

viewpoints

Thirty Years of Denying the Evidence on Gender Symmetry in Partner Violence: Implications for Prevention and Treatment

Murray A. Straus, PhD

University of New Hampshire, Durham

The first part of this article summarizes results from more than 200 studies that have found gender symmetry in perpetration and in risk factors and motives for physical violence in marital and dating relationships. It also summarizes research that has found that most partner violence is mutual and that self-defense explains only a small percentage of partner violence by either men or women. The second part of the article documents seven methods that have been used to deny, conceal, and distort the evidence on gender symmetry. The third part of the article suggests explanations for the denial of an overwhelming body of evidence by reputable scholars. The concluding section argues that ignoring the overwhelming evidence of gender symmetry has crippled prevention and treatment programs. It suggests ways in which prevention and treatment efforts might be improved by changing ideologically based programs to programs based on the evidence from the past 30 years of research.

KEYWORDS: dating; marriage; prevention; treatment; self-defense

The first objective of this article is to briefly summarize research on symmetry between men and women in perpetration of physical violence against a spouse or dating partner and symmetry between men and women in the motives and risk factors for partner violence (PV). These two sets of results contradicted deeply held beliefs and have been denied.

The second objective is to document the fact that the deniers of the research showing gender symmetry in PV have dealt with the denied research results by scientifically unacceptable tactics such as concealing those results, selective citation of research, stating conclusions that are the opposite of the data in the results section,

and intimidating researchers who produced results showing gender symmetry. The third objective is to suggest what underlies the denial of gender symmetry in PV. The fourth objective is to suggest that efforts to prevent and treat PV could be improved by restructuring those efforts to explicitly recognize gender symmetry in PV.

The focus of this article is on physical assault, because that is the aspect of partner maltreatment that has been the focus of the most controversy. Two aspects of gender symmetry in physical assaults will be addressed: similar rates of perpetration by men and women and parallel etiology of perpetration. The criterion of symmetry in perpetration is that the percentage of women who physically assault a male partner is about the same or greater than the percent of men who physically assault a female partner. The criterion for symmetry in etiology is that an etiologic variable is correlated with assaults by women as well as by men.

THE EVIDENCE ON GENDER SYMMETRY IN PERPETRATION

The controversy over gender symmetry in PV was fueled by the 1975 National Family Violence Survey, which found a perpetration rate of assault by men partners of 12% and by women partners 11.6% (Gelles & Straus, 1988; Straus & Gelles, 1986; Straus, Gelles, & Steinmetz, 2006). The rate of severe assaults such as kicking, punching, choking, and attacks with objects was also about the same for men and women (3.8% by men and 4.6% by women). Neither of these gender differences was statistically significant.

Early Failure to Recognize the Implications of Symmetry

Behind Closed Doors: Violence in the American Family (Straus et al., 2006) presented these results on gender symmetry, but it did not discuss the implications either in the main text or the concluding chapter on primary prevention. Moreover, there had been two preliminary studies that also found symmetry in perpetration that also did not discuss the implications for prevention and treatment of PV (Straus, 1973, 1974). Why were these statistics presented and the implications ignored? An important part of the explanation was that these results contradicted the feminist analysis of PV that had made both the academic world and the general public conscious of PV, and which I presented in an article on "Sexual Inequality, Cultural Norms, and Wife-Beating" (Straus, 1976). As the title indicates, the only PV discussed was wife-beating.

Although I had ignored my own data on gender symmetry, others did not. The 1975 results were vehemently criticized. My former colleague Suzanne Steinmetz did not ignore the data on gender symmetry (Steinmetz, 1977–1978) and bore the brunt of that criticism (Pleck, Pleck, Grossman, & Bart, 1978). There were also personal

attacks (described in the section of this article on the use of intimidation to suppress the evidence on gender symmetry).

Some of the ways these criticisms affected me are described elsewhere (Straus, 2008a). Rather than silencing me, it prompted me to seek explanations for gender symmetry. One result was the introductory chapter to *The Social Causes of Husband-Wife Violence* (Straus & Hotaling, 1980), which identified causes of PV that are inherent in the characteristics of family and society and which explain the high rates of PV by both men and women. Bit by bit, my original assumption that PV was about men dominating women has been contradicted by a mass of empirical evidence from my own research and from research by many others, which found that women physically attack partners at the same or higher rate as men and that that male dominance is only one of the many causes. The meta-analysis by Archer (2000) and the bibliography by Fiebert (2004) document about 200 studies that have found approximately equal rates of perpetration by men and women partners. Figure 1, which is a tabulation of studies in the Fiebert bibliography, shows that, as early as 1986, 23 studies found symmetry in perpetration, including two national surveys. Table 1 summarizes a few of the large-scale studies. However, as will be shown later in this article, until recently, few have accepted this evidence, and some of those few will not publicly express their position for fear of the type of ostracism to which it will expose them. Instead, the evidence on gender symmetry in prevalence and etiology is typically ignored (as I had previously), concealed, and often explicitly denied.

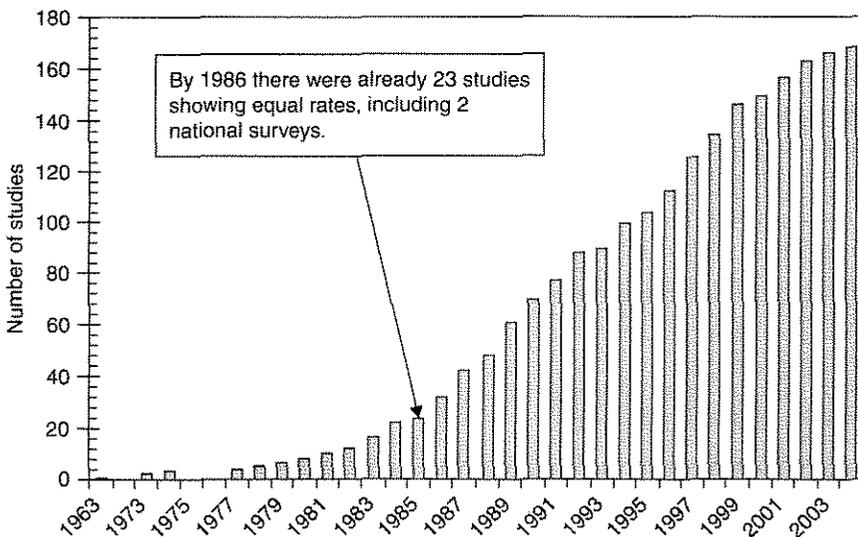


FIGURE 1. Cumulative number of studies showing similar rates of assaulting a partner by women and men.

TABLE 1. Ten Other Examples of the Approximately 200 Studies Showing Gender Symmetry in Assault

| Study | Severity of Assault | Perpetrator | |
|---|---------------------|-------------|-------|
| | | Man | Woman |
| Canadian National Survey (Brinkerhoff & Lupri, 1988) | | 17.8% | 23.3% |
| | Minor Severe | 10.1% | 12.9% |
| Canadian General Social Survey (Mihorean, 2005) | Overall rate | 7.0% | 8.0% |
| British Crime Survey (Mirrlees-Black, 1999) | Overall rate | 4.2% | 4.1% |
| National Co-morbidity Study (Kessler, Molnar, Feurer, & Appelbaum, 2001) | | 17.4% | 17.7% |
| | Minor Severe | 6.5% | 6.2% |
| National Alcohol and Family Violence Survey (Straus, 1995) | Overall rate | 9.1% | 9.5% |
| | Severe | 1.9% | 4.5% |
| Dunedin Health and Development Study (Moffitt & Caspi, 1999) | Overall rate | 27.0% | 34.0% |
| National Violence Against Women Survey (Tjaden & Thoennes, 2000b) | Overall rate | 1.3% | 0.9% |
| Youth Risk Behavior Survey (Eaton et al., 2007) | Overall rate | 8.8% | 8.9% |
| National Youth Survey (Woffordt, Mihalic, & Menard, 1994) | Overall rate | 20.2% | 34.1% |
| | Severe | 5.7% | 3.8% |
| Percentage of emergency room visits for partner violence (Ernst et al., 1997) | Injury | 19.0% | 20.0% |

Mutuality in Partner Violence

Equal rates of perpetration do not necessarily mean mutuality in the sense of both partners engaging in physical attacks. An epidemiological survey might find about the same rates for men and women—for example, 12% in the previous 12 months. However, the 12% of men could refer to one set of couples, and the 12% of women might be occurring in another set of couples. Theoretically, there could be no couples where both are violent. Again, the analyses in *Behind Closed Doors* (Straus et al., 2006) led the way by developing and presenting statistics that showed that, when there is violence, it is most often mutual. And again, like the results on symmetry in perpetration, the profound implications of the results on mutuality were not explicitly discussed in that book. Since then, other studies have also found that, when there is PV, it is most often mutual. The rates of mutual partner violence from the 1975 National Family Violence Survey and five other studies are summarized in Table 2.

TABLE 2. Six of the General Population Studies Showing Predominance of Mutual Violence

| Study | Among Violent Couples | | |
|--|-----------------------|------------|--------------|
| | Man Only | Woman Only | Both Violent |
| National Family Violence Survey 1975 (Straus et al., 2006) | 25% | 27% | 48% |
| National Co-morbidity Survey. 1990–02 (Kessler et al., 2001) | 23% | 24% | 54% |
| National Longitudinal Study Adolescent of Health, 2001 (Whitaker, Haileyesus, Swahn, & Saltzman, 2007) | 15% | 35% | 50% |
| International Dating Violence Study, 2001–06 (Straus, 2008b) | 16% | 29% | 55% |
| International Parenting Study (Straus, 2009b) | 12% | 22% | 66% |
| Philippines Health and Nutrition Survey (Ansara & Hindin, 2009) | 22% | 38% | 40% |

ASYMMETRY IN EFFECTS

The exception to gender symmetry is that the adverse effects of being a victim of PV are much greater for women than for men. This can be considered a difference in context, but the fact that adverse effects are consequences rather than causes of PV needs to be kept in mind.

Attacks by men cause more injury (both physical and psychological), more deaths, and more fear. In addition, women are more often economically trapped in a violent relationship than men, because women continue to earn less than men and because, when a marriage ends, women have custodial responsibility for children at least 80% of the time. On the other hand, the adverse effects of emotional abuse, while not a focus of this article, are often greater than those of physical PV, with a comparable impact on both men and women victims (Hamel, 2009; Lawrence, Yoon, Langer, & Ro, 2009; Taft et al., 2006)

Still, the greater adverse effect of physical PV on women is an extremely important difference, and it indicates the need to continue to provide more services for women victims of PV than for men victims. In addition, as will be explained later, the greater adverse effect on women is one of the things that underlie denial of the evidence on gender symmetry. However, empathy for women because of the greater injury and the need to help victimized women must not be allowed to obscure the fact that men sustain about a third of the injuries from PV, including a third of the deaths from attacks by a partner (Catalano, 2006; Rennison, 2000; Straus, 2005). PV by women is therefore a serious crime and a health and social problem that must be addressed, even though the effects are not as great as the effects of

assaults perpetrated by male partners. Moreover, the risk of injury to women, and the probability of the violence continuing or escalating, is greatest when both partners are violent (Straus, 2009c), as is true for at least half of violent couples (Feld & Straus, 1989; Ross & Babcock, 2009; Straus & Gozjolko, 2007; Whitaker, Haileyesus, Swahn, & Saltzman, 2007).

GENDER SYMMETRY IN ETIOLOGY, CONTEXT, AND MEANING OF PARTNER VIOLENCE

In addition to the concealment and denial to be documented later in this article, another tactic of those who reject the evidence of symmetry in PV has been to claim that the equal perpetration rates do not show symmetry because the motives, context, and meaning of PV by women are different. However, with the extremely important exception of greater adverse effects for women, research has found symmetry in risk factors, motives, context, and meanings.

Symmetry in Self-Defense

Probably the most frequently argued difference in motives of women perpetrators is the assertion that when women assault a partner it is usually an act of self-defense. For example, the influential World Health Organization report on violence states that "Where violence by women occurs it is more likely to be in the form of self-defense (32, 37, 38)" (Krug, Dahlberg, Mercy, Zwi, & Lozano, 2002). However, examination of references 32, 37, and 38 found that reference 32 (Saunders, 1986) reports that 70% of the minor violence and 60% of the severe violence was not in self-defense. Reference 37 (Dekeseredy, Saunders, Schwartz, et al., 1997) used a similar method, and got similar results: 37% of the minor violence and 43% of the severe violence was initiated by women. Reference 38 (Johnson & Ferraro, 2000) is a review article that cites references 32 and 37 and does not report new empirical data. In addition, neither of these studies had data on self-defense by men, so neither provide a basis for concluding that violence by women differs from violence by men. Reference 37 (1997) does report data but they show that only 6.9% of the women acted in self-defense.

At least six other studies report data on self-defense. Five of the six found that only a small percentage of women's violence was in self-defense (Carrado, George, Loxam, Jones, & Templar, 1996; Cascardi & Vivian, 1995; Felson & Messner, 1998; Follingstad, Wright, Lloyd, & Sebastian, 1991; Pearson, 1997; Sarantakos, 1999; Sommer, 1996). For the one study that found high rates of self-defense, the percentage in self-defense was slightly greater for men (56%) than for women (42%) (Harned, 2001).

Rather than self-defense, the most usual motivations for violence by women, like the motivations of men, are coercion, anger, and punishing misbehavior by their partner (Cascardi & Vivian, 1995; Fiebert & Gonzalez, 1997; Kernsmith, 2005). For example, Pearson (1997) reports that 90% of the women she studied assaulted their partner

because they were furious, jealous, or frustrated and not because they tried to defend themselves. These motives are parallel to the motivations of men perpetrators. Research on homicides by women shows similar results. For example, Jurik and Gregware (1989) studied 24 women-perpetrated homicides and found that 60% had a previous criminal record, 60% had initiated use of physical force, and 21% of the homicides were in response to "prior abuse" or "threat of abuse/death." A larger study by Felson and Messner (1998), drawing upon 2,058 partner homicide cases, determined that 46% of the women perpetrators had previously been abused, but less than 10% had acted in self-defense.

Dominance by One Partner

A central feature of the feminist theory is that PV occurs because men use violence to maintain dominance in their marital relationship. This is certainly true. What it ignores is that it is only one of many risk factors for PV, and that women as well as men use violence to dominate. Figure 2 (Medeiros & Straus, 2006) presents the results of a study of 854 students (312 men and 542 women) at two American universities. It shows that dominance by *either* partner is associated with an increased probability of PV. These results were replicated for the 14,252 university students in the International Dating Violence Study (Straus, 2008b). Five other studies also found that dominance by either the male or female partner is associated with an increased probability of violence (Coleman & Straus, 1986; Kim & Emery, 2003; Straus et al., 2006; Sugihara & Warner, 2002; Tang, 1999).

Symmetry in Other Aspects of Etiology

The previously mentioned study of 854 U.S. university students also investigated a number of other risk factors for PV in addition to dominance by one partner

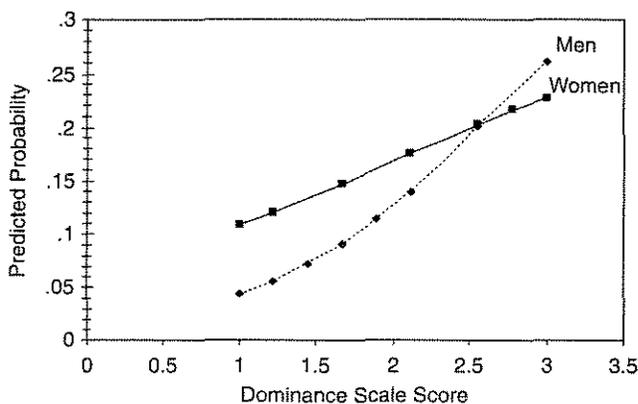


FIGURE 2. Relationship between dominance scale score and probability of severe assault on a partner by gender.

(Medeiros & Straus, 2006). Fourteen risk factors were found to be significantly related to an increased probability of severe assaults such as punching or choking. All 14 were related to severe assaults by women as well as by men: poor anger management, antisocial personality, borderline personality, dominance, substance abuse, negative attribution, posttraumatic stress, conflict with partner, communication problems, jealousy, sexual abuse as a child, substance abuse, stressful conditions during the year of the study, and attitudes approving violence.

METHODS OF DENYING THE EVIDENCE ON GENDER SYMMETRY

The methods used to conceal and deny the evidence on gender symmetry are detailed in previous articles (Straus, 1990, 2007, 2008a) and will only be summarized here. It is important to recognize that the terms *conceal*, *deny*, and *distort* apply to academics who have produced or know about research evidence that could be concealed, denied, or distorted. Thus, this section refers to the academic community, not to service providers.

Method 1: Conceal the Evidence

Perhaps the most frequent method of dealing with the unacceptable evidence that women assault partners at the same or higher rate as men is to conceal the evidence. The pattern was established early in research on PV by a survey conducted for the Kentucky Commission on Women (Schulman, 1979). This excellent survey found about equal rates of assault by men and women partners, but only assaults by men were presented in the commission report.

The upper half of Figure 3 shows prevalence rates by gender in the prepublication version of a Canadian study (Kennedy & Dutton, 1989). In the published version (lower half of Figure 3), the wife-to-husband data are absent.

The data analysis for my coauthored article on the "Drunken Bum Theory of Wife-Beating" (Kaufman Kantor & Straus, 1987) included women who were drunken bums as well as men, but the paper submitted for publication included only data on men's drinking and men's violence.

In the Global School-Based Health Survey, using questionnaires completed by students age 13 to 15 (World Health Organization, 2006), question 38 asked the students whether they had been slapped or hurt on purpose by a boyfriend or girlfriend in the past 12 months. The results for all of the first four nations (Jordan, Namibia, Swaziland, and Zambia) showed a slightly higher percent of boys than girls who reported being slapped or hurt on purpose by a girlfriend or boyfriend. Because those were only the first 4 nations in a planned 70-nation study, I waited until data on more nations became available. Two years later, in 2008, results for many nations were available, but question 38 and the data on this question were nowhere to be found.

| | | Marital violence indexes for 1985 U.S. and 1987 Alberta surveys | |
|---|--------------------------------|---|--------------------|
| | | Rate per 100 couples | |
| | | United States | Alberta |
| Prepublication version (1987) includes wife-to-husband rates | A. Husband-to-wife | | |
| | Overall violence | 11.3 | 11.2 |
| | Severe violence "wife beating" | 3.0 | 2.3 |
| | B. Wife-to-husband | | |
| | Overall violence | 12.1 | 12.4 |
| | Severe violence | 4.4 | 4.7 |
| | C. Couple | | |
| | Overall violence | 15.8 | 15.1 |
| | Severe violence | 5.8 | 5.5 |
| | | Marital violence indexes for 1985 U.S. and 1987 Alberta surveys | |
| | | Rate per 100 couples | |
| | | United States (1985) | Alberta* (1987) |
| Published (1989) wife-to-husband rates have disappeared | A. Husband-to-wife | | |
| | Overall violence | 11.3 | 11.2 |
| | Severe violence "wife beating" | 3.0 | 2.3 |
| | B. Couple | | |
| | Overall violence | 15.8 | 15.5 |
| | Severe violence | 5.8 | 5.5 |

FIGURE 3. Disappearance of women's violence from a published paper.

Although at least 200 papers report research that found gender symmetry in perpetration, many studies with similar results were not submitted for publication because the authors thought a paper showing gender symmetry would not be accepted or because the authors feared adverse effects on their reputation and employability (see Method 7).

Method 2: Avoid Obtaining Evidence on Female Perpetration

The Canadian National Violence Against Women Survey (Johnson & Sacco, 1995) used the Conflict Tactics Scales or CTS (Straus, Hamby, Boney-McCoy, & Sugarman, 1996) to obtain the data on PV for a sample of women. The CTS is based on family systems theory and therefore included items to measure violence by both partners. However, the designers of the Canadian study modified the CTS by deleting the questions on perpetration by the women interviewed. The result, of course, was data on victimization of women and none on perpetration by women. Many other studies have used this strategy. The original plan for the U.S. National Violence Against

Women Survey was identical—that is, interview women and use only the CTS questions about their victimization. Fortunately, a last-minute compromise was reached between those who wanted to interview women only about their victimization and those who wanted to use the full CTS. The compromise to proceed with the original plan of asking women only about their victimization but to add a sample of men who were also asked only about victimization (which among heterosexual couples had to also be data on female perpetration). This created embarrassing results, such as that 39% of the violent acts documented by this study were perpetrated by women and that the coercive control scale scores of women were as high as the scores of men (Felson & Outlaw, 2007; Tjaden & Thoennes, 2000b). These “unbelievable” results were part of the reason for the two-year delay in releasing the study results.

After the study data became available, the data on men victims and women’s perpetration continued to be ignored, as illustrated by Thompson, Saltzman, and Johnson’s (2003) study of risk factors for injury and M. P. Johnson’s study of “intimate terrorists” (Johnson & Leone, 2005). Both analyzed only the female participant half of the data. Consequently, no information about the risk of injury to men and no information about women intimate terrorists will appear in the literature. Fortunately, a growing number of researchers are not constrained by the ideology that has dominated and handicapped understanding of partner violence for the past 30 years. The misleading picture that is conveyed is shown by the results of a study that did examine the full data set. Felson and Outlaw (2007) found that the coercive control scores (the criterion used by Johnson to distinguishing intimate terrorists from other violent partners) of men and women were about the same. Straus and Gozjolko (2007) applied Johnson’s criteria for identifying intimate terrorists to the 14,252 participants in the International Dating Violence Study. They found about the same percentage of women as men in the intimate terrorist category or have coercive control scores (the key mean of identifying intimate terrorists) as high as the scores of men in the study, as have five other studies (Felson & Outlaw, 2007; Graham-Kevan & Archer, 2004; Laroche, 2005; Prospero, 2009; Prospero, Dwumah, & Ofori-Dua, 2009). Yet in his 2008 book, Johnson continues to assert, without qualification, that intimate terrorists are almost exclusively men. The results of these four studies of intimate terrorism are also consistent with other research showing that gender symmetry applies to chronic severe violence and to police and shelter cases (Straus, 2009c).

Method 3: Selective Citation of Research

Both individual researchers and government agencies deny the evidence by citing the few studies that show men’s predominance in PV and do not mention the huge number of studies that have found symmetry. The World Health Organization report on violence (Krug et al., 2002) is an important example because it is by leading scholars and is widely read and respected. One can read the entire report—which has impressively detailed documentation of studies of male perpetrations—and not find

a citation of any of the almost 200 studies that have found that women also assault their partners, except for the previously described section that erroneously argues that it is usually in self-defense.

The U.S. National Institute of Justice publishes fact sheets and research summaries designed to inform the public about crime, including PV, such as Catalano (2006) and Catalano, Smith, and Snyder (2009). They present results from the National Crime Victimization Survey, which show 85% male perpetration. They fail to cite the National Institute of Justice's prior publications on the National Violence Against Women Survey (Tjaden & Thoennes, 2000) and the Dunedin birth-cohort study (Moffitt & Caspi, 1999). Both the omitted studies found gender symmetry, and both provide more valid estimates of PV (Straus, 1999). These publications also fail to cite any of the other surveys shown in Table 1, most of which are nationally representative and which, without exception, found equal or higher rates of perpetration by women.

Method 4: State Conclusions That Contradict the Data

The article by DeKesseredy et al. (1997) described in the earlier section on self-defense concludes that PV by women is primarily an act of self-defense, but their data show that only 6.9% of the women acted in self-defense.

An article by Kernsmith (2005) concludes that "Males and females were found to differ in their motivations for using violence in relationships. Females reported using violence in response to prior abuse, citing revenge and retaliation as a primary motivation" (p. 173). What do the results show? A factor analysis of the questions found three factors. Women have a significantly higher score on one of the three factors: It is labeled "striking back for abuse." However, that label is misleading. It applies to only one of the five questions in the factor ("to protect yourself"). The other four questions tell a different story than the name given to the factor. They are "to get back at your partner for hurting you emotionally" (which is a measure of anger-motivated violence), "to get your partner to stop doing something" (which is a measure of coercion), "to get back at your partner for hitting you first" (which measures retaliation, not self-defense), and "to show anger." So even the only factor that is significantly different for men and women is as much or more about coercion and anger as about striking back. The other two factors tell the opposite story than the "response to prior abuse" conclusion. One is "disciplining a partner" with items such as "to get your partner to do what you wanted." The other is "exerting power," with items such as "to feel more powerful." Men and women did not differ on either the "disciplining a partner" or the "exerting power" factor. That is, women used violence to exert power and punish a partner as much as men.

A study by Allen, Swan, and Ragahvan (2009, p. 1816) states that "the path models suggest that women's violence tends to be in reaction to male violence, whereas men tend to initiate violence and then their partners respond with violence." On the contrary, the coefficients in the paths from victimization to perpetration are

almost identical (women = .52, men = .49). There are many other examples of conclusions that contradict the evidence reported in the article (e.g., O'Keefe, 1997).

Because the erroneous conclusions quoted above were published in a reputable journal, and because most readers of the article are unlikely to carefully examine the tables or compare the path coefficients with what is said about them, the erroneous conclusions are what will be cited as though they were scientific evidence. From then on, there will be citations such as "a study by Kernsmith of 60 men and 54 women in a batterer counseling program found differences in males' and females' motivations for using violence," even though the article shows similar motives. And because the article is in a reputable peer-reviewed journal and has an appropriate sample, readers of the subsequent articles in which that is cited will accept it as a scientific fact. Thus, fiction is converted into scientific evidence that will be cited over and over again by the deniers of gender symmetry, as was shown by the World Health Organization report on violence. Another example is a report issued by the National Center for Victims of Crime and the National Council on Crime and Delinquency titled *Our Vulnerable Teenagers: Their Victimization, Its Consequences, and Directions for Prevention and Intervention*. It cites White and Koss (1991) as though it provided empirical data showing self-defense. However, the article asserts this, but provides no empirical data on self-defense.

Method 5: Block Publication of Articles That Report Gender Symmetry

This method of denial mostly works through self-censorship by authors who fear their article will be rejected or that it will undermine their reputation. A dramatic example occurred while this article was being written. A colleague coauthored an article with me that dealt with gender symmetry. She probably did 60% of the work on the article. During the course of our collaboration, she learned about the harassment and penalization of some researchers who have published on gender symmetry (see Method 7 below). That led her to withdraw from coauthorship of an important article. She was coming up for tenure and promotion review and feared authorship of that article would adversely affect the chances for a successful review and also a more general stigmatization that could make finding an alternative position difficult. Even if her perception of the threat was wrong, the fact of her fear and its effect on her scholarly work was real.

Method 6: Prevent Funding of Research to Investigate Female Partner Violence

In December 2005, the National Institute of Justice invited grant proposals to investigate PV and sexual violence. It stated that studies involving men victims are not eligible for funding.

A proposal I submitted to the National Institute of Mental Health was not funded because, among other criticisms, one of the reviewers strongly objected to the premise that PV is a human relationships issue, as much or more than a gender issue. In the tough competition for funding, if one reviewer out of the panel gives a proposal a very low rating, it is enough to push the priority score below the funding line.

Others have had similar experiences—for example, Amy Holtzworth-Munroe (Holtzworth-Munroe, 2005).

Method 7: Harass, Threaten, or Penalize Researchers Who Publish Evidence on Gender Symmetry

Because being harassed or penalized is not mentioned in published articles, most of the examples in this section refer to instances in which I have been the target. However, a number of others have experienced similar treatment, and some examples are presented.

The most extreme example was the experience of Susan Steinmetz. When she was at the University of Delaware and was being reviewed for promotion and tenure, there was an organized attempt to block her appointment through unsolicited letters to her department and the university president. They asserted that Steinmetz was not a suitable person to promote because her research showing high rates of women's perpetration of PV was not believable. In short, they accused her of scientific fraud (Susan Steinmetz, personal communications during the years 1973 to 1988, when we collaborated in research and coauthored two books). An academic version that implies fraud is Pleck and colleagues (1978). Even more extreme, there was a bomb threat at a daughter's wedding.

At the University of Manitoba, a lecturer's contract was not renewed because of protests about her research, which found approximately equal rates of PV by women and men.

I have been repeatedly harassed and penalized.

- In 1980, I was invited to speak at the University of Massachusetts but was prevented from doing so by hoots and stamping. Repeated requests to the audience to allow me to speak and respond to their questions were ignored, and the presentation was finally canceled.
- I was informed that the chair of the Canadian Commission on Violence Against Women told two public hearings that I could not be believed because I was a misogynist, beat my wife, and sexually exploited students. Fortunately, when I brought this to the attention of the Minister of Women's affairs, she required her to cease and write a retraction letter.
- Two of my graduate students were warned that they will never get jobs if they do their PhD dissertation with me.
- When I was president of the Society for the Study of Social Problems, the members seated in the first two rows stood up and walked out as I started to give the presidential address.

- When that paper was to be published in the society's journal *Social Problems* (Straus, 1991b), the editor commissioned three critiques. I do not object to publishing a critique of a presidential address. However, this was probably the only instance in 55 years of publishing presidential addresses that critiques were published, and I do not know of any since then. Moreover, I was not informed about the plan. When a colleague told me about it, my request to see the critiques and write a rejoinder was refused. Only after I said that I would ask the society's board of directors to require the editor to publish a rejoinder did that happen. A final bitter touch is that my presidential address was not on PV. It was on spanking children. Why would a paper on spanking elicit a critique by the deniers of gender symmetry in PV? Correctly or incorrectly, I believe the main motivation was to discredit me as a means of discrediting the politically intolerable research evidence on gender symmetry. The effectiveness of this mode of intimidation persists to this day, as shown by the previously mentioned incident in which fear of retribution led a colleague to withdraw from coauthorship of an article on gender symmetry.

Colleagues have expressed to me similar accounts of research being suppressed and presentations boycotted, some quite recently. The senior editor of *Partner Abuse*, for instance, was picketed and disrupted by a group of battered women's advocates at a major domestic violence conference in 2008 during a talk on domestic violence in disputed child custody cases. When he brought this matter to the attention of the conference organizers, his complaint was essentially ignored (John Hamel, personal communication, March 14, 2010).

BIASED MEDIA COVERAGE OF PARTNER VIOLENCE

Media coverage is influenced by many things, including the beliefs and perceptions of reporters and editors and by what they think will sell papers or increase viewers, both of which have led to biased reporting of crime, including PV.

An example of a bias resulting from publishing articles that are likely to attract an increased readership or audience was documented in a study of homicide trends in the 1990s. Because of the preceding two decades of increasing crime, the subject was high in public concern and interest. Recognizing this, television stations around the United States competed by increasing their coverage of crime. As a result, from 1990 to 1998, TV coverage of homicides *increased* by 473%, and the homicide rate *decreased* by 33% (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2001).

A study of newspaper coverage of 785 homicides in Cleveland, Ohio, from 1984 to 1992 (Lundman, 2000) found that, of homicides in which a man killed a woman, 79% made it into the newspaper, whereas only half of homicides in which a woman killed a man were covered. Of those that were reported, much more space was given to cases of men killing women: an average of 3.6 articles for male homicides of females and 1.7 articles for female homicides of males. Women kill partners in a third of the instances of partner homicides, but the biased coverage makes it seem even more rare.

An article titled “And Then He Hit Me” in the American Association of Retired People magazine on PV among the elderly declared flatly that women-on-men domestic violence among the elderly is negligible. The basis for this is given as a study of elder abuse in Boston by my colleagues Karl Pillemer and David Finkelhor (Pillemer & Finkelhor, 1986). I was certain that was incorrect and looked up the study again. What the study actually shows is that 43% of physical violence cases were the wife assaulting the husband—that is, the study shows gender symmetry.

Another misrepresentation of PV by the press is the emphasis on horrific cases of men who virtually enslave and torture women partners. Those cases sell newspapers and attract TV audiences but are less than half of 1% of the segment of couples who experienced an incident of PV in the previous 12 months (Straus, 1991a). This leads the public to think that the typical PV case is a beaten-down, physically injured, and virtually enslaved female victim. It is very likely that almost all the perpetrators of those rare cases are men. However, featuring them leads the public to think that men predominate in all cases of PV.

A commentary on two recent celebrity cases also illustrates the biased press coverage of PV (Angelucci, 2009): “Female abusers and male victims are not only politically incorrect; they also don’t ‘sell’ well.” That would explain why hardly anyone heard about the two celebrity domestic violence arrests of women that occurred shortly after the Rihanna incident. Kelly Bensimon, who plays in the Bravo reality show *Real Housewives of New York City*, was arrested for giving her boyfriend a black eye and a bloody gash on his cheek. And the girlfriend of Tampa Bay linebacker Geno Hayes was arrested for stabbing Hayes in the neck and head. Where was the outcry? Nowhere. In fact, most of the media coverage incidents did not even call these incidents “domestic violence.”

In my opinion, the biased press coverage of PV is not deliberate falsification. Rather, it results from errors in perception of PV to be explained in the next section. Regardless of why the biased coverage occurs, it is one of the reasons the public thinks PV is almost entirely a male crime.

WHAT UNDERLIES THE DENIAL AND THE BIASED PRESS COVERAGE OF SYMMETRY IN PARTNER VIOLENCE?

The explanations fall into two categories. The first is why almost everyone fails to perceive the symmetry in PV. The second is why academics who do know the evidence on symmetry conceal or deny it. (The sections on PV are slightly revised from part of a previous article [Straus, 2009c].)

Why Symmetry in Partner Violence Is Not Perceived

Men Predominate in Almost All Other Crimes. For almost every other type of crime, and especially violent crime, men predominate. For some types of crime,

such as homicide and sexual assault, the gender ratio is as high as 10 to 1 (Dawson, Straus, & Fauchier, 2007; Ellis & Walsh, 2000). Consequently, there is a tendency to think this also applies to PV.

Men Predominate in Police and Hospital Statistics on Partner Violence.

Men also predominate in hospital and police statistics on PV. Most tabulations of police data show that, in 80% to 99% of PV cases reported to police, men are the perpetrators. This is not because of more physical attacks by men. It is because of the greater probability of injury from attacks by men and greater fear for safety by women (Straus, 1999), both of which characteristics lead to police intervention. In addition, there is less police intervention for attacks by women because men are even more reluctant than women to involve the police when they are victims of an assault by a partner (Tjaden & Thoennes, 2000). Police are involved in, at most, 5% of PV cases (Kaufman Kantor & Straus, 1990). Despite the unrepresentative nature of police statistics, they are usually taken as representative of all cases of PV. This gives the impression that PV is almost exclusively men who physically assault their partner. Similarly, hospital data show a preponderance of female victims, reflecting the greater probability of injury from an attack by a man, the fact that the issue is usually investigated only for women patients, and that if men are asked about the source of their injury, they are less likely than women to say it was an attack by a partner.

Women Are Injured More and Fear More. As just indicated, women are physically injured by PV more frequently and more severely than men. Empathy for victims results in greater concern and sympathy for women victims—as it should, because women are more often injured. Empathy also leads the press and the public to focus on assaults perpetrated by male partners. If violence is defined in terms of whether the assault resulted in an injury, it adds to the perception that men are the predominant offenders. The much lower probability of injury from attacks by a female partner is probably a large part of the explanation for the greater cultural acceptance of violence by women than by men in developed nations (Greenblat, 1983; O’Keefe, 1997; Straus, 1995; Straus, Kaufman Kantor, & Moore, 1997).

Violence by a male partner produces an appropriate fear of injury among women. Among men, the much lower rates (coupled with greater cultural acceptance of women’s PV just mentioned) leads to trivialization of physical attacks by women and hinders perception of PV by women. It also reduces the probability of men (and others) perceiving attacks by women as dangerous or violent, even though men sustain a third of the homicides and a third of the nonfatal injuries inflicted by romantic partners (Catalano, 2006; Rennison & Welchans, 2000; Straus, 2005). Witnesses are less likely to call police for female-to-male PV than for male-to-female PV unless the incident is very serious (Felson, 2002). The lower injury rate results in men not fearing injury and men not taking protective steps, such as calling the police or ending the relationship. The fact that about a third of partner homicide victims are men indicates that the neglect of self-protective steps can be fatal.

The Importance of Ending Cultural Norms Tolerating Male Violence.

Until nearly the end of the 19th century, husbands were allowed to use “reasonable

chastisement" to deal with errant wives (Calvert, 1974). Thus, even though women's PV has been documented since the Middle Ages (George, 1994), men who allowed this were ridiculed. Physical chastisement of a misbehaving wife, like spanking of children then and now, was an accepted part of the culture. It has taken a major effort by feminists and their academic colleagues such as myself (Straus, 1976) to change the continuing implicit cultural norm accepting a certain amount of men's PV. I suggest that the necessary intense focus on this effort interfered with recognizing PV by women and interfered with recognizing the large body of evidence showing that there are many causes of PV in addition to male dominance (Dutton, 2006; Hamel & Nicholls, 2006; Lutzker & Whitaker, 2008; Whitaker & Lutzker, 2009).

Men have the predominant power in society as judged by many indicators (Archer, 2006; Sugarman & Straus, 1988; United Nations Development Programme, 2006; Yodanis, 2004). The cognitive discrepancy between men's power and high rates of PV by women, even in extremely male-dominant societies (Straus, 2008b; World Health Organization, 2006), blocks recognition of the equal rates of violence. In many societies or segments of societies around the world, high levels of male control over women and of male violence against women is still culturally accepted (Archer, 2006; Sugarman & Straus, 1988; United Nations Development Programme, 2006; Yodanis, 2004). In these countries, there is an urgent need to promote empowerment of women. That need also exists in the United States and other advanced industrial nations, but as end in itself more than as a means of ending PV.

Gender Stereotypes. Most cultures define women as "the gentle sex," making it difficult to perceive violence by women as being prevalent in any sphere of life. More specifically, as noted previously, there are implicit norms tolerating violence by women, on the assumption that it rarely results in injury (Greenblat, 1983; Straus, Kantor, & Moore, 1997). This assumption is largely correct, but, as previously noted, it is also correct that about a third of homicides of partners and about a third of non-fatal injuries are perpetrated by women (Catalano, 2006; Rennison & Welchans, 2000; Straus, 2005).

Evidence Not Available to the Public. As explained in the previous section on *Biased Media Coverage of Partner Violence*, a major factor contributing to the public not perceiving the extent of female PV is that the information has not been made available or has been distorted in the media. This reflects and reinforces the gender stereotypes described previously.

Difficulty of Correcting False Information. Research on the persistence of false information has found that it is difficult to correct false information. Experiments by Schwarz, Sanna, Skurnik, and Yoon (2007) and others have found that denials and clarifications of false information, although necessary, can paradoxically contribute to the resiliency of popular myths. This may partly result from the fact that denials inherently require repeating the bad information. Consequently, even when the evidence on gender symmetry is presented by an authoritative source such as the Centers for Disease Control, there will be only limited success in changing beliefs about female perpetration.

Taken together, the seven blocks to perception of PV by women just listed obscure the perception of PV by women and are part of the explanation for the denial of symmetry in PV.

Explanations of the Denial of Symmetry

Failure to perceive PV by women is part of the explanation for the denial. But much more contributes to the denial, and the concealing and distortion of evidence cannot be attributed just to perceptual limitations. This section suggests four additional explanations for the fact that reputable scholars deny the overwhelming evidence on gender symmetry, including evidence from their own research.

Focus on Extreme Cases. An important cause of the denial of gender symmetry occurs because the deniers tend to focus on the relatively small proportion of overall PV that is visible to the criminal justice system, shelters, batterer treatment programs, and other service providers. These tend to involve women victims. There usually are also men victims, but that is not known to service providers and researchers in those settings because they do not ask and are usually forbidden to ask women victims whether they have also attacked their partner. For example, I was refused permission to do a study in a shelter I had a small part in founding because of such a question. In contrast, the research showing gender symmetry has, until very recently, been based on general population samples where the predominant form of PV is minor. The findings of these general population studies are not believed by battered women's advocates because they are inconsistent with what they know about the characteristics of the cases they work with every day. However, the few studies that have obtained data from women partners of men in batter treatment programs or men arrested for PV have found that a quarter to two-thirds of the women have assaulted their partner (Straus, 2010). For example, a recent community study of couples (Capaldi et al., 2009) found that, although the men were more likely to have been arrested for PV, the women "had higher levels of physical and psychological aggression than the men overall. Men who were arrested did not have higher levels of aggression toward a partner overall compared to the women involved in the incidents" (p. 514). A study of battered women and their children by McDonald, Jouriles, Tart, and Minze (in press) asked the women about their own use of violence. More than 67% admitted to have perpetrated severe PV on a male partner in the previous year. Furthermore, this violence was significantly correlated with externalizing behaviors by their children.

Defense of Feminist Theory. I suggest that one of the explanations for denying the evidence on gender symmetry is to defend feminism in general. This is because a key step in the effort to achieve an equalitarian society is to bring about recognition of the harm that a patriarchal system causes. The removal of patriarchy as the main cause of PV weakens a dramatic example of the harmful effects of patriarchy. Any weakening of efforts to achieve greater gender equality is unfortunate but by no means critical, because that effort can continue on the basis of many other ways in which women continue to be subordinate to men, such as the gap in earnings of men and women.

Protecting Services and Avoiding Harm to Women Victims. There is a fear that, if the public, legislators, and administrators knew about and believed the research on gender symmetry, it would weaken funding of services for women victims, such as shelters for battered women, and weaken efforts to arrest and prosecute violent men. I know of no evidence that funding for services for women victims has ever been decreased because "women are also violent." Nevertheless, I have been told on several occasions that I am endangering services for battered women by publishing the results of research showing equal perpetration and insisting that PV by women must also be addressed. At a meeting of the Society for the Study of Social Problems, one panel member said that this type of phalli-centric research was undermining efforts to help battered women. This was followed by vigorous applause.

Arrests of women for PV have been increasing nationwide (Martin, 1997; Miller, 2001). In California between 1987 and 1997, the ratio of male to female arrests for PV decreased from 1 female arrest to 18 male arrests to a ratio of 1 female arrest to 4.5 male arrests (Deleon-Granados, Wells, & Binsbacher, 2006). The increase is not a result of more female PV, because rates of both fatal and nonfatal PV declined during this period (Catalano, 2006; Rennison & Rand, 2003; Straus & Gelles, 1986; Straus, Kantor, & Moore, 1994; Straus & Kaufman Kantor, 1994). It is most likely a result of the successful effort by the women's movement to change police practice from one of avoiding interference in domestic disturbances to one of mandatory or recommended arrest (Deleon-Granados et al., 2006). Their fear is that if the evidence on symmetry becomes widely known and accepted, it will justify more arrests of women for PV. In my opinion, if criminal prosecution is an appropriate part of the effort to reduce PV, that policy should apply to women as well as men perpetrators.

The denial of the overwhelming body of evidence on gender symmetry can be understood as one of many instances of the operation of theory of cultural cognition (Kahan & Braman, 2006). Cultural cognition research has found that that people tend to reject evidence that threatens key values. Other current examples include denial of climate change and denial of the evidence on the effectiveness and safety of vaccination.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PREVENTION AND TREATMENT

Research on treatment programs for perpetrators of PV has found that they have limited or no effect (Babcock, Green, & Robie, 2004; Dutton, 2006; Feder & Dugan, 2002). This section suggests ways in which attention to three aspects of the misperception and denial could increase the efficacy of prevention and treatment of PV. A more extensive discussion is in Straus (2009a).

Gender Symmetry in Partner Violence

With rare exception, current prevention and treatment efforts are based on the assumption that PV is perpetrated almost entirely by men. Thus, they proceed under

an erroneous assumption because, as shown earlier, about the same percentage of women as men physically attack a partner, most PV is mutual and, among young women, a higher percent of women than men are the sole perpetrator. To substantially reduce PV, prevention and treatment efforts must be explicitly directed to women as well as men, and must attend to the dynamics of the relationship (Hamel, 2009).

Prevention. Most PV prevention programs focus on violence by boys and men. In 2009, for example, the British government announced that "Every school pupil in England is to be taught that domestic violence against women is unacceptable" (BBC News, 2009). Nevertheless, some programs are becoming at least partly gender neutral. The *Love Is Not Abuse* program sponsored by Liz Claiborne has partly replaced language that specified boys as the offender with gender-neutral terms such as "abuse" and "domestic violence." However, as explained earlier, such gender-neutral terms are perceived by program recipients as referring to male perpetration. Moreover, the examples continue to be of boys hitting girls (see, e.g., Liz Claiborne International, 2010), and the statistics are all about women victims and ignore the results of their own survey that found gender symmetry (Liz Claiborne International, 2006). It is insufficient for prevention programs to be gender neutral. They need to be *explicitly* directed to girls and women as well as boys and men. In addition, more than just awareness of female perpetration is needed. The target audience also needs to be informed that PV by a woman increases the probability that her partner will be violent (Straus, 2005).

Treatment. In respect to programs for offenders, a fundamental change is to replace the default assumption that there is only one perpetrator and it is almost always a man. The default assumption should be that it could be male only, female only, or mutual. Once safety has been assured, the first step is to establish who is doing the hitting and to what extent it is bidirectional. Only then can treatment proceed on the basis of the actual pattern of relationships.

Multiple Causes of PV

As shown in the section on symmetry in the etiology of PV, there are multiple causes. Patriarchy and male dominance in the family are clearly among the causes, but there are many others. However, with rare exception, current offender treatment programs are based on the assumption that the primary cause is male dominance. Thus, they proceed under an erroneous assumption. Illustrative of this fallacious single-cause approach are the state-mandated offender treatment programs that forbid treating other causes, such as inadequate anger management skills (Maiuro & Eberle, 2008).

Ordinary Partner Violence. Most PV involves minor attacks such as slapping or throwing a plate of food at a partner. The etiology of this level of PV is likely to be different than the etiology of PV characterized by a pattern of chronic severe assaults, injury, and domination of the partner. The "ordinary" violence that occurs in so many families is likely to be traceable to inadequate relationship skills, such as nonviolent methods of resolving conflicts with a partner and poor anger management. This

is because the predominant proximal motives for "ordinary" or "common couple" violence, by women as well men, are frustration and anger at some misbehavior by the partner and are efforts to coerce the partner into doing or not doing something (Cascardi & Vivian, 1995; Fiebert & Gonzalez, 1997; Follingstad et al., 1991; Kernsmith, 2005; Stets & Hammons, 2002). Almost all studies that have tested both men and women using the same instrument have found that women engage in coercive control as much as men (Ehrensaft & Vivian, 1999; Felson & Outlaw, 2007; Laroche, 2005; Oswald & Russell, 2006; Stets, 1991; Stets & Pirog-Good, 1990).

Clinical-Level Partner Violence. The chronic, severe, and subjugating level of PV is more likely to be traceable to risk factors such as antisocial personality traits, chronic excessive drinking, social disadvantage, a propensity to crime, and psychopathology of varying degrees of severity (Ehrensaft, Moffitt, & Caspi, 2004; Holtzworth-Munroe, Meehan, Herron, Rehman, & Stuart, 2000; Hotaling, Straus, & Lincoln, 1990; Kim & Capaldi, 2004; Kim, Laurent, Capaldi, & Feingold, 2008; Straus, 2009a; Straus & Ramirez, 2004).

Despite these differences in etiology between ordinary PV and chronic severe PV, it is important to keep in mind that they are only general tendencies. Consequently, treatment of PV needs to start by empirically assessing dangerousness by means of an instrument such as the Danger Assessment (Campbell, 1995, 2001), assessing symmetry by means of an instrument such as the Conflict Tactics Scales (Straus & Douglas, 2004; Straus, Hamby, Boney-McCoy, & Sugarman, 1996), and assessing risk factors for PV by means of an instrument such as the Personal and Relationships Profile (Straus et al., 1999; Straus & Mouradian, 1999).

Equality in relationships needs to be a focus, because research has repeatedly shown that dominance by *either* partner is associated with an increased probability of violence (see earlier section on *Dominance by One Partner*). However, to maintain equality requires relationship skills. Thus, a main focus of both prevention and treatment needs to be on relationship skills addressed to girls and women as well as boys and men.

CONCLUSION

It is time to make the effort to end all family violence, not just violence against women partners, because this is morally and legally necessary and because it is crucial to protect women. This must include PV by women, which is widely viewed as mostly harmless (Greenblat, 1983), because physical injury inflicted by women is more rare than physical injury inflicted by men (Stets & Straus, 1990). On the contrary, even when attacks by women result in no physical injury, ending PV by women is a basic prevention step to reduce violence against women and all other humans. The research shows that this so-called harmless violence by women because a meta-analysis by Stith and colleagues (2004) found that a woman's perpetration of violence was the strongest predictor of her being a victim of partner violence. Similar

conclusions follow from the longitudinal study of Feld and Straus (1989) and study of Whitaker et al. (2007).

The needed changes are starting to happen in response to several trends, starting, of course, with the huge volume of research alluded to in this article. Another factor leading to recognition of gender symmetry is the growth of a men's movement, which, for example, achieved a change in the reauthorized Violence Against Women Act to include a statement that it applies to men victims as well as women. Eventually that will have an effect, even though, as of this writing, the program continues to be administered as if women are the only victims and men the only perpetrators.

A partial recognition of symmetry occurred in a Department of Justice publication on teen dating violence (Mulford & Giordano, 2008), which stated that,

At a recent workshop on teen dating violence, co-sponsored by the U.S. Departments of Justice (DOJ) and Health and Human Services (HHS), researchers presented findings from several studies that found that girls and boys perpetrate the same frequency of physical aggression in romantic relationships. (p. 1)

However, the article then goes on to deny that symmetry applies to adult couple relationships and reasserts the patriarchy paradigm by saying that these results were found for teenagers because of the "absence of elements traditionally associated with greater male power in adult relationships. Adolescent girls are not typically dependent on romantic partners for financial stability, and they are less likely to have children to provide for and protect" (p. 3). That is true of teen dating relationships, but the implication that, because adult women are often economically dependent on men, women are victims rather than perpetrators, is a subtle denial of the overwhelming evidence of gender symmetry in adult PV. And it also reiterates the claim that male dominance is *the* cause of PV and, by omission, denies other causes. Nevertheless, acknowledging gender symmetry for teen dating violence represents a step forward, even though it was followed by two steps backward.

Another factor bringing about recognition of gender symmetry may be the shift in the predominant discipline of family violence researchers from sociology to psychology. This could make a difference, because psychologists tend to be more concerned with helping individual persons and couples change and less focused on bringing about change in the nature of society. Sociologists, however, tend to be more concerned with bringing about change in the nature of society. Thus, the conceptualization of PV as consisting of women victims of a patriarchal society paradigm, which is mainly a societal-level explanation, and accompanying programs to bring about social change (Straus, 2008a) is particularly attractive to sociologists, and they may be more reluctant than psychologists to acknowledge that male dominance in society and the family is only one of many risk factors for partner violence.

Finally, there are two important recognitions of gender symmetry that are likely to portend further change. The first is a legal rejection of the explicit or implicit

statutory and administrative definition of domestic violence as occurring only against women, such as California statute H&S 124250, which restricted funding of services to women victims:

The program provides grants to battered women's shelters that provide services in four areas: emergency shelter to women and their children, transitional housing programs to assist in finding housing and jobs, legal and other types of advocacy and representation, and other support services. (*Id.*, subd. (c).) The statute defines domestic violence as occurring only against women. "Domestic violence' means the infliction or threat of physical harm against past or present adult or adolescent female intimate partners, and shall include physical, sexual, and psychological abuse against the woman, and is part of a pattern of assaultive, coercive, and controlling behaviors directed at achieving compliance from or control over, that woman."³ (*Id.*, subd. (a)(1).) The statute speaks in gender specific terms; services are to be provided to "women and their children." (*Id.*, subds. (a)(2) & (3), (c)(1), (d)(1), (g)(1).) (California Court of Appeal (2008, p. 6)

The California Court of Appeal (2008) ruled on October 14, 2008, that this provision is unconstitutional and ordered state-funded services to be made available to men victims. Subsequent to that decision, at least one shelter has entirely revamped its approach to include services to men victims (Rooney, 2010). As noted previously, the reauthorized Violence Against Women law explicitly states that services can be provided to men victims

The second recognition of gender symmetry that is likely to portend further change is a change in the academic community signified by the inauguration of this journal and by a growing number of articles and books that recognize the importance of gender symmetry in PV (e.g., Dutton, 2006; Ehrensaft et al., 2004; Felson, 2002; Hamel & Nicholls, 2006; Straus, 2009a; Stuart, 2005; Whitaker & Lutzker, 2009). These changes signal a process that will ultimately end the current pattern of denying gender symmetry and will contribute to reducing all types of interpersonal violence, including violence against women.

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Correspondence regarding this article should be directed to Murray A. Straus, PhD, Family Research Laboratory, University of New Hampshire, Durham, NH 03824. E-mail: murray.straus@unh.edu

programs and practice

The Peaceful Families Project: Addressing Domestic Violence in Muslim Communities

Salma Abugideiri, MEd, LPC

Peaceful Families Project, Great Falls, Virginia

The Peaceful Families Project (PFP) is a domestic violence prevention organization that was established in response to a critical need in the U.S. Muslim community, which has only begun to openly discuss and tackle issues related to domestic violence in the last 10 to 15 years. The organization utilizes education and training as the primary means of addressing domestic violence in Muslim communities. Although Muslims in the United States are a diverse population, they are united by certain common beliefs and values that can be utilized in domestic violence prevention. Educational materials and programs focus on highlighting teachings and values from within the Islamic paradigm to address attitudes and behaviors among Muslims that may contribute to the occurrence of abuse within the family. Technical assistance and trainings are also offered to mainstream service providers to increase their ability to deliver culturally sensitive and appropriate services to Muslim communities. By targeting individuals, families, Muslim leaders, and mainstream service providers, PFP seeks to create systemic change in an effort to make a real contribution toward ending domestic violence.

KEYWORDS: domestic violence; Muslims; systemic change; prevention; cultural attitudes; religious values

Maryam was sitting in the imam's¹ office, tears streaming down her face as she looked at the floor. The imam could barely hear her as she told him she had had enough. She wanted a divorce. She said her husband had been threatening to divorce her for years every time she did something to displease him. He had hit her several times over the past 10 years, but yesterday, the children had been present. Her eight-year-old daughter had tried to intervene by standing between them, but her father just pushed her aside, knocking her to the ground. Maryam knew she was responsible for