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Toward a National Research Agenda on Violence Against Women: Continuing the Dialogue on Research and Practice [Part Two]

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INTRODUCTION TO THE SPECIAL ISSUE: PART 2

Toward a National Research Agenda on Violence Against Women Continuing the Dialogue on Research and Practice

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This is the second in a two-part special issue on the nation's research agenda on violence against women (VAW). As introduced in Part 1, this special issue is not the definitive word on what the nation's research agenda should be nor is it the final critique on the current state of research in this critical area. Rather, this special issue is an informative contribution to the nation's dialogue on the empirical study of a phenomenon that deleteriously affects a significant population of women across the United States and, indeed, around the world.

The articles for this two-part special issue derive from a national research conference coordinated in late 2003 by the University of Kentucky Center for Research on VAW. The conference commissioned 10 articles on select contemporary questions regarding VAW, including the following: How should one define VAW? What are its primary health and mental health consequences? Does the legal system provide safety for women? What do women need to know about risk? How does substance use play a role? What are the implications of race and ethnicity with respect to abuse perpetration? Is there a common typology for offenders? And how can researchers and advocates collaborate toward the common end of quality research? The goal of these articles and the 13 discussant responses provided to each of them was to synopsize the extant literature and to formulate areas of need for future empirical study.

In November's Part 1 of the special issue, articles by Dean Kilpatrick, Pat Tjaden, and Linda Saltzman addressed methodological issues related to defining and measuring VAW. In a second plenary article, John Briere and I offered a brief review of the mental health consequences of victimization, with discussant responses from Mary Ann Dutton, Mindy Mechanic, and Patty Resick. Part 1 also focused on health implications through articles by Stacey Plichta, Judith McFarlane, Terri Weaver, and Heidi Resnick. Finally, in Part 1, Linda Williams provided a discussion of liberating methodologies to foster researcher-advocate collaboration.

Following up on Part 1's offerings, Part 2 of the special issue now provides a series of articles on offender typology, led by Amy Holtzworth-Munroe and Jeffrey Meehan, who consider how best to conceptualize the heterogeneity among maritally violent men and who propose moving to consider more immediate, situational, and dyadic processes leading to violence perpetration. In his discussant response, Daniel Saunders suggests that macroframeworks offer promising arenas for furthering an integrative, complex, and more complete understanding of offender typologies. Tom Widiger and Stephanie Mullins-Sweatt promote further development of the Holtzworth-Munroe typology by understanding it within a more general model of personality functioning, and Don Lynam emphasizes earlier identification of generally violent men in their life course using psychopathic traits. Robert Prentky responds to whether sex offender taxonomies can be used to inform domestic violence offender typologies by identifying dimensional commonalities between these two domains.

The legal system is addressed in two plenary articles. First, I provide a brief review of the interface between women and the court of justice, noting that access is made more challenging for women as the literature offers disparate findings as to the efficacy of criminal justice responses and civil remedies. In their plenary article, Mary Koss, Karen Bachar, Quince Hopkins, and Carolyn Carlson offer an innovative collaborative model for a community's justice response to sex crimes.

In Jacquelyn Campbell's plenary article on helping women understand their risk from intimate partner violence, she posits that a woman's perceptions, the expertise of domestic violence professionals, and risk assessment instruments are all key informants of a woman's degree of risk exposure. T. K. Logan and Robert Walker refine a discussant response by critiquing the research on separation in the context of victimization.

The issue of risk was an underlying theme in two additional important articles. In one, Carolyn West reviews current knowledge on the elevated risk faced by African American women, providing a focus on sociodemographic factors that make this population particularly vulnerable to abuse and sug-

gesting the direction of future research. Maria Testa reviews the literature on substance use and physical and sexual VAW, summarizing empirical relations with victimization and perpetration.

As in the introduction to Part 1, I take a guest editor's prerogative of thanking those responsible for making this special issue a reality. That credit extends to the researchers and advocates who served as faculty for the conference, all those who authored articles, and the reviewers whose anonymous contributions added significantly to our efforts. This guest editor maintains a robust indebtedness to each.

The introductions to both parts of this special issue began with an admonishment to readers that the collective articles are not to be viewed as the final word on how the nation's research agenda should be informed. That caution derives not from an underestimation of the quality of any of the articles, as readers will find an abundance of provocative thought and far-reaching recommendations in every article. The caution, instead, comes from a keen sense that our empirical understanding of VAW is still very much in its infancy and in need of much more than a single special issue can provide. In 2004, the National Research Council (NRC) published a book titled *Advancing the Federal Research Agenda on Violence Against Women* (Kruttschnitt, McLaughlin, & Petrie, 2004), building on the work of an earlier NRC panel whose work was published under the title *Understanding Violence Against Women* (Crowell & Burgess, 1996). These works strike a theme common to our own work here that although the knowledge base from research on the violent victimization of women has advanced significantly in the past decade, important gaps remain.

The challenge of advancing science in understanding, mitigating, and ultimately ending the crimes of intimate partner violence, rape, and other forms of aggression toward women is not just an empirical one. At its heart lies a fight for the very welfare of women. It is as Albert Einstein said: "It is not enough that one should understand science, concern for man himself and his fate must always form the chief interest of all technical endeavors." **PLS PROVIDE REFERENCE AND PAGE NUMBER** The empirical study of VAW, then, is in a real sense an effort to sustain women. It is a struggle to preserve the security and quality of community that is at the very root of our nation's greatness.

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Carol E. Jordan currently serves as director of the University of Kentucky Center for Research on Violence Against Women and holds faculty appointments in the department of psychology and the college of social work. Her areas of writing and research interest include the nexus of mental health and criminal justice, particularly as it relates to the experiences of women. She has published numerous articles on violence against women and the legal system and has coauthored two books that address violence against women, the mental health effects of victimization, the experiences of women in the court of justice, and practice implications in forensic mental health. She has 20 years of experience in public policy, legislative advocacy, and the development of programs addressing domestic violence, rape, and stalking. Before coming to the University of Kentucky, she served for 8 years as executive director of the Kentucky Governor's Office of Child Abuse and Domestic Violence Services.