Brenda Russell
Celia Torres *Editors*

Perceptions of Female Offenders, Vol. 1

How Stereotypes and Social Norms Affect Criminal Justice Responses

Second Edition

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Preface Volume 1

It is with great pleasure that we present the second edition of *Perceptions of Female Offenders: How Stereotypes and Social Norms Affect Criminal Justice Response*. A decade has passed since the publication of the first volume, and during this time, the landscape surrounding female offenders has experienced significant shifts. Our understanding of this complex issue has grown, yet challenges persist in how we perceive and respond to criminal behavior. Volume 1 of this series examines an ecological view of female juvenile delinquency, college-age women perpetrating aggression, and adult women engaged in intimate partner violence and sexual abuse. These topics shed light on the diverse experiences of female offenders, which are often overshadowed by assumptions of uniformity based on male offender paradigms. Our aim is to unravel the intricate motivations and behaviors driving these women's actions while exploring the influence of stereotypes and gender norms on both their offending and criminal justice system response.

Since the first publication, notable events have highlighted the complexities of female victimization and offending. Society witnessed the bilateral intimate partner violence through the high-profile case of Amber Heard and Johnny Depp, while women's voices prominently emerged in the #MeToo movement, sexual abuse and controversy surrounding high office politicians, and stories of sexual abuse involving US team Olympians filled the media, underscoring the widespread issue of gender-based violence. However, despite these events, our attitudes regarding women and women's rights have remained stagnant or, in some cases, regressed with the imposition of increased restrictions on sexual expression and abortion.

In the past decade, empirical research on female offenders has seen remarkable growth, with scholars uncovering the many layers of intersectionality and revealing the reality of female offending. Nonetheless, our criminal justice system has been slow to adapt to the specific needs of female offenders, and society continues to perceive their behavior differently than that of their male counterparts. Clearly, there is still much work to be done dismantling the barriers and biases that impede progress in this area.

The second edition of this volume series builds upon the foundation established in the first book. We have included updated research from previous contributors,

incorporating cutting-edge findings and emerging ideas. Additionally, new contributors with diverse perspectives, research methodologies, and revealing data have enriched this edition. Notably, we have expanded the scope to include new insights in intimate partner violence, and female sex offenders and the influence of culture and social media. These additions reflect the evolving landscape of female offending and provide valuable insights into the multifaceted nature of this issue.

The content in this volume seeks to deepen our understanding of how social norms and stereotypes continue to shape offending and victimization dynamics. The general theme of this text is to follow the trajectory of young women's motivations and behaviors for their actions and follow the research spanning young adulthood and adulthood. An overarching theme addresses how stereotypes and gendered norms continue to play a significant role in offending and criminal justices' response to female offenses. Scholars will demonstrate some of the gender symmetry involved in these crimes, and the reasons why our society remains slow to acknowledge their existence.

By doing so, we aim to encourage more inclusive approaches in identification, prevention, intervention, and treating female offenders. It is our hope that the research presented in this volume will contribute to positive change in our criminal justice system, leading to unbiased treatment, improved outcomes, and ultimately, a more equitable society.

As editors, we extend our gratitude to the contributors who have invested their expertise, time, and passion to this second edition, including Raquel Rose and Shabnam Javdani; Lucie Holmgreen and Debra Oswald; Don Dutton and Christina Tetreault; Elizabeth Bates, Elizabeth Harper, and Alende Amisi; Jennifer Cox, Elizabeth MacNeil, and Haylie Stewart; James Anderson, Kelley Reinsmith, and Lee Tazinski; and Dawn Pflugradt and Bradley Allen, without whom this volume would have not been possible. I would also like to thank the Springer team, including Anna Goodlett for her inspiration to continue this path with a second edition and Thiyagarajan. A. and Srividya Subramanian for their support coordinating and editing. This book would also have not been possible without the help of my dedicated co-editor, Celia Torres. Their dedication to advancing our understanding of female offenders is commendable, and their work paves the way for future exploration and continued progress in the field.

In conclusion, *Perceptions of Female Offenders: How Stereotypes and Social Norms Affect Criminal Justice Response*, 2nd Edition, offers an updated and comprehensive examination of the intricacies surrounding female offending. We invite readers to engage with this volume, challenge preconceptions, and join us in the ongoing pursuit of a more just and inclusive society.

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Aggression in Adolescence and Young Adults and Female Offenders of Intimate Partner Violence

Chapter 1
Introduction. Moving Beyond Perceptions: Unveiling the Complexities of Female Offenders in a Rapidly Changing World

Brenda Russell and Celia Torres

Introduction

Understanding societal perceptions and social norms associated with female offenders is a formidable challenge, fraught with complexity. Our deep-rooted beliefs and stereotypes often cast a veil over our ability to recognize and acknowledge female criminality. For centuries, women have been assigned specific roles and are often characterized as gentle, nurturing, and passive. These deeply ingrained stereotypes paint a picture of women that is contrary to the image of an offender. The incongruity between these traditional gender roles and the concept of female criminality creates a cognitive dissonance, challenging our preconceived notions and making it difficult to accept women as potential criminals.

Heteronormativity further compounds this challenge by entrenching gender-based norms and expectations. Heteronormative frameworks adhere to the notion of binary gender roles, emphasizing the complementary natures of masculinity and femininity. Such frameworks perpetuate the belief that women lack the capacity for violence or criminal behavior. This narrow lens restricts our ability to perceive women as offenders and contradicts the social narrative.

Furthermore, the historical marginalization and victimization of women also play a role in shaping our perceptions. Women have long been subjected to various forms of subjugation and violence, making it challenging for society to reconcile the image of a victimized woman with that of a perpetrator. In this regard, the narrative surrounding female criminality often attributes their actions to external

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influences, such as victimization or coercion, rather than acknowledging their agency and capacity for independent decision-making.

The convergence of these factors creates a deeply ingrained bias, thus obscuring our ability to perceive women as offenders. Such beliefs seep into the very foundations of the criminal justice system. Potential bias can arise through the unequal application of laws for men and women. While female offending is less of an anomaly than it was just 10 or 20 years ago, this series will draw from extensive research and compelling evidence on female offenders to dissect the multifaceted nature of female offending, the role of societal norms, and their relationship to criminal justice response.

From Victimization to Perpetration: Perpetuating Social Norms and Enduring Bias

From a historical point of view, there have been significant advancements in our societal attitudes toward behaviors like child abuse, sexual assault, and intimate partner violence (IPV), which were historically tolerated. For example, the earliest documented law, such as those found in the Code of Hammurabi, considered the rape of a virgin as a form of property damage against her father. Fast forward to the early American colonies, laws of rape were designed to safeguard the chastity of women and be protected from other men. In this regard, rape was defined as the non-consensual sexual act with a woman aged 10 or older (Deer, 2015). Later, the age of consent was altered to range between 14 and 18 in the late 1800s. Unfortunately, women of color were not protected under rape laws until *George v. State* (1859) when the Mississippi Supreme Court made it a crime for a Black man to rape a Black girl younger than 12. This law did not apply to White men until the Georgia state code extended the law to assert that raping an enslaved or free person of color would be penalized with a fine or imprisonment. More than a century ago, the women's movement and feminists relentlessly fought for women's and children's rights, and the movement sought and successfully obtained legal reform and criminal justice protection from these crimes. Historically, domestic violence and child abuse were considered "family problems," wherein abuse was sanctioned as the father's or husband's right to do what they wished with their wife and/or children (Erez, 1986; Ménard, 2014). For example, it was not until the 1950s when the *Journal of American Medical Association* published an article on "battered woman syndrome," which led to new research and laws designed to report suspected child abuse (Ménard, 2014).

Similarly, domestic abuse was tolerated, hardly ever addressed in public, and rarely viewed as a crime (Erez, 1986). Although Alabama was the first state to revoke the "husbandly" right to physically abuse a spouse in *Fulgham v. State* (1871), responses to such cases remained infrequent. In instances when criminal justice response did occur, husbands were typically charged with misdemeanors. It

was not until the 1960s that the severity of abuse was considered, leading to the recognition that more severe charges, such as felonies, were warranted (see Cox et al., in press, this volume, Chap. 6). Then, the changing social and political climate of the 1960s and 1970s, particularly regarding the women's movement, brought about significant shifts in how society perceived and responded to IPV.

The emergence of the Anti-Rape movement in the 1960s, as part of the second wave of the feminist movement, brought attention to violence against women. Substantial legislative advancements were made during the 1970s, including the criminalization of marital rape, the implementation of rape shield laws, the inclusion of sexual harassment, funding for rape crisis centers, and eventually the *Violence Against Women Act* (VAWA) in 1994 and recent reauthorization in 2022, which led to increased services for survivors from underserved and marginalized communities. These efforts marked significant progress in addressing sexual abuse. However, it should be noted that sexual assault or rape laws in the United States only pertained to women until the change in 2013 to the Uniform Crime Report (*Federal Bureau of Investigation,* 2017) definition of sexual assault, which became more gender inclusive and allowed for data to be collected on male, female, and sexual minority victims, and offenders.

With the substantial gains from the women's movements and the increase in legislative reforms over the years came a significant shift in the direction of research, theories, interventions, and additional legal reforms designed to encourage criminal justice response to reduce victimization against women. Unsurprisingly, researchers overwhelmingly focused on women as victims and men as oppressors during this transformative period. While some scholars studied female and male family violence perpetration in the 1970s–80s (Gelles & Straus, 1988; Steinmetz & Straus, 1974), such research was scrutinized and/or dismissed. For example, studies by Gelles and Straus (1988) found that women perpetrated IPV almost as much as men. However, the researchers' results were stifled, and the research methodologies were hotly contested. It was conceivable that scholars, influenced by the prevailing political climate, hesitated to investigate the role of women as offenders. Such an inquiry could potentially challenge the notion of women as innocent victims and even impede the progress toward gender equality.

Problematically, the prevailing stereotype of sexual and partner violence is that they are acts of violence committed by a man against a woman or child (Little, 2020; Messerschmidt, 2014). However, as this book will attest, this is not always the case. For example, recent research by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC; Leemis et al., 2022) reported that the lifetime prevalence of sexual violence, physical violence, and stalking by an intimate partner was 47.3% for women and 44.2% for men. Similarly, Stemple et al. (2017) examined data from two National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Surveys and two extensive surveys from the Bureau of Justice from 2008 to 2013. The authors found that women perpetrate sexual crimes at higher rates than previously believed. Seventy-nine percent of the men in the study who experienced sexual coercion and/or unwanted sexual contact reported that a woman abused them, and 58% of these male victims reported that the offender used violence during the abuse.

While such studies as these have existed for many years, the public remains indifferent or naïve about the extent to which women partake in criminal behavior. Perhaps it is more likely that women's violence is not highlighted in the media as much as men. Typically, what we see on television and social media is more likely to showcase incidents of men's criminal behavior than women's criminal behavior. For example, Estrada et al. (2019) examined newspaper articles from 1905 to 2015 and found that 90% of crime articles focused on male offenders. The media leads us to believe that women do not participate in crime nearly as often as men. Such omission in the news and discussion of women's behavior perpetuates the belief that they are the primary victims of most crimes. When women are identified in newspaper articles or social media, they are often considered low-risk offenders depicted as sexualized bad girls, black widow prototypes, bad victims deserving of their circumstances, or good victims depicting the perpetrator as a bad person (Collins, 2016). Others (Brennan & Vandenberg, 2009; see also Slakoff et al., in press, Volume 2) have demonstrated how previous research on female offenders features how gender stereotypes impact expectations of appropriate behavior in females. The authors provided media explanations for offending as mad/bad/sad, with a more substantial stigma associated with female than male offenders.

Research indicates that women are more likely to suffer more severe injuries in IPV incidents than men (Archer, 2000). In addition, studies have shown that women are more likely to be victims of male-perpetrated intimate partner homicide (Stöckl et al., 2013) and sexual abuse (Basile et al., 2022). These findings, no doubt, contribute to the prevailing perception that women are less likely to be perpetrators of IPV or sexual assault. However, it is essential to recognize that women can also perpetrate IPV and sexual abuse, resulting in severe physical and psychological trauma for their victims. Understanding the complexity of gender dynamics in abusive relationships is crucial to support and assist all survivors, regardless of their gender and sexual orientation. With few contrasting views in the media, our perceptions of women as the primary victims are further solidified (Depraetere et al., 2018; Ellemers, 2018). Additional research continues to find that sexual abuse (Banton & West, 2020) and partner violence (Poorman et al., 2003; Russell et al., 2015; Stanziani et al., 2018) committed by a woman is considered less severe and less likely to be considered abuse than the same act committed by a man. If we perceive female offending as uncommon, it becomes more difficult to understand, and therefore we seek an explanation for their behavior (Estrada et al., 2019). For example, when we hear about an offense committed by a female, we look for excuses or believe they are deviant in some way.

In this updated volume, readers will see how these stereotypes and social norms affect criminal justice responses. Put plainly, a gender disparity continues in criminal justice response, prosecution, and sentencing. Research has indicated that men are more likely to be arrested for domestic abuse (Hamilton & Worthen, 2011) and sexual abuse, as well as sexual offenses, than women (Shields & Cochran, 2020). Furthermore, research on prosecutorial decision-making involving female and male offenders tends to be mixed. For instance, some studies have found that prosecutors are more likely to drop charges from a felony to a misdemeanor for female

defendants than male defendants (Henning & Renauer, 2005; Kingsnorth & MacIntosh, 2007), while others (Romain & Freiburger, 2013) have found female defendants in IPV cases were significantly less likely to have their case dismissed compared to male defendants or have found no significant differences among male and female defendants in how violent crime is prosecuted (Sommers et al., 2014).

Furthermore, Nowacki (2020) found that the odds of women receiving a prison sentence were lower for females than for males. Over time, there has been a "strong gender effect" (Kim et al., 2019, p. 489) that shows female defendants in federal cases benefit in terms of sentencing, and this effect continues after controlling for legal and extra-legal factors (Doerner & Demuth, 2012; Holland & Prohaska, 2021). Overall, studies indicate female offenders receive less severe sentences than male offenders when sentenced for the same crime type (Doerner & Demuth, 2012; Koons-Witt et al., 2014; Shields & Cochran, 2020; Spohn, 1999). However, Liu et al.' (2021) study showed no differences in sentencing among male and female defendants of severe crimes. Carson (2022a) reported that the percentage of people in state prisons for violent offenses was 45% for women and 64% for men.

Since *Perceptions of Female Offenders* was first published in 2013, women's prison populations have grown enough to counteract reductions in male inmates' populations; women currently comprise the fastest-growing segment of the incarcerated population (Kajstura & Sawyer, 2023). According to Carson (2022b), women in prisons are more likely than men to be incarcerated for drug or property crimes. Despite the more significant number of incarcerated men compared to women, the rate at which female imprisonment has grown has been twice as fast as that of men since 1980. According to the Bureau of Justice, almost one million women (976,000) are under the supervision of the criminal justice system (Carson, 2022a). In 2021, the imprisonment rate for Black women was 1.6 times (62 per 100,000) higher than for white women (38 per 100,000). Latinx women were imprisoned at a rate of 1.3 times more than white women (49 vs. 38 per 100,000). While the imprisonment of Black and Latinx women has decreased since 2000, the rate for white women has increased by 12%. Interestingly, when we look at the incarceration of girls (ages 10–17), we find that African American (77 per 100,000) and Native American girls (112 per 100,000) are more likely to be incarcerated than White (24 per 100,000), Latinx (27 per 100,000), and Asian (4 per 100,000) girls. Most girls (34%) are in trouble for status offenses such as truancy or curfew violations, and more than half of girls are incarcerated for running away.

Research on criminal justice-involved women and girls has found that incarcerated women have experienced higher rates of substance use, child abuse (emotional, physical, and sexual), and other traumas under the age of 18 compared to women who have not been incarcerated (Bodkin et al., 2019; Grella et al., 2013; Messina & Grella, 2006; Tusher & Cook, 2010). Researchers (Saxena & Messina, 2021) examined the trajectories of victimization toward incarceration and found childhood victimization and continued involvement with the criminal justice system and substance use increased adult perpetration of violence. Women who experience childhood trauma may face additional constraints that restrict their options and expose them to more significant risks as they progress into adolescence and adulthood. This can

create circumstances that pave the way for being unhoused, experiencing unemployment, substance abuse, and engaging in illegal activities just to survive (Chesney-Lind & Pasko, 2004). Because gender inequality persists, wherein women are raised in communities that uphold sexist values, this ultimately results in a greater marginalized status. Moreover, women from diverse cultures and racial backgrounds encounter distinct circumstances and often have fewer choices than their White counterparts. Specifically, individuals who identify as sexual minorities, people of color, or those living in poverty experience even greater marginalization and potential for incarceration (Chesney-Lind & Pasko, 2004).

Special Considerations: LGBTQ+ Victims and Offenders

When addressing issues associated with female offenders, one must also recognize female sexual minority victims and offenders. The most recent data on IPV victimization shows that sexual minorities (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual; LGB) are more likely to be victims of serious crimes. Bender and Lauritsen (2021) found that LGB victimization rates for rape and sexual assault were 2–4 times higher than that of heterosexuals. Lesbian and bisexual couples were 4–7 times more likely to experience IPV victimization (Bender & Lauritsen, 2021). In essence, bisexual women bear the brunt of all forms of IPV compared to other sexual minorities and heterosexual women (Chen et al., 2020).

Furthermore, sexual minorities are over-represented in the criminal justice system (Frazer et al., 2022). More specifically, approximately 38.5 transgender adults identify as trans women (Herman, et al., 2022) and are disproportionately exhibited in the criminal justice system. According to Frazer et al. (2022), 17–65% of all trans women have been incarcerated, and racial and ethnic minority trans women were more likely to be incarcerated compared to White, non-Hispanic, and trans women (Reisner et al., 2014). However, we know much less about perpetrators within the LGBTQ+ community. Our gender role expectations and heteronormative views of relationships serve to create social norms. Those who deviate from this norm are considered deviant, leading to greater discrimination against those who do not fall neatly under the umbrella of heteronormativity.

The widely held heterosexist assumption that women are victims and men are perpetrators of IPV and sexual abuse impacts all aspects of criminal justice response. It is worth noting that cases involving male victims and sexual minorities fall outside the conventional stereotype, and as this book series will show, male and sexual minority perpetrators who face prosecution receive more severe penalties than women. Gender stereotypes and the violation of prescribed gender roles can harm defendants and victims in IPV and sexual abuse cases, leading to bias and unfair treatment within the legal system.

Legal Restrictions and the Policing of Bodily Autonomy

Moreover, the characterization of a female offender may become redefined because of the widespread ramifications of recent restrictions on sexual autonomy placed on women and sexual minorities. These trends indicate the power of a patriarchal system, as described by researchers (Chesney-Lind, 2020; Chesney-Lind & Hadi, 2017), underscoring the growing necessity to assert control over women's and LGBTQ+ sexuality and reproductive choices. These laws may widen disparities affecting women of color and those with lower socioeconomic status and further dismantle families by needless imprisonment.

As our society witnesses a shift in values and beliefs about women, it is possible that women's prison populations will continue to rise. Recent trends of higher female incarceration rates and more restrictive regulations about sexual expression and reproduction have led to increased scrutiny of women's actions, aligned with a shift in societal values toward more conservative perspectives and legislation. For example, bills have been enacted and/or are being proposed in states (Arkansas, Texas, Kentucky, and South Carolina, Florida) to establish the fetus as a person with full constitutional rights at the moment of conception. The proposed penalties for mothers include charges of homicide to endangering a fetus—which could include taking prescribed medication and taking illegal drugs or alcohol. Bills exist or have been recently proposed that civilly or criminally penalize anyone who assists a woman with an abortion or punish the woman herself for crossing state lines to receive an abortion. Other states have recently enacted revised "conscience clauses" that open the door for medical professionals and insurance companies (e.g., Florida, Ohio) to refuse service to sexual minorities. Florida also recently passed a bill to stop gender-affirming care for trans minors, allowing the state to intervene to remove the child from their home. Another Florida law recently enacted (as of this writing) calls for the death penalty for child abuse and reduced the number of jurors to 8 out of 12. This is particularly disturbing, as states have come to call transgender and members of the LGBTQ+ community "groomers" for sex abuse. Other states are curtailing sex education in schools. While there have been more bills introduced further restricting the rights of women and LGBTQ+ individuals, it is too soon to determine the extent to which these new laws can impact females in the criminal justice system.

Scholars (Chesney-Lind & Irwin, 2008; Ehrmann et al., 2019; Silcox, 2017) attribute some of the rising rates of incarceration to more severe punitive laws on status offenses or being forced into prostitution. It is possible that women's incarceration might continue to rise with more states imposing conservative attitudes that punish women who stray from the feminine ideal. The past years have been tumultuous, particularly in growing conservative ideologies despite attempts to bring greater attention to female victims of sexual harassment and rape (i.e., #MeToo Movement) and rights of sexual expression. Nevertheless, the metaphorical leash placed upon women's and sexual minorities' rights to control their bodies grows tighter. As a number of states in the United States expand restrictions on abortions

and rights to privacy and increase efforts to control one's sexual expression, the potential repercussions of such laws have civil and criminal implications that can lead to potential financial liability, stigma, fear of violence, and criminalization. Such restrictive laws can influence freedom of thought, conscience, religion, or beliefs. Many of these laws disproportionately affect marginalized populations.

The Purpose of This Book

This volume focuses on the trajectories of female offending and the various ways differential treatment occurs, providing theoretical and empirical evidence to elucidate the reasons behind these differences. It offers contemporary insights into female offenders across different crimes, including sexual coercion, assault, partner violence, and sexual offenses. In addition, the book explores how societal influences, such as sex-role socialization and social media, perpetuate disparities in criminal justice response.

This updated edition has broadened the focus to include a wider group of contributors, including researchers, psychologists, sociologists, and criminologists. This volume incorporates the latest research data and statistics to ensure readers can access up-to-date information. Many chapters include authors from the previous volume, updated to reflect recent theories and research. New authors are introduced in this volume that expands upon female offending in youth to adulthood in crimes such as aggression, assault, partner violence, and sexual violence. The role of social media is also discussed in terms of its growing influence in shaping perceptions and behaviors related to female offenders.

The goal is to present a thought-provoking reading that catalyzes dynamic discussions. As research on the impact of perceptions of female offenders and the workings of the criminal justice system evolves, there are still significant questions surrounding the interplay between stereotypes, societal norms, and our perceptions of female offenders. We hope this volume will encourage readers to question their preconceptions about women in society and the criminal justice system and consider the potential benefits and consequences for female offenders.

The Organization of Chapters

This volume highlights the significance of gendered viewpoints that must be considered when working with women who have committed offenses. Initially, we delve into the undeniable fact that gendered understandings of society emerge during childhood. Our examination commences by investigating the impact of these gender-oriented perspectives on our development. Subsequently, we examine empirical studies on women who have engaged in sexual aggression, partner violence, assault, and sexual abuse. Furthermore, we delve into the vital discussion

around gender equality, which is intricately interwoven with these crimes and laws about criminal justice and response measures. This book is broken down into two sections. The first section focuses primarily on aggression in adolescence and young adults and addresses female offenders of intimate partner violence. For example, in Chap. 2, Rose and Javdani study the role of gender using an ecological lens to understand female crime. In this regard, the authors examine legal actors' attributions of girls and adolescents in the juvenile justice system and the interplay of gender, race, and class. Their study demonstrates how girls' contact and trajectory through the criminal justice system are perceived differently by professionals in the criminal justice system. Next, Chap. 3 (Holmgreen & Oswald) provides an updated chapter on female sexual aggression on campus and how women's perpetration is often overlooked. The authors describe the behaviors used most often, the correlates of sexual aggression in college women, and how colleges recognize and respond to female sexual aggression.

Chap. 4 addresses the female perpetration of intimate partner violence. Dutton and Tetreault review the most recent research on perceptions of IPV held by the public, police, courts, and custody assessors. Dutton and Tetreault provide a short history of research and gender symmetry and explain how aggression in women develops much like in men. They follow the research studies that demonstrate pre-existing characteristics that predict IPV perpetration and address psychological syndromes predictive of IPV among male and female offenders. In Chap. 5, Whitesitt expands upon gender symmetry in the context of coercive control and situational violence. Whitesitt discusses how the absence of representation in the different types of IPV in American culture has been excluded from social media and perpetuates the gender paradigm. She examines high-profile cases such as the Johnny Depp and Amber Heard case and other famous cases to impart the need for the public to understand how different types of violent relationships involve different gender dynamics. In Chap. 6, Cox, McNeil, and Stewart review the history of policy and criminal justice response to IPV. The authors review various policies and the effectiveness of these policies. For example, the authors review law enforcement response, prosecutorial decision-making, judicial decision-making, and potential IPV reforms needed to decrease IPV and improve public safety. The authors also discuss the limitations of current research and the lack of data on gender and racially diverse individuals.

The second section of this volume further evaluates the role of gender stereotypes and social norms in intimate and sexual violence among female perpetrators. For example, in Chap. 7, Bates, Harper, and Amisi address the impact of gendered stereotypes and perceptions of violence on female perpetrators of domestic and sexual violence. The authors describe the lack of acknowledgment of women's perpetration of IPV and focus on literature that will assist our understanding of how gender influences perceptions of family and sexual violence. The authors also address the understudied topic of sibling and child-to-parent aggression and how it affects treatment and intervention with perpetrators and victims.

The final two chapters in this volume focus on female sexual offending. Chap. 8 (Anderson, Reinsmith-Jones, and Lee) examines the ripple effect of female sexual

offending. Anderson and colleagues believe female sexual abuse is a growing public health problem with few intervention and prevention strategies. They explain how our continued negligence of this issue impedes the health and welfare of victims. In the first part of the chapter, the authors explain the various typologies of female sexual offenders and contexts for offending, including mothers as perpetrators or bystanders, female healthcare and mental health professionals, sex traffickers, and adolescent offenders and traffickers. In the second part of the chapter, the authors discuss the victims of female sex offenders and the lack of professional support for victims of female sex offenders. Lastly, in Chap. 9, the authors Pflugradt and Allen examine ways to assess women who perpetrate sexual offenses. Pfludgradt and Allen review the research on female sexual offending and risk-relevant characteristics associated with female offenders. There is a lack of assessments for female sexual offenders. The authors find ways to identify pathways and motivations for offending, given that research shows a low base rate of recidivism for reoffending. The authors also seek to examine how female sexual offenders with a higher degree of criminogenic factors may be at greater risk of sexual reoffending. The authors stress the need to identify criminogenic needs, factors related to recidivism risk, and the necessity for more comprehensive assessments validated on female offenders.

We hope this volume provides an understanding of young female offenders and obstacles that can lead to a trajectory toward aggression, the role of women in partner violence and sexual offenses, and how perceptions impact the response (or lack thereof) of the criminal justice system. The information in this book can catalyze societal transformation, promoting inclusivity and equity. Because research on female offenders is still relatively new but expanding, we continue to lack the knowledge, resources, or research on female offenders compared to male offenders. This area is ripe for new research to accommodate female offenders better while considering the intersections among race, socioeconomic status, sexual minority status, and other social and personal characteristics that influence female offending. Since it is evident that gendered perceptions ultimately shape the criminal justice system's response and public policies concerning male and female offenders, scholars must identify shared beliefs and fundamental disagreements to reach a compromise that guides us toward novel ideas in research and theory, fostering inclusiveness and fairness. It is important to note that our knowledge of female offenders remains incomplete, and while acknowledging the limitations and unaddressed issues in this text, we hope this volume will underscore the necessity for a paradigm shift in how we research, fund, and work with female offenders.

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Chapter 2
Gendered Surveillance: A Critical Analysis of Female Legal System Actors' Attributions About Girls' Behaviors

Raquel E. Rose ⓘ **and Shabnam Javdani** ⓘ

Introduction

> *… there are some good people who work there and who would like to … change the system and some of those people are even judges and so they have a lot of power, but they're still working in an environment that is … institutionally prejudiced* (TK: ROSES Stakeholder).

Criminal and juvenile justice reform that is feasible, responsible, and effective for women and girls has been a nonlinear process rife with setbacks, unintended consequences for those most impacted by these systems, and conflicting goals (van Wormer & Bartollas, 2021; Walker et al., 2015). Past research in criminal justice reform has not centered on the experiences of women and girls, and feminist scholars have sounded the alarm that the paternalistic and racist underpinnings of the justice system contribute to the inequitable criminalization of women and girls (Davis et al., 2022; Richie, 1996). These patterns are pronounced for women and girls who are Black, Latine, Indigenous, Asian/Pacific Islander, and living in economic precarity (Snyder & Sickmund, 2006). This scholarship highlights how the dominant theoretical and practice approaches to crime have been shockingly gender-blind, ousting girls' voices from reform efforts and shaping the assumptions and perceptions held by stakeholders who occupy various positions of power within the legal system (henceforth termed "system actors"; Cobbina et al., 2008; Epstein et al., 2017). However, the nature and influence of system actors' perceptions about women and girls' system contact—and the racialized and gendered biases undergirding these beliefs—remains an understudied area (Chesney-Lind et al., 2008).

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While the US symbol of justice (a blindfolded woman) is meant to signify impartiality and equality under the law, one could interpret this as a symbol of historical blindness to, and tolerance of, the inequities experienced by women and girls. For example, while laws such as the Muncy Act were considered unconstitutional due to the resulting disparity in sentencing between men and women, the ramifications and assumptions behind such laws have had lasting impacts (Pollock, 2014). While the evidence is mixed, this disparity has seemingly continued, particularly in the juvenile legal system, where there is greater discretion in decision-making about girls' services and sentences (Epstein et al., 2017). For instance, girls often receive harsher sentences than boys for similar offenses and are more likely to be adjudicated for nonviolent offenses, such as drug-related offenses, truancy, and "prostitution" (Chesney-Lind, 2001; Javdani et al., 2011). Additionally, this gender-based disparity widens as offense severity increases and when girls' identities and presentations differ from traditional scripts of femininity, whiteness, and middle-classness.

Even with the implementation of policy to explicitly address these historical inequities through placing limits on punishment for minor and status offenses (e.g., Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act of 1974), net widening, relabeling, and bootstrapping patterns have continued to undermine the effectiveness of these policies in practice (Feld, 2009; Javdani et al., 2011). Implementation of equity-enhancing policy requires stakeholders occupying positions of relative authority and decision-making within the system to be attuned to gender and race disparities and to employ strategies that concretely support access to equity-enhancing resources and opportunities (Berezin et al., 2023; Javdani & Allen, 2016). Thus, efforts to tackle systemic injustice through systemic reform require attention to system actors' perceptions about girls' crime and delinquency and their attributions regarding girls' behavior.

Legal system actors—including frontline staff and workers, judges, case workers, probation offices, and correctional staff—have discretion and decision-making power and influence women's and girls' individual and collective trajectories. System actors vary in their backgrounds and ideologies on crime and punishment. Their beliefs about girls may not align with suggested best practices for working with women and girls who have experienced polyvictimization and trauma. Gaarder et al. (2004) found that system actors often described girls as "liars," "criers," and "manipulators" who often "fabricated" stories of abuse, "complained," and manipulated staff to "get their way" (p. 11). In fact, empirical studies have evidenced this deficit-based view of system-impacted girls and system actors' persistent preference to work with boys instead of girls as early as the 1990s. During a focus group conducted with juvenile justice staff, staff called girls "more difficult" and "untrusting of systems and authorities" than boys (Belknap et al., 1997). Miller (1998) found that attributions for black girls' delinquency were more pathologizing and attributed to individual failures through poor lifestyle choices. White girls' delinquency was attributed to more sympathetic factors such as peer influence or low self-esteem. Overall, these early studies underscore the need to study how system actors—across system contact points and professional roles (e.g., leadership; frontline)—understand and interpret girls' behaviors and experiences, as well as whether

and how these perceptions continue to shape the response of legal systems to girls' delinquency (Galardi & Settersten, 2018).

Social Problem Definition

This study draws from a social problem definition framework (Caplan & Nelson, 1973; Ryan, 1976; Sarason, 1981) to better conceptualize system actors' attributions and perceptions of girls' behavior. This framework argues that professionals and scholars rely on individualistic explanations of human behavior at the expense of more contextualized knowledge. Moreover, we may attribute causal significance to these person-centered influences and rely on solutions that seek to "change the person" over solutions that target changes in contexts and social structures. The social problem definition framework has been expanded and applied specifically to the social problem and women's and girls' crime and delinquency (Anderson et al., 2023; Javdani, 2013). Specifically, Javdani's (2013) conceptualization, grounded in interviews with system-impacted girls, identified three patterns of social problem definition around girls' delinquency. Individual or *person-centered* definitions locate problems directly within the individual (i.e., "broken girls"; Anderson et al., 2023). The cause of girls' delinquency is assumed to arise directly from individual girls' abnormal thoughts, feelings, and actions, necessitating responses that target changes exclusively in how girls think, feel, and act. In past research, this attributional style has been evidenced across stakeholder groups and tends to be the second most frequently endorsed (Anderson et al., 2023; Javdani, 2013). In the second classification, *person-mediated*, problems are assumed to stem from precarious, invalidating, or abusive contexts but ultimately only matter because they negatively impact girls (i.e., "broken contexts, broken girls"; Anderson et al., 2023). As such, girls mediate the maladaptive links between broken contexts and delinquent behaviors. Prior scholarship shows that this attributional style is the most typically endorsed and tends to support individual-level solutions despite acknowledgment of context (Anderson et al., 2023; Javdani, 2013). Lastly, the problem is located directly in sociopolitical structures and contexts in *ecological* attributions. While this perspective recognizes that individual behaviors, thoughts, and feelings vary and matter, it focuses on the response of social structures and institutions to these behaviors. It attends to how this response creates disparities in access and opportunity based on social power.

Critical race, adolescence developmental, and black feminist scholars recognize that these levels of analysis are interrelated and mutually affect one another (Crenshaw, 1989). However, a contemporary examination of system actors' perceptions about system-impacted girls building on prior work can offer important theoretical insights and practical implications to promote needed changes at multiple turning points of the juvenile legal system continuum. Toward this goal, this chapter qualitatively examines system actors' perceptions of girls to understand how they attribute blame and locate causes for contact with juvenile legal and child welfare

systems. We first interrogate whether these narratives suggest person-centered, person-mediated, or ecological problem definitions and expand on previous scholarship by interrogating sub-themes within these broad categories. Next, building on this analysis, we explore what system actors' perceptions about girls reveal about the gendered logic and pattern of the systems' response to girls and their families.

Methods

System actors were identified through a purposive, criterion-based, and snowball sampling method (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Participants were eligible if they occupied positions that directly or indirectly impacted girls involved in the juvenile justice system or were at risk for legal system involvement. System actors were first recruited by leveraging previously established working relationships within the local juvenile justice system, from frontline staff to executive leadership, and through national networks focused on girls' justice. Second, snowball sampling was used to invite participants who completed the interview to recommend other system actors with experience working with and on behalf of system-impacted girls. The study achieved a 59% participation rate, enrolling 33 out of 58 identified system actors. These system actors included frontline staff who were in direct youth service roles (e.g., social workers, clinicians in detention facilities, probation officers, attorneys) and those whose work indirectly impacted girls either through administration and leadership (e.g., executive-level administrators representing the child welfare and juvenile justice systems, judges), or through research and community organizing work that influences public opinion about system-impacted girls (researchers, advocates, and community organizers). Participants experience working on issues related to juvenile justice issues ranged from 1 to 30+ years. The majority reported 6–10 years of experience working on issues related to girls in the juvenile justice system ($n = 8$; 28%). Almost all had attended training regarding juvenile justice issues ($n = 29$; 94%), trauma-informed care ($n = 23$; 85%), and girls in juvenile justice ($n = 27$; 87%).

A subsample informed data for this study of interviews with system actors who identified as female ($n = 25$; 82%). All interviews were audio recorded and transcribed with participants' consent ranging from 30 to 220 min. Interviews were conducted using a semi-structured protocol covering a wide range of topics, including (i) perceptions of system-involved girls; (ii) perceptions of the system; (iii) cross-system connections; (iv); perceptions of available services and programs; and (v) recommendations for system improvements. Questions and probes were designed to understand participants' everyday work, views, understandings, and experiences surrounding system-impacted girls.

Qualitative coding was completed in NVivo 13 and analyzed using open thematic coding procedures (Gibbs, 2007, Chapter 4) grounded in a critical-constructivist grounded framework to explicitly identify themes surrounding system actors' attributions of girls' system involvement across interviews (i.e., a unit of

analysis is at the level of the theme); as well as to examine the narratives that system actors told surrounding girls' system involvement within a single interview (i.e., the unit of analysis is at the level of the individual system actor). This multi-pronged approach will allow themes to be contextualized within individual positionalities and roles of system actors, with attention to role (e.g., administrative, frontline), identity (e.g., gender, race, ethnicity), and other emergent contexts. We selected this method since thematic analysis is a flexible approach well-suited for a variety of questions, thus allowing researchers to focus on the data in several ways (e.g., reporting semantic and imbued meanings and the assumptions underpinning them) (see Braun & Clarke, 2006). This approach also allows for an inductive (bottom-up) and deductive (top-down) approach to analysis. The coding process began with an initial full read of each interview transcript and the generation of a memo by the lead author to identify (1) salient high-level themes that emerged around the stories told by system actors about girls and (2) capture paradoxes and tensions that emerged within a single interview.

In the next analytic phase, a coding scheme was generated based on the themes emerging from the data and our knowledge of the literature on system actors' perceptions and problem definitions of system-impacted girls. The coding scheme was then refined as interviews were coded and discussed between the first and second authors. Negative case analysis was conducted to identify cases that ran counter to codes to improve qualitative rigor (Hanson, 2017). Interrater reliability was assessed in an ongoing way until a consensus was reached (i.e., consensual qualitative coding; Hill et al., 2005).

Results

Analyses revealed four overarching themes, synthesized in Table 2.1 and described in the following sections. These themes aim to provide insight into how utilizing an attribution framework not only provides insight into current prevailing approaches to girl incarceration but is also an effort to frame how we can move toward ecological responses to system-impacted girls.

Theme 1: Escalation and Relabeling of Status Offenses

Status offenses—behaviors such as truancy, running away, and curfew violations—are not considered crimes but are prohibited by law due to a youth's status as a minor. While most of these behaviors are seen by scholars in the child development field as relatively appropriate and do not escalate to more serious behavior, they often lead to juvenile justice contact for youth holding certain identities (Javdani, 2013). "Incorrigibility" has typically been used when girls are deemed disobedient or uncooperative. However, this evaluation is ill-defined, subjective for girls and can

Table 2.1 Synthesis of themes generated from qualitative analysis of interviews with system actors ($N = 25$)

Theme	Description	Exemplary excerpt or quote
Escalation and relabeling of status offenses		
Escalation and relabeling of status offenses	Recognition that racialized and gendered dynamics within systems can escalate status offenses to delinquency offenses.	… mom called the police because kid wouldn't obey, kid did something she wasn't happy with and then when the police show up, a crime hasn't been committed yet because all it is is a status offense if you won't go to bed or you won't put away the iPad … but then the child mouths off to the police the child won't give the device to the police, now it's obstructing governmental administration. Now it's a crime or the kid spits at the police officer while he's, and now it's attempted assault (JL)
		… some of it is the lack of resources, I can't tell you how many moms I meet who are doing it on their own and are breaking their backs to, to provide for their families, but as a result they're not available to supervise their children, they're not available to monitor them and make sure they're involved in pro-social activities and it's such a catch-22, like, she is a good parent and that she's trying to provide a better life for her child but at the expense of supervising and having a relationship with her child (BG)
		it's clearly a family offense and there's not a grave injury; sometimes the judge will convert the case to a PINS whether the parent agrees or not because he feels like this is PINS behavior; This is status offense behavior, they need to learn to get along better and the parent needs to learn to become a better parent, this is not something that needs to go through the justice system (BG)

(Dis)connection as a coping mechanism

The ways in which young people had to disconnect—especially from family and school contexts—as a means of coping, adapting, and surviving. Yet, these types of behaviors are not necessarily recognized as an adaptive survival technique	The system often identifies the family as a site of risk for girls. However, interventions often still focus on girls or, through surveillance and monitoring, turn families against youth	Cause a lot of kids come from broken homes, you know their mom or dad are on drugs or, putting their husband or boyfriends before their kids, um … some parents just work a lot, some parents are just hard-working parents and they don't, you know, to be able to take care of their kids that's what they have to do, then they're not home a lot, you know kids start ripping in running (AW)
		Participant:… family offenses are more typically girls' though they do tend to commit more crimes in and around the home.
		Interviewer: What sorts of crimes?
		Participant: Assaults on family members and thefts of family members, yup those are the more typical ones and the girls are more likely to have a history of running away from home (JL)
		I feel like there are a lot of girls that get arrested for things that happen within their family and now I'm thinking particularly of girls who are in placement currently, fight with mom that escalated to someone throwing something or pushing someone and then they fell against the wall and were injured or one girl couldn't stop fighting with her sister (GB)
	Schools, a necessary context for youth development, is often a site of risk for girls	If you're interacting with an, a police officer and um, start mouthing off and becoming assaultive and flailing your arms and, you know um, if, if the school safety agent is, like, you know, Knock it off and interacts and then just the, the actual interaction I feel like doesn't go well (QE)
		Participant:… where it's like you couldn't go to school and perform because you weren't healthy, you couldn't go to school and perform because you weren't…fed, you know, and it's like you didn't get enough sleep or you were at grandma's house this night and your auntie's, you know, house that night, this is why I didn't come with my books, not because I'm, you know, I dont-
		Interviewer: Lazy or I don't care
		Participant: Yeah (YI)

(continued)

Table 2.1 (continued)

Theme	Description	Exemplary excerpt or quote
Poverty creating informal economies that endanger girls		
There are significant structural and historical etiologies of justice involvement. In particular, poverty can create informal economies that endanger girls	While the reasons for girls' drug-related offenses are often qualitatively different than other groups, these factors are not considered during arrests	I've seen some fairly serious drug use among girls where even the marijuana use has risen to a level where clearly it's self-medicating and it's interfering with daily functioning whereas for a lot of boys that's not necessarily the case, they might smoke marijuana the way they might smoke cigarettes and it doesn't have a big impact on their life but for some of the girls there's definitely more than psychological aspect to their use that they are definitely self-medicating emotions and feelings and some of them are insightful (JL)
		… her boyfriend was much much older, um, you know, t had met like he was another runaway homeless youth as well and like they were using drugs pretty heavily and one day he was just like, Well, like, what are you going to do to contribute to the drugs that we're doing, you know what I mean, so then it just kind of like snowballed from there so she got involved with that and so she was being exploited by him (TK)
	Sexual trafficking of girls puts girls at risk for further legal involvement	… the police went in to execute a search warrant on a drug-related crime and found these girls in the attic with a mattress and drugs, um, some of them partially unclothed, so they were arrested for drug-related crimes and trespass but, obviously, the red flags for, you know, some type of sexual exploitation were there … the kids were arrested for burglary and trespass and, and we're finding out later on that these issues present (FY)
		… you can charge more for sex than you can for drugs and also you can use the same girl for a while, you know, whereas with drugs you sell it once and it's gone so yeah … so that seems pretty common, is the gangs but also I think too like … probably just like growing up in the similar kind of dysfunctional situations and needing money. They're just on the opposite end of it, so like trying to get out of poverty (DR)
		I've seen happen is that judges lock girls up for their own protection which I like ideologically have a lot of problems with, um, 'cause that's not a good solution to trafficking at all. A lot of girls say that whatever their sentence is, is harsher than what they deserve (TK)

Systems underequipped to respond to girls

(Black) teen motherhood is penalized and stigmatized despite the lack of responsive resources	… like pimps will see it as their right to not use protection with the girls that work for them even if the girls are expected to use protection obviously with like dates and other men, but like that's like their right, you know, and it's almost like another way of having control over another person, if you have a child with them and you're like constantly threatening, like, I'm going to take your child away (TK)	
	Participant: So it's this unconstitutional thing that happens to child welfare … if you're a young parent in child welfare, they can open a case against you as a parent and sometimes it's the same judge who is over both cases, who's supposed to have your best interest in mind and your child's best interests *Interviewer:* Open a case against, so if I'm a teenager and I'm pregnant … and the judge has deemed me responsible or whatever, then the judge will open a case against me? *Participant:* DCF will file a case against you, um, alleging that you either abused, abandoned, neglected your child, and they will start the case to put you on service plan to, uh, that will eventually lead, if you don't comply, to termination of your parental rights (CX)	
Girls often face a catch-22 when faced with being unhoused/unstable housing	*Participant:* I've talked to girls who were literally like, Yo my life is set, and then my mom lost her job and we had to move in with my aunt, and my aunt and m-, her boyfriend are like, you know, and he does this, right, and like what am I supposed to say 'cause we're, where me, my mom, my little brother gonna go, like, that, that, that, like so you were fine, and then one thing happened and now you're not, and like, I'm attempting to find you a place that's safe but like, the housing options for young people, I like, I can name them by hand … like, that's it, this is where you have *Interviewer:* and are those places safe? *Participant:* No, they're not all safe (LL)	
	Most of my girl's do have like some kind of placement or something in place where like there are mechanisms in place like if they have a crisis in the middle of the night, whereas the older girls may be like homeless, living in a shelter they just don't have somebody to call and a lot of times, like, their relationships with family are that much more strained once they're older (TK)	

vary based on the system actors' blame attributions (Burson et al., 2019).One participant noted a common and repetitive theme through her years of service in law enforcement being used to address behaviors that are often developmentally appropriate and should not require police intervention:… mom called the police because kid wouldn't obey, kid did something she wasn't happy with and then when the police show up, a crime hasn't been committed yet because all it is a status offense if you won't go to bed, or you won't put away the iPad … (JL ROSES Stakeholder).The respondent continues to elaborate on how a familial disagreement can escalate to a criminal offense by saying:… but then the child mouths off to the police. The child won't give the device to the police, now it's obstructing governmental administration. Now it's a crime or the kid spits at the police officer while he's, and now it's attempted assault (JL).

At first glance, while many would question why police involvement was necessary, they may also take a person-centered perspective to justify the outcome. One could argue that the child was oppositional and, while under her parent's roof, was meant to follow an established schedule. A child's role is to comply, particularly with authorities, and she "stepped out of line" and escalated the situation by spitting at a police officer. From a person-mediated perspective, an individual may still view the child as unruly but may locate their reasoning in an ineffective parent dynamic and disruptive elements in the home. From both perspectives, this girl's actions are ultimately identified as the problem, whether in isolation (person-centered) or because of her problematic home environment (person-mediated).

The participant then notes that in carrying out the system's expectations of seeking support for their child, parents may inadvertently enter situations where girls experience relational escalation and relabeling status offenses to more serious offenses. What previously could have been seen as developmentally appropriate push-back from a young girl became "incorrigibility" and escalated to obstruction or assault. A potentially more effective response would be to support parents and children to communicate about electronic usage and provide nonpolice resources for remediation between mother and child more effectively.

This common story among respondents highlighted a lack of accessible resources for parents and moved toward an ecological view of why interactions with girls are often escalated. Another youth worker expressed an emphatic response to the double-bind that families often experience in feeling underequipped to support their child, overwhelmed by competing responsibilities, and lacking readily accessible resources.… some of it is the lack of resources, I can't tell you how many moms I meet who are doing it on their own and are breaking their backs to, to provide for their families, but as a result, they're not available to supervise their children, they're not available to monitor them and make sure they're involved in pro-social activities, and it's such a catch-22, like, she is a good parent and that she's trying to provide a better life for her child but at the expense of supervising and having a relationship with her child (BG ROSES Stakeholder).

Many parents turn to systems for support "and don't realize that the systems might not be helpful and have a good impact" (participant). Parents, who fear more severe legal contact, may react in a frustrated state and turn to systems in the hope that it

will "teach [their] child a lesson" (participant) to be more appreciative. However, responses utilized by legal actors often betray their over-reliance on person-centered and person-mediated conclusions on how to de-escalate these types of conflict effectively. While the system response may initially align with the parent's request to "sit [her] in detention for a few weeks and re-, realize how good she has it at my house," legal stakeholders may escalate charges based on personal biases:… if it's clearly a family offense and there's not a grave injury, sometimes the judge will convert the case to a [status offense] whether the parent agrees or not because he feels like … they need to learn to get along better, and the parent needs to learn to become a better parent this is not something that needs to go through the justice system (BG).

While the letter of the law is believed to be clear and impartial, in practice, judges have leeway on the definition of "out of control" and of "incorrigible," which could be biased on racial and gendered scripts of acceptable behavior. This net widening and inconsistent application of justice not only identifies the child as a person in need of supervision but can be viewed as coercive as the system may now monitor the parent for future "failings" and being an ineffective parent. This person-mediated view leading to consequences—not only for the child but for the family unit—continues to emerge in proceeding themes.

Theme 2: (Dis)connection as a Coping Mechanism

This category exemplifies the myriad ways young people had to disconnect—especially from family and school contexts—to cope and survive. Nevertheless, these behaviors (e.g., disconnecting by not participating in the classroom in traditional ways, going to your room to avoid an argument in a home with significant family conflict) are not recognized as an adaptive survival technique based on stakeholder reports. Instead, a girl's disconnection is often viewed as disengaged at best and disrespectful at worst by people and the institutions they represent. This paradox is a common gendered and racialized "bind" that girls experience and are often penalized because of it.

The "Dysfunctional Family": (Disengaging from) Family as Risk

While there has been a shift in both literature and practice from solely pathologizing youth, system actors often adopted a person-mediated stance as they shifted their gaze to the "dysfunctional family" as the source of "broken girls." Many respondents acknowledged that girls often come from homes that experience high conflict, difficult parent–child relations, and (intergenerational) trauma. The precipitating cause for their system involvement is likely relation/family centered.… Cause a lot of kids come from broken homes, you know their mom or dad are on drugs or, putting their husband or boyfriends before their kids, um … some parents just work a

lot, some parents are just hard-working parents and they don't, you know, to be able to take care of their kids that's what they have to do, then they're not home a lot, you know kids start ripping in running (AW ROSES Stakeholder).

In this example, this frontline system actor recognized adult behaviors (such as parental substance use) and systemic constraints (such as working long hours for survival) as reasons why youth disengage from families. However, as explored in the previous section, this disengagement can often lead to further system involvement through status offenses such as running away.Participant: … family offenses are more typically girls' though they do tend to commit more crimes in and around the home.Interviewer: What sorts of crimes?Participant: Assaults on family members and thefts of family members, yup those are the more typical and the girls are more likely to have a history of running away from home (JL).

After the 1974 Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act (JJDPA), the juvenile legal system made significant changes in youth incarceration, but disparities in status offenses remain (Chesney-Lind, 1989). The JJDPA was implemented to divert and deinstitutionalize youth charged with noncriminal offenses. However, youth disengagement from their family being charged as status offenses still disproportionately impacts girls of color. Running away or "taking a break from home" (Rose et al., 2023) is a common response to family conflict for girls, but this frequently drives them further into the system. In 2009, up to 55% of arrests for running away were made for girls, potentially reflecting a common juvenile justice belief that arrest and incarceration are for the girl's protection. However, one respondent noted that despite the prevailing person-centered view on girls' aggression (an alternative to leaving home), this view neglects to recognize that girls are frequently also the victims of violence within the home:I feel like there are a lot of girls that get arrested for things that happen within their family and now I'm thinking particularly of girls who are in [confinement] currently, fight with mom that escalated to someone throwing something or pushing someone and then they fell against the wall and were injured or one girl couldn't stop fighting with her sister (GB).

In a person-centered view of this situation, one would assume that the girl has violent tendencies that instigated physical violence. A person-mediated perspective would suggest that the dysfunctional family context made this girl fragile, emotionally dysregulated, and ineffective at decision-making. The commonality of system-impacted girls experiencing violence in our data mirrors national statistics on girls' experience of domestic violence. Researchers found that from 1996 to 2005, girls' arrests for assaults increased more or decreased less than boys' arrests. Within those numbers, girls' arrests for simple assaults increased by 24%, a shocking number when compared to a *decrease* of 4.1% for boys (Zahn et al., 2009). However, no respondents identified the ecological factors that may contribute to girls' experience of violence within the home. Researchers have posited that the rise in girls' arrests may also be due to negative and sensationalized portrayals of gang-affiliated girls and the shifts in laws and practices around domestic violence. Zahn et al. (2009) noted that changes in laws pushed for mandatory arrest policies in cases of domestic

violence, which led to increased arrests for girls rather than mediation through the child protective system. Another complication is the presence of other children in the home, which makes law enforcement more likely to remove the child rather than the adult caretaker. Considering this information and a trauma-informed relational lens, girls' responses of disengaging from their family and running away as a coping and survival mechanism makes sense; however, this reality is often overlooked, and adaptive survival is pathologized and punished (Strom et al., 2014).

Schools as Sites of Risk

Schools have long been identified as necessary sites of psychological and professional development for children and youth, but critical race scholars have noted that educational settings are sites of risk and unfulfilled promises for girls (Blake et al., 2011). While Black girls make up less than 10% of K–12 students, they are overrepresented in exclusionary school discipline statistics. The most recent data from the Office of Civil Rights Data Collection project (from the 2017–2018 school year) clearly show that when we disaggregated by gender and race, we see that Black girls have the highest subgroup proportion of all indicators of school pushout, with particularly pronounced and high levels of referrals to law enforcement, use of mechanical or physical restraints, and transfers to other schools for disciplinary reasons (United States Department of Education, 2020).With larger class sizes and ever-decreasing resources, the perception of an increased need for order in urban schools created notorious school reform policies, with "zero tolerance" being the most infamous (American Psychological Association [APA], 2008). While zero-tolerance policies were initially introduced to curb drug and weapon possession (with schools threatened with loss of funding if sanctions were not brought against the offending student), they increasingly policed behaviors typically handled by parents and educators (Skiba & Peterson, 1999). However, there has been significant criticism against such policies due to the methods of enforcement, the disproportionate consequences for racial/ethnic minority and gender-diverse youth, and unclear/contradictory policies, leaving students (and sometimes teachers) as the victims of muddy bureaucracy. One youth worker expressed her frustration at the prevailing educational beliefs around system-impacted girls that are deficit-focused and alienating: "[Adults believe] ... that they don't want to succeed, that they're not env-, ambitious, that they're not motivated, that they're ghetto, that they're loud ... you know, that they're hood" (YI ROSES Stakeholder). While not as severe as their black counterparts, disciplinary and expulsion rates for Latine girls also outpace that of their white peers. Across the last decade, trends suggest that black girls are suspended at six times the rate of White girls and represent one-third of all female school-based arrests, despite comprising 16% of the female student population (Epstein et al., 2017; Morris & Perry, 2016). Black girls are also twice as likely to drop out of school as White girls and experience more mechanical and physical restraint and transfers to other schools (United States Department of Education, 2020).One youth worker noted how quickly interactions within schools can escalate:… if you're

interacting with an, a police officer and um, start mouthing off and becoming assaultive and flailing your arms and, you know um, if, if the school safety agent is, like, you know, knock it off and interacts and then just the, the actual interaction I feel like doesn't go well (QE ROSES Stakeholder).

A person-centered approach would note that after the initial warning of "knock it off," girls should recognize it as a warning to comply and stop "mouthing off" to avoid school discipline. The respondent goes on to express how girls in this situation experience an escalation from status offenses to criminal offenses due to perceived noncompliance with school regulations. However, examining this interaction from an ecological lens, one may ask, is the girl expressing a trauma response to feeling unsafe in her school or home environment? How prepared are school staff to respond effectively, and what are the procedures and noncarceral resources available on-site to support girls? While respondents did not raise these questions frequently, some stakeholders questioned the lack of responsive practices within academic contexts.Many interventions in education have examined how to improve engagement, enrichment, and ultimately school belonging to address the school-to-prison pipeline; however, these efforts have not ameliorated the disparities in school pushout (Berezin et al., 2023). School belonging, defined as "the extent to which students feel personally accepted, respected, included, and valued by others within the school social environment" (Goodenow, 1993, p. 80), is strongly associated with school achievement, school engagement, and high school completion (Furrer & Skinner, 2003), particularly among low-income students (Battistich et al., 1995). Nevertheless, while girls of color consistently report lower levels of school belonging (Booker, 2006), attributions for low belonging are typically youth-centered and deficit-focused. From an ecological perspective, looking at the systemic reasons girls of color experience less belonging and positive school engagement is necessary.Participant: … where it's like you couldn't go to school and perform because you weren't healthy, you couldn't go to school and perform because you weren't ... fed, you know, and it's like you didn't get enough sleep or you were at grandma's house this night and your auntie's, you know, house that night, This is why I didn't come with my books, not because I'm, you know, I don't-Interviewer: Lazy or I don't careParticipant: Yeah (YI).

From this example, we noted how structural factors change and impact how girls engage in educational contexts. However, educators promote person-centered and person-mediated solutions to building girls' school engagement. While some approaches toward re-engagement and enrichment can somewhat support girls remaining connected to schools, basic needs—such as safety and food—cannot be ignored if girls are expected to succeed in their academic contexts. Other respondents took ecological stances when they noted the lack of resources provided by underfunded schools for assessing youth for co-occurring mental health and learning difficulties, which could further impact how girls succeed socially and academically. One worker noted the systemic disinvestment of schools (decreased intellectual/emotional testing, decreased enrichment, multiple schools in one

building) and the increased expectation placed on youth to meet expectations without support (OB).

Theme 3: Poverty Creating Informal Economies That Endanger Girls

While many of the attributions focused on the micro and macro forces present in girls' lives, significant responses explicitly identified the structural and historical etiologies of justice involvement. Respondents' answers pointed to a theme of poverty creating informal economies that endanger girls, and attributions within this theme vary. However, although survival behaviors were acknowledged and frequently discussed by system actors in relation to girls' arrest, ecological solutions that de-criminalized these behaviors and focused on addressing housing and economic precarity directly were rare.

Drug-Related Offenses

Research has shown that girls in the juvenile justice system have high rates of co-occurring trauma, childhood abuse, and substance use (Belenko & Dembo, 2003; Donovan & Jessor, 1985; Teplin et al., 2005). One youth worker described her work with a young woman who experienced significant victimization and substance use, stating: "she was nine and, like, now she's fourteen and she has track marks all up and down her arms." Another respondent noted how substance use was a common means to cope with experiences of violence and neglect:I've seen some fairly serious drug use among girls where even the marijuana use has risen to a level where clearly it's self-medicating and it's interfering with daily functioning whereas for a lot of boys that's not necessarily the case, they might smoke marijuana the way they might smoke cigarettes and it doesn't have a big impact on their life but for some of the girls there's definitely more than psychological aspect to their use that they are definitely self-medicating emotions and feelings and some of them are insightful (JL).

While an emphatic and trauma-informed response to substance use as a coping mechanism may be more effective, policies from the "war on drugs" era have created harsh and inflexible rulings for individuals struggling with substance use. This is important to note, as research into the contexts of women's and girls' substance use qualitatively differs from that of men and boys. As expressed in the previous anecdote, girls often use substances to cope with trauma. A person-centered response would blame a substance use-related arrest solely on girls and attribute their use to "lack of control" and "lack of motivation" or poor decision-making around selecting coping skills. A frequent person-mediated attribution that arose for girls is involvement in substance use by association with higher-level male dealers or older romantic partners, an attribution supported by literature (Javdani et al., 2011).… her boyfriend was much older, um, you know, T [the youth] had met like he was another runaway homeless youth as well and like they were using drugs pretty heavily and

one day he was just like, Well, like, what are you going to do to contribute to the drugs that we're doing, you know what I mean, so then it just kind of like snowballed from there so she got involved with that and so she was being exploited by him (TK). This respondent shared an example of a young woman who connected with another system-impacted youth, a slightly older boy, who was utilizing substances to cope with past trauma and connect with her partner. The youth worker then shares how the young woman became involved in selling drugs for her partner, and exploitative sex work to support them both. A stakeholder reflecting on this situation from a person-mediated lens may empathize with the young woman's difficult circumstances. However, the ultimate blame would be placed on the girl for continuing the relationship or utilizing substances. An ecological response would entail examining the support structures (e.g., housing and counseling) readily available to both youth and working on building connections while reducing their substance use. While stakeholders in the study itself often held ecological beliefs/understanding of how girls behave, they are frequently surrounded and bound (in the flexibility of their response to girls) by person-centered beliefs and practices targeting girls. The respondent went on to explain that substance use-related arrests for youth, and girls, are challenging to navigate for both youth and stakeholders. She provides an example of an arrest by law enforcement where initial police approaches to multiple status offenses obscured the police's ability to support young people effectively:

> … the police went in to execute a search warrant on a drug-related crime and found these girls in the attic with a mattress and drugs, um, some of them partially unclothed, so they were arrested for drug-related crimes and trespass but, obviously, the red flags for, you know, some type of sexual exploitation were there … the kids were arrested for burglary and trespass and, and we're finding out later on that these issues present (FY ROSES Stakeholder).

While a person-centered approach to addressing the situation was utilized by law enforcement (arresting youth for trespassing and drug use) and, one could argue that *eventually*, the youth's experience of sexual exploitation was discovered, this approach is deeply flawed. Previous examples in this chapter have illustrated that arrests beget arrest, and system contact in and of itself is traumatizing. An ecological and trauma-informed approach to young women and girls at the intersection of substance use and other status offenses should include supportive social services and a comprehensive needs assessment.

Child Sexual Exploitation and Trafficking (CSEC)

As noted above, experiences of precarity can create complex, intertwined risks that uniquely affect girls. No system actor spoke about child and youth sexual trafficking from a person-centered lens and typically identified the intertwined structures that continue to propagate the (sexual) trauma-to-prison pipeline. One youth worker shared how "girls … they're more vulnerable and stuff like that, and half the time they're runaways, um, you know and that's when these people kind of prey on them"

(VA ROSES Stakeholder). This individual noted that girls who experience child sexual trafficking already experience multiple vulnerabilities and are subsequently unconnected from supportive social networks. Other youth workers identified poverty and the informal substance economy that put girls at particular risk:… you can charge more for sex than you can for drugs and also you can use the same girl for a while, you know, whereas with drugs you sell it once and it's gone so yeah ... so that seems pretty common, is the gangs but also I think too like ... probably just like growing up in the similar kind of dysfunctional situations and needing money. They're just on the opposite end of it, so like trying to get out of poverty (DR ROSES Stakeholder).

This respondent highlighted how girls are treated more akin to property in these informal economies and are stripped of their agency by pimps and gangs. However, she also notes that girls may have grown up in similar situations (sexual exploitation by an older male relative) and have been isolated and abused early on in their development. This anecdote is noted by other participants who have named their fathers, uncles, older male cousins, and many girls as their first exploiters. Another stakeholder shared an experience where a narcotics officer arrested a young woman who had been sexually trafficked but "didn't see the signs." She expressed that further information about the girl's experience with sex trafficking was only discovered later due to the inexperience of the law enforcement she had contact with. This lack of understanding of best practices surrounding CSEC extends past frontline staff such as law enforcement. This respondent went on to share:I've seen happen is that judges lock girls up for their own protection which I like ideologically have a lot of problems with, um, 'cause that's not a good solution to trafficking at all. A lot of girls say that whatever their sentence is, is harsher than what they deserve (TK).
This belief of "locking girls up for their own good" is a person-mediated response that further traumatizes girls. While the judge recognizes that the girl has been exploited, his response implicitly tells the girl that she has done something wrong. The youth worker's action to share the directly expressed needs of girls that "the punishment is harsher than what they deserve" (participant quoting a youth) indicates that, from an ecological lens, this response is ineffective.

While not shown here through quotes, an adjacent dynamic was the person-centered use of language when speaking about girls who have experienced sexual trafficking. Historically, juveniles involved in commercial sexual activity were referred to as child prostitutes or underage sex workers, but there is increasing discourse about the term "prostitute" when referring to children. Respondents stated that it is still frequently used within the juvenile justice system, and girls are still charged with that crime. The term "prostitute," when used for children, is inherently person-centered/mediated, adultifying, and overlooks the inherent coercion youth experience in their attempts to survive (poverty, hunger, homelessness) (Marshall et al., 2021; Epstein et al., 2017). While a few respondents used the term (to describe the charge and not the girls in their care), those who did often expressed the need for a shift in language and the impact the term has on girls themselves. This section exemplified that even when a gendered social context is widely acknowledged, girls remain the target of change (and legal blame).

Theme 4: Systems Underequipped to Respond to Girls

While child welfare and juvenile justice systems posit that they are tasked with the responsibility of protecting and rehabilitating youth, girls have often stated that they are over-monitored and underserved by these systems. Rose et al. (2023) found that "despite children occupying a unique position in our society, the childhoods of girls of color are regularly interrupted due to state-sanctioned violence and neglect justified by flawed developmental and criminogenic theories of behavior." Girls of color simultaneously experience infantilization, adultification, and sexualization at the hands of systems. We examine two of the many ways respondents share how systems are underequipped and unwilling to respond to the needs of girls. The focus on the system response by most stakeholders in the study was, in and of itself, an ecological lens, yet system actors identified critical gaps in these systems.

Motherhood

Expected scripts of motherhood have historically centered images of the white, middle-class, cis-gendered women at the detriment of those holding other identities trying to fit into this one-sided portrayal of motherhood. Black motherhood has been particularly maligned with stereotypes, such as having "multiple baby daddies" or "welfare queen," while simultaneously having to engage as much as white-cis-het mothers to protect their children. Girls of color who have experienced pregnancy while sexually trafficked face stigma, isolation, and legal punishment for experiencing trauma.… like pimps will see it as their right to not use protection with the girls that work for them even if the girls are expected to use protection obviously with like dates and other men, but like that's like their right, you know, and it's almost like another way of having control over another person, if you have a child with them and you're like constantly threatening, like, I'm going to take your child away (TK).

A person-centered response to these girls would blame them for poor decision-making and not remaining in the home or returning home. A person-mediated approach would recognize the potential coercion these girls have experienced or threats of violence (both from their exploiters and potentially family) but would ultimately place the blame for not leaving the situation on the girls themselves. However, an ecological response would ask: what are the factors propagating the sexual exploitation of girls?

Girls who are mothers also experience a catch-22 of being viewed as both perpetrators (due to the perception of being unfit mothers) and as victims that must be forced to engage in services and protected "for their own good."

> Participant: So it's this unconstitutional thing that happens to child welfare … if you're a young parent in child welfare, they can open a case against you as a parent and sometimes it's the same judge who is over both cases, who's supposed to have your best interest in mind and your child's best interests.

Interviewer: Open a case against, so if I'm a teenager and I'm pregnant … and the judge has deemed me responsible or whatever, then the judge will open a case against me?

Participant: [child services] will file a case against you alleging that you either abused, abandoned, neglected your child, and they will put you on service plan that will eventually lead, if you don't comply, to termination of your parental rights (CX ROSES Stakeholder).

This ecological response recognizes the coercion for system-impacted girls and continues to funnel them deeper into the legal system. However, a further bind experienced by girls is that the juvenile legal system is often ill-equipped to meet the needs of girls who are mothers due to poor programming and facilities not structured to support the development of children and the continued growth/enrichment of young mothers. When girls are mandated to programs, some sites are unable or unwilling to offer care for their children, which prevents girls from engaging with services that do not have parent-specific programming. The previous stakeholder also shared how foster families often overlook young mothers and the ever-present risk of children being separated from their mothers due to the perception that system-impacted girls are "difficult" to deal with.

Being Unhoused and Unstable Housing

Many large cities are currently experiencing high-income disparities and housing crises that have placed many families in a place of precarity and put youth at risk. One respondent shared the story of a young woman who experienced sudden housing instability:

Participant: I've talked to girls who were literally like, Yo my life is set, and then my mom lost her job and we had to move in with my aunt, and my aunt and m-, her boyfriend are like, you know, and he does this, right, and like what am I supposed to say 'cause we're, where me, my mom, my little brother gonna go, like, so you were fine, and then one thing happened and now you're not, and like, I'm attempting to find you a place that's safe but like, the housing options for young people, I like, I can name them by hand … like, that's it, this is where you have

Interviewer: and are those places safe?

Participant: No, they're not all safe (LL ROSES Stakeholder).

This young woman faced the burden of choosing between her safety and protecting her family due to limited housing options. Girls sublimating their needs to maintain familial integrity and safety is a common theme for many parentified and adultified system-impacted girls. Many girls worry about their younger siblings' safety and continued education and don't want to "rock the boat" even if they are experiencing abuse. A person-mediated response to girls and their families in this situation would be to blame the mother for failing to maintain secure housing, not obtaining governmental housing support, or not seeking shelter to prevent the abuse. However, these options have complex structural barriers that do not address the urgency of many families experiencing eviction and other housing pushout. Examining this anecdote from an ecological lens would highlight how obtaining vouchers for housing is

arduous, and many landlords are hesitant to accept them due to stigma. Many individuals who have experienced the shelter system often express how dehumanizing the experience can be, and finding shelters for larger families near youths' schools and parents' work is difficult.

The same youth worker goes on to share a common sentiment among youth in foster care and other common support programs: "I'd rather live on the street … this is the kind of system we've built … I'd rather exchange sex for money, food, and a place to stay than you mention the word foster care" (UY ROSES Stakeholder). Many young people share how, even if they opt to use existing resources, they are underequipped to support the intertwined needs of girls.

Additionally, systems often fall short in supporting girls over 18 despite developmental psychologists' recognition that individuals at this age have barely entered emerging adulthood and are still experiencing significant neurological, emotional, and social development. Emerging adulthood can be a stressful time of transition. However, the perception of "what is successful" completion of those developmental milestones is often based on white, middle-class populations who have experienced more stable childhoods and adolescence. Girls of color who have experienced familial dysfunction may not have the skills and support network to engage with these milestones but are often not provided with substantial aftercare and wraparound services when they turn 18:… most of my girls do have like some kind of placement or something in place where like there are mechanisms in place like if they have a crisis in the middle of the night, whereas the older girls may be like homeless, living in a shelter they just don't have somebody to call and a lot of times, like, their relationships with family are that much more strained once they're older (TK).

This anecdote is an example of the lived experiences of girls who lack supportive structures to increase their chances of thriving and decrease recidivism. A person-mediated response may critique the girl in the anecdote for the lack of stability, questioning why she was shuffled from group home to group home or why she signed herself out of foster care. Additionally, while efforts to increase the diversity within the juvenile justice system may scaffold staff's ability to build supportive relationships with girls, women and other staff within the juvenile justice system need to be supported as well. One youth worker spoke about their experience of high caseloads, strained human resources, and significant vicarious trauma. She expressed: "I had like 120 kids on my caseload, I felt like I was being set up to fail." With an incredibly high caseload, frontline youth workers must dedicate a high amount of physical and emotional resources toward the youth in their care at the risk of guilt, helplessness, and burnout.

Conclusion: Gender (Mostly) Matters—Fundamental Change Requires Fundamental Shifts

Throughout this chapter, we have presented an attributional framework to understand the girls' contact and trajectory through the justice system as well as examined how stakeholders navigate their own and prevailing workforce narratives around girls. While these perspectives can contribute to our understanding of system-impacted girls' behavior, overreliance on person-centered and person-mediated frameworks can promote deficit-based and narrow views on the cognitions, feelings, and actions of youth without situating them within their context.

The insights and lived experiences of both system-impacted girls and wom(y)n youth workers highlight that in both responding to girls and making change, gender does matter … to an extent. We see that gender does matter as we reconceptualize how to respond to system-impacted girls effectively. However, sustainable change also requires shifting from simply increasing diversity in the juvenile justice workforce to changes in underlying ideologies and practices.

Particularly as there have been increased calls to utilize diversity, equity, and inclusion to ameliorate the gendered bias existing in the juvenile justice system, structural change must be intersectional and cognizant of race, class, ability, and orientation. We highlight the importance of shifting the burden of change *from* individuals *toward* system processes and policies. One policy suggestion aligns with the current call-to-action to increase the consistency and accessibility of gender-responsive and trauma-informed processes (such as trauma screenings, non-carceral treatment plans and services, consistent wraparound care, etc.) throughout settings along with policies that reduce youth worker caseloads and can mitigate the traumatic experience of the juvenile legal system. Multiple respondents also noted that while gender and race are sometimes considered by frontline care staff during interactions with girls, there is still a need for standardized training. Though not reviewed here, respondents noted that stakeholders could become more aware of these shortcomings through training and reflective practices. One respondent described her experience of an older, white male judge bucking expectations by running a trauma-informed courtroom (i.e., not using the term "prostitute" to refer to girls experiencing sexual exploitation). The typical belief is that younger individuals with shared identities with girls will respond in ways that align with gender and trauma-responsive tenants. However, we must not discount the impact of system-wide training. Lastly, efforts must be made to reduce disproportionate minority contact. One youth worker contrasted her experience with community policing and noted there was more community surveillance by law enforcement in specific neighborhoods, making youth more likely to be arrested for behaviors that would not have been noticed in more affluent neighborhoods. This stakeholder's lived experience aligns with current literature, which states that being more exposed to law enforcement increases a girl's likelihood of becoming system involved, despite no difference in behavior.

This study is not without limitations that should be considered for future research. First, this study consisted solely of respondents who identified themselves as women. While this provides a unique look into the attributions of key stakeholders in this field (a high proportion of certain stakeholder fields are comprised of women, such as social workers), other fields are more proportionate (judges) or overwhelmingly male-identified (law enforcement). Even less research has been conducted to examine the attributions of individuals who identify outside of this binary. Further studies examining stakeholder attributions regardless of gender could provide a more complex picture of current attribution trends. Another limitation is that this was a small sample of stakeholders compared to the juvenile justice and child welfare workforce in the region where the study was conducted. This limited our ability to examine the impact of intersectional identities on attributions comprehensively. Lastly, as participation was voluntary and snowball sampling was used, some self-selection could have occurred.

Underlying all these themes was the adultification, parentification, and silencing of system-impacted girls, and we witnessed the impact of these dynamics on the psychosocial and legal trajectories of girls. Throughout this chapter, we emphasized how girls, especially girls of color, adapt and thrive despite their circumstances but are criminalized for that survival. From net widening to substance use to school pushout to sex trafficking, participants in our studies (womyn stakeholders) have repeatedly shared examples of how they understand the forces contributing to girls' system involvement. These anecdotes highlight a critical need to move from language and beliefs that center blame on girls (i.e., some implicit psychological and moral failing) to using more nuanced, ecological lenses to build both our empathy for system-impacted girls and co-construct effective solutions to girl's incarceration with girls. As we began this chapter with a quote, we end with a recommendation for women and girls on both sides of the juvenile legal system: to center the voices of those most impacted by this reform (girls) as we continue to promote systemic gender-responsive policies and intervention.I think to just create the change that we want to see or at least be ... we have to be involved in like, national discussions around research and policy and it's like, one of the things that I feel like is wrong with, especially with research is that there are so few people are, you know, have the lived experience of being a survivor (YI).

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Chapter 3
Female Sexual Aggression on Campus: Misperceptions and Implications for Intervention

Lucie Holmgreen and Debra L. Oswald

Sexual victimization is associated with myriad negative psychosocial consequences (e.g., depression, posttraumatic stress disorder, and academic impairment; Banyard et al., 2020; Dworkin et al., 2017) and is common on college campuses. By their fourth year of college, at least 22% of United States college students have experienced sexual assault, with 10% experiencing rape (Cantor et al., 2020). Between 1.3% and 28% of college students report engaging in sexual aggression (e.g., Campbell et al., 2021; Krishnakumar et al., 2018). Researchers lament the static rates of college sexual aggression (e.g., Foubert et al., 2007) despite decades-long efforts at reduction (e.g., Anderson & Whiston, 2005). Campus intervention efforts to date have resulted in little-to-no meaningful decrease in perpetration (e.g., Anderson & Whiston, 2005). As prevention efforts emerge in large part from an understanding of perpetrators, female perpetration needs far greater attention.

Researchers and college personnel alike should be aware that harmful sexual aggression can be perpetrated by women. Furthermore, much of the aggression in college-aged dating relationships is bidirectional (Straus, 2008), with many men who report engaging in aggressive behaviors also having been victimized by an intimate partner (Russell & Oswald, 2002). A discussion of female-perpetrated college sexual aggression does not minimize the seriousness of the problem of sexual aggression perpetrated by men against women. In fact, it is important to highlight that many of the same belief structures that enable the sexual victimization of women may also facilitate and obscure sexual victimization *by* women. As Stemple and Meyer (2014) assert, the feminist principles of "equity, inclusion, and

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intersectional approaches; the importance of understanding power relations; and the imperative to question gender assumptions" (p. e19) necessarily underlie investigations of female-perpetrated sexual aggression. Additionally, useful theories of sexual aggression must be able to account for acts perpetrated by women as well as by men, and current theories are decidedly mixed in their ability to do so (Turchik et al., 2016).

This chapter reviews the growing literature on sexual aggression perpetrated by college women and considers the life experiences as well as the attitudinal and behavioral traits of women who engage in sexually aggressive acts. It then explores public perceptions of such women and the stereotypes and assumptions that undergird them. Finally, it considers the implications of such perceptions on college campuses and provides recommendations for institutions of higher education.

Definitional and Methodological Issues

Determining the scope of college sexual aggression has proven complicated, resulting in widely varying estimates, due largely to definitional and methodological differences across studies. The U.S. Department of Education uses Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) definitions of sexual violence, defining rape, for example, as "the penetration, no matter how slight, of the vagina or anus with any body part or object, or oral penetration by a sex organ of another person, without the consent of the victim" (FBI, 2018). However, studies vary with respect to how they operationalize, measure, and tabulate sexual aggression, which here refers to a broad range of behaviors designed to result in sexual interaction against another person's will. It encompasses verbally coercive tactics, such as threats to end a relationship, as well as the use or threat of force and the exploitation of a victim's incapacitation. It also encompasses multiple resultant sexual acts ranging from groping to penetration of or by sexual organs. Most researchers consider acts combining physically coercive or incapacitation tactics with penetration of a victim to constitute rape (e.g., Anderson et al., 2019).

Questions surround the accuracy of prevalence data on sexual aggression in general and on female sexual aggression in particular. For example, there is concern that current measurements do not adequately capture experiences of compelled penetration, where a person is forced to penetrate another person unwillingly (e.g., Anderson et al., 2020; Weare, 2021). Additionally, there is evidence that women may be both more likely than men to report actual instances of perpetration (Dobash et al., 1998) and to inadvertently report their own victimization experiences as perpetration (Buday & Peterson, 2015). Methodological inconsistencies also hamper prevalence estimates; studies vary, for example, with respect to their focus on incidence or prevalence, timeframe, and specificity of data on tactics and sexual acts. Additionally, some of what is known about female sexual aggression is inferred from studies of male victims given that sexually victimized college men overwhelmingly report female perpetrators (e.g., Burczycka, 2020; Cantor et al., 2020; Turchik,

2012). Finally, research on sexual and gender minority individuals' experiences of sexual aggression, while growing, remains relatively scarce. More work is clearly needed to clarify the scope and phenomenology of female-perpetrated sexual aggression on campus, and current prevalence data should be interpreted with some caution.

Overview of Female-Perpetrated Sexual Aggression

Despite definitional and methodological inconsistencies, several summary conclusions about female college sexual aggression are possible. These conclusions are based both on studies measuring self-reported perpetration of sexual aggression and on those collecting perpetrator data from victim reports.

Women Report Less Perpetration and More Victimization Than Do Men

In college samples, women report perpetrating less sexual aggression than do men. For example, Krishnakumar et al. (2018) found that more college men (28%) than women (23%) reported using verbal or physical tactics to have intercourse or anal sex with a partner. Campbell et al. (2021) found lower rates of perpetration but the same pattern of gendered results, with more men than women reporting perpetration of unwanted sexual contact (3.4% vs. 1%, respectively) as well as attempted or completed rape (2.1% vs. 0.7%, respectively). Other studies have found similar gender differences in perpetration (e.g., Buday & Peterson, 2015; Eaton & Matamala, 2014; Walsh et al., 2021).

Rates of self-reported victimization are also relevant because sexually victimized college men overwhelmingly identify female perpetrators (e.g., Burczycka, 2020). Conversely, sexually victimized college women overwhelmingly identify male perpetrators (e.g., Burczycka, 2020). In most research, college women are more likely to report victimization than are men (e.g., Burczycka, 2020; Campbell et al., 2021; Cantor et al., 2020; Krishnakumar et al., 2018).

Women Are More Likely to Use Verbal Than Physical Strategies

Women report using verbally coercive strategies at higher rates than physically coercive strategies. For example, Buday and Peterson (2015) studied a sample consisting primarily (84%) of college students and found that 20% of women (and 37% of men) reported perpetrating verbally coerced sexual aggression since age 14,

whereas only 1.5% of women (and 3% of men) reported perpetrating physically coerced sexual aggression. Studying aggression within heterosexual college dating relationships, Katz et al. (2002) found that the most common form of aggression was "insistence" for both men and women.

Consistent with this trend in perpetration studies, college men report less victimization by physical coercion than by verbal coercion. In Cantor et al.'s (2020) large, multi-site college sample, 8.4% of male college seniors reported physical or incapacitated coercion victimization, while 32% of women reported these experiences. When all tactics (and sexual acts) were combined, 12% of men and 40% of women reported victimization (Cantor et al., 2020). Similarly, Campbell et al. (2021) found that 5.3% of college men (and 16% of college women) reported being verbally coerced into nonpenetrative sexual acts in college, whereas no men (and 0.1% of women; gender difference not significant) reported penetrative victimization by threat of physical harm, and 0.1% of men (and 1.2% of women) reported penetrative victimization by force or use of a weapon.

Female Perpetration Within and Against Sexual and Gender Minority Communities

In addition to perpetrating sexual aggression against men, women perpetrate against other women. Research on these experiences is increasing, which is particularly important because sexual and gender minority students experience as much (or more) sexual victimization than do their cisgender, heterosexual female counterparts (e.g., Cantor et al., 2020; Martin-Storey et al., 2018). Martin-Storey et al. (2018) found that 22% of sexually victimized college women reported a female perpetrator. Similarly, in a sexual minority college sample, Murchison et al. (2017) found that 18% of sexually victimized women reported a female perpetrator.

Women also perpetrate against gender-nonconforming victims, but they appear to do so at significantly lower rates than do men. In Martin-Storey et al.'s (2018) sample, 43% of sexually victimized gender-nonconforming students reported female perpetrators. Cantor et al. (2020) found that 86% of sexually victimized gender-nonconforming students reported male perpetrators for acts including penetration, while 72% reported male perpetrators for nonpenetrative sexual acts, with most of the remaining perpetrators being female. Similarly, Murchison et al. (2017) found that perpetrators were 83% male and 31% female in sexually victimized, gender-nonconforming, sexual minority college students. Finally, Mellins et al. (2017) found that 78% of sexually victimized gender-nonconforming college students reported a male perpetrator.

There is very little evidence that transgender women perpetrate sexual aggression at significant rates; Walsh et al. (2021), for example, studied a college sample that included 26 gender-nonconforming individuals and found that none of them reported any sexual perpetration. In a study examining sexual partner violence

in sexual and gender minority college students, Edwards et al. (2021) found that none of the self-reported perpetrators identified as transgender, while 70% identified as female, 18% identified as male, and 12% identified as genderqueer/nonconforming/nonbinary. Interestingly, while most perpetrators in this sample identified as female, most victims reported male perpetrators, suggesting that college women are less likely to perpetrate sexual aggression toward gender and sexual minority individuals than are college men and that heterosexual men may be the most common targets of sexually aggressive women.

Correlates of College Female Sexual Aggression

Research attempting to determine which college women are likely to engage in sexual aggression has largely focused on life experiences (e.g., Russell & Oswald, 2001), attitudes and beliefs (e.g., Anderson, 1998; Katz et al., 2002; Krahé et al., 2003), and behavioral correlates of sexual aggression (e.g., Krahé et al., 2003). Importantly, most research in this area indicates that the majority of sexual aggression correlates in college women parallel those in college men.

Life Experiences

Sexual victimization is a robust predictor of sexual aggression. Specifically, child sexual abuse has been linked to later sexually coercive behavior in college (and college-aged) women (Anderson, 1998; Krahé et al., 2003) as well as in college men (e.g., Senn et al., 2000). Similarly, research has documented correlations between being the victim of, and perpetrating, sexual coercion in college women (Russell & Oswald, 2001), in college men (e.g., Russell & Oswald, 2002), and in combined-gender samples (e.g., Edwards et al., 2021; Walsh et al., 2021). Other life experiences may also relate to perpetration. In a combined-gender sample of sexual minority college students, minority stress—the deleterious effects of minority status on mental health—was associated with sexual aggression, but only at high levels of hazardous drinking (Edwards et al., 2021), suggesting that a combination of factors such as internalized homophobia and a tendency to cope using substances may increase risk of perpetration.

Attitudes and Beliefs

Traditional beliefs and attitudes about gender norms are related to sexual aggression in both women and men. Sexually aggressive college women as well as men, for example, endorse heteronormative beliefs about men's sexual dominance and

insatiability (Eaton & Matamala, 2014). The authors theorize that it is the belief in the adversarial nature of sexual relations between men and women that underlie the relationship between heteronormative beliefs and perpetration. In fact, explicit adversarial sexual beliefs are associated with perpetration in both college women (Anderson, 1998) and men (e.g., Malamuth et al., 1991). Similarly, traditional beliefs about masculinity (i.e., the association of maleness with strength and power) were associated with sexual aggression in a combined-gender college sample (Walsh et al., 2021). Finally, greater tolerance of sexual harassment has been linked to both female (Russell & Oswald, 2001) and male sexual aggression (Reilly et al., 1992) in college samples, and both sexually aggressive college women and men endorse greater approval of violence (Krishnakumar et al., 2018).

Behavior

Sexually aggressive college-aged women are more likely than are other women to engage in risky sexual behaviors, including having more consensual sex partners (Krahé et al., 2003), having sex earlier in relationships, and drinking alcohol on first dates (Shea, 1998). Additionally, women's use of ambiguous sexual communication strategies (e.g., saying no to a sexual act when one ultimately intends to engage in it) is associated with their use of sexual coercion (Krahé et al., 2003; Shea, 1998), possibly due to a false consensus bias, leading women to believe that their partners behave as they do and therefore do not necessarily mean "no" when they object (e.g., Krahé et al., 2003). Similarly, perpetration in a combined-gender sample was associated with nonverbal consent strategies as well as binge drinking and pre-college sexual perpetration (Walsh et al., 2021).

While causal relationships among these variables remain uncertain, what is clear is that many—if not most—of the same factors associated with sexual aggression in men are also linked to sexual aggression in women. Further understanding of the correlates of sexual aggression in both genders will help researchers identify appropriate targets for intervention.

Perceptions of Sexually Aggressive Women

Research on interpersonal violence finds that a substantial percentage of women engage in sexual aggression against people of all genders (e.g., Cantor et al., 2020; Krishnakumar et al., 2018). While many factors are likely involved (see Straus, 2009), gender-based stereotypes and assumptions about sexual aggression are major reasons for the lack of attention given to female-perpetrated sexual aggression. Typical gender stereotypes portray men as aggressive and women as warm and nurturing (e.g., Spence, 1993). This is especially true of sexual aggression, where there are strong sexual scripts and women are stereotypically portrayed as victims of

men's sexual aggression (Depraetere et al., 2020). These stereotypes predispose perceivers to look for and recognize men's aggression while minimizing women's.

Women who engage in sexually aggressive behaviors are typically viewed as less aggressive than men who engage in the same behaviors (Oswald & Russell, 2006; Russell et al., 2019). For example, participants consistently rated male-perpetrated sexual violence more harshly than the same act perpetrated by women in research using experimentally manipulated written scenarios (Oswald & Russell, 2006; Sorenson & Taylor, 2005). Similarly, men who victimized women are more likely to be identified as aggressive than are gay men or any women who engage in the same behavior (Russell et al., 2015). While a male perpetrator is perceived as being aggressive, the same behavior from a female perpetrator is interpreted as being promiscuous (Oswald & Russell, 2006). Interestingly, female sexual perpetrators are perceived as most aggressive when they use a verbally coercive strategy, not physical force, to obtain sex from an unwilling male partner. Verbal strategies often consist of psychological or emotional coercion, so this result is consistent with the common assumption that women cannot inflict as much physical harm as can men, and that instead female aggression is emotional or psychological in nature.

Failure to perceive female perpetrators of sexual aggression as acting aggressively (e.g., Oswald & Russell, 2006) also denies acknowledgment of targets' victimization. This appears to be especially true in the context of heterosexual relationships (Russell, 2017; Russell & Kraus, 2016). While female victims of male-perpetrated aggression are acknowledged as having been victimized (Oswald & Russell, 2006), male victims of female-perpetrated aggression are perceived as being "romantically interested" in the perpetrator. Perceivers report more empathy for victims of rape perpetrated by a man rather than by a woman, and for female victims than for male victims regardless of perpetrator gender (Osman, 2011). Male victims are also held more responsible for their victimization than are female victims (Parker et al., 2022; Sleath & Bull, 2010).

Perceptions of female sexual aggression, especially in the context of heterosexual relationships, are consistent with traditional scripts about men's and women's roles in sexual relationships. Men are expected to initiate sex, while women are expected to be sexually passive or to "gatekeep" and deny men's advances (Depraetere et al., 2020; Eaton & Matamala, 2014). Given that men are perceived as responsible for initiating sex, their advances might be more likely to be labeled as aggressive. In contrast, women's sexually aggressive behaviors might be viewed less negatively, given the commonly held belief that women are less able to physically harm men than vice-versa (e.g., Russell et al., 2019). Men and women who hold these traditional heteronormative sex scripts are more accepting of sexual coercion (Eaton & Matamala, 2014).

Female-perpetrated aggression might also be less likely to be identified as it varies dramatically from expectations, or scripts, of a "real rape." Such scripts involve an unfamiliar male perpetrator, a dark secluded location, and physical force resulting in noticeable physical harm (e.g., Anderson, 2007). Rapes not meeting these criteria are often viewed as less serious or less harmful, with less blame attributed to the perpetrator. Unfortunately, this script differs dramatically from the typical

college sexual aggression, and particularly from that perpetrated by women, which fails to conform to the script simply by violating the assumption of a male aggressor. As noted, female-perpetrated sexual aggression is most often verbally coercive, which is perceived as less aggressive than physically coercive tactics (Oswald & Russell, 2006; Struckman-Johnson & Struckman-Johnson, 1991). Verbally coercive strategies are rated as less aggressive because they are perceived as less distressing to experience, and the victim (especially if male) is perceived as responsible for, and capable of, effectively managing such strategies (Katz et al., 2007; Sleath & Bull, 2010). Finally, female aggressors are not believed to be able to cause fear of physical harm in male or female victims (Parker et al., 2022; Russell et al., 2019). Thus, female-perpetrated sexual aggression violates the (inaccurate) stereotypical script of a "real rape." Unfortunately, this can hinder the identification and awareness of female-perpetrated sexual aggression.

Implications of Ignoring or Minimizing Female Sexual Aggression

Most research on college sexual aggression and resultant interventions have focused on sexual violence perpetrated by men against women, creating a concerning gap in the discussion, with female perpetrators and their victims largely missing from the wider consideration of campus sexual violence and prevention efforts. Female-perpetrated sexual aggression is less likely to result in support for law enforcement interventions or in guilty verdicts than is male-perpetrated aggression against women (Pica et al., 2021; Sorenson & Taylor, 2005). Law enforcement officers are more likely to endorse the use of non-arrest options (e.g., mediation, asking someone to leave the premises) for heterosexual women engaging in intimate partner violence against a male partner than they are for heterosexual men engaging in the same behavior (Russell & Sturgeon, 2019). Additionally, women's sexual aggression is less likely to be viewed as meeting the necessary legal elements for a rape conviction than is the same sexual aggression in men (Russell et al., 2011). Unsurprisingly, female aggressors are perceived as less guilty of committing rape than are male aggressors (Russell et al., 2011), suggesting that perceptual biases about male and female aggression can also translate into more difficulty successfully prosecuting sexually aggressive women, especially in cases with male victims. Furthermore, victims (especially male victims) of female-perpetrated aggression are less likely to receive support or to be believed by law enforcement (Hammond et al., 2017; Russell, 2017) than are victims of male-perpetrated aggression. In fact, victims of female-perpetrated sexual aggression are blamed to an even greater extent than are victims of male-perpetrated aggression (Davies et al., 2006; Parker et al., 2022).

The harm of failing to see female aggression as such can also extend to health services offered and provided to victims (Navarro & Clevenger, 2017). Despite the

perception that men are not traumatized or hurt by sexual aggression (e.g., Chapleau et al., 2008), men who have been the targets of women's sexual aggression experience a range of negative reactions to the incident (Byers & O'Sullivan, 1998; Depraetere et al., 2020; Weare, 2021). While much research suggests that male college victims (whose perpetrators are usually women) experience psychosocial consequences less severe, on average, than those experienced by female college victims (e.g., Burczycka, 2020), it is clear that many male victims of sexual violence experience significant negative consequences (see Randle & Graham, 2011). For example, 43% of sexually victimized college men (most by a female perpetrator) reported long-term negative psychosocial impacts (Littleton et al., 2020), and about 23% of sexually victimized undergraduate and graduate men reported being frightened or very frightened during the incident (Navarro & Clevenger, 2017). This is in stark contrast to the general (mis)perception that men do not experience trauma or stress at the hands of an intimate partner, especially if that partner is a woman.

Finally, college men experience significant barriers to acknowledging, reporting, and seeking help following sexual assault. Anderson et al. (2018) found that only 12% of college men who had experienced rape acknowledged it as such. Of 28 sexually victimized undergraduate and graduate men, most disclosed the assault to no one, and none made formal reports (e.g., to university authorities or mental health professionals; Navarro & Clevenger, 2017). Low rates of acknowledgement, disclosure, and formal reporting among male victims are likely strongly influenced by traditional gender stereotypes and sex scripts (e.g., Donne et al., 2018).

Failure to acknowledge a person as a victim, and indeed even directing blame toward them, can result in secondary victimization and interfere with help seeking (Hammond et al., 2017; Navarro & Clevenger, 2017) or possibly result in the victim staying in an unhealthy relationship. Not identifying a person as coercive when she is using verbal threats, purposeful intoxication, or physical force to obtain sex from an unwilling partner may prevent appropriate interventions for college campus sexual prevention programs. This further highlights the need for proper education about the various forms of sexual coercion perpetrated by both men and women on college campuses.

Implications for Interventions and University Policies Dealing with Sexual Aggression

The US federal government places requirements regarding preventing and responding to sexual aggression on institutions of higher education receiving federal funding through legislation including Title IX, the Clery Act, and the Violence Against Women Act (e.g., Richards, 2019). In the context of sometimes rapidly changing federal requirements, institutions have struggled to prevent and to respond appropriately to sexual aggression. For example, they have largely failed to meaningfully reduce the incidence of sexual perpetration (e.g., Anderson & Whiston, 2005;

DeGue et al., 2014). Furthermore, researchers have noted many ways in which colleges must improve their handling of sexual misconduct investigations and outcomes (e.g., Webermann & Murphy, 2022). In particular, scholars have pointed out the dubious benefits of compelled disclosure (Holland et al., 2018), gaps and barriers in services provided to accused perpetrators (Henkle et al., 2020), problematic investigative premises (Davis & Loftus, 2019), and extremely low rates of findings of responsibility (Richards, 2019). Many difficulties facing institutions in this area are likely exacerbated by misperceptions about female perpetration.

Colleges and universities can work to prevent and respond to sexual aggression in ways that better reflect the reality of female perpetration. First, student-facing messaging about sexual violence (e.g., prevention programming, advertisements for victim services) should be more gender inclusive. Prevention programming must address the existence of sexual perpetrators and victims of all genders and sexual orientations. Narratives and examples of sexual violence should move away from exclusive portrayals of men as perpetrators and women as victims of sexual and other intimate partner violence.

Institutions can also do more to specifically support victims of female-perpetrated sexual assault. Outreach materials aimed at victims of sexual violence should include images or stories of female perpetrators, male victims, and sexual and gender minority students. Donne et al. (2018) recommend that outreach specifically target stigmatizing norms around masculinity and emphasize the anonymous or confidential nature of services available to victims.

Many college personnel interact with victims and would benefit from specific education on the stereotypes and realities of sexual violence perpetrated by women. This education could be integrated with existing Title IX training or other recurring education. Staff likely to benefit from such education include mental health providers, student health workers, chaplains, student life officials, campus safety officers, and Title IX and other sexual assault response staff. Other groups who may also benefit include faculty, coaches, support staff, and those involved in Title IX adjudication proceedings in an ad hoc capacity. Education in this area should be designed to help staff respond to and/or administer care in ways that are gender inclusive and should specifically address male rape myths, such as the belief that men cannot be raped (e.g., Depraetere et al., 2020). This should include specific education on the physiological realities of rape experienced by men, such as the fact that men can experience erection and ejaculation in the absence of consent and in the presence of fear (see Bullock & Beckson, 2011, for discussion). Finally, violence screening should be performed in health settings with both male and female patients (Turchik, 2012).

Conclusions

Research examining female-perpetrated college sexual aggression is growing. However, there are limitations to this research which will hopefully be addressed in future studies. Reported prevalence rates across studies vary dramatically, due largely to varying definitions of sexual aggression and other methodological inconsistencies. Much of the work on female sexual aggression to date has examined heterosexual aggression; less is known about female sexual aggression directed toward victims of other genders. Current data suggest that college women report sexual perpetration at lower rates and victimization at higher rates than do men. They are also more likely to use verbally than physically coercive strategies, and they perpetrate against all genders. Most correlates of female sexual aggression parallel those of male sexual aggression and indicate that sexist ideologies, including rigid gender and sex scripts, likely play a role in sexual perpetration by both women and men.

Despite the prevalence of female-perpetrated sexual aggression, it is often underestimated, and its seriousness is minimized. As a result, the trauma resulting from female aggression is trivialized or denied (Chapleau et al., 2008). This is unfortunate as it can prevent victims from receiving necessary support services. Furthermore, ignoring college female sexual aggression hinders the development of proper intervention programs (see Straus, 2008, 2009) and impedes the development of healthy relationships in young adulthood—an essential time for developing enduring relationship interaction styles and patterns. Thus, identifying relationship aggression, understanding why this aggression occurs, and working to prevent it in all genders is essential for establishing healthy fulfilling relationships. College-based sex education and rape prevention programs need to highlight the idea that sexually aggressive behavior, regardless of perpetrator gender, is inappropriate and unhealthy.

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Chapter 4
Perceptions of Female Perpetrators of Interpersonal Partner Violence

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Perceptions of Female Perpetrators of Interpersonal Partner Violence

Intimate partner violence (IPV), sometimes called domestic violence (DV), has received cyclical recognition as a major social problem throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, ranging from whipping post punishment for male perpetrators to increased incarceration rates (Pleck, 1987). Criminal justice solutions to the problem have been intermittently proposed but with generally limited success (Garner & Maxwell, 2000). Whipping post legislation was rejected in most US states (and in Britain and Canada) as being "cruel and unusual punishment." In those few states where it was law, it was used disproportionately against African American men. While the perceived causes of IPV perpetration have varied, one aspect has remained consistent: the problem is perceived as male perpetrated, and punishments for males have exceeded those for female perpetrators of IPV (Brown, 2004).

The sociolegal policies designed to diminish IPV are based on a conceptualization of its causes. As Wilson (1983) pointed out, such policies were doomed to fail unless they had a solid understanding of the causes of the act. As Dutton et al. (2010) have shown, the current widely held perception of IPV is what is known as the "gender paradigm." This paradigm views male violence against females as normative and, therefore, frequent and used to reinforce the prevailing social arrangement: patriarchy. Female violence is viewed as suppressed by the threat of physical

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retaliation by males who experience impunity with regard to punishing their female partners. When female IPV does occur, according to this paradigm, it is perceived as self-defense (Saunders, 1986). Hence, we argue that the gender paradigm underestimates the frequency, motivation, and seriousness of female violence because it is seen through a political lens (DeKeseredy, 1988; Dragiewicz & Lindgren, 2009).

A single IPV act by a man is often described as "violence against women:" a political construct where male-perpetrated IPV is to suppress all women's rights and perpetrated against all women. No corresponding term exists for a single IPV act by a woman. However, as shown in Table 4.1 (Dutton et al., 2016), empirical studies of IPV incidence and of self-reported motivation given by women for their own IPV perpetration have repeatedly disconfirmed the gender paradigm. For example, Follingstad et al. (1991) found that very few women reported perpetrating IPV in self-defense. Similarly, Raison and Dutton (2019)—in a review of studies of perpetrators' self-reported reasons for IPV—found anger, jealousy, and retaliation for emotional hurt to be frequently reported, but again not self-defense.

When looking at the frequency of incidents of IPV and injury, Archer's (2000) meta-analytic study found that women used IPV slightly more than men and were injured slightly more (one-sixth of a standard deviation [SD] difference). This small difference in injuries was unexpected based on the prevalence of the gender paradigm perspective at the time. Women were more fearful of male IPV in general, but studies about male fearfulness found it to be considerable (83% of male victims) when female IPV was severe or used instrumentally (Hines & Douglas, 2010; Laroche, 2005). Five independent, large sample surveys found that the most common form of IPV was bilateral (39–60%), meaning the IPV matched for level of severity and frequency, followed by female violence against nonviolent or less

Table 4.1 Incidence of intimate partner violence in large sample US surveys

		% of IPV reports[a]	Male[b]	Female[c]	Bilateral
Stets and Straus (1989) National FV survey (N = 5,242)	Married	15%	15.6%	36.6%	38.8%
	Cohabiting	35%	12%	34.9%	45.2%
Whitaker et al. (2007) National Longitudinal Study on adolescent (18–28) health (N = 11,370)		24%	28.7%	71.3%	49.2%
Williams & Frieze, 2005 National Comorbidity Study (N = 3,519)		18.4%	21.6%	28.7%	49%
Caetano et al., 2008 National Survey of couples (N = 1,635)		13%	14.6%	25.6%	59.7%
Morse, 1995 National Youth Survey 1992 (N = 1,340)		32.4%	16%	30%	47.4%

[a]The percentage of IPV reports from the total population examined in the survey
[b]males engaged in more severe acts of violence (e.g., male minor, female none; male severe, female none; male severe, female minor)
[c]females engaged in more severe acts of violence (e.g., female minor, male none; female severe, male none; female severe, male minor)
From: Dutton et al. (2016)

violent males (husband battery, 25–36%), followed by male violence towards non-violent or less violent females (wife battery, 14–22%; Caetano et al., 2008; Morse, 1995; Stets & Straus, 1989; Whitaker et al., 2007; Williams & Frieze, 2005). Coker et al. (2002), in a reanalysis of the Violence Against Women Survey data, found that the long-term physical and psychological effects of abuse victimization were nearly identical for men and women.

Evidence that Aggression Develops Independently in Females

Despite the perceptions of female aggressiveness described below, aggressiveness develops in women in much the same way as men although its behavioral expression may vary with cultural shaping. Longitudinal studies (Magdol et al., 1997; Moffitt et al., 2001; Serbin et al., 2004) found lifelong tendencies toward physical aggression in subsamples of girls. In the Concordia (Montreal) longitudinal study, Serbin et al. (2004) traced Grade 3 girls who scored in the 95th percentile for aggression based on student and teacher ratings. Girls' aggression was later associated with a preference for male partners who were also aggressive, perhaps explaining the high incidence of bilateral IPV. As these girls approached adolescence, this Aggressive group had elevated rates of smoking, alcohol, and illicit drug use and "continue[d] to seek out behaviorally compatible peer groups, probably comprised of boys and girls with similar aggressive or 'predelinquent' behavioral styles" (p. 283). They had elevated rates of gynecological problems, were more likely to go on birth control sooner, had higher rates of sexually transmitted infections (STIs) between ages 14 and 20, and became pregnant sooner and more frequently. Girls who scored above the 75th percentile on the Aggression and Withdrawal scales had a 48% teen pregnancy rate. The Aggressive group had elevated levels of depression and anxiety disorder by their late teens. When they married, their children had higher health risks, and the Aggressive girls had become aggressive mothers, exhibiting maternal childhood aggression with children who had more visits to hospital emergency rooms for injuries.

In a similar study, Magdol et al. (1997) followed an unselected birth cohort of 1,037 participants, and data were collected every two years. At age 21, participants provided data on intimate relationships ($n = 861$) as well as mental health issues (among other questions). Respondents had to have a relationship with a romantic partner for at least a month in the last 12 months to be included. IPV was assessed using a scale where each respondent reported both self and partner IPV. The women and men who were in intimate relationships indicated that both minor and severe physical violence rates were higher for women, whether self or partner reported. The female severe physical violence rate was more than triple that of males (18.6% vs. 5.7%). Based on this same sample, Moffitt et al. (2001) reported that pre-existing characteristics of the women (at age 15) predicted: (1) choice of an abusive male partner and (2) their own violence with that partner apart from the male's violence. In Magdol et al.'s (1997) research, the authors provided a possible explanation for

these prevalence rates and stated: "[e]arly studies of partner violence assumed that men's perpetration rates exceeded those of women in part because these studies relied almost exclusively on clinical samples of women who sought assistance or of men in court-mandated counseling programs" (p. 69).

A comprehensive analysis of the Dunedin data (longitudinal data collected over the last 50 years at the Human Health and Development Research Unit in Dunedin, New Zealand) found that the following characteristics predicted IPV in females: approval of the use of aggression, excessive jealousy and suspiciousness, a tendency to experience intense and rapid emotions, and poor self-control/impulsivity (Moffitt et al., 2001). The authors used the term negative emotionality (NEM) to describe this constellation of traits. Moffitt et al. (2001) also found that antisocial traits measured in females at age 15 made them more likely to be involved in relationships with an abusive man at the age of 21, even after controlling for their partners' physical abuse.

Dutton's (2002) description of what he described as the abusive personality for males is similar to what Moffitt et al. (2001) described as women's as negative emotionality: attachment insecurity, trauma symptoms, and borderline personality. With the men, these were related to independently assessed borderline traits (Dutton, 2007). NEM has similar psychological features to borderline personality, which unfortunately were not formally assessed in the Dunedin women. From the descriptors given in that study (Moffitt et al., 2001), it seems that an identical "abusive personality" exists for male and female IPV perpetrators. The assessment of abusive personality held up as a predictor of IPV in women in a later study (Clift & Dutton, 2011). In short, it is psychological features—not gender—that are most predictive of IPV.

Ehrensaft et al. (2004) also studied the Dunedin birth cohort finding that 9% were in "clinically abusive relationships," defined as those that required intervention by any professional (e.g., hospital, police, lawyers). Currently, more help exists for women than for men, and women are more likely to use it, suggesting the results may be skewed. However, the authors found comparable rates of violence: 68% of women and 60% of men self-reporting injury. Both male and female perpetrators demonstrated signs of personality disturbance. The authors noted that the women had "aggressive personalities and/or adolescent conduct disorder" (p. 267) and stated: "these findings counter the assumption that if clinical abuse was ascertained in epidemiological samples, it would be primarily man-to-woman, explained by patriarchy rather than psychopathology" (p. 258).

According to women's reports on surveys, only about 4% of men commit anything resembling potentially harmful violence in any given year (Stets & Straus, 1989; Whitaker et al., 2007). This incidence statistic is true for female perpetrators as well. Why then do we adhere to overly broad categories of analysis for IPV? The answer lies in the political centrality associated with IPV by the gender paradigm— a view that all male IPV is a political act. Political categories are "central beliefs" and, thus, especially resilient to disconfirming data (Kahneman et al., 1982). A more accurate picture of IPV is to describe it as bilateral, driven by psychological issues, and usually the result of a coercion trap in which neither partner wants to back down

(Cordova et al., 1993). Despite these data, the perception persists that female violence is "different" somehow than males' violence (see Table 4.1 for the dimensions of this perception).

Public Attitudes Towards Female IPV

Many studies support the notion that female-perpetrated IPV is perceived as less serious compared to the same actions committed by a male. Harris and Cook (1994) used a vignette designed to depict IPV perpetrated by a female to a male partner, a male to a female partner, and a male to a male partner. Overall, participants felt the female perpetrators' actions towards a male were less violent compared to the same actions perpetrated by a male toward a female. Also, participants viewed the female perpetrator as less responsible compared to the male perpetrator and saw less need to intervene against the female perpetrator (e.g., less likely to indicate that they would have called the police had they witnessed the altercation). Additionally, participants were less likely to indicate that the female aggressor should be convicted for their actions and less likely to indicate that the male victim should leave the relationship compared to the female victim. The authors concluded that these findings suggest that the depiction of a situation of female-perpetrated violence is viewed as less serious than the same acts committed by males.

In a similar study, Feather (1996) examined the perceptions of Australian participants ($N = 220$) to an act of either male- or female-perpetrated physical IPV in a variety of vignettes. Measures of violence perception for each vignette included how deserving the perpetrator was of their penalty, the level of perpetrator responsibility, the perceived seriousness of the offense, the perceived harshness of the penalty, the level of positive affect regarding the penalty, and the level of sympathy for the perpetrator. All variables in the vignettes were kept constant (e.g., the level of marital dissatisfaction, level of violence, degree of injury, legal intervention, and ramifications for the perpetrator) except for the gender of the perpetrator and whether the violence occurred in a moment of stress or if the violent act was planned and felt that the use of violence would improve their situation within the marriage. Participants rated the actions of the wife to be less serious, less responsible for the situation, and less deserving of the punishment. These findings suggest that the wife IPV perpetration was viewed less negatively compared to the same acts by the husband.

When comparing the two wife-perpetrated scenarios (committed in a moment of stress or premeditated as it would improve their situation in the marriage), it was discovered that participants felt the violence of the wife to be more serious, and the woman to be more deserving of the penalty received, when her aggression was in response to stress, rather than premeditated. Feather (1996) speculated that this, as well as the less negative reactions in response to the wife's violence, may be due to participants feeling more favorably about a wife whom they perceive as defending herself against her husband (as the vignettes describe a history of verbal abuse),

compared to a husband resorting to violence in the identical act of "self-defense." However, it is important to reiterate the fact that the vignettes describing wife- and husband-perpetrated physical abuse were identical in all respects other than the gender of the perpetrator and the victim. When the results were analyzed by participant gender, females felt that the husbands' perpetration was more serious than did male participants. There was no statistically significant difference between the male and female participants' scores in the seriousness of the wife's offense. Female participants felt that the wife was less deserving of her punishment compared to male participants, and these results were also statistically significant. Other research has found similar results (Hine et al., 2022; Rhatigan et al., 2011; Russell et al., 2015, 2019; Savage et al., 2017).

Seelau and Seelau (2005) also examined participants' perceptions of relationship violence in various types of romantic relationships by presenting several vignettes depicting an incident of IPV occurring in a heterosexual couple (female or male perpetrator) or a same-sex couple (female perpetrating against a female partner, or male perpetrating against a male partner). Individuals were more likely to recommend that the couple "be left alone," as opposed to "have friends intervene" or "call police/hotline" when the perpetrator was a female (against a male victim) as opposed to a male perpetrator against a female victim. When police interventions were considered, individuals were more likely to recommend greater leniency with a female perpetrator. Individuals were also more likely to recommend a female perpetrator receive a warning (67% female vs. 49% male), whereas individuals were less likely to recommend that police take action when the perpetrator was female (16% female vs. 31% male).

Overall, female participants were more likely to indicate that they would have taken "official" action in response to witnessing the situation when the victim was female (e.g., calling the police; 40% vs. 20% of men), whereas men were more likely to indicate that they would try to talk to the couple (51% vs. 43% of women) or do nothing (29% vs. 17% of women), regardless of victim gender. In other words, participants appeared to exhibit beliefs that conform to the gender stereotype: men are more powerful and, therefore, more capable of inflicting injury (even though the level of injury was kept constant throughout the scenarios).

Sorenson and Taylor (2005) implemented a random digit dialed survey in four languages of 3,769 adults in the Los Angeles area. Respondents were presented with five vignettes in which characteristics of the victim, assailant, and incident were experimentally manipulated. The vignette variables (assailant's motive, type, or intensity of abuse, whether alcohol was involved, presence of weapons, presence of children, frequency of abuse) and respondent characteristics were examined. Respondents' judgments about women's violence against male intimates (vs. the opposite) were less harsh and took contextual factors more into account. The type of violence and the presence of a weapon played a central role in respondent judgments. Across vignettes, male violence was seen as more likely to be illegal. It is important to note that while some of the abuse types were physical, others were psychological, involving control or humiliation. In scenarios depicting a female perpetrator and male victim, participants were more likely to state that the couple

should attempt to "talk" (what the authors describe as "couple-promoting strategies") and were less inclined to state that the victim should "leave" the relationship (what the authors describe as "victim-protective strategies"). Suggestions of "formal" interventions—such as involving the police, issuing a restraining order, or jail time—were less common in scenarios depicting a female perpetrator. The authors suggested that female-perpetrated IPV was viewed as less serious and/or posed less of a threat to the safety of their partner.

Sorenson and Thomas (2009) examined the views of IPV perpetrated by males and females against either same-sex or opposite-sex intimate partners (using the same methods as reported above). The authors manipulated multiple variables describing the perpetrator, victim, and the situation in which the IPV occurred, and they presented these variables in a series of vignettes. Regarding the statement that the aggression depicted in the vignette should be illegal, the lowest percentage of affirmative responses were to situations in which a female was depicted as aggressing against a male partner (69.1% of participants indicated that they believed these actions should be illegal) compared to 79% of male perpetrators (see Table 4.2). The remaining three subcategories of vignettes had relatively similar affirmative responses with aggression by a male toward a female receiving the highest rating of illegality, followed by female toward female, and lastly male toward male.

To examine the cultural acceptability of IPV, Straus et al. (1997) analyzed data from four separate studies, which took place across a 26-year period, each with relatively large samples ranging from 524 to 6,002. Each of the four studies asked whether there were any situations in which the participant felt they would approve of an individual slapping their opposite-sex spouse (husband or wife) in the face. When the authors combined the results for this item from the four studies examined, they found overall 26.4% of men and 18.4% of women approve of a wife slapping her husband, and 16.1% of men and 11.6% of women approve of a husband slapping his wife. A similar discrepancy was found by Simon et al. (2001) in a nationally representative sample of 5,238 participants. A greater percentage of men and women indicated that it would be acceptable for a woman to hit her husband/boyfriend if he hit her first, compared to the number who believed it would be acceptable for a man to hit his wife/girlfriend (see Table 4.3). Although far fewer individuals felt that it would be acceptable for anyone to hit their partner to "keep them in line," a greater number indicated it would be acceptable for a woman to utilize violence this way. This indicates that both men and women were more approving of the use of female violence against a male partner, and men were more approving of the use of violence within an intimate partnership in general. When the

Table 4.2 Attitudes of illegality by gender of victim and perpetrator

Gender of perpetrator	Gender of victim	
	Female	Male
Female	81.0	69.1
Male	82.0	79.0

Adapted from: Sorenson and Thomas (2009)

Table 4.3 Attitudes towards use of IPV

	Percentage agreeing with the statement	
	Men	Women
Ok for a man to hit his wife/girlfriend:		
If she hits him first	9.8	7.2
To keep her in line	2.0	1.8
Ok for a woman to hit her husband/boyfriend		
If he hits her first	33.0	27.0
To keep him in line	5.0	4.4

Adapted from: Simon et al. (2001)

data from these studies were examined across time, rather than analyzed together, another pattern emerges. The approval of male-perpetrated violence had decreased between 1968 (20%) and 1994 (10%), whereas the approval of female-perpetrated violence had remained approximately consistent at 22% over this period. Straus et al. (1996) suggested that this pattern may be due, in part, to the efforts to condemn male-perpetrated violence against female partners during this time by woman's advocacy groups or service providers and the lack of a similar effort in support of male victims.

In another study, Hamby and Jackson (2010) found that university students ranked vignettes on violence perpetrated by a female partner as less severe than violence that was perpetrated by a male partner ($M = 4.00$ [female], $M = 4.79$ [male], from rankings on a 7-point Likert scale). The vignettes utilized in this study depicted the violence-perpetrating partner as grabbing their partner's arm and slapping their partner in the face after their partner stated they were overreacting. The authors found that female-perpetrated IPV against a male partner was seen as less severe than male-perpetrated IPV against a female partner. Female perpetrators were also considered less responsible for the incident. Additionally, participants perceived the female perpetrators as instilling less "physical fear" in the male victim as well as less "fear from personality/relationship." The items used to measure physical fear included items meant to determine whether the perpetrator caused fear due to their size and strength, whereas the personality/relationship fear included items to measure if participants believed the perpetrator would commit similar acts again, had previously committed similar acts, or would be likely to commit more serious violence against their partner.

In Marshall's (1992a, b) study, the author discovered discrepancies in the perceived amount of physical and mental harm that a female and male perpetrator could inflict on their opposite-sex partner. Female participants felt that a male partner would cause more physical and mental harm to his female partner with acts, such as slapping or beating her up, compared to ratings by male participants about the identical acts perpetrated by a female toward her male partner. It is possible in these examples that physical size and strength disparities between the couple could account for this lack of consistency in perception of harm. However, a similar

pattern emerged in more serious acts. The act of using a knife or gun against an opposite-gender partner was considered to cause more physical and emotional harm when it was committed by a male against a female partner. The act of being burned with something by an opposite-sex partner had an impact weight of 0.91 on the physical and emotional harm scales by female students (these rankings were for the act being committed against a woman in general, not against the participant). Male students ranked the same act committed toward a male as 0.82 for physical and 0.78 for emotional harm. With acts of violence utilizing a weapon, the relative size and strength of the perpetrator and victim should have a less pronounced effect on the ratings of potential harm. Also, the experience of being burnt should be equally painful for males and females, yet the female partners' actions were viewed as less potentially damaging compared to the identical acts by a male perpetrator. This pattern was even more pronounced when the acts were sexually abusive. Female students rated the act of forced sexual intercourse (against a female victim) as 0.82 and 0.92 for physical and emotional harm, respectively, whereas male students rated forced intercourse (against a male victim) as 0.43 and 0.64 for physical and emotional harm, respectively. This same pattern was expressed for non-student participants and across various sexually violent acts.

Rhatigan et al. (2011) reported that participants who were recruited from two southwestern universities ($N = 728$) attributed less blame to female IPV perpetrators compared to male perpetrators. In vignettes where the perpetrator had been provoked by the victim, participants attributed less blame to the perpetrator (for both males and females). The authors hypothesized that due to in-group biases, males and females would attribute less blame to perpetrators of their own gender. However, as females share in-group status with other females, it would be expected that females would attribute less blame to female acts of aggression, compared to males, and vice versa. In this study, this pattern was only seen in reaction to vignettes depicting male perpetrators and was not found for depicted female perpetration. Overall, the authors found that female participants attributed more blame to the perpetrator compared to male participants, and male perpetrators were believed to be more responsible and more to blame compared to female perpetrators (regardless of the participants' gender).

A similar pattern of gender disparity is apparent for not only physical abuse—in which case the relative size and strength of the perpetrator and victim may affect the degree of injuries sustained—but also for psychological abuse. Follingstad et al. (2004) examined psychologists and found them to be more inclined to rate identical acts of psychological abuse as more severe with a male perpetrator. These psychologists provided gendered explanations for their rationale with psychologically abusive acts by females being less problematic than the same act performed by a male. This pattern may demonstrate how prevalent and ingrained these gender paradigmatic beliefs are within society if highly trained individuals may be susceptible to gendered stereotypes for IPV perpetration.

Press Reports

Reports of IPV in the press were examined in a sample of news media articles covering male ($N = 395$) and female ($N = 61$) offenders over a two-year period (Carlyle et al., 2014). In general, reports involving female offenders were more exonerative, more likely to report the (male) victims' infidelity, emotional distress of the perpetrator, financial or economic stress, or self-defense. Regarding the latter, "Battered Woman Syndrome" has been used as a defense in cases of females killing male intimate partners (e.g., Walker, 2009), often in response to escalating violence.

In contrast to the press reports, a survey by Velopolous et al. (2019) of actual intimate homicide reported only 5.0% of the male victims and 0.8% of the female victims had assaulted their partner in the month preceding the homicide, and very few cases were categorized as justifiable self-defense—for male (0.1%) but also for female perpetrators (6.4%). Jealousy was a motive in a small number of cases (10.5% for male perpetrators, 6.4% for female perpetrators). In only 22.8% of cases was there evidence of prior IPV against female victims and only 10% for male victims. Therefore, most cases had no prior IPV nor was it escalating. This profile is at odds with the generally held perception of the battered woman. Nevertheless, histories of abuse were reported significantly more frequently when the IPV perpetrator was female (Carlyle et al., 2014).

Police Perceptions

A study of police perceptions of IPV based on a set of interviews with officers in New York State found police perceptions to be an amalgam of the gender paradigm and personal, on-the-job, observations (Sinden & Stephens, 1999). The personal experience aspect showed up in a study of police perceptions of IPV causation in Texas (El Sayed et al., 2022). The authors found, in response to the statement "[w]omen are just as likely as men to engage in family violence," 85.4% of police officers agreed. It may be because police confront the variety of patterns of IPV firsthand, and their perceptions are less in line with the gender paradigm.

Russell (2018) conducted a study of police perceptions using a cyber sample of 273 officers. Results showed no difference in perceptions of blameworthiness by male perpetrators but did find a difference in their perceived dangerousness. Heterosexual males were perceived as more responsible for their own victimization than were heterosexual females. Heterosexual female perpetrators were found to be least likely to have inflicted harm on their partners in the past. As the author stated, these perceptions were "consistent with the stereotype that heterosexual female victims are the prototypical victims of IPV who are feminine, weaker, and unable to inflict harm to their partners" (p. 202). The reader is reminded that Archer's (2000) meta-analytic study of IPV by gender found that females were injured more than males, but only by one-sixth of a standard deviation. Victims of female perpetrators

were perceived as more likely to have inflicted harm on their partner in the past, providing an exculpation for female violence. Apart from perceptions, police behavior strongly follows the gender paradigm. In a longitudinal study, police arrested 85% of the males in mutually violent couples who called for police assistance despite being in a "dual arrest state" (Oregon) and despite the couple having a history of mutual violence (Capaldi et al., 2007).

Legal System

Advice on IPV causation was given to the Wingspread Conference of Juvenile and Family Court Judges in 2007 (Jaffe et al., 2008). Unfortunately, as Dutton et al. (2010) pointed out, the information was based on a generalization to community samples from women's shelter samples that recommended only screening fathers for child abuse potential in custody disputes. In reality, mothers are more likely to engage in physical child abuse and child homicides compared to fathers (60% vs. 40%; Gaudioisi, 2006). There is bias against male victims in other aspects of the justice system. For instance, because female perpetration is not perceived to be as aggressive, severe, or dangerous, males are less likely to be granted restraining or protective orders (Kingsnorth et al., 2013; Mele et al., 2011). Thus, male victims do not receive equivalent support to female victims, perpetuating the gender paradigm.

Summary

Both the general public and criminal justice system professionals share a stereotype about female IPV. It is seen as less serious, more reactive to imagined past transgressions toward the perpetrator, and is generally located less in inherent features of the female (e.g., personality female"ness") than in external systemic factors. In males, IPV is seen as a natural byproduct of male aggressiveness. The results of this stereotyping are diminished services for male IPV victims (Dutton et al., 2016), negative expectations of police reaction by male victims (Dim & Lysova, 2022), and consequently, less use of police assistance for IPV against males (Stets & Straus, 1990).

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Chapter 5
(Mis)Perceptions of Gender Symmetry in Culture and Media

Erin M. Whitesitt

Hashtags and Death Threats

"It's not that simple," I pointed out to a former student who described the $15 million awarded to actor Johnny Depp in a 2022 defamation lawsuit against former partner Amber Heard as a "win." The trial, streamed in real-time across websites such as YouTube and Twitch, was of keen interest to many of us who came of age in the era of *Edward Scissorhands*, *Benny and Joon*, and Disney's *Pirates of the Caribbean* franchise. Despite his history of multiple arrests and longstanding substance abuse issues, Depp's popularity in the 1990s and 2000s seems to have engendered a sense of credibility among his fans, and Heard's public, if intentionally vague, 2018 accusations of intimate partner violence (IPV) against the actor were not well received. Social media websites quickly populated with *#teamjohnny* and similar hashtags. Heard began receiving daily death threats, became the subject of violent web fanfiction, and was openly mocked by fans and fellow celebrities alike, including comedian Chris Rock, who quipped the public should "believe all women *except* Amber Heard" (Murphy, 2022). Both parties made lurid claims about the other's abuse, each declared financial losses in the tens of millions of dollars, and media outlets speculated as fans took sides: who was the *real* victim in this case? For whom was the outcome "a win"?

There is an obvious answer, of course. When IPV is involved, few "winners" are found. At best, perpetrators may be held accountable, and victims may be accorded legal validation, freedom from abuse, compensatory damages, or—in extreme cases—their lives, but these scarcely constitute "winning." The main reason Depp's victory can be considered a "win," my student contended, involved a conditional statement. *If* men underreport being victims of IPV by women, *then* the outcome is

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not only a win for Depp but for male victims of female perpetrators more generally. That this viewpoint has gained traction in popular culture, especially in the context of other domestic violence-related arrests of women celebrities, including musician Michelle Branch and actresses Emma Roberts and Stacey Dash, is less an indicator of some innovative notion that men can be victims and women abusers (we already know), and more about how its representation in media and other institutions shapes the way we have been socialized to view IPV in the first place. Do all acts of physical violence count the same? Is IPV necessarily defined by power and control? What happens—beyond a countersuit—when someone hits back?

While some family violence researchers have traditionally favored gender-neutral explanations based on measurable acts of violence, over the past two decades, many in the contemporary research scene have come to view such an approach as problematic and reductionist (Dobash & Dobash, 2004; Johnson, 2006, 2008; Johnson & Ferraro, 2000; Myhill, 2015; Stark, 2007; Walby & Towers, 2018). In reality, the extent to which men, women, and others are more or less likely to be victims or perpetrators depends largely on the type of violent relationship. Moreover, the extent we are socialized to notice is influenced by the dominant culture, gender norms, and media representation. In this chapter, I discuss how the relative absence of typologies of IPV in American culture and media has effaced the issue of gender symmetry in the public imagination.

Introduction to Intimate Partner Violence

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) describes four distinct forms of IPV: sexual violence, physical violence, stalking, and psychological aggression (Breiding et al., 2015). Sexual violence includes all nonconsensual sexual activity, while physical violence involves behavior such as striking, biting, strangulation, and other forms of unwanted physical contact. Stalking involves repeated actions, such as following a person or tampering with their belongings, which causes them to fear they may be at risk of bodily harm and to alter their behavior accordingly. Psychological aggression is intended to undermine a victim's well-being or sense of self-worth. It can take the form of "expressive aggression," such as name-calling or yelling to express hostility or anger, or "coercive control" tactics, including intimidation, isolation, threats, or other behavior meant to make the victim feel powerless and afraid (Breiding et al., 2015; Stark, 2007; Whitesitt, 2016). Researchers and advocates have also proposed additional categories, including economic abuse, where victims are restricted from household finances or lack reasonable spending autonomy (Johnson, 2021; Stark, 2007; Wallace et al., 2019).

Because not all of these forms are easily enforceable from a criminal justice perspective, most domestic violence-related arrests involve some level of physical

contact between the abuser and the victim, at least in the United States.[1] Domestic violence advocates and public health organizations commonly cite IPV as a leading cause of injury and death for women. American women are more likely to be injured or killed by a loved one than any other type of offender. About 40% of all female murder victims in the United States are killed by an intimate partner, compared with around 5% of homicides involving a male victim (Cooper & Smith, 2011; Violence Policy Center, 2015). Perhaps unsurprisingly—and consistent with an intersectional feminist perspective—a person's risk of injury and death at the hands of their intimate partner also varies according to their other social identities, with women of color, poor women, and those with lower levels of education at greater risk (Myhill, 2015; Violence Policy Center, 2015).

Although women are statistically more likely to be seriously injured or killed by an intimate partner than men, the latter is popularly believed to underreport victimization out of shame, embarrassment, or the risk of social consequences. However, Dobash and Dobash (2004), Kimmel (2002), Myhill (2015), and others, as well as research on self-perception more generally, have called this assumption into question, pointing out that not only do common metrics of IPV fail to account for most coercive control tactics, but people of all genders have been socialized to underestimate men's use of violence and overestimate women's. The sociological explanation for this is normative: we anticipate and expect men to be more violent than women, so we are less likely to recognize men's violence than women's. This is true of people within a violent relationship but also of the public at large. Hundreds of high-profile men have been credibly accused of (or arrested for) domestic violence, but accusations against Heard, Branch, Roberts, Dash, and other female celebrities are all the more noticeable for their gender.

Gender Symmetry

In their book *Behind Closed Doors*, Straus et al. (1980) made the controversial claim that the number of battered men in the United States rivaled the number of battered women. Their statement was based on data collected using the Conflict Tactics Scales (CTS) developed by Straus (1979), which purported to offer a more objective, quantifiable method of measuring IPV in terms of raw numbers of specific acts committed in a certain period of time (Kimmel, 2002; Walby & Towers, 2018; Whitesitt, 2016). Though the CTS eventually became an essential tool for measuring domestic violence, it has been widely criticized by feminists and advocates for its failure to situate IPV in the relationship context more generally (e.g., taking into account prevailing patterns of power and control) and Straus's problematic use of non-representative samples (Myhill, 2015). Straus disputed such

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[1] Walby and Towers (2018) note that a law criminalizing engaging in "controlling/coercive behaviour in an intimate/family relationship" passed in the United Kingdom in 2015 and was updated in 2016. Ireland, France, Portugal, and certain other European nations have enacted similar laws.

criticism on multiple occasions prior to his 2016 death, but Kimmel (2002) has described situations in which victims of IPV are ascribed CTS scores equal to or greater than those of their abusers, such as when a victim pushes away an abuser during an active episode of violence or intimidation.

Stark (2007) notes that while women can and do engage in violent behavior against male partners, the former are more likely to be seriously injured or killed, express significant fear, or be victims of coercive control. Among other evidence, Stark points to the fact that the women's shelter movement has, paradoxically, done more to reduce the number of men killed by women than vice versa, suggesting shelters function as an alternative exit strategy for women who might otherwise feel their only way out is to set the bed aflame. Stark believes that coercive control is mainly the purview of men, who use these tactics because it benefits them and they feel culturally entitled to do so. Feminist IPV scholars have similarly supported sociocultural explanations, noting that gender asymmetry in intimate relationships is analogous to gender inequality in society more generally. As we have heard, the personal is political; what occurs in a micro setting, such as an intimate relationship, shapes and reflects what happens at the level of social institutions and social structure. From this perspective, men use violence—actual and symbolic—to maintain power, and women and others have only so many options: resist, submit, and internalize.

Types of Intimate Partner Violence

Johnson (2006, 2008) and Ferraro (2006, 2013) have worked, separately and together, to bridge the gap by arguing that different types of IPV cannot be neatly consolidated into a single phenomenon with a unilateral gender dynamic. A fuller understanding of IPV, they suggest, must account for a variety of situations, as well as different types of (and motivations for) relationship violence. Johnson (2008) proposed four subtypes of IPV based on the "dyadic control context" of relationship violence: situational couple violence, intimate terrorism, mutual violent control, and violent resistance. In Johnson's view, there is a distinction to be made between a person who becomes frustrated and throws an object at their partner during a heated argument, a person who systematically terrorizes their partner with the intent of establishing or maintaining control over them, a relationship where both parties engage in violent behavior to control one another, and a person who "hits back" as a form of resistance against their abuser. The issue of gender symmetry is a cornerstone of Johnson's typology. While men are more likely to perpetrate intimate terrorism on their partners, situational couple violence is less gendered, with women and men committing situational acts of violence in roughly equal measure, at least in terms of prevalence (Johnson, Leone, & Xu, 2014). Women are more likely than men to engage in violent resistance, a byproduct of their greater victimization rate by intimate terrorism. Mutual violent control depends not on gender but on the presence of controlling behavior in both members of the relationship. In one study,

Frankland and Brown (2014) found that violence rates (and intimate terrorism specifically) in same-sex relationships were similar to those in heterosexual relationships. However, mutual violent control occurred at higher rates. The authors have proposed possible explanations for this discrepancy, including the influence of heterosexism and the fact that standard binaries are difficult to apply to descriptions of same-sex IPV.

Johnson's typology offers a great deal to conversations about IPV insofar as it fills the space between measurable acts of violence and the less tangible nature of coercive control. However, it is not without limitations, as Johnson himself notes. To begin, women are still more likely than men to be injured, and more often seriously so, in domestic violence-related physical altercations, regardless of whether the violence was situational or intimate terrorism (Johnson, Leone, & Xu, 2014; Walby & Allen, 2004; Whitesitt 2016). Women also remain more likely to be killed by their male partners, irrespective of the type of violent relationship. While Myhill (2015) found that coercive control was a risk factor for more severe and frequent injury and was more likely to continue after the relationship ended, situational violence can also be quite serious and may repeatedly occur during a relationship. Walby and Towers (2018) have thus advocated the approach of *domestic violent crime*, arguing that all domestic violent crime—defined by a violent act and/or by harm, including fear or distress—is, by definition, coercive and harmful.

Intimate Partner Violence in Culture and Media

Most representations of IPV in film and literature have focused on physical violence in heterosexual relationships, with men depicted as the primary perpetrators and women as the victims. Alcohol is routinely involved, and acts of expressive aggression (e.g., yelling and name-calling) are commonplace. On-screen abusers are variously sadistic and apologetic, reflecting the widespread belief that people who commit acts of violence against their partners are fundamentally flawed or trapped in a "cycle." Storylines formed around physical or sexual violence are common, while portrayals of coercive control, including Alice Walker's 1982 novel *The Color Purple* and the 1991 film *Sleeping with the Enemy*, directed by Joseph Ruben, appear less frequently. Leaving a psychotic spouse, as in the 2002 film *Enough*, makes a great plotline for a suspense thriller, just as remaining with an abusive alcoholic, as in the 2018 film *A Star is Born*, appears downright romantic on screen. However, even as these representations flatten lived experiences of IPV, their impact on readers and viewers remains powerful. Few of us know what it is like to go to space, live in a castle, or be stranded on an island in the middle of the sea, but we can still imagine we know something about these experiences based on what we have read or seen.

In an era of globalization, pop culture is an increasingly important source of information about the world around us, but it is certainly not the only one; we also learn through our families, peers, formal education system, and other sources, which

sociologists have termed *agents of socialization*. These agents of socialization are intimately intertwined and tend to reinforce one another since, in a given time and place, members of society generally attend similar schools, watch the same television shows, participate in the same sports, use the same social media websites, and so forth. Differences—many of which are rooted in social identities and social inequalities—exist. However, the ideas, beliefs, and norms passed down through socialization tend to reproduce throughout the culture and generations. Therefore, understanding IPV is a product not only of lived experiences, which are shaped by time and place, but also of socialization into a culture more generally.

No Stock Characters

It goes without saying that IPV is a fundamentally bad thing. As Walby and Towers (2018) point out, all forms of violence committed against a partner are inherently coercive and harmful, regardless of motivation, frequency, severity, or physical injury. What *does* need to be said is that a person who commits an act of harm against their partner is not always a fundamentally bad person, just as one whom their partner harms are not always helpless or terrified. It is accurate to say that some abusers are sadistic or psychotic, but most people who cause harm to their partners do not fit into this category. Likewise, some victims are terrified to leave, and rightly so, given that separation is a known indicator of lethality (Tjaden & Thoennes, 2000). However, others may simply judge that they are personally better off, on balance, staying in an abusive relationship than leaving it. This can be especially true if the abuse does not result in serious physical injury and victims are worried about declining living conditions—a legitimate concern given the degree to which divorce is associated with women's poverty (U.S. Government Accountability Office [GAO], 2012).

Much of what we learn from culture and media suggests that abusers are bad people and that victims are supposed to leave. However, in real relationships, there is no uniform motivation for violence nor a single trajectory for violent relationships. Victims and abusers are not stock characters; they are *people* and, therefore, prone to defying socially constructed ideas and societally imposed expectations (Gordon, 1997). To understand IPV better, we must acknowledge that much of what we have learned about the issue from culture and media has been wildly oversimplified. This also means accepting certain premises: IPV is not just one thing, gender symmetry or asymmetry has a lot to do with relationship dynamics, men still hold more power than others at the levels of social structure and social institutions, and, perhaps most importantly, people do not always behave how we expect.

Toward a Broader Understanding

Intimate Partner Violence in Popular Culture

When musician Michelle Branch was arrested for domestic violence in August of 2022, her partner, Black Keys drummer Patrick Carney, had no visible injuries (Goldsberry, 2022). Branch had accused Carney of infidelity on the social media website Twitter. When law enforcement was called to their Nashville residence for a disturbance, she admitted to slapping him during an argument. The charges were later dropped, and Branch, who was breastfeeding the couple's infant son at the time, was quickly released. Infidelity, as harmful and demeaning as it may be, is not criminalized in most states, but striking an unfaithful spouse is illegal in all of them. In the absence of other examples, according to Johnson's (2008) typology, Branch's behavior is probably best regarded as an example of *situational violence*, where a person who does not typically engage in controlling behavior loses control.

In 2013, 22-year-old actress Emma Roberts was arrested after an altercation with her partner, *Dahmer* star Evan Peters (Gardner, 2013). Peters, who was not arrested, had a bloody nose, while Roberts did not have immediately obvious physical injuries (bruises appeared later). Roberts and Peters continued their relationship for several years before ending it in 2019. In 1999, former Baywatch actress Carmen Electra and her husband, basketball superstar, and provocateur Dennis Rodman, were both arrested after a physical altercation in Miami, Florida, each claiming the situation had been a "misunderstanding" (Cherfils, 1999). The two later divorced after less than a year of marriage. In 2019, *Clueless* actress Stacey Dash was arrested for scratching and pushing her male partner, who later posted her bail (Henderson, 2020). In each case, as in Branch's, a woman was arrested, and the male victim, who incurred few or minor injuries, did not express significant fear of their female partner. To be clear, IPV is unacceptable in all forms, and all of the relationships eventually ended (save Branch and Carney's, for which it is too early to tell). However, these incidents also seem to support Johnson's suggestion that situational violence is more gender-equal than cases of coercive control.

The Depp-Heard case does not fit neatly into this category. The defamation trial that spurred violent threats by fans against Heard was a civil proceeding, not criminal, and both parties' claims of violence were quite serious, with Heard accusing Depp of numerous physical assaults and of sexually assaulting her with an alcohol bottle, and Depp countering Heard had nearly severed his finger. There is also the unavoidable issue of a massive power differential between the two. Depp's net worth is dozens of times greater than that of Heard, and Depp—a beloved and prolific actor—undoubtedly benefited not only from his celebrity but from gender dynamics more generally, as Heard (2018) herself wrote in the *Washington Post* opinion piece that formed the basis of the lawsuit:

> In real-time, I had the rare vantage point of seeing how institutions protect men accused of abuse. Imagine a powerful man as a ship, like the Titanic. That ship is a huge enterprise.

> When it strikes an iceberg, many people on board are desperate to patch up holes—not because they believe in or even care about the ship, but because their fates depend on the enterprise.

It is undoubtedly easier to declare the need for change than propose realistic, actionable solutions. Moreover, integrating a more nuanced understanding of IPV into culture and media is complicated and runs the risk of downplaying the harm associated with domestic violent crime. However, criminal and civil cases and public discourse tend to consider issues related to frequency, severity, and motivation where other forms of harm are concerned. So, while the task may be difficult, it is not impossible. We can start by doing a better job of educating educators. Training related to IPV is often provided to first responders and local groups by community-based domestic violence advocates, many of whom are socialized to view IPV only through the lens of coercive control. While this is an important contribution, it offers a limited framework for understanding situations that do not fall into this category. Another potential solution involves a broader representation of different types of IPV in popular culture, a wider range of on-screen responses from victims and service providers, and integration of pop culture antagonists who are well-rounded and morally complex, which has become increasingly popular in the era of shows such as *Game of Thrones* and *The Last of Us*.

However, the Depp-Heard trial was ultimately Heard's to lose, whether she was a victim, an aggressor, or part of a relationship characterized by mutual violent control (Johnson, 2008). As a fellow 40-something recently explained to me on social media, "nobody wants their teenage crush to be a monster." But Depp is not a monster—he's a man, a powerful one, which does not mean he cannot also be a victim of IPV or a mutual aggressor in a violent relationship. We tend to take an overly simplistic view of gender symmetry or asymmetry because of the culture in which we live, and the media and people with whom we interact. This is unlikely to change without more and better representation, as well as more discussion of how different types of violent relationships may involve different gender dynamics.

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Chapter 6
Intimate Partner Violence and Women Offenders

Check for updates

Jennifer Cox, Elizabeth MacNeil, and Haylie Stewart

Introduction

Intimate partner violence (IPV) is a pervasive public health crisis, with 47.3% of women and 44.2% of men[1] experiencing sexual violence, physical violence, or stalking by an intimate partner over their lifetime (Leemis et al., 2022). Although historically considered a "gendered crime" with men abusers and women victims (Kubicek et al., 2015), the recent rise in women arrested for IPV has prompted scholars, legal practitioners, and treatment providers to consider IPV policies and treatment practices (Bair-Merritt et al., 2010; Dixon & Graham-Kevan, 2011). There is much debate regarding the motives and phenological make-up of women arrested for IPV (Carney et al., 2007; Henning et al., 2006), calling into question whether policies and interventions designed to deter IPV can effectively generalize to this population (Goldenson et al., 2009).

In this chapter, we first review the history of IPV policies within the United States and consider how gender was infused into legislation aimed at deterring IPV. Next, we consider public perceptions of IPV and how these perceptions influence the criminal legal system's response to IPV. We review current prevalent criminal legal system policies, including mandatory arrests and no-drop prosecution, and

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[1] Sex and gender are distinct, yet they are constructs that are frequently erroneously used interchangeably. In this chapter, we attempt to decipher between gender and sex for each study we review. If there was not enough information available to determine the appropriate term, we use the same term as the study's authors.

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outline potential reforms. Finally, we identify limitations in the research and high-light areas in need of additional, methodologically rigorous data.

IPV Policy History

In the United States before the 1970s, the general public, criminal legal entities, and psychosocial researchers rarely viewed IPV as illegal and domestic violence inci-dences were often treated as a "family problem" (Erez, 1986; Gelles, 1985). Indeed, dating back to ancient Rome, "wife beating" was a socially accepted practice and, in some cultures, legally sanctioned (Berry, 2000). However, in 1873, Alabama became the first state to rescind the "husbandly" right to physically punish a spouse (Fulgrahm v. State, 1873) and throughout the rest of the mid-to-late 1800s, many US states followed suit. Despite this, incidents of IPV were largely considered mis-demeanors, with only a handful of jurisdictions explicitly designating domestic vio-lence of a certain severity as felonies beginning in the 1960s (Danis, 2003).

The social and political zeitgeist of the 1960s- and 1970s-women's rights move-ment resulted in significant changes in perceptions and reactions to IPV. For exam-ple, before the advent of unilateral divorce (i.e., the court terminates a marriage at the request of one spouse without the consent of the other), women could petition the courts for divorce from their husbands on the grounds of "extreme and repeated cruelty," but the husband had the opportunity to defeat the divorce petition by prov-ing that the woman "provoked" the violence (Weisberg, 2019). As jurisdictions adopted unilateral divorce legislation in the 1960s, rates of IPV cases in the criminal legal system significantly dropped (Stevenson & Wolfers, 2006).

In 1989, Sherman and Cohn published the seminal Minneapolis Domestic Violence study, which reported arrest as a deterrent to repeated IPV instances. Coupled with the general "tough on crime" atmosphere of the 1980s and 1990s, criminal legal responses to IPV intensified. By 1990, 48 states had legislation that strengthened victim protection laws, allowing for police to make misdemeanor arrests without warrants and to enforce restraining orders (Danis, 2003; Dobash et al., 1992). Furthermore, many law enforcement agencies adopted mandatory arrest policies while district attorneys implemented "no-drop policies," increasing the number of individuals arrested and prosecuted for IPV (Mignon & Holmes, 1995). In 1994, federal legislation codified IPV as a phenomenon under the purview of law enforcement with the Violence Against Women Act. Despite the name, the most recent iteration encompasses protections for all victims of violence, including women, men, transgender and nonbinary individuals, college students, the elderly, Native Americans, sex trafficking victims, and immigrants. The act went defunct in 2019 but was reauthorized by President Biden in 2022 (The White House, 2022), seemingly highlighting society's continued commitment to protecting victims of IPV.

IPV and the Criminal Legal System

Traditional characterizations of IPV depict violence occurring between an abusive man and a victimized woman (Kubicek et al., 2015; Russell et al., 2015). Indeed, research consistently suggests lay people perceive violence involving a woman victim, compared to a man victim, as more serious (Hamby & Jackson, 2010; Stanziani et al., 2018, 2020) and violence perpetrated by a woman as significantly less serious (Cox et al., 2021). Despite these perceptions, recent research suggests IPV impacts all genders. For example, over half of all IPV is bidirectional, over one-third of men experience IPV in their lifetime (Smith et al., 2018), and members of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer/questioning, intersex, asexual, and more (LGBTQIA+) community experience IPV at rates equal to, or higher than, their non-LGBTQIA+ counterparts (National Coalition Against Domestic Violence, 2020).

When considering public perceptions of IPV, it is perhaps unsurprising that law enforcement and legal decision-makers similarly perceive gender as intertwined with IPV. Hamel et al. (2009) surveyed family court professionals regarding their knowledge and perceptions of IPV and determined these professionals were misinformed about the high rates of serious physical injuries in female-perpetrated (male victim) IPV. Furthermore, family law attorneys and family court judges performed just slightly better than undergraduates on a test of IPV knowledge. Indeed, formal legislation and policies adopted by law enforcement have resulted in disparate treatment due to the alleged perpetrator, although in complex ways. Next, we review the complex and nuanced experiences of women offenders within the context of the IPV policies and reforms.

Law Enforcement IPV Response

In tandem with the "tough on crime" zeitgeist of the 1980s and 1990s, during this time many jurisdictions enacted mandatory arrest statutes requiring responding law enforcement to make an arrest if they find probable cause that an offense occurred. Unsurprisingly, these statutes resulted in an increase in arrests for IPV (Hirschel, 2008; Mignon & Holmes, 1995), and initial research generally supported these statutes as effective in reducing future violence (Sherman & Berk, 1984). However, mandatory arrest laws were accompanied by significant criticism, including arguments that these policies stripped victims of agency (Goodmark, 2009) and are differentially applied (Frye et al., 2007). In a meta-analysis of 11 published studies exploring mandatory arrest efficacy, Hoppe et al. (2020) determined mandatory arrest policies did not limit the likelihood of a future offense and, in some studies, actually increased the likelihood of repeat offending.

Currently, women make up a small but increasing minority of all IPV arrests (NCADV, 2020). In analysis of the National Crime Victimization Survey from 1987 to 2003, Cho and Wilke (2010) reported women perpetrators are typically only

arrested if the incident involves physical injury. Furthermore, some argue women resort to violence as a means of self-defense within the context of their partner's ongoing perpetration of abuse (Chesney-Lind, 2002; Miller, 2001), although others argue women do commit unilateral abuse, yet sociocultural beliefs about violence serve as a factor to penalize males (Carney et al., 2007).

As a direct result of mandatory arrest policies, rates of dual arrests, or arresting both individuals in the relationship, have also increased with the subsequent consequence of increased rates of victim arrests (Durfee, 2012). Consequently, recent decades have seen a disproportionate number of women arrested for IPV (DeLeon-Granados et al., 2006; Frye et al., 2007; Zorza & Woods, 1994). Women are more likely to be dually arrested and more likely to have their case dismissed when dually arrested (84%) compared to when arrested as the sole aggressor (29%; Henning & Renauer, 2005). However, women are more likely to be charged with a felony suggesting, although this group remains less likely to be arrested in general, they are more likely to be arrested for more serious offenses including significant victim injury (Henning & Feder, 2005).

Prosecutorial Decision-Making

Following arrest, prosecutors typically have significant discretion in determining case processing, including whether to pursue criminal charges, engage in plea negotiations, and trial strategy (Jacoby & Ratledge, 2016). However, some legislatures enacted "no drop policies" mandating prosecution should there be sufficient evidence and regardless of victim cooperation (Buzawa & Buzawa, 2003). One, albeit dated, survey found 66% of prosecutor offices across the United States adopted no-drop policies (Rebovich, 1996), and advocates argue these policies interrupt the cycle of violence and remove the burden of decision-making from the victim. However, like mandatory arrest statutes, no drop policies have also been met with significant criticism. For example, Dayton (2003) and Mills (1998) argue victim autonomy should be a central focus of arrest and prosecution. Indeed, in a randomized study of no-drop policies, Ford and Regoli (1993) found victims who were given the choice as to whether to pursue criminal charges, and chose to do so, were less likely to experience future violence compared to victims without a choice. Of note, victims who chose to drop charges were more likely to experience future abuse than victims in the "no-drop" policy condition. However, there is little consensus as to whether no-drop policies are effective in reducing IPV recidivism, and critics argue these policies steal autonomy and power away from victims, further victimizing the individual and family.

Unfortunately, there is little research regarding the experiences of women offenders with no-drop policies. One may presume no-drop policies have resulted in an increase in the number of women prosecuted for IPV, as prosecution is not contingent upon a cooperative witness. Indeed, the number of women prosecuted for IPV

has risen in the last three decades (DeLeon-Granados et al., 2006), presumably as a direct result of mandatory arrest and no-drop policies.

In many jurisdictions, prosecutors also can "defer prosecution" or delay adjudicating the charge for a specific period of time after which, if the alleged aggressor meets predetermined criteria (e.g., no rearrest, completing a treatment program), the charges are dismissed (Klein, 2003). Garner and Maxwell (2009) reviewed 135 studies examining IPV prosecution and determined deferred prosecution is a "common disposition," although studies were typically unclear as to whether cases were deferred and dismissed or deferred but ultimately pursued. Furthermore, there is little research concerning how prosecutors use this tool with women defendants. In one study, Muftić and Bouffard (2007) reported women arrested as part of a dual arrest were less likely to receive deferred imposition compared to women arrested as the sole aggressor (31.6% and 53.3%, respectively). However, research regarding case outcomes of women offenders and deferred prosecution remains mostly elusive.

When prosecutors do move forward with adjudication, it is unclear as to whether women offenders receive differential treatment. For example, Kingsnorth and MacIntosh (2007) examined over 8000 cases in an urban domestic violence diversion court and determined prosecutors were less likely to file charges, less likely to file felony charges, more likely to reduce felony charges to misdemeanors, and more likely to dismiss the case for insufficient evidence when the defendant was a woman. Yet, Romain and Freiburger (2013) determined women defendants are less likely to have cases dismissed, presumably because women are arrested for more serious violence (Henning & Feder, 2005). However, these effects do not readily translate to the laboratory. Cox et al. (2021) presented practicing US prosecutors with a vignette describing an alleged IPV incident and manipulated the sex and sexual orientation of the individuals involved. They found no differences in the severity of charges due to the defendant's gender. These results were essentially replicated in a follow-up study using realistic stimulus materials (e.g., police report, hospital records, victim statement), in which prosecutors recommended more punitive charges when the victim was female, regardless of the offender's sex, suggesting the sex of the victim—rather than the sex of the offender—is an important influence on prosecutor charging decision (Cox et al., 2022).

Judicial Decision-Making

In many jurisdictions, courts have the capability to issue "stay away orders," or protective orders, regulating the circumstances under which a couple can have contact. However, judges typically have few enforcement mechanisms, and approximately 40–50% of orders are violated (Russell, 2012). Regarding women offenders, research suggests judges are *less* likely to grant a protection order to men plaintiffs with women aggressors (Muftić & Bouffard, 2007; Muller et al., 2009), particularly for low levels of violence (Muller et al., 2009). Indeed, Basile (2005) determined

gender was the greatest predictor of protection orders, with victims of women aggressors granted orders 66% of the time and victims of men aggressors receiving protection orders 91% of the time.

Although approximately 90% of criminal charges do not proceed to trial (United States Courts, n.d.), researchers have also considered how jurors and juries consider women defendants charged with IPV. For example, Stanziani et al. (2018) manipulated the sex and sexual orientation of the defendant/victim and measured mock jurors' verdict and perceptions of a simulated case. Consistent with previous jury decision-making research (e.g., Seelau et al., 2003; Sorenson & Thomas, 2009), participants were more confident in a guilty verdict when the defendant was male and perceived the male defendant more negatively than the female defendant. Subsequent studies have determined juror individual beliefs regarding masculinity and sexism may be a more salient factor than defendant sex (Cutroni & Anderson, 2021; Stanziani et al., 2020).

Potential IPV Reforms

Over decades, policymakers and law enforcement have implemented various strategies to decrease IPV and generally improve public safety. However, as demonstrated by the dramatic increase in arrests of women after the implementation of mandatory arrest laws, many of these reforms differentially impact specific groups. Below we outline proposed reforms to simultaneously address this disparate treatment and improve public safety.

First, we acknowledge the importance of language and the power of language to shape perceptions of this issue. Federal legislation to address IPV was titled the Violence Against *Women* Act, and IPV is typically discussed within the context of an opposite-sex male-aggressor framework. Indeed, much of the empirical research specifically addresses this model of IPV. However, current data highlight that IPV impacts individuals of all gender identities (NCADV, 2015; Smith et al., 2018). Reed et al. (2010) also argue (and we agree) complete erasure of gender from the IPV conversation is extremely problematic as women are more likely to be victims of severe, injury-inducing, IPV. Instead, we urge researchers, clinicians, and policymakers to consider using inclusive language that simultaneously honors the lived experiences of individuals and is supported by empirical data.

Since inception and implementation, the merits of mandatory arrest policies have been the source of significant debate. Supporters argue these statutes alleviate pressure on the victim and signal law enforcement and society are committed to reducing violence in the home (Barata & Schneider, 2004; Hoctor, 1997). Opponents argue these policies disempower victims and decrease the likelihood that the victim will report future abuse (Goodmark, 2009). Meta-analytic data (Hoppe et al., 2020) indicate mandatory arrest policies do not limit the likelihood of a future IPV offense and may increase the likelihood of repeat offending. Thus, we must consider our goal; if our objective is to signal that society takes IPV seriously and will punish

accordingly, then it is likely mandatory arrest laws are successful in this regard. However, if the goal is to decrease IPV and increase the likelihood that relationships characterized by IPV relate to community-based services, then data suggest mandatory arrest laws are not effective in this respect.

Problem-solving courts offer alternatives for traditional criminal adjudication and focus on specific types of crimes (e.g., IPV) or populations (e.g., individuals with substance use disorder; National Institute of Justice, 2020). In the mid-to-late 1990s, "domestic violence courts" became a popular correctional intervention (Gover et al., 2021). These courts emphasize therapeutic jurisprudence via treatment and individually tailored programming, and research suggests participants report numerous therapeutic benefits, including feeling as though they were treated with respect, they had the opportunity to tell their story, and the court took them seriously (Rottman & Casey, 1999). Despite the popularity of these courts, there is relatively little research examining the impact of domestic violence courts in reducing recidivism, and the current published research is mixed (Cissner et al., 2015). As such, like mandatory arrest policies, we must consider the purpose of domestic violence courts as an intervention; if the goal is to punish the offender and/or reduce recidivism, it remains unclear if these courts are effective for this purpose. However, if we prioritize therapeutic interventions and increase victim and offender satisfaction with the adjudicative process, domestic violence courts may be effective in this regard (Gover et al., 2021).

We also highlight the importance of trauma-informed prosecution in working with individuals involved in relationships characterized by IPV, including the alleged aggressor. As noted by Stuart et al. (2006), in one sample of women in violence intervention programs for IPV, almost 40% of women reported self-defense, suggesting women aggressors likely experience some form of trauma specifically within the context of the relationship. Indeed, trauma-informed prosecution includes a basic knowledge of trauma and its impact, considering how perceptions and biases can impact information gathering and decision-making, and treating victims, witnesses, and the alleged aggressor with respect (Institute for Innovation in Prosecution, n.d.). This progressive approach may be particularly important for women offenders who demonstrate significantly higher rates of trauma-related mental health symptoms and post-traumatic stress disorder, compared to their men offender counterparts (Komarovskaya et al., 2011).

Relatedly, communities should have a wide array of services to intervene and provide support when a relationship is characterized by IPV. This could include IPV screenings in general practitioner, gynecological, and urgent care offices. Han (2003) also emphasizes the importance of services for IPV victims when interacting with the criminal legal system, including participation in the legal process, access to legal advice outside of the prosecutor's office, and counseling services.

Regarding treatment, early IPV interventions specifically targeted male offenders and were based on the Duluth model that emphasizes men's utilization of power and control (Pence & Paymar, 1993). However, this emphasis on power and control overlooks the complex factors that confluence to cause IPV, particularly for women offenders, and meta-analytic data highlight questions regarding the efficacy of this

approach in reducing violence (Karajurt et al., 2019). Instead, practitioners may consider utilizing the Risk, Needs, Responsivity framework to identify specific risk factors and determine appropriate, empirically supported, interventions (Travers et al., 2021). Interventions may be particularly effective when they are trauma-informed and include substance abuse care (Karajurt et al., 2019).

We also echo Bagwell-Gray and Bartholmey's (2020) call for more systematic and intentional collaboration between researchers, policymakers, and practitioners. Without such collaborations, researchers may "miss the mark" on studying applicable and implementable interventions while law enforcement may approach IPV intervention using outdated frameworks. Community-based participatory research requires researchers to recognize the community as an equal partner in the research process and include community partners at every stage of the research process, from developing the research question to disseminating results (Holkup et al., 2004). Within the context of IPV deterrence, effective collaboration may include prosecution offices and courts working with researchers to identify IPV's impact within the community and craft empirically supported interventions to divert IPV offenders into treatment while also ensuring the safety of the victim and community. Johnson and Stylianou (2022) systematically reviewed research on coordinated community responses to IPV. Although researchers concluded there is a great deal of variability in community approaches and desired outcomes (e.g., reduced arrests, increased service usage), they also emphasize the importance of these collaborations as catalysts for program implementation and change.

Limitations to Research and Future Directions

Lack of Data Examining Female Offenders

Limitations of the research are derivative of the reigning conceptualization of IPV depicting men as offenders and women as victims. Responding research, while important, has primarily functioned within this framework. Such a model is steeped in heteronormative, cisgender, and patriarchal structures (Baker et al., 2013; Brown, 2008). Although the current chapter reviews research challenging the traditional conceptualization of IPV (i.e., women offenders), there is a relative lack of empirical data examining women-perpetrated IPV. Particularly, notable gaps emerge when considering the experiences of women offenders within the context of no-drop policies, prosecutorial discretion in charging decisions, and sentencing (see Cox et al., 2022). When examining "real-world" data outside of the laboratory, researchers consistently highlight the complexity of these cases; for example, mandatory arrest policies disproportionately impact women who are more likely to be dually arrested in jurisdictions with these policies in place. However, charging and case processing outcomes are more elusive, with data suggesting women IPV offenders are treated

both more (Kingsnorth & MacIntosh, 2007) and less leniently compared to male offenders (Romain & Freiburger, 2013).

While much of the literature on women IPV offenders involves opposite-sex couples, some of the extant research includes same-sex couples. Studies focus on lay perceptions of women aggressors using vignettes (e.g., Poorman et al., 2003; Wasarhaley et al., 2017), perceptions of LGB individuals on related laws and barriers to help-seeking (e.g., Baker et al., 2013; Guadalupe-Diaz & Yglesias, 2013), and legal responses to same-sex IPV (e.g., Lantz, 2020). However, this literature often fails to account for historical context (e.g., legality of same-sex marriage), fluidity within identities, stigma, and variables beyond gender (e.g., strength, emotional awareness; Baker et al., 2013; Calton et al., 2016), further highlighting the complexity of this phenomenon.

Absence of Trans and Gender-Diverse Individuals in Research

Even more strikingly absent from the literature are data investigating IPV within trans and gender diverse (TGD) populations. Many scholars have called attention to alarmingly high prevalence rates of IPV within this population (Kurdyla et al., 2021; Yerke & DeFeo, 2016). Some studies attempt to assess the utilization of, and experiences with, IPV services and interventions—including law enforcement— within the TGD population (Guadalupe-Diaz & Jasinski, 2017; Kurdyla et al., 2021; Langenderfer-Magruder et al., 2016). However, published psycho-legal research examining how law enforcers (or mock legal actors) perceive, respond to, or prosecute IPV within TGD couples remains scant (Cox et al., 2022).

Nuance Within IPV Based on Gender

The mechanisms of abuse within romantic partnerships with individuals across the gender spectrum may vary in important ways. For example, some research has explored the nuance in IPV perpetration and legal decision-making based on cisgender women in opposite-sex relationships (Henning et al., 2005, 2006), and to a lesser extent, cisgender women in same-sex relationships (Henning & Renauer, 2005). For example, Whitaker (2014) found women offenders had higher self-reported rates of physical violence and lower rates of psychological IPV compared to men offenders.

However, many scholars acknowledge forms of psychological abuse unique to LGB and TGD individuals, such as outing their partner's sexual orientation or gender identity or leveraging the sentiment that reporting IPV would further stigmatize their community (Baker et al., 2013). Additionally, trans individuals may be uniquely exposed to transphobic emotional abuse, such that partners may shame body parts related to their gender identity (White & Goldberg, 2006; Yerke & DeFeo, 2016). Furthermore, Walker (2015) hypothesizes the unique challenges

encountered when a partner is in the process of publicizing or claiming their identity as trans, which may give rise to abuse. Specifically, Walker notes this process involves the deconstruction of identities and relationship status, which can result in perceived or actual grief related to the loss of the relationship. Such a process may engender factors related to violence, including jealousy, attachment, and dependency (Wigman et al., 2008).

The White Perspective in Empirical Research

Furthermore, related empirical research employing vignettes typically sample the majority of White university students. Although some research taps the perceptions of community members (e.g., Stanziani et al., 2020), IPV service providers (e.g., Basow & Thompson, 2012), and police officers (e.g., Russell & Sturgeon, 2019), these samples are likewise lacking in racial diversity. In a similar vein, the characters described within these vignettes may skew toward envisioning White individuals. Research studying the effect of gender and sexual orientation in IPV scenarios primarily does so by manipulating the names and pronouns of characters in the vignette. When reviewing vignettes describing female-perpetrated IPV, names primarily involved European-originating names (e.g., Anna, Mary, Nicole, Tracey, Jess). Such names may prime individuals to consider and respond to IPV within a White framework.

Although there is little empirical evidence on how respondents utilize assumptions on demographic variables in case vignettes, Gerber (1994) qualitatively describes this phenomenon. Specifically, she emphasizes how expectations of social roles and assumptions of demographic variables (e.g., age, gender, marital status) shape participants' responses to vignette scenarios. Such "hidden assumptions" are visualized and incorporated into responses. Accordingly, the reviewed literature primarily taps the White perception of White couples involved in IPV, effectively excluding the perspectives and nuances of people from other cultures, races, and ethnicities.

Nuance Within IPV Perpetration Based on Race

Just as IPV can manifest differently based on the gender of couples, IPV may vary in important ways by a couple's race. IPV perpetration rates appear to be higher in African American and Hispanic women than in White women (Caetano et al., 2001; Williams et al., 2008). Caetano and colleagues juxtapose subculture violence theory with social-structural theory, which contends such differences in prevalence rates are attributable to systemic conditions, such as poverty and racial discrimination. Research is necessary to empirically test such theories and evidence factors that may mediate such discrepancies (e.g., substance use; Caetano et al., 2001).

Importantly, a significant portion of empirical evidence sampling experiences with IPV collect racial demographics but do not report statistics on how prevalence rates and experiential differences may differ based on these identities (see Williams et al., 2008). Furthermore, despite some notable contributions exploring the differential forms of IPV utilized by women of color (e.g., Walley-Jean & Swan, 2009), this area has received very little attention in the field.

Psychological Abuse

Psychological or emotional abuse is a form of IPV acknowledged by governmental organizations (e.g., the Centers for Disease Control [CDC]) and scholars alike but is often comparatively excluded from the research. As indicated by Cox et al. (2022), this may be a consequence of the inclusion of the word "violence" in terms primarily used to describe partner abuse (e.g., IPV, domestic violence). Notably, some research explores prevalence rates of different forms of abuse (e.g., Walley-Jean & Swan, 2009) or perceptual differences in emotional versus physical IPV by key stakeholders (e.g., service providers; Basow & Thompson, 2012). Yet, our understanding of psychological IPV, which may be more prevalent in relationships with partners from traditionally underprivileged groups, is not well developed. In a systematic review of women offenders in opposite-sex relationships, Williams et al. (2008) determined physical violence was most commonly studied, while emotional and sexual abuse were grossly underrepresented in the literature. A more complete understanding of the experience of women offenders with psychological abuse is warranted.

Conclusion

Gender plays an inextricable role in defining and understanding IPV. Although historically considered a "gendered crime," more recently researchers, practitioners, and policymakers have considered how IPV-related policies specifically impact women offenders. Data generally suggest some policies (e.g., mandatory arrest laws) have increased the number of women arrested and prosecuted for IPV. However, overall, research with IPV women offenders is lacking and inconsistent (e.g., Kingsnorth & MacIntosh, 2007; Romain & Freiburger, 2013). Additionally, this research is typically constrained by the gender binary, cisgenderism, and heteronormativity. Accordingly, researchers must embrace a multifaceted, nuanced approach to obtain a deeper and more authentic understanding of IPV. Such nuance is essential to capture the complexities of real-world relationships and more completely craft the criminal legal response.

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Part II
Stereotypes and Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence

Chapter 7

The Impact of Gendered Stereotypes and Perceptions of Violence: Perceptions of Female Perpetrators of Domestic and Sexual Violence

Elizabeth A. Bates, Elizabeth I. Harper, and Alende Amisi

Introduction

Over the last 50 years, there has been a development of research and practice-based evidence that details the significance of the problem of domestic violence and abuse. The gendered model of intimate partner violence (IPV) originated from the women's liberation movement and has been hugely influential in raising awareness of violence against women and violence within families. However, gendered models arguably have the unintended consequence of privileging one group's experiences: they posit that IPV is a problem of men's violence toward women driven by gender inequality and male privilege (Dobash & Dobash, 1979). This model has been influential within practice and remains so to this day, despite little evidence of its effectiveness (see Bates et al., 2017b, for a review). Gendered models ignore evidence that details the impact of trauma and adverse childhood experiences on IPV (Whitfield et al., 2003); ignore violence in the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer/questioning (LGBTQ+) community (see Laskey et al., 2019); neglect the similarities that exist in risk factors for men's and women's IPV (Bates et al., 2017a); and ignore the broader evidence of family violence (Papamichail & Bates, 2019). Importantly, for this volume, these models also ignore women's perpetration of IPV in the face of an abundance of evidence of perpetration toward both male (Bates, 2020; Hines et al., 2007) and female victims (West, 2002). Despite this evidence, there is still a widespread lack of acknowledgment of women's IPV perpetration in policy (in the *Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy* in the United Kingdom

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[UK]), practice (Hope et al., 2022), and in the public narrative and perceptions, including those within the criminal justice system (Donovan et al., 2020). The current chapter aims to discuss our understanding of how gender influences perceptions of family and sexual violence. This chapter will explore the influence of gender and how it impacts the way in which we perceive IPV specifically, but it will also include consideration of other forms of family violence (sibling aggression and child-to-parent violence) and how it can affect treatment and intervention with both perpetrators and victims.

Evidence of Women's Violence

Empirical evidence of women's perpetration of IPV can be found as early as the late 1970s and 1980s. Since then, there has been a wealth of evidence of women's perpetration, including through police data, as evidenced in Melton and Belnap's (2003) study analyzing US IPV cases. While they found most defendants were male, they found that a substantial minority of 14% of cases as female defendants supported the presence of women's violence. Crime survey data in England and Wales indicate that for every three victims of domestic violence, one is male and two are female (Office for National Statistics, 2020). We further know from the (limited) available data about perpetrator gender that many perpetrators who are violent toward male victims are women. Indeed, in the Scottish Justice Survey (see Scottish Government, 2019, which does identify the gender of the perpetrator), the research points to perpetrators being female in 88% of IPV cases against men. Academic research has demonstrated gender parity in the ratio of male versus female rates of IPV perpetration as studies have found that women and men perpetrate IPV at nearly equal rates (see, for example, Baker & Stith, 2008; Capaldi & Crosby, 1997; Follingstad et al., 1991; Gray & Foshee, 1997; Katz et al., 2002). A vital source of evidence can be found in Archer's (2000) meta-analysis demonstrating in a sample of 82 studies with over 64,000 participants that women reported perpetrating significantly more IPV than men. There are critics of each of these statistics, but regardless, there is clear and indisputable evidence of women's violence.

Despite evidence from the extant literature, we know female perpetrators are not viewed the same way as male perpetrators, including severity, impact, and need for legal or health-related intervention. This often includes denial of women's violence or dismissal of its consequences. For instance, Michael Johnson—one of the pioneers in academia on domestic abuse—asserts, "When a woman slaps her husband in the heat of an argument, it is unlikely to be interpreted by him as a serious attempt to do him physical harm. In fact, it is likely to be seen as a quaint form of feminine communication" (Johnson, 2008, p. 107).

Physical Violence: Vignette-Based Research

Much of the research on perceptions of female perpetrators and all genders and sexual orientations have originated from scenario or vignette-based research. Utilizing these hypothetical scenarios allows for controlled exploration of the perceptions of gender and sexual orientation by simply manipulating the gender and sexual orientation of the perpetrator and victims. One of the earliest studies to explore this was Harris and Cook (1994), who used vignettes to explore the perception of a husband battering his wife, a wife battering her husband, and a gay male battering his partner. The scenario where the woman was the victim was seen as more violent than when the victim was male; however, when the male (husband) was the victim, he was more likely to be blamed for his own victimization. This literature base has consistently found that men's violence toward women is considered the most serious and dangerous. Women's violence toward men is less likely to cause injury or require intervention. For example, we see perpetrator blame is higher for males compared to female perpetrators (D'Costa & Saklofske, 2022), IPV perpetrated by men against women is considered more severe than women perpetrating against men (Seelau & Seelau, 2005), and female perpetrators are seen as less likely to cause injury and induce significantly higher rates of victim blame against male partners (Parker et al., 2022).

Moreover, men's perpetration of psychological abuse is consistently perceived to be more harmful (Capezza et al., 2021). However, we know psychological abuse is perceived as less severe than other types of abuse (Frazier, 2021). These perceptions also impact the ways in which we perceive the need for intervention. For instance, female perpetrators are consistently recommended more lenient sentences in vignette-based research (Socia et al., 2021).

It is important to note that these perceptions affect the terminology used to label abuse scenarios which, in turn, affects how victims and those around them identify such behavior. In Nordin's (2021) study, college students felt female perpetrated IPV did not "count" as IPV to the same extent as male-perpetrated violence, where bystanders were even encouraged not to intervene in such cases. In another study, Kuijpers et al. (2021) had young adults rate the "normality" of IPV vignettes. Participants deemed those with a male perpetrator and female victim to be lower in normality ratings. In contrast, scenarios with male victims and female perpetrators were seen as the most normal. These results were noted to be most significant for male participants.

Indeed, the literature has further demonstrated that the gender of the participants in the studies often impacts these perceptions. For example, Roberts and Price (2019) found that women considered a broader range of IPV behaviors than men, particularly psychological and financial abuse. Furthermore, participants identified that men and women could perpetrate IPV but felt that men did so more often, leading the authors to suggest they had constructed IPV as a problem of men's violence toward women. Women have also been found to deliver harsher sentences than men; for example, in Kern et al.'s (2007) study, women delivered more severe sentences

than men during the pre-deliberation stages, but there was no change in the post-deliberation stage, indicating men had changed their sentencing to a greater extent.

Criticism of Current Vignette-Based Research

IPV and violence generally are at their peak during the 16–25 age bracket, which explains the utilization of younger samples in this body of research described above. That said, the dominance of college and university samples within the attitudes and perceptions literature is a limitation for identifying the understanding of how all social groups perceive IPV. This group represents a particular and often privileged social group lacking cultural and other diversity types. For example, many of these college/university samples are from what has been named WEIRD (Western, Educated, Industrialized, Rich, and Democratic nations; Henrich et al., 2010), and indeed college/university samples will be likely to form one particular social and economic strata of these nations. Critics of the lack of diversity within psychological research have highlighted that an over-reliance on these so-called "WEIRD" samples skews our understanding of the psychological theory that is based on such a relatively small section of the social world. Furthermore, college and university samples are also typically heavily skewed in the female direction; for example, Wilson and Smirles (2022) had 593 undergraduate students most of which ($n = 457$) were women. This points to our understanding of this issue coming from primarily Western, young, female student samples and lacks research working directly with front-line service providers or professionals.

Despite this, limited available research has explored these perceptions with some professionals, specifically police officers. In Gover et al.'s (2011) study, the authors utilized experiences (rather than a vignette-based study) and found that police officers generally felt IPV was a serious crime, but they felt frustrated with the number of repeat calls. Most officers also agreed that men were less likely than women to report incidents of IPV and felt women were as likely to perpetrate IPV. A study with policing students found, regardless of gender, IPV is considered serious, but when in same-sex relationships, it is considered less serious than violence toward a heterosexual female yet more serious than toward a heterosexual male (Fröberg & Strand, 2018).

Explanations of Differences in Attitudes

Some research has linked gendered perceptions of IPV to the physicality of men and women. Hamby and Jackson (2010) found that male violence toward women was perceived as more severe, primarily due to the stereotypes about the differences in size and strength. In studying our understanding of female perpetrators, the evidence suggests we go to a greater length to explain women's violence because it is

seen as "abnormal"—it goes against the female gender role. So, it leaves women (and society) with a need to try to explain the aggression in a way men do not have to (see Bates, 2018). In vignette-based studies, men's violence is attributed internally (e.g., they are angry), whereas women's is attributed externally, often characterized as a response to provocation (Scarduzio et al., 2017). Linking this to underlying gender roles, Bates et al. (2019) found that IPV was less likely to be identified in scenarios with a female perpetrator and a male victim than in the opposite gendered scenario. This was further seen within implicit attitudes (using the Implicit Association Test) where incongruent stereotype priming via stereotype congruent, incongruent, or no information about IPV victimization was not enough to challenge these perceptions. Bates et al. (2019) suggested this may indicate that presenting information about IPV is not enough to challenge deeply ingrained gender norms and societal perceptions.

Gendered perceptions are mainly present in media portrayals where female perpetrators are often cast in movies and television in a humorous or sensational way (Scarduzio et al., 2017); yet, when we look at how female offenders are characterized in the news, we see women who kill are often labeled as "mad, bad or a victim" (Weare, 2013, p. 33). These perceptions point to an "explanation" for violence (a removed sense of agency from women) and can be seen as an attitude rooted in sexism. This again falls back to the discussion about socially conditioned gender roles yet has more impact on men than women. In Scarduzio et al.'s (2017) study, men are described as being outside the acceptable bounds of masculinity when they are violent to a woman, but also when they are victims themselves—for women, neither hitting nor being hit undermined perceptions of their femininity. These contradictory findings point to a double standard in how we consider perceptions of perpetrators of IPV. Female perpetrators were perceived as almost excessively feminine, having lost control and being overly emotional (Scarduzio et al., 2017).

Perceptions of Sexual Violence

When considering perceptions of women's sexual violence, legislation in England and Wales provides a clear example of how rape is gendered. It currently only recognizes men as offenders, which excludes the possibility of female perpetrators where men are forced to penetrate by women (Weare, 2018b) due to the misconception that "clearly a woman cannot bring about sexual intercourse with a male against his will" (Rumney & Morgan-Taylor, 1997, p. 333). Despite this common belief, research involving female perpetrators of sexual violence toward men has revealed several strategies to enable this abuse. Weare (2018a) detailed aggressive strategies women use, including taking advantage of men's vulnerability through intoxication, using physical force, and threats of physical harm. The author further asserts that women used gendered strategies, "that is, strategies where women are aware of, and take advantage of, their gendered roles and experiences, *qua* women" (p. 2201).

The public, and sometimes professionals, see women's sexual violence toward men as unlikely and implausible (Davies & Rogers, 2006). Research suggests that cases involving a female offender are seen as less serious and require a lesser punishment than a male offender (Gould & Gertz, 1994), and further shows more sympathy toward female perpetrators of sexual assault (Moore & Miller-Perrin, 2022). Clements et al. (2014) found in their systematic review that legal and health or social care professionals recognized female-perpetrated sexual assault as a serious issue. However, this was minimized compared to male-perpetrated abuse, and professionals had more favorable attitudes toward female perpetrators. Furthermore, professionals perceived that service involvement (e.g., police, social services) was less appropriate when the perpetrator was female. Davies and Rogers (2006) reviewed the literature on perceptions of female perpetrators of sexual assault as part of their more comprehensive review of male rape; the general findings were consistent in that if there was a male victim and a female perpetrator, the perpetrator was blamed less, the male victim was blamed more, and the perception was that men should always be sexually available to women (thus minimizing the impact of the female perpetrator).

Traditional gender role stereotypes dictate that men are dominant and assertive, and women are weaker and passive (Fisher & Pina, 2013). These stereotypes feed into rape myths that women cannot rape men. Weare (2021) details several myths around forced-to-penetrate cases that impact our perceptions, including misperceptions about the nature of men's arousal (specifically that if a man has an erection, he must be giving consent), the size and strength differences between men and women, and that even if this can happen, it is not likely to be particularly harmful to men. If believed by victims, this is likely to create a barrier to reporting. Indeed, Sable et al. (2006) explored men's and women's barriers to reporting sexual violence and found that one of the most significant barriers for men was the fear of not being believed—this was scored significantly higher for men than for women. This literature helps us understand the perceptions of women's sexual violence within the context of IPV, but much less research directly explores these perceptions in this context. This is an important area for future research; the combination of general IPV attitudes and attitudes about women's sexual violence likely means men will face disbelief and an underestimation of the impact and consequences of their experiences.

Female Perpetrators and the LGBTQ+ Community

There is a lack of consensus on the prevalence of IPV in same-sex relationships, with disparities likely due to barriers to reporting (Whitehead et al., 2021). As mentioned earlier, the Scottish Justice Survey (see Scottish Government, 2019) identifies the gender of the perpetrator and points to the prevalence of female perpetrators accounting for around 1% of female victims. Academic research supports that lesbian violence figures may be higher; Badenes-Ribera and Bonilla-Campos (2021) suggest from their prevalence data that lesbian violence is higher than for heterosexual women. This lack of consensus is in keeping with broader conclusions about

LGBTQ+ IPV being underrepresented within the research literature (Laskey et al., 2019).

Research has explored the perceptions of same-sex IPV using vignette studies. This methodology often manipulates the gender of the victim and perpetrator to understand the impact of gender and sexual orientation. Typically, we see perceptions of IPV within same-sex relationships as not considered serious, particularly when compared to men's violence toward women. For example, Poorman et al. (2003) found that participants reported male-against-female abuse as the most serious and were more likely to suggest pressing charges compared to IPV within same-sex relationships. Similarly, in Ahmed et al.'s (2013) study, IPV was perceived as more serious with a female victim, a male perpetrator, and when the violence was severe. Moreover, Sorenson and Thomas (2009) found that IPV against gay male, lesbian, and heterosexual women is more likely to be considered illegal, linked to issue of stay-away orders, and recommendations to call the police compared to heterosexual men. When reading media reports, Savage et al. (2022) found participants rated stronger punishments for a heterosexual male perpetrator; there was no difference between male and female same-sex relationship perpetrators, but these were both stronger compared to a female heterosexual perpetrator.

Less research has focused on perceptions of IPV that occur within lesbian relationships. Rather it is more often included within wider studies exploring the LGBTQ+ community. For example, Russell et al. (2015) found that scenarios were less likely to be recognized as abuse when there was a gay or lesbian couple compared to those in opposite-sex relationships. Evidence suggests IPV within lesbian relationships is often perceived as mutual or bidirectional. In Little and Terrance's (2010) study, the authors explored perceptions of lesbian IPV and manipulated the physical appearance of the perpetrator and victims. They found that female participants perceived the IPV as more dangerous than male participants and that both men and women rated the more feminine victim as less blameworthy and having a more legitimate claim. Literature also suggests that bisexual women are perceived as promiscuous, which can lead to victim blaming in sexual violence cases (Dyar et al., 2021).

We know from exploring service provider's perceptions that they often view same-sex IPV differently than that in opposite-sex relationships. In Brown and Groscup's (2009) study, crisis center staff were equally as likely to recognize IPV within opposite-sex and same-sex relationships. However, they felt the scenarios involving same-sex couples were less serious and less likely to escalate and that these relationships were easier to escape. Interviews with those working within sexual assault services showed that myths and stereotypes lead to minimizing sexual violence while also victim-blaming LGBTQ+ survivors (Mortimer et al., 2019). Similarly, Russell (2018) found that police officers were more likely to victim blame or see victim responsibility when the IPV was perpetrated by a female.

The literature exploring perceptions of IPV as a type of family violence is significant. We can see from the above brief review that these perceptions have not demonstrated significant changes over the last few decades. While there is less research on other forms of family violence, we see similar patterns and similar impacts of gender on our perceptions.

Other Forms of Family Violence: Sibling Violence

Sibling aggression is known to be marginalized as a form of family violence because it is perceived as harmless and of little consequence (Khan & Rogers, 2015), thus making it an understudied form of violence (Linares, 2006). Prevalence figures estimate between 37.6% (Tucker et al., 2013) and 82% of siblings have experienced this aggression (Mackey et al., 2010). Researchers often identify aggression by its forms (e.g., physical and psychological aggression; Chen et al., 2019), but it is also essential to highlight its functions and motivations to investigate the damaging effects of such aggression for adjustment in childhood (Tucker et al., 2015). At the time of this writing, no prevalence studies explore sibling aggression in adults.

Much of the research in this area has been quantitative in nature, has detailed some levels of prevalence, and has provided mixed evidence around gender differences in perpetration and victimization. This is partly due to the lack of consensus on the definition and the different measures used in the studies (Harrison, 2017). Research has, contradictorily, demonstrated that boys are more aggressive (Tucker et al., 2013), that girls are more aggressive (Tanrikulu & Campbell, 2015), and even that the aggression can often be mutual or bidirectional (Duncan, 1999). This research also demonstrates that this violence is often not conceptualized as such by respondents. Kettrey and Emery (2006), for example, found in their sample of 200 college students that the majority of their sample had experienced sibling violence—83% reported mild or severe sibling violence, and 70.5% reported experiencing or perpetrating severe violence. Despite this, many participants discussed experiencing "conflict" rather than violence.

In some qualitative accounts, we see evidence of women's perpetration of this type of violence. For example, in Elliot et al.'s (2020) study, one sister wrote about the range of abuse experienced:

> My sister became increasingly violent following the separation of my parents when she was ten and I was six. She was verbally and emotionally abusive (towards the whole family), and this escalated to physical and sexual violence (against me only) by the time she was 14 to 15 … The abuse is characterized by secrecy (usually only occurring in the home) and threats of harm if I told anybody or got help. (p. 172)

Similarly, Harrison (2017) described experiences of both men's and women's sibling aggression; results indicated that girls used this violence and then justified it by reporting it as self-defense, and many female participants reported using emotions to illicit parental support.

Compared to the IPV literature base, relatively little has explored perceptions of sibling violence concerning the gender of perpetrators and victims. Specifically, there has been relatively little research to explore the perceptions of specifically female perpetrators of sibling violence. The current research points to similar trends in the IPV literature in that men's violence and women's victimization are viewed as the most serious forms of this aggression. For example, Harris (1991) found that aggression against a woman was rated more negatively and that female victims were seen as more justified in retaliating. They further found that male participants rated

sibling aggression as the least acceptable form of violence (compared to other targets), and female participants rated it as the most acceptable. The authors link this to possible early discipline boys may experience when parents are trying to control their use of aggression.

Child-to-Parent Violence

As with sibling violence, child-to-parent violence (CPV) is one of the most under-researched aspects of family violence (Ibabe et al., 2020). Various authors have added concrete elements to the definition of CPV since 1979 when it was introduced as "Battered parent syndrome" (Harbin & Madden, 1979)—a discreet form of family violence, which exclusively comprised of physical aggression and verbal/non-verbal threats of physical harm. Although there is no universal definition of this type of violence, the concept has been expanded over time. As defined by Cottrell (2001), CPV is "any act of a child that is intended to cause physical, psychological or financial damage to gain power and control over a parent" (p. 3).

Regarding gender differences, findings seem to vary depending on the sample and type of aggressive behavior studied. Pereira et al. (2017) argued that CPV contains more gender similarities in perpetration, with percentages being more equal in more normalized samples such as students. When accounting for clinical or judicial samples, most aggressors reported are males aged 10–18, and the victims are usually female (Condry & Miles, 2014; Contreras & Cano, 2014). As exemplified in a recent meta-analysis of a total sample of 3660 young people reported by parents and researchers, 72% of CPV perpetrators were male (Gallagher, 2008).

Nock and Kadzin (2002) identified mothers as victims of CPV in 93.4% of cases; these figures further displayed only 2.7% of CPV perpetration from their large 606 clinical sample directed toward fathers. However, Walsh and Krienert (2008) suggested their finding that CPV victims are more likely to be mothers could be explained by the mothers being more frequent disciplinarians, and so are exposed to a greater risk of harm. Furthermore, findings such as this are comprised of population samples that are significantly higher in one-parent families, and where many of those single parents are mothers (Ibabe & Jaureguizar 2010).

Some authors propose that the perpetrators' gender may influence how law enforcement interprets CPV incidents (e.g., the event severity; Strom et al., 2014). Through an examination of 1113 CPV incidents, Armstrong et al. (2021) discussed a gendered perception in law response to CPV; when controlling for injuries present, boys were more likely criminalized through arrests when the victim was female, yet both male and female aggressors were less likely to be arrested when the victim was male. Additionally, CPV (like other forms of domestic violence) is underreported and only reported to the police depending on the severity of the abuse (Miles & Condry, 2015). As a result, other forms of CPV, such as financial and psychological, may not be captured in the data set.

In terms of perceptions, this is again a type of family violence that has been largely underexplored. McElhone's (2017) study of perceptions of CPV manipulated perpetrator and victim gender and highlighted that sons were perceived to be more aggressive toward a maternal figure than daughters. The author further suggested that these perceptions result from societal views of violence and the biased portrayal of violence in the media. A potential danger in conceptualizing CPV as almost exclusively a son-to-mother phenomenon, or as Hunter et al. (2010) label it as "mother abuse," neglects the potential of those who suffer from CPV to be met with applicable services. It is also important to acknowledge that many parents reporting violence from their children to the police are male (Condry & Miles, 2014).

Conclusion

The evidence reviewed in this chapter presents an account of the perceptions of female perpetrators of domestic and family violence that have not been impacted by the decades of research around this violence. The body of literature demonstrating women's violence is both developed and developing, yet this has not impacted our perceptions and attitudes toward women's propensity to be violent and cause harm to others. It is clear from the above review that these attitudes often portray women's (and girls') violence as less impactful, less serious, and less in need of intervention. The public reactions to domestic violence and abuse often rely on stereotypes to understand the issue rather than understanding the complexity of IPV (Scarduzio et al., 2017).

The impact of this can be seen in a lack of research that has explored female IPV perpetrators' pathways into offending (see Mackay et al., 2018, for a review) and a lack of interventions for working with female perpetrators (see Bates, Graham-Kevan, et al., 2017b). These perceptions further feed into the treatment of victims within the criminal justice system and health care systems, which can lead to barriers to help-seeking for male victims (Taylor et al., 2022), as well as missed opportunities for intervention when victims come to the attention of social services (Hope et al., 2022).

Our pre-existing understanding of gender roles impedes us from identifying men as victims and likely influences how they are treated within services (Thomas & Hart, 2022). For example, these perceptions can influence treatment decisions by being less likely to recommend victims leave (Brown & Groscup, 2009). The literary evidence even shows that the willingness of female IPV victims to re-engage with police after having called once was impacted by seeing the police being interested and their satisfaction with police response (I. M. Johnson, 2007).

This review has further highlighted that these gendered perceptions can impact how we respond and react to sibling and child-to-parent violence. Particularly in comparison to IPV, there is relatively little exploration of the perceptions and impact of said perceptions on these types of violence. So, a further recommendation from this review is a call for more research on this violence (and the perceptions more

widely). This will require overcoming barriers to engaging with families, such as parents' reluctance to consent. Previous sibling aggression studies have led to a backlash of stigma and judgment on the parent, stating they should be accountable for their child's behavior (Desir & Karatekin, 2018). However, this is a barrier that researchers must overcome to not only improve this practice but to develop a safe space where parents can be involved in research without facing backlash. This will aid societal recognition of sibling aggression and CPV.

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Chapter 8
Female Sexual Offending (FSO): The Ripple Effect

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Introduction

To many people, the idea of women being sexual predators challenges their understanding of the nature and cultural stereotypes of womanhood and emphasizes femininity (Messerschmidt, 2014). More specifically, reconceptualizing women as anything other than caregivers and nurturers presents a paradigm shift for many in society. However, research that investigates female sexual offending (FSO) concludes that the behavior is more common than imagined. For example, a recent meta-analysis that examined FSO globally revealed that women account for 12% of all sexual abuse cases (Jelgic, 2020). This finding also estimates that the percentage could be higher since many victims fail to report the behavior either because they may not recognize it as sexual abuse (as if it is a male-gendered behavior) or because they fear no one will take the matter seriously, given the behavior contradicts cultural perceptions of women (Becker et al., 2001). Consequently, those in law enforcement, child protection, and other professions conclude that the behavior is gravely underreported. Nevertheless, the fact remains that nearly 40% of men who report they were sexually victimized indicate that the perpetrator was a woman (Jelgic, 2020).

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Researchers contend that contrary to popular belief, FSO is not a myth; instead, it is a grim reality that is just as devastating and traumatic when committed by women. Moreover, it can be perpetrated by women of all socioeconomic statuses. For example, the recently convicted and disgraced British socialite, Gheslaine Maxwell (associate of Jeffrey Epstein), is instructive since she not only recruited, groomed, and provided wealthy men with a supply of young girls but she also participated in the sexual abuse. Some experts reported that with Epstein's financial backing, Gheslaine recruited, manipulated, and coaxed victims into dangerous situations. This example reveals that the behavior is pervasive and can affect everyone, especially economically vulnerable victims, yet FSO has remained a silent predatory crime (Anderson et al., 2021). Many experts suggest these offenders operate under the radar since the justice system and others in society have become complicit in enabling their predatory behavior by either refusing to apply the full weight of the law against them or failing to recognize the behavior and holding them accountable to the same extent as their male counterparts when sexual victimizations are discovered. FSO is a serious issue with implications for both the criminal justice as well as the public health system since it involves criminal offenders, victims, and a host of adverse health outcomes that must be treated. Therefore, this chapter is divided into four parts. Part One discusses female sexual offenders in general. Part Two addresses the victims of FSO. Part Three presents the "ripple effect" of FSO by arguing that it is a public health issue with many negative health consequences. Part Four offers policy recommendations to prevent FSO. In the final analysis, we argue that FSO can be prevented by using both criminal justice and public health approaches.

Part One: Female Sexual Offenders

The term *sexual violence* is an umbrella label for many forms of sexual abuse: sexual assault, child sex abuse, intimate partner sexual violence, incest, and drug-facilitated sexual assault, to name a few (Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network [RAINN], n.d.). Park et al. (2000) also view sexual abuse as intended or unintended, which can be of verbal, emotional, psychological, sexual, or physical form resulting in (or is likely to result in) equivalent harm, or suffering, including threats of acts such as coercion or deprivation. Additionally, sexual violence against children has been categorized according to the ages of both child victims and child perpetrators: *problem sexual behaviors* are those perpetrated by children under 10 years old with victims 0–4 years old, and *sexually abusive behaviors* are perpetrated by children over 10, but younger than 18, who abuse children aged 10–18 years old (El-Murr, 2017).

While men perpetrate most sexual violence, the percentage of sexual violence women commit is significant. The Committee on Health Care for Underserved Women (2011) reported that each year in the United States, it is estimated that women commit sex crimes against 1.5 million girls and 1.1 million boys. It is

difficult to estimate the exact number of female sex offenders due to differences in the legal systems, problems with reporting processes, and definitions of sexual offenses (Cortoni et al., 2016). For example, Cortini and colleagues (2016) found that the prevalence of female sex offenders in a multi-country study increased six-fold (11.6%) when self-report data were considered. This suggests that the information provided by offenders is more accurate than the information given by victims. Gender bias has also affected whether the female sex offender is considered an offender, if she is charged and/or convicted, and the severity of her punishment (Lambert & Hammond, 2009). In a 2017 Canadian study, 3.7% of 4703 sex-offending adults were female (Savage, 2019). Past prevalence estimates provided by Green (1999) reported that up to 24% of male victims and up to 14% of female victims had a female perpetrator. Despite the significant number of female sexual predators, they remain under-represented on the sex registry and under-convicted in the court system (Cortoni et al., 2009).

Adult Female Sex Offenders

Adult female sex offenders (AFSOs) range from their 20s to 50s (Darling et al., 2018; McLeod, 2015; ten Bensel et al., 2019). Most *female child sex offenders* (FCSOs) are White, with a small group of Black offenders (Comartin et al., 2018; ten Bensel et al., 2019). Moreover, FCSOs, with exceptions in the healthcare profession (to be discussed later), are described as cognitively lower functioning, may have a learning disorder, and are less educated than non-female child sex offenders (Bickart et al., 2019; McLeod, 2015). Most studies report that FCSOs know the victim as a relative or acquaintance (Comartin et al., 2018; Vandiver & Kercher, 2004). Their motivations vary; however, the offender typically views themselves as a nurturer of the victims, may perceive their child victims as sexual, and tend to minimize the harm they cause (Gannon et al., 2014). Overall, female sex offenders do not show a victim gender preference (Colson et al., 2013). Notwithstanding, those who act alone are more likely to seek male victims (ten Bensel et al., 2019; Williams & Bierie, 2015), and those who offend with a partner, usually male, seek female victims (Wijkman & da Silva, 2020).

Many AFSOs mirror adolescent female sex offenders concerning characteristics such as histories of childhood sex abuse (Bickart et al., 2019; Levenson et al., 2015); drug use (including illicit drugs and alcohol use) (McLeod, 2015); and mental health problems with or without care (inpatient stay rates are reported between 15% and 37.2% of study samples) (Bickart et al., 2019; Fazel et al., 2010) with a 47% rate of outpatient treatment (Fazel et al., 2010). AFSOs, like their younger counterparts, experience higher rates of depression, bipolar personality disorder, anxiety, and psychosis (Miller et al., 2009). The use of psychotropic medication and suicide attempts have also been noted (Miller et al., 2009), along with significant issues of low self-esteem, self-empowerment, and isolation (Williams et al., 2019).

Sexual Offences Committed Most Often by FSOs

Violence against females, women, and children is "a global epidemic cutting across geographic, race, class and cultural boundaries," causing injury worldwide (Watson & Silkstone, 2006, p. 112). The World Health Organization (WHO) (2021) estimates that between 2000 and 2018, in 161 countries, about 30% of women have been victims of intimate partner sexual violence or non-partner sexual violence. Female sex offenders are also part of that epidemic since they perpetrate crimes against adults and young males.

Sexual violence and sexual offenses take many forms, such as online sexual offending, including pornography (which may involve touching), that could cause harm to victims. Additionally, there is *technology-assisted female-perpetrated child sexual abuse* that involves luring children into inappropriate relationships including a co-offender and creating and distributing child pornography (Augarde & Rydon-Grange, 2022). A 2019 report from the United Kingdom's Ministry of Justice Research (Parke & Karsna, 2019) revealed that of 103 female sex offenders convicted, 2% were solo-offending predators, and 52% were involved with child pornography. Research suggests that incidence rates may be scarce regarding online sexual abuse because of the strategies that perpetrators use to elude detection (Darling et al., 2018).

Sexual offenses that involve touching committed by female sex offenders against adult victims also include male rape. Rape is associated with strength and supports the myth that female offenders cannot rape men due to the perceived disparities in size and severity of injury female offenders can commit against males (Fisher & Pina, 2013). Literature suggests women take advantage of men who are under the influence of alcohol or drugs (Krahé et al., 2003) along with the use of other modes of aggression, such as verbal abuse (Graham, 2006), to achieve oral sex, sexual touching, and sexual intercourse (Krahé et al., 2003). While statistics on female rape offenders are scant, the incidence of male rape, by either female or male offenders, has been reported as nearly 3% of all men in the United States, and 1 of every 10 rape victims have been male (Planty et al., 2013). Basile et al. (2022) report that 4.5 million men were victims of a completed or attempted rape. Male lifetime reports of sexual violence was 30.7% and men were victimized most, but 10.4% involved women perpetrators.

Female Sex Offender Typologies

There are four basic female sex offender typologies: (1) teacher/lover, (2) the male-coerced molester or co-offender, (3) the psychologically disturbed, and (4) the experimenter/exploiter (Vandiver & Kercher, 2004). The *teacher/lover* offender views herself as involved in consensual sex and strongly denies the harm rendered to the victim, who is often a student. The *male-coerced or co-offender* occurs with

both adult female and adolescent abusers. This offender often abuses her children or relatives, either in partnership with a male or when coerced by a male. The adolescent molester may victimize siblings or other young relatives (Mathews et al., 1989). The *experimenter/exploiter* is often a young offender who is sexually curious (e.g., a babysitter) but may develop into a more aggressive offender, such as a sex trafficker (Mathews et al., 1989). Last, the *psychologically disturbed* offender has diagnosed or undiagnosed mental disorders that can be a motive for offending (Gabbard, 2016). The context of the abusive behavior is what separates the types of FSO.

Contexts of Offending for and Roles of Adult Female Sexual Offenders

Mothers as Perpetrators and Bystanders

Mothers as perpetrators or bystanders are often overlooked in the literature on female child sexual abuse. Hunger (2019) found that victims who reported being abused by a relative most often named their mother as the perpetrator or bystander. Hunger discovered that a regular act of mothers as abusers involved "doing nothing" while her child was being abused, encouraging the sexual abuse, and/or having sex in the presence of her children. Studies also reveal more FCSOs as mothers when compared to females committing nonsexual violent offenses (ten Bensel et al., 2019; Hoefnagels & Zwikker, 2001). Experts contend that a successful intervention is less likely when the family is aware of the abuse because the family has been told similar messages by the abuser, who intends to justify the behavior (Hoefnagels & Zwikker, 2001). In a study of 166 sexual abuse cases, 80 victims indicated the presence of bystanders, and in 21.3% of those cases, the most frequently named bystanders were the victims' mothers (Gerke et al., 2021).

The Female Healthcare and Mental Health Professional

The Federation of State Medical Boards (FSMB) (n.d.) defines *sexual misconduct* as "behavior that exploits the physician-patient relationship in a sexual way," and the term "patient" includes "the patient and/or the patient surrogate" (p. 2). The FSMB has labeled physician sexual misconduct as either *sexual impropriety* or *sexual violation*. Sexual impropriety involves "behavior, gestures, or expressions that are seductive, sexually suggestive, disrespectful of patient privacy, or sexually demeaning to a patient" (p. 2). Sexual violation is described as those that "include physical sexual contact between a physician and patient, whether or not initiated by the patient, and engaging in any conduct with a patient that is sexual or may be

reasonably interpreted as sexual" (p. 2). The latter is more aggressive or violent. As expected, 50% (Levine et al., 2011) to more than 70% (AbuDagga et al., 2016) of physician perpetrators have been reported as undisciplined by any state medical board.

Physicians have committed the greatest number of patient sexual misconduct (PSM) among healthcare professionals (Clemens et al., 2021). Numbers for FSO are not wholly accurate due to under-or-no reporting of the crime. According to Tillinghast and Cournos (2000), fewer than 1 in 10 patient victims report the incident. Physician offenders' ages range from 40 to 59 (AbuDagga et al., 2016). In a 2020 study conducted in Germany, a sample of 2503 patients consisting of 50.2% females with a mean age of 49.5 years, 4.5% of females, and 1.4% of male patients reported being victims of PSM (Clemens et al., 2021). The abuse ranged from unnecessary physical examinations reported by 40 (3.2%) female and 8 (0.6%) male patients, sexual contact by 28 (2.2%) females and 10 (0.8%) males, and sexual harassment by 31 (2.5%) females and 7 (0.6%) male patients (Clemens et al., 2021). Even though males committed more sexual offenses, female-perpetrated PSM was significant. For example, female physicians perpetrated sexual misconduct in 21% of cases and committed 6% of unnecessary physical exams and 9% of harassment incidences. DuBois et al. (2019) reported more violent forms of PSM perpetrated by physicians. More specifically, they discovered in 101 cases that physicians, male and female, engaged in "inappropriate touching (33%), sodomy, (31%), rape (16%), child molestation (14%), and consensual sex (7%)" (p.3). While most abuse occurs in outpatient settings, it can also occur within practices such as family medicine and obstetrics/gynecology (Sansone & Sansone, 2009).

The Female Mental Health Professional

Mental health professionals are disproportionately female: 76.7% identify as female, are in their 40s, and are primarily Caucasian (Zippa, 2022). For example, social work, a female-dominated profession, is mostly comprised of mental health workers as government social services employees; child, family, and school workers; and as substance abuse, behavioral disorder, and mental health counselors (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2022).

Perpetrator prevalence rates are 7–12% among general mental health practitioners in the United States (Celenza, 2007), encompassing approximately 2.5% of women and 9.4% of men (Pope et al., 1986). Mental health sex offenses often take the form of and/or progress to a dual relationship with a provider. According to Kagle and Giebelhausen (1994), it occurs when the provider becomes something other than a therapist/counselor/psychiatrist with a patient or client. It often manifests into the provider becoming a friend or lover before, during, or after the professional relationship begins. These relationships violate boundaries. According to Reamer (2001), such breaches lead to one or more conceptual categories: "intimate relationships, pursuit of personal benefit, how professionals respond to their own

emotional and dependency needs, altruistic gestures, and responses to unanticipated circumstances" (p. 8).

The Female Sex-Trafficker

Sex trafficking involves victim sexual abuse at high rates. It is also committed by adult and adolescent female sex traffickers. Oram et al. (2012), in a review of 19 studies, found the prevalence of physical or sexual violence experienced by victims of trafficking to be 12–96%. Kiss et al. (2015), in a cross-cultural study of three countries, found the prevalence of physical or sexual violence experienced by trafficking victims to be 48%, especially among female victims. Ottisova et al. (2016) reported a prevalence of sexual violence from 33% to 90% among trafficked survivors. In a 2017 Australian Federal Police investigation between 2004 and 2017, there were 20 trafficking convictions and nine female traffickers. Its results were similar to findings from a 2012 United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) Global Report on Trafficking in Persons.

Moreover, Baxter (2020) confirmed, on an international scale, that the rate of female traffickers was high compared with other crimes (see also UNODC, 2016). UNODC (2020) reported that 36% of convicted sex traffickers were female, and approximately 1% were juvenile female offenders. The UNODC (2012, 2016) reports found that the high number of female traffickers is related to the high number of previously trafficked or victims of other sex crimes (Hughes & Denisova, 2003).

Adolescent Female Offenders

While female youth represent a small percentage of sexual offenders (less than 10%), they often have access to other young potential victims (Finkelhor et al., 2009). However, in the United States, young offenders are responsible for over one-third of all juvenile sex crimes. Similarly, Radford et al. (2011) in the United Kingdom and Shlonsky et al. (2017) in Australia found that youth were responsible for a significant percentage of sex crimes. In the United Kingdom, juvenile offenders were responsible for 65% of sexual contact abuse. Warner and Bartels (2015) found within 1 year, adolescent female offenders accounted for 58% of sexual offenses in Wales. In the United States, in a study with over 13,000 young sexual offenders, 7% were female (Finkelhor et al., 2009). Of these, females were more likely to have a co-offender (36% and 23%, respectively) and co-offend with an adult (13% and 5%, respectively). Using a larger sample (N = 43,018 females and 773,118 males, both adults and youth) provided by the National Incident-Based Reporting System (NIBRS), Williams and Bierie (2015) confirmed that females, adults, and adolescents perpetrate crime with a male co-offender more often than male offenders.

Other studies have examined characteristics of female adolescent sex offenders (FASOs) including school problem behaviors (van der Put et al., 2014); prevalence of mental health problems (Tardif et al., 2005); adverse childhood experiences, levels of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) (Levenson et al., 2015); sexual victimization (Bumby & Bumby, 1997; Hunter et al., 2003; Levenson et al., 2015); diagnosed mental illness treatment (Bumby & Bumby, 1997; Hunter et al., 2003); drugs and/or alcohol use (Bumby & Bumby, 1997); and verbal abuse and emotional neglect, as well as having a history of child sex abuse (Levenson et al., 2015).

Adolescent Traffickers

In 2020, approximately 16,658 persons were trafficked in the United States, primarily for the escort industry (*n* = 1116), pornography (*n* = 939), and elicit massage parlors (*n* = 626) (Polaris Project, 2022). A disturbing trend reported by law enforcement is the prevalence of female sex traffickers (adults and juveniles). It is difficult to measure their prevalence since they easily blend in with the victims. While they typically work at the base level for trafficking organizations, they are necessary to recruit young victims (United Nations, 2008). These young traffickers lack "empathy, compassion and kindness," with "intimacy deficits" in all realms of their life (Miccio-Fonseca, 2017, p. 30). They are referred to as *sexually violent* or *sexually violent and predatory* and often utilize extreme coercion, including threats of death and/or weapons (Miccio-Fonseca & Rasmussen, 2015). They likely became traffickers after being trafficked into prostitution (Kiensat et al., 2014). Many victims, turned perpetrators, were recruited from foster care, the streets, or residential facilities, where female perpetrators were initially recruited (Kiensat et al., 2014). The children they prey on are vulnerable, typically escaping from problem homes, physical abuse, sex abuse, and homelessness (Williamson & Prior, 2009). These factors often attract the "most severe sexually abusive youth, including juvenile sex traffickers" (Miccio-Fonseca, 2017, p. 30).

Part Two: Victims of Female Sexual Offending

Women who sexually offend have existed throughout history. However, they remain significantly underrepresented in the literature due to society's regard for women as caregivers and motherly figures incapable of doing such things (Denov, 2003). In fact, perceptions of females sexually victimizing children are dismissed by the notion that it is the female's natural role to be loving and caring. Women sexually offending is regarded as a misguided display of love, thus minimizing the victimization; however, when the male commits the offense, it is perceived as a sexual offense (Hetherton, 1999).

Studies compiled by the Uniform Crime Reports revealed that females accounted for 7% of sexual offenses and 2.8% of forcible rapes (Federal Bureau of Investigations, 2014). Moreover, according to the Center for Sex Offender Management (2007), female sexual offenders victimize both genders more frequently than their male counterparts. While the literature regarding the prevalence of female sexual offenders is increasing, the literature regarding their victims remains scant.

Victim Characteristics and Statistics: A Comparative Analysis

Williams et al. (2019) examined how solo female sexual offenders (SFSOs) and co-offending female sexual offenders (COFSOs) differed from solo male sexual offenders (SMSOs) when children were sexually abused. The study relied on a sample size of 20 SFSOs, 20 COFSOs, and 40 SMSOs collected from the Lucy Faithfull Foundation in the United Kingdom. The criteria of inclusion in the study were 18 years of age or older at the time of the offense; the victim was under the age of 16; and the offender had to have been convicted in a criminal court or had a judge's finding of fact against them in family court or admitted to the offense. Arrest characteristics of the SFSOs and the COFSOs indicating demographic characteristics of their victims revealed: (1) many of the victims were age 13+, with the youngest victims being ages five and under; (2) the victim's relationship with the COFSOs was primarily intra-familial, and the relationship with SFSOs was primarily extra-familial; and (3) the most common offenses committed against victims were indecent assault, sexual activity with a minor, sexual assault, aiding and abetting sexual assault, and rape. In another investigation, van der Put et al. (2014) examined differences in the psychosocial and developmental characteristics of female adolescent sexual offenders (FASOs), adolescent females, and adolescent males and discovered that FASOs were more likely than the other groups to victimize people not related to them. However, Mathews et al. (1997) found that FASOs' sexual offenses targeted younger family members, children they babysat, or those located near them.

An examination of adolescent sex offender studies reveals that these investigations are limited, with most focused on adolescent males (Wijkman et al., 2014). FASOs (like female sexual offenders) victimize those they can easily persuade to keep silent. However, several studies have isolated the characteristics of female sexual offender victims. For example, Vandizer and Kercher (2004) examined female sexual offenders and victim characteristics in Texas using two primary data sources: the Texas Department of Public Safety's Sex Offender Registry and criminal histories from the Criminal History Division of the Department of Public Safety. The study relied on arrest records, sentencing data, offender demographics, and victim information on 471 adult female sexual offenders. Their findings revealed that female sexual offenders were more often arrested for indecent behavior with children, sexual assault on a child, and aggravated sexual assault on a child. Most female sexual offenders ranged in age from 18 to 77, and 88% were Caucasian,

while African Americans accounted for 12%. Their victims were males and females who were approximately 12 years of age, with ages that ranged from infancy to 97. Fifty percent of the victims were male, and 47% were female. Almost half of the victims (46%) knew the offenders, 37% were related to them, and 7% were strangers. While this study provided extensive victim data throughout the state of Texas, there is a need for national and international research on the victims of female sexual offenders. In addition, data revealed that the prevalence is much higher than the CDC and other research studies have shown, suggesting it's much more pervasive than what is reported.

Munroe and Shumway (2022) conducted a study on the plight of victims of female-perpetrated sexual assault (FPSA). They sampled 138 adults who experienced one or more incidents of sexual assault by a female. The researchers reviewed characteristics such as perpetrator's age, relationship to the victim, and whether the victim viewed the offense as a sexual assault and reported it to others. The findings revealed that 61.6% of the respondents experienced FPSA as children, 18.8% experienced it as an adult, 19.6% experienced FPSA as children and as adults, and 78% were revictimized once or more. The victims were between the ages of 11 and 12, and they had a relationship with the perpetrator that could be categorized as a friend, classmate, neighbor, family member, babysitter, romantic partner, or colleague. Findings also indicated that victimization by someone in authority (e.g., a teacher or coach) or who was a dating partner occurred less often and typically before the age of 18. Most victimizations occurred by the predator acting alone. Results of the study also revealed that offenders of FPSA typically act alone and know their victims and the incidents are rarely reported.

The commonalities found in these studies are that victims are under the age of 18; victims are usually (but not always) related to the female sexual offender; the victims are either raped, sexually assaulted, or exposed to indecent behavior; and the victim does not disclose most sexual offenses. There is also a need for further research that collects data on the victim's race and sexual identification to determine if female sexual offenders disproportionately victimize certain groups.

Victims' Perceptions of Female Sexual Offenses

Few studies have captured the perceptions of the victims of female sexual offenders. Some studies have revealed that victims of female sexual offenders felt their experiences significantly influenced their ability to establish and maintain interpersonal relationships. These studies provide that the offenses also impacted the victims' psychological health, which caused them to describe feelings of having no voice since society fails to recognize the existence of female sexual offenders (Hetherton, 1999). With respect to victims' interpersonal relationships, studies reveal feelings of betrayal by the female sexual offender, mistrust of women, social isolation, and difficulty in forming and maintaining adult relationships (Ogilvie & Daniluk, 1995; Peter, 2006). Moreover, studies by Deering and Mellor (2011) indicate that male

and female victims have negative concerns about disclosing sexual relationships, increased sexual discomfort, sexual confusion, and increased sexual promiscuity during adolescence and adulthood. Studies that focused on the psychological well-being of victims also revealed they reported feelings of self-hatred, low self-esteem, feeling dirty and stigmatized, deserving of further abuse, suicidal thoughts, and depression (Ogilvie & Daniluk, 1995; Peter 2008). Denov (2016) revealed that most victims used alcohol and drugs as coping mechanisms.

Broussard et al. (1991) examined male victims' perceptions of female sexual offenders. They documented the belief that male victims of child sexual abuse experience less psychological harm than their female counterparts victimized by male sexual offenders. This belief is held because males may not view their sexual victimization by females as harmful to their well-being. It is also plausible that the male adolescent who is sexually victimized by a female teacher may see it as an act of masculinity or a rite of passage into manhood. As mentioned earlier, some believe that males cannot be abused or raped by women due to their physical strength.

Stemple and Meyer (2014) assessed data from the Bureau of Justice Statistics, the CDC, and the FBI from 2010 through 2012 on the sexual victimization of men in America. The study revealed that over 1 year, most male victims reported female sexual predators. In the Stemple and Meyer study, 4 years of data from the NCVS were analyzed, and the findings revealed that 35% of the male victims had experienced rape or sexual assault by at least one female perpetrator. Of those who had been raped or sexually assaulted by a woman, 58% of the male victims and 41% of the female victims disclosed that the assault was violent, and many reported their injuries.

Nature of Violence Against Victims

Little research exists regarding the nature of violence that occurs among the victims of female sexual offenders. Prior studies examined violence committed by female sexual offenders using victim-reported injuries as an indicator. Budd and Bierie (2020) examined data from NIBRS that were reported from 1992 through 2014. These data were used to understand patterns of victim injury and the use of violence by female sexual offenders. Data provided information on types of force used, injuries sustained by the victim, and the victim's demographics, including their relationship with the offender. The findings revealed all FSOs were classified as forceful sexual assaults, the presence of a male as a co-offender did not increase the use of violence on the victim, the influence of alcohol or another substance increased the presence of an injury to the victim, children aged 0–5 and young adults had a higher risk of injury than children elementary school age or adolescents, male victims suffered more violent injuries (perhaps due to the female sexual offenders perceived need to defend herself), and the act was more often committed using a gun or knife. However, an earlier study by Budd et al. (2017) revealed that female co-offenders were more likely to use a weapon and cause injury to victims. Of the studies

conducted on the victims, Chan and Frei (2013) suggested that most victims were either friends or acquaintances of the offender, but there was no intimate partnership. They further found that most victims were male (70%), most homicides involved one victim, and most were killed with firearms. When victims were females, the offender mostly used strangulation, asphyxiation, or drowning.

Chan et al. (2019) used the US Supplementary Homicide Reports database to discover if there were differences in the types of murder weapons used by offenders to kill their victims. The report examined single-victim homicide cases from 1976 to 2012. It contained 3009 male homicide sexual offenders and 151 female homicide sexual offenders. The findings indicated that more female homicide sexual offenders used firearms (63%) in the commission of their offense, and 43% of the male homicide sexual offenders used personal methods in close contact with victims that involved strangulation, beatings with bare hands, and asphyxiation. The study revealed that female homicide sexual offenders who committed murder most often murdered male victims at a rate of 78%.

Similarly, Myers and Chan (2012) discovered that the most frequent weapon of choice for female juvenile sex homicide offenders was a firearm. Myers and Chan surmised this was due to the physical strength of the male victim who could overpower them. It is important to note that most studies on female sexual offender violence against victims focus on other offenses committed by female sexual offenders and only emerge from research on female sexual offender characteristics or typologies. Research on the weapons used to kill victims, and the characteristics of victims who are killed, is scant, suggesting the need for additional empirical studies on the characteristics of victims violently assaulted and killed by female sexual offenders.

Shortcomings of Professional Support for Victims of Female Sexual Offenses

The support that victims of female sexual offenders receive may be impacted by the attitudes of those trained to assist them. Denov (2016) found that victims of FSO reported that some professionals minimize the seriousness of their victimization when these incidents are reported. Similarly, Peter (2006) reported that professionals made 56.2% of the referrals to child welfare services for male abuse, but only 35% of referrals for female-perpetrated abuse were made by professionals; nonprofessionals who were concerned made the remaining two-thirds of the referrals. Peter (2008) later noted that victims of female sexual offenders reported they did not trust many professionals out of fear that their victimization would be disclosed to others. Hetherton (1999) reported that adult males whom female sexual offenders victimized claim after revealing the victimization to professionals (including law enforcement), they usually failed to realize that the male had been abused. Whether or not the male was abused, sensitivity to his victimization and concerns about his

masculinity, sexuality, and self-blame are warranted. Perhaps this is why many males do not report their victimization by female sexual offenders to the police or other professionals. However, when a report is filed on a female sex offender, the offender is often sent to social services instead of being arrested and prosecuted (Girshick, 2002).

Similarly, in examining police officers and psychiatrists, Denov (2001) reported that the training and professional culture received by these professionals was overwhelmingly based on the male perpetrator because, as late as the twenty-first century, training and the professional culture did not view women as being capable of sexual assault. In sum, these studies suggest that professionals should be sensitive to the needs of female sexual offenders' victims to provide counseling and therapy. Experts warn that if the intervention is not positive, there could be negative consequences for the victims, their families, and society.

Part Three: The "Ripple" Effect of Female Sexual Offending

After sexual victimization occurs, it is difficult for some victims to return to their pre-victimization state. However, the crime often has a "ripple" effect that could send victims into a downward spiral. FSO is a public health issue that presents negative health consequences to its victims. Statistics reveal an estimated 463,634 sexual abuse victims in the United States (Morgan & Truman, 2020). Sexual abuse research studies show that FSOs are responsible for 12% (Bourke et al., 2014). If these statistics are valid, many people suffer at the hands of female offenders. Health officials report that the behavior is not only likely to have immediate short-term effects on the victims, but it can also impact their behavior and health in the long term since many will experience a diminished quality of life (Daane, 2005). More specifically, they argue that some victims of FSO will experience anger and suicidal or depressive thoughts after sexual violence. Many will experience symptoms of depression and PTSD that could last for decades and require counseling and medical treatment to cope in the aftermath of their victimization. For example, Struckland-Johnson and Struckland-Johnson (1992) reported that males who experience sexual abuse reported having problems such as depression, suicidal ideation, anxiety, sexual dysfunction, loss of self-esteem, and long-term relationship difficulties. Other experts argue that some victims of FSO are more likely to experience problems in relationships and sexual functioning. Some may also turn to illegal drug use to cope with or escape the trauma of their sexual assault (Jeglic, 2020). A few popular drugs these victims abuse include marijuana, alcohol, and a variety of opioids. Experts report that sometimes victims abuse these drugs for years. Health officials also report that FSO leads to problems in school, and the workplace, which brings tension and disruption in both environments that directly or indirectly impact others, including peers, coworkers, employers, and family members. Moreover, officials at the CDC and WHO contend that another public health issue FSO causes is the spread of sexually transmitted infections (e.g., chlamydia, herpes, gonorrhea, HIV/AIDS,

hepatitis, and others), which typically occur when those who are infected engage in unprotected intercourse with a victim. Where FSO is concerned, it is highly likely that when a perpetrator or perpetrators (either could be infected) co-partner in sex crimes, they increase the risk of contracting and spreading the infection (Kernsmith et al., 2019).

Because of the complexity associated with certain types of violence and crime, public health prevention approaches are multidimensional leading to perceived increased efficacy because they draw from knowledge taken from a wide range of disciplines that include: medicine, epidemiology, sociology, psychology, education, criminology, and economics (Schneider, 2020). According to officials at the CDC, WHO, and the National Institutes of Health (NIH), public health researchers have successfully addressed many health concerns nationally and globally, such as cigarette smoking and driving fatalities. The public health approach consists of a four-step process that can be applied to any health problem affecting the population, including FSO. The model includes (1) defining and monitoring the problem; (2) identifying risk and protective factors; (3) developing and testing prevention strategies; and (4) assuring widespread adoption (Schneider, 2020).

Defining and Monitoring the Problem

Public health officials contend that the first step in preventing violence, especially FSO, is to understand the "who," "what," "when," and "how" associated with this victimization. This requires understanding the nature and extent of the problem by reviewing and analyzing available data on female sexual offenses and the injuries and harm inflicted by offenders, including whether they are physical or psychological. FSO data can be obtained via victim surveys, police, social service, medical and hospital records (Schneider, 2020). These data can be instrumental in revealing the number of incidents, how frequently FSO occurs, where they occur, trends and patterns associated with them, and who are the victims and perpetrators. For example, are victims and offenders known to each other? Are they strangers, relatives, teachers-students, or immediate family members?

Identifying Risk and Protective Factors

While it is essential to define and monitor the problem of FSOs, public health experts contend that it is crucial to understand the risk factors that expose victims to FSOs. Public health officials work under the guise that risk factors alone do not cause violence since the presence of such factors does not guarantee victimization. For example, do victims experience sexual abuse, neglect, exposure to family violence, exposure to child sexual abuse, and other types of sexual harm? Many experts believe these factors significantly increase the likelihood that sexual and nonsexual

revictimization of boys and girls will occur, especially for subsequent sexual offending for boys. Identifying and addressing risk factors among victims is paramount since research suggests that the likelihood of repeat victimization is greater after the initial victimization (Wittebrood & Nieuwbeerta, 2000). Another risk factor includes exposure to pornography (Ogloff et al., 2012). Experts believe exposure to rigid gender values could be a protective factor (Quadara, 2019). Other protective factors can result from social development with families, peers, and communities and psychological maturity that could result in dissidence in FSO. According to de Vries Robbé et al. (2015), eight protective domains can help desistance from sexual offenders: healthy sexual interest, capacity for emotional intimacy, constructive social and professional network, goal-directed living, good problem solving, busy with employment or constructive leisure activity, sobriety, hopeful, optimistic, and motivated attitude to desistance. Therefore, those who study and treat FSO must group risk and protective factors to identify and target where prevention efforts should be focused.

Developing and Testing Prevention Strategies

Health officials suggest that research findings and data from needs assessments combined with community surveys, focus groups, and stakeholder interviews can be used to create violence prevention programs. These data should inform and help create evidence-based approaches that fashion program planning. These violence prevention strategies typically focus on the targeted group of interest. They could include universal interventions, selected interventions, or indicated interventions. First, universal interventions are aimed at a group or the general population, even if it has not experienced any risk. This strategy could offer a violence prevention curriculum to every school student in a given community. Second, selected interventions are approaches given to those at high risk for violence. These interventions often provide training on healthy child-rearing practices, especially to child-rearing parents. Third, indicated interventions are aimed at individuals who have already engaged in violent behavior, including FSOs (Krug et al., 2002). After creating and implementing programs, they should be evaluated to determine their effectiveness.

Assuring Widespread Adoption

If newly created programs are determined to be successful, there should be a community-wide effort to implement and adopt the programs on a broad scale. Health experts encourage implementation based on best and current practices to ensure programs' smooth start and lasting success. To ensure success in this process phase, those involved should be trained in networking and using technical assistance and program evaluation. Krug et al. (2002) contend that health experts also

suggest efforts should be made to continuously assess whether the strategy or program serves the community by preventing more violence.

Public Health Approaches to FSO Prevention

People typically rely on the police to protect them from crime, including sexual offenses. However, because law enforcement, in general, and the broader society, has not taken female sex crimes seriously, any token effort to hold women accountable has proven to be a failure to keep the public safe from female sexual offenders. Since, in most cases, very little is done by the justice system to deter the behavior, research reveals that these silent offenders continue to victimize. In contrast, the justice system is fundamentally reactive when addressing FSO (Anderson et al., 2021). Comparatively, the public health system offers a proactive prevention approach drawn from empirically rigorous and multidisciplinary collaborations assembled to define and survey the scope of problems that are public health concerns. The approach evaluates proposed interventions and assesses their effectiveness. When public health officials are convinced of their veracity, they support, disseminate, call for adoption, and deliver the most effective interventions. In the past, these approaches effectively addressed health issues and influenced positive outcomes (Mercy et al., 1993, p. 17). The public health approach to address FSO relies on primary prevention, secondary prevention, and tertiary prevention.

Primary Prevention

Primary prevention targets preventing injuries before they occur. These efforts are aimed at susceptible populations, which can prove challenging when addressing FSO since this population of victims is often hidden. Nevertheless, others are not exposed to behavior that causes injuries when it is done. Thus, it is imperative to spread awareness to the public about the risks and signs of FSO. For example, public service announcements placed and advertised on billboards, radio programs, and news reports aimed at promoting awareness, education, and understanding about FSO and its effects on victims—including children, teenagers, and adults—have successfully been used as national and international primary prevention efforts (Krug et al., 2002). However, more research efforts and funding need to be conducted and devoted to educating the public by increasing its awareness and understanding of FSO to aid those seeking preventive efforts (Cant et al., 2022). Despite these initiatives, the number of FSO cases can never truly be known. As experts and researchers report, the behavior is often under and unreported because they are often committed by family members, relatives, and teachers; and, in some cases, because society generally believes that the FSO is a myth (Bunting, 2007).

As a matter of prevention, those with knowledge of FSO victimizations and offenders (at risk of abusing children or others) need to take steps toward preventing further abuse. Levenson et al. (2017) argue that several obstacles prevent offenders from taking steps towards desistence, which include: (1) the stigma from the behavior; (2) concerns about confidentiality; (3) fear over legal consequences; and (4) confusion about whether the behavior is a crime. Some experts contend that for primary prevention efforts to be effective, there must be a paradigm shift in public education, media campaigns, and resource allocation that encourages offenders, victims, and enablers to seek help to prevent FSOs from continuing to occur. They also suggest that sensitive, well-developed social marketing campaigns, such as public service announcements during primetime television viewing or billboards highlighting the issue and statistics, are needed to increase awareness of the complexities of FSO and provide information on the availability of service programs for victims and offenders. This may include targeting family, relatives, teachers, and friends to prevent or respond to abuse in the aftermath (Grant et al., 2019). Those using primary prevention efforts should seek to detect and understand the conditions before victimization. More specifically, they should examine characteristics such as the host, the agent, and the environment. Health experts argue that these elements are important when predicting whether victimization will occur (Schneider, 2020).

Secondary Prevention

Secondary prevention efforts aim to reduce the impact of an injury that has already occurred so that the victimization and suffering do not escalate (Schneider, 2020). This requires victims of FSO to be provided the treatment they need to minimize the manifestation of the behavior. At the same time, the perpetrators of FSO must also be detected and treated to prevent them from continuing to engage in the behavior and to reduce the number of potential victims. This is not to suggest that they are not criminally prosecuted for their offenses; however, it does suggest that FSOs receive treatment to address their need or compulsion to victimize others sexually. Secondary prevention aims to return people to their pre-victimization state or health and work to prevent any long-term negative health consequences associated with the behavior. This may require both short- and long-term medical and physical therapy, medication, and psychological treatment. Those using secondary prevention methods can support efforts to develop FSO protocols at treatment sites that address rape, alcohol and drug abuse, suicide prevention, child abuse, and emergency psychiatric issues (Stark & Flitcraft, 1995). Resources should also be devoted to bringing FSO to the attention of service providers to encourage programs to meet the needs of FSO victims. Health and social services can expand the help they give women to include more behavioral-oriented counseling, which should emphasize the appropriateness of caring and nurturing, being accountable for wrongdoing, and being taught non-violent skills when responding to interpersonal tensions (Rosenberg & Fenley, 1991).

Tertiary Prevention

Tertiary prevention strategies aim to reduce the impact of an injury that could have lasting effects. Health professionals are concerned that what happens after the victimization will determine whether the victim will survive the injury and the extent of any resulting disability. As such, tertiary prevention is devoted to the long-term responses after FSO has occurred to address the lasting consequences of treatment intervention (Lee et al., 2007). Because of this, health experts contend that tertiary prevention often requires quality emergency care (Schneider, 2020). Some public health experts argue that tertiary prevention efforts also require community mobilization to succeed since it involves rehabilitation and reintegration and attempts to reduce aspects of trauma associated with violence. Lee et al. (2007) report that community mobilization is premised on the idea that prevention is contingent on changing community norms, patterns of social interactions, values, and practices that will improve the quality of life for those in the community, especially the perpetrators and victims of FSO. This calls for institutional change or positive changes in institutional norms to provide education on the consequences of FSO and information on the help that is needed for victims and offenders. Burns and Lofquist (1996) captured it best by stating, "[w]hen people have an opportunity to participate in decisions and shape strategies that vitally affect them, they will develop a sense of ownership in what they have determined, and commitment to seeing that the decisions and that the strategies are useful, effective, and carried out" (p. 10). To accomplish this, the victims of FSO must be given help to manage any long-term negative health consequences, including injuries, to have a better quality of life. The goal is to help victims to be functional. They may be referred to several rehabilitation programs to help them cope with depression, PTSD, or suicidal thoughts, to name a few. Other tertiary prevention efforts include placing victims in contact with support groups composed of people who are similarly victimized so they can assist the newly victimized with survival and coping strategies.

Part Four: Policy Implications

Because FSO is a serious public health issue with negative health consequences that can adversely impact its victims, it is incumbent on law enforcement and public health agencies to prevent the behavior. This requires multifaceted and comprehensive intervention programs (Kewley et al., 2021). The criminal justice system and other professionals (e.g., healthcare and child protection workers) must depart from historical and cultural practices and stereotypes of viewing FSO differently by applying the full weight of the law when it is discovered that sexual offenders are women (Bunting, 2007). This requires that abuse allegations are taken seriously and investigated. If the situation warrants it, the female sex offender should be apprehended, arrested, and held criminally responsible (Anderson et al., 2020). While in

custody, prevention requires several interventions. As such, criminal justice practitioners must recognize that FSO exists and is a growing problem and that offenders should be given gender and case-specific treatment, such as cognitive behavioral treatment, group therapy, and individual therapy in correctional settings to reduce the risk of recidivism for these offenders. This treatment approach confronts the initial thoughts and beliefs that lead to antisocial behavior and offers offenders opportunities to model and engage in prosocial skills. Since FSO transcends criminal justice owing to health consequences after victimization, prevention strategies must also rely on using public health approaches as a prevention framework that combines prevention efforts on several levels, namely primary, secondary, and tertiary, into a system that is adapted and implemented into several subsystems (Cant et al., 2022). As stated earlier, the complexity of FSO requires using many disciplines contributing to developing strategies to detect, monitor, and treat the behavior. To achieve success, public health strategies require that each community rely on a range of resources (e.g., billboards, radio, public service announcements) to educate the public about the danger and pervasiveness of FSO and the resources of the existing programs to assist those needing help.

Experts also suggest that media campaigns should be used to promote knowledge of female sexual offenders; however, the media must provide accurate portrayals of female offenders and their victims. Campaigns using multifaceted methods have been proven to increase awareness and understanding and help facilitate the public to take preventive measures (United Nations Children's Fund, 2020). Those seeking to prevent FSO must realize that preventing the behavior requires both criminal justice *and* public health approaches with a commitment from all stakeholders and policymakers and long-term funding for preventing FSO. These efforts should also include state and federal funding for more research in this area (Kewley et al., 2021; Lee et al., 2007). However, those who embrace both approaches must understand that it is vitally important to prevent future offenders from committing their first offense and prevent FSOs from reoffending (Cant et al., 2022). The failure to do so will inevitably mean more people will experience this traumatic type of victimization.

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Chapter 9
Empirically Directed Risk Assessment for Women Who Perpetrate Sexual Offenses

Check for updates

Dawn M. Pflugradt and Bradley P. Allen

Introduction

Although research on women who engage in sexually assaultive behaviors has increased considerably since the seminal writings of Matthews et al. (1991) and Mathews et al. (1989), the identification of generalizable offense-related risk factors remains elusive (Augarde & Rydon-Grange, 2022). While the methodological difficulties of conducting research involving female perpetrators of sexual crimes are well-documented (Cortoni, 2010; Cortoni et al., 2010; Cortoni & Gannon, 2011; Deering & Mellor, 2007; Stemple et al., 2017; Wijkman et al., 2010), these challenges also reflect the diverse and contextual nature of female sexual offending (Springer-Kremser et al., 2003). Although women who commit sexual offenses also engage in antisocial behaviors or express criminal attitudes like male perpetrators (Cortoni, 2010), their manifestations of these characteristics are typically within a relational context (Colson et al., 2013; Grayston & De Luca, 1999; Gillespie et al., 2015; Rousseau & Cortoni, 2010; Vandiver, 2006; Williams & Bierie, 2015).

Whereas studies have also found that some women who perpetrated sexual offenses reported sexual attraction to their victims (Augarde & Rydon-Grange, 2022: Beech et al., 2009; Cortoni, 2018; Lambert & O'Halloran, 2008; Moulden et al., 2007; Pflugradt & Allen, 2015), it remains unclear the extent to which paraphilic arousal is associated with sexually offending behaviors (Cortoni, 2018; Ford, 2010; Ford & Cortoni, 2008). Moreover, women are diagnosed with paraphilic disorders less frequently than men (Logan, 2008; Pflugradt & Allen, 2012, 2013; Wijkman et al., 2011), and diagnostic assessment is often complicated by the presence of sexual fluidity and capacity for situation-dependent sexual responsiveness (Chivers, 2017; Diamond, 2016).

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Despite the dearth of information, clinicians are often required to provide estimations of risk for sexual re-offending. The following will explore the evolution of research that contributed to the identification of risk-relevant characteristics for female sexual offenders and its influence on formulating an empirically directed assessment methodology.

Typologies (Multidimensional Classifications)

Analyst-Constructed Typologies: Teacher/Lover, Predisposed, and Male-Coerced

Due to small sample sizes, early research on risk-relevant characteristics of female sex offenders focused primarily on the relationships between offender and victim(s). Mathews et al. (1989) were among the first researchers to examine the relational and contextual features of female sexual offending behaviors by utilizing a small sample of women referred to a community corrections program. Based upon the sparse research available (Belensky et al., 1986; Gilligan, 1982; Keller, 1985; McCormack, 1987), the authors utilized a holistic-inductive research methodology that did not assume male-oriented models also applied to women (Patton, 1980). Mathews and colleagues obtained data from numerous sources and then employed qualitative methods that generated three "analyst-constructed typologies" (Mathews et al., 1989, p. 11) that included *teacher/lover*, *the predisposed* (i.e., those with intergenerational factors), and *the male-coerced*.

As operationalized by Mathews et al. (1989), the *teacher/lover* typology pertained to female perpetrators who had difficulties believing that her behavior was criminal or harmful. Individuals in this category had no malice toward the children she assaulted and perceived herself as teaching them about sexuality. While doing so, she fell in love with an adolescent male who became her sexual partner. She perceived her victim as an equal and believed that he would not have had sex with her unless it was a desired, positive experience. The perpetrator also believed that her sexual behaviors were acts of kindness because she liked the victim. She tended to endorse the perception that sex is so important to adolescent males that they are ready and willing to engage in it at any opportunity. Although women within this typology were not the victims of sexual abuse as children, their backgrounds included emotional and verbal abuse. Additionally, their first sexual experiences tended to be coercive, the first of many traumatic experiences/relationships with men. Women within this typology also tended to minimize the negative impact of their sexually assaultive behaviors on victims.

The *predisposed* (i.e., those with intergenerational factors) typology included women who acted alone in initiating the sexual abuse, usually against family members, in some cases, their own children. Within this typology, there were indicators of multigenerational sexual abuse occurring within their immediate and extended

family. Women within this typology also reported being the victims of sexual abuse at an early age, usually perpetrated by more than one family member or caregiver. These women further reported having difficulties establishing positive relationships with male peers. They also experienced low self-esteem accompanied by dependence on substances, issues with anger, mistrust, acting out behaviors, and distorted thinking (Mathews et al., 1989).

The characteristics of women in the *male-coerced* typology included passivity and powerlessness in interpersonal relationships. These women endorsed a traditional lifestyle with the husband/father as the provider and wife/mother as the homemaker. Women in this typology typically reported they feared their husband's anger and tried not to antagonize him while also being dependent upon him. Such women married young, had limited employment experiences, and few marketable skills. They reported being sexually abused in childhood and having bad relationships with men in general. They further reported being fearful that they could not attract a husband and needed to preserve their relationship even if it was abusive. Their lives became more chaotic over time as the demands of their husbands became more extreme. In all cases, the husbands were involved in sexual abuse first and then involved their wives. Most became involved only after some resistance, one participated willingly, and another did as she was instructed despite emotional turmoil. Whereas these women tended to be passive and nonassertive, there were also indications of issues with anger and antisocial tendencies. Additionally, they had low self-esteem with an increased risk for substance abuse or dependent relationships. Although some women engaged in sexually abusive behaviors only with their male co-offender, some also initiated the sexual assaults by themselves (Mathews et al., 1989).

Although Mathews et al.'s (1989) exploratory study did not explicitly address factors associated with sexual recidivism, some of their early findings continue to be cited as relevant to risk assessment (Cortoni & Gannon, 2011, 2013). Among their contributions, their conceptualizations of the similarities and differences across sexual offenses provided a framework to operationalize contextual and relational risk factors (e.g., offending behaviors, abuse patterns, responsibility, and rationale). They also explored the women's subjective experiences regarding the sexual abuse they perpetrated, male dependency, parenting, and self-worth.

A particularly interesting finding that continues to be relevant to risk assessment is whether the women experienced sexual arousal associated with their offending behaviors (Ford & Cortoni, 2008; Logan, 2008; Pflugradt & Allen, 2012, 2013). Mathews et al. (1989) noted that all the women who initiated the sexual abuse acknowledged either arousal to, or fantasies about, their victims. None of the women who reported they engaged in sexual abuse only when coerced by a male reported sexual arousal or fantasies about their victims. Additionally, most women reported sexual arousal was not a primary motivating factor in committing their sexual assaults. That is, they reported their arousal was associated with imagining that they were in a reciprocal relationship with their child victims. Although Mathews and colleague's typologies have limited clinical application (for a review, see Pflugradt

& Allen, 2010), their study has often been cited as instrumental in the development of subsequent research (Logan, 2008; Nathan & Ward, 2001; Ward & Siegert, 2002).

Cluster Analytic Typologies

With the advent of state-mandated sex offender registries, it became possible to construct typologies with a greater number of variables. Among the first researchers to study the categorical traits of a large sample of female sex offenders were Vandiver and Kercher (2004). They theorized that typologies could describe the causes and associated processes of sexual offending behaviors. Utilizing a sample of 471 women from the Texas Department of Public Safety Sex Offender Registry, their cluster analysis yielded six types of female sex offenders based on demographic information, victim characteristics, and criminal histories: *heterosexual nurturers*, *noncriminal homosexual offenders*, *female sexual predators*, *young adult child exploiters*, *homosexual criminals*, and *aggressive homosexual offenders*.

The *heterosexual nurturers* were the largest grouping comprised of 146 women with an average age of 30 years. They were the second least likely to have a subsequent rearrest and the least likely to have an initial arrest for sexual assault. Additionally, this group victimized only male adolescents. Vandiver and Kercher (2004) indicated that this group was generally similar to Mathews et al.'s (1989) *teacher/lover* typology but also included offenders in mentorship or caretaking roles.

The second category identified by Vandiver and Kercher (2004) was *noncriminal homosexual* offenders that included 114 women who were the least likely to have a subsequent arrest after the sexual offense for which they were placed on the registry. With an average age of 32 years at the time of their sexual offense, they also had the lowest average number of arrests, and most (96%) of their victims were female. Although information about co-offenders was not available, the relatively low arrest rates and high number of female victims in this typology may indicate that the women (who did not generally have an antisocial predisposition) offended against a female victim with and/or at the direction of a male accomplice. As such, it is hypothesized that because they might have been coerced by a partner, they would not be interested in offending of their own volition, leading to lower rearrest rates.

The third grouping included 112 offenders who Vandiver and Kercher (2004) described as *female sexual predators*. They were the most likely to be rearrested after their sexual offense. These offenders also had a relatively high number of offenses and were younger at the time of their arrest with an average age of 29 years. Most (60%) of their victims were male and had an average age of 11 years. These women possess similar characteristics to other female nonsexual offenders, suggesting their sexual offending may have been associated with an overall general criminal disposition.

The fourth cluster, *young adult exploiters*, included 50 women with the fewest average number of arrests and they were the youngest at the time of arrest for their sexual offense (i.e., average age of 28 years). Women in this group were the most

likely to commit sexual assault, and their victims' average age was 7 years. One half of the victims were related to the offender, and this group was described as women who preyed on young male or female children (Vandiver & Kercher, 2004).

The fifth grouping, *homosexual criminals*, included 22 women who were more likely to be rearrested and had the highest number of total arrests. In addition, most of their victims were female (73%) with an average age of 32 years. As noted, none of the offenders in this category were arrested for a sexual assault. Their offenses included sexual performance of a child as well as compelling prostitution. For some of these offenders, their motivation appeared to be based on financial gain rather than sexual gratification (Vandiver & Kercher, 2004).

Vandiver and Kercher (2004) described the sixth typology as *aggressive homosexual offenders.* These 17 women were the oldest group at the time of arrest, most likely to commit a sexual assault, and had the oldest victims. The majority of victims were female adults (88%). As noted, the largest proportion of the offenders in this category previously knew their victim, indicating a pre-existing intimate relationship.

As summarized by Vandiver and Kercher (2004), the demographic characteristics of their sample were typified by a 32-year-old Caucasian woman who was arrested for indecency or sexual assault with a child. Consistent with past literature, the victim was either male or female, approximately 12 years of age, and either an acquaintance or relative. Their findings also indicated that female sex offenders were likely to assault males and females equally, and slightly more than half of the victims were between 12 and 17 years of age. Perhaps the most relevant finding regarding risk assessment was the interactions between these variables. That is, their hierarchical log linear modeling yielded two significant relationships involving three variables: (1) sexual assault, relationship with victim, and victim's age; and (2) offender's age, relationship between victim and offender, and victim's age. As they concluded, women who perpetrate sexual offenses, as a group, cannot be effectively assessed using approaches that focus on only single dimensions. Rather, there appear to be significant interactions between offense behaviors, offender demographics, and victim demographics.

In a follow-up study, Sandler and Freeman (2007) attempted to replicate Vandiver and Kercher's (2004) research by studying a sample of 390 registered female sex offenders in the state of New York. Although their research yielded similar demographic characteristics, their cluster analysis resulted in six categories that varied from those identified by Vandiver and Kercher (2004) (i.e., *criminally limited hebephiles*, *criminally prone hebephiles*, *young adult child molesters*, *high-risk chronic offenders*, *older nonhabitual offenders*, and *homosexual child molesters*). As the authors concluded, the main difference between the two studies was that 47% of the offenders in Vandiver and Kercher's (2004) analysis targeted female victims as compared to their research which found only 34% victimized females. Moreover, in contrast to four of the six clusters identified by Vandiver and Kercher (2004), only one of their typologies showed a strong victim gender preference. And lastly, only two of Vandiver and Kercher's (2004) six clusters (*heterosexual nurturers*, *young*

adult child exploiters) were similar to the clusters identified in their study (*criminally limited hebephiles*, *young adult child molesters*).

An interesting similarity between the two studies was that both found significant two-way interactions between the same variable—type of sexual assault–victim age and offender age–victim age. However, Sandler and Freeman (2007) also found another two-way interaction between victim gender and victim age. As they asserted, it is important to consider these interactions when determining the typology with which a specific offender is most compatible.

In addition to their risk-relevant findings of interactions between offender, victim characteristics, and age, Sandler and Freeman (2007) confirmed that women who perpetrate sexual offenses are, as a group, heterogeneous, with differential patterns of offending characteristics with some sub-groups or clusters being higher risk than others. They further suggested that the identification of offending patterns may provide information on the pathways that result in women perpetrating sexual offenses (Sandler, & Freeman, 2007, 2009).

Multiple Correspondence Analytic Typologies

Using a different methodological approach, Wijkman et al. (2010) employed MCA to examine typologies in a sample (n = 111) of registered, female sexual offenders from the Netherlands. Offense characteristics obtained from court files indicated most women in their sample sexually assaulted children (77%) with a co-offender (63%) who was usually their intimate partner (75%). Over one-third of the women were solo offenders, and in only 9% of the cases, victims were strangers. In addition, a significant number of the women had been victims of sexual abuse themselves (31%) and/or diagnosed with mental disorders (59%). The results of their analyses yielded a moderate two-dimensional solution indicating overlap between groups. That is, many of the women shared similar characteristics across the identified four prototypes (Wijkman et al., 2010).

The first prototype, *young assaulters*, was described as young women, without significant mental disorder(s), whose sexual assaults included fondling and/or oral sex. The abuse often occurred while they babysat a male relative and involved physical violence (Wijkman et al., 2010). This group of perpetrators resembled Vandiver and Kercher's (2004) *young adult child exploiter* typology.

The sexually assaultive behaviors of the second prototype, the *rapist*, involved sexual intercourse and penetration of older victims. There was no clear gender preference and women in this group usually assaulted non-relatives. The perpetrators themselves had childhood histories of sexual abuse by a non-familial perpetrator (Wijkman et al., 2010). This group partially resembled Vandiver and Kercher's (2004) *female sexual predator* and the *intergenerationally predisposed molester* described by Mathews et al. (1989) and Matthews et al. (1991). Specifically, this typology includes female offenders who independently initiated sexual abuse against a family member.

A third group, the *psychologically disturbed co-offender*, included those women who were identified as having a mental disorder(s). This prototype tended to include women (30–35 years of age) who committed their offenses with one or more co-offenders. Some of the women were sexually abused as children within their family, but some were not. Although their victims were often their own children, they also abused other relatives or acquaintances. The abusive behaviors ranged from fondling to sexual intercourse and included penetration (Wijkman et al., 2010). These perpetrators did not exhibit a gender preference, and most resembled the *intergenerationally predisposed molester* identified by Mathews et al. (1989) and Matthews et al. (1991).

The fourth prototype was the *passive mothers* who, on average, were the oldest group (over 41 years old). They included women who either watched the abuse of a child perpetrated by another or provided the opportunity for the abuse to occur. The women in this group also reported that they played no active role in the abuse. The offenses involved their own children or stepchildren of both sexes who are relatively young (7–11 years of age) and resembled the *male-coerced* typology described by Mathews et al. (1989).

As concluded by the authors, most of their prototypes resembled, to some extent, those identified by Vandiver and Kercher (2004), Mathews et al., 1989, and Matthews et al. (1991). As noted, the study demonstrated that the backgrounds of the female perpetrators, their assaultive behaviors, victim characteristics, and the offense settings varied significantly. For some women, their sexual offending appeared to be the culmination of numerous factors, including past childhood abuse, maltreatment, neglect, relationship issues, and mental health issues. Given the heterogeneity of women who commit sexual offenses, it is important to identify if sexual offenses characterized their criminal career (specialists) or if the woman also committed a range of criminal offenses (generalists) (Wijkman et al., 2011).

Single Modernized Cluster: Three Basic Typologies

More recently, McLeod and Dodd (2022) utilized meta-analytical and grounded theory strategies to analyze some of the studies pertaining to typologies. In contrast to prior research using primarily demographic and offense-related information, they defined typology as a single grouping of traits that included developmental history or behavioral trajectories. Their analysis revealed significant similarities between the identified, empirically validated typologies from which they constructed a "single modernized cluster" of three basic typologies: *relational*, *predatory*, and *chaotic*. They further applied psychodynamic and behavioral perspectives to each typology while also considering the relevant trauma-informed literature.

The women in the *relational* grouping did not consider their offending behavior as immoral because they did not "intend" to harm the victim(s). They also believed that they were demonstrating kindness or love while pursuing an emotional connection and relationship with their victim(s). In contrast, the *predatory* offender typology

was characterized by women who lacked empathy, indicative of antisocial personality disorder, narcissism, or psychopathy (McLeod & Dodd, 2022). As proffered by the authors, a desire for power and control was a primary motivator for this typology. These women were also more likely to intentionally exploit their victims and view them as objects or with indifference.

The third typology was described as the *chaotic* offender who viewed themselves as a victim. They viewed themselves as powerless—which they used in conjunction with cognitive distortions—to justify their sexually assaultive behaviors (McLeod & Dodd, 2022). A significant finding from McLeod and Dodd's (2022) study was how trauma overlapped with the psychodynamic and behavioral domains. As they indicated, consistent with the extant literature (Christopher et al., 2007; Levenson et al., 2014; Pflugradt et al., 2018), chronic trauma and adverse childhood experiences can negatively impact interpersonal and coping skills and possibly lead to the women re-enacting the abuse they experienced as children by perpetrating abuse against a new generation of victims.

Offense Pathways: Descriptive Model of the Offense Process

Whereas the typologies developed for women who commit sexual offenses provided conceptual frameworks for practitioners, they did not include information about "… the various components signifying risk-heightening phenomena for future reoffending" (Gannon et al., 2008, p. 354). With the goal of developing a descriptive model of the offense process for female perpetrators, Gannon et al. (2008) utilized a grounded theory methodology to study women convicted of a sexually motivated offense against either an adult or child. The participants were recruited from five female prisons and one probation region in England. Their mean age was 37.05 years, and their estimated mean Full-Scale Intelligence Quotient score was 98. Additionally, their mean sentence length was 5.68 years and most of the participants were Caucasian (91%). Although none of the participants had any prior convictions for sexual offenses, their index offenses included a total of 13 male and 25 female victims. The victims included nine adults and 29 children, all of whom knew the offender. Less than half of the victims (n = 18) were related to the offender. Eleven participants (50%) offended in the presence of a man; five were coerced, and six were accompanied by a male. Six of the participants were solo offenders, and five women committed their offenses in a group of three or more people.

From this methodology and sample, Gannon et al. (2008, 2010, 2012a, b, 2014) derived the Descriptive Model of the Offence Process for Female Sexual Offenders (DMFSO) that indicated female sexual offending tends to follow three primary pathways: *Explicit-Approach*, *Directed-Avoidant*, and *Implicit-Disorganized*.

The *Explicit-Approach* pathway accounted for half of the sample (n = 9) and represented a heterogeneous group of women who held different goals for their offending (i.e., sexual gratification, intimacy, revenge). They offended against either adults or children and tended to explicitly pre-plan their offending at both distal

(i.e., establishing long-term goals) and proximal (i.e., identifying short-term objectives) time points indicative of intact self-regulation. These offenders also experienced significant positive affect or emotions associated with their offending (Gannon et al., 2008, 2010, 2012a, b, 2014).

The *Directed-Avoidant* pathway included 27.8% of the sample (*n* = 5). All the female perpetrators in this pathway were directed to sexually offend against children by a coercive and/or abusive male. Thus, women classified by this pathway tended to offend out of fear or to obtain intimacy with their male co-offender. The sexual offending was explicitly pre-planned by the male perpetrator. Women in this pathway reported that they experienced significant negative emotions associated with their sexual offending (Gannon et al., 2008, 2010, 2012a, b, 2014).

The *Implicit-Disorganized* pathway was the smallest, comprising 22.2% of the sample. This pathway was described as a heterogeneous group who had differing goals associated with their sexually offending behaviors (e.g., intimacy, revenge/ humiliation, and/or sexual gratification). These women offended against either adults or children. In contrast to the women in the other pathways, these offenders did not appear to engage in any planning, indicative of impulsivity and disorganization. They were also characterized as experiencing either positive or negative affect (Gannon et al., 2008, 2010, 2012a, b).

In a follow-up study, Gannon et al. (2014) examined whether the three pathways identified by the DMFSO were also applicable to a sample of North American women convicted of sexual offenses. In this study, two independent raters were asked to assign each woman to one of the three offense pathways outlined by Gannon et al. (2008, 2010, 2012a, b). The sample included 36 women convicted of a sexual offense against either an adult or child from two North American prisons (81%, *n* = 29 Arizona Department of Corrections; 19%, *n* = 7 Correctional Services Canada). The mean age of the participants was 36.58 years, and their mean years of formal education was 12.75 years. The mean sentence length of the sample was 8.82 years, and a majority of participants were Caucasian. As further noted, none of the participants had previous convictions for sexual offenses. They offended against a total number of 48 victims (21 males, 27 females), and the majority were minors (*n* = 45). One-fifth of participants (*n* = 7) were biologically related to their victims. Although some women had offended alone (*n* = 14), many had co-offenders—41.7% (*n* = 15) of the participants offended with a single male co-offender and 13.9% (*n* = 5) offended in groups of three or more. For two participants, information about co-offenders was unclear or unavailable (Gannon et al., 2014).

In short, the authors concluded that the DMFSO provided a reasonable representation of the offense styles and motivation of North American women who have committed sexual offenses. They further concluded, since neither of the independent raters used to classify the offenders identified the presence of any new offense pathways, the DMFSO accesses the fundamental variables associated with three primary offense styles (Gannon et al., 2014).

Recidivism Risk Factors (Large-Scale Analyses)

As information about women who perpetrate sexual offenses increased, it became possible to analyze larger samples with more sophisticated research methodologies to look for factors related to recidivism. For example, in a large-scale study of women convicted of a sexual offense in the state of New York, Sandler and Freeman (2009) analyzed computerized criminal history files of every woman arrested for a registerable sexual offense between January 1, 1986, and December 31, 2006. The follow-up periods were 1, 2, and 5 years from the first sexual offense(s) conviction to rearrest for four types of recidivism. The initial sample included 5309 women arrested for a sexual offense(s) during the study time frame; however, only 1466 (27.6%) were convicted. The results indicated, after their first conviction for a sexual offense, 432 offenders (29.5%) were rearrested for any crime, 204 (13.9%) for a felony, 92 (6.3%) for a violent (including violent sexual) felony, and 32 (2.2%) for a sexual offense. As further reported, however, only 19 or 1.8% of all female sex offenders with at least 5 years of follow-up data were rearrested for a sexual offense. Another important finding was that if the women convicted of promoting/patronizing prostitution were excluded, the rearrest rate decreased to 1.2% (12 out of 988).

The authors between group comparisons also found that women who sexually re-offended were more likely to have at least one misdemeanor conviction, at least one felony conviction, and at least one drug conviction. On average, recidivists had more total convictions prior to their first sexual conviction(s), which indicated that female sexual recidivists did not restrict their offending to only sexual crimes; as a group, sexual recidivists more closely resembled general, chronic offenders rather than those female sex offenders who did not recidivate. Moreover, half of the recidivists were rearrested for promoting prostitution, which is usually considered a general criminal offense for financial gain. The results of their logistic regression also identified three factors that increased the likelihood of a female sexually re-offending following her first conviction for a sexual offense: prior convictions for child abuse of any type; prior misdemeanor convictions; and increased offender age (Sandler & Freeman, 2009). As noted, however, when the women convicted of promoting/patronizing prostitution were removed from the analysis, offender age was no longer a significant variable.

These findings suggest that the women who were most likely to sexually re-offend began their sexual offending later in life following a history of nonsexual offending. Additionally, the results support findings of other research that characterized female sexual recidivists as being more like general offenders.

Recidivism Base Rates

A subsequent study by Cortoni et al. (2010) utilized a meta-analysis to study recidivism rates for female sexual perpetrators. The authors identified three types of recidivism: sexual, violent, and any offense (i.e., general). Sexual and violent

recidivism were defined as arrests, charges, convictions, or incarceration for a new sexual or violent offense. Similarly, any recidivism was defined as any other (i.e., besides sexual and violent) new charge, conviction, or incarceration. The three recidivism types were examined separately in a total sample of 2490 offenders with an average follow-up time of 6.5 years. The resultant meta-analytic review found that women who perpetrated sexual offenses had low rates of sexual recidivism, between 1% and 3%. Violent recidivism rates (including sexual) were somewhat higher ranging from 4% to 8%. The recidivism rate for any other offense type was significantly greater, ranging from 19% to 24%. As the authors suggested, their results demonstrated that after female sexual offenders are detected and sanctioned, they typically do not commit subsequent sexual offenses. That is, the women who were convicted of any new crimes were 10 times more likely to be reconvicted for a nonsexual offense (Cortoni et al., 2010).

Consequently, due to low base rates, the authors concluded that the risk assessment instruments developed for males who commit sexual offenses should not be used for female sexual perpetrators because they will overestimate recidivism risk (Cortoni et al., 2010). Moreover, since recidivism for nonsexual offenses is more prevalent, practitioners assessing female sex offenders should consider utilizing instruments validated on women to evaluate general and violent risk. In those cases when the practitioner is required to address specific referral questions (e.g., forensic, legal issues), the most empirically valid estimate would be the recidivism base rates (Cortoni, 2018). However, there may be exceptions to this recommendation when there are factors so obvious (e.g., statement of intent to sexually re-offend) that the presumption of risk based upon the base rates may not apply (Cortoni, 2018; Cortoni et al., 2010; Pflugradt et al., 2022).

A more recent study by Vandiver et al. (2018) examined recidivism in a group of 471 adult female sexual offenders during an average follow-up period of 18.83 years. Analyzing data from multiple sources, their study included all adult women registered as sexual offenders in Texas between September 1, 1991, and April 27, 2001. Although most women ($n = 383$ [out of 471]) were arrested between these dates, some women ($n = 88$) were required to register retroactively for sexual offenses occurring between 1988 and the end of August 1991. The results indicated that 52% of the female sexual offenders ($n = 243$) were rearrested for any offense after their index offense (i.e., the arrest for which they were placed on the registry). Of these recidivists, 9% ($n = 41$) were arrested for a violent (i.e., nonsexual) offense and 7% ($n = 34$) for a sexual offense.

Additionally, of the 82 women who were rearrested within 1 year of their index sexual offense, 65 were identified as pseudo-recidivists—women arrested for offense(s) that occurred prior to the index sexual offense—while 17 women committed new sexual offenses after being arrested for a sexual offense. The authors also identified three factors that distinguished sexual recidivists from nonrecidivists. They included a higher number of prior arrests, a higher number of prior alcohol/ drug arrests, and sexually assaulting an acquaintance during the index sexual offense. The sexual recidivists and nonrecidivists did not substantially differ on most other factors. As concluded by the authors, although the offender's age at the

time of offense was a significant predictor of recidivism for nonsexual offenses (i.e., younger offenders had higher recidivism rates), the offenders' age was not significantly related to sexual recidivism (Vandiver et al., 2018).

Empirically Directed Assessment

In the past two decades, an evolving body of information relating to recidivism risk has emerged (Augarde & Rydon-Grange, 2022), and recent studies have provided some consistent risk-relevant considerations across samples, settings, and time periods (Cortoni, 2018; Marshall et al., 2021; Vandiver et al., 2018). For example, the early studies that categorized women who committed sexual offenses by demographic and offense characteristics identified that offenses occurred under differing relational contexts (Mathews et al., 1989; Matthews et al., 1991). Additionally, studies of typologies provided information about the relative prevalence of offense characteristics. Moreover, research using typological categories identified interactions between some of the offense-related variables, indicating that the sexual offending behaviors of women are multifactorial (Sandler & Freeman, 2007; Vandiver & Kercher, 2004; Wijkman et al., 2010).

As further noted, however, the typological research was limited insofar as it did not explicitly explore components related to the risk of sexual re-offending (Gannon et al., 2008). In response to these limitations, Gannon et al. (2008, 2010, 2012a, b, 2014) developed the DMFSO that found female sex offenders tended to follow three primary offense pathways. These pathways provided important insights and risk-relevant information about female sexual offending by not only identifying offense dynamics (e.g., planning, levels of coercion, levels of self-regulation) but also the motivations for offending (e.g., desire for intimacy, revenge/humiliation, sexual gratification, financial gain). More specifically, Gannon and others expounded upon the typological research by using more comprehensive categorizations of female sexual offending that yielded information about underlying factors (i.e., background, vulnerability, risk, etc.) and offense approach/behaviors.

Within the risk phase of their research, the subcomponents sexual satisfaction, intimacy, and instrumental-other generally corresponded to factors identified in the literature as risk relevant. Moreover, Gannon et al.'s (2008, 2010, 2012a, b, 2014) model enabled the comparison of offense pathways exhibited by women who perpetrate sexual offenses with those who commit nonsexual offenses (Salisbury & Van Voorhis, 2009; Van Voorhis et al., 2010).

In addition to the risk-relevant propensities identified by the pathways, studies have examined the recidivism rates for women who perpetrate sexual offenses. The most recent recidivism studies have consistently found low base rates for female sexual re-offending across settings and samples (Cortoni, 2018; Cortoni & Gannon, 2011, 2013; Cortoni & Hanson, 2005; Cortoni et al., 2010; Cortoni & Stefanov, 2020; Vandiver et al., 2018). For example, the recidivism rates provided by the large-scale studies cited here ranged from 1% to 7% for sexual offenses, 4% to 9%

for violent offenses, and 13.9% to 52% for any offense. Given the significantly higher general recidivism rate among women who perpetrate sexual offenses, some studies have concluded that as a group, female sexual recidivists resemble general, chronic offenders (Cortoni & Hanson, 2005; Sandler & Freeman, 2009; Vandiver & Kercher, 2004). Consequently, it has been suggested that female sexual offenders with a higher degree of criminogenic factors may also be at a greater risk to sexually re-offend.

Although the research pertaining to female sex offenders has identified relative risk factors, there continues to be a paucity of empirical information regarding factors associated with absolute risk or estimated probabilities of re-offending. Whereas some studies have reported sexual recidivism risk factors for women—such as prior convictions for sexual offenses, prior convictions for child abuse of any type, prior convictions for alcohol/drug offenses, noncontact offending, offending against an acquaintance, and solo offending with a male victim (Cortoni, 2018; Marshall et al., 2021; Sandler & Freeman, 2009; Vandiver et al., 2018)—they were based upon small samples of recidivists and their generalizability has not yet been empirically established.

As such, any assessment of absolute recidivism risk for female sexual offenders, such as those required in civil commitment proceedings, must include a comprehensive assessment using structured professional judgment (Douglas et al., 2003) since there are no available actuarial instruments (Cortoni, 2018; Marshall et al., 2021; Pflugradt et al., 2022). Despite the lack of actuarial instruments, there is sufficient research to conduct empirically directed risk assessments. Specifically, evaluators should use an instrument validated for women such as the Level of Service Inventory-Revised or the Women's Risk and Needs Assessment (Cortoni, 2018; Pflugradt et al., 2022). Although these instruments will not provide a risk level for sexual recidivism, they will provide information related to general criminal recidivism as well as a rating of the overall level of criminogenic needs that the woman possesses. Based on research, it appears that women may be at greater risk for sexual re-offending if they have a higher level of general criminogenic needs; however, evaluators are not able to numerically quantify this increased risk beyond the known base rates.

Despite being potentially higher risk to re-offend sexually than other female sexual offenders, the known base rates tell us that, as a group (even the ones with high criminogenic needs), women who commit sexually motivated offenses are still at low risk to re-offend sexually. The presence of any of the factors discussed in this chapter does not, by themselves, elevate sexual re-offense risk above the base rates. As such, the re-offending base rates are well established and, unless there are significant extenuating circumstances, they are the best estimates of a woman's sexual recidivism risk (Cortoni, 2018; Pflugradt et al., 2022; Vandiver et al., 2018). Therefore, it is important to reiterate that despite the presence of multiple criminogenic needs and factors that have been identified as related to risk, there is no research to indicate that these elements elevate a woman's risk above the identified base rates. Similarly, there is no research that identifies a nexus between paraphilic

disorders and/or severe personality pathology and increased sexual recidivism risk for women.

In summary, women who perpetrate sexual offenses are a low-risk, high-need population. When assessing female sex offenders, a comprehensive gendered assessment should be undertaken. This comprehensive assessment of risk and criminogenic needs will also provide insights into high-risk situations, vulnerabilities, treatment targets, strengths, goals, and/or relational contexts that could increase or mitigate the likelihood of a woman engaging in future acts of sexual assault (Pflugradt et al., 2022; Steffensmeier & Allan, 1996).

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