

# Remove the Feminist Schema to Save Lives: A Change in Approach

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For around 50 years the feminist movement has dominated the discourse surrounding DV/IPV. Arguably, this approach has achieved very little. Is it time to reassess our perceptions in an effort to finally reduce numbers of victims?

The social phenomenon that is domestic violence (DV), is arguably amongst the most emotive and frequently discussed subjects in the field of social sciences. Challenges can arise surrounding linguistic discourse when simply attempting to define DV. Terminology used can be met with sometimes visceral (and arguably bigoted) responses from different feminist leaning academics (Kelly & Westmarland, 2016); the media (Bindell, 1999); as well as some of the more vocal women's rights organisations currently lobbying the UK government (Women's Aid, 2019). A prime example of the extent of this issue can be seen in the process surrounding the adjustments made to the Violence Against Women and Girls Act (VAWA) in 2015 here in Wales. A Welsh Assembly member who sat on the panel charged with the responsibility of ensuring the Act was passed, reported that nine of the thirteen DV charities invited to give evidence, wrestled with the wording as it included the phrase 'gender-based violence' and therefore (in his words) "...could insinuate that men could be victims as well". This is evidenced by his email excerpt, which he kindly wrote for the purpose of this paper.

"The Violence against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (Wales) Act 2015 became law in Wales on 29 April 2015.....The Act had originally been introduced in June 2014 as the "Gender-based Violence, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (Wales) Bill"....Committee's 'Evidence Session 1' kicked off almost straight away with:

"[6] Christine Chapman: I just want to ask you some questions around the title of the Bill. I wonder whether you could tell me why you chose not to refer to violence against women in the title of the Bill."

Recommendation 2 in the subsequent November 2014 Communities, Equality and Local Government Committee 'Gender-based Violence, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (Wales) Bill: Stage 1 Committee Report' stated "We recommend that the Minister amends the Bill in the following ways:.....- to refer to Violence Against Women, rather than Gender-Based Violence." (Email, 2019).

Issues such as this have prompted the Home Office and Ministry of Justice to focus on the area of definition as part of their creation of the new 'Domestic Abuse Bill' (Home Office, 2019). Until such a time as the government has agreed a concrete definition, academics and institutions alike are forced to opt for one of the many differentiations available, at the risk of being condemned for doing so. For the aforementioned reasons this paper will avoid the use of a definition, instead highlighting this example as one of the many patterns surrounding DV that ultimately, the author would argue, only serve to allow the continuance of said phenomena. It is the author's hope that, by focusing on patterns of behaviour surrounding the providers of victim and perpetrator services *in conjunction* with behaviours exhibited by social actors experiencing DV, this paper will demonstrate that, by enabling this field to be dominated by radical-left, feminist ideology, we only serve to create further victims of what most would agree to be amongst the most abhorrent of crimes. It is hoped this would then enhance our ability to identify the root causes which, in turn,

should facilitate the opportunity for the government to develop interventions with much higher success rates than those currently relied upon, notably at substantial cost to the taxpayer.

To understand the current climate surrounding DV, it is important to briefly assess the predominant theoretical approach to these phenomena. The overwhelming and dominant ideology states that DV holds its roots in the patriarchal oppression of women (Bettman, 2009). It also appears to be widely accepted amongst academics that “Since the 1970s, many feminists continue to maintain that patriarchy is the ultimate cause of all abuse against women” (Tracy, 2007:557). As a result, interventions surrounding DV perpetrators has been heavily geared towards the re-education of men, working from the core premise of what is colloquially referred to as the ‘Duluth model’ (Pence & Paymar, 1993). This approach grounds its philosophy within the notion that all DV is as a result of mans innate need to retain power and control, which is then expressed as violence towards their partners. One of the underlying issues of this model is that it precludes the possibility of men being victims, or indeed other members of the LGBTQ+ community (Letellier, 1994). After many years of this being the predominant approach, right across the western world, it has now been reported as a catastrophic failure, not just by institutions such as the Ministry of Justice (MOJ, 2013:23) or academics within the field (Dutton & Corvo, 2007) but, interestingly, by one of the *originators* of the Duluth model (Shepherd & Pence, 1999).

The abject failure of said intervention is perhaps amongst the most important indicator of what many an academic has long argued, is the result of a very serious fundamental attribution error, an excellent example of which can be seen during the testing of this theory (Bates, Graham-Kevan & Archer, 2014). Theoretical testing aside, its basis of foundation within patriarchal theory is, arguably, disproved by the existence of male victims in heterosexual relationships, as well as female victims in same-sex relationships. The author would argue it is these victims who remain truly oppressed by a political ideology whose only intent appears to be to further ‘blame or shame’ said victims into nonexistence. Frustratingly, the research has long shown that the prevalence of male victims is very similar to the rates of females. Here in the UK, the best current measure is agreed to be the ‘Crime Survey for England and Wales’ (CSEW) (ONS, 2018); which currently records the prevalence rates as 695,000 male victims as compared to 1.3 million female victims for the year ending 2018. Whilst this may seem a substantial difference, it is important to remember that men underreport abuse at about the rate of three times higher, than that of women (Brooks, 2018, citing ONS, 2015). It is perhaps understandable why men would be hesitant to seek help, given the reaction by the services surrounding the phenomena, whereby men often find themselves being arrested, despite being the victim (George & Yarwood, 2004).

For those academics researching outside of the feminist theoretical perspective, the prevalence rates of DV towards men are potentially much higher than we see in the CSEW, even when adjusting for rates of under-reporting. Evidence of this can be seen in what are widely regarded by gender neutral academics to be amongst the most comprehensive investigations to have been conducted in this field (Archer, 2004; Whitaker et al, 2007; Hamel, 2012). Studies such as these consistently report victimisation rates to be comparable across the two most common genders. The differentiations become apparent when one focuses on the perpetrator gender *as compared* to other factors such as, motivation, form of violence used, and type of injury sustained by the victim. For example, all three reports show higher perpetration levels by women than men when quantifying ‘unidirectional’ violence (meaning the violence was only directed at one individual). The Hamel (2012) report, recorded unidirectional rates of male to female violence as 13.8%, whilst female to male violence was recorded at 28.3%. Interestingly, and counter to the prevailing ideology within the field, 57.9% was reported as bidirectional (meaning that both parties expressed violence to each other).

As the academic fields and western governments alike become more aware of the true dynamics of this type of social action, we see an increased scrutiny of the patterns surrounding individuals involved with this type of behaviour, leading to further conclusions regarding the ultimate cause. For example, the Hamel report’s research into the motivation of perpetrator behaviour identified several recurring themes. Interestingly, primary motives appear to range from matters such as revenge for emotional harm, stress, jealousy, to express anger and to get their partners attention. This seems to suggest emotional literacy levels and poor communication habits within the relationship as being a predictor to potentially violent behaviour. Associations between mental health problems and risk factors further

strengthen this theory but, interestingly, the link is stronger for women than men, suggesting a possible focus for future, therapeutic interventions. This is further evidenced by the identification of protective factors against dating violence, which include a high standard of involved and positive parenting during adolescence, combined with the existence of supportive peers. This point alone seems to strengthen the argument that intervention may be possible if approached from the correct therapeutic or preventative perspective.

Building from this evidence we can see a historically well-known correlation between DV and poor mental health (Howard, et al., 2009). In searching to identify causation, we would at this point be remiss not to highlight the growing understanding and recognition of comorbidity of mental health problems and addiction (Carra, et al., 2014), in relation to how this dynamic may interact with the circumstances surrounding DV. It is the author's belief that whilst many feminist academic papers highlight the link between substance use and increased rates of DV incidents (Brooks-Hay & Nancy, 2018), the true relevance of this dynamic is yet to be understood. A recent paper written on behalf of the Australian government (Hulme, Morgan & Boxall, 2019), found 36% of DV incidents were alcohol related, whilst another 4% (median ranges) were drug related. The importance of this study is that it took a non-gendered and largely quantitative approach that, compared with most other ideologically and politically-driven research, is rare. The findings of nearly 40% of DV incidents being related to substance abuse, highlights an area requiring much more focus by services worldwide. This is obviously a substantial finding and, arguably, should form a much more significant part of current and future intervention practices.

According to the Hamel report, women, when intoxicated, are more likely than men to initiate physical violence. Controversially, *all three* reports state that women are much more likely to initiate violence directed towards their male partners in most situations. This is especially relevant to the coercive and controlling dynamic of what some have termed 'social', 'relational', or 'indirect' forms of violence (Archer & Coyne, 2005). Once again, all three of the main studies highlighted have shown that female perpetrators utilise this form of DV at much higher rates than men do. The UK governments definition of coercive and controlling behaviour states "Controlling behaviour is: a range of acts designed to make a person subordinate and/or dependent by isolating them from sources of support, exploiting their resources and capacities for personal gain, depriving them of the means needed for independence, resistance and escape and regulating their everyday behaviour.....Coercive behaviour is: a continuing act or a pattern of acts of assault, threats, humiliation and intimidation or other abuse that is used to harm, punish, or frighten their victim." (Home Office, 2015). Given the severity of the impact on the targeted individual (Williamson, 2010), the author feels this is a much-understated area in relation to female perpetrated violence.

The idea that women use social violence at higher rates than men is a familiar aspect of society and can be seen in good detail during the study of the phenomenon of 'Slut Shaming' (Muggleton, Tarran & Fincher, 2019). The researchers of this study state that women may have a natural disposition to this type of social punishment action, which the researchers identify as being ingrained in evolutionary anthropology. Darwinist routes aside, further evidence is documented in well-known sayings such as "hell hath no fury as a woman scorned", "women can be right bitches to each other", as well as media representations of how women treat each other in the workplace (Khazan, 2017) or in society in general (Vine, 2016). With this type of behaviour being so prevalent in society, the author would argue, we would be misguided to presume this dynamic would not then impact in our day-to-day intimate relationships. One of the more damaging areas of this type of socially destructive behaviour comes in the form of parental alienation syndrome (Harman, Hines & Kruk, 2018). The dynamics of this type of behaviour, whereby the relationship between child and parent is manipulated and destroyed, appears hauntingly reminiscent of the socially isolating patterns associated with slut shaming.

Further investigation into these dynamics reveal that amongst alienating parents, mothers are significantly more likely to use indirect forms of alienating strategies (such as the use of false accusations) than fathers, who are often statistically recorded to be the most likely to experience such targeted behaviour (Harman, et al., 2019). The long-term impact on targeted parents and children alike is often described as torturous (Hassman, 2013; Whitcombe, 2014) which goes some way to explaining the often-far-reaching impact on both parties mental and physical health (Baker, 2005; Bates, 2019). Many feminist academics have long argued that when victims of DV are questioned by

their perpetrator in the family court environment, it leads to a situation whereby the victim is further abused during the process of what is termed 'secondary victimisation' (Laing, 2017). Given that the process of parental alienation involves the manipulation of all the authorities surrounding the victims, it could be argued that this situation can be much more impactful than to simply be questioned by your abuser. This can be seen during research into the impact of psychological torture and exposure to humiliating and inhumane behaviour (Basoglu, Livanou, & Crnobaric, 2007) and would explain the existence of what has been termed 'legal abuse syndrome' (Huffer, 1995).

The lack of understanding regarding the severity of these indirect forms of DV by the criminal justice system has, so far, been attributed to the perception that physical violence is more impactful and therefore should take precedence (Robinson, et al., 2016). Given that bidirectional rates make up most recorded incidents, combined with the tendencies of females to use more covert forms of indirect violence, this then raises substantial concern relating to the guilt of men who have been charged with DV. As we have seen in the George and Yarwood report (2004), innocent men often find themselves being arrested despite evidence showing they are the victim. Couple this issue with the well-known and evidenced research showing the existence of gender biases in judicial decision-making (Miller, 2018), it is perhaps easy to understand how mistakes can be made when attempting to identify on whom to focus appropriate services. The need of the services to identify a clear victim and perpetrator, is evidently as a result of the polarising attitude of theoretical scientists in this field. The need to pigeonhole men as dangerous and violent (and therefore prove the existence of patriarchy) appears to have completely overridden any concerns regarding the safety of men, women and children. It is quite clear to the author of this paper, as well as many others, that this particular societal schema is responsible for the suffering of millions of truly vulnerable people in the UK.

As this paper has shown, the patterns surrounding DV and the reason for its existence are often considered complex. Once we remove the societal schema centring on female oppression and take an objective stance, it becomes quite clear that there are many missed opportunities for intervention. Most importantly, it appears that a great deal of DV behaviour can be attributed (but not limited) to three main causes: emotional disturbance (and therefore associated behaviours such as revenge seeking), substance abuse issues, and the existence of mental health problems. Perhaps this is an oversimplified approach but, given that such a high proportion of incidents are centred on these three issues, combined with the failure of the Duluth Model, it appears quite obvious that much can be done to vastly reduce the numbers if one were to simply approach this matter from a therapeutic perception. Therefore (and with a heavy heart), the only conclusion this paper can come to is that the reason DV exists at such high rates is because of the existence of sexist attitudes by feminist academics, and because of the tendency of the government to virtue signal. These academics and officials alike are responsible for the last 50 years' worth of faulty reporting on these matters and, as we have seen, have long fought the idea of the presence of male victims despite the existence of evidence to the contrary.

Finally, by ignoring the largely bidirectional nature of DV, we fail to help those individuals who have been polarized into categories irrespective of whether that pertains to the victim or perpetrator. The continued and quite deliberate ignorance over the true nature of this phenomenon must, at some point, beg the question to be asked as to whether the UK government and academic institutions are complicit in their behaviour. It is hard to imagine any other scenario where we would ignore the plight of victims, especially where so many children are exposed to such devastating behaviour, simply because it offends our sensibilities. Whilst the author recognises that this particular societal schema is deeply entrenched in UK society, and that change would have to be radical and of a particularly wide scope, given the vast impact this is having, coupled with the vast cost, something must be done sooner rather than later.

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