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Factors influencing attitudes to violence against women

Abstract

Attitudes towards men's violence against women shape both the perpetration of violence against women and responses to this violence by the victim and others around her. For these reasons, attitudes are the target of violence prevention campaigns. In order to improve understanding of the determinants of violence against women and to aid the development of violence prevention efforts, we review the factors which shape attitudes towards violence against women. We offer a framework with which to comprehend the complex array of influences on attitudes towards violent behavior perpetrated by men against women. Two clusters of factors, associated with gender and culture, have an influence at multiple levels of the social order on attitudes regarding violence. Further factors operate at individual, organizational, community, or societal levels in particular, although their influence may overlap across multiple levels. We conclude with recommendations regarding efforts to improve community attitudes towards violence against women.

Keywords: Perceptions of domestic violence; Domestic violence; Sexual assault; Attitudes

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KEY POINTS OF THE RESEARCH REVIEW

- Attitudes play a role in violence against women in three domains: the perpetration of violence against women, individual and institutional responses to violence against women, and women's own responses to victimization.
- Attitudes towards violence against women are formed by a wide range of social processes at multiple levels of the social order.
- Key influences on attitudes at multiple levels include gender roles and relations and other forms of social difference associated with ethnicity and class.
- Further factors documented to shape attitudes towards violence against women at the individual level include experiencing or witnessing violence and age and development. At the organizational level, they include participation in violence-supportive contexts, while at the community level, they include participation in informal peer groups and networks. Finally, at the societal level, factors which shape attitudes towards violence against women include pornography and other media and education campaigns, with other possible influences including criminal justice policies and social movements.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE, POLICY, AND RESEARCH

- Attitudes are a key variable shaping violence against women, although this violence also has cultural, collective and institutional underpinnings.
- Efforts to prevent violence against women must address not only those attitudes which are overtly condoning of violence against women, but the wider clusters of attitudes related to gender and sexuality which normalize and justify this violence.
- Equally, prevention efforts must address particular social processes and settings through which violence-supportive attitudes are maintained. Key processes include the intergenerational transmission of violence facilitated by children witnessing or experiencing violence. Key settings include adolescent and particularly boys' peer cultures, the formal and informal settings of male university colleges, sporting clubs, workplaces, and military

institutions, and religious institutions. In relation to media, relevant strategies include social marketing, education in media literacy, and the regulation of media content.

- To prevent violence against women, we must not only change attitudes, but also address the structural conditions that perpetuate violence.

Attitudes have been of central concern in relation to violence against women. Attitudes play a role in the perpetration of this violence, in victims' responses to victimization, and in community responses to violence against women. With good reason, attitudes have been a key target of community education campaigns aimed at preventing violence against women. However, there has been relatively little coordinated examination of the factors which shape attitudes towards violence against women.

This review provides an overview of key factors shaping attitudes to violence against women. We focus on factors for which there is existing empirical evidence of their influence, identifying six key clusters of influence. The review draws on scholarship examining the formation of attitudes regarding both violence against women in general and specific forms of violence (domestic violence, sexual assault, sexual harassment, and so on) in particular.

We begin with two clusters of factors which have a multi-level influence on community attitudes, broadly termed 'gender' and 'culture'. Both are 'multi-level' in the sense that they influence attitudes at each of the four levels of attitude formation otherwise used to organize this discussion: individual, organizational, community, and societal. Both gender and culture therefore can be seen as meta-factors, influencing community attitudes at multiple levels of the social order. We then examine further individual, organizational, community level, and societal factors which influence community attitudes towards violence against women. In a companion piece (Pease & Flood, in press), we offer a critical examination of the concept of 'attitudes' itself. We note that attitudes are not the only causal important variable in relation to violence against women. Explanations of men's violence against women, and efforts to prevent it, must also address the material conditions and institutionalized power relations which underpin violence against women. Nevertheless, attitudes are significant for violence against women, as we now discuss.

The Relationship Between Attitudes and Violence Against Women

The last three decades has seen the steady development of scholarly tools with which to assess attitudes towards violence against women. Burt's (1980) outline of rape myths was one of the first to

operationalize feminist accounts of socio-cultural supports for rape. Two decades later, at least 11 measures of beliefs and attitudes regarding sexual aggression had developed (Murnen, Wright, & Kaluzny, 2002), addressing such dimensions of sexual violence as the acceptance of rape myths or adversarial sexual beliefs, hostile or hyper-masculinity, victim-blaming or victim empathy, and sexually aggressive intentions. Other instruments focus on attitudes towards and perceptions of other, specific forms of violence against women, from wife assault to sexual harassment and date rape.

Attitudes are significant for violence against women in three key domains: (1) the perpetration of violence against women; (2) community and institutional responses to violence against women; and (3) women's response to this victimization.

Attitudes have a fundamental and causal relationship to the perpetration of violence against women. There is consistent evidence of an association between violence-supportive beliefs and values and the perpetration of violent behaviour, at both individual and community levels. For example, men with more traditional, rigid and misogynistic gender-role attitudes are more likely to practice marital violence (O'Neil & Harway, 1997, p. 192; Heise, 1998, p. 278). Boys and young men who endorse more rape-supportive beliefs are also more likely to have been sexually coercive (Anderson, Simpson-Taylor, & Hermann, 2004). In a recent meta-analysis aggregating data across all studies relating an aspect of masculine ideology to the incidence of sexual aggression, Murnen *et al.* (2002) found that all but one measure of masculine ideology were significantly associated with sexual aggression. In other words, there is a consistent relationship between men's adherence to sexist, patriarchal, and/or sexually hostile attitudes and their use of violence against women.

Second, women's responses to their own subjection to violence are shaped by their own attitudes and those of others around them. To the extent that individual women agree with violence-supportive understandings of domestic violence or sexual assault, they are more likely to blame themselves for the assault, less likely to report it to the police or other authorities, and more likely to experience long-term negative psychological and emotional effects. Various studies document that

female rape victims' self-attributions of blame are associated with greater trauma and distress (Neville, Heppner, Oh, Spanierman, & Clark, 2004, p. 85). Media portrayals and social norms teach women to 'self-silence', to place their partners' needs above their own (Margolis, 1998), and women are less likely to report violence and abuse by their partners if they express traditional gender role attitudes (Harris, Firestone, & Vega, 2005). Furthermore, stereotypical and narrow representations of violence inhibit women from even recognizing and naming their experience as violence. One of the key reasons why women do not report incidents that meet the legal definition of sexual assault is that many do not fit common stereotypes of 'real rape' – they were not by a stranger, did not take place outside and with a weapon, and did not involve injuries. Women may not perceive acts as criminal victimization, while they are more likely to do so if they 'deprive victims of liberty, threaten their lives or physical integrity, or produce psychological harm' (Lievore, 2003, p. 28). Victims also do not report violence because of their perception of *others'* attitudes: their fear that they will be blamed by family and friends, stigmatized, and the criminal justice system will not provide redress (Lievore, 2003, pp. 8-28; Felson, Messner, Hoskin, & Deane, 2002; Kingsnorth & Macintosh, 2004). However, there is no evidence that attitudes play a causal role in women's risks of victimization in the first place, and to emphasize this would be to blame the victim for her victimization. In short, there is no evidence that women's attitudes to rape influence their likelihood of being raped (Anderson *et al.*, 2004, p. 87).

Attitudes play a role in the responses to violence against women adopted by individuals other than the perpetrator or victim, whether family members and friends, professionals, or bystanders. People with more violence-supportive and violence-condoning attitudes respond with less empathy and support to victims, are more likely to attribute blame to the victim, and are less likely to report the incident to the police and more likely to recommend lenient or no penalties for the offender (Pavlou & Knowles, 2001, pp. 84-85; West & Wandrei, 2002). Societal attitudes also shape the formal responses of professionals and institutions to the victims and perpetrators of violence against women, including police officers, judges, priests, social workers, doctors, and so on. Cross-national studies

find that attitudes towards rape and other forms of violence against women inhibit effective and appropriate responses to female victims (Nayak, Byrne, Martin, & Abraham, 2003). In a study among Queensland police officers, those who allocated greater blame to the victim of family violence also indicated that they would be less likely to charge the assailant (Stewart & Maddren, 1997). These formal and informal responses have effects on the victims themselves. Others' responses to help-seeking by women who have experienced abuse from a male partner influences the likelihood that they will report future domestic violence to the police (Hickman & Simpson, 2003), as well as their subsequent help-seeking, separation, and eventual recovery from the abuse (Giles, Curreen, & Adamson, 2005, p. 99).

Given the importance of attitudes with regard to violence against women, what factors influence their formation?

Gender and attitudes

The gender gap in attitudes towards violence against women

One of the most consistent findings to emerge from studies of attitudes towards violence against women is a gender gap. Gender is a consistent predictor of attitudes that support use of violence against women. A wide range of international studies find a gender gap in attitudes towards domestic violence, sexual assault, and other forms of violence against women. In general, men are more likely than women to agree with myths and beliefs supportive of violence against women, perceive a narrower range of behaviors as violent, blame and show less empathy for the victim, minimize the harms associated with physical and sexual assault, and see behaviors constituting violence against women as less serious, inappropriate, or damaging. This gender gap is especially well documented in studies among college and & populations in the USA (Chng & Burke, 1999; Hinck & Thomas, 1999; White & Kurpius, 1999; Cowan, 2000; Ewoldt, Monson, & Langhinrichsen-Rohling, 2000; Anderson & Swainson, 2001; West & Wandrei, 2002; White & Kurpius, 2002; Lee, Pomeroy, Yoo, & Rheinboldt, 2005). The gender gap also has been documented among university students in other countries including Turkey (Sakalh, 2001), India, Japan and Kuwait (Nayak *et al.*, 2003), and Hong

Kong (Tang & Cheung, 1997). In Australia, the gender gap in attitudes towards violence against women has been documented in representative surveys of adults (ANOP Research Services, 1995) and of youth. A nationwide survey of 5,000 young people aged 12-20 found that 14 per cent of young males, but only 3 per cent of females, agreed with the statement, 'It's okay for a boy to make a girl have sex with him if she has flirted with him or led him on' (National Crime Prevention [NCP], 2001). Earlier Australian studies are similar (Davis & Lee, 1996; Xenos & Smith, 2001). Gender differences in definitions and perceptions of violence are evident too with regard to particular forms of violence against women, such as sexual harassment (De Judicibus & McCabe, 2001), date rape (Workman & Freeberg, 1999), and wife assault (Hillier & Foddy, 1993). Moreover, cross-gender differences in attitudes in many countries are stronger than differences associated with other social divisions such as socioeconomic status or education (Kennedy & Gorzalka, 2002).

It is not *sex per se*, but gender orientations, that shape men's and women's contrasting understandings of violence against women. There is a powerful association between attitudes towards violence against women and attitudes towards gender. Especially among men, traditional gender-role attitudes are associated with greater acceptance of violence against women (Davis & Liddell, 2002; De Judicibus & McCabe, 2001; NCP, 2001, pp. 89-90; Pavlou & Knowles, 2001; Truman, Tokar, & Fischer, 1996; Wade & Brittan-Powell, 2001; White and Kurpius, 2002).

Conversely, the more that people maintain egalitarian gender attitudes, the better are their attitudes towards violence against women. They are more likely to see violence against women as unacceptable, to define a wider variety of acts as violence or abuse, to reject victim-blaming and to support the victim, and to hold accountable the person using violence. The most consistent predictor of attitudes supporting the use of violence against women is attitudes towards gender roles, that is, beliefs about appropriate roles for men and women (Berkel, Vandiver, & Bahner, 2004; Good, Heppner, Hillenbrand-Gunn, & Wang, 1995; Simonson & Subich, 1999).

The relationship between adherence to conservative gender norms and tolerance for violence has been documented among males in a wide variety of communities and countries, both Western and

non-Western, including Arab and ultra-Orthodox Jewish communities in Israel (Haj-Yahia, 2003; Steinmetz & Haj-Yahia, 2006), South Africa (Abrahams, Jewkes, Laubscher, & Hoffman, 2006), and adult men and young men in Australia (De Judicibus & McCabe, 2001; NCP, 2001; Pavlou & Knowles, 2001). The relationship between gender-typing and victim-blaming seems to be far weaker among women, perhaps because of their low levels of attributions of blame overall (De Judicibus & McCabe, 2001).

Gender and sexual norms

Attitudes to violence against women are inextricably grounded in and intertwined with attitudes towards women, gender, and sexuality. In other words, judgments of violence against women are shaped by wider norms of gender and sexuality. For example, perceptions of the legitimacy of men's violence to intimate partners are constituted through agreement with the notions that men should be dominant in households and intimate relationships and have the right to enforce their dominance through physical chastisement, men have uncontrollable sexual urges, women are deceptive and malicious, and marriage is a guarantee of sexual consent. Such beliefs have a long history in Western and other cultures, and have been enshrined in Western legal systems (Straton, 2002) and social norms (Berkel *et al.*, 2004, p. 129). For example, women who dress less modestly and more suggestively are more likely to be seen as responsible for and deserving of sexual assault (Viki & Abrams, 2002; Whatley, 2005). Women are seen as more likely to 'provoke' sexual harassment if they are attractive (Golden, Johnson, & Lopez, 2001) and as more culpable for date rape if wearing a short rather than long skirt (Workman & Freeberg, 1999), while stereotypically attractive male perpetrators are judged as less harassing (La Rocca & Kromrey, 1999). Female victims of domestic violence are judged more harshly where they are perceived to have 'provoked' aggression, for example by being verbally aggressive or in situations which might inspire their husbands' jealousy (Hillier & Foddy, 1993; Pavlou & Knowles, 2001). When a man rapes his wife or girlfriend rather than a stranger, he is seen as less responsible, the behavior is seen as less harmful, and it is less likely to be seen as rape (Cowan, 2000; Simonson & Subich, 1999).

Violence-supportive norms and relations are evident in ‘normal’ sexual, intimate, and family relations. For example, three studies among youth in the US, New Zealand and Britain document that violence, and the antecedents of violence, are woven into the ordinary descriptions of romantic heterosexual relationships given by early adolescent boys and girls. For many boys and girls, sexual harassment is pervasive, male aggression is normalized, there is constant pressure among boys to behave in sexually aggressive ways, girls are routinely objectified, a sexual double standard polices girls’ sexual and intimate involvements, and girls are compelled to accommodate male ‘needs’ and desires in negotiating their sexual relations (Hird & Jackson, 2001; Tolman, Spencer, Rosen-Reynoso, & Porche, 2003).

Attitudes towards violence against women are shaped in less gendered ways by other characteristics of the victim of violence, the offender, and situational characteristics of the incident, including the severity of the incident and the presence of alcohol or other drugs. Australian research finds for example that when the incident involves more severe violence and has more severe consequences, more responsibility is placed on the perpetrator and less on the context in which it occurred (Lane & Knowles (2000). Intoxication informs community and professional judgments of victims’ blame and perpetrators’ responsibility (Stewart & Maddren, 1997; Lane & Knowles, 2000).

Given that attitudes towards gender and gender roles have a profound influence on assessments of the victims and perpetrators of violence against women, it is worth examining the formation of gender-role attitudes in general. While a full examination is beyond the scope of this review, several points are worth noting. First, improvements in attitudes towards violence against women in Western countries in recent decades may reflect improvements in community attitudes towards gender roles. Where the latter has been best documented is in the USA. There has been since the 1970s a ‘dramatic and widespread liberalization of gender role attitudes’ in US society (Bolzendahl & Myers, 2004, p. 759), corroborated by other longitudinal analyses (Bryant, 2003; Ciabattari, 2001; Harris & Firestone, 1998). Key predictors of pro-equality or ‘feminist’ attitudes, whether among women, men, or both, include employment, (younger) age, (greater) education, and (urban) region. However,

general gender attitudes cannot be taken as a simple proxy for attitudes to violence against women. For example, measures of general gender-role attitudes have less power to predict men's sexual aggression than measures of hostile and patriarchal masculine beliefs in particular (Murnen *et al.*, 2002). We move now to the second cluster of factors shown to influence community attitudes towards violence against women.

Culture and attitudes

'Culture' here is understood broadly to refer to class, race, ethnicity, and other forms of social difference (other than gender). This usage is somewhat arbitrary, in that gender is just as 'cultural' as class or ethnicity. Nevertheless, distinguishing between gender and culture allows us to emphasize important clusters of influence on community attitudes towards violence against women. Scholarship on the associations between attitudes towards violence against women and forms of social difference has focused largely on gender and race or ethnicity and to a lesser extent on age, while neglecting divisions of class and sexuality. While this section reflects such a focus, we begin with socioeconomic factors in order to highlight that 'culture' is not being used as a euphemism for ethnicity.

Socioeconomic factors

There is some evidence that attitudes towards violence against women vary with socioeconomic variables such as labor market participation and socioeconomic status, for example in Australia (ANOP Research Services, 1995) and the US (Markowitz, 2003; Nagel, Matsuo, McIntyre, & Morrison, 2005). Moreover, rates of violence against women themselves vary with socioeconomic variables, and American and Australian studies find associations between economic and social disadvantage and higher risks of violence and crime in general and intimate partner violence in particular, at both individual and neighborhood levels (Markowitz, 2003; People, 2005). Such associations are shaped by attitudes towards violence, and these in turn are likely to be shaped by personal and community exposure to violence, the community-level structural factors which intensify this violence (Markowitz, 2003), and other correlates of socioeconomic status.

Race and ethnicity

Attitudes towards violence against women vary across different cultural groups and communities in any one country, and from one culture to another. Australian research found that adults born in non-English-speaking countries had poorer attitudes to domestic violence than those born in Australia or other western countries (ANOP Research Services, 1995), while those 12-20 year-olds who agreed with the use of violence by both sexes were more likely to have Middle Eastern or Asian backgrounds (NCP, 2001). Similarly, various North American studies have documented ethnicity-related differences in attitudes towards violence against women (Cowan, 2000; Kennedy & Gorzalka, 2002; Locke & Richman, 1999; Mori, Bernat, Glenn, Selle, & Zarate, 1995). For example, Asian students at a Texas university were more likely than Caucasian students to believe that women are responsible for preventing rape, sex is a motivation for rape, and victims precipitate rape, perhaps reflecting Asian cultural attitudes emphasizing female chastity, silencing talk about sex, and framing sex as a sexual matter between individuals (Lee *et al.*, 2005).

However, other research explores inter-Asian comparisons and finds significant inter-ethnic differences. In a US study, Yoshioka, DiNoia and Ullah (2001) found that Southeast Asian respondents were more supportive of the use of violence and of male privilege than East Asian respondents. Inter-Asian differences suggest the influences of particular cultural systems, patterns of immigration, and other factors. In addition, apparent differences in attitudes among ethnic groups may reflect other demographic contrasts between them. For example, apparent differences between White and African American people's attitudes towards victims of rape disappeared once differences in socioeconomic status and education were taken into account (Nagel *et al.*, 2005). Attitudes regarding violence against women vary from one nation to another (Cousineau & Rondeau, 2004; Heaven, Connors, & Pretorius, 1998; Nayak *et al.*, 2003), although few cross-national examinations have been conducted.

Attitudes towards violence against women are constructed by, and only meaningful within, particular cultural contexts. For example, in Beirut, Lebanon, perceptions of rape are structured by the

centrality of marriage and marriageability in shaping notions of women's status (Wehbi, 2002).

Women seen to be unmarriageable, because they are separated, divorced, or disabled for example, are perceived as more legitimate targets of sexual predation. In Palestine, cultural emphases on preserving family reputation and female virginity stifle responses to female rape victims and revictimize the victims themselves (Shalhoub-Kevorkian, 1999). Notions of male 'honor' and female purity and modesty can be used to justify and excuse violence against women. 'Honor cultures' involve traditional gender ideologies and male dominance, strong familialism, and norms of female chastity and male sexual freedom. Both men and women from such cultures are more tolerant of men's violence to female partners, see men's violent responses to infidelity as more excusable, and have more positive responses to victims who blame themselves for the violence (Vandello & Cohen, 2003).

The associations between culture and attitudes towards violence against women are dynamic. On the one hand, there is evidence that people who move from a more violence-supportive cultural context to a less violence-supportive one can have their attitudes improved as a result. Two studies document that attitudes can improve with Western acculturation (Kennedy and Gorzalka, 2002; Mori *et al.*, 1995). On the other, violence-supportive attitudes can be 'imported' by immigrant communities from one cultural context to another (Ely, 2004).

Acknowledging the ways in which violence-supportive attitudes are shaped by ethnicity runs the risk of reinforcing racism (Stubbs, 2003). At the same time, we must address the complex intersections of race and ethnicity, class and other forms of social difference which shape women's and men's attitudes towards and involvements in violence (Russo, 2001).

'Culture' here overlaps with gender, our first meta-factor, in that cultural and national variations in attitudes themselves partially reflect variations in gender. Differences in attitudes towards violence against women in different countries and cultures reflect different beliefs about gender roles.

Societies with lower rates of violence against women are characterized by more gender egalitarian attitudes and behavior and a greater intolerance of violence (Nayak *et al.*, 2003). At the same time,

cultural differences are not reducible to gender, in that they also reflect other social, political, and economic characteristics of contexts and communities.

Individual Factors

Experiencing or Witnessing Violence

One of the key mechanisms of attitude formation in relation to violence against women is intergenerational transmission. There is strong evidence that children who either witness such violence or are subjected to violence themselves are more likely as adults to adhere to violence-supportive attitudes (and to perpetrate violence). There is a well-documented association between a history of child physical abuse and men's current physical aggression to an intimate partner, with childhood victimization having consistent, small-to-medium effects in the findings of eight out of ten relevant studies (Schumacher, Feldbau-Kohn, Slep, & Heyman, 2001). Attitudes are central to this link: 'children who are subject to violence come to engage in violence in their later marital relationships because they acquire certain attitudes which facilitate violence' (Markowitz, 2001, p. 215). Thus, witnessing or experiencing violence while growing up has a direct impact on the perpetration of violence against spouses, and an impact on attitudes which in turn impact on perpetration (Markowitz, 2001, pp. 207-208). More recent studies, including longitudinal examinations, continue to document the intergenerational transmission of violence-supportive attitudes and behaviors (Carr & Vandusen, 2002; Lichter & McCloskey, 2004; National Institute of Justice [NIJ], 2004). A meta-analysis of 118 studies suggests that children who witness interparental violence show more negative psychosocial outcomes than children who witness only other forms of interparental conflict or aggression (Kitzmann, Gaylord, Holt, & Kenny, 2003, p. 346).

The effects of witnessing or experiencing violence are greater for males than females, as at least five studies have found (Markowitz, 2001, p. 209). In other words, it is boys, rather than girls, who are more likely to grow up to condone and to perpetrate violence against women having witnessed or experienced violence themselves. Similar patterns can be discerned for sexual violence in particular (Abbey, Zawacki, Buck, Clinton, & McAuslan, 2004). Among girls on the other hand, evidence for

the impact of observing interparental violence or experiencing childhood physical abuse on subsequent victimization is inconsistent (Adams-Curtis & Forbes, 2004; NIJ, 2004; Riggs, Caulfield, & Street, 2000; Schumacher *et al.*, 2001).

Such patterns among boys lend support to a ‘social learning’ theory of intimate partner violence. Through witnessing the use of violence by one parent against another, they may learn that violence is an effective and appropriate instrumental strategy (Heise, 1998, p. 268). However, early experiences of violence also shape children’s developing personalities and may inhibit behavioral control, adaptive social skills and empathy (Carr and Vandeuken, 2002, p. 642; Johnson & Knight, 2000, p. 166). More widely, the relationship between children’s witnessing and experience of violence and their adult perpetration may reflect processes of ‘cultural transmission’, in which the violence-supportive norms and violent social relations of local communities are learnt from generation to generation.

There are three caveats to be made here. First, some studies find no link between childhood victimization and the adolescent or adult perpetration of violence (Sellers, Cochran, & Branch, 2005) or young people’s own attitudes towards domestic violence (NCP, 2001). Second, prior experiences of violence can lead to diverse attitudinal formations, both violence-supportive and violence-intolerant (De Judicibus & McCabe, 2001). Third, childhood victimization interacts with other influences and involvements to shape adolescent and adult males’ attitudes towards and perpetration of violence against women. Research examining predictors of sexually coercive behavior finds that the impact of parental violence and child abuse on boys is mediated by sexually hostile attitudes and emphases on sexual conquest and promiscuity (Johnson & Knight, 2000).

Age and development

Age, and the developmental processes and relations associated with age, appears to be another factor shaping individuals’ attitudes towards violence against women. It might be expected that younger individuals will espouse more informed attitudes towards violence against women, reflecting improvements over time in community attitudes as well as the influence of younger cohorts’ greater

exposure to university and other positive influences. Certainly there is evidence of better attitudes among individuals under 55, from a variety of surveys in Australia and the US (ANOP Research Services, 1995; Carlson & Worden, 2005; Nagel *et al.*, 2005). At the same time, among the youngest age groups, and males in particular, younger people have *worse* attitudes than their older counterparts. A series of international studies document that boys and young men are more likely than older men to endorse rape-supportive norms and to report a likelihood of committing rape (Aromaki, Haebich, & Lindman, 2002), while there are either no age-related differences among young females (Hutchinson, Tess, Gleckman, Hagans, & Reese, 1994) or gender differences are greatest among younger individuals (Anderson *et al.*, 2004, pp. 85-86). Among Australian youth aged 12 to 20, younger boys aged 12 to 14 showed higher support for violence-supportive attitudes than older males (NCP, 2001, pp. 75-95). Two other Australian studies report similar results (Davis & Lee, 1996; Xenos & Smith, 2001).

There are at least three explanations for this pattern. Younger boys' greater endorsement of violence against women may reflect their lack of exposure to the liberalizing influence of late secondary school and university education. It may reflect developmental shifts in attitudes and in other qualities such as empathy, sensitivity, and moral awareness (Davis & Lee, 1996, p. 799; Hutchinson *et al.*, 1994, p. 417). It may reflect distinct characteristics of boys' peer cultures. Among boys, both gender segregation and homophobia peak in early adolescence (Flood, 2002; Plummer, 1999, pp. 67-68), and in this context boys may be particularly prone to expressing views tolerant of violence against (girls and) women. In the late school years and after school, boys invest more in social and sexual relations with girls, they are less influenced by school peer groups, and they achieve more stable gender and sexual identities. Such shifts may lessen both older males' endorsement of violence-supportive attitudes and the gender gap in this endorsement.

Organizational Factors

The second cluster of factors shown to influence community attitudes towards violence against women are organizational, namely the social, cultures, policies, and other characteristics of formal

organizations and institutions. We focus in this section on the impact of membership of or participation in formal contexts. Organizations' impacts on the wider community, and their informal social relations are the focus of later sections below.

Associations between violence-supportive attitudes and formal organizations or institutions have been documented for four types of context: sports, university residences (fraternities), the military, and religious institutions. Taking sport first, early research noted that male athletes report significantly greater agreement with rape-supportive statements than men in general (Boeringer, 1999). Contemporary research documents that violence-supportive attitudes are spread unevenly across sports and can vary even within a particular sport. In an American study among university athletes, rape myth acceptance was highest among male athletes, especially younger athletes and those playing a team-based sport (football or basketball) versus individual sport (Sawyer, Thompson, & Chicorelli, 2002).

For both sports and university residences, there is evidence of particular masculine contexts in which violence-supportive norms, and violence against women, are particularly intense. On American campus cultures with high rates of sexual violence, some of the socio-cultural correlates (especially among college fraternities) include greater gender segregation, an ethic of male sexual conquest and 'getting sex', displays of masculinity through heterosexual sexual performance, high alcohol consumption, heterosexism and homophobia, use of pornography, and general norms of women's subordinate status (Boswell & Spade, 1996; Sanday, 1996). Some fraternities and athletic teams involve much higher risks of sexual assault than others, because of members' higher levels of hostility towards women and peer support for sexual violence (Humphrey & Kahn, 2000). Another context with similar masculine dynamics and similarly elevated levels of tolerance for violence against women is the military. The evidence is that it is not group membership *per se*, but norms of gender inequality and homosocial male bonding that foster and justify abuse in particular peer cultures, that promote violence against women (Rosen, Kaminski, Parmley, Knudson, & Fancher, 2003; Schwartz & DeKeseredy, 1997).

Several mechanisms may produce the increased prevalence of violence-supportive attitudes and violent behavior among men in such contexts. One is group socialization: men are actively inducted into the existing norms and values of these contexts. Another is involvement: participation in peer activities associated with that sub-culture, such as drinking or consuming pornography (Godenzi, Schwartz, & Dekeseredy, 2001). Others include identification with the group (Humphrey & Kahn, 2000, p. 1320), attachment: having close emotional ties to significant others, and commitment: men's investments in the patriarchal social order and their interest in gaining the rewards of peer acceptance and status associated for example with sexually active and potentially abusive behavior (Godenzi *et al.* 2001). Another mechanism is self-selection. Thus, men's investment in and conformity to social norms and bonds in patriarchal and violence-supportive contexts encourages their development of violent attitudes and behaviors.

There is also evidence that participation in particular occupational or educational contexts can shape attitudes towards violence against women. Individuals who attend university, who have received university education, or with higher levels of educational attainment tend to have more progressive attitudes than individuals who do not or have not (ANOP Research Services, 1995; De Judicibus & McCabe, 2001; Foulis & McCabe, 1997; Nagel *et al.*, 2005, p. 734). These patterns may reflect the younger age profile of university students or the liberalizing influence of educational environments (Bryant, 2003).

Studies comparing particular occupational groups are rare, but they suggest that some workplace and professional cultures involve less violence-supportive norms than others. Hong Kong psychologists, social workers, and nurses had broader definitions of violence against women than police officers and lawyers, which may reflect the latter's work in settings where legal and more restrictive definitions of criminal behavior are dominant (Tang & Cheung, 1997). Among people working or studying in mental health and counseling in the US, alongside a persistent gender gap, undergraduates had more negative attitudes towards rape victims than graduate counseling students, who in turn had more negative attitudes than the mental health professionals (White & Kurpius,

1999). Such examples may reflect the influence of occupational cultures and training in encouraging positive shifts in violence-supportive attitudes, or self-selection by individuals who are more sensitive to issues of gender and violence. On the other hand, occupational cultures may intensify violence-supportive norms. In a US study, gender uniformity in police attitudes regarding domestic violence may have reflected female officers' education in the norms of this male-dominated occupation (Stalans & Finn, 2000).

There is some evidence that religious and spiritual involvements and beliefs can influence individuals' attitudes towards violence against women, although some studies find no relationship between religiosity and the endorsement of domestic violence (Berkel *et al.*, 2004). In the USA, Catholic priests and Protestant ministers with greater adherence to fundamentalist religious beliefs had narrower definitions of wife abuse and more victim-blaming responses to battered women (Gengler & Lee, 2003). Among clergy from over 20 Christian denominations, the more sexist that participants' attitudes were, and the more fundamentalist their religious beliefs were, the more unfavorable were their attitudes towards rape victims (Sheldon & Parent, 2002).

Community Factors

Peer groups and informal social relations

Just as attitudes towards violence against women are shaped by participation in formal groups, institutions, and occupations, they are shaped by participation in informal peer groups and social networks. Indeed, these two overlap. Men's peer and social relations have a significant influence on their tolerance for (and perpetration of) intimate partner violence. Participation and investment in homosocial male peer groups can intensify men's tolerance for violence against women. A series of North American studies have documented that male peer support for sexual assault, including young men's attachment (close emotional ties) to abusive peers and peers' informational support for sexual assault (peer guidance and advice that influences men to assault their dating partners), were significantly correlated with sexual and physical abuse of women (DeKeseredy and Kelly, 1995; Schwartz & DeKeseredy, 1997, 2000). Two further US studies among university students document

associations between embeddedness in a social network in which men's intimate partner violence is condoned and rewarded and the use of such violence (Reitzel-Jaffe & Wolfe, 2001; Sellers *et al.*, 2005).

There is recent experimental evidence that perceptions of peer norms regarding violence against women do influence men's self-reported willingness to commit such violence. In a German study among male university students, Bohner, Siebler, and Schmelcher (2006) found that if men were told that others in their peer group had a high level of acceptance of rape myths, their own 'rape proclivity' increased. More generally, among US undergraduate men, having a homosocially focused social life is associated with attitudes conducive to the sexual harassment of women (Wade & Brittan-Powell, 2001) and with more conservative views of gender roles (Bryant, 2003).

Religion, spirituality, and churches

Spiritual institutions potentially have an impact on attitudes towards violence beyond their influence on their direct participants. While there is little empirical assessment of potential impacts, there is evidence of contexts in which religion is (mis)used to justify violence against women or to perpetuate women's vulnerability to victimization. For example, Christian evangelism's emphasis on wifely submission and hierarchical gender relations can encourage pastors to counsel women to stay with their abusers (Nason-Clark, 1997). In some Arab and Islamic countries, selective excerpts from the Koran may be used to prove that men who beat their wives are following God's commandments (Douki, Nacef, Belhadj, Bouasker, & Ghachem, 2003). Shari'a (Islamic law) may be used to sanction male authority over female relatives and the legitimate use of physical violence (Hajjar, 2004). At the same time, religious and theological emphases on compassion, justice, and liberation in a variety of faiths can be mobilized in opposition to violence against women (Ware, Levitt, & Bayer, 2004).

Societal Factors

Mass media

There is substantial evidence that particular forms of media do influence attitudes towards violence against women. At the same time, media representations do not have simple and deterministic effects

on attitudes or indeed behaviors. Instead, viewers engage with media texts in active and diverse ways. Personal and developmental factors mediate the impact of exposure. The relationship between violent media and violent attitudes or behaviors is reciprocal, in that viewers with violent inclinations and behaviors show greater interest in and enjoyment of violent media representations. And the relationships between representations and attitudes or behaviors are complex (Flood & Hamilton, 2003, pp. 45-46; Huessman, 2007, p. S11).

Pornography

The application of summary techniques or 'meta-analysis' to existing empirical studies finds consistent relationships between pornography and sexual aggression (Malamuth, Addison, & Koss, 2000). This association is strongest for violent pornography and still reliable for nonviolent pornography, particularly among frequent users. Several types of empirical examination demonstrate this relationship. In experimental studies, adults show significant strengthening of attitudes supportive of sexual aggression following exposure to pornography. Exposure to sexually violent material increases male viewers' acceptance of rape myths, desensitizes them to sexual violence, and informs more callous attitudes towards female victims (Allen, Emmers, Gebhardt, & Giery, 1995). Experimental studies also find that adults also show an increase in behavioral aggression following exposure to pornography, again especially violent pornography (Allen, Alessio, Emmers, & Gebhardt, 1996). Correlational studies of pornography use in everyday life find that men who use hardcore, violent or rape pornography, and men who are high-frequency users of pornography, are significantly more likely than others to report that they would rape or sexually harass a woman if they knew they could get away with it. There is a circular relationship among some men between sexual violence and pornography (Malamuth *et al.*, 2000).

Television and other popular media

Other media such as television, music, and film are also effective teachers of gender-stereotyped and violence-supportive attitudes (Hogan, 2005; Huessmann, 2007). Both experimental and observational studies among children document greater rates of aggressive attitudes and behavior

among children exposed to media violence, correlational studies show a relationship between heavy viewing of television violence and self-reported or peer-assessed violent behavior, and longitudinal studies find that exposure to media violence in early childhood is a significant predictor of aggression at older ages (Strasburger & Wilson, 2002, pp. 85-99). Viewing media violence shapes children's cognitive schemas, normative beliefs, and scripts for social behaviour, as well as their later aggressive behaviour, including when one controls for early aggressiveness (Huessman, 2007, p. S10).

Media impacts on young people's attitudes towards violence against women have been further identified in two genres of mass media in particular: music and electronic games. Various studies find that sexually violent, misogynist, and objectifying themes influence violence-supportive, sexually aggressive, and sexist attitudes (Barongan & Nagayama, 1995; Johnson, Jackson, & Gatto, 1995; Kalof, 1999; Strasburger & Wilson, 2002, pp. 297-298). In more focused and intense forms of media involvement such as playing violent electronic games, aggressive behavioral scripts may be shaped by powerful combinations of psychological absorption and immersion (Funk, 2002). There is growing evidence that playing violent electronic games is associated with lower empathy and stronger adherence to pro-violence attitudes (Anderson & Bushman, 2001; Funk, 2002; Funk, Baldacci, Pasold, & Baumgardner, 2004), and an emerging consensus that exposure to violence in video games and elsewhere is an important risk factor for aggression (Gentile & Anderson, 2005).

Other aspects of popular culture identified as reinforcing community tolerance for violence against women include advertising and language (Murnen *et al.*, 2002, p. 371). Materials identified as particularly concerning here include TV advertising for children with aggressive content (Larson, 2003) and advertisements focused on women's bodies and body parts (Hall & Crum, 1994; Reichert & Carpenter, 2004). There is evidence that the latter portrayals can increase attitudinal support for sexual aggression, especially among men (Lanis & Covel, 1995).

News coverage

Media coverage of and public controversy regarding high-profile incidents of violence against women can increase community awareness. In a US attitudinal poll, 72 per cent of respondents

reported that they had learned something about domestic violence from the media coverage of the O.J. Simpson trial, such as the fact that such violence 'is a serious problem' (Klein, Campbell, Soler, & Ghez, 1997, pp. 8-11). Media coverage of domestic violence dramatically increased over 1994-1995, and over a single year the percentage of male respondents who rated domestic violence as an 'extremely important social problem' climbed from 25 to 33 per cent. After the Hill-Thomas sexual harassment hearings in 1991, Jaschik-Herman and Fisk (1995) replicated a study that had taken place two years before. Women in the more recent study were more likely to spontaneously label as harassment the behaviors depicted in a video segment.

On the other hand, media reportage can have negative effects. Depersonalized representations of female victims of violent crime decrease empathy towards them and engender victim blame (Anastasio & Costa, 2004).

Community education and social marketing campaigns

Education and media have also been deliberately used to change community attitudes. Face-to-face education regarding violence against women is delivered in primary and secondary schools, universities, and in other contexts. Such interventions can have positive effects on males' attitudes towards and participation in violence against women (Flood, 2005-2006; Whitaker *et al.*, 2006). While not all educational interventions are effective and changes in attitudes often 'rebound' to pre-intervention levels, education programs which are intensive, lengthy, and use a variety of pedagogical approaches have been shown to produce lasting change in attitudes and behaviors (Flood, 2005-2006). In addition, social marketing campaigns in the mass media have been shown to produce positive change in the attitudes (and behaviors) associated with men's perpetration of violence against women (Donovan & Vlasis, 2005).

Criminal justice policies and law reform

While there is little consensus on the impact of criminal justice policies on the attitudes of the wider community (Dugan, 2003), an American study did show that the existence of legal sanctions has an impact on attitudes towards violence against women. Perceptions of criminal justice policies

impacted on attitudes towards criminal justice responses and had effects on victim-blaming attitudes in relation to domestic violence (Salazar, Baker, Price, & Carlin, 2003). At the same time, criminal justice systems also may have a negative influence, for example when they fail to respond appropriately to the victims and perpetrators of violence against women.

Social movements

The last form of influence on community attitudes towards violence against women we consider is social movements. The social movement with the most impact on community norms regarding violence against women is the women's movement. Public recognition of men's violence against women as a 'social problem' has been a major achievement of the women's movement in particular (Bush, 1992). It is difficult to document the impact of social movements on social norms, in part because of the scale at which change occurs and the complexity of the possible dynamics of change, but it is very likely that the women's movements and feminism have had a distinctive, and substantial, impact on community attitudes towards violence against women. The women's movement's impact is likely to be both direct, through its advocacy on violence, and indirect, through its impact on gender norms and relations more widely. Other collective mobilizations with a potential influence on community understandings of violence against women include anti-feminist 'men's rights' and 'fathers' rights', pro-feminist men's (Flood, 2005), and conservative religious groups and networks. However, there is very little direct empirical evidence of their impacts, whether positive or negative.

Conclusion

Attitudes towards violence against women are shaped by a multitude of factors at all levels of the social order. Two clusters of factors have a multi-level influence on community attitudes. Both gender and culture are powerful influences on attitudes, and both operate at micro and macro levels including individual socialization, the norms and relations of particular contexts and communities and the society-wide workings of the media, the law, and other factors. Gender and culture themselves intersect, in that different cultural contexts involve particular norms and relations of gender which shape community attitudes towards violence against women. In addition, a wide range of other

influences on attitudes operate among individuals, organizations, communities, or in society as a whole, and many of these operate at more than one level. For example, particular institutions such as schools and workplaces shape their participants' attitudes through both formal policies and structures and informal norms, they are locations for informal peer relations which shape attitudes, and such institutions are themselves shaped in dynamic ways by wider factors such as the mass media. In turn, the influence of societal factors such as the mass media is affected by the local contexts in which media representations are seen and individual variations in experience and understanding. The intersections of gender, race and ethnicity, and other social divisions cut across all of these levels and help to reproduce the social relations and institutional structures which perpetuate pro-violence attitudes and violence towards women.

Given the breadth of factors, settings, and social forces which shape community attitudes regarding violence against women, there is a wide range of possible settings and groups for intervention in such attitudes. There is not space here to identify key points, settings, and populations for intervention, although we have done so elsewhere (Flood & Pease, 2006). However, efforts to improve community attitudes towards violence against women should be guided by five assumptions. First, the process of changing attitudes must be located within a project of changing familial, organizational, community and societal norms which support violence against women. Second, interventions must address not only those attitudes which are overtly condoning of violence against women, but the wider clusters of attitudes related to gender and sexuality which normalize and justify this violence. Given the close association between attitudes towards violence against women and attitudes towards gender, especially males' adherence to sexist, patriarchal, and hostile attitudes towards women, the latter must be targeted in educational campaigns. Third, efforts to address violence-supportive attitudes must work also to provide an alternative, a set of norms and values centered on non-violence and gender equality. Fourth, violence prevention interventions must be culturally appropriate, such that this includes sensitivity not only to ethnic diversities but to local gender cultures (Flood, 2005-2006). Finally, interventions aimed at attitudinal and cultural change

must be accompanied by changes in structural relations and social practices if violence against women is to be prevented.

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