

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE TODAY

PART 6: GENDER ROLES

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PATRIARCHY AND PARTNER VIOLENCE

The Patriarchal Model:

1. In this view, gender roles are clear: Men have the power and make the decisions; women submit. A review of American and European history confirms that women have traditionally been relegated to an inferior status in society, denied the same economic and political resources as men. Custom, state law and religious institutions have supported men's dominance over women in the home as well, where wives have historically had unequal status not much higher than their children. Secular minded individuals regarded women to be "by nature" subservient to men, while the devout would cite Bible passages supporting male dominance. Such dominance included the use of violence. In 1776, Abigail Adams eloquently described this state of affairs in a letter to her husband, John Adams:

...and by the way in the new code of Laws which I suppose it will be necessary for you to make I desire you would Remember the Ladies, and be more generous and favourable to them than your ancestors. Do not put such unlimited power into the hands of the Husbands. Remember all Men would be tyrants if they could...that your Sex are Naturally Tyrannical is a Truth so thoroughly established as to admit of no dispute, but such of you as wish to be happy willingly give up the harsh title of Master for the more tender and endearing one of Friend. Why then, not put it out of the power of the vicious and the Lawless to use us with cruelty and indignity and impunity. Men of Sense in all Ages abhor those customs which treat us only as the vassals of your Sex (quoted in Dobash, R. & Dobash, E., 1979, p. 4)

2. Despite the efforts of Abigail Adams and others, including the gains made by the Suffragettes in gaining women the right to vote, husbands continued to enjoy a great deal of legal sanction in using violence against their wives. In 1971, a group of battered women from Chadwick, England began to speak up about their plight, and to challenge existing laws and customs, and the shelter movement was underway. As a result, the old laws began to be replaced by new ones, intended to protect women from their partner's assaults. Lenore Walker, however, in her pioneering first book on battered women (1979), voiced this concern:

Although these laws have not been enforced for a while, the attitudes which permitted them to be written in the first place still exist...In a recent television documentary, a batterer...claimed that it was his right to discipline his wife in any way he saw fit. If she did something minor, he claimed, then he would beat her

up a little. If she did something that he really did not like, then he would beat her up a lot. The women interviewed in my study all stated that their men felt it was their right to discipline them. Most of these women did not question this “right.” They were socialized to believe that they must be doing something wrong if their men were constantly beating them (pp. 12-13)

3. What Walker was describing was a patriarchal system that only had superficially changed. And Dobash & Dobash (1979) found the conclusions of some pioneering domestic violence researchers, such as Straus, Gelles and Steinmetz, especially presumptuous:

The use of neutral, or equalitarian terms like “marital violence” or “spouse assault” imply that each marital partner is equally likely to play the part of perpetrator or victim in a violent episode, that the frequency and severity of the physical force used by each is similar; and that the social meaning and consequences of these acts are the same. None of this is true. In the case of marital violence, it is the husband who is the most likely to be the perpetrator and his wife the victim. For this reason we do not subscribe to twists of equalitarian terminology that mask centuries of oppression of women and contribute to their further oppression by neutralizing the very word that describes the continued practice of wife beating (pp. 11-12)

4. The authors were equally scornful of psychological theories of partner violence:

Investigations that attempt to abstract physical violence out of its social setting and focus primarily on the backgrounds or personal characteristics of individuals are not likely to lead to an elucidation of interpersonal violence...We propose that the correct interpretation of violence between husbands and wives conceptualizes such violence as the extension of the domination and control of husbands over their wives. This control is historically and socially constructed (pp.14-15)

The willingness to use force is coupled with a set of beliefs and standards regarding the appropriate hierarchical relationship between men and women in the family and the rightful authority of husbands over wives. Thus, all men see themselves as controllers of women, and because they are socialized into the use of violence they are potential aggressors against their wives ...

The use of physical force against wives should be seen as an attempt on the part of the husband to bring about a desired state of affairs. It is primarily purposeful behavior and not the action of deviant or aberrant individuals...Rather, men who assault their wives are actually living up to cultural prescriptions that are cherished in Western society - aggressiveness, male dominance, and female subordination - and they are using physical force as a means to enforce that dominance (pp. 22-24)

5. This etiological model has dominated the domestic violence field for the past quarter century, informing research, assessment and treatment on both a public policy and clinical intervention level. Some aspects ring true, particularly its historical perspective

Problems With the Patriarchal Model:

The patriarchal explanation has become less relevant in recent years. It has weak empirical support, and is contradicted in a number of ways:

1. The economic, political, legal and educational status of women is rapidly approaching parity with that of men:
 - * Women earn more money, have better jobs, and are getting elected or appointed to political positions at an increasingly higher rate
 - * Women generally enjoy equal status under the law. Some aspects of domestic violence law, such as the “battered woman’s syndrome” defense, and the application of “dominant aggressor” guidelines by law enforcement, actually give women advantages over men
 - * More women than men are currently attending institutions of higher learning
2. Patriarchal attitudes are a factor among some violent men. However, they are not sanctioned by prevailing norms. Contemporary attitudes supportive of violence by men apply to competition displays and male-on-male violence - not to violence against women:
 - * Arias and Johnson (1989) found that among violent couples, both sexes rate partner aggression by females less negatively than by males. In Follingstad’s study of dating couples (1991), 18% of the female perpetrators justified their assaults by asserting a right to be violent. Their male victims agreed. However, none of the male perpetrators took this position regarding their own behavior
 - * In intimate partner relationships society more liberally sanctions violence by women. Prevailing attitudes are well captured in newspaper cartoons, and Steinmetz and Lucca (1988) have

documented how violence by women is treated as a source of humor, rather than a topic worthy of serious consideration

- * Straus, et al. (1997) measured public attitudes about domestic violence. Participants were asked: “Are there any situations that you can imagine in which you would approve of a husband slapping his wife’s face, or of a wife slapping her husband’s face?” Approval of slapping by husbands decreased from 20% in 1968 to 10% in 1995, but approval rates of slapping by the wives remained at 22%
- * In a survey of 5,238 adults by Simon, et al. (2001), 9.9% of males and 7.2% of females approved of a man hitting his partner if she hit first; and 33.8% of males and 26.5% of females said it is OK for a woman to hit her partner. 2.1% of males and 1.4% of females approved of a man hitting his partner to “keep her in line;” 5.0% of males and 4.4% of females approved of a woman doing this to her partner

3. The connection between “patriarchy,” whether defined as social status and/or attitudes supportive of male dominance, and incidence of partner violence upon women, is tenuous:

- * The National Family Violence Surveys yielded a wealth of information on domestic violence, some of it consistent, and some inconsistent, with a patriarchal explanation of domestic violence. Yllo & Straus (1990), for instance, found no correlation between the status of women and norms supportive of men’s rights to dominate women in the home. On the other hand, states with the highest patriarchal norms were also those with the highest incidence of wife abuse

Another finding was that states with the greatest social inequalities between men and women had both the lowest, and the highest, rates of male-perpetrated violence. The authors offer this analysis:

Wife beating is most common where there is an inconsistency between women’s status in economic, educational, political, and legal institutions and social norms that hold that their status within marriage should be subordinate. In such a context, social changes may be occurring quite rapidly. Social values, for whatever reason, have not kept up with the realities of structural changes. The conflict between

norms and structural opportunities may well be being waged within the home. And that battle appears to include physical violence for a sizeable proportion of couples (p. 397)

- * Coleman & Straus (1990), using data from the 1975 NFVS, examined the relationship between marital power, conflict and violence. Power was measured according to “who has the final say” in decisions regarding: buying a car, having children, what residence to take, what job either partner should take, whether a partner should go to work or quit work, and how much money to spend each week on food. The table below shows how power and conflict are related:

		Level of Marital Conflict %		
Marital Power Type	Number	Low	Medium	High
Male dominant	200	25.0	36.0	39.0
Female dominant	160	23.8	43.1	33.1
Divided power	1146	20.5	45.7	33.8
Equalitarian	616	32.5	47.1	20.5

Although these findings come from a survey conducted four years prior to the work of Dobash & Dobash, they show that even in 1975 only 200 couples (9%) could be characterized as male-dominant. A fairly comparable 160 (8%) were female-dominant, and the overwhelming majority of couples rated themselves as having an equal partnership. The survey also found:

The lowest conflict was among the equalitarian couples, and the highest in male dominant relationships

Few male-dominated households had a consensus about that arrangement, but those that did had significantly less conflict

Only 26% of the high-conflict couples were physically violent

When conflict is high, rates of violence increase substantially, with the greatest increase among female-dominated households, and the second highest among the male-dominated ones. The authors

conclude that:

Perhaps the most important finding is that there is an interaction effect. The power structure affects the relationship between conflict and violence: When conflict occurs in an asymmetrical power structure (the male-dominant and female-dominant types) there is a much greater risk of violence than when the conflict occurs among the equalitarian couples. It appears that equalitarian relationships can tolerate more conflict before violence erupts than other power structures. Thus, although normative consensus reduces conflict, when conflict does take place it is associated with a much higher risk of violence than occurs when similar conflicts occur in equalitarian families (Coleman & Straus, 1990, p. 300)

Levels of violence were the same across the four power configurations when the couples reported low conflict and high marital satisfaction. This would suggest that it is marital satisfaction, rather than asymmetrical power structures, that determines level of violence

- * Women are victimized equally or more in lesbian relationships, where patriarchal structures should not exist, than in heterosexual ones (Coleman, 1994). Lesbians who batter (Renzetti, 1992), include “feminine” as well as “butch” types. Furthermore, lesbian victims tend to wield more power in the relationship, in terms of income level, job status and education, than perpetrators. This dynamic resembles that of certain heterosexual relationships, where unemployed males are thought to batter their employed, better-educated female partners in an attempt to regain “male privilege.” One could argue that this type of behavior is, in heterosexual relationships, another example of the influence of male patriarchy. But what are we to make of the same dynamic in *lesbian* relationships?

One explanation is that certain individuals, regardless of gender or sexual orientation, are simply envious and insecure, and use violence to feel better about themselves. Violence by men is not symptomatic of a pervasive cultural misogyny. It is rather “a pathology of intimacy, as frequent among gays as among straight people” (Sommers, 1994)

- * A Canadian study (see Cook, 1997) determined that 28% of the men who belonged to conservative, patriarchal Protestant denominations used violence the past year, a rate twice as high as the 12% - 14%

rates for the general population. But the same study found that the *women* in those denominations were more assaultive than the men. Furthermore, the study indicated that the highest rates of abuse by men were among those who did not belong to any denomination, and the lowest rates were among individuals who frequented church regularly.

- * Some studies of battered women often find conservative gender attitudes among violent husbands (Coleman, et al., 1980; Rosenbaum & O'Leary, 1981). Others (e.g., Neidig, 1986), have not found such a link. In a meta-analysis of 29 studies on violence and patriarchy, Sugarman & Frankel (1996) measured patriarchal norms along three dimensions: attitudes about violence, attitudes about gender roles and gender schemas (extent of "masculine" vs. "feminine" traits). They found a significant correlation between attitudes supportive of violence against women and the use of such violence. However, the effects of traditional gender role attitudes (e.g., that a woman shouldn't work outside the home, ought to let the man make the decisions, etc.) did not differentiate violent from nonviolent men. And, contrary to expectations, the violent men actually measured *lower* on dimensions of masculinity - defined, at least in part, as a tendency towards instrumentality versus expressiveness

- * The deficits of a patriarchy causal model can be summarized this way:

If patriarchy is the main factor contributing to wife assault, then a large percentage, if not the majority, of men raised in a patriarchal system should exhibit assaultiveness...What kind of causal weight does patriarchy have if 90% of the men raised under it are nonassaultive? Do these men all dominate their wives using nonviolent means? (Dutton, 1994, pp. 172-173)...Patriarchy does not elicit violence against women in any direct fashion. Rather, it may provide the values and attitudes that personality-disordered men can exploit to justify their abuse of women (p. 176)

The question of men's use of non-physically violent power and control tactics will be explored in another section. Meanwhile, we would do well to ponder this question, again courtesy of Dutton (1994):

If "patriarchy "causes" violence, how can we hold men individually responsible for their violence? (P. 177)

SOCIALIZATION OF GENDER ROLES

Patriarchal theory presents a far too simplistic view of partner violence. The position that men are dominant aggressors and women their helpless victims is simply not supported by the facts. There are also few indications that violent men, as a whole, have especially strong patriarchal beliefs. However, that is not to say that the patriarchy does not exist. Despite the rapid change in social mores, a number of salient differences persist between men and women in the way they carry out their respective gender roles. These gender role differences contribute to relationship conflict, which in turn increases the likelihood of partner violence

A visit to the local toy store ought to make anyone skeptical about the imminent advent of unisex socialization. Despite women's greater access to economic, political, legal and economic resources, and the existence of laws such as Title IX, mandating girls' equal access to sports opportunities, little boys still seem to favor "action" toys, and little girls still prefer to play with dolls. Reasons may have to do with nurture" as well as "nature"

In their respective seminal works on relationships, gender roles and communication, Farrell (1988) and Tannen (1990) have elaborated on the persistence of stereotypical gender roles. Although there are many exceptions, male and female socialization takes a predictably dual path

- Socialization path taken by boys:

They engage in competitive games in which there are clear "winners" and "losers"

Usually play in large, hierarchically-structured groups, and arrive at decisions based on status in the group

Learn that it is OK to be aggressive under certain conditions, and are given greater latitude than girls when it comes to physical fighting

Are taught that it is better to not examine or express vulnerable feelings, and to expect adults to minimize their physical injuries

- Socialization path taken by girls:

They typically play in smaller groups or in pairs, and make decisions based

on consensus

Play cooperative games (e.g., hopscotch, jump rope)

Learn to refrain from exhibiting outward aggression, and to engage in gossip, ostracizing and other indirect forms of aggression

Taught that vulnerable feelings ought to be expressed, and to expect adults to respond quickly and empathetically to their physical injuries

Again, it should be noted that there are many exceptions, and that these tendencies are considerably weaker than they once were

Adult Differences

It is not by accident that girls and boys are differentially socialized along these lines:

- For girls, being raised to be cooperative, consensus-seeking and nurturing, and to express pain and vulnerable emotions, prepares them for the world of home and family
- For boys, being raised to be competitive and aggressive, minimize pain and vulnerable emotions, and maintain hierarchical organizations in play groups prepares them for the world of work

When it comes to negotiating wants and needs and resolving conflict, men often feel they are at a disadvantage in intimate relationships. Women appear to have the advantage in intimate communication because they have had more time to practice. This continues to be the case, with the breakdown of patriarchal authority, and the corresponding breakdown of hierarchical family structures

Differences in male and female socialization have other consequences, in terms of values, expectations and motives. Such differences may be sources of conflict and violence:

- Tannen (1990) postulates that although men and women both value autonomy and intimacy, men place a higher value on the former, and women place a higher value on the latter

- Men's need for autonomy, and their desire to be seen as competent, sometimes causes them to interpret sincere advice-giving as "nagging"
- Women tend to engage in "rapport" talk, which often includes a more diffuse expression of feelings. Men tend to engage in "report" talk, which contains a greater proportion of facts. "Rapport" talk is often interpreted by men as indirect and manipulative; whereas "report" talk is often regarded by women as arrogant, boring and/or insensitive
- Men don't express a lot of feelings partly because they don't consider them important enough, and partly because such expression isn't "natural" for them. They regard this as more "work" which they prefer to avoid after a long day on the job. But women may interpret this as evidence that their partner doesn't care
- Women expect men to offer sympathy and emotional support, and often regard problem-solving efforts as presumptuous and controlling
- Men interpret their partner's complaints as invitations to solve a problem. They see help-giving, such as fixing things, as a way of connecting to their partners
- Sometimes, women try to connect and offer support by matching a complaint from their partner with one of their own. This is, however, often interpreted by the man as dismissing and belittling
- Men will sometimes engage in "complaint matching" with other men, and for similar reasons. Their intention is to give support to other men by denying the problem, or purposely withholding advice. This is done out of respect for the other man's autonomy
- Men's hierarchical orientation discourages help-seeking, which implies that they are in a one-down position
- Women prefer "face to face" intimacy. Men bond to other men in what Farrell (1988) calls "shoulder to shoulder" intimacy
- Women expect their partners to look directly at them when they are talking, to show respect and support. But men tend to position themselves at an

angle when engaged in conversation. With other men, they are concerned about coming off as too threatening, and with women they are concerned about being perceived as flirtatious

- When women interrupt a conversation, it may be a way of maintaining rapport with the other. However, men regard this as annoying and disrespectful
- Because of their consensus orientation and lower tolerance for direct conflict, women soften commands to suggestions, and infer rather than state their intentions directly. Men often interpret this as manipulative
- Tannen (1990) suggests that the consensus orientation encourages women to play “peacemaker” more often than men. Because they have been socialized to work within hierarchies and to be competitive, men regard conflict as a normal state of affairs
- According to Farrell (1988), because men are socialized to obtain sex, and because securing sex partners brings status and approval, they often regard women as ‘sex objects,’ which women rightfully resent

Socialized to pursue relationships, a woman’s traditional goal has been to become a wife and mother. Although many women now work outside the home, Farrell points out that society grants women the option of being homemakers, whereas men who don’t have regular jobs are regarded with scorn. It therefore pays for women to find a mate that can support them should they elect not to work. Thus, women regard men as “success objects”

- Finally, men’s socialization for physical aggressiveness is balanced by their role as protectors:

“Feminists who say that masculinity is about men believing they can batter women display the deepest ignorance possible about men and masculinity. Battering a woman is the male role broken down. A man who batters a woman is like a cross-dresser: he’s out of role...In virtually every culture, manhood rests on men learning to protect women, not hurt women” (Farrell, 1999, pp. 128-129).

AGGRESSION OUTSIDE THE HOME: DIRECT AND INDIRECT

Misconceptions about the extent to which women perpetrate partner violence partly stem from what we know, or think we know, about aggression in general. Of the two sexes, men are assumed to be far more aggressive than women. But the picture is not so simple, because sex differences in aggression depend largely on several variables, including how aggression is defined and measured, who is doing the measuring, and the context in which it occurs. There is controversy, for instance, about the role of both testosterone and estrogen on aggression, calling into question the assumption that men are biologically predisposed to greater levels of aggression (Bjorkquist, 1992).

A landmark review of the social-psychological literature on gender differences in aggression was undertaken by Ann Frodi and her colleagues at the University of Wisconsin (1977), with a focus on laboratory-based, experimental design studies. It is a fascinating review, rich with important - though sometimes conflicting - information on how men and women express aggression. In one study, subjects in a contrived learning task were given the opportunity to either administer electric shocks or to use alternative strategies, such as ignoring. The women subjects chose the alternative strategies more often than the men. Frodi found an overall trend among the studies for women to avoid physical aggression, but not under all conditions. In another study, women subjects in a frustrating condition were more inclined to administer an electric shock to another person than to themselves, whereas the reverse was true for the men, a finding that seemed to disprove the theory that women turn anger inward.

Men were generally more aggressive than women in situations where the subjects had not been previously provoked to anger, but when they had sex differences tended to disappear. Under certain types of provocations (e.g., being criticized), women will respond with more aggression than men. Women will use aggression at rates comparable to men when they believe it is justified. And they will use it to avoid engaging in direct confrontation. In one experiment, for example, women who were insulted and administered electric shocks as punishment for errors on a learning task responded with electric shocks of their own, as opposed to engaging in face-to-face insults against their tormentor. The women perceived this more impersonal, mechanical delivery of pain as “less aggressive” than verbal confrontation. In studies where subjects were given an opportunity to deliver shocks anonymously, levels of aggression by women matched those of men.

Women, the authors concluded, shy away from direct aggression not because they are naturally less aggressive than men, but because of other factors, such as fear of retaliation and being injured. Eagly and Steffen (1986), whose meta-analysis will be reviewed shortly, point out that social norms require women to not put themselves at risk - e.g., the “women and children first” principle as applied to dangerous situations. Other norms discourage aggression by women as not “lady-like.” Women, in fact, approve of violence, and appreciate hostile humor, to the same extent as men; however, they experience more guilt and anxiety than men when actually having to confront or engage in aggressive behavior. Women also seem to be more empathetic towards potential victims, but not always. In one study, for instance, men were less likely than women to evaluate a nemesis positively, after being given accounts of that individual’s personal problems. In another, the men *verbalized* less empathy, but actually exhibited it in their behavior as

frequently as the women.

Women are socially conditioned to verbalize empathy and concern, and feelings of anxiety and sadness, whereas men are expected to verbalize feelings of anger. But this doesn't mean that men don't feel anxiety or concern, or that women don't experience anger. Norms for the State-Trait Anger Expression Inventory, a standard in the field of anger assessment, indicate that women experience as much "trait" anger as men (Spielberger, 1999). Trait anger (T-anger) has three dimensions: the extent to which one feels angry on a day-to-day basis, angry temperament, and the extent to which one reacts angrily to criticism, perceived slights and negative evaluations by others. Men express anger outwardly more often than women (AX -O), but they are better at controlling the outward expression of anger (AC-O). Women, on the other hand, score higher on AC-I, a measure of one's ability to self-soothe and control anger inwardly.

Averill (1983) conducted a study with a sample of college students, as well as a representative sample of subjects from the larger community. The subjects were extensively interviewed regarding their experiences of annoyance and anger, and were asked to keep daily logs. One might expect that the women would have reported comparable levels of annoyance, which is more socially acceptable, but lower levels of actual anger. In fact, the women reported having experienced both annoyance and anger as frequently and as intensely as men, and to have expressed it outwardly as often, and for similar reasons.

The difference between anger and annoyance was due not just to the degree of intensity, but also to the perceived seriousness of the offense. There were qualitative differences, in other words, as well as quantitative. The logs revealed anger to have a strong evaluative component. For these subjects, it was not the specific nature of the provocation that caused anger, but rather to what extent was it perceived as unjust or unfair. Anger, in the words of Averill, is an "accusation." A full 85% of anger episodes involve provocations considered either voluntary and unjustified (59%), or a potentially avoidable accident - e.g., due to negligence (26%). This conceptualization is in line with a social constructivist view of emotion, which holds that emotions such as anger are social constructions, used to regulate interpersonal relationships, rather than biological phenomena or exclusively cognitive processes. It dovetails nicely with Frodi's findings of equal rates of aggression by men and women under "justified" conditions.

After carrying out a comprehensive meta-analysis of 63 social-psychological studies of aggression, Eagly and Steffen (1986) concluded that overall rates of aggression by men are higher than women, but not in all cases, and not by much. The authors write:

In general, this meta-analysis shows that men are more aggressive than women and that this sex difference is more pronounced for physical than psychological aggression. It also demonstrates that women and men think differently about aggression and suggests that these differing beliefs are important mediators of sex differences in aggressive behavior...

Frodi et al.'s (1977) generalization that women are not always less aggressive than men is rendered more precisely by our meta-analytic methods. Indeed, effect sizes were heterogeneous overall and often quite small. When averaged, they yielded a relatively small mean effect size (p 325).

In fact, the average sex difference in all the studies was 0.29, less than a third of a standard deviation.

These researchers also warn us not to overgeneralize. Certain demand characteristics of the experiments themselves - the context of a laboratory setting, the particular learning tasks, the directions given by authority figures - may very well have skewed the results towards greater male aggressiveness. This makes sense in light of one particularly germane finding, which is that men are less aggressive when given the choice of aggressing, as opposed to when it is mandated. It should also be pointed out that the studies reviewed above, whether conducted in a laboratory setting or, in some cases, in the natural environment, all involved aggression on strangers. An important finding from Averill's study was that men express anger far more often to strangers or acquaintances. For women, anger is directed more often towards a loved one. Particularly in the home, where women are given primary responsibility for carrying out domestic chores and the care of children, there is a greater likelihood of anger, especially justified anger, which will negate the effects of aggression anxiety.

Bjorkquist and Niemela (1992) postulate that there are two broad types of aggression. Direct aggression is face-to-face, and indirect aggression involves manipulative methods (e.g., gossiping, withholding affection, administering electric shocks anonymously.) Direct aggression can be further categorized into four types. Playful aggression is exhibited in sports, and by children (typically boys) in rough-and-tumble play. Reactive aggression, sometimes referred to as "expressive" in the domestic violence literature, occurs in the heat of anger and conflict. Instrumental aggression is utilized to get something. The last type, bullying, is a form of aggression used for no particular reason other than to dominate, perhaps due to underlying insecurities and poor self esteem. In the preschool years, there is evidence that girls are as aggressive as boys in the use of reactive and instrumental aggression (Frey & Hoppe-Graff, 1994). However, boys *appear* more aggressive because of the ubiquity of rough and tumble play, and the notoriety that goes with bullying. As they get older, girls become socialized to acquire an indirect aggressive style. Girls are more likely than boys to ostracize, set up adversaries for punishment by an adult, gossip and spread vicious rumors (Bjorkquist, 1994).

As adults, women don't engage in as much *direct* aggression as men outside the home. This is true of our own culture, and of most societies across the globe. Like men, however, women also utilize verbal and emotional abuse and engage in psychological warfare, and they continue the use of indirect aggression developed in childhood (Farrell, 1999). In child custody disputes, for instance, it is common for men to withhold child support payments, and for women to file false sex abuse allegations against their ex, or spread malicious rumors about them to the child's teachers and day care providers. In light of the many incorrect assumptions informing domestic violence treatment, these points cannot be overstated. Bjorkqvist (1994) writes:

There is no reason to believe that females should be less hostile and less prone to get into conflicts than males. But being physically weaker, they simply have to develop other means than physical ones in order to reach successful results. Accordingly, one should not expect women to develop and use exactly the same strategies for attaining their goals as men do. If strategies for aggression and conflict resolution are learned, not innate, then women are likely to learn different methods than men. Important aspects are power and capacity, not only physical, but also verbal, and social... Verbal skills, when they develop, are quickly utilized not only for peaceful communication, but also for aggressive purposes. When social skills develop, even more sophisticated strategies of aggression are made possible, with the aggressor being able to harm a target person without even being identified (pp. 178-179.)

“KING OF THE CASTLE” OR “QUEEN OF THE CASTLE?”

1. The pioneering researcher Murray Straus (1999) articulated the reasons for the much higher incidence of women’s use of direct physical aggression in the home, compared to outside the home:

Inhibitors of Assaults by Women Outside the Family	Facilitators of Assault by Women Within the Family
A. <u>Cultural Norms</u> : It is considered “unfeminine” for females to hit, but “manly” for males	A. <u>Cultural Norms</u> : An indignant woman slapping a man’s face is widely accepted
B. <u>Lesser Size and Strength</u> : Women afraid of retaliation and possible injury by someone not committed to them	B. <u>Lesser Size and Strength</u> : Women assume that they cause less harm, and less fearful of being harmed in return
C. <u>Self-Defense or Retaliation</u> : Low because, other than rape, women are assaulted less often	C. <u>Self-Defense or Retaliation</u> : High due to frequent assault rates within families
D. <u>Gender Norms for Conflict</u> : Women interact more with other women outside the family, and men with men, and male culture more supportive of violence as a means of conflict resolution	D. <u>Gender Norms for Conflict</u> : In intimate relationships, men less reach-able with negotiation skills from female-female relationships. Violence possible as a way to force attention to the problem
E. <u>Source of Identity</u> : Women’s identity not as strongly based on extra-family interests. Thus, they have less need to defend their interests and reputations with violence	E. <u>Source of Identity</u> : Women’s identity is as strongly or more strongly based on family than men’s. Women thus have an equal need to defend their interests and reputation
F. <u>Violence Level of Setting</u> : Women are less often in high violence occupations (e.g., police, construction)	F. <u>Violence Level of Setting</u> : Women spend more time at home, where they get many years of practice hitting their children as morally correct practice
G. <u>Criminal Justice System Involvement</u> : Police involvement not greatly different for men and women	G. <u>Criminal Justice System Involvement</u> : Low likelihood of men calling police, or women being prosecuted, thus letting women get away with violence more often

2. The notion that women's identity is more strongly anchored in family than men's was investigated by Allen & Hawkins (1999). The authors conducted telephone interviews with 622 dual-earner mothers in several Western states about their beliefs on housekeeping. Although the women worked 39 hours per week outside the home, they reported to have worked an additional 35 hours doing housekeeping duties, in contrast to 20 by their husbands.

The common view regarding this discrepancy is that men are resistant to doing housework. Allen & Hawkins found this to be true. However, they found that the women themselves also contributed to this problem:

- 21% of the women were found to exhibit strong attitudes and behaviors that inhibited the husband's involvement in housework, including the raising of children. Another 42% exhibited a moderate degree of such tendencies
- This "gatekeeper" role has three components. One is the wife's tendency to regard herself as the one who defines the standards, and who has ultimate responsibility, for housekeeping. Another is the extent to which her identity is defined by her housekeeper role. And the third is her view of family roles as rigidly separated, between those of mom as homemaker and dad as income provider
- According to the authors, women's gatekeeper functions have long historical roots:

The 19th- century ideological construct of the doctrine of separate gender spheres dictated differentiated roles and functions for mothers and fathers in family work...The culture of maternalism...or the cult of true womanhood ...further facilitated the polarization of the sexes into separate spheres by advocating and exalting the unique and "natural" disposition of women to care for home and family. The ideas of women as nurturers of home and children and men as breadwinners came to represent an ideal in which women, by being central to the home and family, were given the opportunity to wield some domestic power and privilege over men...Thus a wall was built around a maternal garden of home and family, complete with a latched gate to ensure the specialization of gender in "proper" spheres of influence...the distinctiveness of mothers' and fathers' spheres of influence within the home remained fundamentally unchallenged until the feminist movement of the 1960's...However, despite dramatic changes in women's political rights, economic privileges, and work patterns, their responsibility for maintaining the home and caring for the children

remained basically the same (p. 201)

- Women have ambivalent attitudes about such dual roles:

Some women both cherish and resent being the primary caregiver and feel both relieved and displaced by paternal involvement. They are both intentional and hesitant about negotiating for more collaborative sharing and feel guilty and liberated when men become more involved in family work...This ambivalence about increased paternal involvement serves to keep the gate to the domestic garden periodically swinging open and shut (p. 202)

- Gatekeeping functions can exacerbate tensions in the home, and contribute to an escalation of conflict. The significance of this problem cannot be overstated; as previously mentioned, couples interviewed in the first NFVS indicated that differences over housekeeping were their number one source of conflict:

One interaction that is especially relevant to the discussion of gatekeeping is a manager-helper relationship between husband and wife. Some wives may act as managers by organizing, delegating, planning, scheduling, and overseeing the work done by husbands in order to maintain responsibility for the day-to-day aspects of family work. Their husbands act as helpers by doing what is requested, but by waiting to be asked and requesting explicit directions...In this interaction, a mother may give verbal assent to increased paternal involvement, but because she doesn't accept or trust the father's domestic skills, she continues to manage his involvement and keep him from taking more responsibility....Mothers also may redo tasks, set unbending standards for family work, or criticize their husbands' work to protect their own authority in the home (p. 203)

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