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FEMINIST FORUM

Langhinrichsen-Rolling's Confirmation of the Feminist Analysis of Intimate Partner Violence: Comment on "Controversies Involving Gender and Intimate Partner Violence in the United States"

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Abstract This article makes four major points in response to Jennifer Langhinrichsen-Rolling's (2010) review of the intimate partner violence literature. First, the evidence is clear that there is more than one type of intimate partner violence. Second, the feminists are right. Gender is central to the analysis of intimate partner violence, and the coercive controlling violence that most people associate with the term "domestic violence" is perpetrated primarily by men against their female partners. Third, different types of intimate partner violence have different causes, different developmental trajectories, and different consequences. They require different models to understand them. Finally, we need more qualitative research focused on the least understood types of intimate partner violence: violent resistance and situational couple violence.

Keywords Intimate partner violence · Gender symmetry · Domestic violence · Intimate terrorism · Abuse

Introduction

My comments are organized around four major topics: (a) the central role of gender in intimate partner violence, (b) the importance of distinctions among types of intimate partner violence, particularly distinctions that focus on the role of coercive control in violent relationships, (c) the need for different models for the different types of intimate partner violence, and (d) a call for qualitative dyadic analyses of intimate partner violence. Some of my comments are designed to highlight what I think are the most important implications of Jennifer Langhinrichsen-Rohling's (2010) analysis, some to dispute some of her conclusions, and others to go beyond her analysis to suggest promising paths for future research and policy development.

The Central Role of Gender in Intimate Partner Violence

It would be hard to tell from the abstract and conclusion of Langhinrichsen-Rohling's paper that one of the major implications of her analysis is that the coercive, controlling violence that most people associate with the term "domestic violence" is in fact perpetrated primarily by men against their female partners—as feminist theorists and activists have long argued (Dobash and Dobash 1979; Johnson 2008; Stark 2007). This conclusion is less visible than it should be because of the separation of the first two controversies that Langhinrichsen-Rohling addresses: the gender-symmetry debate and the debate about the utility of typologies. In her discussion of the gender symmetry debate she makes an important point that is too easy to miss and whose import is not clear unless it is combined with some of her conclusions in the section on typologies. Studies using agency samples (e.g., law enforcement, courts, hospitals, shelters) indicate that in heterosexual relationships intimate partner violence is largely male-perpetrated; in contrast, studies using general samples indicate that intimate partner violence is roughly gender-symmetric in terms of perpetration. Thus, the two major

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sampling methodologies of intimate partner violence research lead to dramatically different conclusions about gender. In my early review of the domestic violence literature (Johnson 1995), this pattern led me to develop the typology that has been the heart of my analyses ever since.

Briefly, my control-based typology distinguishes among three major types of intimate partner violence. (There is a fourth type of intimate partner violence discussed in my work, *mutual violent control*, which involves two partners fighting for control of each other. However, it shows up only in very small numbers in most samples, and there is considerable controversy regarding its very existence. Therefore, I have chosen in most of my recent work to focus on the three well-established types discussed below.) *Intimate terrorism* involves a violence perpetrator who uses violence in combination with a variety of other coercive control tactics in order to attempt to take general control over his partner. In heterosexual relationships intimate terrorism is perpetrated primarily (although not exclusively) by men. *Violent resistance* is the violence engaged in by many of the women (and the few men) who find themselves to be entrapped in a relationship with an intimate terrorist. These two types of intimate partner violence predominate in agency samples—for the obvious reasons. Intimate terrorism is an ongoing pattern of violence and coercive control that is likely (a) to frighten the victim into seeking help from law enforcement, a protection order, a shelter, or a divorce court, (b) to produce injuries that require medical attention, and (c) to draw the attention of others who report incidents to the authorities.

The third major type of intimate partner violence, *situational couple violence* involves arguments that escalate to verbal aggression and ultimately to physical aggression. It does not involve a general pattern of coercive control. The interpersonal dynamics that produce the escalation can differ considerably from couple to couple, variously rooted in anger management problems of one or both of the partners, couple communication issues, substance abuse issues, and so on. This is the violence that dominates general survey data, because of the biases of so-called representative survey samples. These biases arise from the little-noted high rates of refusal in survey samples—40 percent in the much-cited National Family Violence Surveys (Johnson 1995). Because intimate terrorists and their partners refuse to participate in such surveys, the former because they do not wish to implicate themselves, the latter because they fear retribution from their partner, general social survey data include almost no intimate terrorism or violent resistance (Johnson et al. 2008).

Recent analyses by myself and others confirm these patterns, indicating that the two major sampling strategies (agency samples and general samples) tap two basically different intimate partner violence dynamics (Graham-Kevan and Archer 2003; Johnson 2006a; Johnson et al. 2008). In the ongoing debate about the gender structure of intimate partner violence (Holstein and Sacks 2009; Young 2009), those who lean toward a gender-symmetric view continue to ignore the agency data and other clear evidence for the predominant male perpetration of intimate terrorism, preferring to cite general survey data as if it referenced the pattern of coercive control that the public equates with the term "domestic violence," when in fact those survey data tell us only about situational couple violence, which happens to be gender-symmetric in terms of perpetration.

Note how careful I am to say that situational couple violence is gender-symmetric "in terms of perpetration." The on-going social/political construction of gender symmetry in intimate partner violence is accomplished not only through ignoring both agency data and the distinction between intimate terrorism and situational couple violence, but also by focusing on a ridiculously narrow definition of symmetry in terms of incidence/prevalence. In the studies that find so-called gender symmetry, what "symmetry" means is that roughly the same number of men and women acknowledge that at least once in some specified time period they have engaged in at least one of the violent behaviors listed in whatever survey instrument is used. It is clear, however, that even in these general sample, so-called gender-symmetric studies, men's violence produces more physical injuries, more negative psychological consequences, and more fear (Archer 2000; Kimmel 2002). The alleged gender symmetry of intimate partner violence, even in its situational couple violence form, is a myth created in the service of political ends that include attacks on the funding of shelters and batterer intervention programs (Dragiewicz and Lindgren 2009).

Because the role of gender in intimate partner violence is pervasive and involves much more than gender differences in perpetration or consequences, gender theory is an essential theoretical perspective in this area (Johnson 2007, 2008). Gender theory (most fully elaborated in sociology) is a general perspective rooted in the idea that gender is a concept that can be applied at many levels of analysis, from average gender differences in size and strength, physical abilities, personality, attitudes, and values to the gender structure of large-scale social institutions (Lorber 1994; Risman 2004). Gender theory is thus a perspective that meets Langhinrichsen-Rohling's call for models of intimate partner violence that are couched at many levels of analysis. Let me cite just a few examples of research that demonstrates the centrality of gender in intimate partner violence. Richard Felson (1996) established the importance of gender differences in size and strength. Sugarman and Frankel (1996) have shown the importance of traditional attitudes toward women.

Holtzworth-Munroe and her colleagues (2000) have demonstrated the importance of hostile attitudes toward women. A number of studies have demonstrated the effects of gendered social structures on state and national rates of domestic violence (e.g. , Levinson 1989; Yllö 1983) and on women's ability to escape from intimate terrorism (Anderson 2007). Finally, of course, we must not forget all of the evidence cited above that intimate terrorism is largely male-perpetrated, that violent resistance is primarily a woman's response to intimate terrorism, and that all types of intimate partner violence involve more injury, fear, and psychological damage when perpetrated by men rather than women.

The Importance of Control-based Typologies

Although one of Langhinrichsen-Rohling's major points is that "there are subtypes of IPV," she nevertheless is critical of typologies at a number of points in her paper. I do not find her criticisms to be convincing. As I proceed to consider Langhinrichsen-Rohling's interpretation of the research on types of intimate partner violence, the distinction between typologies of violence and typologies of batterers will be important. One class of typologies focuses on the nature of the violence itself or on its role in the relationship. For example, with respect to the nature of the violence itself, distinctions are often made in terms of severity or frequency. As an example of a typology that focuses on the relationship context of the violence, my control typology is based on the way in which the violence is or is not embedded in a pattern of coercive control.

Another class of typologies focuses on characteristics of the perpetrator. For example, Holtzworth-Munroe and her colleagues (2000) identify types of batterers by means of a cluster analysis of a number of personality traits, violence outside the dyad, and level of intimate partner violence. They identify three core types of batterers: family-only batterers, borderline/dysphoric batterers, and generally violent/antisocial batterers. Their finding that only the latter two types score high on a measure of coercive control strongly suggests that these two types are both engaged in intimate terrorism, whereas family-only batterers are engaged in situational couple violence. Among the intimate terrorists, the borderline/dysphoric batterers are evidently motivated to exert coercive control by an extreme emotional dependence on their partner. The generally violent/antisocial batterers are motivated by a generally antisocial orientation toward having their own way by any means necessary—with others as well as with their partner. These two types of batterers exhibit different psychological profiles, different developmental histories, and different behavior outside of the dyad, but both are involved in a general pattern of coercive control with respect to their partner, i.e., intimate terrorism.

Now let us turn to Langhinrichsen-Rohling's critiques of typologies of intimate partner violence: "Unfortunately, despite their intuitive appeal, several studies have been unable to fully replicate these original typologies [mine and Holtzworth-Munroe's] as proposed or empirically derived…" (Langhinrichsen-Rohling 2010, this issue). First of all, I have to object to the wording here. Her reference to "intuitive appeal" suggests that there is no empirical basis for these typologies, as does the reference to "as proposed or empirically derived." In fact, both of these typologies *are* empirically derived and both have considerable support across a variety of samples and a variety of measures.

More substantively, I must object to Langhinrichsen-Rohling's interpretation of the three studies that she cites as not supporting Holtzworth-Munroe's typology. As far as I can tell, the first study actually does support it. Here is the abstract: "This study empirically tests Holtzworth-Munroe and Stuart's (1994) typology of male batterers in a community sample. Latent class analyses based on severity of physical aggression, generality of violence, and psychopathology partially replicated the Holtzworth-Munroe and Stuart typology by identifying 3 types of violent men: family-only, medium-violence, and generally violent/psychologically distressed. Separate groupings of borderline/dysphoric and generally violent/antisocial types were not found. In comparisons of batterer types to each other and to nonviolent men, generally violent/psychologically distressed men differed from other groups on psychological abuse, life stress, marital satisfaction, and attitudes about violence. Types also differed on wives' fearfulness of their husband and injury from marital aggression" (Delsol et al. 2003, p. 635). I suppose that Langhinrichsen-Rohling sees this study as not supporting Holtzworth-Munroe's typology because there is no differentiation of the two types of intimate terrorists, but that is probably because this is a community sample that is dominated by situational couple violence and does not have enough intimate terrorism in it to allow for such fine distinctions. In any case, the study certainly supports a distinction between situational couple violence and intimate terrorism.

The second study (Waltz et al. 2000) does find a situational couple violence group and two types of intimate terrorists, but some of the personality patterns that differentiate the latter two are somewhat different from the ones found by Holtzworth-Munroe and her colleagues. Nevertheless, the authors conclude as follows: "In summary, the present study found support for Holtzworth-Munroe and Stuart's (1994) model, with the exception of personality disorder characteristics not distinguishing between the generally violent and pathological groups in the predicted

fashion. Further clarification of the distinctions between these groups is needed, particularly in terms of personality patterns and attachment styles. The model shows promise as a means of identifying meaningful differences between batterers, and the implications for treatment matching should be further explored empirically" (Waltz et al. 2000, p. 668). The third study (Babcock et al. 2004) actually does not even deal with Holtzworth-Munroe's typology. In sum, what I see here are two studies that in fact give considerable support to Holtzworth-Munroe's model, and one that is irrelevant.

Later in Langhinrichsen-Rohling's paper, she cites a study in which she and her colleagues found that a measure of psychopathology was not helpful in predicting batterer intervention success—as if that were further evidence of the weakness of Holtzworth-Munroe's typology. Although that seems like something of a non sequitur to me, other studies in fact show that this typology does meaningfully predict batterer intervention success (Clements et al. 2002; Eckhardt et al. 2008). Even more impressively, a 1996 report of a randomized experiment (Saunders 1996) demonstrated that the batterer intervention treatments that were tailored to each of the two types of intimate terrorists identified by Holtzworth-Munroe were more effective than those that were not.

If one were to consider all of these studies, along with (a) the series of studies done by Holtzworth-Munroe with various colleagues, and (b) all of the previous studies by other researchers that had converged on three types and that led Holtzworth-Munroe and Stuart to propose their model in the first place (Holtzworth-Munroe and Stuart 1994), it is clear that the support for Holtzworth-Munroe's typology is quite compelling.

As I have suggested above, much of the research concerning the Holtzworth-Munroe typology also supports my distinction between situational couple violence and intimate terrorism. In addition, my colleagues and I have found support for the control-based typology using a variety of secondary data sources with different samples and different measures (Johnson 2001, 2006a, 2008; Johnson and Cares 2004; Johnson et al. 2002; Johnson and Leone 2005; Johnson et al. 2008; Leone 2007; Leone et al. 2007; Leone et al. 2004). Support has also come from other authors, using a variety of measures in dramatically different samples (Frye et al. 2006; Graham-Kevan and Archer 2003; Laroche 2005; Rosen et al. 2005). So, in the final analysis, I see no reason to have any serious doubts about the validity of either Holtzworth-Monroe's typology or mine. There are different types of intimate partner violence and different types of batterers. We can neither move our analyses forward nor develop effective interventions unless we acknowledge those differences.

The Need for Multiple Models

In one major section of her paper, Langhinrichsen-Rohling proposes a multivariate causal model of intimate partner violence. One model will not be enough. Her model may be adequate for bi-directional situational couple violence, but the evidence is clear that we need different models for different types of intimate partner violence. Let me give just a few examples of areas in which we already know that different types of intimate partner violence have different correlates and different dynamics.

In a fairly early attempt to distinguish empirically between intimate terrorism and situational couple violence, Macmillan and Gartner (1999) found, among other things, that marital status was related in opposite directions to these two major types of intimate partner violence: married women were more likely than cohabiting women to be the target of intimate terrorism, but less likely to experience situational couple violence. Alison Cares and I (Johnson and Cares 2004) have shown that childhood exposure to parents' violence toward each other is strongly related to adult male intimate terrorism, but not to adult male or female situational couple violence. A number of studies have demonstrated that couples' communication patterns are related in different ways to situational couple violence and to intimate terrorism (Johnson 2006b; Olson 2002). And most importantly, gender is strongly related to the perpetration of intimate terrorism, but not situational couple violence (e.g. , Graham-Kevan and Archer 2003; Johnson 2006a; Johnson et al. 2008).

A number of studies have shown that the dynamics of different types of intimate partner violence are quite different. For example, intimate terrorism is more likely to escalate than situational couple violence, and it is less likely to be bi-directional (e.g. , Graham-Kevan and Archer 2003; Johnson 2006a; Johnson et al. 2008). Intimate terrorism has been shown to have more serious consequences for the victim than situational couple violence (e.g., Graham-Kevan and Archer 2003; Johnson et al. 2002; Johnson and Leone 2005; Leone 2007; Leone et al. 2004). Women experiencing intimate terrorism are more likely to seek help than those experiencing situational couple violence (Leone et al. 2007).

Finally, a literature is developing that demonstrates that batterer intervention programs have different outcomes for different types of intimate partner violence (Clements et al. 2002; Eckhardt et al. 2008). There is also a literature on other criminal justice interventions that could benefit from attention to differences among the types of intimate partner violence. For example, domestic violence arrest policies are only effective for some types of offenders, but no one has yet looked at the connections with types of intimate partner violence (Buzawa 2003). Linda Mills (2003, 2008) has

received considerable attention for her assertion that a restorative justice alternative (Strang and Braithwaite 2002) to conventional batterer intervention is useful for cases of situational couple violence, but not for intimate terrorism. Susan Miller (2005) shows how batterer intervention groups for women often treat women as violent resistors rather than as batterers. Finally, the rapidly growing literature on differentiating among types of intimate partner violence in family court (Jaffe et al. 2008; Kelly and Johnson 2008) should soon lead to research on the effectiveness of various interventions for different types of intimate partner violence. Jennifer Hardesty and her colleagues have already shown that divorced couples who have experienced intimate terrorism have great difficulty working out post-divorce parenting roles, whereas this is not the case for those who had experienced situational couple violence (Hardesty and Chung 2006; Hardesty et al. 2006; Hardesty et al. 2008).

The Inevitability of Dyadic Analyses and the Need for Qualitative Research

Intimate partner violence is inherently about two people and the relationship between them. Thus, Langhinrichsen-Rohling is certainly correct that we need some sort of dyadic analysis. However, she seems to base this conclusion on the fact that there is considerable bi-directional intimate partner violence. If she is suggesting that dyadic analyses may not be needed for other types of intimate partner violence, I would have to disagree. All types of intimate partner violence require attention to both partners, to their relationship, and to the broader social context. In this connection, I want to make a plea for an increased focus on qualitative research. Langhinrichsen-Rohling's call for more dyadic analyses can be implemented most effectively by looking closely at the interpersonal dynamics that are involved in the various types of intimate partner violence. Models that look at statistical associations among variables can give us clues about what is going on in relationships, but they involve abstractions that are far from the realities that we must understand in order to be able to intervene effectively. The major reason why we have such a complex understanding of intimate terrorism is that the research literature on intimate terrorism is deeply rooted in the narratives of women who have survived it. In contrast, we have very little qualitative research on situational couple violence or violent resistance.

One of the reasons that we have so little qualitative research on situational couple violence is that the general survey samples through which it is most accessible have been devoted to quantitative, variable-oriented analyses. These quantitative analyses suggest tremendous diversity within this particular type of intimate partner violence. For example, an many as 40% of the reports of situational couple violence involve only one incident, while others involve chronic, frequent violence (Gelles and Straus 1988). Most couples experiencing situational couple violence desist, but a significant minority escalate their violence over time (Feld and Straus 1990). About half involve violence on the part of both partners, one fourth the female partner only, one fourth the male partner only (Straus and Gelles 1990). What we need now are narrative investigations that can help us to understand this great diversity. This can be done in a mixed-method approach in which a relatively large sample answers a standard set of survey questions, while some or all of the violent couples are recruited for a more intense qualitative inquiry. The questions to be asked about situational couple violence are almost endless. How does "once-only" situational couple violence differ from continuing situational couple violence? Why doesn't it happen again? How is it that some couples who experience multiple incidents desist, while others continue or even escalate? What is the role of alcohol and other drugs in incidents of situational couple violence? What are the various dynamics that produce bi-directional violence? Why is it that some couples' relationship satisfaction is not severely damaged by situational couple violence? Why do some seek help, while others do not? To what extent are the coping strategies that are marshaled in response to intimate terrorism also relevant for situational couple violence? How does men's violence differ from women's? Are there gender differences in intentions, in interpretation, in consequences? Are the gender patterns similar for bi-directional and unidirectional violence?

The other under-studied major type of intimate partner violence, violent resistance, is to be found primarily in agency samples. Remember, violent resistance is not simply about a situational resistance to incidental violence; it is about violent reactions to the coercive controlling violence of an intimate terrorist. Given that our vast knowledge of intimate terrorism comes primarily from in-depth interviewing of survivors, one would think we would know a lot about violent resistance. Indeed, that research has told us a good deal about the creative means by which women cope with intimate terrorism, but most of it has been focused on non-violent coping (e.g., Campbell et al. 1998; Campbell and Soeken 1999; Taft et al. 2007), help-seeking (e.g., Gondolf and Fisher 1988; Kaukinen 2004; Leone et al. 2007) and the process of leaving (e.g., Choice and Lamke 1999; Kirkwood 1993). There has been little focus on violent resistance to intimate terrorism, with the exception of the literature on women who kill their abusive partners (Browne 1987; Browne et al. 1999). However, recently increased attention to women's violence in intimate relationships (provoked in large part by the gender

symmetry debate) has begun to turn this tide (Dasgupta 2002; Miller 2005; Sullivan et al. 2005; Swan and Snow 2002). A small amount of women's violence may be intimate terrorism (Hines et al. 2007; Renzetti 1992), and of course most of it is the situational couple violence discussed above. We need detailed investigations of violent resistance, exploring the conditions under which women will use violence in response to intimate terrorism, when and why they desist or continue with their violent resistance, what its consequences are for them and for their relationship, and what their experiences are with the criminal justice system. Susan Miller's book (2005) on women in batterer intervention programs begins to address the latter question, and Hillary Potter's recent book (2008) addresses many of these questions for African American women. It's a start.

In Sum

My reading of Jennifer Langhinrichsen-Rolling's paper leads me to the following broad conclusions. First, the evidence is clear that there is more than one type of intimate partner violence and more than one type of violent partner. Second, the feminists are right. Gender is central to the analysis of intimate partner violence, and the coercive controlling violence that most people associate with the term "domestic violence" is indeed perpetrated primarily by men against their female partners. Third, the different types of intimate partner violence have different causes, different developmental trajectories, and different consequences. They require different models to understand them. Finally, we need more qualitative research, especially that focused on the least understood types of intimate partner violence: violent resistance and situational couple violence.

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