

Fighting about violence:

Analysing the nature of the backlash in Ireland — the issue of violence against women.

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ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the nature of the current Irish backlash against the violence against women movement. I will illuminate firstly, the emergence of backlash writings from the USA and the UK which attempt to position men as the oppressed sex within interpersonal relationships and how the latter is a direct result of men's loss of power within the private sphere. I will further examine the nature and tone of the anti-feminist commentary threaded throughout the texts of those supporting the backlash on violence and will explore why the latter feel particularly compelled to undermine feminist analyses of male violence. Specifically, I will offer refutations of research being put forward by the backlash to support their argument that male and female intimates abuse one another in equal measure and furthermore I will illuminate the danger inherent in attempts to de-gender the issue of interpersonal violence. This thesis also examines the impact which the anti-feminist backlash on violence is having on individuals working to address male violence. By analysing semi-structured interviews conducted with key individuals, I will explore possible ways of responding to and challenging the backlash against the violence against women movement.

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Introduction

The backlash against women's autonomy plays out its tune to many themes regarding women's roles both in the public and private sphere. Traditionally in Ireland this counteraction has been most vociferous in the debate about reproductive rights. More recently, however, a new theme is becoming the focus for the umbrage of antifeminist commentators; that of interpersonal violence. This thesis aims to explore specifically how the backlash against feminism operates to reconfigure the debate on interpersonal violence by presenting 'evidence' that men are equally victimised by female intimates. By examining the nature of this debate as it is argued by backlash proponents, I will refute the notion that men are equally victimised by female intimates and I will further illuminate what appears to be the primary aim of the backlash on violence; attacking and undermining feminism. The aims of this aspect of the backlash appear to be as follows; undermining the notion of male dominance, proposing the notion, however improbable, of female dominance or male oppression and more significantly to then assert that feminism is responsible for the latter.

The term 'backlash' was popularised by Susan Faludi to describe the reaction and resistance by patriarchy to second wave feminism (Faludi (1992)). Feminist commentators such as Marilyn French and Faludi have demonstrated how the backlash has engineered a deliberate retaliation against feminism, which is not simply a *reaction* to feminism but an orchestrated attempt to lessen its gains. Faludi, outlines how the achievements of feminism on behalf of women, especially in the areas of reproductive rights and equality legislation in employment, has lead to a loss of power and status among men and a consequent need to reassert that power. The Collins dictionary defines 'backlash' as a 'sudden and adverse reaction'. Synonyms for the word 'backlash' include; 'counteraction, kickback, reaction, resistance, resentment and retaliation '. The need to 'retaliate' is suggestive of a sense of having been wronged in some way, thus instilling a consequent desire for vengeance. In this instance this desire for retribution seems to arise from men's real and perceived loss of power within the private sphere.

My interest in this topic arises out of my work on the issue of male violence. For a number of years I have worked with Women's Aid, a feminist organisation working to address male violence against women within intimate relationships. About five years ago we began to observe the beginnings of a backlash against our work from within the media. A prime commentator in this regard was the Irish Times columnist John Waters who was proposing that men and not women constitute society's oppressed. Initially Waters writing focused on the issue of fatherhood but increasingly began to incorporate a number of other themes relating to men's supposed oppression as a result of feminism. These included; men's health, male suicide and domestic violence against men. These writings coincided with the establishment of AMEN (Abused MEN), in 1997. The organisations founder, Mary Cleary, had previously worked as a volunteer in a refuge for abused women in Co Meath but felt that there was a need to set up a similar service for men and therefore established a Helpline for abused men operating from her own home. Cleary outlined her reasons for setting up the service, in the following address to a conference hosted by AMEN in 1999:

'I started to question the statistics, the diet that we have been fed and swallowed whole and undigested for over twenty years- the diet which (sic) tells us that women are the only victims of domestic violence'. (conference address 'The Silence is Over' Dec 10th 1999)

John Waters at this time began to publicly voice his support for the work of AMEN both in his weekly columns in the Times and by chairing their first conference in 1998. What was becoming increasingly apparent to Women's Aid was the dangerous way in which the debate on interpersonal violence was being skewed by AMEN, Waters and their supporters. The notion that domestic violence was 'a 50/50 phenomenon' with females abusing males in equal measure was regularly being mooted, together with calls for the issue of domestic violence be de-gendered (AMEN, 1999). Increasingly, John Waters writings became more rancorous towards feminism and AMEN began to juxtapose their concerns about abused men with unsubstantiated claims that feminists were deliberately suppressing the 'truth' about abuse as part of their supposed goal to demonise men. By November 1998, just over one year since the inception of the AMEN Helpline, Cleary was claiming that the 2,500 calls which the organisation had received, was evidence that 'domestic violence against men has received epidemic proportions' (Gleeson 1998).

Within Women's Aid workers began to voice their concerns regarding the backlash as its impact began to be noted. Agencies and groups, with whom we worked, although noting "" if that they were not meeting many abused men in the course of their work, nonetheless were beginning to question whether women were in fact the significant majority of domestic violence victims. As the media delighted in having a new angle on domestic violence, the print media, plus radio and TV began to devote more and more attention to the backlash and its supporters. Women's Aid were finding their energy diverted as increasingly we were being called upon to defend our position. My decision, therefore, to focus on this particular topic is a desire to augment our knowledge and understanding of the backlash within Women's Aid. I would hope

that my exploration of the issue would assist in the development of a response to the symmetry of violence argument, which we are increasingly being asked to comment on by external agencies and groups.

The methodology employed throughout this work involves a review of literature on the emergence of the backlash and feminist reactions to it plus analysis of backlash texts most particularly as they arise in the print media currently in Ireland. I will also offer a critique of statistics being proffered to support the symmetry of violence argument. I will also analyse data obtained from semi-structured interviews with four key individuals working to address male violence, in order to ascertain their views on the backlash. Initially when deciding with whom to conduct interviews, I was of the opinion that it would be interesting to interview key players of the backlash such as John Waters and Mary Cleary of AMEN. I then began to consider the nature of feminist research and what it aspires to do. This led me to revisit one of the key tenets of feminist research; to enable silenced women to tell their stories. As the backlash has attempted to silence those of us working to address male violence would my interviewing of only backlash players be colluding with that silencing? I believed it would.

At this time I also began to revisit my own reasons for choosing this topic for in the first instance. One of the key reasons being to add to our understanding in Women's Aid, of the nature of the backlash. It seemed more appropriate, therefore, to enable other individuals with whom I work both directly and indirectly to be a part of that process of discovery. Often I have felt that those of us immersed in working to address male violence have little time and energy to also take time out to consider the backlash and its impact upon us. In conducting interviews with my colleagues, therefore, I hoped to do two things; firstly to enable them to take some time to examine how the backlash is impacting upon them and their work, and, secondly to ascertain from their extensive expertise and experience ideas about how to respond to and challenge the backlash on violence.

Chapter one is an examination of the rise of the backlash against women's increased autonomy in the private sphere. I will outline the similarity in ideas put forward by backlash commentators in their attempts to position men as the new oppressed within interpersonal relationships. I will also outline how feminists have critiqued this aspect of the backlash.

Chapter two will explore the antifeminist nature of the symmetry of violence argument. I will outline the extent to which attacks on feminism feature in writings by the supporters of the battered male phenomenon and how this aim features as central to their goals.

In chapter three I will specifically address the symmetry of violence argument. I will offer refutations of statistics being proffered to substantiate the claims of the backlash in this regard. I will explore the ways in which male violence against female intimates is integral to female oppression within the context of patriarchy, thus imbuing interpersonal violence with particular meaning for women more so than for men experiencing abuse.

Chapter four examines how the backlash attempts to undermine the credibility of

organisations working to address male violence. I will illustrate how Women's Aid in particular, have been singled out in this regard I will also offer an analysis of semi-structured interviews four individuals working to address male violence. In particular it is my intention to illuminate perceptions of the backlash and how it is impacting on work to address male violence.

Chapter one; The emergence of the current backlash and its positioning of men oppressed gender.

'If I have one hope for 1999 it is that this will be the year when men finally start to stand up for themselves. I would hope that individually and collectively, men would begin to look at the society they are *alleged* to dominate, and ask themselves: where is the evidence of such domination in a society which demonises and denigrates them at every turn, which conspires to steal their children at the whim of mothers and institutions' (Waters, Opinion, Irish Times 12th Jan 1999) (emphasis added).

This chapter outlines the emergence of the current backlash against feminism and, more particularly, against the violence against women movement. I will outline the ways in which backlash texts in the US the UK and more recently Ireland, are attempting to position men as society's new oppressed regarding their interaction with women on an interpersonal level. I will also explore the similar themes which thread through backlash texts on interpersonal violence and will expose what appears to lie at the heart of backlash texts in this regard.

We are now being regularly informed that men are the new oppressed. As the title of Professor Anthony Clare's recent book attests; 'Masculinity in Crisis'. Men, we are informed, are losing their role in the public world in order to make way for women, many of whom it is being suggested, are now also dominating the private world of home and hearth. And furthermore, it is assumed that feminism is to blame for all of the above. The backlash against feminism and more particularly against the violence against women movement has finally reached Irish shores. The print media headlines scream; 'Manhood is increasingly a terminal condition' (Waters, Opinion, Irish Times, Jan 13th '98); 'Battered men the hidden horror' (Weekender, Jan 17th '98), 'Secret hell of Irish Battered Husbands' (News of The World, Sept 13th '98), 'Women top the health agenda as men die' (Waters Opinion, Irish Times, Oct 26th 1999) and more to the point 'Feminists accused of suppressing the truth about battered husbands' (Patsy McGarry, Irish Times, Dec 11th 1998) and 'feminism no longer an agent for true change' (Waters, Opinion, May 4th '99). Backlash texts ask us to believe that feminism has achieved so much of a foothold that it must now graciously back off as men regroup to decide what to do next. As David Thomas laments;

'people under forty have no experience of anything other than feminism. It's a bit like growing up in Czechoslovakia or somewhere where people had no experience of anything other than Communism.' (Thomas 1993 p-253)

The backlash both in Ireland and in the rest of the Western world has, therefore, set about establishing men as the new oppressed. In the US, one of the leading commentators in this regard is Warren Farrell. Farrell, originally an ardent supporter of feminism, later realised that he hadn't been listening to men and so decided to tell their side of the story. Susan Faludi, who interviewed Farrell as part of her book 'Backlash', noted with amusement that as she sat in Farrell's house listening to him speak of men's powerlessness, he was being handed coffee by a female maid while in

an adjoining room his female secretary typed his notes. Faludi believes that Farrell originally lost his enthusiasm for feminism 'when it lost its media glitter'. Referring to the fact that the women's movement began to ignore him once he changed tracks, he laments;

'It affected me a lot to see my popularity waning among people who saw me as an idol' (Faludi 1992 p-339).

Farrell, who has very obviously influenced Irish backlash commentator John Waters, coined the phrase, later to be used by Waters, 'the disposable sex', to describe the supposed new position of men which they directly attribute to feminism. Farrell asserts that society is 'both patriarchal and matriarchal, both male and female dominated' (Farrell 1993 p-7). He grudgingly acknowledges that women do experience powerlessness, the examples he chooses are interesting; fears of pregnancy, ageing, rape, date rape and being physically overpowered; less socialisation to take a career that pays enough to support a husband and children; less exposure to team sports; greater parental pressure to marry and interrupt career for children without regard for her own wishes; not being part of 'old boys' network; having less freedom to walk into a bar without being bothered (op cit p-13). Interestingly Farrell omits other forms of powerlessness' that girls and women experience, which are gendered in nature. These include; sex selection and abortion of female foetuses, infanticide of female babies, Female Genital Mutilation, footbinding, Dowry related violence and murder, forced marriage, being trafficked for the purposes of sexual slavery, involvement in prostitution and pornography, domestic violence and sexual harassment in the workplace.

According to Farrell, men experience powerlessness in the following ways; having to pay alimony and child support following a marriage break-up, male suicide, being killed in wars and their 'spending obligations' to women. The latter phrase was recently borrowed by John Waters in an article provocatively titled: 'Irish women not poor - they just spend more'. Here, Waters uses the findings of a UN survey to propose the thesis that although men earn more of the Irish State's earned income than women, this is in fact a sign of *women's* power - the power to spend their husbands money. The findings for Ireland showed that Irish men earn 73.2% of the income in the State and women earn 26.8%. Waters, in what is clearly a swipe at feminists, writes of the UN report:

'The usual propagandists (will) use the findings relating to women to promote their all too familiar agenda and fuel their favourite victimology' (Opinion, Irish Times 22nd September 1998)

Ironically Waters in the same article sets out it seems to fuel his own favourite victimology, that of the oppressed male, who according to Waters, slaves all day only to come home to 'she who consumes'. 'Men, in general' he writes, 'have ultimate responsibility for providing homes, food and other everyday expenditures'. The fact that men perhaps *should* in many instances, have greater 'spending obligations' due to their often greater 'earning potential', is not suggested. Consider the following statistics in this regard; in 1994 although women constituted only 41% of all employees, they accounted for 54% of those experiencing low pay. (Nolan and Watson 1999); Ireland has the lowest level of participation of mothers in the formal

economy in the EU, due to the inadequacy of State sponsored child care (Barry 1998); In 1997 the average industrial wage for men 317 pounds per week, the female equivalent was 210 pounds.

Waters continues: 'Not only do women spend more on themselves, men spend far more on women than on themselves'. He offers, however, no evidence to support this claim. In a piece of research in 1997, Combat Poverty found the reverse; that when it came to spending household income, men are more likely than women to spend it on themselves rather than the family. The key findings of the Irish study were that women are more likely than their husbands to share their earned income and devote more of it to the family (they spent 5% on themselves). The researchers note;

'husbands are consistently more likely to have money for their entertainment and their leisure than their wives' (ibid p-1).

Backlash supporters also make no mention of the fact that women are more likely to live in poverty than men. Research conducted by the ESRI for Combat Poverty (1999), found that:

'Women experience a greater risk of poverty than men, female-headed households a greater risk than those headed by men or couples' (Nolan and Watson op cit p-xx)

The report also found that the risk of poverty in female-headed households has *increased* in the period 1987 -1994. Women in the main, must find themselves a male to depend upon for financial security. This hardly seems evidence of their power.

The emergence of the backlash against women's increasing independence within private sphere.

In the 1990's something sinister was afoot in the American men's movement. A Christian men's group called the Promise Keepers were enthralled millions of men in stadium filled rallies all over the States. The movement's leader, evangelist Bill McCarthy called on men to repent for their domestic wrong doings and to take a 'servant-leadership' role in their families (Faludi 1999 p-227). Many feminists saw this rhetoric as little more than new lamps for old, a more palatable version of 'take back the wife', for a more enlightened America whose women were now cognizant of their subordinate position thanks to tow decades of feminism. The promise keepers opposed to reproductive rights and homosexuality were making a big impact with men and their families, one gleaned something of the real objectives of the group from the following advice to his followers by promise keeper Tony Evans:

'The first thing you do is sit down with your wife and say something like this; Honey I've made a terrible mistake. I've given you my role. I gave up leading this family, and I forced you to take my place. Now I must reclaim that role'. Don't misunderstand what I am saying here. I'm not suggesting that you ask for your role back. I'm urging you to *take it back* ' (cited in Faludi 1999 p-229)

Also in the USA in the 1980's Robert Bly a leading exponent of the men's movement was noting his dismay at what he saw as the emergence of the sort male 'in American

society (Bly 1990 p-2). The feminist movement, Bly declared 'has laboured to breed the fierceness out of men' and the latter it seemed was embarking on a mission to breed the feminisation' out of them. At a seminar given by Bly to over 1,000 men in 1987, one man noted;

'Robert, when we tell women our desires they tell us we are wrong'.

Bly's response:

'So you bust them in the mouth' (cited in Faludi 1992 p-345)

Similarly in Britain, backlash advocates were suggesting that women were tired of having to 'lead' the family and wanted their men folk to take back control. David Thomas, a leading backlash proponent in the UK interviewed the renowned family therapist Dr Robin Skinner as part of his book 'Not Guilty, in defense of modern man'. Skinner who having agreed with Thomas's assertion that feminists are 'emotionally delinquent', went on to describe his work with families who were suffering the aftershock of feminism (Thomas 1993). These 'dysfunctional' families were ones where the father had stopped assuming an authoritative role and where the children (and presumably the wife) had become 'uncontrolled'. Therapy with such families, Skinner informed Thomas, would focus on reintroducing the man as head of the house. He describes this by saying:

'This would be achieved by egging the woman on (to goad her partner into) behaving like a man'.

Eventually, we are informed, the man would fight back;"

'There would often be a brief period of violence. He would hit her or she would hit him or throw plates their sex would improve because it became exciting at this point because she would be a match for him'. (ibid 1993 p-255).

Once again it was being proposed that women not only 'wanted' their men assuming full control at the helm of the household, but were also deliberately bringing their partners wrath to bear on themselves because they secretly loved it. Freudian theories of women's 'innate' masochism which supposedly explained why they ended up in violent relationships and which feminists were successfully managing to purge from text books on violence, were it seems, making a comeback.

Establishing the notion of male as oppressed - the case of the equally abusive woman.

While the lies of the backlash being spun by commentators like Farrell and Thomas have many themes, the one concerning interpersonal violence is specifically the focus for this thesis. A key strategy of the backlash is to establish in the mind set the notion of male oppression and female dominance. Backlash commentators attempt to reconfigure existing truths regarding male dominance (often in the most bizarre ways imaginable) and present them as evidence of men's oppression. Subsumed under this theme is a series of sub-themes, which many backlash proponents both here and elsewhere have argued in a similar fashion. They include the following; the 'feminism is to blame for male oppression' theme (which will be dealt with in more detail in chapter two); the 'women are equally as violent in interpersonal relationships as men' theme (this will be dealt with in more detail in chapter three); the 'men cannot help it

if they are better at violence' theme; the 'women's behaviour is comparable to men's use of violence' theme and lastly the 'violence against women statistics are greatly exaggerated' theme.

Women's bad behaviour is comparable to men's use of violence' theme.

Warren Farrell has much to say on the subject of rape. Rape he feels has everything to do with sexual attraction and little to do with abuse of power.

Is date rape a crime or a misunderstanding'? he asks (op cit p-225). Men are consistently being rejected by women and that hurts, Farrell laments. He believes that this is the reason men objectify women, not as feminists would have us believe, because it is easier to justify the rape and abuse of an object, but because 'it hurts *him* less to be rejected by an object' (op cit p-227)(emphasis added). Women, Farrell believes, are capable of behaviours towards men which are every bit as violating as rape is for a woman. These behaviours include; 'date robbery'; 'evenings of paying (for the date) to be rejected can feel like the male version of date rape', Farrell informs us; 'date fraud and lying, 'a woman who says 'no' (to sex) with her verbal language and 'yes' with her body language is committing date fraud'. (op cit pp227-229).

David Thomas also supports Farrell in his theories about rape. Most of Thomas's 'evidence' to support his claims throughout the book comes in the form of anecdotes. In relation to his rape thesis, Thomas's assertions about rape are arrived at on the basis of two stories. The first concerns 'a friend of a friend' who raped a woman at a party, having 'mistaken' her refusal to have sex as an indication that she actually did want intercourse. The man in question was jailed for two years. He compares this story to an incident concerning himself. He once, we are told, organised a party with the express intention of inviting an ex- girlfriend with whom he was still in love and wanted to rekindle a relationship. At the party they ended up in his bedroom and began to kiss. As things progressed a bit further the woman in question called a halt and said that she was seeing someone else and therefore did not want to continue. Thomas tells us that he was crestfallen. He asks the reader to consider whether it was fair for the man in the first story to be jailed for something which he did not know he was even guilty of doing, while the woman in the second story got off scott free for 'breaking' his heart (Thomas 1993 p-175). The following quote from Thomas, which sums up his assertions on rape, sounds eerily similar to the defence a rapist himself might use to justify his crime:

'Women can't be raunchy sex kittens on the one hand and delicate virgins on the other' (ibid p-186)

In the above skewed analogies, the bruised ego of the males is given parity with the bruised, battered, raped and violated body of the female. There is an interesting parallel here between the analogies used by the afore-mentioned authors and the ways in which perpetrators of violence towards intimate partners to justify their own behaviour, by similarly equating the less serious behaviour of their female partners with their own violence. As one perpetrator notes:

'Women can verbally abuse you. They can rip your clothes off without even touching you but but men don't. Well they weren't brought up to talk as much

as women do. So it was a resort to violence, if I couldn't get through to her by words' (Ptaeck 1988 p-145)

Similarly, the partner of Sandra Tobin who strangled her in 1996, used the following justification:

She went on and was telling me about x being her lover. Her nagging got to me she was giving me as much as I was giving her' (Irish Times, April 29th 1997)

It is also not uncommon for clinical literature to equate women's verbal aggressiveness with men's physical aggressiveness so that the significance of men's use of physical violence is given parity to a woman's use of verbal abuse. Deschner (1994), for example, notes the following:

'(husbands and wives) alternate between giving and getting punishment. After a period of abuse the wife rises up and scolds her husband or else withdraws from him. After tolerating her negatives for a period, he rises up again in another act of violence. Each partner periodically enjoys the reward of being on top' (cited in, Yllo 1988 p-153)

The 'men can't help it if they are better at violence than women' theme

David Thomas believes that the reason more men end up in prison than women is not because women are less criminally minded, but because men are more 'effective' at crime. By way of illustration he asks us to consider interpersonal violence. If a man hits a woman he is likely to do more harm, even if he did not start the argument. Women he feels however, are just as capable of 'wanting to inflict' and their desire to do harm is every bit as bad as actually doing harm.

In an interview with Emily O'Reilly, John Waters out lines this backlash logic. Waters while commenting on the numbers of women being killed by men in Ireland, notes this is due to the fact that men are stronger. O'Reilly sums up Waters logic as follows:

'men and women should share equal responsibility for initiating violent scenes or acts but men should not be demonized because, as a result of their superior strength, their infliction of violence is more likely to end up in serious injury or death than the violence inflicted by women'. (Sunday Business Post, March 18th 2001)

While on the one hand Waters seems assured of the murderous intent of *both* parties, he immediately undermines his own argument by noting:

'how can we ever know the dynamics of the relationship, or the interaction between male and female that resulted in death'. (ibid)

One wonders, in what instances a woman, aware of the greater physical strength of her male partner, would decide to take him on in one to one physical combat when the outcome would seem inevitable? Perhaps, when the woman in question is trying to defend herself from violence her partner has initiated?

The 'violence against woman statistics are exaggerated' theme

Minimising the *extent* of male violence is a theme also common to backlash authors and perpetrators of violence alike. While this theme will be looked at in more detail in chapter three, it is interesting to briefly examine how it is commonly argued by backlash commentators. John Waters, for example, in many of his articles on the subject of interpersonal violence, rejects any statistics on the extent of male violence issued by what he refers to as 'the domestic violence industry' which he infers is incapable of objective research on the subject. It is interesting, however, that credence is given to any woman, including feminists, which the backlash has managed to co-opt to its team. Faludi (1992) and Dworkin (1983) have both identified an important backlash tactic as being the recruiting of women to aid in attacking the cause for their own advancement. Erin Pizzey, and founder of the first women's refuge in the 70's, is happily fulfilling this role for the current backlash against the violence against women movement. Pizzey relentlessly quotes her 'findings' that of the first 100 women who used the refuge in Chiswick, 62 were as violent as the men they had left. Pizzey did not research this formally but arrived at the figure from her personal observations. Waters, however, has no doubt as to the veracity of her figures:

'since she has been working in the area of domestic abuse for nearly 30 years, he writes, 'I think it is fair to assume that she knows what she is talking about'.
(Opinion, Irish Times, January 12th 1999)

No such credence is given to groups who have been working on the issue for as long as Pizzey and who have used formal research methods to arrive at their figures regarding the extent and prevalence of domestic violence.

David Thomas also believes that statistics on the extent of male violence are 'inflated far beyond anything that was justified by the actual - as opposed to the claimed - evidence' (op cit p-124). In relation to figures for rapes committed, Thomas believes that most women who report a rape 'have an axe to grind' (op cit p-166). Thomas feels that the real likelihood of a woman being raped is slim. He believes that women should be more frightened about the prospect of getting breast cancer than worrying needlessly about the possibility of being a victim of rape.

Thomas also has something to say regarding the statistics on domestic violence. The 'evidence' we are offered by Thomas to substantiate his assertion that figures for domestic violence are widely exaggerated is that none of the men he knows - friends or colleagues - are capable of beating their wives or children. In one fell swoop Thomas dismisses the veracity of worldwide statistics on male violence against women and children, without any critique of any of this research. His one attempt to 'critique' the statistics on domestic violence does, however, deserve particular mention. In this instance Thomas begins by refuting a statistic quoted by Dr Rosalind Miles in her book *The Rites of Man*. Miles cites the findings of a study from the greater London area, attesting that more than 100,000 women per annum seek

treatment in London hospitals because of male violence. Thomas sets out to refute this. He asks Dr Hugh Millington, a consultant in the A&E in Charing Cross hospital, to give a rough estimate of the numbers of women coming into his hospital per year as a result of male violence. Mr Millington takes a stab that the figure could be 500 to 700. Thomas multiplies this figure by the number of hospitals in the greater London area (40) and declares triumphantly that as the figure is nowhere near 100,000 Miles must be incorrect.

The fallacy of Thomas's conclusion is apparent. World- wide research on the numbers of women accessing health services as a result of violence consistently finds, that significant numbers of abused women fail to be correctly identified by hospital staff. This is also the case in hospitals where staff have received training to identify women suffering domestic violence (Stark and Flitcraft (1996)). In one retrospective study for example, researchers examining the charts of females who had attended the A&E of one hospital in the US, found that for every one woman that practitioners correctly identified, there were 10 women who were not identified (Kurtz and Stark 1988). Furthermore, this was a hospital where staff had received training in the identification of women experiencing abuse. If one were to adopt Thomas's 'research' method using the results of *this* study, then Mr Millington would be failing to identify 10 women for every 1 woman he was successfully identifying- putting the 'actual' figure at 5000 - 7000. This figure multiplied by the 40 hospitals in the greater London area gives us a much greater figure than the 100,000 put forward by Miles. For one to extrapolate such a figure from the latter research would, however, be as erroneous as employing Thomas's method.

Looking beyond backlash rhetoric.

For as long as women have had a voice to air their concerns about being subordinated within a patriarchal society, it seems there has been an inevitable counteraction. Susan Faludi in 'Backlash', adroitly exposes the hypocrisy of the backlash, whose proponents on the one hand dismiss feminism as old hat and a failure for women yet on the other hand attest that feminist supremacists are about to seize power. The counteraction to the gains made by women in the decades preceding the so-called second wave of feminism is, however, hardly novel. As Faludi remarks:

Fear of feminism is a sort of perpetual viral condition in our culture, it is not always in an acute stage: its symptoms subside and resurface periodically'.
(Faludi 1992 p-13)

Feminist commentators on the backlash have argued that men's liberationists like Farrell, supported the original demands of feminism only as a self-serving exercise. Farrell, and more recently Waters in Ireland, seem to consider that feminism should also be responsible for 'liberating' men. Waters notes in this regard:

We took feminism at face value, imagining that it would liberate us also from some of the responsibility of providing and enable us to live more fulfilled lives in harmony with women and children (Waters, Opinion, Irish Times, May 4th 1999).

Florence Rush writing on the backlash, wonders if feminists were perhaps supposed to liberate' men from having to pay alimony and child support once women were co-opted into the workforce; or perhaps feminism was to 'liberate' men from having to negotiate sexual access to women once women were empowered to be sexually in control. Certainly the following quote from Farrell indicates that some pro-feminist men were not supporting the feminist cause out of the goodness of their hearts:

'Men cannot be expected to participate in these changes unless women's liberation is re-defined as a two-sex movement which provides enough benefits for men to make the change worthwhile' (cited in Rush 1990 p-167)

The anti-feminist virus has long since reached American shores where second wave feminism first made inroads. The backlash's Irish incarnation focused primarily on the area of reproductive rights and more recently on the issue of interpersonal violence within the nuclear family. The latter focus is perhaps a reaction to the relatively recent successes of Irish feminist organisations such as Women's Aid, who have succeeded in putting male violence against women on the public and political agenda. It seems hardly surprising then, that the current anti-feminist backlash in Ireland is being primarily articulated through the phenomenon of interpersonal violence. As Monica O Connor, Research and Policy Officer with Women's Aid notes:

'The agenda (of the backlash) is to attack feminism and violence against women just happens to be articulated by an Irish organisation that most articulates feminism' (interview with O'Connor June 2001)

Political scientists Lipset and Raab have defined backlash politics as:

'The reaction by groups which are declining in a felt sense of importance, influence and power' (cited in Faludi op cit 1992 p-260).

Certainly when attempting to look beyond the rancour of backlash texts to their underlying meaning, what seems to be evident is an anger at the loss of positions of privilege and power which are no longer being automatically afforded the male. Within the family especially, men are increasingly losing their positions of authority evidenced by women's increasing autonomy; increasingly households are being headed by women parenting alone, more women than men are instigating divorce petitions in the USA and the UK and women no longer see themselves destined for a life of motherhood and homemaking to the exclusion of career choices in the world of work.

Individual commentators also seem to have personal axes to grind in their war against feminism. Media commentators, for example, have noted John Waters sense of personal disenchantment regarding his ongoing battle with Sinéad O'Connor for custody of their daughter. Waters seems to blame feminism for men's diminished role as fathers in the lives of their children, roles which Waters feels men never abandon by choice, but rather are forced to give up 'unless mothers see fit to decree' otherwise (Opinion, Irish Times, Oct 6th 1998). Waters seems to have jumped on the violence against men bandwagon primarily to champion the issue of father's rights. The first AMEN conference in 1998, for example, was chaired by Waters. Although the

conference was addressing violence against men, Waters keynote address never once mentions domestic violence, but refers throughout to fathers loss of parenting rights. The following quote is indicative of Waters personal issues coming to the fore:

'People say I'm angry. Well they have only seen me on my good days! If you are not going to be angry when your children are stolen, when in the name of God are you going to be angry' (AMEN conference papers p-5 (1998), CD ROM 'It's also a crime to beat a man ')

Because feminism can take much of the credit for men's diminished power within the nuclear family, it seems logical that the backlash prioritises the undermining of feminism as key objective. Faludi (1992) has cogently demonstrated how the backlash in the US was directly related to the perceived threat which feminism posed to the traditional nuclear family and more significantly to men's diminishing authoritative role therein.

I will outline in chapter three how feminism has traditionally brought its political lens to bear on the nuclear family as a primary cite of women's oppression. Backlash proponents prefer to propose that the traditional nuclear family structure is a 'naturally' occurring phenomenon much in the same way as they view gender roles, thus making feminist challenges to its operation seem unreasonable and that anything outside the norm of the traditional nuclear family structure is an aberration. John Waters, for example, deliberately canvasses the homophobic vote to advance his thesis regarding feminism's intent regarding the family. He writes:

'Under the new Gender Agenda of Big Mac feminism, a 'family' can be two gays, a dog and somebody else's child.' (Features, Irish Times Oct 14th 2000)

Similarly, Erin Pizzey, a keen supporter of AMEN and a speaker at their conference, in a rather self-aggrandising piece attacking feminist critiques of the nuclear family, writes:

'Those of us who believe that the family is the cornerstone of any civilisation are embattled with feminist forces that seek to destroy the role of men in the lives of women and children. In 1971 I opened the first shelter for victims of domestic violence in the world. The feminist movement hungry for funds and public recognition hijacked *my* movement and turned it into a war against men a traditional family, the biological mother and father under one roof with their children, offers those children the best possible chance of becoming healthy, loving law abiding adults. (Pizzey 1997)(emphasis added)

In reading the above one would be forgiven for thinking that Pizzey has forgotten that the women she set up the refuge to assist in the instance, were fleeing male violence which was being neatly hidden within the 'traditional' family she now lauds. Anthony Clare, author of 'Masculinity in Crisis' believes that it is not so - interview with journalist Katherine Holmquist he notes:

'The decline of the traditional nuclear family represents one of the less recognised but arguably the most significant of all the threats to phallic superiority' (Holmquist, Irish Times, Thursday 14th Oct 2000)

Summary

The emergence of the backlash on violence against women seems to be a direct result of men's loss of power within the private sphere. Rather than explicitly state this motivation, however, backlash proponents use the clever tactic of reconfiguring language originally adopted by feminism to explain women's subordination, to position men as the new oppressed. Thus men are described as the 'disposable sex' and male liberationists like Farrell, describe themselves as 'masculists'. The primary objective which is to attack and undermine feminism, however is never far from the surface.

Chapter two; The underlying aim of the backlash against violence - undermining feminism.

'Rise up and smash the feminist oppressor pig' (Glen R Burger, contributor to the AMEN guest book - web site www.amen.ie)

'Feminism is perhaps the most reactionary force in our society, the proper course for anyone seeking to promote truly progressive ideas is to attack it without qualification.' (Waters, Opinion, Irish Times 4th May 1999)

The backlash against the violence against women movement in Ireland, like its counterparts in the US, Britain and the rest of Europe, has gone hand in hand with a backlash against feminism and feminist organisations working to address the issue of male violence. This chapter sets out to examine the nature of the anti-feminist backlash in Ireland; the language and imagery invoked by commentators regarding the nature of feminism; the ways in which a feminist approach to violence is undermined, together with some possible explanations for the need to particularly undermine a feminist analysis of male violence.

Undermining feminist analyses of male violence.

It seems logical that a primary tactic of supporters of the backlash on violence should be the undermining of feminist analyses of patriarchy and the consequent power afforded to all men. The women's movement has successfully demonstrated that men are socialised to dominance and consequently hold the reigns of power in every societal institution using violence to maintain and reinforce that power. This undermines the suggestion that large numbers of men are silently suffering at the hands of abusive female intimates. It is useful, therefore, to examine the ways in which proponents of the backlash in Ireland attempt to undermine the violence against women movement in this regard.

Second wave feminists were not the first to 'discover' male violence against women in intimate relationships but were the first activists to propose the notion that gender roles ascribed differential power to men and women. Radical feminist activists in particular, articulated the ways in which 'power' is ascribed to the construction of masculine identity and that the maintenance of this power over women through the use of violence and subordination is legitimised by every societal institution; exemplified by the absence of any real sanctioning of abusive men or any substantial form of protection and support for women by the state, Brownmiller (1976), Hanmer (1978), Dobash and Dobash (1979) and Mc Kinnon (1987). Mc Kinnon, went further with her thesis on the construction of gender, she argued that inequalities between genders was in fact sexualised and that gender was the sexualisation of inequality between men and women

A crucial thesis of a gender approach to violence against women, not only examines the ways in which gender roles are constructed but also how societal institutions reinforce stereotypical messages regarding men and women's roles. Women traditionally, for example, were conditioned for motherhood and marriage. Feminism challenged the idea that motherhood is women's inevitable destiny and that women's only role lay in domestic servitude. At the same time feminist activists also

challenged society's valorisation of male strength and violence. Activists such as Enloe (1983) and Brownmiller (1976) exposed the ways in which the glorification of male violence through militarization, song, film and poetry was contributing to the normalisation of rape and abuse of women by men both in the public and private sphere. These challenges both to women's confinement within the home and to men's use of violence, posed a direct challenge to men's authority in the private sphere which like women's domestic role was seen as 'natural' or innate. Feminists also cogently argued that society colludes to reinforce women's dependency on men within the nuclear family, most notably with regard to economic dependence which is regularly cited by women as a major barrier to leaving a violent partner (Pleck 1983) (Kelleher and Associates and O'Connor 1995).

This approach, one could argue, is considerably more uncomfortable for society. Rather than individualising the problem of domestic violence, which is a feature of psychological and pathological approaches, a gender approach politicises the issue of male violence. It thus calls into question relations between *all* men and women and not only those where abuse of women is an issue. Where feminist approaches to male violence have been most challenging, is in highlighting that while not *all* women directly experience abuse by a male intimate and not *all* men use abuse against a female intimate, nonetheless, all men benefit from a system that perpetuates female subordination and all women subsequently suffer - either directly or indirectly. Backlash proponents, therefore, tactically must undermine the notion of gender roles being socially constructed if they are to convince society of two things, firstly that feminists inaccurately portray discrimination and abuse of women as a patriarchal conspiracy and secondly that it is in fact men who constitute society's oppressed. As Sue Oakley notes, in this regard:

'If it was women who posed the question that gender was devised to explain, then it would be logical to suppose that any move to do away with women as the problem would have to also take on gender. Such a strategy is an important weapon in the current armoury of the backlash... Backlash texts... return us to a world of naive understandings about the origins of social differences between men and women' (Oakley 1997 p-33)

This naivet Oakley refers to is evident in some of the current writings by backlash of proponents in Ireland at present. Kevin Myers, for example in an article attacking feminism, writes of gender roles:

'Most men are not homemakers and you can't socially engineer them into being such. Motherhood is as natural to most women as competition and contest is for most men' (Myers, Irishman's Diary, May 25th2000)

John Waters similarly, in an attempt to dismiss the notion that masculinity is a social construct, confuses the difference between 'sex' and 'gender':

It goes without saying that masculinity is not a 'social construct' at all. (Are beards and bald patches socially constructed?)' (Features, Irish Times Oct 14th 2000)

Waters goes on to suggest that if in fact masculinity *is* socially constructed then women are responsible for its construction. By way of explanation he offers the following simplistic thesis:

'(women) who in selecting men to be their mates and the fathers of their children, and in nurturing and rearing those children, play the most fundamental role in the definition of male identities' (ibid)

It is arguable that the above might be a more accurate reflection of what occurs in the animal kingdom, but hardly accounts for the socialisation of humans who are subjected to a whole plethora of influences which are saturated with images of the dominant male, including; the media, popular culture, education, religion, peer group, family beliefs and traditions.

Irish proponents of the backlash have been most vociferous in their repudiation of feminist critiques of gender roles and how dominant forms of masculinity in particular, have been instrumental in perpetuating male violence against women. This has been particularly played out in relation to the 'Exploring Masculinities' programme, introduced by the Department Of Education for transition year male students. The programme is designed to promote the personal development of young men and covers a range of topics including: sport, relationships, health and sexuality, men and power, violence against women and men and children. Proponents of the backlash, most noticeably AMEN and John Waters, have taken considerable exception to the programme and its alleged hidden feminist agenda. The aforementioned seem to have two main concerns with the programme; firstly, that it is a vehicle to supplant feminist ideology in the minds of young men. In relation to the issue of violence, this 'ideology' supposedly demonizes all men because of the actions of a recalcitrant few. Secondly, there is a concern that the programme sets out to emasculate the male in its attempts to deconstruct masculinity. In regard to the latter, what follows are some of the issues raised:

'The exploring masculinities is an attempt to deconstruct and reconstruct men and masculinity...it *falsely* portrays men as violent and abusive and women as victims of an oppressive male patriarchy. ' (Mary Cleary- AMEN, Irish Times Letters October 2000) (emphasis added)

In another letter to the Times by Cleary in the same month, in a barely concealed swipe at feminists writes:

'It is totally unacceptable in an alleged free society, that the Department of Education should give any small exclusive group the power to' change how men and masculinity are constructed' to comply with their ulterior agenda under the guise of stopping violence. The so-called Exploring Masculinities programme is a form of eugenics in disguise. The Minister has no mandate... to introduce this neo -Nazi experiment into our schools' (Mary Cleary- AMEN, Letters, Times October 2000)

and another commentator notes:

'More seriously still is the "fundamental premise" of the programme that "masculinity is a social construct", a core belief of radical feminism which is clearly taken as proven... it's a grievously misguided attempt at social engineering based on offensive feminist dogmas about the nature of masculinity' (Brian O'Higgins, Letters, Irish Times Oct 15th 2000)

Backlash proponents like Higgins above, seem to labour under the illusion that feminists invented the term 'gender' as a means of 'de-constructing' the male. In fact psychologists as far back as the 1930's were using the term to describe differences between men and women that could not simply be ascribed to biology (Oakley 1997). Feminists may have well been the first to name the power differential that gender ascribes, however anthropologists and sociologists for decades have outlined the huge influence the environment has on shaping our identities as males and females. In a letter to the Irish Times, refuting Waters ideas about masculinity being innate, Kevin Donegan writes:

If Mr Waters doesn't understand that 'attachment to certain life roles is 'socially constructed' perhaps he needs to look at who cleans the toilets in his favourite restaurant' (Letters, Times, Feb 17th 01).

Harry Ferguson, Professor of Social Policy at UCD and a contributor to the 'Exploring Masculinities Programme', in a letter to the Times, attempts to address this issue by responding specifically to Mary Cleary of AMEN. With regard to Cleary's criticism of the programmes attempts to deconstruct masculinity, he writes:

'The supreme irony of her (Cleary's) rejection of the programme is that the struggle for men to be seen as victims of anything, or as vulnerable in any way, arises from how the dominant construction of masculinity says that males must always be strong, competitive, aggressive, never seek help or show their true feelings. Changing how men and masculinity are constructed is what stopping violence and reaching victims has to be all about' (Letters, Irish Times, October 5th 2000)

Ferguson neatly sums up what feminists have in fact argued for decades, namely that is not innate to men, but rather is a construct; the ying to the passive yang of femininity which allows patriarchy to flourish. This, one can argue, while holding dual men responsible for their actions also allows for the possibility of societal and dual change. Viewing traditional masculinity and male aggression as innate, however, does little more than tacitly allow men to continue using violence as an inevitable by product of masculinity, which they can hardly be held accountable for increasingly, as feminism has helped to free women from traditional notions of femininity being associated with passivity, this has forced an inevitable shift regarding masculinity as also being perceived. In 'masculinities and violence' Lee Bowker outlines her thesis on the reluctance of patriarchy to reconfigure existing notions of masculinity:

'we tend to search for the timeless and eternal during moments of crisis, those points of transition when old definitions are yet to be firmly established' (ibid 1998 p-120)

It is no coincidence that anti-feminist commentators are eager to recapitulate to earlier when traditional hegemonic forms of masculinity were accepted as a given. Thus we have Robert Bly in the US calling for men to locate their 'wild man' and get in touch with their 'fierceness' (Bly op cit 1990). In Ireland, John Waters also seems to be at pains to preserve dominant forms of masculinity. In his attack on the masculinities programme he writes:

'This (programme) is not about making men more aware of their masculinity, but about eliminating existing/traditional forms of masculinity from coming generations...the approach is as if to "empower" the most weedy, unathletic boy in the class and bring the rest down to his level' (Waters, Features, Irish Times, Oct 14th 2000) (authors emphasis)

The irony of the above statement is not lost when one considers the extent to which Waters has written about the plight of male victims; of suicide, ill health, and domestic violence. Surely then, it is the cause of the 'weedy, unathletic' boy that Waters should in fact be championing.

The language and imagery of anti-feminist backlash

The language and imagery evoked by Irish backlash commentators to describe and indeed decry feminism is very similar in tone and nature to its American and UK counterparts. One woman in a letter to the Irish Times on John Waters continuous attacks on feminism, describes his tone as 'fems under the beds rhetoric' (Meade, Letters, Irish Times 8/Jan/2001). The latter description is indeed apt, since much of the language is paranoid in, and descriptive of a pervasive and imminent feminist super power about to befall the State. John Waters in particular has painted a picture of a silently advancing hoard of man-hating feminists ready to purge all opponents once the reigns of power have been seized. Feminists are described as 'sly' and 'self-serving' (Opinion 18th Dec 2000). He refers to 'multinational feminism spreading its tentacles around the globe' (Features, Oct 14th 2000), to 'feminazism' (Opinion, June 8th 1999) as 'system' which our 'political leaders live in fear of' (Opinion May 4th 1999). He paints an absurd picture of a fearful government kow-towing to the demands of feminism, absurd when one considers our present government where only 5 out of 32 elected TD's are women, or when one considers other positions of power, namely the Civil Service where 96% of secretary grades - the highest posts - are held by men (IPA 1999). In his descriptions of the supposed imminent feminist State, Waters writes:

The men who run the Irish Times... are the last generations of men in power...They imagine these years of appeasement will prompt the new regime to grant them leniency, for are they not the 'good' men the 'nice' men the 'progressive' men? I wish them well. (Opinion, Irish Times, 17th Feb 1998)

And:

'Feminism has opted to settle for temporary power sharing, with a view to eventual supremacy. Feminist have no ambitions for the lives of men other than they be ground into the dust of history' (Opinion, Irish Times, May 4th 1999)

Anti-feminists have gladly jumped on Waters coat tails, using the latter's rancour as a

springboard for their own paranoid suppositions about feminism. One man writing to the Irish Independent clearly shares Waters fears of an imminent feminist Super State:

'Women's groups appear to be seeking a status of total dominance over men in the legal, workplace and social arenas, with men forming an underclass like (formerly) Catholics in Northern Ireland, Jewish people in Nazi Germany and non-white people in South Africa' (Paula Lynch; Letters Irish Independent, July 6th 1999)

Mr Lynch gives no substance, however, to his claim than women's group are seeking total dominance with the exception of a strange assertion that 'erotic fashion designs are aimed at men to make them compliant, and men should know that . Lynch, however, fails to point out that fashion designers who find success in today's world are overwhelmingly male not female. Another letter writer to the Independent notes:

After more than thirty years of feminism we have seen the introduction of feminist equality legislation, the creation of a feminist family law system and an ever expanding state financed feminist academic propaganda machine... feminism has become a tyranny' (Peter Farrell, Letters, Irish Independent 22nd Aug 1999)

Mr. Farrell fails to elaborate on how exactly our family law system is feminist. Since the creation of legislation and education has traditionally been the monopoly of men, it is interesting that any move for the voice of women to be considered is not only seen as threatening but is immediately labelled 'feminist'. Ironically, if one were to substitute the word male instead of feminist in the above quotes, one would have an apt description of our present socio-political climate in the Western world which is almost completely dominated by men, as the following figures affirm:

- Presently, Irish women constitute a mere 2% of senior management in semi-State bodies. (IPA 1999)
- Of the 32 TDs in the Irish Government only 5 are women (IPA 1999).
- In 1995 women constituted 82% of clerical assistants and 79% of clerical officers in the Civil Service; the lowest grades. Men, on the other hand, constituted 94% of assistant secretaries and 96% of secretaries; the two highest grades. (O'Connor 1998)
- Presently in Ireland there are 23 high court judges, only 3 of whom are women (IPA 1999)
- Of the 12 main Irish newspapers, none has a female editor. (IPA 1999)
- Women constitute a mere 8% of the Garda. (IPA 1999)
- Although women constitute 75% of Primary school teachers, they only hold 45% of principle posts.

- Although women constitute the vast majority of midwives the senior positions obstetrician and gynaecologist are male dominated: 90 out of 108 posts. (Irish Directory 1998-99)
- Rubery et al (1995) noted that 84% of Irish men interviewed said they did no domestic work (cited in O'Connor 1998)

Globally, the picture is not a great deal brighter:

- In at least 19 countries worldwide at present, women must have permission from their husband, father or a male guardian in order to get a passport or travel abroad. (Seager 1997 p-28)
- In at least 30 countries worldwide between 700 - 1,000 women die in childbirth per 100,000 live births (ibid 1997 p-46)
- In 1996 only 6 heads of government worldwide were women and in 59 countries not one cabinet position is held by a woman. (ibid 1997 p-90).
- Although Women produce about 2 thirds of the worlds food, they own only 1% of the world's land (Williams and Mwua (1994))

The list is inexhaustible.

There have, however, been many reactions to the backlash to refute its suppositions of a coup. One individual, responding to Waters and in particular to the latter's call for a Commission on the status of men' to be established, writes:

'To call for this (commission) implies a defensive body to protect men's superior standing. Any privileged group which is undergoing erosion of its privileges tends to protest that the pendulum had swung too far when it has barely moved. So it is with many men.' (Ken Keable, Letters, Times, 23rd Jan 1998)

Keable may be closer to the truth than he knows as the following quote from a piece by Waters on male suicide illustrates:

Young women are now offered multiple lifestyle choices between career and motherhood, workplace and home. Young men are told that they must make way for their hitherto disadvantaged sisters and... forego the primal joy of fatherhood if that is what their womenfolk decide.' (Jan 13th 1998).

Here Waters not only seems resentful of the advances women have made thanks to feminism, but attempts to attribute the rise in male suicide directly to women's increased equal status. In another letter refuting Water's attacks on feminism, Maighread Medbh writes:

Men have had very effective systems of organisation and association; women have begun only in this century and with great difficulty, either to become part of these systems or to establish their own... If feminists oppose John Waters I suspect it is because of his marked misogynist tone and his sweeping

imputations of a united pernicious feminist intent. '(Letters, Irish Times, Oct 13th 1998)

The anti-woman language of the backlash

Anti-feminism is a direct expression of misogyny: it is the political defense of women hating' (Dworkin 1983 p-195)

When one considers the aspirations of the feminist movement, which are to advocate for equality on behalf of women, it seems difficult to imagine a repudiation of such a movement as anything other than misogyny. Andrea Dworkin believes that 'feminism is hated because women are hated' (p-195 *ibid*). Certainly, Irish feminists commenting on the current backlash are in no doubt about the misogynist tone of backlash writings. Susan Mc Kay writing on the first AMEN conference wonders why a conference about domestic violence should be 'so anti-woman' (Sunday Tribune April 2 2000). Similarly, Nuala O'Faolain was moved to write an article expressing concern at the level of anti-feminist and misogynist sentiment being expressed by Waters and Kevin Myers. She notes:

the slow and uneven progress of women towards anything like equality of opportunity is in part explained by the deep, strong undertow of fear and resentment which John Waters and Kevin Myers both wittingly and unwittingly articulate' (Irish Times Magazine, Dec 9th '00)

Waters in a reply to O'Faolain, attempts to defend his attacks on feminism and counter the charge that he is anti-woman. He notes:

I have never made generalisations about women in the way O'Faolain has, I am unaware of using feminist as a 'curse word'. I do not believe that my writing has been rancorous or venomous towards women' (Opinion, Dec 18th '00).

Many readers of Waters columns would, however, beg to differ. His references to 'feminist as feminazis' is hardly flattering and he has indeed made generalisations about women that one could well counter as misogynist. In an article criticising Princess Diana, in what could only be described as a markedly misogynist tone, notes:

'Princess Diana was an icon to a particular form of female self-indulgence she was the personification that women have a divine right to perfect happiness (Opinion, Irish Times, Sept 1st 1998).

Similarly in an article about male homelessness Waters launches an attack on women parenting alone:

the fact that an adult has care of a child means that he or she is likely to be moved up the queue for housing. The fact that mostly this means women... it is clear that children, in this context, function as a 'resource' to be used to put roofs, over their mothers heads. (Opinion, Oct 12th '99)

In another clearly misogynist article, Waters urges readers to purchase a book by Rich Zubaty called 'What men know that women don't know' (Opinion, Feb 6th 2001). 'I have seen the future and his name is Rich Zubaty' Waters enthuses. 'Unlike feminist tracts' we are informed, 'Zubaty seeks to prove his contentions with facts and analysis and hard-earned experience'. This 'hard-earned experience' is presumably the fact that Zubaty spent several years of fighting false charges of abusing his children' (ibid). Zubatys contentions include the following; 'men have deeper feelings than women. Women are not oppressed. Women are the cause of war' and that 'feminism annihilates love'. Waters even assists by giving us the online address where we can purchase the book. This author accessed the said web site which advertises another book by Zubaty with the dubious title; 'Surviving the Feminization of America; how to keep women from ruining your life.' The footnote of web page carries a large font banner that tells the reader; 'It s OK to be a man'.

Summary

It is interesting to note how threatened backlash commentators appear to be at the modest gain of feminism. The tone of the above texts are indeed deeply paranoid and misogynist and certainly appear to derive from a perceived loss of power to women in arena. Backlash attempts to critique feminist analyses of violence and how men are socialised to violence, are both simplistic and contradictory. Insisting, for example that traditional masculine traits be lauded and preserved and that the 'weedy unathletic boy' be looked down upon, hardly sits well with their supposed aim of supporting the male victim. More significant, however, is the attempts by the backlash to demonise feminists in an attempt to further isolate women from the movement which seeks to advance the cause for their equality. One woman writing to the Times is, however in no doubt as to the importance of feminism in its continued struggle to promote equal rights for Irish women:

'Ireland is a depressing country for women...Men are so unconscious of their privilege; sexism and social conditioning have the deepest roots imaginable. Feminism must continue to light the way for both sexes into the new millennium' (M.T Walsh, Letters, Irish Times October 1998)

Chapter three; refuting the 'symmetry of violence' argument proposed by the backlash.

'We need at some point to make it completely socially unacceptable to accuse men of sexually abusing their children, of domestic abuse, when in fact there is no evidence' (Erin Pizzey, address to the AMEN conference (1998), Conference Papers p-10 AMEN CD Rom)

This chapter will examine the evidence put forward to propose the notion of a parity of violence between men and women in intimate relationships and will offer refutations of research being used to suggest that men are *equally* victimised by women in intimate relationships. It will critique some of the ideas put forward by the key-players, in relation the nature of this newly emerging phenomenon of the battered male and how such a phenomenon compares with the systematic abuse of women and its meaning within a patriarchal society.

One of the often-quoted tenants by supporters of the parity of violence thesis, is that women are equally violent to their male partners in an intimate relationship. (George 1996) (Straus, Gelles and Steinmetz 1981) (Thomas 1993) (Steinmetz 1977). Referring to the AMEN conference in 2000, 'Its Also A Crime To Beat A Man', Waters notes:

'contrary to the propaganda suggesting that 95% of perpetrators are male, domestic violence breaks down 50-50 in terms of gender...That men and women are equal in their darkness is in its own way as challenging to the psychic integrity of society as the idea that fellow humans exterminated six million Jews' (Opinion, Irish Times, 17th April 2000).

The reason men do not report their violent partners to the extent that women report male violence it is suggested, is due to the greater shame and stigma men experience by being abused by a woman. The latter being assumed rather than having been arrived at from the basis of research undertaken. Mary Cleary of AMEN notes:

A senior Garda asked (Cleary) why are the men not coming forward? I had to brief him on the obstacles and the barriers, the disbelief and the ridicule that these men may experience when attempting to report an incident (Silence is Over Conference papers 1998 op cit p-57)

In 1999 AMEN carried out research to determine the extent of domestic violence perpetrated by women on their male partners (AMEN 1999). The study was funded by Combat Poverty and Peace and Reconciliation and was launched at an AMEN conference the same year. Respondents were a self-selected sample who responded to newspaper ads, local radio ads and public meetings held in the North Eastern region. In the findings we are informed that the survey was limited to 40 respondents due to the limited resources available to AMEN .The findings were as follows:

- 100% of the men said they had experienced some form of mental abuse. The main types experienced being; 'partner told lies about them' and 'partner claimed to be a victim'.
- 72% said they had experienced physical abuse.

- 77% said they responded to violent incidences by walking away and 15% said they 'pushed' their partner away.
- 72% said they never received any medical treatment as a result of an assault.

Regarding their reasons for not leaving, the respondents reported the following:

- fears for the children's safety (69%).
- financial issues (59%).
- fear of losing contact with children (59 %).
- did not realise they were in fact being abused (27%).
- Still loved partner (27%).

Interestingly, 'fear for their own safety' or 'threat of further violence' did not factor as a reason why the men did not leave. Perhaps the most telling finding in the survey, is the fact that 57% of respondents said that their partners had been granted barring orders against them through the courts. This is however, presented as an example of the *woman's* abusive behaviour; making false allegations against her partner.

The meaning of abuse for women.

What is particularly notable when one examines the literature by supporters of the battered male phenomenon, is the lack of attention paid to the socio-political and cultural meaning attached to violent acts perpetrated by men on women and women on men. Violence is thus reduced to what one person does to the other irrespective of the gender of the victim and perpetrator and whether this affords the act any meaning. This has led to groups like AMEN calling for the problem of intimate partner violence to be seen not as a gender issue but a social one (Cleary op cit p-56). It is however, of vital importance to ask the question; do men and women attach the same meaning and significance to issues of personal safety and bodily integrity? And if not then why is that so?

Since men seem to have the monopoly on violence in every social arena; the street, the football terraces, the pub, and so on, why, one might ask, should the home be any different? In Ireland, for example the percentage of women convicted for crimes of violence against the person constitutes a tiny percentage of the total of female convictions (most of which are for property crimes such as theft) and is in decline. In 1997 the rate was 3% of all female convictions, in 1983 it was 2.3% and in 1991 the figure was .6% (O'Mahony 1995 p-61). Men on the other hand, are socialised to violence, with physical strength and aggression seen as part and parcel of hegemonic forms of masculine identity (Kaufman and Brod (1994) Bowker(1998) Yllo and Bograd (1988) Stanko (1995)). Women's rights activists the world over and results from crime victimisation surveys have for decades highlighted the extent to which this violence is directed at women. When one examines the extent of male violence against women worldwide, women it seems, have good reason to be concerned:

- Every year an estimated 310,000 women are raped in the USA (Seager 1997 p-56).
- Random sample surveys estimate the prevalence of domestic violence against women to be -20% in Holland, 25% in Canada, 33% in Mexico, 22% in New Zealand 25% in Norway, 58% in Japan, 60% in Chile (Heise 1994 pp6-10). In the UK the estimated figure is 25% (Mooney 1993) and in Ireland 18% (O' Connor and Kelleher 1995).
- In the USA approximately 4,000 women are murdered per year. Approximately 70% of those murders are committed by male intimates (Bureau Of Justice Statistics 1994)
- In India approximately 5,000 women are killed every year in 'Dowry related murders' (Heyzler 2000)
- In Rwanda approximately 15,000 women were raped as a weapon of war in a one - year period (ibid)
- In one study in an Indian abortion clinic of 8,000 fetuses aborted 7,999 were female (Heise et al 1994)
- The UN estimates that globally each year, about 4 million people are trafficked for the purposes of slavery, prostitution and forced labour. The vast majority of these are women and girls and the sanctions for traffickers are less serious than for the trafficking of arms or drugs (Coalition against trafficking in women 2001)

Violence, therefore affects females extensively and throughout the life cycle and it would seem from statistics that women are navigating a world where men are either their abusers or their protectors. Individually women learn to negotiate their safety on a daily basis and regularly cite it as a main preoccupation. MATCH a Canadian organisation working in developing countries listed male violence as the number one concern for women (Heise 1994). At a 12 country workshop in China, women unanimously named 'fear of men's violence' as the worst of being female (ibid p-4). In a survey of 2,270 Korean women, 40% said they felt 'extremely uneasy' about the threat of sexual assault and restricted their movements accordingly (ibid p-25)

Stanko (1990), in her investigations into violence, found that men and women define safety differently. She refers to 5 victimisation studies carried out in the UK between 1978 and 1985. In those studies men reported feeling safe walking alone at night and when they thought about safety were inclined to think about physical safety and threats to their property. 13% of the men as opposed to 48% of the women reported feeling unsafe in such situations. The men also (correctly) perceived other men as being the greatest risk to their safety. The women on the other hand describing threat to their physical safety were very much concerned with the threat of sexual assault and rape as a main threat to their physical safety. Stanko also cites 'fear of crime' surveys in the USA which indicated that 10% of men and 48% of women adapted their behaviour because of perceived threats to their e.g. not walking on particular streets or staying home to avoid risks (ibid p-122) what the researchers also noted in these studies was that men who had been physically assaulted were very surprised at the realisation that

they could not take their safety for granted women on the other hand were not surprised.

'worry about personal safety' Stanko notes, is one way women articulate being female (bid p-122)

The supreme irony is that the very men are encouraged to believe will protect them (an intimate partner), in fact the greatest risk to their safety. Society, however, consistently promotes the idea that women are not at risk from the men they know but from strangers. Stanko (1990) points for example to a UK Home Office crime prevention campaign aimed at woman. This campaign costing millions promoted only the risks women experience on the streets and from strangers and made no mention of either sexual violence or the greater risk women face at home from their own partners.

The women's movement has been instrumental in articulating the ways in which male violence against women has a particular objective; the subordination and control of women (Stanko (1995) Kelly (1998) Dobash and Dobash (1992) Dobash and Dobash (1998) Hammer and Maynard (1987) Mc Kinnon (1983) Pence (1987) Yllo and Bograd (1988)). Bograd articulates how this form of power operated both on social level and individually between intimates:

'Our society is structured along the lines of gender. Men as a class wield power over women. As the dominant class, men have differential access to important material and symbolic resources, while women are devalued as secondary and inferior. Although important social class and race differences exist among men, all men can potentially use violence as a powerful means of subordinating women wife abuse reinforces women's passivity and dependence as men exert their rights to authority and control. The reality of domination at the social level is the most crucial factor in maintaining wife abuse at the personal level' (Yllo and Bograd 1988 p-14)

Male violence against a female intimate is very much, therefore, layered with meaning. Rather than it being the aberrant behaviour of a few violent men, it is rooted in social and cultural patterns linked to men's domination, control and aggression. Such violence is systemic in that it is reinforced by societal institutions, political, social and cultural. This imparts particular socio-political and cultural meaning to the abuse women experience by a male intimate, which does not hold true for men who may experience abuse by a female.

Marriage and female subordination

Feminist activists have pointed to the institution of marriage as a legitimising factor of male control over women who historically were viewed as the 'chattel' or property of the man. As early as the mid 1800's feminists were identifying the family as a major cite of women's oppression. In 1870 in the US Elizabeth Cady Stanton in her lecture 'marriage and divorce', outlined that women's victimisation at the hands of their husbands arose out of the latter's ownership of his wife as property (Pleck 1987). In Massachusetts, for example 19th century law decreed that a husband could punish his wife and children at home since:

'the husband and father was the highest ranking figure in the household. Only he could act on the basis of authority delegated by the State' (ibid p-25)

An English contemporary of Stanton, Frances Power Cobbe, wrote a piece entitled 'wife torture in England', to lobby parliament for greater economic remuneration for women who need to divorce abusive husbands. Cobbe was castigated as a threat to the family and the institution of marriage.

The fact that rape within marriage only constituted a criminal offence in Ireland as recently as 1991, is indicative of this power afforded to husbands. Catherine Ross (1991) in her study on marriage and the sense of control, found that marriage significantly affects women's perceived sense of autonomy in a way that does not hold true for married men. In her interviews in 1985 with 803 randomly selected individuals, she found the following: ranked from a low sense of control to a high sense of control were - married women, non-married men, married men and non-married women. While marriage increased the women's income level it decreased their sense of autonomy. She found that this was not the case for married men who gained both in income levels and in levels of autonomy.

Straus and Gelles the original researchers proposing the notion of the battered husband, note that because women are more likely than men to be locked into a marriage due to economic dependency this invariably adds to women's victimisation by abusive mates (op cit 1981). Indeed, research commissioned in Ireland by Women's Aid found that the two main reasons women gave for not being able to leave an abusive partner were; no alternative affordable accommodation and economic dependence (Kelleher et al op cit 1995).

Traditionally as the head of the household, men expect certain privileges and feel justified in using violence when those demands are not being met by their wives or partners. Straus et al in their afore-mentioned research noted that 28% of the male respondents and 23% of the female respondents felt that hitting a partner was normal. They further noted that the men were more than twice as likely than the women to view this behaviour as 'good' and 'necessary' (op cit 1981). When one examines the ways in which abusive men justify their behaviour and how women describe the reasons they are beaten, it is clear that the justifications run along stereotyped gender roles which society sets out for women:

On the expectation that women should be sexually available:

"It (the violence) was over sex and it happened I guess because I was trying to motivate her and she didn't seem too motivated"

"I did strike her and basically for the same reason. I just tried making love and she couldn't do it" (Ptaeck 1988 p-147)

I tried to have sex with her and pushed myself a lot if you know what I mean, but she wasn't wanting it and I just started hitting her...(injuries) broken nose and two black eyes...well if she let me do it (have sex) I wouldn't have punched her"

(reason for violence) sex. I wasn't getting enough. Once a week is no good to me" (Dobash and Dobash 1998 p-151)

On the expectation of domestic servitude:

(how did she provoke you?) I came home from work and she'd never vacuumed or dusted the place"

he was late and I'd started cooking his meal, but I put it aside you know, when he didn't come in. Then when he came in I started heating it. I was standing at the sink and he just came up and punched me in the stomach...it was only because his dinner wasn't ready on the table for him" (ibid p-146-147)

"I certainly didn't think I was wrong in asking not to be filled up with fatty foods" (Ptaeck 1988 p-147)

"I had a poker thrown at me just because his tea was too weak" (Dobash and Dobash 1992 p-4)

On the perceived entitlement to own and control women:

"(why did you hit her?) I was wanting to show her who was the boss"

"(is there something she could have done to stop you being abusive to her?) Yes. Keep her mouth shut. (Have you wanted to stop being violent?) No, she's my wife" (Dobash and Dobash 1998 p-154)

"I think it were a feeling that I owned her. I owned this particular person and she were my property"

"I just can't handle a woman arguing with me"

"I think basically it's power. I have enough of this argument, I have enough of it and I want it to stop now" (Hearn 1998 pp135-136)

Using violence against a female intimate, therefore, has a particular meaning for men. It is a vehicle, the outcome of which confers privilege and power on the male. In the words of Kaufman writing on men's violence:

if a man beats his wife for not having dinner on the table right on time, it is not only to make sure that it doesn't happen again, but is an indication of his sense of entitlement to be waited on' (Kaufman 2001 p-26)

Men and women's reported rates of victimisation

If levels of violence against men in intimate relationships is in any measure comparable to levels of violence against women, why, one might enquire are significantly more *women* than men consistently presenting to hospitals, police and other agencies for protection and support? AMEN, who established a Helpline for abused men in 1997, claim to be inundated with calls from men experiencing abuse. It is difficult to get an

accurate figure for the number of *abuse related* calls to the line since its inception, since only one number fields all calls to the organisation. This author contacted Mary Cleary to ask her about the calls received. Cleary said that AMEN had received 15,000 calls to date, 'from men and their concerned family members'. I asked Cleary if she could give me a break down of the calls, in terms of how many were actually from abused men themselves, how many calls were enquiries from students like myself, wrong numbers, hang ups and so on. She asked me how this could be possible when the organisation had no money to set up a database. I suggested that as there was only one line and therefore only one person answering the phone at any one time s/he could keep a written record of the call, whether it was helpline related or merely an office enquiry. In response, Cleary said that this was very difficult as often she received calls on her mobile when she was out of the house. I then asked how she could, therefore, say with certainty that the 15,000 calls received were all abuse related and I asked how for example my call would be logged as I had phoned the helpline number. At this point Cleary became somewhat irate and asked why I needed to query the calls like this. I said that I was merely trying to ascertain exactly how many calls were abuse related. She said that all 15,000 calls were from abused men and concerned members of their families. When I again asked how *my* call would be logged she did not respond. (Phone conversation with Mary Cleary April 26th 2001).

The statistics offered by AMEN seem inconsistent with those gained from formal research studies. An examination of the gender breakdown in terms of who is reporting being victimised within an intimate relationship reveals the following:

- In Ireland during 1999, 10,000 incidents of domestic violence were reported to the Gardai of which 92% involved male perpetrators (Garda Annual report 1999).
- Research commissioned by Women's Aid in 1999 regarding the effectiveness of the Domestic Violence legislation found that applicants for protective orders were female in over 90% of cases (Kelleher and O'Connor 1999).
- A study by McWilliams and Spence (1996) investigating the results of exclusion and protection orders in Northern Ireland found that in a sample of 2,000 such orders only 2 were instigated by men experiencing domestic violence (Mc Williams 1998).
- In the UK, British Crime Surveys indicate that 8 out of 10 of their reported incidents of domestic violence involved men as perpetrators (cited in Stanko 1995).
- The Cork Domestic Violence Project has worked with 1200 families where domestic violence was a feature. In only 2 cases was the woman the abuser (Interview with Don Hennessy 2001)
- The Duluth Community Intervention project which operates in a city following 20 years of pro-arrest police policies, has never had more than 7% of women on perpetrators programmes (Women's Aid Federation of England 1999)

- In the USA, Bureau of Justice Statistics in 1994 found, that 28% of all annual violence committed against *women* was perpetrated by an intimate partner. The corresponding figure for *men* was 5% (Bureau of Justice Statistics 1994).
- It is estimated that 90% - 95% of violence by intimates in the USA, is perpetrated by men on women (ibid).

The reason, we are told, that we are not seeing *comparable* figures for violence directed by women against men, is due to the shame and stigma preventing men from reporting abusive females (AMEN (1999), Stitt and Macklin (1997), Steinmetz (1977)). Steinmetz has suggested that men are unlikely to come forward as victims of partner abuse, due to the 'extraordinary stigma' they must overcome in order to do so (cited in Dobash et al 1992 p-76). However, one would imagine that if men are reluctant to go to agencies such as the police regarding their abusive mates, they would be able to access more discrete confidential services. It was for this reason a refuge for battered men was set up in the UK in 1993. It closed some time later however, due to lack of use. Of the few men who did access the refuge, many were themselves perpetrators who had become homeless due to being barred from their own homes for violence perpetrated against their partners (Stanko 1995)

At the first AMEN conference in 1998, some of the invited speakers seemed somewhat confused at this supposed epidemic they themselves were clearly not seeing in Ireland. They seemed, however, anxious to politely accept the ideas being put forward. Jim Higgins TD noted.

I was first elected to the Dail in 1987. I have not had a single incident of male domestic violence brought to my attention which indicates just how deep rooted the problem is' (The Silence is Over conference papers p-43).

Roisin Shortall TD noted similarly:

I had no experience of men in abusive relationships coming to me seeking help . (ibid p-18).

Marie Murray a clinical psychologist who spoke at the conference told the audience:

I was surprised at the extent of the problem Mary Cleary outlined because it had not been my clinical experience, over twenty-five years practice, to encounter many men expressing being bullied in the home...violence towards men was infrequently disclosed' (ibid p-21).

A letter to the Irish Times by John McGetterick, a family law solicitor, also expressed incredulity at AMEN's claims in regard to women's use of violence. McGetterick writes:

Of the considerable case work we have handled in the past 20 years, no more than 2% were men seeking protection. On the contrary I have witnessed at close hand the suffering fear and anguish of women and children who have had to flee their homes due to the actions of a violent partner (Letters 11/9/2000).

Despite the above observations, it is claimed that men are silently suffering abuse at the hands of their female intimates, unable to come forward even when injured as a result of the abuse. The absence of large numbers of males reporting abuse leads battered men sympathisers to conclude, not that there are in fact very few men actually *being* battered but rather that men are not reporting. Commentators have thus drawn the most astounding conclusions from available statistics. Stitt and Macklin (1997) for example, note:

Less than 2% of all reported cases of domestic violence involves a battered man. This clearly suggests that the incidences of 'battered husbands' remains largely unreported (p-3)

It is difficult to understand how the above suggests such an interpretation. Gross in his article *Husband Battering* notes:

police studies have shown that men are over ten times less likely than women to report spousal battering to the police (Gross 1999 p-1)

He does not indicate, however, how this figure was arrived at. While many sympathisers of the battered men phenomenon lament the reluctance of men to come forward, there is little or no evidence put forward to actually substantiate their claims that men find it more difficult than women to report being abused. In the words of Jack Straton writing on the supposed phenomenon of the battered husband:

Men have never before been shy in making their needs known, so it is peculiar that in seventeen years, this supposed huge contingent of 'battered men' has never revealed itself in the flesh. Could it be that it simply does not exist? (Straton 1994 p-79)

What research does exist, seems to support the opposite, that men *are* willing to report being victimised by a female intimate:

- In research carried out by AMEN in 1999 a sample of 40 self-selected male respondents claimed abuse by a female intimate. Of those 45% had in fact reported their partner to the Gardai and 72% had reported the abuse to a legal advisor (AMEN 1999).
- 337 sample cases of domestic violence drawn from court records in Ontario by Kincaid, found that although there were 17 times as many female victims as male, only 22% of women pressed charges as opposed to 40 % of men. The men, she further noted, were less likely to drop charges than the women. (cited in Dobash et al 1992 p-76).
- Dobash et al cite a review of 1973-1982 US National Crime Survey Data by Schwartz (1987), in which it was found that 67.2% of men and 56.8% of women called the police after being assaulted by their spouses (ibid p- 76).
- The British Crime Survey (1996), found that men were more likely to report an assault by their female partner while she was present than women were to report an assault by a man while he was present (Women's Aid UK 1999).

- Thomas (1993) cites a study by Malcom George carried out in 1992. Of a self-selected sample of 38 men who claimed to be victims of their wives abuse, 40% had reported their partner to the police. What is also interesting about this study is that 25% of the wives had obtained non-molestation orders against the husbands in question

Proponents of the sexual symmetry of violence thesis avoid making any mention of the extraordinary shame and embarrassment women too must overcome in order to report their abusers. This added to their other fears which include; fear of further violence or being killed and fear that their children will be removed to care. (Kelleher and associates (1995), Mc Williams and Mc Kiernan (1993) Heise et al (1994) Dobash and Dobash (1992). The following statistics illustrate that women too are very likely to under-report their own victimisation at the hands of a male partner:

- Dobash and Dobash (1992) in a study of approximately 35,000 incidents of violent attacks on women, found that only 2% had been reported to the police.
- In an Irish study conducted in 3 GP surgeries by Clare and Cheasty, one in thirty women reported having been raped. The overwhelming majority of those had not reported it to the Gardai (Clare 1999).
- A national survey on abuse of women by partners conducted in 1986 in the Netherlands, found that 22.6% of women experienced physical abuse by a partner. Of those, only 2% reported it to the police (cited in Clare 1999).
- An extensive Canadian study on violence against women conducted in 1993 and involving 12,300 women, found that only 28% of the physical assaults and 6% of sexual assaults were reported to the police (in Stanko 1995).
- The American Psychological Association Task Force on family violence found that female victims of partner violence were less likely to report the crime to the police than female victims of stranger violence (American Psychological Association 1996).
- Torrey (1991) estimates that no more than 10% of female rapes are reported to the police in the UK, USA and Canada (RCC 1998)

Another reason which leads women to underreport their own victimisation is due to the way in which violence against women by male partners is normalised within our culture, as noted earlier (Dobash et al 1992). Unless women understand that they are in fact being abused they are unlikely to report such victimisation (Kelly 1995).

The sexual symmetry of violence argument

The notion of there being a parity in terms of the levels of abuse initiated by both male and female intimates was first mooted by Murray Straus and Richard Gelles following research undertaken in 1975 in the USA (Straus, Gelles and Steinmetz 1981). This research and a repeated survey in 1985 by the afore-mentioned, using identical methodology (the CTS, a tool which will be critiqued in more detail below) has more or

less become the basis upon which the violence against men backlash has gathered momentum in the USA and other Western countries. This research is regularly quoted by the Irish organisation AMEN as justification for promoting the phenomenon of the battered male, coupled with the suggestion that women's organisations have deliberately skewed its findings. Mary Cleary of AMEN notes:

extreme feminist groups have took (sic) from the study what they wanted - that women are victims - and ignored all the information about the men. And they've tried ever since to discount his (Straus's) findings (Big Issues Nov/Dec 2000)

The research by Straus has spawned numerous pieces of research similarly using the CTS method, which seems to suggest a level playing field in terms of men and women's use of violence in relationships. Cleary of AMEN, for example, invites readers to view the AMEN web site, which lists:

'almost 100 two-sex studies which show that men and women abuse each other in roughly equal measures' (Irish Times-Letters, 13/9/2000).

What is contained on the web page is the following; 20 *reviews* of existing studies on the phenomenon of violence against men; 70 studies highlighting the phenomenon; 1 review of homicide statistics in the USA from 1976 - 1985 (which found incidentally, that more wives were killed) and 1 paper lamenting the lack of objectivity in feminist research.

Of the 70 studies listed, the methodology used are as follows:

- 46 employ the Conflict Tactics Scale, which will be critiqued in more detail below.
- 13 use a 'survey' but do not indicate if they are employing the CTS.
- 8 do not indicate methodology, however, as the numbers of respondents in these studies ranges from 228 people to 4,708 it is likely that a survey method, such as the CTS, was employed.
- 1 uses an interview method.
- 1 is an examination of the portrayal of the victimisation of men and women in 1950's comic strips.
- 1 presents a hypothetical situation about some other couples violence and asks respondents to comment on who is being most victimised.

The British Crime Survey of 1996 deserves particular mention also, as it is often referred to by AMEN in their writings. Launched in 1999, the survey found that 4.2% of men and 4.2% of women said they had been abused by their partner in the previous year. Women's Aid Federation in the UK(1999) published a discussion paper on this research on the basis that anti-feminist groups were deliberately distorting its findings. The survey was criticised as an inappropriate method to describe the complexity of domestic violence, as respondents were only allowed answer 'yes' or 'no' to the

questions. Women's Aid highlighted the following results from the findings, which backlash commentators ignored:

- Women were more likely to have been injured and to have sought medical attention than the male respondents.
- Women were more afraid and upset following the assault.
- Women suffered more repeated and chronic assaults (3 out of chronic victims were women)
- Women were much more at risk from ex-partners than male respondents.
- Twice as many women as men saw themselves as victims of domestic violence.

The use of the CTS to measure interpersonal violence

Straus and Gelles original research in 1979 surveyed 2,143 married or cohabiting individuals (960 males and 1,183 females) with only one individual from any couple being interviewed. The research tool used, the Conflict Tactics Scale (CTS) is a set of questions designed to measure the tactics used by an individual to resolve conflict (see below). The scale offers a series of acts ranging from discussed an issue calmly and threw something at him/her to hit or tried to hit him/her beat him/her up used a gun, to measure three constructs; reasoning, verbal aggression and physical aggression or violence which is further sub-divided into minor violence or severe violence (ibid 1981). Significantly, the CTS does not include sexual assault or rape on the violence index. This is a serious omission, since women are more likely to experience sexual violence from intimate partners. The Dublin Rape Crisis Centre, for example, found that 80% of its female clients had been assaulted by men they knew, 23% by husbands and partners (Donaghy 2001).

The results of the survey found that 12.1% of wives and 11.6% of husbands were victims of at least 1 violent act by their partner in the previous year. The study was repeated in 1985 and on this occasion 12.1% of husbands and 11.3% of wives were the victims. The finding of the latter study led to the researchers extrapolating that 6.8 million US husbands and 6.25 million US wives were victims of spousal assault in 1985. The results of both studies led Straus et al to further conclude that the problem was not so much one of wife-battering but more one of violent families and violent couples. Steinmetz, following her study in 1977 coined the phrases battered husband and battered husband syndrome (Dobash et al 1992)

Problems with the reliability of the CTS in measuring interpersonal violence

Straus and his team who originally used the CTS to measure inter-personal violence, have themselves issued a note of caution in relation to how the survey results should be interpreted:

It would be a great mistake to detract from giving first attention to wives as victims as the of social policy' (op cit 1981 p-43) (emphasis added)

The main criticisms of the CTS as a tool to measure violence in intimate relationships are detailed and critiqued below:

1. The CTS asks respondents to consider how they react to *conflict* situations and does not measure the use of violence in non-conflict situations.

Academics, activists and researchers working on the issue of violence against women by men for over three decades, have illuminated the fact that a significant feature of the abuse is that it is a pattern of tactics intended to gain control and power over the woman as a result of the man's perceived entitlement to do so. This entitlement to hold the power within the relationship is a micro reflection of a macro phenomenon, namely, the inequalities experienced by women throughout all societal institutions (Dobash and Dobash (1992), Yllo and Bograd (1988), Kelly (1995), Kelleher and associates and O'Connor (1995), Kelleher and O'Connor (1999) Stanko (1995)). Stark and Flitcraft (1996) have succinctly illuminated this important feature of male violence towards female intimates. They note:

Personal problems can obviously motivate any assault. What distinguishes partner violence against women is that immediate stimuli converge in a singular consequence - female subordination. Regardless of whether a man beats his wife when he is drunk, stalks his girlfriend out of jealousy, or sets fire to his partner's house when he is depressed, the selection of women as objects of coercion and control gives these events a social meaning, (ibid p-4)

The tactics used, therefore, are intended to *control* the woman and do not necessarily occur in response to a conflict between the parties but more often when there is a real or perceived threat to the man's power in the relationship (CDVP 1998). Such tactics used therefore, include; isolating her from family and friends; telling her what to wear, who to see, where to go; threats to her and the children if she leaves; using sexual and physical violence to intimidate her both during the relationship and after she has left and controlling her access to the family income (Pence (1987) (Kelleher and associates and O'Connor (1995)). None of the afore-mentioned are listed on the CTS. The use of these tactics is a repeated reminder to the woman that her partner is the one with the power in the relationship and are infrequently symptomatic of an uncontrolled response to conflict. The Cork Domestic Violence Project who work with abusive men have noted in this regard:

The programme focuses on helping men recognise that their acts of abuse are intentional and are not uncontrolled responses to stress or anger but are very specific behaviours which have evolved into a system of interrelated behaviours directed at their partners to achieve and maintain power . (CDVP 1998 p-20)

Abusive tactics are instrumental in establishing and reinforcing the man's power over his partner and are thus goal-oriented. They are imbued with very specific meaning which becomes lost if the focus is merely on conflict resolution. One could also argue that conflict infers a mutual interchange where both parties are involved. However, if one examines the context in which abusive men regularly employ their tactics it

becomes clear that they do not always arise from an interaction with the woman. Women, for example, describe being woken from their sleep with blows and/or verbal abuse and thus there is no provocation or conflict that could have led to the behaviour (Campbell (1995)). Some tactics also require forethought and therefore are not a spontaneous response to conflict for example stalking the women interrogating her and ringing her regularly to check her whereabouts (CDVP op cit)

Another feature of the abuse initiated by abusive males is that it continues and indeed escalates post-separation (Campbell (1995), Dobash and Dobash (1998)). This type of abuse which includes stalking, and in extreme cases homicide, is not associated with conflict resolution but with punishing the woman for leaving the relationship and/or trying to intimidate her into returning to the relationship. Feminist activists and groups working with male batterers have illustrated that as domestic abuse is intended to *control* the woman, the ultimate threat to this control comes when the woman leaves or attempts to leave her abuser. Ellis (1994) in his Canadian study of separating couples, found that during the separation process, husbands are most likely to use violence to control their wives. Intentional abuse of wives, he found, increased during the six months prior to separation (cited in Stanko 1995). Activists have always underscored the importance of prioritising the woman's safety at the time she is attempting to leave. Mc Williams and Spence for example, note:

Since the rate of husbands killing wives is elevated in the aftermath of separation, then leaving a violent relationship can be a very dangerous time for women (Mc Williams and Spence 1996)

In the UK 42% of female homicides are committed by a male intimate, 51% of those deaths occur during or after the woman has left the relationship (Campbell op cit 1995). An examination of 24 cases of female homicide which occurred in Ireland between 1996 and 1998 show that of the 12 women who were murdered by a current or ex-partner, at least 5 murders occurred *after* the woman had left the relationship (Women's Aid murder file 2001). In the US it is estimated that at least 65% of female homicides by male intimates occur post-separation (Florida Governor's Task Force (1997)). There is however, no measurement of post-separation abuse on the CTS.

2. The CTS fails to measure the consequences of the acts employed.

A criticism of the CTS is its failure to measure what *impact* the individual. As Straus himself has noted:

a six foot two, 240 pound man punching his wife is likely to do more harm than if she punches him (ibid p-22).

It is fair to assume that most men are physically stronger than women and thus capable of inflicting more damage to a woman than the reverse. The fact that women are physically inferior in this regard has been noted by researchers on spousal homicide. While most women who are killed by their male partner are beaten to death, men who are killed by a female intimate are killed by the use of a weapon (Campbell op cit,

Saunders (1988)). A review of Irish female homicide cases since 1996 reveals a similar pattern.

In terms of the impact of male to female violence, Straus et al remind the reader that one beating by a physically stronger male partner is likely to establish the power dynamic in the relationship for a long time. Thus, he may not need to resort to using severe violence against his partner on a regular basis in order to keep her in line. A physically weaker female on the other hand is, arguably, less capable of having the same impact on a physically stronger male and consequently less likely to instil the same level of fear.

Research by Szinovacz, for example, comparing aggregate and couple data found that while husbands admitted to lower rates of violence than was indicated by their wives, there was a tendency for wives to rate more violence for *themselves* than husbands did for them (Szinovacz 1983). The latter hypothesises that the reason husbands were reporting lower rates of violence by their wives could be due to the lesser impact of such acts thus making them more forgettable, even funny. Adler (1981) noted similar findings in his interview data. Here, both parties felt that even the hardest punch thrown by the female of the couple was unlikely to hurt the male, with the latter viewing their partners attempts to use violence amusing (cited in Yllo op cit).

When it comes down to who actually sustains injuries during domestic violence incidents, the figures overwhelmingly illustrate that it is women and not men:

- Schwartz (1987), in a review of National Crime Surveys in the US found that women are 13 times more likely than men to need medical attention after a spousal assault.
- Bureau of Justice statistics in the US found that 243,000 people receiving emergency room treatment for violence related injuries in 1994 had been injured by an intimate. Female victims outnumbered male victims by 9:1 (1997).
- Susan Steinmetz in her 1977 survey found that the men caused more injury to their female partner than the reverse (op cit).
- Research in 5 Australian hospitals indicated that regarding injury presentation for violence by an intimate partner, women outnumbered men by 5:1 (Australian Social Monitor 1999).
- US National Crime Survey data collected from a nationally representative sample of American households, indicates that in relation to violence between couples women constitute 95% of injured victims and men 5% (Finkelhor et al 1983).
- Berk et al (1983) reviewed 262 incidents of domestic violence responded to by the Santa Barbara Police in California. In terms of reported injuries, they found that women were victims 94% of the time while men were victims 14% of the time (allowing for occasions when both parties were injured). They concluded:

'When injuries are one's primary concern, the mutual combat characterisation of spousal violence is terribly misleading...we can find no substantial evidence for the battered husband syndrome'. (ibid p-210)

3. The CTS does not measure concordance in couple's responses.

In both studies by Straus only one individual in the relationship was ever interviewed, thus giving no indication of concordance between couples in terms of their use of violence. Dobash et al, in their critique of the symmetry of violence assumption argue that.

if couples routinely provide discrepant CTS responses, data derived from the CTS simply cannot be valid (Dobash et al op cit 1992).

Several researchers have attempted to examine the extent to which couples agree or disagree in terms of their reported use of violence by employing methodologies that question *both* individuals in a couple about their use of violence. Browning et al (1986) interviewed 30 couples where the men were accessing a programme for perpetrators of domestic violence. The results found that the wives rated 'significantly' more violence for their husbands than the husbands did for themselves while the husbands rated slightly more violence for the wives than the wives did for themselves. The researchers concluded that 26 out of the 30 wives rated the relationship as husband violent, while the husbands were more likely to rate the relationship as mutually violent or wife violent -16 out of 30. This tendency for abusers to minimise their own violence, even when involved in treatment programmes has been highlighted by many clinicians working with abusive men (CDVP (1998), Hearn (1998), Yllo (1988) Ptaeck (1988)).

Jouriles et al (1985), interviewed 65 couples who were attending marital therapy and 37 who responded to an ad in the paper. They used a modified version of the CTS which included spouses reports of *their own* use of violence as well as that of their spouse. The results found a tendency for the clinic sample to underreport their own use of violence compared to the rates reported for them by their wives.

Szinovacz (op cit) set out not, he states, to criticise the CTS but to compare aggregate data with couple data. He interviewed 103 couples selected at random from telephone directories in Pennsylvania. Couples were interviewed separately by trained researchers.

The results showed that husbands admitted to lower rates of violence than was indicated by their wives. Comparing the aggregate data and the couple data Szinovacz notes:

husband violence especially, seems to be more common than the response of either spouse would suggest (p-643)

Szinovacz also found very little agreement between couples regarding their use of violence. For the item beat up, for example, no couple concurred that one had administered a beating and the other had received one. This was despite the fact that respondents of both sex claimed to have been both beaten and to have administered beatings. He concludes:

The results provide clear evidence that aggregate husband-wife data cannot substitute for couple data (p-633)

Dobash and Dobash (1998) in in-depth interviews with 122 violent men and 134 women partners found that men were very reluctant to admit to using severe forms of violence against their female intimates. While there was concordance among the couples in terms of the less severe forms of violence such as; punched walls restrained her and pushed/grabbed, women were likely to report significantly higher levels of serious violence by a partner than the men would admit for themselves especially; forced sex, kicked face, hit in stomach when pregnant and threatening with an object. The researchers conclude that it is likely that physically stronger men more so than women will be ashamed to admit to using violence against a partner. They write in this regard:

it cannot be to their (men's) credit that they beat a woman into unconsciousness, burned or wounded her, or hit her in the stomach while pregnant. There is no valour in violence directed at a woman as there might be in a fair fight between men (ibid p-156)

4. The CTS does not sufficiently distinguish between acts.

A further criticism of the CTS is that it does not sufficiently distinguish between acts, Dobash and Dobash (1979), Straton (1994) Szinovacz (1983). Hit/tried to hit him/her, for example, are combined as the same act. There is, however, significant difference between *trying* to hit someone playfully with a cushion and actually beating someone with a baseball bat in order to terrorise and control them. As Dobash and Dobash note:

Minor and severe violence are distinguished solely on the basis of *speculation* that a particular act has the potential for producing injuries rather than knowledge of injuries actually sustained (1979 op cit p- 277)(authors emphasis)

Szinovacz, has suggested that the CTS be modified in this regard to include hit with a dangerous/heavy object (1985 op cit p-642)

5. The CTS does not indicate the context within which acts are used nor the intent of the actors.

Straus in his rationale regarding the validity of the CTS, has pointed to the sensitive nature of asking questions about individual's use of deviant behaviour. This is why, he explains, the instrument is presented in the context of disagreements and conflict. (Straus 1979). He writes:

Since almost everyone recognises that families have conflicts and disagreements this serves as the first step in legitimising responses (ibid p-79).

This attempt to make the survey acceptable to respondents was also a factor in the way acts are described. The scale quite significantly omits rape and sexual assault in the list of physical acts. Employing terms such as hit or tried to hit slapped and pushed, rather than assaulted or reacted violently', as well as couching the research in the

context of conflict resolution rather than behaviour intended to hurt, intimidate and control could, arguably, have significant impact on the response rate.

In presenting the findings from the survey Straus et al define a respondent as a perpetrator of severe violence if s/he employs one of the following acts even once; hit/tried to hit with an object , bit , kicked , threatened with a knife or gun , used a knife or gun - regardless of the intent or the consequence of the act. The intent of the respondent in employing any of these acts listed on the scale is, however, *very* important to establish. Dobash et al highlight this point succinctly with the following illustration:

Consider a slap . The word encompasses anything from a slap on the hand chastising a dinner companion for reaching for a bite of one's dessert to a tooth-loosening assault intended to punish, humiliate and terrorise (1992 op cit)

Margolin (1987) carried out a study involving 103 couples, comparing couples self-reports of violence to those of both parties. More interestingly, she also attempted to get an idea of the *intent* behind the use of acts. Some of her findings were interesting in this regard. Where one couple, for example, both admitted to kicking one another, a more in depth interview revealed that the kicking took place in bed and was playful in nature. Margolin notes:

Although this behaviour meets the criterion for severe abuse on the CTS, neither spouse viewed it as aggressive let alone violent (p-82)

Regarding another couple in the study where the wife scored on severe physical aggression while her husband scored on low-level aggression it was discovered that;

after years of passively accepting the husband's repeated abuse, this wife finally decided on one occasion to retaliate by hitting him over the head with a wine decanter (ibid p-82).

Her study led her to conclude that frequency data alone has limitations in attempting to measure marital violence.

A further issue relating to the intent of the actors in employing acts of aggression relates to the extent to which women use violence in the context of defending themselves against a violent partner. Commentators have noted how women who experience abuse by a partner will often use violence as a way of defending themselves and may on occasion issue a pre-emptive attack where they know their partner is about to become violent. (Campbell (1995), Kelly (1995)).

Saunders (1988) set out to determine to what extent battered women's use of violence was defensive , retaliatory or first-strike . 52 women experiencing abuse by a male partner participated in his survey. They completed modified versions of the CTS and the results were as follows:

- 75% of the women reported that they engaged in some form of non-severe violence.

Of those:

- 30% said all their violence was in self-defense
- 23% said all their violence was 'fighting-back'.
- 4 women said they initiated the acts themselves.
- 50% - 60% engaged in severe violence.

Of those:

- 40% said all their violence was in self-defense.
- 30% said all their violence was 'fighting-back'.
- 1 woman said she initiated most of the violence.

Respondents he notes, tended to view self-defense and fighting back as the same thing. In short, to quote Dobash and Dobash who have extensively critiqued the use of the CTS as a tool for measuring domestic violence:

The survey is particularly poor at investigating complex behaviours, emotions and social processes such as those associated with violence, and its necessary brevity means it can rarely be used to explore the contexts associated with social behaviour (1992 op cit p-276)

Summary

It is not a convincing argument of the backlash, to suggest that the low rate of reported cases of abuse towards men, is simply due to men's reluctance to come forward. Men are it seems willing to report their victimisation to Rape Crisis centres and many adult males are coming forward to describe the brutal physical and sexual abuse they endured at the hands of male religious orders.

Intimate partner violence is one issue that must be discussed within the context of gender. The huge numbers of women being abused at hands of male intimates is in no manner comparable to the numbers if men being abused by women. What is crucial to understanding male violence against women, is the perceived entitlement by men that the use of this abuse and violence is justified as a means of having power over and controlling women. This occurs within a societal context which colludes in keeping the latter dependent within that dynamic.

Chapter four; The impact of the backlash on feminist organisations working to address male violence.

This chapter aims to explore the ways in which feminist organisations, in particular Women's Aid, have been targeted by key supporters of the battered men phenomenon. I will explore how attempts are made to undermine the credibility of their work and how this particular aspect of the backlash has, at times, seemed to be a more urgent concern to the key players than addressing the plight of abused men. I will also analyse data obtained from interviews conducted with individuals working to address male violence, in order to ascertain their views on the current backlash and its impact on their work.

Undermining the credibility of feminist organisations working to address male violence

The best of the backlash ire is reserved for feminists involved in the violence against women movement. Here, John Waters refers to activists as bully-girls and misandrists and feminazis (Opinion, 12th Jan '99) who have developed a multi-million pound industry out of the demonization of the adult male (Opinion, June 8th '99). Brenda Power, writing in the Tribune, suggests that organisations working to support women victims of domestic violence are deliberately suppressing the truth about abused men:

Some interest groups have been capitalising on the enemy's (men's) reticence and promoting a version of events that suits their purpose (O'Brien 17th June 2001)

Michael Stephens in a letter to the Times writes:

This industry has a multi-million pound turnover and provides a variety of career choices which appear to be expanding by the day (Letters, Times, Sept 19th 00).

This argument is also taken up by Erin Pizzey, who accuses feminists working to address male violence of having a central aim, to collect and squander hard earned taxpayers money to fund their deviant (sic) and pathological abnormal behaviour (Pizzey 1997). What this deviant and pathological abnormal behaviour is, Pizzey does not make clear. However, one suspects that she is referring to lesbians since her homophobia is starkly evident in a number of articles. In one such article titled; how the women's movement taught women to hate men Pizzey describes her early involvement with the women's movement before she established the Chiswick refuge. Detailing a conversation with a lesbian feminist, whom she rather childishly describes as smelling of incense and too few baths, she writes:

We, they (lesbians) always use the royal. We don't like men, nor do we like heterosexual women at the first women's conference I was struck by the hundreds and hundreds of women claiming to be radical militant lesbians. The first women's conferences were destroyed by violent fistcuffs between these women and most of us were very afraid of them. (Pizzey, 1999)

Eamon McCann in an article refuting much of the backlash assault on feminism, which he describes as a version of new laddism, makes particular mention of Pizzey, whom he interviewed in the 70's when the Chiswick refuge opened. McCann observed that Pizzey ruled her refuge with a rod of iron. He further notes:

She was outraged at the idea, which appealed to the new women's groups in London, that the residents should have a say in, even control over the way refuges were run. Her stridency against lesbians was startling (McCann, Hot Press, April 1999).

There is also the more serious charge made by the backlash, that feminist activists working to combat male violence are unscrupulous and that they cannot be trusted to provide an unbiased account of interpersonal violence. Mary Cleary of AMEN, juxtaposes the words unbalanced with feminist, she writes:

unbalanced feminist theories have been accorded the status of articles of faith (AMEN web site, Oct 18th 2000)

Erin Pizzey accuses feminist activists of having:

deliberately and knowingly lied and cheated, altered figures and statistics to justify their lies (Pizzey 1997)

Waters suggests that Catherine Nevin, convicted of paying two men to murder her husband, would have perhaps been acquitted if she had procured the services of the scheming domestic violence industry :

Perhaps the mistake she made was not invoking the aid of the domestic violence industry to present a history of abuse at the hands of her husband (Waters, Opinion, Irish Times, April 17th 2000).

Undermining the credibility of Women's Aid

Women's Aid who have worked to support female victims of male violence in the home for the past 25 years are particularly singled out as targets of the backlash. Attempts are frequently made to undermine the credibility of research commissioned by Women's Aid in 1995 which found that 18% of Irish women had experienced abuse by a male partner at some time in their lives (Kelleher and O'Connor 1995). Letters to the Times, for example, refer to the much-hyped dubious statistic that one in five men beat their wives (Michael Stephens, Letters, Times, Sept 19th 2000), and an organisation called non-disposable daddies refute the main source of lies by women's aid that 20% of Irish women are beaten in the home (e-mail to Irish Times, May 2000). In the latter mail, the chairman of NODDI, Sean Kelly claims:

Women's Aid have a lot of sins to answer for in this country and the day is coming when they will be called to book for their lies, false allegations and dubious dealings with public funds (ibid)

Waters rejects statistics on the extent of male violence, especially those issued by what he refers to as the domestic violence industry which he infers is incapable of

objective research on the subject. Waters further suggests that feminist organisations dealing with male violence encourage women to lie about being victimised by their male partners. In one article Waters, while ostensibly having ago at the aforementioned 'Exploring Masculinities programme', seems more intent on attacking Women's Aid. Waters calls into question the programmes section on domestic violence. In this section logic goes out the window, he writes, as the programme adheres closely to the gospel according to the domestic-violence industry. He notes that the programme quotes a survey by Women's Aid which found that 71% of boys felt that there was some likelihood they would use violence in a relationship. 'It emerged that no such survey was conducted' Waters declares triumphantly. What in fact occurred in this instance was an error on the part of the Department of Education who wrongly accredited the research to Women's Aid. While the statistic was indeed quoted by the latter group in a leaflet, the original research was carried out by the Scottish Zero Tolerance campaign.

In another piece, Waters continues to undermine the credibility of statistics on domestic violence. Referring to a document on domestic violence issued by the church, he writes:

The only hard data are transcribed directly from the handouts of organisations operating in the domestic violence industry. (Opinion Times, September 4th 2000)

This, we are to suppose, immediately undermines their credibility. The above also begs the question where should the church have sourced statistics on domestic violence only from organisations operating to address the issue?

Another attempt, albeit bizarre, to undermine the credibility of Women's Aid by Waters occurs in an interview with the journalist Emily O'Reilly. O'Reilly in attempting to convince Waters that men and not women major in perpetrating domestic violence, asks him to consider the fact that 50 Irish women have been murdered by men since 1996 (the figure was in fact 65 when the article went to print). Waters response is to enquire how O'Reilly knew whether those figures were indeed true and not just Women's Aid propaganda (Sunday Business Post, March 18th 2001).

That Waters conspiracy theory about feminism extends to a belief that Women's Aid could manufacture murder statistics seems incredulous. In fact the shocking rise in female homicide in Ireland since the beginning of 1996, is something which has been tracked by Women's Aid through the media reports of those crimes. Until 1996, the average number of women murdered in Ireland per year was 4/5. In 1996 the figure jumped to 18. In the period Jan 1996 and March 2001, 65 Women have been murdered. Of the cases that have come to trial more than half the murders have been committed by the woman's current or former partner or husband. (Women's Aid 2001).

In other deliberate swipe at Women's Aid, AMEN defaced a Women's Aid slogan to as the title to its conference. The slogan 'it's a crime to beat a woman' had the word 'also' inserted after 'it's' and the 'wo' of woman heavily scored out in purple so that the slogan now read 'it's also a crime to beat a man'. What seems to be inferred here

is that Women's Aid, does not view the abuse of a *man* as a crime. Denise Charlton, Director of men's Aid commenting on the defacing of the slogan notes:

'Anti-divorce activists used a Women's Aid slogan in a similar way in 1996. They are intent upon undermining us instead of concentrating on their own needs (Susan McKay, Tribune op cit)

Certainly, Charlton's assertions seem to be accurate, in that it would appear that there is more energy invested by the backlash in undermining feminist organisations rather than actually promoting their own work. As Professor Harry Ferguson notes:

I'm still not sure what exactly they do for men because we never get to hear about it as their advocates are so busy trying to play politics and publicly undermine the women's movement (Ferguson, Letter to the Times, e-mailed to Women's Aid May 11th 2000)

Regarding the attempts to undermine research conducted by Women's Aid, there is in fact no actual critique of the research offered by backlash proponents. Aside from swipes attesting to the lies and false allegations of the domestic violence industry this author could find not one single attempt by backlash proponents to outline exactly how organisations such as Women's Aid were supposedly manufacturing statistics to dupe the public. Perhaps the reason for the particular focus on Women's Aid has more to do with its clearly articulated feminist philosophy and less to do with the actual nature of its work.

Interview analysis

Data was obtained from semi-structured interviews with four individuals all working to address the issue of male violence and all working from a feminist or gender perspective on the issue. I felt it important to choose individuals who work from a feminist perspective, since much of the backlash aims to undermine feminists and feminist approaches to the issue. It was also crucial for me to interview individuals from within Women's Aid since as outlined in chapter three, this feminist organisation has been singled out for particular criticism by backlash proponents. All four respondents were asked the same questions and interviews were recorded on tape with the exception of Fiona Neary with whom I was unable to meet directly. Fiona answered the questions by e-mail. The following questions formed the basis for all the interviews. I did, however, allow for flexibility and sometimes asked particular questions that seemed relevant to the respondents were taking the discussion at the time:

1. How have you become aware of the backlash on violence against women and how do you perceive it?
2. What has been the impact of the backlash on your work?
3. What (if any) has been the impact of the backlash on you personally?
4. Do you have any suggestions regarding how it should be addressed by those of us working on the issue of male violence?

The following is a brief profile of the four interviewees:

Collette O'Donovan is the co-ordinator of the support and outreach service in Women's Aid. This service provides one to one support and information for women experiencing abuse by a male partner. This service also supports women by accompanying them to court should they wish to seek a legal remedy regarding the violence.

Monica O'Connor is Research and Policy Officer with Women's Aid. She has worked on the issue at a national and international level for a number of years and is the co-author of two main pieces of research conducted by Women's Aid - 'Making the Links' (1995) a study of the prevalence and extent of violence against women in intimate relationships in Ireland and 'Safety and Sanctions' (1999) a study of the workings of the Domestic Violence Act and its enforcement.

Don Hennessy is the co-ordinator of the Cork Domestic Violence Project. This project works to ensure the safety of women experiencing abuse by engaging their violent partners in an intervention programme. The women also are provided with support upon request.

Fiona Neary is the co-ordinator of the Network of Rape Crisis Centres in Ireland. She works on a national and international level on the issue of rape and sexual assault.

How the backlash is perceived by interviewees.

All respondents were very much aware of the backlash through the course of their work; Don Hennessy interestingly notes the way in which his attention was brought to the newly emerging phenomenon of the battered male :

I became aware of it by getting invitations from AMEN. I actually use the word invitation advisedly because they were actually quite forcibly suggesting that I attend meetings.

There was agreement among respondents that the backlash aimed to position men as equal victims of women's violence. Fiona Neary notes that while she would always have been asked and indeed spoken about men as victims of rape and incest (by other men), she was now noticing a different slant to the questions being asked when giving talks:

Reflecting upon the information, which I had gathered from the interviews, a clear metaphor was coming into focus. It seemed that the respondents feelings about the tactic of backlash proponents, how they perceived the impact of the backlash and indeed how they responded to it was similar in nature to the relationship between a woman experiencing abuse and her abusive partner. Hennessy was the only one to make this explicit. He describes the key objective of the backlash - the undermining of feminism - as follows:

well my sense of it is from working with violent and abusive men, I would see this as another tactic that would be used by some men to discredit the women's

movement. It would be a not unusual tactic for men to do this; to present themselves as victims and to want the sympathy of the community on their side. They are quite effective in doing that.

Similarly, Collette O'Donovan in her description of what she sees as the aims of the backlash, might well be describing the tactics of an individual abuser, namely taking, control and establishing power together with a denial that they are in fact abusive. She notes:

As far as I'm concerned the backlash has to do with men taking control again. It's to do with power; men are denying that they are the main culprits in perpetrating domestic violence .

Also notable are the similarities between interviewee's descriptions of their own and, others *responses* to backlash proponents and the ways in which individual women regularly describe their own negotiation of their abusive partners' behaviour. O'Connor, for example describes a silencing , where certain words like sexual consent , rape and abortion become difficult to talk about. O'Donovan describes her observations of a change in the behaviour of family law judges who seem afraid and cautious regarding the granting of orders to protect women that might not appease men's groups. Neary and O'Connor describe how analyses of violence are becoming clouded and distorted, similar to the ways in which abused women begin to believe their abusers version of events having been told that they are wrong so many times. Hennessy particularly notes his dismay at the similarity between a woman experiencing abuse whose focus is constantly on her partners needs and not her own in attempting to understand him and maintain her safety, and how groups and agencies allow the backlash to become their focus also;

I've been at meetings and the whole meeting is being taken over by what these guys are doing and I've come into working with a woman on her own and she does exactly the same thing .

This similarity between the tactics of backlash commentators and those of individual perpetrators of abuse is evident from interviewee's descriptions of their personal interaction with the former. Don Hennessy describes one interaction with Mary Cleary of AMEN:

I wrote a public letter to AMEN at one stage and the amount of abuse I drew on myself was really quite astounding. It was interesting from the point of view of seeing how they react to these things and I had a couple of abusive phone calls from the co-ordinator of AMEN Mary Cleary. I had some phone conversations with her, all one sided, where she was telling me what was wrong with me I really didn't get much of a chance to talk to her at the time.

Hennessy further notes:

I've been threatened by the AMEN people that they will send in people who will explain these things to me but they never arrived. I'd be quite open to

meeting anybody here. Or that they would send in these abused men as clients but they have never arrived.

The personal impact of the backlash

In describing how the backlash impacted upon them personally, once again there were often echoes of the dynamics of an abusive relationship. O'Connor notes:

It's exhausting having to always begin with a kind of justification.

and:

It's undermining, it makes you more vulnerable and isolated .

Respondents also felt angry that the backlash was detracting from their day to day work and Fiona Neary felt undermined by the research being proffered by backlash commentators attesting to women's abuse of men. Neary notes:

this is another battle that I just don't need, things are hard enough

The wider agenda of the backlash.

Monica O'Connor believes that groups such as AMEN, while purporting to work on the issue of violence against men really have a bigger agenda:

they are anti-gay, anti-reproductive choice, they want women back in the home, so they have a much wider agenda .

As outlined in chapter two, feminism seems to be a critical focus for backlash criticism since its call for increased autonomy for women has inevitably led to men having to concede power both in the private and public spheres. O'Connor takes up this point also. She notes:

everywhere that women have made any headway there has been a concerted and powerful effort to at least lessen their gains to some extent and to hold onto ground .

In chapter two it was noted that a primary tactic of the backlash in undermining gender approaches to male violence is to undermine the notion of masculinity as a social construct and to position more traditional forms of masculinity as innate and natural. O'Connor, touches on this when she describes a meeting she attended which was called by opponents of the Exploring Masculinities Programme . A leading male pro-life advocate who spoke at the meeting sneered at the way in which feminists were looking for sensitive men . O'Connor recalls how the former went on to laud the lost qualities of traditional masculinity, which he listed as; strength , prowess , courage , discipline , stoicism and sacrifice . Immediately noting the inherent irony she muses:

there is something completely illogical in their train of thought about these two things. On the one hand what they are trying to portray is that there are values

that traditional men can hold onto and at the same time have things both ways - men as victims and men as dominators .

O'Connor believes that the rhetoric regarding feminism, being issued forth by individuals such as John Waters and groups such as AMEN, functions as a distraction:

from the fact that the vast majority of the blocks to women's progression; politically and economically, comes from men in power, in government buildings, not these small groups organising .

The impact of the backlash on the work

All respondents felt that the backlash was having a negative impact on the wider work to combat male violence, however, both O'Connor and Hennessy noted that this was nothing new, merely a new manifestation of an old tactic (interview with Don Hennessy). One of the tactics of the backlash, as outlined in chapter one, is the reconfiguration of the language of the women's movement to position men as the gender in need of 'liberation'. O'Connor illuminates what is perhaps the other side of this coin as she describes how the backlash has caused a number of liberals, including feminists, to dilute their own language in the face of backlash attacks. O'Connor describes how this has led to the use of safe words to describe discrimination and denial of human rights . This in a sense, is another mirroring of an abusers attempt to negate his victims descriptions of her victimisation and to silence her.

This attempt to look for safe ways to describe male violence also leads to a de-gendering of the issue which was also highlighted by respondents. It was noted that due to a lack of understanding on the part of agencies and professionals about what a gender analysis means, calls to de-gender the issue were being perceived as reasonable. Don Hennessy notes how de-gendering the issue is being seen by the media as the more politically correct thing to do. Indeed the following quote from Padraig O'Morain in the Irish Times illustrates Hennessy's point:

We will see domestic violence, not as an issue of men attacking women but of violent people of either gender attacking their partners. Victims of both genders will have to be considered by the law and by voluntary and statutory agencies . (O'Morain, 25th June 2001)

Hennessy, who has worked with over 1200 families where domestic violence was a feature (of which only 2 of the perpetrators were women) underscores the danger of falling into the gender-neutral trap:

In terms of abuse and violence there has to be a position taken on it and not every position has an equal right to talk .

Likewise, O'Connor notes in particular the danger for women victims of abuse if interpersonal violence is approached as a gender-neutral issue:

I think that if anything attempts to equalise gender in terms of violence against women, women will be the sufferers, because it removes an analysis of power

and that is even where women use violence. It fails to take account of institutional collusion, so it becomes a personalised, individualised issue to do with personal responsibility. What happens then is, those who are responsible for protecting women merely become bystanders or witnesses, rather than looking at their responsibility to protect and hold him accountable.

Neary notes how the backlash is impacting on the funding being allocated to Rape Crisis Centres. She underlines her concern at the consequences of de-gendering the issue of rape:

some centres are now considering employing men, so this will be an enormous shift away from the origins of the RCC's as safe spaces for women .

O'Donovan noted specific examples of the impact of the backlash on individual cases she has come across. She described how increasingly the abusive partners of women who are presenting to the Women's Aid support service are being encouraged by groups like AMEN to also apply for protective orders from the courts to counter their partners application;

Women who are going for barring and safety orders, the men now really have it together in that they are all saying the same thing because they are getting information from these groups (AMEN and Parental Equality), they are manipulating the court system, they're either being granted the same order as the woman or else the judge is refusing both applications and giving the woman no protection .

O'Donovan notes how the above leads to the woman feeling much more isolated and further abused following the legal systems collusion with her abusive partner. In another example, O'Donovan outlines the involvement of Parental Equality to support a man whom the courts had barred from his home for abusing his partner:

They were taking it on themselves to phone this woman because the man couldn't go near the house, they were saying to the woman we will collect the children and bring them to him . Even though this was a complete stranger that this woman was expected to hand her children over to.

O'Connor further notes how the public vilification of Women's Aid and the undermining of their credibility will make it more difficult for individual women to access their services for support.

Summary

The attempts to silence feminist organisations in speaking out against the backlash mirrors to some extent the silencing an abused woman also faces when she attempts to speak out against her abuser. The attempts of the backlash to undermine the work of organisations such as Women's Aid, are not only frustrating and demoralising for those involved in that work, but are dangerous for women experiencing abuse. Backlash efforts to de-gender the issue of domestic violence are being dangerously misconstrued by many in the media and by agencies who have the power to protect and support women, as being the more equitable approach to take. As O'Donovan

highlights above, the result of de-gendering the issue of interpersonal violence have clearly disastrous consequences for women attempting to seek support and protection. Courts and Police, the only agencies with the power to hold perpetrators accountable, who choose to remove the wider context of unequal power relations between men and women from the issue and who reduce the violence to mutual conflict or fighting are quite simply putting the lives of women and children at risk.

Conclusion

Backlash attempts to position men as the new oppressed do not hold up to scrutiny. Forms of male powerlessness as listed by the backlash and including; male suicide, men's spending obligations and the killing of men in wars are in fact more attributable to patriarchy than to the impact of feminism as is suggested. Attempts to position men as the oppressed sex in regard to interpersonal relationships are equally dubious. Equating, for example, the rape of women with men's feelings of hurt at being rejected by a woman are not only insulting but echo the attempts of abusive mates to equate their own use of physical violence with their partners verbal abuse.

The suggestion that women are equally as violent and abusive to their male intimates does not hold any weight, when one examines the evidence put forward. Men are simply not coming forward to report abusive females in figures that are in any way comparable to the numbers of women coming forward. Suggestions that this is due to the greater shame for a man in reporting abuse, is not supported by any evidence. Reported rates for women experiencing abuse outnumber men's reports by ten to one in most agencies, this despite the fact that studies illustrate time and again that *women* are extremely likely to underreport their own victimisation at the hands of a partner. The bulk of the research which seems to propose that domestic violence is a 50/50 phenomenon, use a research tool which has been extensively critiqued as being inappropriate for measuring such a complex issue.

The real agenda at play regarding the backlash against the violence against women's movement is the desire to reassert men's power within the private sphere. It is for this reason that attacking feminism and feminist organisations working to challenge male violence, is a primary aim of the backlash. As outlined in chapters two and three, feminist analyses of male violence underscore the ways in which male violence is a direct result of the unequal power relations between men and women in every societal institution. Backlash texts seem to wish to preserve traditional dominant forms of masculinity so as to return us to a time when men's power and authority in the nuclear family was seen as both natural and necessary. As long as feminism continues to challenge men's power in the private sphere, the backlash will continue to challenge and attack feminism.

Responding to the backlash

What strategies should the women's movement adopt in the current backlash on violence against women? I put this question to the individuals with whom I conducted interviews. Their responses were interesting and varied. A common theme throughout the information obtained from Don Hennessy, was the need to react and perceive the backlash much in the same way as one would an abusive man:

- avoid getting caught up in *his* version of events as this inevitably detract from the woman's needs:

The other thing that makes me angry is this whole political correctness in the media about being, eh giving everybody an equal say, which is quite there is no justification for it. In terms of abuse and violence there has to be a position taken on it and not every position has an equal right to talk .

- women experiencing abuse should avoid the temptation to try and change their partner's behaviour as this again detracts from their own needs and also is something only *he* can control:

the women's movement needs to, well ignore them really, not engage with them. There is no point in engaging with them, there is no reasonable level at which you can have a discussion with these people. So engaging with them is really a very frustrating thing.

Hennessy's analysis of the interaction between the backlash and organisations working to address male violence are interesting. I wonder, however, about the benefits of consistently ignoring the backlash. If any lessons are to be learned from the backlash against women's reproductive rights, is that this counteraction does not go away if you ignore it, which many in the women's movement thought it might. It may subside at intervals, however, it is managing to maintain a constant presence. I do agree with Hennessy that it is futile to engage *directly* with backlash proponents, however, it may be important to engage other key players who are confused about the arguments in the face of the information they are getting from the backlash. Women's Aid in attempting to redress some of the harm done by the symmetry of violence argument, has issued a briefing document which addresses and refutes some of the key arguments of the backlash in relation to interpersonal violence. This document will be made available to individuals working in relevant agencies and groups, in the statutory and voluntary sector. From my own interaction with agencies and groups, individuals are describing the need for training and awareness raising sessions to discuss the backlash and how to respond to it. Awareness is also necessary to highlight the dangers for women experiencing abuse when the issue of interpersonal violence becomes de-gendered. Case studies such as the one described by O'Donovan in chapter 4, need to be made available to illustrate the devastating impact of the backlash on the lives of individual women and children.

The suggestions by the backlash that women are handed barring orders by the court for the most minor transgression by a male partner, needs to be challenged. The present *in camera* rule in relation to family law hearings, means that there can be no reporting of the outcome of cases, in order to protect the confidentiality and safety of the concerned parties. The backlash has argued that this ruling is preventing the truth about men's victimisation by the courts from being exposed. There is need for a limited removal of the *in camera* ruling, so that the outcome of hearings regarding custody, access and protective orders is known. It is the experience of Women's Aid that access is rarely, if ever, denied to men whose violence against the children's mother has been proven and also that women increasingly must produce significant evidence in order to get protective orders from the court. Research examining the issuing of orders and how the court arrives at its decisions regarding the granting of protective and access orders needs to be undertaken.

O Connor notes the need for men's groups to voice their concern and opposition to the backlash on violence. O Connor feels men's, groups who are genuinely interested in challenging gender violence must voice their support for feminism and feminist organisations working to address male violence. O Connor also notes the need to address the issue of language. She believes that the original language of women's

liberation needs to be re-visited, with words such as liberation , transformation and revolution being embraced once more, together with new definitions, which adequately describe what the backlash is attempting to do. O Connor believes that the word backlash for example, does not adequately describe the intent of the backlash. The latter being not only a reaction to women's increased autonomy but a deliberate orchestrated attempt to undermine and erode the gains women have made. O Connor feels that if anything positive is to be gleaned from the backlash it might prove an opportunity for feminists to collectively organise and re-visit the original aspirations of the women's movement once again. It might prove to be a uniting force, which will bring feminists together and revisit a common goal of organising against patriarchal resistance to women s liberation.

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