<CH head>Chapter 2

Family Violence or Woman Abuse?

Putting Gender Back into the Canadian Research Equation

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> The trajectory of public response to feminist anti-violence work has moved from outright denial, to recognition, to backlash and re-privatization. (Gotell, 2007, p. 128)

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<h1>Introduction

Research on violence against women has been among the most scrutinized areas in social science. From the beginning, efforts to empirically document the prevalence, incidence, and characteristics of violence against women have been hotly debated (DeKeseredy, 2011; Dragiewicz & DeKeseredy, forthcoming; Minaker & Snider, 2006). Objections that violence against women was rare have given way to acknowledgement that it is more common than once thought. Research on the outcomes of woman abuse has documented the serious ramifications of this type of violence for individual victims and the broader community. However, violence against women was not simply "discovered" by scholars in the 1960s, leading to a progressive growth of the literature. Knowledge production around violence against women has been fiercely contested, and feminist insights in particular have always been met with backlash (Gotell, 2007; Minkaer & Snider, 2006; Randall, 1989; Sinclair, 2003).

Research on violence against women has been targeted with claims of politicization, as if other social science research is devoid of political implications. Although the act of delineating

the boundaries of any crime is political by definition, violence against women seems to be disproportionately characterized as such. Indeed, the issue of violence against women has been raised in the service of numerous campaigns for social reform, feminist and otherwise, since the 1800s (Pleck, 1983).

This chapter first reviews the growth and changes in the Canadian research literature on violence against women over time. Then it describes key indicators of the current status of women in Canada. Next, it defines the terms "sex" and "gender" and the difference between them. In the following section, Canadian research on differences between women's and men's experiences of violence is discussed, including methodological issues and trends in the ways that violence is discussed by the Canadian government. This part of the chapter highlights key areas of the research that illustrate how different women's and men's experiences of violence are, including separation assault, homicide, injury, and other outcomes. Finally, the chapter addresses the cultural context in which Canadian discussions about violence and gender have unfolded, with special attention to neo-liberalism and anti-feminism and their implications for scholars and practitioners alike.

In Canada, as in other countries where violence against women has been recognized as a social problem, woman abuse was first brought to public attention by feminists working to secure women's rights to live free from violence. In the face of denial that violence against women was a problem worthy of collective concern, feminists first worked to document the harm that resulted from it. Drawing upon the first academic studies and information from hospitals, police, and coroners, feminists effectively argued that woman abuse was prevalent, harmful, and serious (Gotell, 2007; Sinclair, 2003). In addition, women's groups campaigned for years to achieve the social change that transformed violence against women from something that

was condoned or ignored to something that was no longer socially acceptable (DeKeseredy, 2011; DeKeseredy & MacLeod, 1997; Johnson, 1996; Johnson & Dawson, 2011).

Although widespread disapproval of violence against women is often taken for granted in Canada, it required a major shift in the culture. It was a shift that women fought for every step of the way. Resistance to recognizing violence against women as a social problem is often left out of the story of the "discovery" of woman abuse, but it has been a part of the picture from the start. In 1977, the Canadian United Way sponsored a "family violence" conference in British Columbia. The National Clearinghouse on Family Violence was established in 1982. Health and Welfare Canada created the Family Violence Prevention Division in 1986. Each of these initiatives used gender-blind language that obscured the nature of the problem they were designed to address (Dragiewicz & DeKeseredy,).

Even today, some scholars, activists, politicians, and commentators in Canada continue to actively resist efforts to address violence against women. To shine a light on this resistance, in 2003 the Violence Prevention Coordinating Council of Durham identified five significant areas of backlash against efforts to address violence against women: (1) cuts to services for survivors of violence; (2) increasing use of gender-blind language; (3) the push for presumptive joint custody in family law; (4) an increase in dual arrests; and (5) mainstream media repetition of anti-feminist rhetoric on violence and abuse (Sinclair, 2003, p. 4). Although it may not be evident at first glance, each of these areas is closely related. Campaigns to discredit feminist knowledge about woman abuse form the foundation of bolstering the other efforts. The promotion of a "gender-blind" approach to violence and abuse, and claims that the research supports this perspective, have been used as political tools to attack services for abused women, circumvent pro-arrest policies intended to rectify police non-response to violence against

women, and undermine women and children's reports of abuse in custody cases (Boyd, 2008; Dragiewicz, 2011; Dragiewicz & DeKeseredy, 2009; Dragiewicz & Lindgren, 2009). All of these campaigns draw upon mass media, including mainstream and online outlets, to amplify and repeat claims that violence is not a gendered phenomenon (Dragiewicz & DeKeseredy,).

<h1>Historical Context

Those opposed to woman abuse initially named the problem of wife battering. Subsequent discourses framed the issue as woman abuse or violence against women due to rapidly emerging recognition of the continuum of offences experienced by women throughout their lives and across marital status categories (DeKeseredy, 2011; DeKeseredy & MacLeod, 1997; Johnson, 1996; Johnson & Dawson, 2011; Minaker & Snider, 2006; Randall, 1989). As Melanie Randall explained:

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> Some form of men's sexual intrusion or aggression touches virtually every woman's life. This can include the experience of being beaten in a marriage, sexually harassed on the street or at work, sexually abused as a child, raped while on a date with a male friend or boyfriend, or simply living in a society surrounded by pervasive images of sexual violence against women which are sold as entertainment in the media, in popular culture, and in pornography. (1989, p. 4)

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Contrary to frequently repeated false claims, Canadian scholars who study woman abuse have never claimed that women are never violent or that only men abuse women (DeKeseredy & Dragiewicz, 2007). Indeed, MacLeod explicitly included same-sex abusers in her definition of

wife battering in the first Canadian book published on the subject in 1980. While violence may be a pervasive and persistent part of the lives of both women and men, the nature of the experience is quantitatively and qualitatively different. Rather than somehow denying the existence of violence against men, feminist articulations of woman abuse highlight the particular causes, character, and dynamics of violence against women.

Feminists in Canada and other countries have called for social changes to prevent men's violence against women, and for structural changes that ameliorate women's risk of violence and entrapment in abusive relationships. While they have received a disproportionate amount of attention, interventions focused on the law and its application in the criminal justice system have always been only one part of calls for broad-based cultural, economic, and institutional changes to address violence against women. While there are multiple feminist theories that differ from one another substantially, feminist theories of violence share the unifying recognition that structural and cultural factors, including gender inequality, are central to the etiology of this type of violence. As Holly Johnson observed:

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> The reason for studying violence against women lies in the context within which these events take place and the nature of these experiences for the women involved. The problem of violence against women is a problem of intimate violence. Few people would argue that women are uniquely vulnerable to sexual violence. Wife battering is also unique in that it occurs within a specific context that is different from violence that occurs in other arenas. Because of the social context of the husband-wife relationship that historically has awarded men higher social status and authority over their wives and children, domestic assaults on women take on a significantly different meaning than the

same acts perpetrated by one man against another or by women against their husbands. Wife battering can have the effect of reinforcing the unequal status of the female partner, strengthening the husband's dominance and authority within the relationship, and more firmly entrenching her dependence on the abuser. The same acts by women don't have the same outcome. (internal citation omitted; Johnson, 1996, p. xviii)

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In other words, the social location in which violence takes place shapes the qualities and the meaning of that violence. The meaning of violence cannot be understood without consideration of the gendered realities of life in contemporary and historical contexts.

All of the resources that are currently available to survivors of woman abuse—such as emergency shelters, rape crisis centres, hospital sexual assault and domestic violence programs, and transitional housing facilities—were developed to address the manifest need and disparate physical danger and socio-economic inequality faced by women leaving abusive male partners. Women's greater physical danger stems from men's disproportionate use of violence against female partners. It is also exacerbated by men's greater use of violence, including homicide and familicide, post-separation. Women's greater poverty stems from the persistent pay gap as well as women's disproportionate care of children. Women's ongoing greater participation in child care, combined with a lack of publicly supported child care, contributes to lifelong economic disadvantages relative to men. Emergency services for abused women were also designed to ameliorate the damage caused by the ongoing failures of the criminal justice system in protecting women from men's violence.

Prior to the feminist and battered women's movements, men who perpetrated violence against women who were their current or former intimate partners often did so with impunity

(Goodmark, 2012; Schneider, 2000). While criminal laws were written in gender-neutral terms, they were applied in a deeply gendered fashion. This is not surprising given the degree to which our everyday lives are shaped by gender. The feminist and battered women's movements brought attention to the pervasive, systemic, and socially constructed nature of the gender-specific failure of formal and informal social controls at preventing violence and harm to women.

The results of feminist efforts to change the response to violence against women have been mixed. Status of Women Canada was established in 1976. When it published its first action plan on women's issues, *Towards equality for women*, violence against women was included as one of the key issues (Gotell, 1998, p. 42). However, the contextualizing term "violence against women," which recognized the continuum of violence in women's lives, was undermined by government division of the issue into separate, distinct, and de-gendered issues such as sexual assault and family violence (Gotell, 1998, p. 43).

By the mid-1980s, state funding for women's services, including shelters, was already being cut. Federal programs like the Secretary of State's Women's Program were also rearranged to decrease their political influence (Morrow, Hankivsky & Varcoe, 2004, p. 362). The 1989 Montreal massacre at the École Polytechnique de Montréal sparked partial respite efforts to address violence against women. In this incident, a man walked into a university classroom, systematically separated the women from the men, then shot fourteen women to death before turning the gun on himself. In his suicide note, the killer explicitly identified the murders as a political act targeting feminists, whom he blamed for his failure to attain the life to which he felt entitled.

Despite the perpetrator explicitly stating his anti-feminist motives, a heated public discussion of the meaning of the killings ensued. Some commentators complained bitterly that

feminists were contextualizing the massacre within a larger patriarchal culture that engenders many forms of violence against women (Rosenberg, 2003; Rosenberg & Simon, 2000). Ironically, a major strand of response to this anti-feminist mass killing was to blame feminism for causing a man to kill feminists. Fierce cultural resistance to feminism in general and feminist understandings of violence and abuse in particular continues to this day. Indeed, the claim that feminism, rather than patriarchal structures and cultures, are the source of women's problems are a hallmark of backlash.

However, the high visibility of this horrific crime required a state response. The Canadian Panel on Violence against Women was convened in 1991, but neither its feminist, sociological approach to violence against women nor its structural recommendations for ending violence against women by promoting equality was implemented. The Canadian Panel on Violence against Women was superseded by the Family Violence Initiative, which has prioritized intervention rather than prevention, and shifted the focus from violence against women to family violence. Some Canadian feminists have argued that this signalled a shift from broad-based and political support for women's rights to a narrower focus on criminalizing violence against women, the ramifications of which continue to be debated (Morrow, Hankivsky & Varcoe, 2004, p. 363). As Morrow, Hankivsky, and Varcoe explain:

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> As the issue of violence against women came increasingly on to the Canadian political agenda it was shaped by the aims and demands of the state in ways which de-politicized the original intent of the feminist anti-violence movement (to expose patriarchal systems of power and to establish women-specific supports) which meant governments

> were more likely to fund gender neutral systems of supports and professionalized responses. (internal citations omitted; 2004, p. 369)

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The appropriation of research on violence against women into gender-blind family violence initiatives discredited the very sources that had been used to argue for the implementation of anti-violence efforts. Research with and from community organizations and shelters was increasingly dismissed in favour of government-designed studies, which relied on a narrow selection of quantitative methods (DeKeseredy & Dragiewicz, 2009).

In 1995, the Advisory Council on the Status of Women was eliminated, and the Family Violence Initiative had its funding slashed by $100 million. The minister responsible for the Status of Women was demoted from a Cabinet-level position to the secretary of state responsible for the Status of Women. In addition, the government cut public funding to feminist organizations like the National Action Committee on the Status of Women and other organizations working to promote women's rights (Morrow, Hankivsky & Varcoe, 2004, p. 362).

<h1>Status of Women in Canada

Although the popular assumption is that women in Canada are among the most liberated in the world, and either have achieved equality or are coming closer to it every year, the data present a different picture. The status of women in Canada has actually declined since 2006. As of 2010, Canada ranked 20th out of 134 countries (Hausman, Tyson & Zahidi, 2010, p. 8). While Canada ranks 8th in economic participation and opportunity, it ranks 35th in educational attainment, 47th in health and survival, and 36th in political empowerment for women (Hausman, Tyson & Zahidi, 2010, p. 10). Rather than an indication that we are living in a post-patriarchy that calls

for de-gendered, post-feminist responses to social problems, contemporary social indicators point to ongoing structural and cultural inequality.

Complaints from anti-feminists that men are “the new women” and an “underclass” are undermined even by the sources they cite to support their own arguments. Indeed, an anti-feminist activist bitterly complained in a recent article in the *Toronto Star* that:

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> A 2008 StatsCan study shows that, over the previous two decades, the gap in average hourly wages between men and women has been steadily shrinking. The 75.7 cents women earned on the male dollar in 1988 inflated to 83.3 cents by 2008—nearly a 12 per cent jump. (Cribb, 2011)

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The tortured logic that paints women’s 17 percent lower wages as evidence of men’s oppression aside, claims that gains for women or services for women are evidence of discrimination against men are the stock in trade of anti-feminist discourses. The *Star* article describes a “man-power backlash” in which the anti-feminist quoted in the article objects to battered women’s shelters because “They are almost entirely set up for women victims but if you look at the statistics, there are a surprising percentage of cases where men are being victimized” (Cribb, 2011). Of course, these services exist because of men’s disproportionate use of violence against female intimates, especially at separation. While they reference official Canadian sources, claims that women and men are equally violent seriously distort even the most conservative state-funded research.

<h1>Key Issues in Understanding the Research on Gender, Sex, and Violence

<h2>*Sex/Gender*

Key to understanding the research on sex, gender, and violence is that the terms "sex" and "gender" are often misused and conflated. The distinction between these concepts has been widely taught to students in introductory sociology and psychology classes for more than forty years. Nonetheless, the terms are often used interchangeably in colloquial speech and writing. The terms continue to be frequently misused, even in scholarly writing. As a result, research findings may be unclear, un-interpretable, or misleading. In the simplest terms, sex refers to the ostensibly biological categories: male and female. Gender refers to the collection of social attributes associated with the sexes: masculine and feminine (Dragiewicz, 2009).

Many social scientists use sex category as a demographic variable in research, noting whether respondents are male or female. This variable may be useful in identifying similarities and differences between women and men. However, as public health researchers increasingly recognize, such findings are not as self-explanatory as they may seem on the surface (Fishman, Wick & Koenig, 1999; Phillips, 2005). Historically, differences between women and men were presumed to be based on essential biological differences. While it is true that there are biological differences between women and men, most differences identified by the sex variable are not of biological origin. For example, while men are more violent than women throughout the world, significant differences in the rates of woman abuse from country to country indicate that cultural factors engender or discourage this type of violence (Johnson, Ollus & Nevala, 2007). Accordingly, it is important to recognize that sex differences describe the characteristics of violence rather than its causes or contributing factors. Furthermore, the presence or absence of sex differences does not tell us about the importance of gendered factors in producing violence. In order to understand the role of gendered norms and institutions, it is necessary to investigate the gendered aspects of experience. For example, studies that use the sex categories female and

male can tell us how many women and men have certain experiences. Still, the sex variable alone cannot tell us whether or not and similarities or differences across sex are caused by biological differences or socio-economic factors. This means that we can't directly learn about gender based on studies that measure only the sex category. However, even the conservative sources cited by anti-feminists in support of their claims that women are as violent as men indicate that women's and men's experiences of violence are very different.

<h1>Canadian Research on Sex Differences in Non-fatal Violence against Intimates

Efforts to promote the use of gender-blind language selectively cite research to incorrectly characterize violence as bi-directional, mutual, or "sex symmetrical." For example, *Family violence in Canada: A statistical profile 2000* notes that 8 percent of women and 7 percent of men "experienced some type of violence by a partner during the previous 5 years" (Pottie Bunge & Locke, 2000, p. 5). Some people cite this percentage as evidence that women's and men's violence is essentially the same. However, the same report finds marked differences in women's and men's experiences of violence. For example:

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- Women were more likely than men to report "more severe" forms of violence.
- Women were more likely than men to report repeated victimization.
- Women were more likely than men to be injured by a partner.
- Women were more likely than men to report negative emotional consequences as a result of the violence.
- Women were more likely to experience forms of violence that came to the attention of the police.

- Women were much more likely to report fear that their lives were in danger. (Pottie Bunge & Locke, 2000, p. 5)

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What this tells us is that looking at the percentage of women and men who have experienced some type of violence by a partner during the previous five years is not enough to understand the nature of that violence. Furthermore, looking at the prevalence of violence on its own is likely to produce extremely misleading results. In other words, counting people who have ever experienced any form of violence by a partner during a certain time period does not allow us to understand anything about violence well enough to help prevent it. Under crude prevalence counts, a man who has beaten his partner repeatedly and is pushed by her once are both victims of intimate partner violence. While both may have experienced aggression, this is not the full story. Such crude accounting obscures factors such as the context, meaning, and motives of violence, which are necessary to interpret the numbers accurately. For example, violence used to defend oneself—even lethal violence—means something very different in a court of law and in public opinion than offensive attacks. Counting these types of violence as equivalent is misleading.

<h2>*Methodological Issues*

In addition to selective citation of sources, it is important to note that methodological issues have a profound impact on statistics about violence. The reasons for underreporting of violence in survey research have been discussed extensively elsewhere (see, for example, DeKeseredy, 2011; DeKeseredy & Dragiewicz, 2007; Johnson & Dawson, 2011). StatsCan reports like the one cited above use data from the General Social Survey (GSS), which does not use state-of-the-

art research methods for measuring violence and abuse. Instead, the GSS uses narrow definitions of violence based on the Criminal Code, omitting many of the types of violence and abuse frequently experienced by abused women (see DeKeseredy, 2011, for an in-depth discussion of state-of-the-art research methods and critiques of the GSS). In addition, its framing as a crime survey drives down reporting as respondents report only incidents they believe meet the threshold for being a crime. The person calling to introduce the GSS says:

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> We are calling you for a study on Canadians' safety. The purpose of the study is to better understand people's perceptions of crime and the justice system, and the extent of victimization in Canada. (GSS, cited in Brownridge, 2009, p. 16)

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As a result, the GSS yields only a fraction of actual cases of violence and abuse.

Comparing three often-cited sources of official data illustrates this point. Police, the GSS, and the Violence against Women Survey (VAWS) found very different rates of violence against women. Canada last sponsored a national study of violence against women in 1993. In that year, police reports yielded 46,800 physical assaults perpetrated by a spouse, the GSS found 107,500, and the VAWS reported 201,000. For sexual assaults by any perpetrator, police reported 15,200, the GSS reported 316,000, and the VAWS reported 572,000 (Johnson, 1996, pp. 41–42).

Not only do these numbers vary dramatically across sources, the underreporting of sexual assaults to police was so extreme that police reports indicate a higher number of physical assaults against women than sexual assaults, while the other two sources indicate the opposite pattern—that sexual assault is more common than physical assault. This example shows how different

research methods not only obscure a portion of the actual crimes, but distort even the picture of which types of violence are most common in women's lives.

<h2>*Obfuscating Violence against Women*

Recent government reports on family violence increasingly obscure the most elementary information about differences in women's and men's experiences of violence and abuse (Dragiewicz & DeKeseredy, 2009). *Family violence in Canada: A statistical profile 2011* is a case in point. The highlights on "self-reported spousal violence" combine victimization rates for women and men into an unintelligible and misleading aggregate figure. The report reads: "Of the 19 million Canadians who had a current or former spouse in 2009, 6% reported being physically or sexually victimized by their partner or spouse in the preceding five years" (Statistics Canada, 2011, p. 8). Choosing to report the percentage of victims in this fashion obscures much higher rates of sexual assault of women and much lower rates for men. Women aren't mentioned until page 6 of the report, in the discussion of violence against seniors.

However, even this report includes evidence that women and men experience very different forms of violence. The report indicates that: "females report more serious violence than males" (Statistics Canada, 2011, p. 10). For example:

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> Females who reported spousal violence were about three times more likely than males (34% versus 10%) to report that they had been sexually assaulted, beaten, choked or threatened with a gun or a knife by their partner or ex-partner in the previous 5 years. (Statistics Canada, 2011, p. 10)

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A chart is included in the report, which indicates what appear to be large sex differences in these types of violence, but the numbers are not reported for the different types of violence. Instead, the report indicates that the "proportion of victims who has reported the most severe form of spousal violence has remained stable since 2004" (Statistics Canada, 2011, p. 10). Brennan (2011) indicates that 42 percent of women and 18 percent of men victimized by intimates were physically injured (p. 13). Brennan also reports that 57 percent of female victims and 40 percent of male victims experience "multiple victimizations" (p. 9), and that 15 percent of women reported having obtained a restraining order against their abuser compared to 5 percent of men (p. 12). As DeKeseredy and Dragiewicz (2009) have argued elsewhere, "Even a cursory glance at these findings indicates that the violence experienced by women and men is neither similar nor equivalent" (p. 17?).

However, the 2011 report obscures many other indicators of violence that have historically been reported and which show marked sex differences. For example, the data on victim hospitalization and fearing for their lives are unreported. The choice to omit or aggregate the numbers for types of violence showing marked sex differences in favour of an emphasis on similarities produces a misleading impression that violence is similar for women and men. A comparison with earlier reports illustrates this point well. *Family violence in Canada: A statistical profile 2000* reported that 8 percent of women and an "amount too small to be expressed" of men reported sexual assault by a current partner. Twenty-seven percent of women and 5 percent of men reported sexual assault by a former partner. In addition, 10 percent of women and an "amount too small to be expressed" of men reported being choked (Pottie Bunge & Locke, 2000, p. 13). The recent choice to omit reports of sexual assault and strangulation, which are common to female victims of intimate partner abuse, is just as political as stressing the

importance of sex differences in understanding violence and abuse (Dragiewicz & DeKeseredy, 2009).

<h2>*Separation Assault*

The family violence reports also obscure other important aspects of violence against women. Although many police officers, judges, and child custody mediators mistakenly believe that men would stop using violence against women if they “just left,” separation actually increases the risk of lethal and sub-lethal physical and sexual assault for many women. Marital status is not necessarily a reliable indicator of whether violence occurs pre- or post-separation. Indeed, scholars who study separation assault have utilized a range of definitions (see, for example, Brownridge, 2009, pp. 54–56).

Nonetheless, multiple Canadian studies have documented the increased risk to women from former husbands and boyfriends, with especially large differences in severe violence. Smith (1990, p. 50) found that 31 percent of divorced or separated women had been victimized by male partners compared to 13 percent of the women in intact relationships, based on women’s reports of victimization. Brownridge noted that separated women reported the highest prevalence of violence, followed by divorced women, then married women (2009, p. 70). Brownridge, Chan, Hiebery-Murphy, Ristok, Tiwari, Leung, and Santos (2008) found that separated women reported nine times more violence than married women, and divorced women reported almost four times as much violence as married women (p. 117). Spiwak and Brownridge (2005) observed that 11 percent of separated women reported violence by a partner in the year prior to the survey (p. 110). For 57 percent of the women, violence began at separation, and was a continuation of previous violence for 29 percent (p. 110). In other words, for a significant portion

of women, violence that began before separation continued after separation. In addition, violence begins at separation for many women.

The GSS findings indicate that risks for women and men are significantly different. Statistics Canada's 2000 *Family violence in Canada* report found that of women and men fifteen and older who had reported violence by a previous spouse in the five years preceding the survey, 27 percent of women (seventeen women) and 5 percent of men (twelve men) reported sexual assault. Twenty percent of women (eighty-six women) and 14 percent of men (thirty-five men) reported that their previous spouse used or threatened to use a gun or knife against them. Twenty-six percent of women (114 women) and 7 percent of men (eighteen men) reported they had been choked. Thirty-two percent of women (139 women) and 16 percent of men (forty-one men) reported having been beaten (p. 13). The 2011 report did not include any information on non-lethal separation assault that was disaggregated by sex. The choice to aggregate the numbers for women and men for this particular type of victimization hides significantly different rates for women and men. Readers may well assume that victimization is similar for women and men. Writing up the data in this fashion minimizes women's actual victimization while exaggerating men's.

<h2>*Femicide*

Perhaps the clearest illustration of the importance of context in understanding violence is intimate partner homicide. The most serious from of violence, homicide is profoundly gendered in Canada as elsewhere in the world. The 2011 report on *Family-related homicides, 2000 to 2009* notes that family homicides make up 35 percent of all solved homicides. Forty-seven percent of family homicides were spousal homicides. Spousal homicides were 16 percent of all solved

homicides from 2000 to 2009 (Taylor-Butts & Porter, 2011, p. 32). Taylor-Butts and Porter noted that while men are the majority of homicide victims in general, women are the majority of victims in family and spousal homicides. The rate of spousal homicides of women is three to four times greater than the rate for men, and women are more than twice as likely (26 percent) as men (11 percent) to be killed by a partner from whom they are separated (p. 33).

In addition, significant sex differences were found in the type of relationship in which women and men were most at risk, with women most at risk from current husbands and men most at risk from common-law partners. In addition, significant differences emerged in the method of killing (Taylor-Butts & Porter, 2011). While stabbing was the most common method of killing, male victims were more likely to be stabbed (72 percent) than female victims (32 percent). Female victims were much more likely to be shot (26 percent) than men (11 percent). Women were also much more likely to be strangled, suffocated, or drowned (22 percent) than men (4 percent). Women were more than three times more likely (15 percent) to be beaten to death than men (5 percent) (p. 34). Although limited information on the context of spousal homicide is included in the 2011 family violence report, it does make certain facts clear. A much larger percentage of killings of women than men comprise spousal homicide. The relationship to the perpetrator is different, with women more likely to be killed post-separation, and the methods of killing differ substantially. These sex differences point to the need for different resources for women and men. However, more information is needed to understand the dynamics of spousal homicide in order to develop strategies for prevention.

Domestic violence death review committees provide a more complete picture. Although it is much easier to quantify fatal victimization than non-fatal victimization, even body counts are not as simple as they may seem at first glance. For example, The *Seventh annual report of the*

domestic violence death review committee—2009 indicates that between 2002 and 2008, there were 184 incidents of domestic homicide in Ontario, resulting in 253 deaths. Of these deaths, 159 were women, seventy-one were men, and twenty-three were children (Ontario Domestic Violence Death Review Committee, 2009, p. 9).

While these numbers are obviously different for women, men, and children, the disparity is even greater than it seems at first glance. Two of the 159 dead women (1 percent of cases) were perpetrators *and* fatalities in homicide-suicides. Fifty-five of the seventy-one dead men (77 percent of cases) were perpetrators *and* fatalities in homicide-suicides (Ontario Domestic Violence Death Review Committee, 2009, p. 9). In other words, even murder, the most easily quantifiable form of violence, requires some contextual details in order to make the numbers intelligible. Homicide-suicides comprised 23 percent of domestic homicides in Ontario between 2002 and 2008. Ninety-one percent of victims were female, and 92 percent of perpetrators were male (Ontario Domestic Violence Death Review Committee, 2009, p. 11). Relying on decontextualized body counts alone would provide an extremely misleading impression of the dynamics of this most serious form of abuse. These numbers also illustrate women's disproportionate need for emergency shelter relative to men. Many of these homicides were preceded by a history of violence and abuse, and many occurred at separation or divorce.

<h2>*Outcomes of Violence*

Help seeking is another area where the ongoing need for services for female victims of violence and abuse is evident. A recent Statistics Canada report on shelters for abused women found that:

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> Between April 1, 2009 and March 31, 2010 there were over 64,500 admissions of women to shelters across Canada, up 5% from 2007/2008. Almost one-third (31%) of these women had stayed at the shelter before, up from one-quarter (25%) in 2007/2008. (Burczycka & Cotter, 2011, p. 5)

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The large numbers of women seeking shelter from abusers, as well as the significant portion of women returning to shelter, reflect the repeated and serious nature of woman abuse in Canada. Despite this, only 40 percent of the women in shelter indicated they had reported the violence to police. Twenty-seven percent of the women reported that formal charges were laid against the abuser in the incident preceding entry into the shelter, and 26 percent reported there had been a restraining order against the abuser (Burczycka & Cotter, 2011, p. 15). These numbers indicate that the problem of violence against women is still a pressing one, and that many women require services targeted to woman abuse.

<h1>Neo-liberalism, Anti-feminism, and Attacks on Laws and Services That Protect Women from Abuse

Given the above evidence of persistent sex differences in violence against women and men by intimates, how can we understand claims that women are as violent as men? Like many other Western democracies, Canada has witnessed the ascendance of neo-liberal ideologies in recent years. These ideologies have contributed to retrenchment of social welfare programs that have specifically targeted women and other minorities (Morrow, Hankivsky & Varcoe, 2004). Cuts to social assistance, legal aid, and services for women have direct and serious implications for survivors of woman abuse.

Fiscal retrenchment has contributed to social policy trends wherein a focus on addressing crime and violence by promoting rights has been replaced with calls for individualized solutions to crime. Kelly Hannah-Moffat has described the "devolution of the state's responsibility for crime prevention and offender reform" (2000, p. 514) in which the language of social movements has been appropriated and turned against itself. In this way, the Canadian government has harnessed efforts to divest itself of responsibility for women's safety to calls for empowerment-based responses to social problems. By annexing the language of empowerment, which links political structures to personal struggles, and then focusing on the effects of disempowerment on individuals, the Canadian government has effectively returned the responsibility for avoiding violence to women themselves—for example, by calling the police and requesting that charges be laid or going to a shelter in response to violence rather than trying to prevent violence in the first place.

As Hannah-Moffat puts it, "The difficulty is that strategies of empowerment tend to resonate with multiple and conflicting objectives" (2000, p. 522). In the case of woman abuse, empowerment rhetoric can be focused on individual behaviours rather than structural factors. As a result, women are blamed for the failure to prevent violence done to them. In addition, the focus on individuals leads to the prioritization of responses to violence, which cannot address structural inequality. For example, funding job-training programs as a response to violence (so abused women can leave) may look empowering because women need incomes to be able to support themselves. However, funding job programs at the expense of child care services means that abused women will struggle to secure affordable child care so that they can actually go to work. In this context, where treating everyone the same is thought to demonstrate fairness, services designed to address women's socio-economic marginalization are attacked as

discriminatory against men. Concomitant demands insist that these services, which are now funded at lower levels than in the past while facing greater demand, eliminate their focus on women's needs in order to serve everyone the same way. In some cases, services for women have been de-funded altogether, and the funding rerouted to generic crisis services (Morrow, Hankivsky, & Varcoe, 2004, p. 366).

We see this dynamic in the turn away from discussion of woman abuse toward gender-blind discourses on family violence and abuse. Even the conservative government statistics cited above point to profound differences between women's and men's experiences of violence, yet these data are framed in reports using the gender-neutral label of family violence. In order to claim that women are as violent as men, it would necessitate ignoring the majority of research on violence and the responses to it. Even the rudimentary measures of violence and abuse utilized in the GSS indicate that the dynamics of violence and abuse against women and men are very different. The fact that demand for emergency shelters for women is increasing rather than decreasing shows that woman abuse has not been eliminated.

It is essential that scholars and practitioners be aware of the political sources and implications of gender-blind rhetoric on violence and abuse. Complaints that violence against women is "hyped" by feminists for some sort of political traction, or that women and men experience violence by intimates in similar ways, are simply not supported by the data. Nonetheless, Canadian government publications increasingly adopt misleading and de-gendered discourses on violence. Clearly, this is a political choice. Unfortunately, it has negative ramifications for Canadians' understanding of the nature of violence and abuse against women and men. Anti-violence advocates and scholars need to hold the line and continue contextualizing violence against women as a continuum of harm, to write and speak accurately

about who is doing what to whom and in what circumstances, and to defend the scholarship and services that we have fought hard to establish.

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