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

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

CAROL E. JORDAN

[PE: CONFIRM THAT ALL ARTICLES REFERENCED
BY AUTHOR ARE INDEED IN THIS ISSUE]

University of Kentucky Center for Research on Violence Against Women

Such an auspicious title for a special issue compels any guest editor to explain its meaning. I do so first by explaining what this special issue is not. This special issue does not presume to set the nation's research agenda on violence against women (VAW), nor is it the first attempt to contribute to how that agenda might be informed. Instead, this issue continues the dialogue about the empirical study of VAW started by and participated in by many others before. Any attempt at something so important, with such an auspicious title, carries with it the acknowledged risk of being considered inadequate. However, no cause of this complexity has ever been achieved by ignoring its challenges.

In 2002, the University of Kentucky Center for Research on Violence Against Women was formed and undertook as part of its mission offering a contribution to the national research agenda. With that aim, a research conference was held in the fall of 2003. The conference commissioned 10 papers on select contemporary questions regarding VAW, asking each author to synopsise the extant literature and to identify needs for future empirical study. Discussants were then solicited to respond to those plenary presentations at the October event. The commissioned papers were formulated around major empirical questions, including: What is 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 commissioned papers and the discussant responses that followed them are collected in this special issue.

The question of how to offer a more standardized method of defining and measuring VAW is addressed by Dean Kilpatrick's plenary article in which he analyzes VAW from criminal justice and public health perspectives. In Linda Saltzman's discussant response, she suggests uncertainty about the impact of context on survey findings and describes a pilot survey that will explore those issues; and Pat Tjaden argues for using a multiple definition-measurement approach when conducting research in the VAW area. In a second plenary article, John Briere and I offer a brief review of the mental health consequences of victimization. Our article and discussant responses from Mary Ann Dutton, Mindy Mechanic, and Patty Resick promote common themes of broadening our understanding of the complexity of women's responses and tailoring interventions to meet the multiple and diverse needs of victims of violence. Briere, Jordan, and Dutton also provide commentary on the use of syndromal labels in contemporary practice. Stacey Plichta offers a plenary on health implications, noting that there are almost no longitudinal studies of interpersonal violence (IPV) and health and that most studies are clustered in a few specialties. Judith McFarlane's discussant response highlights the effects of violence during pregnancy on maternal and infant health; and Ann Coker makes the case that concrete strategies for prevention exist and need to be prioritized. In their response to Plichta, Terri Weaver and Heidi Resnick underscore the complexity of the IPV-negative physical health outcomes relationship and the need for multivariate model development.

A series of articles on offender typology is offered, 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 macro frameworks 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 the 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 and her colleagues 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 suggesting 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.

The October conference also considered collaborative models of research. Increasingly, we understand that advocates and practitioners can play a central role in setting research agendas, yet collaborations do not happen without concerted efforts. The input of advocates should not be read as introducing bias, but rather as making available the greatest contextual expertise with which researchers can craft rigorous experimental designs in the short run and disseminate the most meaningful empirical findings to the practice field in the long run. An article from Linda Williams provides discussion of liberating methodologies to foster researcher-advocate collaboration.

If this special issue achieves the goal of making a contribution, it will be to the credit of researchers and advocates who served as faculty for the conference, all those who authored articles, and to the anonymous reviewers who added their enormous expertise. It will also be the direct result of Jon Conte's generous gift of time, advice, and sense of humor. This guest editor is indebted, in turn, to each.

Finally answering why violence is perpetrated on women, and to what end, is too great a task for one conference, one university, or perhaps even one generation of researchers, practitioners, and advocates. The lives of women harmed by violence are a rich tapestry of experiences and contexts that shape a lifetime, and this reality adds further complexity to understanding this social and criminal phenomenon. The final judgment of whether our nation

successfully meets the challenge of establishing and completing a meaningful research agenda is, ultimately, in their hands.

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 experience 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 experience 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, she served for 8 years as executive director of the Kentucky Governor's Office of Child Abuse and Domestic Violence Services.