

Women's Resistance Strategies in Abusive Relationships: An Alternative Framework

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Abstract

Though abused women are often depicted in the media as passive, women in abusive relationships often resist their partner's abuse. However, the experience of an abused woman will depend on her position in the social structure. First, an overview of resistance in abusive relationship is presented followed by a series of resistance strategies often used. The goal of this paper is to retell the intimate partner violence story and identify structural reforms that are consistent with the experience of intimate partner violence survivors. The response to intimate partner violence should move beyond criminal justice sanctions by involving the community.

Keywords

abuse, criminology, social sciences, crime prevention, women's studies, sex and gender, sociology, family studies

Oftentimes, women in abusive relationships display extreme strength and resilience. However, the stereotypical image associated with abused women is one of passivity, where women experience psychological dysfunction as the violence escalates (Rothenberg, 2003; Stark, 2007; Walker, 1979). Previous research has identified the ways in which women in abusive relationships attempt to establish autonomy and seek help (Abraham, 2005; Gondolf & Fisher, 1988; Rajah, 2007; Stark, 2007). Yet, the narrative most often associated with intimate partner violence is one of passivity. Victims, who resist the abuse and seek out help from agencies, may face hurdles accessing services, as they do not coincide with the notion of a "typical victim." The intimate partner violence story should be retold from the perspective of the woman who talks and/or demonstrates strength and resistance in a situation labeled intimate partner violence.

Yet, when retelling the intimate partner violence story it is also important to consider the multiple aspects of the woman's life. Though intimate partner violence results from the structural inequalities between genders, gender oppression is just one form of oppression women experience. A woman's race, gender, religion, ethnicity, and/or sexual orientation can influence the resistance strategies available to her. A woman's resistance strategies may also be affected if she is in the process of leaving her abuser or if she still is in a relationship with him. The goal of this paper is to retell the intimate partner violence story and identify structural reforms that are consistent with the experience of intimate partner violence survivors.

Dynamics Underlying Intimate Partner Violence

More than 90% of individuals who experience intimate partner violence are female, making it a gender-based crime (Roberts & Roberts, 2005). Even though intimate partner violence is a gender-based crime, the dynamics of abusive relationships differ from couple to couple. This is best captured by the gender symmetry and asymmetry debate. Some couples involve men and women who are both violent, but are not afraid of each other. Johnson (1995) calls this *common couple or situational couple violence*, because it is an argument between equals that escalates into violence. Common couple violence reflects gender symmetry in violence because there are equal numbers of males and females who physically assault their partner during an argument. This type of violence in intimate relationships is typically found in large-scale national surveys on violence in relationships (Dobash & Dobash, 2004; Johnson, 1995). Common couple violence may be a momentary response to a frustration, not a continuous systematic effort to control one's partner. Though common couple violence challenges the conception that

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abusers are always males, it does not represent how the patriarchal structure of society impacts men's use of violence against women. For this reason, the current paper will focus on male violence against female victims. In spite of the focus of this paper on male to female intimate partner violence, anyone can be a victim of intimate partner violence, regardless of their gender and/or sexual orientation.

Many women from shelter surveys report their partner engages in a "campaign of terror" and does not just commit isolated acts of violence. Johnson (1995) refers to this type of abuse as *intimate terrorism*, while Stark (2007) terms it *coercive control*, though both terms capture how patriarchy allows abusive males maintain power and control in relationships. Coercive control goes beyond an argument between equals that escalates into a physical altercation. Coercive control captures the immediate and the more all-encompassing aspects of abusive behavior. Coercion focuses on the present and includes physical violence and threats by the abuser. Coercion is used so that the abused partner engages in a particular action. Control is not limited to a single moment in time and involves the continued deprivation and exploitation of the woman for her abuser's benefit. Taken together, Stark argues coercion and control interact to entrap the woman in the abusive relationship.

Even though Johnson (1995) and Stark (2007) use different terms, intimate terrorism and coercive control are about the man's power and control over his intimate partner. Though physical violence is the focus on many intimate partner violence surveys (e.g., Conflict Tactic Scale), physical violence may only be used by an abuser on rare occasions or it might not be used at all (Bancroft, 2002; Stark, 2007). Abusive men can engage in a wide range of controlling behaviors, without resorting to physical violence, to maintain power over their partner and deprive their partner of certain freedoms. These controlling behaviors include but are not limited to intimidation, isolation, threats, constant supervision, and manipulation.

Women in abusive relationships often report that their partner's controlling behavior is worse than the actual physical abuse (Bancroft, 2002; Stark, 2007). Oftentimes, the abuser does not have to engage in physical violence because the woman knows not to challenge him just by the way he looks at her (Ferraro, 2006). Controlling behaviors can have this sort of effect on the woman because control focuses on what her partner deprives her of as opposed to what he actually does against her when he engages in physical violence (Stark, 2007).

The types of controlling behavior a woman experiences can also be influenced by her race, socioeconomic status, immigration status, and/or nationality (Bograd, 2005). For instance, abusive men whose partner is an immigrant can use her unfamiliarity with the United States legal system as a control tactic, so that he is not held criminally accountable for his abusive behavior (Ferraro, 2006). He can threaten the

woman that she will be arrested if she calls the police or that the police will not believe her. This tactic may not be as successful for an abusive man whose partner is familiar with the criminal justice system or aware of mandatory arrest laws for domestic violence. The woman's response to her partner's abuse is shaped by the controlling behaviors he is able to engage in against her, which can be based on her multiple interconnected locations in the social structure. Nevertheless, abusive men are able to engage in this constellation of behaviors because of the structural inequalities between genders and other social systems in society that privilege men.

Stark (2007) expands on Johnson's (1995) concept of intimate terrorism by focusing on how the patriarchal nature of society allows abusive men to take part in these controlling behaviors. The patriarchal nature of society gives men the ability to monitor and control their partner's behavior because men are the advantaged gender compared with women (Anderson & Hill Collins, 2007; Dobash & Dobash, 2004; Stark, 2007). Women in abusive relationships may not just have to resist physical violence; they may also have to resist the power and control their abusive partner maintains in the relationship.

Autonomy and Resistance in Abusive Relationships

Stark (2007) argues that coercive control is the reaction some men have to women's autonomy and resistance. Coercive control gives the abuser power and subordinates the woman's position. When women are not autonomous or equal partners, men benefit because they are able to have authority in the home. Control develops to squash the woman's autonomy. The woman's resistance may then be the catalyst for her partner's control. Therefore, to identify resistance strategies that are safe for the woman, one must keep in mind that the woman's agency and resistance may fuel her abuser's control.

Researchers have called into question the view that women in abusive relationships are passive by highlighting the help-seeking behaviors of these women (Gondolf & Fisher, 1988; Hollenshead, Dai, Ragsdale, Massey, & Scott, 2006; Ingram, 2007). Gondolf and Fisher (1988) were the first researchers to challenge the stereotypical image of passivity and learned helplessness associated with abused women. Their survivor theory argues that women are not passive but actively seek out help while in an abusive relationship. However, the institutions from which the woman seeks out help oftentimes do not meet her needs. The institutions that provide services are patriarchally structured and therefore do not consider women's unique experiences (Ferraro, 2006; Rothenberg, 2003). This makes it difficult, if not impossible, for her to become autonomous and leave her abuser if the institutions designed to help her do not provide the services intended (Gondolf & Fisher, 1988).

Gondolf and Fisher (1988) also directly challenge Walker's (1979) concept of learned helplessness. By characterizing women as intimate partner violence survivors, rather than victims, Gondolf and Fisher highlight that women's fruitless attempts to end the relationship is a misguided approach. Instead, the survivor theory calls attention to the ingenious ways women try to cope with escalating abuse. Gondolf and Fisher's survivor theory laid the groundwork for challenging Walker's cycle of violence and battered women syndrome to realistically consider the experiences of women in abusive relationships.

As researchers moved beyond the stereotypical view of abused women as helpless, the nuances of intimate partner violence became clearer. Originally, Gondolf and Fisher (1988) focused on the help-seeking behaviors of women as they experienced increasing *violence*. However, researchers began to notice that women in abusive relationships are also subjected to a range of controlling behaviors (Dobash & Dobash, 2004; Johnson, 1995; Stark & Flitcraft, 1996). The influence of these controlling behaviors on the dynamics of intimate partner violence and the options available to women became apparent. As the woman's abusive partner controls multiple aspects of her life and is not just violent during isolated incidents, she becomes entrapped. Therefore, researchers had to account for the ways in which women continue to resist their partner's *ongoing* control as opposed to solely resisting physical violence in isolated incidents.

Women in abusive relationships are able to retain a sense of self by entering into what Stark (2007) calls safety zones, which begin as concrete objects and move to abstract thoughts as the abusive partner's control becomes all encompassing. Rajah (2007) expands on this idea of abstract safety zones by arguing women in abusive relationships may engage in covert resistant actions as opposed to overt actions. Stark's abstract safety zones, which include storing away personal objects or thinking about something else during an abusive incident, are examples of a covert action that occurs without the abusive partner knowing about it (Rajah, 2007). Nevertheless, covert and overt resistance still allow the woman to experience a sense of accomplishment. The woman learns what covert and overt actions she can engage in based on the history of the relationship.

Over time, many women in abusive relationships learn what their partner does and does not like. Women often use their partner's likes and dislikes to discern what will lead him to engage in abusive behavior (Ferraro, 2006). In turn, women can use this information to know how much they can "push the envelope" (Rajah, 2007, p. 206). For example, a woman may openly challenge her abuser's behavior when she believes he is in a good mood. However, the woman may be more covert about her resistance if she believes the direct challenge will further fuel her abuser's behavior. These findings show how a woman's decision to resist and if she will overtly resist is shaped not only by her partner's behavior but also by the relationship's history.

Similar to controlling behaviors abusers engage in, resistance strategies and the resources that are available may differ depending on the women's location in the social structure (Rajah, 2007). All of these characteristics (e.g., race, gender, social class, immigration status, and/or sexual orientation) are part of an integrated system of power in which one group is at an advantage compared with another group (Anderson & Hill Collins, 2007). In turn, the woman's position in the social structure may determine what resistance strategies are available to her.

For instance, the same resources that are available to middle-class women may not be available to poor women. Class experiences may also be shaped by race. Though a middle-class woman who is resisting her abuser may be able to connect with more services, if she is African American it is possible she will continue to experience segregation and racism in spite of her middle-class status (Anderson & Hill Collins, 2007). The impact of class and race can be seen in the findings of Potter (2008) and Richie (1996). Potter found that abused African American women viewed themselves as strong and saw their resistance as a source of empowerment. However, Richie found that African American women felt entrapped because of their gender, race, and social class. Though Potter and Richie researched African American women, Potter's sample was a mixture of working and middle-class women who were not incarcerated while Richie's sample was mostly poor African American incarcerated women. The different findings between women of the same race highlight that factors beyond race can impact the resistance strategies available to certain women, such as social class and/or prior criminal record.

For women of ethnic minorities, Sokoloff (2008) argues that Western cultures tend to concentrate on what the Western cultures believe are the negative aspects of an ethnicity. Yet, Yoshioka and Choi (2005) argue that we should look into the woman's culture for ways to respond to intimate partner violence. Many strengths of certain cultures are overlooked when in fact these strengths can be used by women as a resistance strategy (Sokoloff, 2008). As will be discussed, small cultural communities may be able to use shaming as a way to hold the abuser accountable. Though certain aspects of a culture may be a viable resistance strategy for some women, it may be unavailable because of how the advantaged ethnicity or race has constructed a particular race or ethnicity.

Therefore, to understand the resistance strategies available to a woman, one must consider the intersectionality between race, class, gender, and/or ethnicity. It is important to remember that these four characteristics are not the only attributes of the woman that impact her experience. For instance, the woman's sexual orientation or religion may also play a role. As one considers the resistance strategies available to a woman, it is important to keep in mind the systems of power that influence the options available to her.

Nonetheless, every woman will have her own resistance strategies based on the controlling behaviors her partner does

and does not engage in. Depending on the degrees of threat of physical violence in the relationship, some women may have lower thresholds in which they achieve a sense of accomplishment (Rajah, 2007). Though strategies may differ depending on her partner's abuse or her location in the social structure, the end goal of every strategy remains the same. A woman's resistance of an abusive partner is meant to provide her with a sense of autonomy, or accomplishment, in hopes of changing, or even leaving, the relationship. While, Rajah (2007) and Stark (2007) identify why women may engage in these resistance strategies, Abraham (2005) provides a framework for identifying the different strategies of resistance.

Resistance Strategies

Abraham (2005) argues, similar to Gondolf and Fisher (1988), women engage in certain behaviors throughout abusive relationships to show they are not passive and/or helpless. While some of these behaviors may seem obvious, the identification and availability of resistance strategies will depend on the abuser's level of control, the women's individual characteristics and her position in the social structure. One of the personal strategies to resist an abusive partner is hitting back (Abraham, 2005). However, hitting back can be very dangerous because it is an overt form of resistance (Abraham, 2005; Rajah, 2007). Moreover, the abusive male may be able to physically overpower the woman when she physically resists. Nevertheless, some women still engage in physical resistance, which challenges the notion of passivity in intimate partner violence victims.

Women in abusive relationships may physically resist for a multitude of reasons and it is therefore important to consider the underlying motivation. Johnson (2006) expanded his framework to consider the context in which men and women use violence in relationships. *Violent resistance* is when the woman is physically violent but not controlling. A woman may engage in violence, but it is usually in response to her abusive partner's intimate terrorism (Johnson, 2006). According to Johnson (2006) in a very small number of cases, called *mutual violent control*, both the man and woman are violent and controlling. Therefore, when a woman engages in physical resistance one must not only look at who the aggressor is, but also consider who has the power and control in the relationship. The woman's violent resistance may be a response to her partner's coercive control or it may be a part of her own violent and controlling behavior against her partner.

Another resistance strategy is when a woman contemplates and/or attempts suicide. The woman may believe that death is the only way she can escape the abuse (Abraham, 2005). Ferraro (2006) also found that many women consider suicide as a way to stop the abuse before they murder their abusive partner. Abraham (2005) argues suicide ideation by abused women represents the extreme isolation and

depression they experience. The ideation also highlights the loss of hope many women in abusive relationships undergo. Suicide may be the only form of resistance the woman is able to engage in because her partner controls everything else. The only aspect of her life she may be able to control is whether to take her own life or not.

In line with Gondolf and Fisher (1988), Abraham (2005) identifies accessing formal and/or informal help as forms of resistance. These are outward resistance strategies because the woman goes outside the relationship to assert her refusal to accept her abuser's behavior. Family and friends, both informal sources of help, can then express their disapproval of the abuser's behavior. When family and friends intervene on the woman's behalf, it is meant to show she has options outside of the relationship (Abraham, 2005). Nevertheless, it is important to keep in mind the abuser may use family and/or friends to further manipulate and control the woman, thereby limiting the help an abused woman can receive (Hayes, 2012).

Again, culture, race, religion, and ethnicity must be considered because these social structures may influence the informal sources of help available to the woman. Cultural or religious communities can play an important role by shaming the abusive male (Sokoloff, 2008). When the woman notifies and involves the community, the community can begin to hold him accountable. The batterer must change his abusive ways to be accepted back into the community, a process Braithwaite (1989) refers to as reintegrative shaming. This may be more effective than imprisoning the abuser because reintegrative shaming has those who are important to the abuser holding him accountable. When family and friends become aware of the abuse, they can challenge his abusive mentality while a period of incarceration may not allow for this ongoing process of accountability. If the family and/or friends are being used to further the abuse, the process of reintegration is then not available, further shaping the resistance strategies available to the woman.

The criminal justice system encompasses formal sources of help, such as the police and courts. Though there are mandatory arrest laws for domestic violence and no-drop prosecution that can be life-saving, formal sources of help can create impediments to women's resistance strategies (Menjivar & Salcido, 2002). The problematic response of the criminal justice system to intimate partner violence has been documented and includes women's arrest for intimate partner violence, failure to arrest the male abuser, dual arrest, lack of response from the police or the woman's own deportation (Bui, 2004; Buzawa & Buzawa, 2003; Incite!, 2005). Many of the South Asian women in Abraham's (2005) study did not contact the police for help because of the possible repercussions of involving the criminal justice system, like her own arrest or deportation if she is an immigrant. The woman's fear can stem from a number of reasons such as her abuser's lies about the criminal justice system, her unfamiliarity with the system or her immigration status (Bui, 2004;

Ferraro, 2006; Sokoloff, 2008). Therefore, the formal strategies (e.g., mandatory arrest, no-drop prosecution) that are promoted and relied on so heavily may be one of the least likely ways a woman tries to resist her abusive partner.

It is not just immigrant women who are hesitant to involve the criminal justice system when they experience intimate partner violence. Individuals of different races, ethnicities, sexual orientations, or classes who experience violence in relationships, but who also diverge from the White middle-class stereotypical abused woman, may have a difficult time resisting their abuser through formal sources (Bograd, 2005). Formal sources of help may deem these individuals unworthy of services or deny that intimate partner violence occurs in these populations (Dasgupta, 2005). Moreover, African Americans and minority groups are critical of formal sources of help because of the institutional racism within the criminal justice system. Institutional racism is seen as a component of the structure of society in which the institution is designed to advantage some groups over others (Anderson & Hill Collins, 2007). In the criminal justice system, White individuals are advantaged over minorities. Many abused women of color may not want to involve the criminal justice system, if they are involved in the movement against institutional racism.

Furthermore, the incident-based focus of the criminal justice system is misleading in cases of intimate partner violence. The focus on incidents classifies individuals as either an offender or a victim without understanding the power and control in the relationship or the social structural forces that perpetuate intimate partner violence (Ferraro, 2006). Understanding that a woman's violent assault may be the result of the culmination of an abuser's threats, intimidations, and physical abuse presents a different picture from a fight between two equals that erupts into a physical altercation (Johnson, 2006). Formal sources of help that focus on incidents do not capture the complexity of intimate partner violence. Moving beyond isolated incidents may also allow for the consideration of how multiple oppressions can impact the woman. It is only by considering the ongoing nature of control and how the social structure affects intimate partner violence that one can understand how a woman resists over the course of a relationship.

Resistance Strategies for Safety and Separation

Some women may not be able to separate from their abuser for a multitude of reasons. She may be financially dependent on her abuser or they may have children in common. For some women, the end goal may be safety, not separation (Yoshioka & Choi, 2005). Therefore, the resistance strategies she is able to engage in will be influenced by if she is able to leave her abusive partner. Though the resistance strategies a woman engages in throughout the relationship in the name of

safety are important, there is another point in the relationship in which the woman's resistance plays a vital role.

Resistant acts can prepare the woman to separate from her partner or be used by the woman as she begins to end the relationship. Separation, which encompasses when the woman wants to end, is ending, and when she finally ends the relationship, can be conceptualized as more of a process than an event (DeKeseredy & Schwartz, 2009). When one conceptualizes separation as a continuum as opposed to a single moment in time, there are important implications for the experiences of intimate partner violence survivors. A continuum of separation expands the resistance strategies a woman can engage in. It acknowledges the multiple points in time when the woman asserts her independence and resists her abusive partner as opposed to the incident-based model of the criminal justice system. A separation continuum more accurately represents the experience of intimate partner violence survivors.

As the couple separates, the woman may engage in a range of autonomous behaviors that directly challenge her partner's control. Some of these behaviors include finding a home, getting a job, filing for custody of the children or obtaining a restraining order against her abuser. Each of these behaviors may go against one part of the woman's life the man has control over. They also will not occur at the exact same moment in time but will occur through a process of establishing independence. By viewing separation as a continuum, one can see the ongoing nature of separation.

It is clear that separation is an important juncture in abusive relationships. However, separation is a dangerous time for abused women and their children because they are at an increased risk of violence and femicide (Fleury, Sullivan, & Bybee, 2000; O'Sullivan, 2002; Stark, 2007). Because separation is a challenge to an abuser's control, he may increase his abusive behaviors to regain the control he is losing over his partner's behavior (Bancroft, 2002; Campbell, Glass, Sharps, Laughon, & Bloom, 2007). As the woman resists and continues to assert her autonomy through the process of separation, each resistant act can increase the possibility of retaliatory violence by her abuser. It is always important to keep in mind the potential dangers associated with resistance strategies and how these dangers may be escalated during the process of separation. Nonetheless, it is this process of separation that is critical when reframing and retelling the story of intimate partner violence.

How to Retell the Intimate Partner Violence Story

How should the stories of intimate partner violence survivors be told so that they more accurately reflect the experience of women? Many scholars argue that we need to reconceptualize intimate partner violence to include an increased focus on controlling behaviors and move beyond isolated acts of

physical violence (Johnson, 1995; Polletta, 2009; Stark, 2007). Yet, reconceptualizing intimate partner violence theoretically in academia will not bring about the lasting changes that impact intimate partner violence survivors. Public policy changes need to be introduced to make survivors' lives safer. The issue must be moved onto the policy agenda, with stories being just one way to do so (Stone, 2002). By retelling the story from the women's perspectives of strength and autonomy over the course of time, the story of intimate partner violence that incorporates coercive control can get on the policy agenda.

Polletta (2009) argues the story associated with Walker's (1979) battered women syndrome and the one that dominates the intimate partner violence field today is one of tragedy. It does not present the woman as a survivor, but as someone who kills her abuser when victimization has taken over her rationality (Polletta, 2009). In contrast, Polletta (2009) argues for the rebirth story, in which the woman has *a moment* when she realizes that she wants to live. The decision to live leads the woman to engage in resistance strategies that begin to challenge her abuser's control and/or violence. Researchers have identified the occurrence of this moment for intimate partner violence victims and such events have been given attention in the crisis intervention literature (Campbell, Rose, Kub, & Nedd, 1998; Eisikovits, Buchbinder, & Mor, 1998; Granvold, 2005; Roberts, 2005). By changing the story associated with intimate partner violence from one of tragedy to one of rebirth, the focus shifts to what the woman does to assert her autonomy and resist her abuser.

Polletta's (2009) version of the rebirth story focuses on a single moment in time. Similar to DeKeseredy and Schwartz's (2009) separation definition, it may be more appropriate for the rebirth story to incorporate the process of separation and change rather than focusing solely on an event. As noted, separating from an abusive partner occurs over a period of time and usually does not happen overnight. By highlighting the moment the woman decides she wants to live without fear and/or leave and exploring the process that ensues, the dynamics of the abusive relationship become apparent. One will be able to see how the woman's abusive partner continues to be controlling on separation and how she resists this behavior to assert her autonomy.

For instance, on separation, an abuser may begin to use the children or family members as tools to control the woman (Bancroft, 2002; Bancroft & Silverman, 2002; DeKeseredy & Schwartz, 2009; Hayes, 2012; Stark, 2007). As the father begins using family and friends to manipulate the woman, she will have to continue to challenge his control though they are no longer romantically involved. Throughout this process the woman is asserting her autonomy, which is the basis of the rebirth story. By expanding the rebirth story from a moment to a process, one is able to see how an abusive partner can continue to control the woman once she decides she wants to live a life without abuse.

The rebirth story has implications for women who use violence in intimate relationships. Instead of focusing on the violent incident, the rebirth story emphasizes the woman's struggle against her partner's control. Polletta (2009) points out that by focusing on the woman's decision to live in a single moment, the audience is able to identify with her. By having the audience identify with the woman, it is hoped that she will not be viewed as a violent aggressor even if she resorts to physical violence as a way to resist her abuser. Instead, the audience's identification with the woman is meant to have them sympathize with her choices and recognize how her options were constrained because of the partner's continued control during the process of separation. Though there is the possibility that some outsiders will identify the woman as a violent aggressor if she engages in physical violence, the rebirth story's focus on rationality is designed to have outsiders identify with the woman's limited options.

Strategies for Change Beyond Retelling the Intimate Partner Violence Story

Nevertheless, the rebirth story does not fully capture the dynamics of intimate partner violence. By focusing on a single woman and how she escapes an abusive relationship, the rebirth story suggests it is up to the woman to escape the abusive relationship (Stark, 2009). Therefore, the story of strength and resistance needs to incorporate the societal structures that reinforce patriarchal norms and perpetuate intimate partner violence, moving toward an ecological model that considers how factors at different levels interact (Carlson, 1984; Lischick, 2007).

The experience of intimate partner violence is not the same for every survivor (Bograd, 2005). The rebirth story needs to take into account the multiple forms of oppression many intimate partner violence survivors experience. When the woman is a part of disadvantaged group(s), advantaged groups may not believe or identify with her rebirth story.

This has already occurred with the battered women syndrome, which created a separation between advantaged and disadvantaged women. The battered women syndrome reinforces notions of unrealistic passivity typically associated with White middle-class women (Rothenberg, 2003). Women who depart from this ideal of passivity are less likely to successfully use the battered women's syndrome during a trial. Thus, the battered women syndrome's focus on White middle-class disadvantaged women who were not seen as conforming to notions of passivity and helplessness (Allard, 2005; Ferraro, 2003). The rebirth story must then incorporate other oppressions in the woman's life that can affect her experience. For example, if the woman is African American, she may have to overcome obstacles associated with her race. It may be further complicated if she lives in poverty, which often overlaps with race (Sudbury, 2004). All of these oppressions intersect so that the woman does

not experience gender oppression in isolation from these other oppressions.

Though the rebirth story focuses on an individual woman, it is important to consider how structural forces impact the woman's experience and the options available to her (Carlson, 1984; Lischick, 2007). Structural reforms must also occur so that the focus is not just on changing the individual (Sokoloff, 2008). For instance, it has been argued that the increase in women's poverty is partly due to globalization (Sudbury, 2004). One must consider the larger picture of how globalization has moved jobs outside of the United States, making it more difficult for women to have enough money to sustain a family on their own. While changing the story associated with intimate partner violence is important, it will not provide women with jobs they need to support their children if they leave their abuser. The rebirth story can bring to light the social structural changes needed to improve options for women attempting to end an abusive relationship by showing how individual women struggle. The story can then argue that society must provide practical options to assist women who are trying to end abusive relationships and assert autonomy.

Community accountability, or community-based responses, should be incorporated in the rebirth story as a way to end violence against women. The model involves not only the government and criminal justice system, but also clergy, social service providers, media, and employers (National Center on Domestic and Sexual Violence, n.d.). It may be a viable response to intimate partner violence, especially for those groups that do not want to rely solely on the criminal justice system. Instead of focusing on criminalization and incarceration, the community accountability model has communities work together to tackle the structural forces that perpetuate intimate partner violence and entrap women in abusive relationships (Incite!, 2005).

Violence against women does not occur in a vacuum, but occurs in the context of a socially structured system of politics, class, race, gender, sexuality, and ethnicity. To combat violence against women, Smith (2005) argues strategies must be directed at not only gender inequality but also racism, class oppression, and the overreliance on prisons. If we only address intimate partner violence without considering the institutional racism in the criminal justice system, many people will not get the help they need. Intimate partner violence survivors' lack of faith in the criminal justice system further highlights that the movement must move beyond criminalization. It is not to say that the criminalization of intimate partner violence and state policies have not saved the lives of women. They have, but there are also many women who have suffered the adverse effects of these policies.

If one considers the multiple oppressions women face, it becomes evident that the resources available (e.g., domestic violence services, formal sources of help) are not appropriate for some women (Smith, 2005). Smith (2005) argues that the

answer is not to make these programs culturally competent but to have actual women who have experienced intimate partner violence to be a part of the movement to "*end* (italics in original) violence against women of color" (p. 418). The movement to combat intimate partner violence should also work in tandem with the movement to end state violence (Smith, 2005).

How can a movement possibly address *both* intimate partner violence and state violence? Smith (2005) offers an array of strategies, but notes that advocates should focus on ending violence against women, not providing programs. Though culturally competent programs are an important part of services, services address the violence once it has already occurred (Sokoloff, 2008). Again, it is vital that the movement addresses the structural conditions, such as patriarchal institutions and the capitalist economy, that perpetuate violence against women and entrap women in abusive relationships (Ferraro, 2006). This is because intimate partner violence is not a single issue but a part of larger issues affecting the community (Sokoloff, 2008).

Moreover, the criminalization of intimate partner violence diverts community's attention away from creating ways to respond to the violence that occurs in the community (Incite!, 2005). "Tough on crime" policies do not allow for the development of community responses that could effectively hold abusive men accountable. Instead, "tough on crime" policies focus on the retributive aspect of punishment as opposed to the rehabilitation aspect. Community accountability models and the rebirth story can begin to question patriarchal norms that are also deconstructed in batterer intervention programs (Bancroft, 2002). Community-based programs should not only involve the criminal justice system, but should involve men holding abusive men in the community accountable (DeKeseredy & Schwartz, 2009; Douglas, Bathrick, & Perry, 2008; Incite!, 2005).

Opportunity theory, and the policy implications associated with it, has been applied to a number of criminal justice problems (Clarke, 1997). Yet, it has not been systematically applied to intimate partner violence research, though the isolation process fits within the routine activity framework, where the offender converges in space and time with suitable target in the absence of a capable guardian (Cohen & Felson, 1979; Lanier & Maume, 2009; Stark, 2007). Isolating the victim decreases risk to the offender by limiting capable guardianship and surveillance (Clarke, 1997). Creating practical solutions that increase risk and decrease rewards by implementing guardianship may be a starting point for designing effective intimate partner violence policies.

Another way to reframe intimate partner violence, as part of the rebirth story, is by challenging some of the commonly used words in the field. Many women who are abused by their partner do not want to be labeled or do not see themselves as a battered women or victim (Ferraro, 2006). In line with Gondolf and Fisher (1988), it would be better to find more appropriate terms, like survivors. The term *survivor*

more accurately represents their experience and does not have the negative connotations associated with the “passive victim.”

Individuals working with intimate partner violence survivors must adopt new terminologies. Smith (2005) calls attention to the fact many individuals who work in domestic violence programs see the women as “clients.” Advocates and service providers should see these women not only as survivors, but also as potential activists and organizers (Incite!, 2005; Smith, 2005). By returning to the grassroots nature of the domestic violence movement, Incite! (2005) argues social justice movements will be able to work together to develop communities. By developing communities, we can move from an individualized approach to combating intimate partner violence to one in which men are held accountable by the community (DeKeseredy & Schwartz, 2009; Douglas et al., 2008).

Presently used terms, like *domestic violence* and *physical abuse*, may not reflect the lived experience of many intimate partner violence survivors whose partner is controlling. In addition, separation abuse can be a large part of the woman’s experience long after the couple is no longer together. Therefore, the term domestic violence is misleading in these circumstances because the couple is no longer cohabitating. Domestic violence can also refer to violence between individuals who live in the same household, such as brothers and sisters or parents and children. Intimate partner violence may be a more appropriate term to use to reflect violence that occurs between intimates, either during a relationship or after the couple has separated.

Conclusion

Women in abusive relationships resist their batterer in a number of ways. However, the story associated with intimate partner violence is one that often depicts the woman as a passive and helpless victim. By retelling the story in a way that highlights women’s resistance and strength, changes can be made in the response to intimate partner violence. By depicting the rebirth story as a process in which the woman asserts her autonomy as her partner continues to control her, it is hoped she will no longer be seen as a woman seeking revenge. Instead, her partner’s control comes to the forefront and the woman’s resistance to his behavior is highlighted. The rebirth story will not be enough though and there is a need to reform the social structures that oppress women. Women do not solely experience gender inequality. The oppression women experience because of their gender intersects with various other systems of oppression. It is crucial that the intimate partner violence rebirth story accurately reflects the lived experiences of women and call attention to the structural and cultural constraints of women in abusive relationships.

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