RECENT OR IMMINENT SEPARATION AND
INTIMATE VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN:
A CONCEPTUAL OVERVIEW AND SOME CANADIAN EXAMPLES

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ABSTRACT

The focus of this paper is the link between recent or imminent separation and violence against female partners. First, various bodies of literature are reviewed to establish the fact that separation heightens the risk of violence. Second, the conceptual contributions of social learning and power and control theories are presented as they pertain to intimate violence against women. Third, I apply an expanded version of the power and control model to underscore the violence proneness of separations, especially when separations are initiated by women. To illustrate the expanded model, I provide numerous Canadian examples that are drawn from interviews with divorced women, survivors of intimate violence, and news media reports. Finally, I summarize different strategies to break the cycle of violence, ranging from changing gendered attitudes and behaviour, to those which focus on incremental ways to reclaim one's freedom.

The New Hampshire researchers call the marriage license as a "hitting license" (Straus, Gelles & Steinmetz, 1986, 1980, also see Gelles, 1987, 1994). As national surveys in Canada and the United States show, this attribution is often a very accurate one (WAC Stats, 1993; Canadian Panel, 1993) since one of four women report at least one incident of physical abuse in their long-term relationships (VAWS, 1993). However, thinking about marriage as a hitting license is also slightly misleading in at least two ways: First, it insinuates that not legalized intimate relationships are free of violence. Second, and more importantly, it implies that once the marriage (license) is terminated, the violence
will cease. The following review unequivocally shows that both of these implications are erroneous. Like legal marriages, common-law and dating relationships are also infested with violence (Crawford & Gartner, 1992; DeKeseredy, 1989a; 1989b.) Moreover, termination of relationships often fails to guarantee the termination of violence against the female partner. On the contrary, relationships that were not violent before sometimes become violent at the onset of separation. More often, there is a continuation, even an escalation of violence after separation. In the worst case scenario, women who leave their partners, lose their lives (Bean, 1992; Block & Christakos, 1995; Crawford & Gartner, 1992; Johnson and Chisolm, 1990; Okun, 1986; Wilson & Daly, 1992).

In this paper, I exclusively focus on the violence perpetrated by men against their female intimate partners simply because it is the most frequently observed type of violence (Lupri, Grandin & Brinkerhoff, 1994; DeKeseredy & Hinch, 1991; Dobash & Dobash, 1979). I will use the term "violence" within its broadest context, which incorporates acts carried out with the intention to cause pain, injury or even death (Brinkerhoff & Lupri, 1988; Kennedy & Dutton, 1989) as well as controlling and degrading behaviours which target the personhood and psychological well-being of the woman (DeKeseredy & Hinch, 1991; Dobash et al. 1995; Kirkwood, 1993; MacLeod, 1987; Tifft, 1973). I will use the term separation as an imminent or recent termination of any intimate relationship of some longevity, regardless of a divorce outcome. According to Crawford and Gartner (1992), recent separation rather than divorce per se is the crucial risk factor in (their case, lethal) violence against the female partner. Moreover, I will concentrate on woman initiated separations, since they are the decisions which challenge male hegemony the most. Thus, the type of relationships could be legal or common-law as well as living together/exclusive dating arrangements that end. Within these boundaries, I will first provide a review of the findings about intimate violence and termination of relations. Second, I will apply a conceptual power and control model to show the close link between separation and violence. Third, I will provide examples for the different forms this violence manifests itself. The examples are from the Canadian media coverage as well as from the interviews I conducted with separated/divorced women as well as with survivors of intimate violence. Finally, I will suggest ways in breaking the cycle of violence and control, using the insights provided by the survivors.

WOMEN ABUSE DURING AND AFTER TERMINATION OF INTIMATE RELATIONSHIPS:

VIOLENCE AS A PRECURSOR IN DIVORCE STATISTICS

In Canada, divorce statistics prior to the 1985 Divorce Act provide one of the most visible links between violence and the break-up of legal marriages. Under the 1968 Divorce Act, physical and mental cruelty categories accounted for 60% of all alleged grounds (see Sev'er, 1992: 84-90 for an analysis). Of course, these statistics are open to errors of underreporting due to fear, shame, availability of no-fault categories such as a three-year waiting period etc. For comparison purposes, in a recent survey, of the 29% of Canadian women who have ever been assaulted by their partners (married or otherwise) only 26% reported the assault to the police (Rodgers, 1994). According to a report by the Ontario Medical Association, on average, a woman is assaulted 35 times before she contacts the police (Bain, 1991: i). Thus, one can assume that this
underreporting also mars the reported grounds for divorce, although the extent of such underreporting is conjecture.

Aggregated alleged grounds for divorce also glean over the gender of the victim. Nevertheless, since as much as 92-95% of violence among intimates is directed toward the female partner (Statistics Canada, 1994; WAC Stats, 1993: 55), the fact that 60% of the alleged grounds were in categories of violence is extremely noteworthy. Similarly, in the United States, 30% of divorced adults cite physical violence as the reason for their divorce, again clearly linking violence and marital break-up (WAC Stats, 1993). However, statistics on grounds for divorce are more reflective of existence of violence prior to the break-up than as a simultaneous or resulting development.

VICTIMIZATION SURVEYS AND HOMICIDE DATA

Survey research provides more direct insights into the link between separation and intimate violence against women. For example, an Alberta study (Kennedy & Dutton, 1989) found that more than half (approximately 55%) of separating/divorcing people reported physical violence whereas the percentage among still cohabiting partners was lower (approximately 40%). Smith's (1990) and MacLeod's (1980) findings also attest to the increased risk of victimization of women at the time of separation (also see Canadian Panel, 1993; Kurz, 1996; Wilson & Daly, 1993). Moreover, in a recent national survey, approximately one of five women (19%) who reported violence by an intimate partner claimed that the violence occurred during or after separation. In one of three cases (35%), the severity of violence had increased at the time of separation (Johnson, 1995; Rodgers, 1994; VAWS, 1993).

In the most extreme case, women are killed by their partners during or shortly after they separate (Campbell, 1992; Daly, 1992). After an analysis of Canada's Homicide data between 1974-1992, Wilson and Daly (1994) report 1,435 cases where women were killed by their husbands. This translates to slightly more than 75 Canadian women each year. However, the risk of being murdered by a husband was not distributed at random. In general, married women were nine times more likely to be killed by their spouse than by a stranger, while separation presented a six-fold increase in risk to women in comparison to couples who continued to reside together. Wilson and Daly (1993) also draw our attention to the fact that the increased risk after separation is despite the estranged husband's decreased access to the former wife. Unfortunately, the coding of other types of long-term coresiding relationships is ambiguous, thus the link between their dissolution and violence is less clear.

Crawford and Gartner (1992: 44,51,57,101) point out that just because Canada's rate of woman killing is approximately half of the rate in the U.S. (which they cite as the most violent developed society in the world) should not obscure the parallel fact that the rate at which Canadian women are killed is about twice as high as the rates in most other developed countries (1992: 38). Besides, although overall homicide rates, as well as the rate of husband killings by partners have declined over the years, the rate of women killed by their intimate partners has actually increased (Crawford & Gartner, 1992). They also found that the number one risk factor in intimate homicides is separation. This is
news for Canadian women who generally bask in the glory of living in a "gentle" society.

In sum, whether in divorce statistics, general surveys, victimization studies or intimate femicide statistics, the elevated risk women face during or after separation which sometimes ends in murder is irrefutable. What needs to be addressed is the reasons behind this increased risk.

GENERAL THEORETICAL ORIENTATIONS

Like most persistent social problems, violence against female intimates has multiplex causes, requiring numerous theoretical explanations. They range from psychological theories which place the blame on deranged individuals (sadistic men or masochistic women), or their behavioural/social deficiencies (ie., alcohol/drug dependency, general aggression, inability to keep jobs, etc.). However, the vast majority of men who abuse their partners do not have clinical pathologies (Gelles & Straus, 1988), and the fact that they do not randomly beat up on their bosses, friends and neighbours is an additional proof that they selectively target their female partners (Bograd, 1988). Moreover, although alcohol consumption is highly correlated with cases of violence against wives, alcohol is neither a necessary nor a sufficient cause of such violence (Crawford & Gartner, 1992; Lent, 1991; McLeod, 1980; Rodgers, 1994).

Social learning theories assert that violence is learned through observation, modelling and reward systems, highlighting the generational or peer transmission of violence. Transmission is extremely important when one considers the fact that children witness violence against their mothers in 40% of marriages with violence (Rodgers, 1994: 1, also see Ney, 1992; Wolfe, Zak & Wilson, 1986), and women whose fathers-in-law were violent report more frequent and more severe abuse than women with non-violent fathers-in-law (Rodgers, 1994; VAWS, 1993). The Ontario Medical Association states that one out of three battered women and one out of two abusers were either abused as children or witnessed domestic violence between their parents (Lent, 1991). At an extreme, Crawford and Gartner (1992: 87) report 73 cases where children were direct eye-witnesses to their mothers' killings. For example, an 11 year old called 911 and desperately pleaded for help as his father stabbed his mother to death in front of him (Toronto Star, August 19, 1993: A7).

The transmission of violence could be vertical (such as violent fathers/sons, Levinson, 1989). In a news report about a survivor of wife abuse, Diane D'Andrea tells a chilling story: After calmly watching a particularly savage attack on her, her father-in-law said "Holy shit Joe, I knew you were going to grow up just like me!" (cited in Toronto Sun, May 28, 1995: 51). The transmission of violence could also be horizontal (violent peers, subcultures of violence, DeKeseredy, 1988; DeKeseredy and Kelly, 1993; Wolfgang & Ferracuti, 1967). Indeed, there is substantial support for the role of learning and peer cultures, especially in explorations of violence in dating relationships (see DeKeseredy 1989a/b and DeKeseredy and Kelly, 1992). However, there are also limits to social learning's explanatory power. For example, Dobash and Dobash (1979) claim that children who watch an abusive parent may learn how to be abusive or how bad abuse is. Moreover, learning theories are not well-equipped to explain the onset or escalation of
violence during separation, therefore I now turn to a discussion of feminist views about power and control (Dobash & Dobash, 1979; Kirkwood, 1993; Okun, 1986; Pence and Paymar, 1993; Yllo, 1988).

POWER AND CONTROL

Feminist theories in general converge on seeking the roots of violence in the interlocking of social structures with interpersonal processes by emphasizing the central role of gendered distribution of power. Gender is either seen as the most important axis of oppression (Dworkin, 1993; Firestone, 1970; Russell, 1989) or as part of a sex-class transaction (Radford, 1987, 1992a/b). Gendered power and its manifestation (control) determines work, as well as institutions of politics, law, health, education, etc. More particular to the understanding of violence in intimate relations, gender-based power of men is seen to determine what happens to their female partners. Although all men are not "all powerful" and all women are not "all powerless," and certainly all men are not abusers, a large number abuse women in order to exert and maintain "coercive control" over them (Daly & Wilson, 1988, Ch. 9, also see Wilson & Daly, 1992; Kirkwood, 1993; Radford, 1987; Stets, 1988). Daly and Wilson (1988: 205) point out that "men walk a tight rope" in exerting their proprietary rights over women, and at an extreme, see spousal homicide as the "slip-ups" in such a power struggle. What is notable is that men kill and women die in disproportional numbers (Crawford & Gartner, 1992).

It goes without saying that no theory has all the necessary components to adequately explain a complex phenomenon such as violence against women by their mates. Neither should one ignore the systematic feminist applications of some learning and peer culture theories (ie., efforts of DeKeseredy, 1989a/b; DeKeseredy and Kelly, 1992). However, with regard to the epistemology of the onset, continuation or escalation of violence during the dissolution of relationships, feminist theories that locate abuse within gendered power differentials offer unrivalled insights (Okun, 1986). The latter is the most viable approach precisely because separations, especially when initiated by women, challenge the foundation of a male bastion: his power and control within his home.

NEED FOR CONTROL AND PERCEIVED CHALLENGES TO CONTROL

Since the 1960s, mainstream theorists have explained why men are granted higher familial status and authority through their contribution of "highly valued" resources to the family (see the resource theory of Blood & Wolfe, 1960). The androcentric attributions of "value" to primarily what men do notwithstanding, what is clear is the historical perception of male authority as an "earned and deserved" right. Research indicates that men "defend" their privileged position and may even resort to physical power (the ultimate resource) when the other resources they contribute to the family fail to assure them the privileges they have come to expect (Goode, 1971; Straus, 1974).

What these earlier views allude to is an almost taken-for-granted expectation of men's superior location in the family, which of course is also the vortex of the feminist critique of patriarchy (Dobash & Dobash, 1979). Thus, feminist analysis unequivocally locates
intimate violence within the power and control dimensions. Figure 1 shows this decisive link as articulated in Pence and Paymar's (1993) groundbreaking Duluth Project Model. The power and control tactics subsumed in each of the clockwise slices of the wheel are already well conceptualized and documented in recent works (see Tifft, 1993; Dobash et al., 1995).

There are numerous other examples of increased violence in situations of external or internal, real or perceived threats to men's authority and power within the family. Men who have enjoyed the fruits of "arbitrary male supremacy" are likely to increase their effort to regain control and re-establish the status quo if they feel their control over their mates is threatened or diminished. The severity of reaction is likely to be proportional to the perceived power loss or power reversal men feel. For example, Allen and Straus (1980) document this tendency in status inconsistency situations where the husband's contribution is seriously deficient (i.e., unemployed) or inferior to his wife's (lower income/education, etc.). The literature is also littered with severe punishment of adulterous wives who have "transgressed" their husbands' exclusive propriety rights over their bodies (Phillips, 1988). Shifts in the status quo (i.e., pregnancy) also engender increased violence (Lent, 1991; MacLeod, 1980; VAWS, 1993). Changing rules threaten what some men consider to be their propriety rights in marriage (Wilson & Daly, 1992, 1994), resulting in increased reliance on violence. However, probably the most complete package of challenge to men's dominance unfolds in cases of women initiated separations. To use Dutton and Browning's terms (1988a/b), men who are faced with such "evasions of intimacy" will experience heightened levels of anxiety, resentment and feelings of abandonment. They may attempt to reclaim control through increased psychological or physical pressure on their mates who have challenged the status quo (Renzetti, 1988).

Thus, although all eight segments of the power and control model (Figure 1) generally work in unison to determine physical and sexual violence during the tenure of intimate relationships, four segments are particularly relevant during separations triggered by women. I argue that the reclaims to power and control will concentrate on use of intimidation, use of children, use of economic resources, and use of coercion and threats (see the separation application of the model in Figure 1). Moreover, during imminent or recent separations, the rim of violence may expand to people and things outside of the partner/children, and subsume friends, neighbours, family and kin. Another aspect which needs emphasis is the escalation of overlaps among different control strategies, such as verbal intimidation, stalking, physical assault of neighbours and friends and rape snowballing in a short period of time.

Figure 1 about here

1. Escalated Intimidation: During the tenure of intimate relations revolving around male power and control, intimidation may take the form of looks, gestures, words, actions, ritualistic displays. Men may also install fear in the partner through actually destroying
property and belongings. During the separation process, these tactics on the partner may continue or even escalate to harassing calls, threats, stalking, abducting, kidnapping. They may involve major destructions of property. Moreover, the boundaries of intimidation may expand and routinely overflow to other things and people.

Some Canadian Examples:

Mr. MacNeile was convicted for choking his wife's female friend, whom he felt his (estranged) wife should not associate with. Although they were legally separated, "he felt he had a right to make decisions for her" (cited in Toronto Star, March 28, 1996: A28). A survivor I interviewed, Laurette*, explained the debilitating control on her life in the following words: "Every morning, I woke up and felt that there was a thick layer of cement on me. I did not want to get up, all I wanted was to go back to sleep." Moreover, once she obtained a court order against her abusive husband, and initiated divorce proceedings, he escalated the pressure through relentless phone calls, stalking and breaking into the house and physically assaulting her and their teenage son. He instructed his lawyers to subpoena her telephone-bills, so that he could keep track of whom she was contacting day-by-day. Laurette said "he wanted to make my life so hard and so miserable that I would have no choice but take him back." Another survivor, Sue, was also repeatedly stalked by her estranged partner. She received harassing calls 20-30 times a day, dotted with serious threats. She had to lay charges on several occasions to secure a court order against her partner. At one time, the (male) judge said "Oh no! Not you again!" as if her repeated complaints rather than the partner's relentless stalking/harassment were the problems.

According to news reports, Mr. Schmidt was sentenced to two and a half years for terrorizing, stalking, threatening and swearing at his estranged wife because "he could not accept the fact that his marriage was over." When he heard of his sentence he called out "I might as well have killed her!" (Toronto Star, April 7, 1995: A20). Mr. Vellupuram kidnapped his former girlfriend at the point of a shotgun three months after she broke off their relationship. He told her he "loved" her and wanted to marry her, "but threatened to kill her and himself if she didn't go along with him" (Toronto Star, May 30: 1995:A14).

2. Using Children and Other Loved Ones: During the tenure of relations based on power and control, children may be used to induce guilt, take sides, demean, and threaten the woman. They may also serve as additional targets of control and abuse, along with their mothers. It is also likely that men will escalate their tactics of control during the separation to include others who are closest to the women.

Some Canadian Examples:

Sue talked about the time when her estranged partner picked up her son (from an earlier marriage) from school, without her knowledge or consent. Although her son was returned unharmed, the child had nightmares about the incident, and she was utterly terrified about what else he would do to them. A perusal of kidnapping and murder
cases reflected in the media shows that her fear is not unfounded. For example, in Oshawa, a mother and child were strangled to death. When the recently estranged boyfriend, Mr. Coleman was arrested for the double murder, everyone was "caught by surprise" since he was described as a "friendly and likable person" (Oshawa Times, March 1987). In separate cases, Mr. Korzan drenched his children and his estranged wife with gasoline and turned his wife into a human torch. He also burned down their house that had been put up for sale after the separation, and lost his own life in the explosion. The children escaped unharmed, and the woman's life was saved by the heroic efforts of the neighbours (Toronto Star, May 31, 1993: A1/A4). Alan Gubernat fatally shot his three year old son in the head, and then killed himself, after a judge allowed the child to carry his estranged wife's last name (Toronto Star, May 16, 1995: A21). Richard Brosseau killed himself as well as his two and a half year old daughter six weeks after his wife left him (Toronto Star, May 26, 1994: A1). Eugene Banks abducted and killed his two children, and himself by locking his parked car inside a rented storage unit and turning on the engine (Toronto Star, November 4, 1995: A2). Of course, the above incidents are rare, but the threat is quite persistent.

New partners, family and friends also may find themselves engulfed by the violence. Mr. Quance was found guilty of arson causing bodily harm, when he broke into his estranged wife's boyfriend's apartment and doused both with gasoline, and set them on fire (Toronto Star, April 19, 1996: A28 and March 19, 1996: A8). Perhaps, one of the most vicious mass murders in the recent Canadian history was also committed by a recently estranged husband when nine members of a British Columbia family were gunned down. Significantly, the rampage took place one day before the wedding of a younger daughter. The death toll reached 10 when the assailant turned the gun on himself (Toronto Star, April 6 and 7, 1996: A1; Globe and Mail, April 8, 1996: A4).

3. Using Economic and Legal Abuse: Controlling men often block their partners from reaching economic self-sufficiency. They may interfere with seeking/advancing in a job, refuse sharing money, make their partners ask/beg for an allowance, and may show reluctance in meeting the basic household/childcare necessities (Hoff, 1990; Kirkwood, 1993). During the separation process, these tactics may escalate and even involve the use or misuse of the court system.

Some Canadian Examples:

The day Iris, a woman I interviewed, separated from her husband of 12 years was also the day he took back all her credit-cards. She said she felt deeply humiliated. The same day, her husband also cancelled her health and dental benefits (which required a modest coverage fee at the time), although his employment covered the fees. Because Iris had stayed home throughout her marriage, she had no established line of credit on her own. Because of her long-term problems, losing her dental coverage also meant losing numerous teeth by the time she was able to resume her treatments.

Many other women mentioned their estranged partners' tightening grip on their economic well-being, but the following story is particularly noteworthy. Because Laurette had no independent income, and because her estranged husband was refusing
to pay alimony or child support (for four children), she often bought groceries with the money her mother provided. To save Laurette from the humiliation of "asking" for grocery money, and to save herself from rushing to the bank, her mother gave her withdrawal privileges on her own bank account. When Laurette received some support, she paid her mother what she owed (deposits). However, her husband used this joint-account information to "drag" Laurette's aged mother to court, as a "co-conspirator" in depriving his children of food by "stashing away money" from his "child support!" Laurette had to submit to the court (and thus to the scrutiny of her husband) every grocery bill during the last two years of their legal battles. In her own words: "he was so articulate and so well-accomplished that the judge did not expect him to concoct these vicious lies. Even my own lawyer may have thought, at least at first, that I was starving my own children!"

4. Coercion, Threats, and Explosive Violence: During the tenure of controlling relationships, threats may assure docile acceptance from the partner. Conformity can also be attained through threats of reporting/exposing intimate information to family, friends, or authorities. During the separation process, these tactics may not only increase, but spread outside of the intimate relationship itself. In an extreme, they may spiral into physical and sexual assaults, or lead to intimate femicide and murder.

Some Canadian Examples:

According to Rodgers (1994: 8), 35% of currently married but 59% of previously married women report some form of emotional abuse by their partner. Moreover, "fully 45% of women who had previously lived with an abusive previous partner at some point feared for their lives." The research also indicates the bone chilling fact that when men kill their intimate partners, they often "overkill" by using much more force than it would have been necessary to end a life (Crawford & Gartner, 1992: 97). To give examples from the media, Debra Ellul was stabbed 21 times (Toronto Star, June 2, 1992: A2), Isabelle Holland was beaten repeatedly with a crowbar by her former boyfriend, and died (Toronto Star, March 27, 1996: A3), Francine Nicholas was shot five times in the face after telling her husband that she was leaving him, and miraculously survived (Toronto Sun, May 28, 1995: 52, and Toronto Star, May 25, 1993: A8). Mr. Day got two years less a day for stabbing his wife 17 times with an ice pick. He said "he couldn't cope after his wife walked out on him" and "if he couldn't live with his wife, then no man was going to have her" (Toronto Star, October 18, 1994: A7, also see Campbell, 1992). Men also use multiple methods of force (mutilation, stabbing, dismemberment, shooting, strangulation, burning, etc., see Crawford & Gartner, 1992: 44-46). Examples abound in the media reports: Suzanne Ferry was bludgeoned to death, then set on fire (Toronto Star, November 25, 1992: A22); Nicole Mattison was killed then her body was cut into pieces and disposed of in Lake Ontario (Toronto Star, June 10, 1992: A5); Graciela Montants was viciously beaten, then strangled to death (Toronto Star, February 11, 1993: A10). In all cases, the victims had recently left their partners. One had walked out on her partner the day she was murdered.

Sometimes, the threats and control are sexual. Mr. Morrison was put on probation and ordered to stay away from his ex-wife for three years after he tried to "rape [her] on the street in front of witnesses, including children." The victim remains terrified of Morrison
(Toronto Star, September 29, 1995: A9). Another man who cannot be named to protect the identity of his children, raped his estranged wife on the kitchen floor "and said, if she reported the incident to the police, he would kill her and their son." The next week, he again forced her to perform oral sex, while simultaneously spreading lies that his (ex)wife was trying to "seduce" him. (Toronto Star, July 14, 1995: A22).

A survivor of long-term abuse, Daisy, claimed that her husband literally locked her into the apartment, without money or food. Daisy was an immigrant woman, with no relatives in Canada, and no understanding of the English language. Her only means of escape was a women's shelter, where she felt neither welcome (for cultural disparities) nor safe. Her husband found the address of the shelter and physically assaulted the receptionist on duty, and dragged her home. Daisy refused to testify against him, saying time and time again that he would kill her, and have her family killed (in the country of origin) if she ever left.

Ann, a 23 year old woman I interviewed, is legally disabled as a result of repeated beatings she has suffered from her common-law partner. She said the frequency and the severity of abuse increased when she wanted to return to her parents' home. One attempt to leave resulted in Ann's being taken for a ride in a remote nature conservation area under the auspices of "reconciliation." She was violently raped, and then asked to take off her remaining clothes and walk. She walked, totally exposed, for seven miles while he drove ahead, watching her from his rear-view mirror. Ann said "it was a marshy area, the road was full of slithery things, he knew I was deadly scared of slithery things!" When Ann collapsed from heat exhaustion and fear, her still nude body was "dumped" on the front lawn of her parents' house. Although the partner was convicted of assault, he served less than a month in jail, and then, only on weekends. He continued to make harassing calls from the jail.

Frequently, the target of abusive control is not the woman herself, but something or someone she dearly loves. Laurette and Sue talked about the shattering of their treasured heirlooms in front of their eyes. Laurette's husband burned her books when she decided to take a few university courses. Daisy's husband slashed her favourite dress into ribbons, so that she would not look pretty and "run-away" with men. There were no other men in Daisy's severely isolated existence. Ann's partner's violence extended to the cat she loved (and still keeps). He would raise the cat closer and closer to the revolving blades of the ceiling fan, and demand things that Ann did not want to do (such as swallowing large doses of sleeping pills). The partner kept her drowsy and docile, and always told her that "she needed him." In a recent media report, a man believed to be despondent over his marriage breakup rigged an explosion which burned three houses down, including his estranged wife's. He also died in the explosion (Toronto Star, June 12, 1995: A8).

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

As the literature review and the above examples clearly show, the termination of relationships is not a guarantee for the termination of control tactics or violence, regardless of the type of relationship. As a matter of fact, the control may even increase
and spread outside of the relationship. Of course, the examples provided are only from Canada, and too non-random to lead to any generalizable conclusion. Nevertheless, all entail elements of control during the onset, continuation or escalation of violence against estranged wives, lovers, and girlfriends. It is not so infrequent that men kill their estranged partners or murder their/her children, family, friends and lovers. These are sometimes cold and calculated, other times frantic and explosive attempts to re-establish control, and re-possess the particular woman he is about to lose or has recently lost. The control is concentrated on 1) intimidation: - attempts to make decisions for her or in blocking the decisions she makes for herself/children, - by affecting her well-being through psychological pressures, harassment, stalking, kidnapping, and even dispensing drugs (in Ann's case) and making the woman vulnerable and docile - by attacking things/people she cares about 2) using children and loved ones: 3) - through economic deprivation or legal wrangling 4) - through coercion, threats and assaults - by desecrating, threatening harming children, new lover, family members, friends, including meaningful belongings, house and pets - by defiling her body through sexual assault, burning, maiming and at the ultimate extreme - through single or multiple murders. Children are used, perhaps because they are also perceived as "possessions," or because they themselves are small, trusting and vulnerable, thus making easy targets. Men also use children to get back at their partners. During an inquest about the two and a half year old daughter Richard Brousseau murdered (see above), his mother said "He vowed to make his former wife suffer for ever!" (Toronto Star, October 23, 1995: A6). What also needs emphasis is the fact that in all but one of the above cases, the abusers/killers were "normal" men in all aspects of their lives. 7

What can be done to break the link between separation and increased propensity for male violence? One solution is offered by the learning theories and their peer culture variations. For example, children (both sexes) can indeed be "taught" from very early ages to relate to one another in non-violent ways, and learn to respect and celebrate their similarities as well as differences (be it gender, ethnicity, religion, etc.). However, the insurmountable difficulty of this tolerant upbringing is obvious when one considers the deep divisions and rampant forms of condoned violence entrenched within the larger society (ie., violence in sports, entertainment industry, not to mention sexism, racism, etc.). During a recent conference in Berlin, I came across a three-year pilot project which is designed to socialize young male children in "more affective" and young female children in "more assertive" ways. The program pairs same-sex role models with children, who then introduce them to gender-sensitive play, role-taking and discussions. The program also provides training for parents. However, within the imbalances that exist, the program is already facing two sets of difficulties: first in finding "sufficiently sensitive" male role models. Second, even when appropriate models are found, in making the children assigned to them accept and emulate the models. Children (especially male children) already harnessed by societal biases, seem to reject the "sensitive" male models (Bergdoll, 1996). This pilot project clearly shows that even with the best intentions, social commitment and an enthusiastic staff, counteracting male power is a taxing feat. Even if the experiment succeeds, its impact will still be "local" and its benefits not immediately available to the current adult population.

An effective use of the criminal justice system combined with re-education of men may also play a part in finding solutions (Burris and Jaffe, 1983; Stout, 1992). The Duluth
project in the United States and its offshoots are pioneering attempts (Pence, 1983; Pence & Paymar, 1993; Sherman, 1992; Dobash et al., 1995, see Sneider, 1990 for conceptual difficulties). Yet, a crucial task is to also alter the perceptions and attitudes of law makers/enforcers themselves, since there are many examples of blatant ignorance and sexism. In 1954, G.H. Hatherill, a commander of Scotland Yard stated "[t]here are about 20 murders a year in London and not all are serious -some are just husbands killing their wives" (cited in Toronto Star, December 11, 1995: A17). Lest we think this is dated, here are recent attitudes and behaviours from men who occupy strategic positions in the delivery of justice: 1. A Nova Scotia provincial court judge, Ronald MacDonald (sic) resigned after assaulting his wife. Prior to a public outrage, he was given an absolute discharge as a "respectable" member of the community (Toronto Star, October 6, 1989: A13). 2. Five federally appointed judges were reprimanded for regrettable conduct including telling a victim of spousal abuse that her request to attend a pre-trial hearing was "silly" (Toronto Star, January 25, 1995: A2). 3. A Quebec Superior Court Judge, Justice Jean Bienvenue recently declared that when a woman "decides to sink, she unfortunately does to a depth that the vilest of men would be unable to attain" (Toronto Star, December 13, 1995: A2). 4. A Michigan court Judge, Joel Gehrke "told a man convicted of spousal abuse to roll up his shirt sleeve, then punished him with a three-finger 'slap' on the wrist and said 'Don't do that'" (Toronto Star, January 18, 1996: A13). How can women expect protection from a system that is afflicted with such archaic paternalism?

More easily and immediately attainable strategies are suggested by some of the women I interviewed (also see the resilience of women in Hoff's (1990) interviews). Their suggestions revolve around breaking the control over their lives, more in line with the premise of this paper. A number of them suggested prevention as the golden rule: namely to avoid marrying or living together with men who are abusive while dating. If prevention is not possible, they suggest getting immediate help, or getting out of the relationship as early as possible. With the authority that their often tragic experiences have given them, they argued that an accumulation of episodes (outbursts followed by reconciliations) will only fuel the later explosion (at time of separation).

An outstandingly articulate and bright woman (Laurette) added the following tips. First and foremost, she insisted, women should resist isolation (also see Ellis, 1992; Kirkwood, 1993; Nielsen, Endo and Ellington, 1992). In her marriage that lasted two decades, her husband repeatedly told her that she was a bad wife, bad mother, bad cook, bad in bed, etc. etc. He even called her "fat" although she is well under 100 pounds (and quite attractive according to the North American beauty standards). She said she wanted to be "good," so she tried harder and harder. She was "constantly exhausted" while seeking appreciation or acknowledgment. Finally, Laurette had accepted her husband's judgment of her as "bad" until the principal of her children's school told her how "good" she was with children. In her case, only another man could "un-do" the damage to her self-concept that her husband had inflicted over two decades. Her need to give more weight to only "men" may unnerve some feminist sentiments. However, the message in Laurette's experience is the ability to utilize whatever works to break the suffocating choke on one's personhood.

In very different words, Sue also voiced the need for reclaiming oneself. The triggering
event in her life has occurred when her distant aunt left her just enough money for a
down-payment on a house. For her, this was a confirmation that she was a "worthy
person." Her aunt's endowment made her stronger and released her from the economic
dependence on the partner. Shortly after, Sue stood in front of her abusive partner,
looked directly into his eyes and "ordered" him to leave. To her amazement, he left!

The change in the inner self may not come about as quickly as one wants. However, in
Laurette's words, there are things women can do to protect themselves and their children from physical/sexual attacks, especially shortly before or immediately after a
separation decision: -DO NOT tell your partner you are going to leave, just make your
arrangements and leave -have some money (enough for a cab fare, preferably enough to rent a room) in a safe but reachable place, -store some clothes (for self/children) in a safe and reachable place -have someone (preferably more than one person) to call or drop in at "unexpected" times, make sure that your partner is aware of these unannounced calls - teach your children to leave the house and seek shelter at a sympathetic friend/neighbor's house - teach your children to recite your correct address - if you have more than one child, advise them to stay together, especially during arranged visitations and stay-overs - alert a friend about all impending meetings with the estranged partner - call the police at times of trouble.

According to Laurette, "being caught in abuse is like drowning, you cannot save yourself alone! But, look around, there are people who want to throw you a rope." She concluded our interview by saying "we [survivors of violent relationships] are stronger than most other people, we have survived the unsurvivable." She said she cannot wait to wake up and "live" her life each day now. Recall that she is the same woman who felt entrapped under a thick blanket of cement before. Talking to survivors is a humbling experience, and in their strength, there is hope for other women currently entrapped in cycles of violence and wisdom for those who demand change on their behalf.

NOTES

1. It needs to be stressed that same-sex relationships are not immune to violence. Moreover, some of the power and control processes I discuss in this paper may be equally relevant to violence in same-sex relationships (see Hart, 1986; Renzetti, 1988, 1992).

2. The goal of this paper is to provide a conceptual overview and some examples, rather than reporting the results of a study. The examples I use are drawn from three different sources: 1) Interviews I conducted with 87 divorced women, between 1985 and 1988. Some of the results from this work are published, others are summarized in Sev'er, 1992. 2) Interviews with 10 survivors of long-term abuse from an ongoing study supported by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC). 3) Mass media reports of intimate violence against women and femicide collected between 1990 and 1996 from the Toronto Star, which has the largest circulation in Canada. Although none of these sources are random or representative of violence among all separating
couples, they nevertheless provide clarity to the conceptual links I explore here.

3. Under the 1968 Divorce Act, Canadian Law allowed a number of "marital offenses" such as adultery, physical cruelty, mental cruelty and others (ie., sodomy, bestiality, homosexual acts, etc.). The Law also allowed a number of "marital breakdown" categories such as addiction to alcohol, separation not less than 3 years, desertion not less than 5 years, etc. In 1985, the Divorce Act was liberalized, by eliminating "marital offenses" terminology as well as reducing the waiting period from three to one year. Under the revised act, more than 95% of divorcing couples now use the no fault category of separation not less than a year (see Sev'er, 1992).

4. The stated duration is prior to the 1985 liberalization of the Divorce Act (see note 3, above).

5. According to Pence and Paymar (1993), the power and control model they have proposed is also applicable to violence in same-sex relationships.

6. In order to protect their anonymity, I use pseudonyms (that they chose for themselves) for the 10 survivors who participated in my interviews. Where available, I use real names for examples from the media.

7. The exception is Mr. Morrison who attempted to rape his wife in a public place (see above). He had previous psychiatric problems. I intentionally included him as one of my examples to acknowledge the fact that rarely (very rarely) the abuser is indeed a clinically troubled person. In the vast majority of the cases, like those in the rest of the examples I provide, psychopathology is not part of the equation. The majority may be considered average human beings, and many are perceived as very friendly (ie., Mr. Coleman's case), and even highly educated and well-accomplished (ie., Laurette's husband).

REFERENCES


Bergdoll, K. Personal conversation, Women's Senate, Berlin, Germany, May, 1996.


