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Abstract

The article explores some of the ways heterosexual women are portrayed as perpetrators of intimate partner domestic violence (IPV) in police domestic violence records in England and is the first study in the United Kingdom to examine the issue of gender and domestic violence perpetrators in any detail and over time. The article is based on a study of 128 IPV cases tracked longitudinally over 6 years, including 32 cases where women were the sole perpetrators and a further 32 cases where women were "dual" perpetrators alongside men. Women were 3 times more likely than men to be arrested when they were construed as the perpetrator. However, Pence and Dasgupta's category of "pathological violence" appeared more useful as an analytical category in the construction of women as "perpetrators" and men as "victims" than the notion of "battering."

Keywords

criminal justice, domestic abuse, female perpetrators, intimate partner violence

This article explores some of the ways heterosexual women are portrayed as perpetrators of intimate partner domestic violence (IPV) in police domestic violence records in England. The article is based on a study of 128 IPV cases tracked longitudinally over 6 years, including 32 cases where women were the sole perpetrators and a further 32 cases where women were "dual" perpetrators alongside men. As in the United States, in England the majority of incidents of IPV reported to the police involve male-to-female abuse (Hester, 2006; Smith et al., 2010). Little is known, however, about the nature of incidents where the English police record men as victims and women as perpetrators, or about the circumstances where both partners are recorded as perpetrators. The current research was

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commissioned by the Northern Rock Foundation to fill this gap and is the first study in the United Kingdom to examine the issue of gender and domestic violence perpetrators in any detail and over time.

Gender is an important feature in patterns of interpersonal violence and abuse and helps us to understand the impact of IPV and what may work in overcoming victimization (Pence & Dasgupta, 2006; Stark, 2007). At the same time, intersections with sexuality, age, class, race, and also disability, create different experiences and outcomes. In heterosexual contexts, constructions of power and violence are highly gendered and linked to culturally constructed and idealized forms of masculinity and femininity—what has been termed "hegemonic masculinity" and "hegemonic heterosexuality" (Connell, 1987). The social construction of masculinity, as embodied in heterosexual men, helps to explain, for instance, domestic violence as the exertion of power and control by men over women in intimate relationships within contexts of gender inequality. Meanings attributed to and expectations associated with gender may impact on the ways in which professional approaches to perpetrators and victims or survivors are played out and contribute to the activities and decisions of criminal justice professionals (Hester, 2010).

Research from a range of methodologies not only indicates that both women and men can be violent but also highlight gender differences in the extent, severity, and impact of IPV, with women less likely to use the ongoing pattern of "battering" involving "coercive controlling tactics along with systematic threats and use of violence" (Miller & Meloy, 2006, p. 90) that enable the perpetrator to exert power, to induce fear, and to control the other partner (Slashinski, Coker, & Divs, 2003; Smith et al., 2010; Tjaden & Thoennes, 2000). Johnson (2006) has called such battering behavior "intimate terrorism." He suggests that women who are violent to their male partners are more likely to be using "violent resistance" for self-defense and retaliation against violent male partners who are the "intimate terrorists." Other studies have also found that women are rarely the initiators of violence, are more likely to be acting in self-defense when they do use violence, and may be using a range of behaviors to do so (Downs, Rindels, & Atkinson, 2007; Miller & Meloy, 2006; Saunders, 2002). Based on expertise from a domestic abuse project, Edleson (1998) categorizes women who use violence in intimate relationships into three groups: (a) those who use violence in self-defense to escape or protect themselves, (b) those with a long history of victimization from previous partners and in childhood and who use violence in order to decrease their own chance of further victimization, and (c) those who are the primary aggressors and use their greater physical power to control their partners.

In recognition that some men may experience domestic violence, men are increasingly being encouraged to present as victims of intimate partner violence. In England, for instance, the government is funding a national male victim helpline for this purpose. Men presenting to the police as victims, however, may at the same time be perpetrators of domestic violence, indeed the primary aggressors, while minimizing such behavior. Anderson and Umberson (2001), in a study of male perpetrators in the United States, found that the men were effective in making the less serious violence from female perpetrators appear as the main violence, at the same time excusing their own abusive behaviors so that

they appeared rational, capable, and nonviolent. DeLeon-Granados, Wells, and Binsbacher (2006), also in the United States, observed how male domestic violence suspects were able to influence decisions made by officers at the scene of the crime using "an often-subtle but powerful language" that "conspired against female victims and helped male suspects to minimize their actions, deny responsibility, and shift blame" (p. 361). DeLeon-Granados and colleagues argue that "[male] batterers work to manipulate the system not only to protect themselves from punishment but also as a way to maintain positions of power in their intimate relationships" (p. 361). Whether or not an individual is perceived as a perpetrator or a victim can thus be complex, involving gendered perspectives and constructions by the professionals involved, possibly combined with manipulations by (mainly male) perpetrators who want to remain in control.

Previous research in both the United States and United Kingdom has identified a range of gendered attitudes and approaches of the police and other professionals to IPV, and some of the gender constructions that may take place in interactions between the police, victims, and suspects (DeLeon-Granados et al., 2006; Hester, 2006; Hoyle, 2000; Stanko, 1989). For instance, violence by women may be minimized by some professionals who do not perceive women as capable of "doing such a thing" (Fitzroy, 2001), while others may perceive violence by women as especially abhorrent and treat it more severely, also because it does not fit the female stereotype. Thus, women may not be identified as perpetrators or may end up accused as perpetrators when they are actually protecting themselves by retaliating (Saunders, 2002).

The current article explores some of these issues in English police records, looking in particular at the extent to which women are characterized as what may be termed "batterers," their identification as primary aggressors, and shifts in positioning from female victim to female perpetrator.

Policing and Domestic Violence

Where policy is concerned, since the 1990s there have been a number of initiatives in England aimed at developing criminal justice approaches to domestic violence. As in the United States, this has involved a focus on pro-arrest and increases in prosecution and conviction. In the United States, the pro-arrest policy has been taken further than in England, with mandatory arrest and prosecution in some U.S. states. The pro-arrest policy in England was put forward in 2000 in Home Office guidance, Circular 19/2000 (Home Office, 2000) and more recently in the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) guidance (Centrex, 2004). These documents require police in England and Wales to take positive action in all domestic violence cases by exercising any powers of arrest where they exist and where it is necessary and proportionate in order to carry out an effective investigation and/or prevent further offenses. The most recent legislation, the Domestic Violence, Crimes and Victims Act 2004, has continued this approach, placing further emphasis on criminalizing domestic violence and increasing the possibility of arrest of perpetrators in domestic violence situations (Hester, Westmarland, Pearce, & Williamson, 2008). Alongside this approach, criminal justice agencies have also been encouraged to increase

partnerships and cooperation with women's services and other agencies in order to support and provide safety for (mainly female) victims.

Within the criminal justice approach in England, it is recognized that the police may be faced with conflicting accounts and counter allegations of domestic violence from the two parties involved. Earlier research identified that the English police were at times arresting both parties based on gendered "assumptions about male rights and female blame" (Stanko, 1989, p. 52). Questioning such an approach, and echoing the policy in some areas of the United States such as California (California Penal Code §13701, 2003), more recent ACPO guidance in England urges police officers to identify the primary aggressor in such situations and to avoid arresting both parties. There are no detailed criteria for establishing a primary aggressor; however, officers are expected to ask questions pertaining to the incident and to take into consideration any history of domestic abuse that may be available on police databases. Moreover, the guidance states that dual arrest should not be made in instances of counterallegations where one party is acting in self-defense (Centrex, 2004).

Increase in Arrests of Women

In the United States, the emphasis on mandatory arrest in some states has resulted in a notable increase in the number of women being arrested for perpetrating domestic violence, as well as an increase in dual arrests (see, for example, Busch & Rosenberg, 2004; Hirschel & Buzawa, 2002; Saunders, 1995). DeLeon-Granados et al. (2006) suggest that the increase in women arrested may be the result of a number of factors, including the police becoming more "real" about violence where they previously minimized violence by women. In a large-scale study of dual arrests in the United States, Hirschel and his colleagues found that women and men were equally likely to be arrested in IPV cases and that this may indicate an increase in arrests of women if men were more likely to be arrested in the past (Hirschel, Buzawa, Pattavina, & Faggiani, 2007).

The trend in the United States of an increase in the number of women arrested for domestic violence is seemingly echoed by data from England. By looking at possible changes between incidents from 2001-2002 and from 2004 across the North East England police force area of Northumbria, a small increase across this period in the proportion of women arrested as domestic violence perpetrators as compared to men can be discerned (Hester, 2006; Hester et al., 2006).[1] The increases for women recorded as perpetrators, but not necessarily arrested, are even higher (from 8% to 12%). This is less pronounced than the figures resulting from the mandatory arrest policies in the United States, although the English data indicate a similar underlying trend.

Method

The criminal justice systems in both the United States and England are incident focused, where decisions about arrest, charges, and prosecutions tend to be assessed in relation to individual incidents without looking at the wider context (Buzawa & Buzawa, 2003;

Hester, 2006; Miller, 2005). In contrast, domestic violence is a pattern of abusive behaviors over time (see, for example, Stark, 2007). The research attempted to look at patterns of IPV by tracking and analyzing cases (i.e., one or more incidents related to the same individuals) recorded by the police over a 6-year period, thus allowing a detailed and more realistic picture of patterns of violent and abusive behaviors, as dealt with by the police, to be compiled. While the data are limited to what is reported to and recorded by the police, the data nonetheless provide a set of case "stories" that could not be gleaned by using a snapshot approach.

The main data source for the current study was a comprehensive computer-based system for recording and linking domestic violence incidents across police districts, introduced by the Northumbria police in North East England from April 2001. The database was developed by the police for operational purposes, to help them more effectively determine risk and take into account any history of domestic violence in incidents reported to them. The police would lodge a report for each domestic violence incident attended. The reports were added to the database by a data administrator using a template with demographic details of the victim and perpetrators, description of the domestic violence incident, action taken by the police, other details (e.g., if children were present, whether arrest occurred), risk assessment level determined by the police, and their comment on the incident/history of the case. The domestic violence database was also linked to the wider police intelligence database with details of arrest, charges, and court outcomes.

The current research built on samples already established in two previous research projects using the same data source (Hester, 2006; Hester et al., 2006). The previous studies developed samples to reflect practice across different times of the year and across the police force areas. This involved all 356 IPV perpetrators recorded in the database in April 2001, June 2001, and March 2002, and all 336 IPV perpetrators recorded in the database in the first week of November 2004. Together, the earlier samples included 692 IPV perpetrators with 1,888 incidents recorded.

Across the 692 cases from the earlier studies, cases with sole female perpetrators constituted the smallest group ($n = 58$) and dual perpetrator cases the next smallest ($n = 82$). To generate directly comparable samples, establishment of the subsamples began by tracking reoffending in the 58 cases that appeared to involve only female perpetrators. All IPV incident data related to these cases between April 2001 and June 2007 were downloaded and anonymized. Initial analysis indicated that 26 of the 58 women were actually in dual perpetrator cases (i.e., their partners were also recorded as perpetrators against them in one or more incidents across the 6-year period). Thus, a final subsample of 32 sole female perpetrators in heterosexual relationships was identified for inclusion in the study.[2] To generate the dual perpetrator subsample, it was assumed that the 82 cases initially identified in the earlier studies were representative. A random sample of 32 dual perpetrator cases was established from the 82 and tracked from April 2001 to June 2007. These data were downloaded and anonymized. The sole female and dual perpetrator subsamples provide the main data for this article.

A further subsample of 32 sole male perpetrator cases was generated randomly from the remaining 552 apparently sole male perpetrator cases from the earlier samples, and these

were again tracked for 6 years between April 2001 and June 2007. The data from the sole male perpetrator subsample will only be referred to briefly for comparison.

Interviews with 51 victims had been carried out in relation to cases examined in one of the earlier studies (Hester, 2006). Five of these victim interviews (one male, four female) were directly related to the current samples, and these data were therefore included in the analysis of the relevant cases.

The analysis involved the author reading and rereading the incident records and interviews in relation to each of the 96 cases to identify general themes and build further categories. Initial reading identified a number of broad themes such as police involvement, nature and impact of the violence, presence of children, alcohol/drug misuse, health status, and age of victim/perpetrator. Further themes were identified within these, including the terms and language used in specific incidents. The themes were used to code all of the incidents and interview data, using an NVivo8 database. Once coded, thematic data relating to individual cases were added to qualitative framework grids (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003), so that cases (i.e., sets of incidents over time) could be analyzed longitudinally and case "stories" compiled. Quantitative data relating to victim and perpetrator demographics (e.g., gender, age, relationship status, children), violence (number of incidents, forms of violence used, weapons, direction), and criminal justice progression and outcomes (frequencies and levels of arrests, charges, convictions) for the 96 cases were loaded into an SPSS database to provide general patterns. The findings presented in this article draw on the quantitative patterns, themes, and "stories" that resulted, with focus on the 64 cases involving sole female or dual perpetrators.

Results

In general, the findings from comparing all 96 cases (sole female, sole male, and dual perpetrators) echo previous studies in showing that violent and abusive behavior between heterosexual partners in contact with the police are gender asymmetrical. Incidents where the police recorded women as perpetrators mainly involved verbal abuse, some physical violence, with only small proportions involving threats or harassment. Women were more likely to use weapons, often in order to protect themselves. In addition, the police were more likely to describe female perpetrators as alcoholic or mentally ill (see also Miller, 2005). Men were the perpetrators in a much greater number of incidents. The violence used by men against female partners was much more severe than that used by women against men. Violence by men was most likely to involve fear by and control of female victims, and alcohol misuse by men had a greater impact on severity of outcomes.

Are Women "Batterers"?

While sole male perpetrators were most likely to invoke the intense fear and control for their partners who have been defined as "battering," only one of the women recorded as a sole perpetrator was similarly described by the police as creating a context of fear and

control for the male victim. In this instance, the woman was very ill and suffering from a terminal brain tumor.

The case involved a couple in their 70s, Mr. and Mrs. Silver.[3] Mrs. Silver had become increasingly ill from the brain tumor and drank heavily as a result. When the police were contacted, she had become very aggressive and physically violent, breaking her husband's arm and making him sleep on the floor. She was arrested and charged with serious assault (grievous bodily harm with intent). Mr. Silver stayed with friends and relatives on a few occasions to remain safe, although his main concern appeared to be his wish to look after and obtain help for his wife, with the police recording that he "wants to help her." The police assessed the case as "high risk." The police eventually closed the case when Mrs. Silver died in a hospital for the terminally ill, although in a seemingly simplistic application of risk assessment, she was still assessed by the police as a high-risk perpetrator by that stage. Overall, the case does not seem entirely similar to those where male perpetrators are "batterers" or "intimate terrorists," even if Mrs. Silver was at times displaying very violent and aggressive behavior. Instead, the case appears to fit more closely what Pence and Dasgupta (2006) call "pathological violence," as Mrs. Silver's behavior was linked to the brain disorder and psychological impacts of the tumor. The police record indicates that her husband describes the behavior as a relatively recent phenomenon.

None of the other 31 female sole perpetrator cases could be described as involving "battering" by the women concerned. While some of these cases involved physical violence from the woman, including potential use of weapons, the male victims appeared not to fear the perpetrator or to be controlled by her. In the case with the most incidents recorded by the police, the male victim, Mr. Teal, was not described in any way as afraid of Mrs. Teal, but merely appeared to "manage" the violence from his wife and protect himself by removing potential weapons from her reach, removing himself from the vicinity, or by restraining her.

The case of Mr. and Mrs. Teal had seven incidents recorded by the police over two and half years involving Mrs. Teal as the perpetrator. Descriptions of the incidents mentioned that Mrs. Teal had been drinking and this had led to verbal and at times physical abuse of her husband. Her husband had also on occasion been drinking but was not similarly presented as abusing alcohol. Despite his wife's attacks on him, Mr. Teal did not appear in fear of Mrs. Teal. For instance:

> [Mrs. Teal] had been drinking that evening with her husband, however she continued drinking until this morning . . . her husband asked her to go into another room so workmen could . . . carry out some work. After he asked this [Mrs. Teal] became very abusive, this continued into the kitchen where she threatened to get a knife . . . [Mr. Teal] removed the knives before she could get near them and called the police. (Police Domestic Violence Incident record)

On another occasion, after attending a party, Mrs. Teal again continued drinking when they returned home and eventually attacked her husband while he was asleep. The police recorded, "He then got up, dressed and went outside into his vehicle on the drive and went to sleep." On further occasions, the couple was reported as having argued and one time

Mrs. Teal had hit Mr. Teal resulting in her being formally cautioned by the police for common assault. Another time Mrs. Teal was deemed to have scratched Mr. Teal on the neck, while he was reported "to protect himself by restraining her," again resulting in a charge of common assault against Mrs. Teal.

As in the case of Mrs. Teal, many of the female sole perpetrators were characterized by the police as being alcoholic or drinking heavily and using violence when they were drunk, thus strongly echoing Pence and Dasgupta's (2006) category of "pathological violence." For instance, the police recorded the following in three other cases:

> [Female] offender came home after drinking and an argument ensued with her partner. He asked her to leave so she rang police. (The police arrested the woman for Breach of the Peace in this instance.)

> This is a well-known domestic situation and [female perpetrator] has been arrested several times. She is a known alcoholic.

> [Female perpetrator] has been out drinking for the evening. Upon her return she has become agitated and started breaking items within their home and attacking [male partner]. (The police arrested the woman for Breach of the Peace in this instance.)

Miller (2005), in her U.S. study of women who use violence against male partners, found that the police saw alcohol use as one of three main contexts in which women were violent, perceived women as potentially more violent in such circumstances, and their behavior as "violent, crazy and non-sensical" (p. 73). In England, as can be seen above, the police often responded to such cases by arresting women using the public order offense of Breaching the Peace. Indeed, the police were significantly more likely to make an arrest in cases where the perpetrator was drunk than where alcohol misuse was not an issue. The first of the three case examples also indicates that it was the woman perpetrator who rang the police. This happened often in situations where women were deemed the perpetrator, but hardly ever when men were perpetrators, and echoes other data that suggest women are more likely to disclose violent behavior (Dobash, Dobash, Cavanagh, & Lewis, 2000). In some instances where women contacted the police and said they were perpetrators, the police appeared to focus more severely on the women's involvement, although the men were involved in many more incidents. For example, one case had the man recorded as the perpetrator against the same woman in 31 incidents over 5 years, with the woman recorded as perpetrator in two further incidents. The police nonetheless appeared to (over)construe her as the problem, focusing on her use of alcohol, although her male partner seemed to be drunk more often, and warned both not to harass each other.

A smaller number of the sole perpetrator cases were described by the police as related to postseparation issues. For instance, in the following two cases:

> [Female perpetrator] is believed to be trying to incite [male partner] to become abusive towards her so that she can build up a list of reported incidents of abuse to

> the police to use against [male partner] as they are now getting divorced. . . . This is believed to be on the advice of her solicitors.
>
> Ex-husband suspects wife of sabotaging their company records when he confronted her about it in premises. A verbal altercation ensued which resulted in ex-wife being ejected from premises [by police] and refused entry.

Cases where both partners were recorded as perpetrators included the greatest number of instances where both partners were heavy drinkers or alcoholics and where the circumstances appeared quite chaotic. While most of the female sole perpetrators (78%) had only one incident recorded, more than half (55%) of those in dual perpetrator cases had two or more incidents recorded. Similar to cases with women as sole perpetrators, dual perpetrator cases also included many instances of postseparation issues. In nearly half the cases at least some of the incidents took place postseparation (13 of 32 cases) with issues of divorce and child contact/visitation common. Some of these had few incidents and low levels of violence. However, echoing other studies (Jaffe, Lemon, & Poisson, 2003; Radford & Hester, 2006), postseparation violence also included instances of extreme harassment and ongoing abuse, in particular from male perpetrators, with retaliatory violence from women.

Identifying Primary Aggressors

Across the whole sample of 692, the vast majority of IPV perpetrators recorded by the police were men (92%). Across the comparative subsamples of 96 cases, men were also recorded as primary aggressors in many more incidents ($n = 467$) than women were ($n = 114$), leading to more arrests overall of men than of women. Nonetheless, women were arrested to a disproportionate degree given the fewer incidents in which they were perpetrators. Women were 3 times more likely than men to be arrested when they were identified as a primary aggressor in a particular incident, and the police appeared more ready to arrest women despite patterns of violent behavior that were less intense or severe than the patterns exhibited by men. During the 6-year tracking period, women were arrested every 3 incidents in which they were deemed perpetrators (in 32% of incidents), but men were only arrested in about every 10 incidents (in 11% of incidents). Women were also arrested for a wider range of, and more serious, offenses involving assault than men—from common assault, to grievous bodily harm, to grievous bodily harm with intent. The tendency of the police to focus on individual incidents rather than patterns of behaviors meant that women's use of weapons, albeit for protection, led to women being arrested more often for high-level assaults than men. McMahon and Pence (2003) argue that this is a gendered approach because it does not take into account the wider IPV pattern of women using weapons in self-defense rather than as main aggressors. In one example from the English police data, the police state that the woman is the primary aggressor, seemingly because she is arrested for a very serious offense (grievous bodily harm with intent) following retaliatory violence. Despite the husband's long history of violence against her (he has 28 incidents of perpetration recorded by the police, compared to 2 for

her) and a civil restraining order against him, he was only arrested for lower-level offenses and mainly for Breach of the Peace. The police record states: "Usually it is female assaulting male. She has previous for grievous bodily harm with intent."

Despite emphasis on individual incidents, there was also evidence in the research that the police were beginning to follow the Association of Chief Police Officers' guidance, which urges officers to identify the primary aggressor in situations with dual perpetrators. Dual arrests within an incident were rare and apparent in only a couple of incidents. In one of these the police recorded: "[Male] assaulted the [female] with a baseball bat. The [female] then attacked the [male] with a broken mirror. . . . Both [male and female] arrested for assault, and charged with affray." Although the record presents the violence as "mutual," it seems to indicate some form of retaliatory behavior by the woman. The police appear to have carried out a dual arrest on the basis that each of the behaviors, if seen separately, could be construed as an arrestable offense. However, as Miller (2005) points out, "By following the letter of the law . . . law enforcement officers often disregard the context in which victims of violence resort to using violence themselves" (p. 1).

In some cases in the current study, both partners had been recorded as perpetrators without the police making clear why that was the case, as only domestically abusive activities by one of them (virtually always the man) had been recorded. However, the records often provided indication of who the police considered to be the primary aggressor and how gender might be part of such a construction. For instance, in one case, the police comment states: "Male shown as victim on this occasion by fact that girlfriend called to his address and was arrested to prevent a breach of the peace. Domestic violence history between these two. Normally male assaults female."

It appeared that at least some of the police were using a gender-sensitive approach to determining the primary aggressor. Such an approach relied on consideration of context and pattern of incidents over time, differentiating between initiator and retaliator, and thus pointing to a primary aggressor. The data indicated that, while consideration of arrest and charges continued to be dealt with in relation to individual incidents, over the 6-year period, the police were moving from a merely incident-based to a more contextualized/pattern-based approach when considering the nature of a case, although with a continuing tension between the two. On one hand, women were 3 times more likely to be arrested, resulting from behavior in individual incidents and often as part of a pattern of protection rather than initiating violence. On the other hand, cases with incidents recorded in the latter part of the tracking period were more likely to include evidence of the police looking across incidents to assess overall risk, with a summary in the police record to this effect.

In one example where the female partner used potentially more serious violence, the man was clearly construed as the primary aggressor on the basis of the police officers' understanding of gender-based violence; they saw the woman as retaliating to protect herself. The incident record notes, "[Mr. Yellow] seemed to be the instigator on most occasions to the arguments," while the police also comment, "he was in fact at risk of becoming seriously injured as a result of [Mrs. Yellow's] methods of retaliation." The comment continues:

> [Mr. Yellow] would argue with [Mrs. Yellow] and say something really hurtful thus drawing her into the argument, [and] male had on occasions punched and slapped her. [Mrs. Yellow] not having the physical strength to retaliate has in the past gone to the kitchen, deliberately boiled the kettle and poured the boiling water over his feet, she has stabbed him in the neck (scar injury noted) and used other kitchen utensils to assault him with.

None of these incidents were reported at the time and no sanctions resulted. However, the police discussed and developed a safety plan with the couple so that both "agreed that if there was tension brewing to try and avoid it by leaving the room and or house." Mrs. Yellow also agreed that she would not continue to retaliate, but would involve the police instead: "[Mrs. Yellow] agreed that if [Mr. Yellow] did become violent that she would not fight back but flee and contact the police."

In a different example, that of Mr. and Mrs. Amber, the police appeared to have greater difficulty in identifying the main aggressor. While the police appeared in this case to see the woman as the primary aggressor, the case may have involved mainly male-to-female abuse. The case again reflects a tendency by the police to see the perpetrator as the individual who is abusing alcohol, although alcohol misuse may also be masking the gendered dynamics involved. The police recorded at least three incidents in relation to Mr. and Mrs. Amber over 8 years, two of which were within the research period. Mrs. Amber was recorded as the victim in the first incident, and Mr. Amber as the victim in the second and third. The first incident describes Mrs. Amber as a victim of common assault by Mr. Amber. In the second incident, the police decide on the direction of the violence from evidence of an injury to Mr. Amber (scratches) and that Mrs. Amber was drunk. In a separate interview concerning this incident, carried out by the research team, Mr. Amber construes his wife as the instigator in that she "had shouted at me and I had shouted back." However, later in the interview, he also stressed, "I am not a battered husband any more than she is a battered wife. The argument was mutual on both sides." He described the situation where he received scratches as being merely "an argument that had got out of hand." The third incident was recorded on the police database nearly 5 years later, when Mrs. Amber called the police to report that her husband and son "have just beaten up herself and her daughter," and where she was again very drunk. In relation to this latter incident the police say there is no clear victim or perpetrator, although they again record Mr. Amber as the victim. We do not have interview data for this incident, but the police record states:

> All three parties stated that [Mrs. Amber] is an alcoholic and that it has put pressure on their family life. [Mrs. Amber] has gotten extremely drunk and soiled herself when in bed. Her husband . . . has tried to clean her up and an argument has started.

It was Mrs. Amber who phoned the police in this instance and reported that her husband and son had assaulted her. When the police talked to the parties, however, all stated that "there had not been any" assault. Perhaps the parties were minimizing the incident. However, as stated in the police incident record: "[Mrs. Amber] was very drunk upon

police attendance and was incapable of making any sense at the time." Thus, the police focused on Mrs. Amber's drinking and did not question any further what might have happened in this context. According to the record, Mrs. Amber was clearly misusing alcohol; however, the police did not take into consideration that alcohol use by women in particular may be a response to experiences of domestic violence from their partners (Humphreys, Regan, River, & Thiara, 2005). There are also indications in this case, echoing findings of DeLeon-Granados and colleagues (2006), that the male perpetrator might have been more effective in influencing the discourse that construed him as a victim even though he had instigated the violence.

Another case, that of Mr. and Mrs. Blue, indicates the relevance of considering intersectionality, especially what Crenshaw (1994) calls "structural intersectionality," in IPV cases. Structural intersectionality helps us analyze and understand the social location and experiences of different women, incorporating social inequality and discrimination. Crenshaw discusses this in relation to women's positioning with regard to both gender and race: "[T]he ways in which the location of women of color at the intersection of race and gender makes our actual experience of domestic violence, rape and remedial reform qualitatively different from that of white women" (p. 95).

However, in the current research, it is the intersection of gender and age that is especially pertinent to interpreting the case of Mr. and Mrs. Blue. The case involves a woman in her 40s and man in his 60s. Over the 6-year period, the police record a series of incidents involving Mr. Blue as primary aggressor. The case indicates how drinking by men is less likely to define them as perpetrators than similar behavior by women. The case also shows a subtle shift from Mrs. Blue involving the police to protect herself from Mr. Blue, to her protective actions appearing increasingly controlling of him as an elderly and increasingly vulnerable man. Both Mr. and Mrs. Blue are recorded as using physical violence against each other. Initially, it is mainly Mr. Blue who is violent and threatening, especially after he has been drinking, when Mrs. Blue calls the police to help her "manage" his violence. The police report states:

> Both drunk & [female] attempted to lock [male] in the house as he was very drunk & she was worried he may go & drink all night. No injuries at all to either party.

In a further incident Mr. Blue calls the police, this time to elicit their support on his behalf and construing himself as the victim. Mrs. Blue appears to have been successful by this point in getting Mr. Blue to move out of their house. The police record describes the incident as follows:

> Call from [male] reporting domestic with partner and that she has locked him in, he sounded drunk as slurred a lot. [Male] was visiting [female] at her house. When he told her that he wanted to go out for a drink she locked the doors to stop him from leaving as he had already been out drinking.

Thus, while in the first incident Mrs. Blue was attempting to protect herself by locking Mr. Blue out of the house, in this incident Mrs. Blue appears to be protecting herself by

stopping Mr. Blue from becoming more drunk. In the final incident, where the caller is again Mr. Blue, Mrs. Blue's attempts at protection from her drunk husband appear to have developed further and led to her using physical violence against him and taking his shoes and his mobile phone in order to control his behavior. The police record states that Mr. Blue was

> assaulted by partner, . . . he has left the home of his partner without his shoes, he has been punched and threatened. He is 66 yrs old. [Female] partner took his mobile to stop him ringing police. His partner lives at . . . street. Both parties have been spoken to.

It is the mention in the police record that Mr. Blue is 66 years old that presents the case as one where the police appear to be noting a shift in primary aggressor determination from Mr. Blue to Mrs. Blue and shows how intersections of gender and age can change the identification of the perpetrator. Moreover, the focus on his assault by his partner (assaulted and punched) further underlines the construction by the police of Mr. Blue as the victim and Mrs. Blue as the perpetrator.

Conclusion

This article has explored some of the patterns and complexities in the portrayal by the police of women as IPV perpetrators. The women recorded as perpetrators by the police in North East England were rarely, if ever, what could be defined as "batterers" or "intimate terrorists." Although they used a wide range of violent and aggressive behaviors, they seldom appeared to be invoking fear or to set out to control their partners. The three categories of women who use violence in intimate relationships mentioned by Edleson (1998) were reflected to some extent. Those who use violence in self-defense to escape or protect themselves were, as in many other studies, a prevalent group. It was difficult from the police records to glean the extent to which the women had histories of victimization from previous partners and in childhood, although some did appear to use violence in order to decrease their own chance of further victimization. Finally, the police identified women as primary aggressors—as sole perpetrators or as dual perpetrators—but the women did not necessarily appear to have greater physical power to control their partners and were often alcoholics or heavy drinkers. Pence and Dasgupta's (2006) category of "pathological violence" appears more useful as an analytical category in this respect.

The research indicates the relevance of considering intersectionality in analyzing shifting interpretations and constructions of IPV relationships. For instance, intersections between gender and age meant that there might at times be fluidity in the positioning of women as victims or perpetrators, especially when women were much younger than an aging husband. The research also highlights that men were using approaches linked to their gendered positions of power to manage their own safety. Quite often, the men were able to take an active approach, removing themselves from the vicinity of the violent female partner and removing weapons or imposing restraints, such as Mr. Teal did.

Understanding gendered dynamics was central to the ability of the police to accurately identify the primary aggressor. Where the police exhibited such an understanding they

were also more likely to question whether they had identified the correct perpetrator in instances involving violence by women. This did not abnegate women's responsibility for retaliatory violence, but contextualized such behavior, so that it could be dealt with effectively by focusing on and increasing women's safety. At the same time, the emphasis by the criminal justice system on individual incidents, without a questioning of gender dynamics and constructions, meant that women were 3 times more likely to be arrested, often for violence used to protect themselves from further harm from male partners.

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Notes

1. Using samples tracked in two studies, the proportion of women arrested on charges of domestic violence increased from 9% to 11%.
2. One dual perpetrator case involved same-sex partners. This was taken out of the research, as the remaining cases were heterosexual.
3. All names have been changed to protect individual confidentiality.

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Bio

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