.

In this article, I propose that a neglected but central issue in the sex-symmetry debates is theoretical rather than methodological. I argue that, amid the controversy over the definition and measurement of violence, intimate violence researchers have neglected to recognize that there is equivalent controversy over the conceptualization and measurement of gender. Confusion about how partner assaults are gendered is a reflection of a larger theoretical confusion about what it is that we mean by gender (West & Zimmerman, 1987). Theories of gender have changed dramatically in the past three decades, but recognition of these changes has not entered other substantive areas within the social sciences (Alway, 1995; Ferree, 1990; Stacey & Thorne, 1985; Williams, 1991). For example, although Johnson's (1995) proposed resolution to the sex-symmetry debate has been beneficial in that it focuses attention on the issue of sampling limitations, his categorization of violence into types—some male-dominated and others "gender-balanced"—rests on a specific conceptualization of gender as sex difference (e.g., this approach assumes that if women and men do the same thing then gender is balanced). Johnson (1995) writes that common couple violence is "less a product of patriarchy, and more a product of the less gendered causal processes discussed at length by [scholars] working in the family violence tradition" (p. 285). Critics have argued that this sex difference approach to gender vastly oversimplifies the complex ways in which gender matters within social relationships.

Recently, gender scholars have classified three divergent theoretical approaches to the study of gender—individualist, interactionist, and structuralist (Risman, 1998). Answers to questions about whether and how partner violence is gendered change strikingly depending on the conceptualization of gender utilized by the researcher. For example, if we theorize gender from the interactionist or structuralist theoretical perspectives, we may find that common couple violence is deeply connected to gendered social processes. This article first examines the theoretical approach to gender that underlies most previous studies of sex-symmetry in intimate partner violence—the individualist approach. Next, I apply two competing theories of gender that have emerged in recent decades—interactionist and structuralist—to develop alternative explanations of the relationship between gender and intimate violence. I argue that interactionist and structuralist gender theories provide more fruitful approaches to understanding the complex ways in which intimate violence is gendered than individualist approaches.

INDIVIDUALIST APPROACHES TO THE STUDY OF GENDER

Individualist approaches to the study of gender propose that individual persons are gendered beings (Risman, 1998). In this view, masculinity and femininity are traits that men and women incorporate into their selves or identities, either through a biologically determined predisposition to these traits or through socialization processes. Individualist theories presuppose that a propensity to use aggression and violence is an innate or learned characteristic of masculine persons.

This theory of gender has dominated the research on intimate partner violence conducted by scholars in the family violence tradition. However, family violence researchers have rarely described the theory of gender that informs their research. The assumptions about gender that underlie this research have remained implicit. For example, survey research that conceptualizes sex as an independent variable to predict behavior such as violence rests on the implicit assumption that any statistically significant associations with the dependent variable are caused by individual sex (Williams, 1991). Researchers who claim that domestic violence

researchers should adopt a "gender-neutral" framework base their argument on findings that the independent variable sex does not predict violence perpetration in some national survey studies (Dutton, 1994; Felson, 2002; Straus, 1993). Moreover, Johnson's (1995) claim that patriarchal terrorism is male-dominated and common-couple violence is "gender-balanced" is based on the research finding that rates of common couple violence perpetration do not vary by individual sex.

In addition, partner violence studies that utilize gender schema scales such as the Bem Sex Role Inventory (BSRI) take an individualist approach to gender. The BSRI and similar measures record individuals' assessments of the extent to which they possess traits characterized as masculine or feminine and use these self-reports to categorize people as masculine, feminine, or androgynous (Bem, 1974). In a third individualist approach, researchers classify individuals as traditional or egalitarian on the basis of their self-reported attitudes about men's and women's roles within society. Studies of partner violence that utilize individualist approaches hypothesize that biological males and more traditional and more masculine individuals (e.g., men who score high on masculinity or who report traditional gender attitudes) will be more likely to engage in partner violence than women and more feminine or egalitarian men (Sugerman & Frankel, 1996).

If gender is defined as a property of individuals, substantial research evidence suggests that there is no relationship between gender and partner violence. Studies that conceptualize gender as a person's self-reported maleness or femaleness often fail to find a relationship between gender and partner assault perpetration and victimization (Archer, 2000; Felson, 2002).[3] If gender is defined as a masculine, feminine, or androgynous identity as measured by gender schema scales, the relationship between gender and partner assault contradicts the individualist hypothesis that more masculine persons are more violent. Previous researchers were surprised to find either no relationship between a man's masculinity and violence, or that more feminine men and women reported higher rates of partner assault (Bernard, Bernard, & Bernard, 1985; Burke, Stets, & Pirog-Good, 1988). A meta-analysis of the voluminous research on gender role attitudes and partner violence has offered weak and inconsistent support for the hypothesis that traditional men engage in higher rates of partner violence than egalitarian men (Sugerman & Frankel, 1996).

Findings from intimate violence research that uses individualist approaches to gender suggest that gender is not a particularly important predictor of intimate partner violence. Some researchers have used these results to suggest that intimate violence is not a gendered phenomenon (Dutton, 1994; Felson, 2002; Straus, 1993). However, in recent decades, gender scholars have identified several limitations of the individualist approach to gender (see Connell, 1995; Deaux & Major, 1990; Risman, 1998). First, and most importantly, the individualist approach reduces gender to the behavior of individual women and men. That is, this approach assumes that, if women and men are equally violent within intimate relationships, then partner violence is not gendered.

Second, the "sex as an independent variable" approach cannot tell us why sex differences, if they are statistically significant, exist. For example, the finding that men engage in higher levels of violence toward intimate partners than women can be interpreted through theoretical perspectives as diverse and contradictory as feminism and evolutionary psychology (e.g., Archer, 2000).

Third, this approach cannot easily explain differences within groups of women or men. The empirical research clearly demonstrates that only a small percentage of women and men perpetrate intimate partner violence (Archer, 2000). However, women are biologically similar to other women and men are biologically similar to other men. Moreover, within cultures, same-sex groups experience similar processes of gender socialization. Thus, it is difficult to explain why only some men and women perpetrate intimate partner violence from an individualist gender perspective (Dutton, 1994). Research that employs gender schema scales or measures of egalitarianism overcomes this limitation by recognizing that individuals can vary in the extent to which they incorporate gender ideologies into their sense of identity or into their attitudes (Bem, 1974). However, the research largely suggests that gender identities and attitudes are not associated with the perpetration of partner

[3]Recent victimization surveys are an exception to the pattern of sex-symmetry found in most survey studies. The National Crime Victimization Survey (Bachman & Saltzman, 1995) and the National Violence Against Women survey (Tjaden & Thoennes, 2000) find substantially higher rates of domestic violence victimization among women than men. These surveys find a lower overall incidence of domestic violence victimization than studies employing the CTS and may uncover more serious types of violence than surveys employing the CTS.

violence (Bernard et al., 1985; Sugerman & Frankel, 1996).

Finally, researchers who conceptualize gender from an individualist framework have used studies of partner assault among homosexual couples to buttress their claims that partner violence is not a problem of gender and power. Findings of equivalent or higher rates of partner assault among gay and lesbian couples as compared to heterosexual couples have led some scholars to claim that gender is unrelated to domestic violence (Dutton & Golant, 1995, p. 70; Felson, 2002, p. 42). Such claims rest on the implicit assumption that gender is limited to what women and men do in interactions with the "opposite" sex. This "sex differences" approach ignores the complex ways in which gender operates in social interactions between same-sex people. For example, studies of masculinities and violence suggest that much of male violence perpetrated by youth is intended to impress an audience of male peers (Connell, 1995; Messerschmidt, 1993). Moreover, researchers who use the data on same-sex partner violence to claim that gender does not matter ignore the intricate ways in which gender and heterosexuality are constructed in mutually-reinforcing ways in contemporary Western societies (Butler, 1990; Connell, 1995). Gay men and lesbian women must negotiate a world in which their masculinity and femininity are called into question due to their sexual identity. Findings that partner assaults occur within gay male and lesbian relationships at the same, lower, or higher rates as within heterosexual relationships do not challenge the argument that gender is an important component of intimate partner violence.[4] Rather, these findings lead to additional questions about how gender interacts with heterosexism to influence the dynamics of violence in both heterosexual and homosexual relationships.

[4]Several researchers claim that rates of partner violence are similar in heterosexual and homosexual relationships (Dutton, 1994; Felson, 2002; Merrill, 1998). However, most studies of violence in gay male and lesbian relationships do not use probability sampling techniques (Renzetti, 1998). One recent study of partner violence in gay male relationships that uses a probability sample finds that rates of victimization are slightly higher than rates of male-perpetrated violence in studies of heterosexual relationships that use similar measures of violence (Greenwood et al., 2002). However, because rates of violence are influenced by both sampling techniques and the measurement of violence (Johnson, 1995; Straus, 1992), rates of reported violence from different studies cannot be considered as valid comparisons.

Researchers who believe that domestic violence is interconnected with sexism within society need a stronger theoretical language than that offered by the individualist perspective with which to counter the movement away from an analysis of gender within the field. In recent years, gender theorists have provided such a language. Interactionist and structuralist theories understand gender as more than the behavior of individual women and men. Gender exists in the expectations and demands that we place on people and in their desire to meet (or subvert) these expectations (Butler, 1990; Goffman, 1977; West & Zimmerman, 1987). It exists in the way in which sex is used as a basis for the division of labor, in the sex segregation of activities and leisure pursuits, and in other forms of social categorization (Connell, 1995; Risman, 1998). In sum, these theories propose that gender is a characteristic of interactive situations and of social structures in addition to being a characteristic of individuals (Risman, 1998). Interactionist and structuralist gender theories, applied to the data on partner assault, provide new interpretations and new questions about the relationship between gender and intimate partner violence. Moreover, these theories move us away from understanding gender as solely what individual women and men do in cross-sex interactions. In this regard, these theories can expose the overly-simplified gender framework that forms the basis for claims of gender-neutrality in intimate partner violence.

INTERACTIONIST APPROACHES TO THE STUDY OF GENDER

The interactionist approach to the study of gender emerged in the 1980s as, in part, a critique of individualist approaches (Deaux & Major, 1990; Risman, 1998; West & Zimmerman, 1987). This perspective treats gender as a characteristic of social interaction rather than of individual persons. In this view, individuals "do gender" in daily interactions with others, performing "masculinity" or "femininity" in order to live up to social expectations (Butler, 1990; West & Zimmerman, 1987). From this perspective, gender is viewed as an outcome of social practices rather than as an individual characteristic that predicts behavior. Thus, the interactionist approach shifts our thinking from the question of how masculinity causes violence to the question of how violence causes masculinity. Interactionist gender theory suggests new ways of thinking about gender and intimate partner violence.

Violence Is Not "Gender-Neutral" Behavior. Gender Can Be Constructed Through the Practice of Violence

The practice of violence, in Western cultures, is perceived as masculine behavior. As gender schema scales such as the BSRI demonstrate, aggression is typed "masculine" in U.S. culture (Bem, 1974). Because aggression is a component of an idealized cultural image of masculinity, violence can be used to show others that one is a "real man." Studies of partner violence that utilize interactionist approaches to gender theorize that violence is one means by which men can perform masculinity (Anderson & Umberson, 2001; Hearn, 1998). This approach illuminates qualitative research findings that suggest that men use violence against their wives or partners in response to a perceived challenge to their position or authority (Dobash & Dobash, 1998; Ptacek, 1988; Totten, 2003). However, the use of violence against female partners to perform masculinity is not uncontested; because women are constructed as the "weaker sex" within popular culture, men's violence against women can be construed as cowardly and unmanly. Thus, many men minimize and deny the violence that they perpetrate against female partners (Anderson & Umberson, 2001; Dobash & Dobash, 1998; Ptacek, 1988).

Men's Violence Is Evaluated and Interpreted Differently From Women's Violence

Interactionists posit that gender is a social accomplishment (West & Zimmerman, 1987) that is based on the definitions and interpretations of others. Scholars in the interactive tradition argue that audiences expect different performances from men and women and that the same behavior will be differentially evaluated depending on the perceived sex of the performer and the interactive context (West & Zimmerman, 1987). Thus, the very same violent act that conveys "masculinity" to others when the actor is perceived to be a man (e.g., punching a man who has insulted his honor) will be interpreted in a different fashion when the actor is perceived to be a woman. This framework helps us to understand research findings that men's violence is viewed more seriously than women's violence. Because violence is defined as "masculine" within popular culture, audiences expect, acknowledge, and encourage men's violence as normal behavior. In contrast, audiences may discourage, trivialize, or mock women who engage in violence (McCaughey, 1997).

There is some evidence that these gendered interpretations influence the dynamics of violence within intimate relationships. A qualitative analysis of the accounts of violence offered by men in a court-mandated treatment program found that batterers depicted their violence as rational and effectual, but similar violent acts perpetrated by their female partners were perceived as irrational and ineffectual (Anderson & Umberson, 2001). College students of both sexes trivialize women's violence as compared to men's violence (Miller & Simpson, 1991). The empirical finding that men engage in stalking behaviors that are physically threatening more often than women (Davis & Frieze, 2000) can be explained, in part, by the idea that "women may not be perceived as dangerous in situations where the same acts done by men would be seen as threatening" (Frieze, 2000, p. 682).

Moreover, these gendered interpretations influence how people respond to partner violence that they experience. Tjaden and Thoennes (2000) found that male victims of partner assaults were significantly more likely than female victims to choose not to report the violence to the police because they defined the assault as a minor or one-time. In her study of violence in lesbian relationships, Renzetti (1998) found that women who were victimized by female partners who they defined as physically weaker and more feminine than themselves were unwilling to defend themselves against their partners. Gay men who are victims of partner assaults may also be reluctant to report the violence due to a cultural perception that they should be able to stand up to their partners' assaults "like a man" (Merrill, 1998).

This perspective also helps us to understand why male victims and criminal justice agents are reluctant to hold female perpetrators accountable for their violence. To be labeled as a "victim" of an assault by a woman may threaten a man's sense of masculinity. Thus, even men who are injured by a female partner are reluctant to have their partners arrested or prosecuted (Anderson & Umberson, 2001). Several studies find that male victims are less likely than female victims to report the violence to the police and that police are more likely to make an arrest if the victim is female (Buzawa & Hotaling, 2000; Tjaden & Thoennes, 2000). Renzetti's (1998) study of battering within lesbian relationships found that many victims reported that their friends, families, and even women's shelters refused to believe that they were

battered due to the feminine appearance of the perpetrator.

Violence Will Be Used to Construct Masculinity In Social Situations in Which Masculine Identity Is Threatened

The interactionist perspective on gender suggests that the interactive context influences violent behavior. If violence is a means by which men construct masculinity, violence should occur in situations in which men desire to demonstrate or perform masculinity for others (Anderson & Umberson, 2001; Messerschmidt, 1993). One such situation is when a man's masculinity is challenged or called into question.

There is a small body of research that provides support for the interactionist claim that partner violence is more likely to occur under conditions in which men's sense of masculinity is threatened. Qualitative studies find that men report perpetrating partner assaults when they perceive a threat to their authority or status (Anderson & Umberson, 2001; Dobash & Dobash, 1998; Ptacek, 1988). Other studies suggest that violence is used in a compensatory fashion when men lack other resources to display masculinity; for example, rates of physical and emotional abuse are higher among men whose female partners out-earn them (Anderson, 1997; Kalmuss & Straus, 1990; Kaukinen, 2004). In a recent study, Salari and Baldwin (2002) found that injurious violence was more likely in couples with a greater income contribution by the woman.

The interactionist approach might also help to explain why rates of intimate partner violence are higher among those who live in poverty. Financial success as a family breadwinner is another idealized characteristic of masculinity in U.S. culture, but not all men are able to live up to this ideal (Fine, Weis, Addelston, & Marusza, 1997; Totten, 2003). Men who are unemployed or involved in part-time or low-wage work may feel that their masculine identities are threatened because they are not breadwinners (Anderson, 1997). Research findings that partner violence is correlated with unemployment and low levels of income and education can be understood through this interactionist framework (Totten, 2003). Moreover, men who are breadwinners may be able to exert control over their intimate partners through their control of economic resources rather than through violence (Stark & Flitcraft, 1996).

In sum, interactionist gender theory proposes that violence may be a compensatory method of exerting control and constructing masculinity among men who feel that their authority and masculinity have been called into question. This argument applies to men's violence perpetrated against other men as well as their violence perpetrated against female partners. In the language of causal order, the individualist perspective posits that violence is an outcome of gender, whereas the interactionist perspective proposes the opposite—that gender is an outcome of violence. Applied to the study of partner violence, the interactionist perspective can help us understand why the practice of violence is evaluated differently depending on the gender attributions applied to the perpetrator and victim. For example, a "common-couple violence" scenario in which a woman slaps or shoves her male partner and he responds in kind is not "gender-neutral" in this framework; these equivalent acts will be treated differently based on the perceived sex of the actor and the audience's interpretation (Was she "out of line" in slapping him? Is he a "brute" who deserved it? Is he a "coward" who should "pick on someone his own size"?).

STRUCTURALIST APPROACHES TO THE STUDY OF GENDER

A third and newly emerging approach to gender studies contends that gender is a form of social structure. This perspective emphasizes that gender organizes social institutions as well as identities, attitudes, and interactions. Structuralists contend that gender is a system of stratification that places women and men into unequal categories, roles, and occupations (Risman, 1998). The structural perspective emphasizes that gender exists as a social force that operates independently of individual wishes or desires: "Even when men and women do *not* desire to live gendered lives or to support male dominance, they often find themselves compelled to do so by the logic of gendered choices" (Risman, 1998, p. 29).

The structuralist approach is methodologically distinct from the individualist and interactionist approaches in that it conceptualizes gender as a pattern of resource-distribution and social organization rather than as a predictor of individual behavior (Risman, 1998). From a structuralist gender perspective, individual sex does not predict violent behavior. Rather, the gender structure influences women's and men's opportunities and

rewards for the use of violent behavior. A number of social structural processes influence women's and men's experiences of intimate partner violence. For example, marriage, as an institution, is organized by gender. We assign different roles and responsibilities to husbands and wives within marriage. This means that marriage is experienced differently by women and men (Hochschild & Machung, 1989). Similarly, the practice of violence is organized by gender (McCaughey, 1997). Men receive encouragement, support, and training in the use of violence whereas women are barred from its use in some situations (e.g., U.S. military service). Thus, violence is experienced differently by women and men.

The structuralist approach to gender has long been utilized by feminist theorists of domestic violence although it has not been named as such. Feminist scholars have repeatedly emphasized that domestic violence must be understood in the context of the larger system of gender inequality (Brush, 1993; Currie, 1998; Dasgupta, 2002; Dobash et al., 1992; Yllo, 1993). However, feminist efforts to redefine domestic violence to include this larger context of gender inequality have centered on changing the definition and measurement of *intimate violence* rather than the definition and measurement of *gender*. For example, in a review of the gender symmetry debate, Dasgupta (2002) claims that a broad definition of battering as a "pattern of intimidation, coercive control, and oppression" is needed so that researchers "have to acknowledge the context of social norms and social power differentials between men and women" (pp. 1367–1368). However, no definition of violence can fully encapsulate the myriad ways in which gender organizes social relationships. As the quotation from Dasgupta's work suggests, what feminist theorists really want domestic violence researchers to consider is how the context of gender inequality influences the experience of violence. Although efforts to redefine domestic violence as a pattern of coercive control have been successful in shaping feminist research, they have not helped to stem the political and academic debate about sex-symmetry. It is not that the measures of violence are inaccurate, but that these measures fail to illuminate how gender influences and structures violence. In addition to criticizing the measures of violence utilized by sex-symmetry researchers, feminist researchers should note that the sex-symmetry research rests on individualist gender theory and is thus limited in important respects.

Structuralist gender theory is needed to understand the ways in which women and men encounter different constraints to the perpetration of violence and different barriers to stopping the violence or leaving the relationship. The structuralist theory of gender suggests that an adequate understanding of gender and intimate partner violence must consider the ways in which gender is used to organize social life.

Men Receive More Instruction in the Use of Violence Than Women

Access to violence is unequally distributed by the gender structure. Boys and men are granted more opportunities to learn to use violence effectively than girls and women (Fagot, Hagan, Leinbach, & Kronsberg, 1985; McCaughey, 1997). Girls and women are discouraged from the use of violence as young children and throughout their formative experiences, whereas boys and men are more likely to be encouraged to play sports or apply for jobs in which violence and self-defense skills are taught (Fagot et al., 1985; Messner, 1998). Historically, women have been formally barred from some occupations that involve training in the use of violence and they continue to be barred from military combat positions in the U.S. The ways in which gender organizes training in violence has implications for the severity and success of violence perpetrated by men and women.

The Consequences of Intimate Violence Will Differ for Women and Men Due to the Larger System of Gender Inequality

Consequences for Injury

Cultural expectations about male dominance in heterosexual pairings lead to situations in which women are disadvantaged in violent conflicts with male partners. In U.S. culture, it is normative for men to have slightly more status than the women with whom they pair; male partners are typically older, physically larger, and have greater education and income than female partners (Goffman, 1977). These advantages mean that men and women will have different resources (physical, economic, psychological) for gaining control over a partner. For example, numerous studies demonstrate that although

heterosexual men and women perpetrate assaults at similar rates, women are more likely than men to be injured (Archer, 2000; Brush, 1993; Stets & Straus, 1990). Data from the National Violence Against Women Survey (NVAWS), the largest national study of partner violence in the U.S., show that women victimized by male partners are twice as likely to be injured as men victimized by female partners (Tjaden & Thoennes, 2000). This finding has typically been interpreted as resulting from the fact that men are physically larger and stronger than women (Archer, 2000; Felson, 2002). This explanation, however, treats gender (in this case, physical size and strength) as an individual characteristic. Structuralist gender theory would further explain that men's size advantage is not simply an individual trait—it is built into the organization of heterosexual pairings. Although men, on average, are slightly heavier and taller than women, on average, there are many women who are larger and taller than many men. Gender norms organize heterosexual pairings such that tall women often seek male partners who are taller than themselves, and short men seek shorter women (Goffman, 1977). Men's size advantage is thus a structural component of heterosexual relationships; it is not simply a reflection of individual gender characteristics.

Consequences for Fear, Depression, and Self-Esteem

Victimization studies have documented the negative emotional, social, and psychological consequences of partner violence for female victims (Frieze, Hymer, & Greenberg, 1987; Kirkwood, 1993; Stark & Flitcraft, 1996). However, few studies compare consequences for male and female victims (Anderson, 2002). The available comparative studies suggest that women experience more negative psychological consequences than men as a result of victimization. Jacobsen et al. (1994), in a laboratory study of arguments between heterosexual couples, found that female partners in violent relationships experienced higher levels of physiological arousal than their boyfriends or husbands, suggesting that women experience more symptoms of distress. Research on why victims are reluctant to report abuse to the police finds that women are significantly more likely than men to choose not to report out of fear of retaliation by their attacker (Tjaden & Thoennes, 2000). In a study of married military couples that engage in mutual violence, Langhinrichsen-Rohling, Neidig, and Thorn (1995) demonstrated that wives were more likely than husbands to experience fear during a violent incident.

Intimate violence victimization also has gendered consequences for depression. Stets and Straus (1990) found that, among heterosexual couples, female victims were significantly more likely than male victims to experience stress and depression. Anderson (2002) found that, although domestic assault victimization was associated with increased depression and lowered self-esteem among both women and men, the negative effects of violence on well-being were significantly greater among women.

These findings suggest that the consequences of partner violence are more negative for heterosexual women than for heterosexual men. Although the explanation for why this should be the case has not been empirically demonstrated, the structuralist perspective on gender suggests a number of hypotheses. Because women are assigned responsibility for the care and nurturance of others in the relationship, they may be more likely than men to feel guilt and responsibility for their partners' violent behavior and this may contribute to depression and lowered self-esteem (Kirkwood, 1993). Langhinrichsen-Rohling et al. (1995) found that wives were more likely than husbands to feel blame and guilt about the violence in their marriage. Women may also suffer more negative psychological consequences from violence victimization because they are more likely than men to be injured by violence. Male batterers also isolate their female victims from support networks of family members and friends (Dobash & Dobash, 1998; Kirkwood, 1993; Walker, 1984). This pattern of isolation has also been found in studies of gay male and lesbian relationships (Kirkwood, 1993; Merrill, 1998; Renzetti, 1998). It is currently unknown whether heterosexual men who are victims of intimate violence also experience this isolation. However, structuralist gender theory suggests that heterosexual and gay male victims might experience less social isolation due the gendered organization of employment. Men are more likely than women to experience contact with others in the workforce and thus male victims of partner violence might be less likely than female victims to experience such isolation.

Consequences for Economic Well-Being

Heterosexual women are more likely than heterosexual men to be economically dependent on their intimate partners. Moreover, women are more

likely than men to experience poverty upon dissolution of a marital or cohabiting relationship (Kurz, 1995). These patterns are consequences of the way in which gender organizes labor and compensation patterns and they have implications for the way in which women and men experience intimate assault. Qualitative studies of heterosexual women's experiences of partner violence victimization consistently find that women feel trapped into violent relationships due to their inability to earn enough alone to care for themselves and their children (Kirkwood, 1993; Kurz, 1995). Moreover, the economic consequences of leaving a violent relationship are often severe for gay and lesbian people. Studies of the dynamics of violence within gay and lesbian relationships find that violent gay and lesbian partners rely on societal heterosexism and the threat of "outing" their partners to employers as a means of additional dominance and control (Merrill, 1998; Renzetti, 1998).

The structuralist gender perspective thus suggests that sex and sexual orientation will influence the barriers to leaving a violent relationship. Because the gender structure assigns women responsibility for the care and well-being of children, threatened custody battles may inhibit women's plans to leave a violent relationship; men have less reason to fear that they will be socially sanctioned if they do not obtain custody following a divorce. In a study of mother's experiences of divorce, Kurz (1995) found a significant relationship between women's partner violence victimization prior to the divorce and the experience of fear during child custody negotiations. Moreover, lesbian mothers might remain in a violent relationship due to fears that they will lose custody of their children if they are "outed" by their partners. These findings suggest that the gendered organization of the distribution of income, paid work, and responsibility for childrearing creates differential consequences for women's and men's experiences of intimate partner assaults.

Rates of Intimate Partner Violence Perpetration Among Women and Men Will Vary by Structural Context

Structuralist gender theory is also helpful for analyses of the ways in which rates of partner violence differ across social contexts. One well-documented research finding is that women perpetrate partner violence more often than men within dating relationships (Frieze, 2000). In marriages, rates of male- and female-perpetration seem to be more equal (Archer, 2000). One explanation for this difference might lie in the way in which gender organizes dating and marital relationships. In dating relationships, women are granted a degree of power in that men are assigned the task of requesting dates and women have the "right of refusal" (Goffman, 1977). Moreover, women are able to freely leave a dating relationship (Frieze, 2000). Upon marriage, the balance of power shifts in that men are normatively considered to be "heads of the household" and they usually control the economic resources. The risks for women's violence perpetration increase upon marriage because women are often economically dependent on the relationship and the relationship is less easily dissolved (Archer, 2000).

The structuralist perspective on gender proposes that women and men will experience partner assault differently because they are differentially-situated within societies organized by gender inequality. This perspective suggests that although rates of perpetration and victimization may not vary by sex, the consequences of victimization will differ for women and men because these groups face different structural opportunities and constraints. From this perspective, a "common-couple violence" scenario in which a woman slaps or shoves her male partner and he responds in kind is not "gender-neutral"; this woman and man will in all likelihood be differentially positioned in terms of size, strength, and economic dependency.

RESEARCH AGENDAS

Debates about how gender influences partner violence have flourished in recent decades. However, debate has centered on the definition of measurement of *violence* rather than the definition and measurement of *gender*. Bringing gender theory into the debate complicates the discussion of whether women and men are equally violent by asking us to reconsider what we mean by gender. Do we mean, by gender, what women and men do? If so, the debate about sexual symmetry in intimate partner violence is over. We now have sufficient evidence that both women and men engage in partner violence to put the issue to rest (Archer, 2000). If, however, we apply interactionist and structuralist gender perspectives to understanding gender and partner assault, there remain numerous unanswered questions. Such theories push

us toward questions of *how* gender matters rather than *whether* rates of intimate violence differ by sex.

Interactionist theories of gender, as applied to the issue of intimate partner violence, suggest that violence is a means by which those who wish to be seen as manly can demonstrate masculinity for others. This approach suggests that interactive contexts are part of gender and that we can identify contexts in which male-perpetrated violence should be more likely to occur. The following hypotheses, suggested by interactionist gender theory, should inform future research.

H1: Gender Attributions Influence the Ways in Which Violence Is Defined and Evaluated by Observers

Men's violence will be treated more seriously than women's violence due to our cultural stereotypes about masculinity and violence. Women will be viewed as more credible victims than men. Both women and men will trivialize and discount female-perpetrated violence.

H2: Men's Perpetration of Violence Will Be More Likely to Occur in Contexts in Which Their Masculine Identities Are Threatened

These contexts could include structural disadvantage (e.g., unemployment) and interactive situations in which men feel challenged or threatened by the actions of their intimate partners.

H3: Men's Perpetration of Partner Violence Will, Temporarily, Reinforce Their Sense of Masculine Identity

Interactionists propose that violence can be used to perform masculinity. Although a handful of qualitative studies suggest that violence is successful in bolstering a sense of masculine identity (Anderson & Umberson, 2001; Totten, 2003), the outcome of violence for gender identity remains an empirical question. Moreover, interactionists propose that gender identity is not a stable quality of individuals, but fluid and shifting across time and place (Deaux & Major, 1990; West & Zimmerman, 1987). Thus, it will be methodologically difficult to assess the ways in which violence influences men's sense of masculinity without access to data on the process and context of specific violent incidents.

H4: Women's Perpetration of Partner Violence Will Challenge Their Sense of Feminine Identity

Women who perpetrate partner assaults might experience guilt and a sense of shame for behavior that does not meet cultural expectations for feminine comportment. Alternatively, as noted above, women might dismiss their own violence as trivial or unimportant because they view themselves as "too weak" to do any harm.

Structuralist gender theory suggests that the experience of partner violence will differ by sex due to the larger structure of gender inequality within society. The larger social and cultural circumstances that shape gendered experiences of violence have been undertheorized in intimate partner violence research. Specific hypotheses about partner violence suggested by structuralist gender theory include the following.

H5: Differential Injury Rates by Sex Are Linked to Differential Training and Experience With the Use of Violence and to Advantages in Size and Strength

Men's more successful use of violence is not simply "natural"; it is organized by gender. Of particular interest would be studies that assess whether injury differences by sex occur among the minority of heterosexual couples in which women are physically larger and stronger than their male partners or in which women have training in the use of violence.

H6: Women Will Be More Likely Than Men to Experience Economic, Social, and Psychological Barriers to Leaving Violent Relationships

Compared to male victims, female victims of partner violence will be more likely to be trapped in violent relationships due to economical dependency, social isolation, and damaging psychological consequences.

H7: Rates and Experiences of Partner Violence Will Vary Across Structural Contexts

A small body of existing research documents variation in rates of partner assault across structural contexts. Past studies find that women perpetrate violence at higher rates in dating than in marital contexts and that rates of perpetration are higher

among both women and men in cohabiting relationships as compared to marriages (Anderson, 1997; Frieze, 2000). Additionally, survey findings suggest that U.S. women perpetrate intimate violence at higher rates than women in other nations, a finding that Archer (2000) suggests may be related to the success of feminist movements in the U.S. Although men perpetrate more intimate homicides than women in most societies, U.S. women are more likely than women in other countries to kill their intimate partners (Felson, 2002). Additional studies of contextual variation in the incidence of men's and women's partner violence will help us to understand the interactions between gender inequalities in the larger society and intimate violence. Comparative studies of women's and men's experiences of violence in dating, marital, and cohabiting contexts are needed to explain why rates of intimate violence perpetration by sex vary across these contexts.

CONCLUSION

In their recent review of domestic violence scholarship in the 1990s, Johnson and Ferraro (2000) criticized domestic violence researchers for treating violence a unitary phenomenon. We need to further recognize that gender is not a unitary phenomenon that can be reduced to self-reported sex (Connell, 1995; Deaux & Major, 1990). Gender is multidimensional; it has consequences for individual identities and attitudes, social interaction, and structural position.

Feminist critiques of the use of gender as a variable (e.g., Williams, 1991) have not been recognized within the academic debate about sex symmetry in intimate violence. The use of sex, uncritically, as a predictor of violent behavior suggests that individual sex causes violent behavior, reifying essentialist notions of gender difference (or a lack thereof). This individualist gender framework underlies recent claims of gender-neutrality in intimate partner violence. Scholars who believe that a gender-lens is crucial for an understanding of partner violence need a stronger theoretical language with which to counter the claims drawn from sex-symmetry research. We must clarify that the individualist approach to gender reduces our chances of understanding the complex ways in which violence is gendered within societies.

Interactionalist and structuralist approaches to gender may provide more fruitful contributions to our understanding of the relationship between gender and partner violence than individualist approaches. The hypotheses informed by interactionist and structuralist gender theories that are proposed here will require comparative data on women's and men's experiences of intimate violence victimization and perpetration across social contexts. Previous intimate partner violence research has largely studied women as victims and men as perpetrators (Anderson, 2002). Although there are a number of recent studies of women as perpetrators of domestic violence, these studies do not compare the correlates and characteristics of female versus male perpetrators (Babcock, Miller, & Siard, 2003; Stuart, Moore, Ramsey, & Kahler, 2004). Research on violence within gay and lesbian relationships, to date, has largely focused on exploring violence within one group (e.g., gay men or lesbians) and thus does help us to understand how rates, correlates, or consequences of violence may differ by sex and sexual orientation (Greenwood et al., 2002; Merrill, 1998; Renzetti, 1998). Tjaden and Thoennes' (2000) comparative analysis of intimate violence among same-sex and opposite-sex cohabiting relationships finds that rates of intimate violence victimization are higher among both men and women who have lived with male partners than with female partners. However, their study does not assess whether correlates or outcomes of victimization vary by sexual orientation. Additional comparative research that examines the correlates and consequences of intimate violence by data by sex and sexual orientation is needed to understand the ways in which gender and sexuality matter to the experience of intimate violence.

The vast majority of previous studies on gender and partner violence have used an individualist approach to gender. Interactionist and structuralist gender theories can help us to understand that, although men and women may report perpetrating violence at similar rates, this does not mean that intimate violence is not a gendered problem. Gender is more than a characteristic of individuals. It also exists in the larger societal expectations for behavior and in the ways in which men and women are differentially situated within social institutions.

REFERENCES

Alway, J. (1995). The trouble with gender: Tales of a still missing feminist revolution in sociological theory. *Sociological Theory*, *13*(3), 209–228.

Anderson, K. L. (1997). Gender, status, and domestic violence: An integration of feminist and family violence approaches. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, *59,* 655–669.

Anderson, K. L. (2002). Perpetrator or victim?: Relationships between intimate partner violence and well-being. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, *64,* 851–863.

Anderson, K. L., & Umberson, D. (2001). Gendering violence: Masculinity and power in men's accounts of domestic violence. *Gender and Society*, *15,* 358–380.

Archer, J. (2000). Sex differences in aggression between heterosexual partners: A meta-analytic review. *Psychological Bulletin*, *126,* 651–680.

Babcock, J. C., Miller, S. A., & Siard, C. (2003). Toward a typology of abusive women: Differences between partner-only and generally violent women in the use of violence. *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, *27,* 153–162.

Bachman, R., & Saltzman, L. E. (1995). *Violence against women: Estimates from the redesigned survey August 1995* (NCJ-154348 Special Report). Washington, DC: Bureau of Justice Statistics.

Bem, S. L. (1974). The measurement of psychological androgyny. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, *42,* 155–162.

Bernard, J. L., Bernard, S. L., & Bernard, M. L. (1985). Courtship violence and sex-typing. *Family Relations*, *34,* 573–576.

Brush, L. D. (1993). Violent acts and injurious outcomes in married couples: Methodological issues in the National Survey of Families and Households. In P. B. Bart & E. G. Moran (Eds.), *Violence against women: The bloody footprints* (pp. 240–251). Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Burke, P. J., Stets, J. E., & Pirog-Good, M. A. (1988). Gender identity, self-esteem, and physical and sexual abuse in dating relationships. *Social Psychology Quarterly*, *51*(3), 272–285.

Butler, J. (1990). *Gender trouble: Feminism and the subversion of identity*. New York: Routledge.

Buzawa, E., & Hotaling, G. (2000). *The police response to domestic violence calls for assistance in three Massachusetts towns: Final report*. Washington, DC: National Institute of Justice.

Connell, R. W. (1995). *Masculinities*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

Currie, D. H. (1998). Violent men or violent women: Whose definition counts? In R. K. Bergen (Ed.), *Issues in intimate violence* (pp. 97–111). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Dasgupta, S. D. (2002). A framework for understanding women's use of nonlethal violence in intimate heterosexual relationships. *Violence Against Women*, *8,* 1364–1389.

Davis, K. E., & Frieze, I. H. (2000). Research on stalking: What do we know and where do we go? *Violence and Victims*, *15,* 473–487.

Deaux, K., & Major, B. (1990). A social-psychological model of gender. In D. L. Rhode (Ed.), *Theoretical Perspectives on Sexual Difference* (pp. 89–99). London: Yale University Press.

Dobash, R. E., & Dobash, R. P. (1998). Violent men and violent contexts. In R. E. Dobash & R. P. Dobash (Eds.), *Rethinking violence against women* (pp. 141–168). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Dobash, R. P., Dobash, R. E., Wilson, M., & Daly, M. (1992). The myth of sexual symmetry in marital violence. *Social Problems*, *39,* 71–91.

Dutton, D. G. (1994). Patriarchy and wife assault: The ecological fallacy. *Violence and Victims*, *9,* 167–182.

Dutton, D. G., & Golant, S. K. (1995). *The batterer: A psychological profile*. New York: Basic Books.

Fagot, B., Hagan, R., Leinbach, M. B., & Kronsberg, S. (1985). Differential reactions to assertive and communicative acts of toddler boys and girls. *Child Development*, *56,* 1499–1505.

Felson, R. B. (2002). *Violence and gender reexamined*. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

Fine, M., Weis, L., Addelston, J., & Marusza, J. (1997). (In)secure times: Constructing White working-class masculinities in the late 20th century. *Gender and Society*, *11,* 52–68.

Ferree, M. M. (1990). Beyond separate spheres: Feminism and family research. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, *52,* 866–884.

Frieze, I. H. (2000). Violence in close relationships—Development of a Research area: Comment on Archer (2000). *Psychological Bulletin*, *126,* 681–684.

Frieze, I. H., Hymer, S., & Greenberg, M. S. (1987). Describing the crime victim: Psychological reactions to victimization. *Professional Psychology: Research and Practice*, *18,* 299–315.

Goffman, E. (1977). The arrangement between the sexes. *Theory and Society*, *4,* 301–331.

Greenwood, G. L., Relf, M. V., Huang, B., Pollack, L. M., Canchola, J. A., & Catania, J. A. (2002). Battering victimization among a probability-based sample of men who have sex with men. *American Journal of Public Health*, *92*(12), 1964–1969.

Hearn, J. (1998). *The violences of men: How men talk about and how agencies respond to men's violence against women*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Hochschild, A., & Machung, A. (1989). *The second shift*. New York: Avon.

Jacobsen, N. S., Gottman, J. M., Waltz, J., Rushe, R., Babcock, J., & Holzworth-Munroe, A. (1994). Affect, verbal content, and psychophysiology in the arguments of couples with a violent husband. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, *62,* 982–988.

Johnson, M. P. (1995). Patriarchal terrorism and common couple violence: Two forms of violence against women. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, *57,* 283–295.

Johnson, M. P., & Ferraro, K. J. (2000). Research on domestic violence in the 1990s: Making distinctions. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, *62,* 948–963.

Kalmuss, D. S., & Straus, M. A. (1990). Wife's marital dependency and wife abuse. In M. A. Straus & R. J. Gelles (Eds.), *Physical violence in American families: Risk factors and adaptations to violence in 8,145 families* (pp. 369–382). New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction.

Kaukinen, C. (2004). Status compatibility, physical violence, and emotional abuse in intimate relationships. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, *66,* 452–471.

Kirkwood, C. (1993). *Leaving abusive partners*. London: Sage.

Kurz, D. (1993). Physical assaults by husbands: A major social problem. In R. J. Gelles & D. R. Loseke (Eds.), *Current controversies on family violence* (pp. 88–103). Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Kurz, D. (1995). *For richer, for poorer: Mothers confront divorce*. New York: Routledge.

Langhinrichsen-Rohling, J., Neidig, P., & Thorn, G. (1995). Violent marriages: Gender differences in levels of current violence and past abuse. *Journal of Family Violence*, *10,* 159–176.

McCaughey, M. (1997). *Real knockouts: The physical feminism of women's self-defense*. New York: New York University Press.

Merrill, G. S. (1998). Understanding domestic violence among gay and bisexual men. In R. Bergen (Ed.), *Issues in intimate violence* (pp. 129–141). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Messerschmidt, J. (1993). *Masculinities and crime: A critique and reconceptualization of theory*. Lanham, MD: Rowan & Littlefield.

Messner, M. A. (1998). The limits of the "male sex role": An analysis of men's liberation and men's rights movements' discourse. *Gender and Society*, *12,* 255–276.

Miller, S. L., & Simpson, S. S. (1991). Courtship violence and social control: Does gender matter? *Law and Society Review*, *25,* 335–365.

Ptacek, J. (1988). Why do men batter their wives? In K. Yllo & M. Bograd (Eds.), *Feminist perspectives on wife abuse* (pp. 133–157). Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Renzetti, C. M. (1998). Violence and abuse in lesbian relationships: Theoretical and empirical issues. In R. Bergen (Ed.),

Issues in intimate violence (pp. 117–127). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Risman, B. (1998). *Gender vertigo: American families in transition*. London: Yale University Press.

Salari, S. M., & Baldwin, B. (2002). Verbal, physical, and injurious aggression among intimate couples over time. *Journal of Family Issues*, *23,* 523–550.

Stacey, J., & Thorne, B. (1985). The missing feminist revolution in sociology. *Social Problems*, *32*(4), 301–316.

Stark, E., & Flitcraft, A. (1996). *Women at risk: Domestic violence and women's health*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Steinmetz, S. K. (1977–78). The battered husband syndrome. *Victimology*, *2,* 499–509.

Stets, J. E., & Straus. M. A. (1990). Gender differences in reporting marital violence and its medical and psychological consequences. In M. A. Straus & R. J. Gelles (Eds.), *Physical violence in American families: Risk factors and adaptations to violence in 8,145 families* (pp. 151–165). NJ: Transaction.

Straus, M. A. (1992). The conflict tactics scales and its critics: An evaluation and new data on validity and reliability. In M. A. Straus & R. J. Gelles (Eds.), *Physical violence in American families: Risk factors and adaptations to violence in 8,145 families* (pp. 49–73). NJ: Transaction.

Straus, M. A. (1993). Physical assaults by wives: A major social problem. In R. J. Gelles & D. R. Loseke (Eds.), *Current controversies on family violence*(pp. 67–87). Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Stuart, G. L., Moore, T. M., Ramsey, S. E., & Kahler, C. W. (2004). Hazardous drinking and relationship perpetration and victimization in women arrested for domestic violence. *Journal of Studies on Alcohol, 65*, 46–57.

Sugerman, D. B., & Frankel, S. L. (1996). Patriarchal ideology and wife-assault: A meta-analytic review. *Journal of Family Violence*, *11,* 13–40.

Tjaden, P., & Thoennes, N. (2000). *Extent, nature, and consequences of intimate partner violence: Findings from the National Violence Against Women Survey.* Washington, DC: National Institute of Justice/Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Totten, M. (2003). Girlfriend abuse as a form of masculinity construction among violent, marginal male youth. *Men and Masculinities*, *6,* 70–92.

Walker, L. (1984). *The battered woman syndrome*. New York: Springer.

West, C., & Zimmerman, D. H. (1987). Doing gender. *Gender and Society*, *1,* 125–151.

Williams, C. L. (1991). Case studies and the sociology of gender. In J. R. Feagin, A. M. Orum, & G. Sjoberg (Eds.), *The case for the case study* (pp. 224–243). Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.

Worcester, N. (2002). Women's use of force: Complexities and challenges of taking the issue seriously. *Violence Against Women*, *8,* 1390–1415.

Yllo, K. (1993). Through a feminist lens: Gender, power, and violence. In R. Gelles & D. L. Loseke (Eds), *Current controversies on family violence* (pp. 47–62). Newbury Park, CA: Sage.