

# Exploring The Continuum: Sexualized Violence by Men And Male Youth Against Women And Girls

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## ABSTRACT

In this paper, the continuum of violence against women is explored through numerous news media reports. After a review of social learning, cultural violence and feminist theories on violence against women, the paper concentrates on the climate of misogyny and increased risk of violence, as manifested in the rise in sexual harassment, terrorism in relation to abortion seekers and providers, and intimate femicide, in both the United States and Canada.

## RÉSUMÉ

Dans cet article le continuum de la violence envers les femmes est exploré par l'entremise de nombreux rapports de nouvelles. Après un bilan de l'apprentissage social, de la violence culturelle et les theories féministes sur la violence envers les femmes, cet article se concentre sur le climat de misogynie et le risque croissant de violence, tel que manifesté par la hausse de harcèlement sexuel, le terrorisme envers les personnes qui veulent avoir un avortement et ceux qui les dispensent, et le fémicide intime, aux États-Unis et au Canada.

In the last few decades, interest in violence against women has been on the rise. Whether one reads or watches the news media, or scrolls down popular or academic journals or books, coverage of violence against women abound. Two recent national surveys clearly reflect this rising interest (*VAWS 1993; Canadian Panel 1993*). Nevertheless, specialization on narrow topics (e.g., sexual harassment or female partner abuse or date-rape), or coverage exclusive to geographic locations (e.g., the USA or Canada or the Third World, etc.) often glosses over a continuum of violence. Moreover, exclusive coverage of extreme cases (i.e., wife killings) often fails to emphasize a climate of misogyny within which these events take place. The goal of this paper is to bring the continuum of violence to the foreground. To this end, I will first review theories of violence against women, then provide selected examples. The examples are drawn from general risk of violence for women, subtle forms of violence such as sexual harassment, terrorist activities against abortion service providers and instances of femicide. These dimensions may at first seem unrelated to one another. However, I will explore their widespread existence and their resilience to change as part of the web of gendered

violence.

I will also explore the cross-border nature of gendered troubles. Despite the often justified attempts to dissociate Canada from the much more criminogenic social patterns that exist in the United States, this paper will show that the continuum of gendered violence may be a more widespread phenomenon that subsumes Canada. To trace the web among different patterns of violence against women, I will provide news reports from the *Toronto Star*, *Globe and Mail*, *Ottawa Citizen* and the *Montreal Gazette*. I will attempt to buttress the non-random media coverage with findings from relevant surveys and theoretical research. Finally, within a social responsibility framework, I will call upon individual, social as well as structural change as a possible way out.

## A RECENT EXAMPLE OF VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS

On March the 24, 1998, two youngsters, aged 11 and 13, gunned down four of their school mates and a teacher in Jonesboro, Arkansas. Aside from the natural disbelief and dismay about this disturbing news (*Toronto Star* March 25, 1998:A1),

what was glaring was that the killers were boys and the victims were all girls and a woman. Shortly after the initial horror, reports suggested that this may not have been a random incident of violence after all. Despite their youthful ages, both boys were avid gun-users and hunters. At least one of the two was meticulously trained in target practice and shooting at "pop-up targets" in a military style (*Toronto Star* March 30, 1998: A1). Readers were also told that one of the slaughtered girls was an estranged "girlfriend." Before the shooting, one of the killers had sworn revenge on her and her friends who had snubbed him (*Toronto Star* March 25, 1998:A1). An issue which never got adequate media coverage, but which was easily deducible from a CNN report on the day of the funerals, was that at least 15 of the 16 wounded people in the same incident had distinctly female names. This rampage was against women.

In attempts to make sense of such a "senseless" act, some were tempted to blame teenage hormones, the unruliness of kids, or the ever increasing levels of violence in schools. Some argued for individual pathology. Others regurgitated the negative and almost always reductionist arguments about the faults of single or working (read: female) parents, or passed on moralistic judgments about the decline of "the family" (read: the traditional nuclear family). Moreover, there were muted insinuations about how one of the killers (Johnson) may have been compromised by his mother's "broken-marriage" and work schedules (*Toronto Star* April 6, 1998: A4). Perhaps the only common denominator behind such diffused justifications was the need to impose some kind of cognitive distance between "them" and "us" to overcome the feelings of one's own vulnerability. Of course, the definition of "them" or "us" was different according to who invoked the cognitive distancing process.

It was also tempting to interpret the Jonesboro disaster as a reflection of the overall violence of our southern neighbours (see Gwynne Dyer in *Toronto Star* March 30, 1998: A15). After all, from the most insightful social analyst to the people on the street know that the United States carries the ignominious distinction of being the

most violent developed nation in the world (Crawford and Gartner 1992). Indeed, Canada has a political system with more common sense about gun-control legislation, a much weaker gun-lobby than the powerful National Rifle Association (NRA), and tougher laws to regulate the use and ownership of firearms. Canadian laws are still being improved (*Toronto Star* March 13, 1998: E3). As Canadians who do not enthusiastically aspire to the guns-for-all mentality/politics of our southern ally, it was all too easy for us to separate what happened to "them" from what can happen to "us."<sup>1</sup> However, despite the apparent differences in crime statistics and despite Canadians' undying belief in their "kinder and gentler society", I believe that it will be a mistake to interpret the Jonesboro slaughter as part of a uniquely US plague. Rather, this incident might be better conceptualized as one that feeds on and reflects a continuum of violence against women. Within this continuum some of the factors at play are a culture of machismo, wide-spread misogyny, and the troubling natures of work and intimate relations all over North America. I am going to focus on a power, control, and sexuality triangulation which often sets men/boys against women/girls at the interpersonal, social and structural levels. Moreover, I am going to demonstrate how violence by males towards women and female partners often engulfs people who are family and friends of the target.

### THEORIES OF INTIMATE VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

Intimate violence is the physical, psychological or sexual degradation and harm that one member of an emotionally bound group inflicts upon one or more members of the same group. Unique aspects of intimate violence are that it is repetitive, malicious, intentional and not random. Another aspect of intimate violence is that it is often inflicted by an individual who has more resources (very often men) against those who are weaker and lack resources (very often women and children; see Johnson 1995 for a discussion of risk factors). Intimate femicide is an extreme point in the continuum of intimate violence, where women are

killed by their current or former partners (Bean 1992; Block and Christakos 1995; Crawford and Gartner 1992; Daly 1992). Killing one's own or step children and hurting friends or colleagues who get in the way are other extreme manifestations.

Although no theory can claim full explanatory power over the complexity of intimate violence, there are numerous general violence theory applications to this area. These applications can be grouped under individual pathology, social learning/general culture of violence, and feminist orientations (see Bart and Moran 1993; DeKeseredy and MacLeod 1997; Gelles and Loseke 1993; Sev'er 1997a/b; Viano 1992 for examples). Since this paper is on interpersonal, social and structural aspects of violence, individual pathology theories fall outside of the immediate focus. Moreover, research shows that most men who repeatedly abuse or even kill their female partners or hurt their children do not fit into the individual pathology models (Gelles and Straus 1988). Finally, most men do not randomly beat up on their bosses, friends and neighbours which shows that they selectively target their victims (Bograd 1988). Therefore, I will briefly review the two models which are more helpful in understanding the continuum of gendered violence addressed in this paper: namely the social learning/general culture of violence and feminist orientations.

Social learning and by extension, general culture of violence theories, assert that violence is learned through observation, modelling, reward systems or lack of punishment, and thus highlight the inter or intra-generational transmission of violence. Inter-generational transmission is extremely important when one considers the fact that children witness violence against their mothers in 40 percent of violent marriages (Ney 1992; Rodgers 1994, 1; Wolfe, Zak and Wilson 1986), and women whose fathers-in-law are violent report more frequent and more severe abuse than women with non-violent fathers-in-law (Egeland, 1993 for history of abuse as a risk factor; Rodgers 1994; *VAWS* 1993). Moreover children, especially (but not exclusively) female children, themselves experience violence. For example, in a recent national Canadian survey, 50 percent of the female

respondents reported that they have experienced at least one incident of sexual molestation before they reached the age of 16 (*Canadian Panel* 1993). Reppucci and Haugaard (1993) conservatively estimate that 10 percent of America's female children are subjected to some form of sexual assault and abuse. Such transmission of violence could be vertical (such as violent fathers/sons; Levinson 1989). Expanded versions of learning theories also highlight the intra-generational, or horizontal transmission of violence (violent peers, subcultures of violence; DeKeseredy 1988). There is substantial support for the role of learning in violent interactions.

There are also feminist explanations of men's violence towards women in general and towards their intimate partners (Dobash and Dobash 1979; Okun 1986; Yllo 1988). Although a detailed review of the variations among feminist theories falls outside the modest goals of this paper (i.e., liberal, socialist, and radical), these theories converge on seeking the roots of violence in social structures without disregarding the confounding role of inter or intra-personal processes. What is emphasized is the central role of unequal and gendered distribution of power and resources, a differentially valued division of labour and a general patriarchal system which fuels and protects these inequalities. Feminists underscore the fact that even men who do not directly harass, abuse or otherwise subjugate women benefit from the status quo where women's chances and choices are compromised. Thus, in feminist explanations, gender, power and control triangulation determines work, as well as institutions of politics, law, health and education.

What is also emphasized is that the structural inequalities that exist also colour and shape intimate relations. Even women's right to their own bodies, their freedom of thought or action become contested grounds. Radical feminists emphasize the role of sexualized power, and discuss who are most likely to benefit and who are most likely to be subjugated in such power-imbalanced relationships (Firestone 1970). Women and children, especially female children, frequently fall into the latter category. Although all men are not

"all powerful" and all women are not "all powerless", and all men are certainly not abusers, what is noted is that men abuse and kill, and women and children get abused and die in disproportional numbers (Crawford and Gartner 1992; Daly 1992; Jones 1994; Wilson and Daly 1992). The patterns of abuse and violence are not confined to adults alone, since dating relationships among teens are also infested with violence (DeKeseredy 1989; DeKeseredy and Kelly 1993). In addition, leaving abusive relationships is particularly dangerous for the female partner and her children (Ellis 1992; Ellis and DeKeseredy 1997; Sev'er 1997a/b; *WAC Stats* 1993). It has been shown that violence during and shortly after the dissolution of relationships can be particularly vicious, and may easily spread outside the immediate couple (Sev'er 1997a/b). Aside from those who are the direct targets (women/girlfriends), family and friends, children, new partners and even altruistic passers-by can find themselves in the midst of violence.

It goes without saying that no theory can adequately explain a complex social structural phenomenon such as intimate violence against women and girls. However, as the previous review indicates, learning theories which highlight the transmission of violence through different combinations of rewards, lack of punishment and negative modelling, and feminist theories that locate abuse within gendered power differentials and a climate of misogyny offer compelling insights. Moreover, these theories suggest that remedies to interpersonal violence are complex; requiring personal, social and structural efforts. For example, learning type theories show the necessity of altering reward outcomes for violent behaviour, while at the same time emphasizing positive role-modelling for both men and women to make non-violence a valued aspect of life. Feminist theories suggest the need for equity in the allocation of resources, a stronger voice and representation for women and children, and an equal concern for women's issues in the private as well as public spheres. What I consider the sum-total of these approaches is a social responsibility model against violence (Eichler 1997).<sup>2</sup>

## METHODS

As stated earlier, this paper is an exploration. In that sense, it does not have valid and reliable results to report from a carefully conducted study. Instead, media coverage is generously used to show that violence against women is rampant and occurs in multiple forms, and thus mirrors a climate of misogyny. The sources of media articles are the *Toronto Star*, *Globe and Mail*, *Ottawa Citizen* and the *Montreal Gazette*. As can be expected, the media reports are sometimes a little sensational, and not necessarily free of bias. In addition, these newspapers are from a very concentrated area in the Southeastern part of Canada and definitely not generalizable in and of themselves. However, despite these obvious shortcomings, the sum total will show a continuum of violence against women as the discussed theoretical models assert. The careful testing of some of the assertions awaits future explorations.

## THE CLIMATE OF MISOGYNY

It goes without saying that North American women have made significant gains since the 1970s. One of the most noteworthy is the increase in labour force participation and the closing (yet not closed) wage gap (Baker and Lero 1996; Hamilton 1996, chapter 6). Also, attitudes and behaviour of a sizeable percentage of men towards women have changed for the better (see "Men march to help women," *Toronto Star* May 5, 1996:A7).<sup>3</sup> However, these positive changes do not negate the fact that women have not been able to eradicate the thinly disguised misogyny in our midst. Moreover, we have barely scratched the surface of rampant violence against women at home or in the workplace. In the following section, I am going to review exemplary types of misogyny which are on the rise. These are risk of violence, sexual harassment, violent demonstrations against abortion service providers and intimate femicide. Of course, there are numerous other examples of misogyny such as the current political milieu where social safety nets are being dismantled, often keeping women in abusive relationships (see *Toronto Star*

November 19, 1996: A10 and December 7, 1995: SC1; *Globe and Mail* November 19, 1996: A8 for the effects of cuts to women's shelters).<sup>4</sup> However, it is my contention that the four examples I have chosen are sufficient to clearly establish a continuum that structurally traps many women and puts their careers, and sometimes lives, at risk.

### INCREASED RISK OF VIOLENCE

In 1992, a Statistics Canada survey showed that the risk of violence women face has increased. According to the findings which were widely publicised in the mass media, women were victims in 49 percent of all violent crimes ranging from assault to rape and murder (*Toronto Star* November 19, 1992: A14). Two subsequent national surveys showed that one of four adult women had experienced violence at the hands of a current or former partner (*Canadian Panel* 1993; *VAWS* 1993) and the reported frequency of victimization was much higher for previous than for current partners. Moreover, one of two Canadian women have experienced at least one incident of violence since the age of 16 (*Canadian Panel* 1993). Although a subsequent Statistics Canada report showed an 18 percent decline in spousal assaults (*Statistics Canada* 1997, Table 3.1, p. 8), the latter finding has been received with much scepticism. The argument is that get-tough policies towards the abusers introduced since the early 1990s may have backfired by making victims more reluctant to lay formal complaints against their abusers "especially if they have children and he is the provider" (*Globe and Mail* August 7, 1997: A8). These women still live in terror and continue to seek shelter in ever increasing numbers, without laying charges or involving law enforcement agencies (*Toronto Star* December 8, 1995: A3). Unfortunately, the same era also coincides with severe government cut-backs to services for women and shelter closures (*Toronto Star* December 7, 1995: SC2; *Toronto Star* November 19, 1996: A10).

According to the 1996 Canadian Crime Statistics, crime rates against the person are on the decline (*Statistics Canada* 1997, Table 3.1).

However, this positive trend lacks a positive mirror-image when one looks at violent acts committed against wives and ex-wives. One third of the 84 women killed in 1996 were killed by their spouses or ex-spouses. In addition, spouses and ex-spouses of women perpetrated 41 percent of the 42,005 non-sexual assaults against them (Table 4.10, p. 53). According to recently introduced stalking legislation, there was a sharp increase in reports of criminal harassment by husbands or ex-husbands (2,840 in 1994 but 3,313 in 1996; *Juristat* 1996, 7). During a spousal abuse and murder inquiry of Arlene May by her long time abusive partner Randy Iles, expert witness Dr. Peter Jaffe (the director of the London Family Court and a clinical psychologist at the University of Western Ontario) testified that even the streets are safer for women than their own homes (*Toronto Star* February 19, 1998: E1 and May 26, 1998: B3; Duffy and Momirov 1997, 120; DeKeseredy and MacLeod 1997, 60 for the effects of seeing the home as "private" and thus hidden from public scrutiny).

Children are also routinely victimized. A recent Statistics Canada report found that children were victims in 22 percent of all assault cases reported to the police, and of these, girls suffered 56 percent of the physical and 80 percent of the sexual assaults (*Juristat* 1996, 1).

### INSTANCES OF SEXUAL HARASSMENT

Other instances of misogyny are more subtle but nevertheless recurrent. In fact, one can argue that in the 1990s, there is a particularly callous attitude about the indiscretions of men against women, while younger women may erroneously believe that the gender battles are won. A case in point is the increasing number of sexual harassment complaints, and what appears to be the simultaneously increasing leniency towards those who have crossed boundaries of acceptability. Even in positions of utmost visibility and trust, men who should serve as role-models are failing to do so by allowing or instigating embarrassing situations and finding ways to put the whole blame on women.<sup>5</sup>

Sexual harassment examples are many. Both in the US and Canada, the reported rates of

sexual harassment can be as high as 90 percent in non-random samples (Brooks and Perot 1991) and about 50 percent in more generalizable surveys (Canadian Human Rights Commission 1983). Most of us still recall the US Senate hearings against judge Clarence Thomas in the early 1990s. We remember how the all-male senate committee rushed to the aid of their accused brother, despite the impeccable track-record of his accuser, law professor Anita Hill. More recently, the Ford Motor Company paid one-and-a-half million US dollars to settle a sexual harassment and hostile work environment suit out of court (*Ottawa Citizen* January 30, 1998: C12). In two different contexts, a 1997 survey of athletes and coaches showed that 12.6 percent reported first hand experience of sexual harassment (*Ottawa Citizen* January 22, 1998: D1). A recent Amnesty International report strongly criticized the US correctional system, charging that female inmates routinely face sexual abuse and harassment from male guards (*Toronto Star* March 4, 1999: A14). Not surprisingly, men's sexualized transgressions are not confined to incarcerated women. A psychiatrist recently received a six-year jail term for sexually harassing and assaulting his female patients (*Toronto Star* May 30, 1998: A22). Even a senior Vatican envoy has been charged with sexual harassment, leading to discussions about whether the Vatican should seek diplomatic immunity in the case (*Toronto Star* January 7, 1999: A22).

The army remains one of the most entrenched bastions of male-domination. Recently, Sergeant Major Gene McKinney was acquitted on all charges of sexual harassment against him, which translated to the dismissal of 19 charges by women on one man's word (*Toronto Star* February 12, 1998: A11). Ironically, McKinney was convicted and demoted on a single obstruction charge, not as justice for any of his victims (*Toronto Star* March 24, 1998-A11). In Canada, after long silences and repeated denials, even Defense Minister The Honourable Art Eggleton and Chief of Defence Staff General Maurice Baril publicly admitted that "sexual abuse exists in the military" (*Toronto Star* May 20, 1998: A3). Since publicity began, numerous cases have been brought to light, some

involving harassment allegations against top ranking officials (see "Colonel under fire" in *Toronto Star*, June 18, 1998: A1). Is it any wonder that women are avoiding the army like a plague, and is it any wonder that the Canadian Army is desperately trying to recruit women in order to clear its image (*Toronto Star* March 25, 1998: A9)? On the other hand, which job or occupation is perfectly safe? Recently, a 17-year-old young woman was sexually assaulted during a job interview, despite the fact that she had said "no" at least three times. Yet an Alberta lower court judge (John McClung) acquitted the assailant claiming that the teen did not "present herself in a bonnet and crinolines" (*Toronto Star* February 26, 1999: A7). McClung also engaged in a personalized attack against one of the female Supreme Court judges, Madame Claire L'Heureux-Dubé, even though the Supreme Court decision to overturn McClung's earlier judgment was unanimous (*Toronto Star* March 5, 1999: A5 and A21).

#### VIOLENCE RELATED TO ABORTION ISSUES

Perhaps one of the most profound forms of oppression women suffer is when their fundamental right over their own bodies is taken away or threatened. In the United States, this right was debated at the Supreme Court level and legally entrenched with the *Roe vs. Wade* case (1973). Canadian legislation soon followed, and under the dedicated leadership of Dr. Henry Morgentaller, Canadian women began to exercise their choice over unwanted pregnancies. Nevertheless, the battles over women's bodies are not over. In fact, as it has been argued in the media "the intimidation, torment and murderous violence" may be on the rise (*Toronto Star* July 20, 1997: A1). Within the last few years, there were shooting murders of abortion clinic doctors and staff in Birmingham, Alabama (*Ottawa Citizen* February 28, 1998: A8; *Toronto Star* January 30, 1998: A3) and Miami, Florida (*Ottawa Citizen* August 20, 1994: B3 and November 3, 1994: A4). Even more recently, a New York doctor was murdered in his own home (*Toronto Star* October 1998, A2). There have been

arson and bombings in Atlanta (*Ottawa Citizen* February 25, 1997) and in suburban Boston and Brookline, New York (*Montreal Gazette* February 6, 1995: D1). Extremist anti-choice organizations have launched a guerrilla campaign not only against women but for people who defend women's choice. A Presbyterian Minister, Paul Hill, has lead anti-choice demonstrations with a sign that read "execute murderers, abortionists and accessories." He eventually killed two people and maimed a third, (*Ottawa Citizen* November 3, 1994: A4). In fact, between 1982 and 1994, there have been 146 incidents involving bombing and arson against abortion clinics in 31 US states (*Ottawa Citizen* August 20, 1994: B3). Since 1994, there have been five more attempted murders and two murders of doctors that provide abortion services (*Toronto Star* 1998: A2).

According to a Montreal newspaper, Canadian clinics are extremely wary about the influx of American anti-abortion protesters and the spread of US-type violence. Already there has been an escalation in intimidation tactics, such as cutting phone and power lines, stalking and threatening doctors and staff, harassing patients, break ins and vandalism (*Montreal Gazette* February 6, 1995: D1). The Morgentaller clinic in Toronto was bombed in 1992, and a gynecologist in British Columbia was shot in 1994 after receiving numerous death threats. Extremist right-to-life groups which give themselves names like "Army of God" or "Operation Rescue," etc., are distributing literature against women's choice. Some of these pamphlets have been found to include instructions for making plastic explosives (*Montreal Gazette* February 6, 1995: D1). Investigation of the recent murder of Dr. Barnett Slepian also showed that the violent segments of the anti-choice movement have moved their attack strategies into cyberspace. These electronic hate-sites contain pictures and detailed information about doctors who provide abortion services, and immediately put an X-mark on the pictures of those who are murdered (*Toronto Star* October 31, 1998: A2 and January 7, 1999: A14).

## EXAMPLES OF FEMICIDE AND INTIMATE FEMICIDE

Fortunately, blatant hunting and killing of women is rare. It is often confined to pathological serial killers, and rape/kill campaigns in ethnic wars (Albanese 1998). Nevertheless, there are shocking cases where revenge against one or hatred of all women seem to be the only motive in mass murders. For instance, the 1989 killing of the 14 college women in Montreal is a notorious example of generalized woman hatred. Although the tender ages of the Jonesboro killers (13 and 11) may make such a comparison unpalatable for many, there is an eerie resemblance between the gunning-down of 14 university women and the massacre of five and wounding of more than a dozen girls/women in the 1998 shootout.

While the 13 and 11 year-old killers are extraordinarily young, the Jonesboro massacre is yet another example of violence by men of all ages towards their intimate female partners and friends/family. A much publicised Canadian example of how revenge against one woman spreads was the 1996 shooting murders of nine-members of a British Columbia family. Mr. Chahal, the estranged husband of one of the daughters, killed nine family members of his estranged wife and also killed himself (*Toronto Star* April 6, 1996: A1). The news media is littered with similar reports, where violence against women partners has consumed numerous other lives. For example, Mark Clark detonated a bomb in his estranged wife's car, killing himself, her and her three children (*Toronto Star* September 13, 1995: A17). He had lured his ex-wife and the children to a mall with the promise of buying school clothes. Helen Kirec and her four children were killed by her estranged husband, who also killed himself (*Globe and Mail* April 22, 1997: A1). Michael Stevens sent parcel-bombs to close friends and family of his estranged lover, killing five and maiming two others (*Toronto Star* December 30, 1990: A1). Dean Roberts strangled his wife and their thirteen-month-old twin boys, then set the house on fire (*Toronto Star* November 13, 1995: A30). Ken McLeod stabbed his girlfriend, her three-year-old daughter and 18-month-old niece

to death. There were 40 to 50 stab wounds on each victim (*Toronto Star* March 4, 1996: A8). David J. Gorton bludgeoned to death his common-law wife and her four children (*Toronto Star* September 20, 1997: A8). The slaying of Nicole Brown and her friend (Ronald Goldman) became one of the most widely publicised events of the 1990s. Although her former husband O.J. Simpson managed to get a "non-guilty" verdict in the criminal trial, he was found guilty in the civil trial of the wrongful deaths of Ms Brown and Mr. Goldman (*Toronto Star* March 3, 1996: A12 and February 5, 1997: A1).

In line with the feminist interpretations of intimate violence, the rage fuelled by possessiveness and need to control one's wife/girlfriend and the total disregard for her wish/right to terminate a relationship are similar, time after time (Campbell 1992). Even in Canada, tougher measures have not barred the likes of Randy Iles from obtaining a gun permit and murdering his estranged lover despite multiple outstanding charges of stalking, threatening and confinement against him (*Toronto Star* March 24, 1998: E3 and March 26, 1998: B4). When guns are not available, kitchen knives, ice-picks or bludgeons are used (*Toronto Star* September 20, 1997: A8).

What is additionally worrisome is the youthful ages of some of these killers and their victims. Vincent Gray was 29 when he "stomped" his girlfriend (19) to death while in a jealous rage (*Toronto Star* January 20, 1995: A18). Roderick Ballentino Brown (28) beat his girlfriend (22) to death (*Toronto Star* October 11, 1995: A4). Twenty-six-year-old Gilles Loubier shot and killed his girlfriend and her five-year-old daughter, and wounded another daughter (*Toronto Star* November 28, 1994: A10). Joan Heimbecker was shot four times and killed by her 25-year-old former boyfriend (*Toronto Star* May 24, 1996: A16). Bac Quong Lu (24) smashed his girlfriend's head with a four-pound wrench (*Toronto Star* October 17, 1992: A18). Laurie White (20) was found hanged in her bedroom and her 24-year-old estranged boyfriend was charged with murder (*Toronto Star* May 8, 1997: A6). Patrick Deocharran was 21 when he repeatedly stabbed his ex-girlfriend in the heart (*Toronto Star* February 6, 1993: A4). John

Breen was only 21 when he stabbed and killed his wife, mother and cousin in 1993 (*Toronto Star* July 28, 1995: A10). Rohan Ranger (20) faces two first-degree murder charges for the stabbing deaths of his ex-girlfriend (Marsha Ottey, 19) and her sister (*Toronto Star* June 12, 1996: A11). Perhaps most telling of all, Brian Tackett killed himself and his 21-year-old lover in a hotel room when he was only *fourteen-years-old*. He had incessantly talked to his friends about his murderous intentions, but none had taken him seriously (*Globe and Mail* August 18, 1997: A5). Thus, the difference between the Jonesboro case and other countless examples is a slight difference in age, not in the deed. The young killers and their older predecessors that occupy the North American news chillingly demonstrate how early these violent patterns are learned. The events also demonstrate how young boys/men can and do transgress against women/girls. Recently, a "little boy predator" has been stalking and sexually molesting girls in his school by sticking his finger "right up inside" their bodies. What is alarming about this news is that the predator is eight-years-old, and thus exempt from the intervention of the criminal justice system (DiManno in *Toronto Star* May 15, 1998: F1). The victims' parents were advised to move their children out of the classroom, leaving the predator untouched (and possibly in the position to prey on other girls).

### SOME WAYS OUT AND CONCLUSIONS

I believe that events such as the Jonesboro slaughter can lead to self reflection in order to make sure that they are less likely to happen again. An easy (although questionable) response is to toughen up legislation to deal with "young criminals." In an early US news program following the killings, there were discussions about changing Arkansas laws to deal with young offenders. In the wake of the slaughter, many voices wanted to dismantle the existing leniency towards very young offenders (protection from being tried as adults and protection from long-term sentences). The Canadian government also wants to get tough with young offenders (*Toronto Star* May 12, 1998: A7). Just recently, Justice Minister Anne McLellan

introduced tougher legislation called the Youth Criminal Justice Act (*Toronto Star* March 11, 1999: A1).

Some may even try to establish the death-penalty where it does not currently exist and/or widen its scope where already in use. In their social anguish, many Americans want revenge and some US politicians are eager to oblige the electorate. For example, despite a worldwide outrage, Karla Fay Tucker was recently executed in Texas, and the state gloated in its notoriety of never having pardoned any of the 76 appellants in the last 10 years (*Toronto Star* February 5, 1998:A24). However, there are serious doubts about the effectiveness of such punitive measures in dealing with the social ills they are meant to ameliorate (Hodge et al, 1997 for insightful analyses about deterrence; Murray 1997; Shonebaum 1998; also West 1984 for high recidivism rates among young offenders despite punitive measures).

I believe that the Jonesboro disaster should not be dismissed as another violent fluke that is exclusive to the US. Instead, a more constructive approach would be to honestly and openly re-evaluate the continuum of misogyny and violence in our homes and work lives. Also, each of us, man or woman, victim or perpetrator, must take responsibility for the role we play in its perseverance. The two words I want to underscore here are "continuum" and "responsibility." As lovers or friends, as families and parents, as work-mates, as teachers, as law-enforcers or politicians, we must recognize and be willing to stand up to all types of violence as well as gendered transgressions, rather than wait for the worst possible scenario before showing our dismay. How many of us can honestly say that we never witnessed controlling pushes and shoves, heard demeaning and degrading jokes, belittled a woman's voice, weight, dress, performance or outright achievements or stayed impartial in the face of such belittlement?<sup>6</sup> How many men can say that they did not openly or covertly root for another male colleague during hirings, evaluations, promotions? How many of us put down women for demonstrating the exact drive, perseverance and type of leadership that we admire in men? How

many of us know a sexual predator at work or an abuser at home, but choose to turn a blind eye just because he is a good friend, a good worker, a fun guy, a good provider, an available golf partner, too young, too old, too powerful, etc. etc.? How many of us can claim that we did something about any transgression, whether we were the butt of demeaning jokes, loser in an unfairly resolved dispute or endured an unwanted hug or wandering hands? How many of us overheard shrill cries in the middle of the night, or noticed the strange bruises on a neighbour's son or daughter, or pretended not to see the black eye of a woman in the coffee shop? How many of us still think that these things are none of our business and thus contribute to the conspiracy of silence?

It would also be misleading to deflect the whole burden of troubled gender relations to men, despite the unacceptable conduct of some famous recent examples: Clarence Thomas, Bill Clinton, Gene McKinney, O.J. Simpson, Tommy Lee, Charlie Sheen, Mickey Rourke and their unfamous but equally oppressive counterparts that harass and abuse their mates or co-workers. Women also need to ask themselves about their own role in the continuation of the status quo, as socializers of young children, as workers, as mates, as teachers, lawyers and politicians, and most importantly, as role models. This is not to blame the victim, but to reclaim the resilience and agency of women in initiating much needed social change. It is to encourage women to stand united in their demand for social accountability and justice in the face of gendered transgressions against them.

In sum, the two boys in Jonesboro, Arkansas did not just wake up one day, arm themselves to the teeth and hunt down and kill four girls and a woman, and wound more than a dozen other females. They are a part of a violent continuum. Like their older predecessors, they are products of a society where subtle as well as overt violence against women is rampant. They are a product of a society where women still get paid less, are still disproportionally poor, are continuously saddled with the crushing responsibilities of single-parenthood with little or no help from the state or their former partners (Sev'er 1992). They form a

part of society where laws of equity are still not entrenched, where law enforcement still fails to protect those who are in danger. They form a part of society where judges and juries still acquit abusers and even murderers on the basis of sexist myths, and where some politicians and high-paid lawyers still cater to the rich and the powerful whose needs rarely coincide with the everyday safety of women (see Pence 1996 for an in-depth analysis of safety of women in not woman-friendly social contexts). The Jonesboro killers live in a society where men in positions of power still do and say things which degrade all women. From early years onward, these two boys, along with millions of others, may have been inundated by the overlapping images of love, passion, control, exploitation and violence through films, video-games, music, and television commercials. More recently, every North American household has been subjected to the almost pornographic sex content of even the most sombre news reports due to the poor judgment and equally poor behaviour of the US president (letters to the editor, *Toronto Star* December 30, 1998: A25). Undoubtedly, these young killers have seen women and girls repeatedly put down by men and boys. They may have seen violence against women in their own homes or in the homes of their best friends. They may have seen their heroes, whether actors, sports figures, musicians or politicians, hurt women. What is more, they may have learned that not much happens to men who transgress. Their behaviour then, as abhorrent as it is, is nothing more than a peak of an gargantuan iceberg.

In conclusion, I do not mean to suggest that there is or will ever be an epidemic of gun-toting 13 and 11 year-olds hunting down women and girls. It is also true that most boys and men remain non-violent despite exposure to the sexist and misogynist stimuli that our culture provides. Nevertheless, given the stubborn resilience of gendered inequalities in work and all-too-common violence in intimate relations, it would be naïve to assume that the Jonesboro slaughter is a singular case. I take exception to those who throw up their hands and say they do not understand how this could have happened. I also take exception to those

who suggest that a particular family (read: the divorced mother) failed. This mass murder, like its predecessors, is clearly understandable within the misogyny and gendered violence that already plagues North American society. Similar shocking events have happened before, both in Canada and in the US. The question is, are we going to put aside our differences in creed, colour, status, religion and political affiliation and demand an end to all gendered transgressions and violence? After all, the next time (and there will be others if the status quo remains), it could be our own daughters, sisters, mothers, nieces or ourselves who are harassed or stalked. The next time, a woman who decides to exercise control over her own body may not find a doctor who can help her with her choice. The next time, it could be one of us who is paid less than we deserve, or get overlooked in a new appointment or a promotion. The next time, it could be "us" rather than "them" in the line of fire of a disgruntled man or a teenaged boy, or it could be our own lovers, fathers, nephews or sons who thrust the knife or pull the trigger.

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## ENDNOTES

1. Since the original version of this paper was written, Ontario passed a revised gun law which now permits 12 year-olds to use firearms for "hunting" purposes. The controversial legislation was partially justified with comments such as: "in British Columbia, 10 year-olds can get junior hunting licences"; "children are going hunting anyway"; and "families can now spend 'quality time' with their children during a hunt" (*Toronto Star* 1998, September 16: A2 and September 17: A2). A representative poll conducted by the *Toronto Star* showed that 76 percent of respondents were opposed to 12-year-olds having legal access to guns (*Toronto Star*, 1998, September 16: A2).
2. Eichler (1997) has developed her social responsibility model specifically for the understanding of families and family policy. However, her insight about seeing gendered relationships not as "isolated microcosms" but as "organizational structures" which "interact with society at large" (Eichler 1997, 122) can also shed light on violence of men by women. For more details on this model, see Eichler 1997, especially chapter seven).
3. I acknowledge the fact that some men are also victimised by other men (e.g., sexual molestation of male children and youth by fathers, step-fathers, other male relatives, teachers, coaches, male clergy etc.), or even by some women (e.g., rare instances where male children are molested by mothers, step-mothers, female baby-sitters or teachers, or when men are abused by their female partners; see Straus 1993). Although any one of these may constitute a criminal offence as well as a moral transgression, this paper exclusively concentrates on abuse perpetrated by men and male youth.
4. Another area of increased misogyny can be found in vociferous fathers' rights groups (Bertoia and Drakich 1993) who are demanding extended rights after a separation or divorce and/or automatic joint custody decisions. If legislated, these changes can drastically curb the decision making power and the freedom of movement of the custodial mothers. Another example of misogyny can be found in the militant suppression of the production and wide distribution of RU-468 (the-day-after pill) which includes death threats to its developers, manufacturers and distributors (*Toronto Star* July 20, 1997: A1).
5. The original version of this paper, which was written before the historic impeachment trial of President Clinton, had a section on how the most powerful political figure in the world shortchanged women. After the overly publicized Senate decision to leave him in office, I no longer wish to belabour this point except to say that his treatment of and relations with female workers in his employ, and his highly questionable words and deeds which caused endless embarrassment to his colleagues, party supporters, co-workers, including his wife and daughter, have been less than exemplary.
6. Recently, a Toronto city councillor was reported to shriek at his female colleague "shut up, you fat slut" during a council session. Although a security officer had recorded this gendered insult, the offender claimed that he had said something else, like "fat slub" (September 17, 1998: B3). With the exception of a few headlines, *nothing happened*.

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