

Towards an up-to-date theory and practice of understanding and coping with partner violence

Using a simple and effective interactional distinction between couple types living with violence

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Patriarchal theory perspective

The patriarchal theory was developed within the feminist paradigm.

The theory argues that the social patriarchal structure attributed to most of the world's cultures, including liberal-egalitarian ones, tends to place men in the center, demanding that they dominate and control all realms of life, while marginalizing women, dictating that they succumb to male dominance and obey it.

Patriarchal theory of partner violence has been the leading theory in this field for the last several decades.

The theory is inconsistent with numerous research findings that accumulated for the past 50 years.

Patriarchal theory perspective

According to the patriarchal theory, violence in heterosexual intimate relationships is gender dependent, meaning that only men, or mostly men, perpetrate violence against their female partners.

Even if women's physical violence against men can be identified, it should not be considered as violent behavior, but as an attempt at self-defense or a way to cope with their disadvantage compared to men.

The validity of the patriarchal theory in physical partner violence research

Until the early 1970's it was believed that only men, or mostly men, perpetrate physical partner violence in intimate relationships.

This belief was challenged as mounting empirical evidence indicated that men and women use partner violence in proportions that cannot be dismissed.

Gender and partner violence controversy

Accumulating empirical evidence on one hand, and its rejection on the other hand, sparked a long standing controversy between two groups of contradicting perspectives.

One group, addressed as “feminist researchers” or “gender researchers”, perceives the problem as asymmetrical in terms of gender, that is, that men are those who perpetrate physical violence against their female partners.

The second group, addressed as “family violence researchers”, perceives the problem as symmetrical in terms of gender, that is, that physical violence between intimate partners can be used by both the man and the woman.

Empirical evidence indicates that:

- Men and women use partner violence in proportions that cannot be dismissed
- Men and women use partner violence for similar reasons
- Physical violence results in more frequent and severe injuries among women than among men

Johnson's violence and control dyadic typology

The typology consists of four violent relationship types:

- “**Situational violence**”, when both partners are not controlling but violent
- “**Intimate terrorism**”, when one partner is controlling and violent and the other is not
- “**Violent resistance**”, when one partner is violent and controlling, and the other partner is not controlling but is violent
- “**Mutual violent control**”, when both partners are violent and controlling.

Johnson's argument that only men, or mostly men, are those who use intimate terrorism, was examined by several studies. It received partial empirical support in service population samples. However, Johnson's argument was refuted when studied among samples from the general population, which indicated that:

intimate terrorism rates used by women toward their male partners are higher than the other way around

How come that the knowledge that has been accumulating for years not only did not help resolve the controversy, but also widened and deepened it?

It seems that the controversy is not over science but rather it is a paradigmatic cleavage, with each side having its own worldview, values, language and terminology, the differences between which hinder resolution

DCTs: Dyadic Concordance Types

The typology is founded on two broadly accepted principles:

- Gender is a key factor in understanding and intervention in partner violence
- Expressions of partner violence are a product of escalatory interaction between the partners

There are four DCTs:

- Non-violent dyads (this type is used as a reference and comparison group)
- Man-only violent dyads
- Woman-only violent dyads
- Both-partner violent dyads

Differences in levels of depression among violent and non-violent men and women, within and between DCTs

In general, depression levels among men and women living with violence are higher than those who are not

Depression levels among women were higher than among men across all DCTs.

- The highest levels of depression among men were found among those living in **both-partner violent couples**.
- Depression levels among men in **man-only violent couples** were lower
- The lowest levels were found among men in **woman-only violent couples**

- The highest depression levels were found among women in **man-only violent couples**
- Lower depression levels were found among women in **both-partner violent couples**
- The lowest depression levels were found among women in **woman-only violent couples.**

Based on gender motives theory, Winstok and Straus argued that men's depression coincides with their experience of disgrace, while women's depression corresponds with their experience of risk.

Theory of Gender Motivations

The theory of gender motivations may explain and predict partner violence, providing guidelines to cope with it effectively.

The theory is based on the sexual selection theory (Archer, 1996, 2009; Daly & Wilson, 1988) and the social role theory (Bettencourt & Kernahan, 1997; Eagly, 1987).

The theory focuses on the basic primary motivations of men and women in various life situations.

The theory singles out the motivation of ***status enhancement***, which motivates men more than it does women, and the motivation of ***risk reduction***, which according to the theory motivates women more than it does men

Manifestations of gender motivations: perceived risk

In men in high-risk situations, the motivation for status enhancement will manifest as willingness to enter confrontations, and in low-risk situations, as avoidance and withdrawal from confrontations.

In women in high-risk situations, the motivation for risk reduction will manifest as avoidance and withdrawal from confrontations, and in low-risk situations, this motivation will not be challenged; women's decision to enter confrontations in low-risk situations will depend on other motivations than risk reduction.

The theory of gender motivations assigns low-risk levels, if any, to normative intimate partner conflicts; accordingly, the theory predicts that men's willingness and readiness to confront their partners will be lower than women's.

Gender differences in escalatory tendencies in varying levels of risk

Varying levels of risk included:

Facing verbal and physical aggression by an unfamiliar man, an unfamiliar woman, and an intimate partner

Among men:

- The strongest escalatory tendency was toward an unfamiliar man (high risk)
- The tendency was weaker toward an unfamiliar woman (medium risk)
- The tendency was weakest toward the intimate partner (low risk)

Among women:

The strongest escalatory tendency was toward the intimate partner (low risk)

The tendency was weaker toward an unfamiliar woman (medium risk)

The tendency was weakest toward an unfamiliar man (high risk)

This ranking of escalatory tendencies is consistent with the argument that men are motivated by social status enhancement, while women are motivated by risk reduction, when faced with conflicts, escalation and aggression in social contexts with varying degrees of perceived risk.

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