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Original Citation

Hearn, Jeff (2013) The sociological significance of domestic violence: Tensions, paradoxes and implications. *Current Sociology*, 61 (2). pp. 152-170. ISSN 0011-3921

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The Sociological Significance of Domestic Violence: Tensions, Paradoxes, and Implications

Jeff Hearn

Abstract. Sociology and sociological theory has been effective in analyzing societal and institutional conflict and violence, but less so the specifics of interpersonal violence. This article examines the sociological significance of domestic violence. This relationship, or sometimes its neglect, is underlain by several tensions and paradoxes, which in turn have broader implications for sociology and sociological theory. These matters are examined through: the possible paradox of violence and intimacy in the *phenomenon* of domestic violence; the importance of the *naming and framing* of such violence; *explanation responsibility and agency*; and *gender, hegemony and discourse* in men's violence to known women, as part of a multi-faceted power approach.

keywords: domestic violence, intimacy, masculinities, men, sociology, transnational, violence, women

Introduction

This article examines the sociological significance of domestic violence. This entails considering both how analysis of domestic violence is illustrative of more general issues in sociology, and how sociology can be informed by analysis of domestic violence. The relationship of the topic of domestic violence and the discipline of sociology, or sometimes the lack or neglect thereof, is underlain by several neglects, tensions and paradoxes, which in turn have broader implications for sociology. Both the extent of domestic violence globally and research, especially feminist research, on this gendered problem are vast, with women the overwhelming majority of victims and men the great majority of perpetrators, especially of more severe and extended forms. Yet despite this, these issues are rarely at the heart of

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mainstream of sociology. This neglect and its implications are examined through: the possible paradox of violence and intimacy in the *phenomenon* of domestic violence; the importance of *naming and framing* of such violence; ethico-political questions of *explanation, responsibility and agency*; and *gender, hegemony and discourse* in men's violence to known women, as part of a multi-faceted power approach.

Violence, Domestic Violence and Sociology

Mainstream sociology and sociological theory have been much concerned with and broadly effective in analyzing social conflict, but much less so the specifics of interpersonal violence, domestic violence or violence in intimacy (Ray, 2000, 2011; McKie, 2006). Ray (2000: 145) concluded that while 'violence is a persistent feature of social life ... (with a few exceptions) it has not been central to sociological concerns', and that sociology has tended to focus upon social cohesion and consensus with violence 'as a residual category of power'. This claim probably overstates the case in terms of violence *generally*, but is much more tenable in relation to the relative neglect of domestic violence in intimacy between known persons as a central concern in mainstream sociology. Though there are inevitably major variations across international sociological traditions, this relative neglect is evident in several ways.

First, many canonical writers and texts in sociological theory, both 'classics' and more contemporary landmark texts, have not made such domestic violence a central concern. The founding fathers of sociology, as men of their own historical time, were generally not well attuned to foregrounding interpersonal violence against women. Though Marx and Engels recognized the origins of class oppression in the first oppression of sex and the control of the female sex by males, domestic violence was a not major theme in their work. In *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* Engels (1972) wrote: 'The first class opposition that appears in history coincides with the development of the antagonism between man and Jeff Hearn 'The sociological significance of domestic violence: tensions, paradoxes, and implications', *Current Sociology*, Special issue 'Violence and society: Introduction to an emerging field of sociology', 16(2), 2013, 152-170 .

woman in monogamous marriage, and the first class oppression coincides with that of the female sex by the male.’ And in *The German Ideology* Marx and Engels (1976: 44) had written many years earlier: ‘The division of labour ... was originally nothing but the division of labour in the sexual act.’ However, they did not pursue this theme as domestic violence, though it would seem a reasonable assumption that, as they saw class as a potentially violent relation, potential violence could also apply to sexual/gender relations.

Weber wrote extensively on violence, especially on the state as the monopoly holder of violence. This movement towards the monopoly power of the state is of great significance in reactions to violence against women in intimacy, including state responses to such violence – the dominant legitimate controller of violence - ‘... claim(ing) the monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force within a given territory’ (Weber, 1919/1946). Durkheim was preoccupied with violence, especially suicide, but little with domestic violence. His work has been applied in examining war, torture and communal violence, but rarely domestic violence (Mukherjee, 2010). ‘Classical’ sociological theories more often tackled legitimate forms of social control, consensus and cohesion (as with Durkheim) or sources of division, exclusion and conflict (as with Marx) (McKie, 2006), despite recognition of violence to wives by *inter alia* Frances Power Cobbe and Matilda Gage in the nineteenth century.

Second, major, twentieth century, sociological traditions, whether Parsonian, symbolic interactionism or Frankfurt School, have theorized violence, but generally not prioritized domestic violence. Such interpersonal violence, in contrast to institutional, collective, and revolutionary violence, has often been played down. Benjamin’s (1921) essay ‘Critique of Violence’ exposed the limitations of liberal obfuscations of violence and the ‘force’ of law, but not as a critique of domestic violence (Hanssen, 2000). Foucault’s huge contributions to the study of disciplining, surveillance and permeation of social life through epistemic and discursive violence extended these debates to institutional rather than domestic power.

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Third, the most influential contemporary sociologists in the Anglophone world have been assessed as Bauman, Beck, Bourdieu and Giddens (Outhwaite, 2009). Of these Bourdieu (2001; see Chambers, 2005) has given focused attention to the structural relations of men's violence to women, specifically in studying the Kabyle, whilst drawing on broader work on symbolic violence. Beck and Beck-Gersheim (1995) in some ways extend Weberian and Durkheimian analyses of shifts from pre-industrial to industrial societies as creating more individualist marriage relations to post-industrial society. Bauman has analyzed violence, notably the Holocaust, but rarely domestic violence (see Beilharz, 2002).

Fourth, the structure and activities of the International Sociological Association itself are a significant commentary on these issues. ISA Research Committee 1 is on Armed Forces and Conflict Resolution, but there is no Research Committee specifically on violence, let alone domestic violence. Using advanced searches of citations for keywords in articles in *Current Sociology* and *International Sociology* (January 1952-June 2012), there were 941 references to 'conflict', of which 544 were to 'war', 238 to 'domestic', 46 to 'intimacy'; and of 429 to 'violence', 266 were to 'war', 132 to 'domestic', 26 to 'intimacy'. When violence is referred to it is more often as institutional force by states or collective social groupings. While collective violence is often seen in structural terms, violences around intimate relationships are less often understood as structural phenomena.

Fifth, the major preoccupations of contemporary sociology are seen in the emphases given in recent textbooks, handbooks, encyclopaedias and dictionaries of sociology. For example, in the two volume c.1300 page *21st Century Sociology Reference Handbook* (Bryant and Peck, 2007), one page is devoted to domestic violence (in fact within the last entry), while, for example, military sociology is given a full chapter entry, and Ritzer's 11-volume *Blackwell Encyclopedia of Sociology* awards one page to review of 'Domestic Violence' (Carmody, 2006) out of over 5300 pages of text.

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So, how is this possible, when domestic violence is such a vast worldwide social problem? Some estimates suggest between a quarter and a half of women worldwide experience such physical and sexual assaults. The World Health Organization (Krug et al., 2002) reported the percentage of women assaulted by their partner the previous 12 months ranged up to 27 in Nicaragua, 38 in South Korea, and over half in West Bank and Gaza. Men's violence to known women is among the most pervasive human rights violations (Renzetti et al., 2001; Libal and Parekh, 2009). Thus, a first basic reason for the sociological significance of domestic violence is simply its extent.

The relative marginalization of domestic violence in sociology is despite the vast international research and activism thereon over many decades by feminist sociologists and kindred researchers internationally (Hanmer and Saunders, 1984; Hanmer and Itzin, 2000; Skinner et al., 2005; Hagemann-White et al., 2008). This body of work is diverse and developing rapidly. Though there are major variations within recent feminist research, it has emphasized the gendered, sexual nature of what is predominantly men's domestic violence, including psychological violence rather than reducing focus to physical and sexual violence. The violence against women movement has addressed intersectional gender relations regarding race, class, nationality, sexuality, age, disability for many years (Crenshaw, 1989).¹ The relative neglect of much of this work in mainstream sociology may exemplify long-established avoidance of feminist scholarship in the academy.

Violence and Intimacy: A Fundamental Paradox?

What kind of phenomenon is domestic violence? Domestic violence concerns violence in relations of past or present, sometimes future, intimacy, albeit usually unequal intimacy. Intimacy precedes or supersedes violence; and intimacy occurs within, even as, violence.

Intimacy might appear to *contradict* violence. Though Grandin and Lupri (1997: 440) note, Jeff Hearn 'The sociological significance of domestic violence: tensions, paradoxes, and implications', *Current Sociology*, Special issue 'Violence and society: Introduction to an emerging field of sociology', 16(2), 2013, 152-170 .

‘The etiology of ... partner abuse is grounded in intimacy’, such a paradoxical convergence of violence and ‘intimacy’ has generally not figured strongly in sociological theorizing. In most so-called ‘general’ social theory, often meaning non-feminist theory, interpersonal violence in and around intimate relationships is not seen as a characteristic or pervasive form of interpersonal, structural or social relations. Within mainstream sociology, interpersonal relations are easily assumed to involve relatively rational individuals, with a relatively unified self in relation to the ‘aberration’ of violence, and who conduct their affairs in a liberal, mutually adjusting manner, until something happens to break routine ‘calm’. But domestic violence shows this to be problematic.

Mainstream sociology can learn much from the knots of contradictions of violence and intimacy that include sexuality, and often the privatization of love, (hetero)sexuality, care, trust, known-ness and unequal intimacy. Violence in intimacy is primarily to *known* women, not strangers. This kind of violence occurs in contexts of *intimate* relations – involving confidences, childcare, housework, close physical proximity, conversation, silence, and sexual activity and possibilities. Known relations between men and women probably involve a history together, experience of similar events, maybe future contact. Violence occurs in association with other knowledges of the person. The man *knows* about the woman, her past, perhaps previous violation, strengths, weaknesses; the woman *knows* about the man, his past, his previous violence. The violence is predominantly in privatized heterosexual ‘intimate’ relations. The hierarchy implicit or explicit in heterosexual relations is shown in men’s violence to known women, and contributes to eroticization of dominance.

Intimacy appears to be a very particular interpersonal and intrapersonal social phenomenon, or set of phenomena. It appears positive, but what if ‘intimacy’ is an aspect of gendered intersectional unequal power relations, including profound affective inequality

(Lynch et al., 2009)? However, the gender/sexual power relations of domestic violence
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concerned are constituted in violence *and* intimacy. This is not to suggest that intimacy exists only in heterosexual relationships, this is clearly not so. But rather intimacy, unequal intimacy, is one aspect of gendered intersectional unequal power relations that may sustain heterosexual violence. Intimacy is often ideologically afforded a (overly) positive place, just as love and pleasure are often assumed to be beneficent. It may appear to destabilize a clear distinction between the violent and the non-violent, and challenge a one-sided focus on violence in intimate relationships. But intimacy may also be a way in which some forms of heterosexual violence are discursively moulded. Accounts and experiences of intimacy can be read as *reinforcements* of violence in which emotions such as love and affection are vital, as expressed by this UK man interviewee seeking to explain his violence:

‘I don’t know. I’ll tell you when I find out myself. I just don’t honestly know. I can’t ... I just can’t work that one out. I really can’t. Maybe, and I mean this is just a thought, *but maybe it’s because I loved her so much, and I didn’t want to lose her, you know.* To me that was a way of keeping her, you know, by keeping her in check. It could be something like that.’ [my emphasis] (cited in Hearn, 1998: 153-154).

Berlant and Warner comment ‘(a) complex cluster of sexual practices gets confused, in heterosexual culture, with the love plot of intimacy and familialism that signifies belonging to society in a deep and normal way’ (1998: 554). Rather being part of a positive self-conscious personal project (Giddens, 1992) or simply the extent to which people participate in each others’ lives (Black, 1976), intimacy may be bound with violence, an ideology and institution that may give meaning and intelligibility to violent situations (cf. Sandberg, 2011). One way of making sense of this is to see this intimacy around violence as paradoxically ‘distant intimacy’, with increased relational distance appearing to be associated with more likelihood of domestic violence (Michalski, 2004: 667).

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The intricacy and simultaneity of violence and intimacy can be given flesh in the example of love bites. These may be boldly marks of affection and commitment in a non-violent loving relationship. But within a situation of violent intimacy they take on more complex paradoxical meanings as violent practices, and used as a means of control and (sexual) possession rather than for specifically erotic purposes. As an Australian women experiencing physical violence, put it:

‘he was carrying on [threatening] before I was going out and forced a love bite on my neck, which made me more disgusted with him.’ (cited in Jones and Hearn, 2009: 60).

While such violences are typically in private, ‘domestic violence’ also takes place outside the home itself, in public spaces, such as streets, pubs, clubs and workplaces. Indeed research in feminist anthropology and geography has shown how in many social contexts public spaces are far more dangerous to women than the home (Low and Lawrence-Zúñiga, 2003: 13; Harvey and Gow, 1994).

Moreover, the connections between (domestic) violence, intimacy and relational distance are further complicated by and through differential and dispersed location, beyond immediate proximity, as in processes of transnationalization. Such multiple forms of transnational violence to women typically occur within transnational patriarchies (Hearn, 2009). Transnationalizations add another dimension to violence and intimacy, and affect both the form and processes of such violences in intimacy. Transnational violences in intimacy, principally men’s violences, may include violence in transnational interpersonal relations, threats at distance, abductions, ‘honour violence’, ‘honour killings’, trafficking, human smuggling, forced marriage (Gill and Anitha, 2011), and massive extensions of the sex trade and facilitations of sexual violence via ICTs (Hearn, 2006).

The range of theorizing, feminist and non-feminist, on the transnational, the complexity of transnational transnational economic, political and cultural change, and deterritorialization, Jeff Hearn ‘The sociological significance of domestic violence: tensions, paradoxes, and implications’, *Current Sociology*, Special issue ‘Violence and society: Introduction to an emerging field of sociology’, 16(2), 2013, 152-170 .

and translocality and hybridity are all relevant to rethinking the diverse and changing forms and processes of transnational violences in transnational intimacy (for example, Appadurai, 1996; Hannerz 1996; Ong 1999; Faist, 2000; Westwood and Phizacklea, 2000; Hearn, 2004b; Merry, 2006, Vertovec, 2009). Transnational violences in intimacy are enacted in dispersion, as dispersed and distanced violences, across national boundaries or in social forms that may transcend the nation-state, as in virtual violences (Hearn, 2010).

Specifically, violences and intimacy occur in a wide variety of transnational contexts of transnational dispersed families, transnational corporations, transnational organized crime, migration, domestic service, care chains, including statuses of 'illegal', 'irregular' and refugee migrants, with various linked vulnerabilities. The considerable research on the intersectional links between migration and women's vulnerability to intimate partner violence highlights '... the multifaceted interaction of culture, poverty, host country immigration laws and policies, and other contextual factors [that] appear to exacerbate migrant women's vulnerability to gender-based violence ...' (Kiwanuka, 2010: 164; see Lefko-Everett, 2007). Women's immigrant status is an especially important factor (Menjívar and Salcido, 2002; Burman and Chantler, 2005; Raj et al., 2005), in making the knots of violence and intimacy difficult to unravel. As one of Kiwanuka's (2010: 167) women migrant interviewees expressed it:

'I was with him because I was not settled, even [when] we hooked up it is because I had no place to go, no food and most of all I had to attach myself to a South African to help to get me papers [legal documentation] ... He used to do this [abuse me] because he knew there is nowhere else I can go ...'

Violences and intimacy also occur in contexts of transnational collective violences, war and militarism. This applies in war zones and post-conflict situations, where features of war or militarism continue in 'peacetime', as contexts of men's violence to women, with domestic

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violence and war often mutually reinforcing; violence occurs within violences. Transnational relations on violence, including transnational divisions of labor, impact on violences in intimacy. Transnationalizations, with both neoliberal and other trajectories, produce 'a complex sociality in which generational, local and global processes intersect', with gender and other intersections. Ray (2011: 80) continues 'The international articulation of neoliberal strategies has generated a violent form of enclosure and dispossession'; making the conditions for further interpersonal and structural violences. As Walby (2009) explains, the violence of the powerful is much more extensive than the violence of the less powerful; societal regimes of inequality are key to understanding interpersonal violence.

Naming and Framing

Apart from the sheer extent of domestic violence, and the paradox of violence and intimacy, there are other reasons why domestic violence is significant for sociology. Like other forms of violence, it demands a positioning, orientation and framing from sociology and sociologists that recognizes intersectional gendered relations of power. Thus a third area of sociological significance of domestic violence lies in the politics of its naming and framing (Klein and Kelly, 2013). This set of phenomena, actions and processes is unusual in the variety of its namings, and frames within which it is conceptualized in sociological and related contexts, for example, as: 'domestic violence', 'family violence', 'conjugal violence', 'intimate violence', 'partner violence', 'intimate partner violence', 'spousal violence', 'women abuse', 'abusive relationships', 'wife battering', 'wife beating', 'violence against women', 'violence against wives', 'violence against known women', 'coercive control', 'woman and child abuse', and forms of 'sexual violence'.

Further violences to known persons may include 'sexual exploitation', 'human trafficking' and 'human smuggling', highlighting intersections with, for example, sexuality, Jeff Hearn 'The sociological significance of domestic violence: tensions, paradoxes, and implications', *Current Sociology*, Special issue 'Violence and society: Introduction to an emerging field of sociology', 16(2), 2013, 152-170.

migration and nationality. While men's heterosexual violence generally dominates, same-sex violence, violence by women, and transgender violence are variably recognized. It is important not to see all these concepts above as equivalents. These frames vary in how they are explicitly or implicitly gendered, and in their key social and institutional references. While all have limitations, there are pragmatic reasons for continuing to use the concept of domestic violence, including that the term is recognized by many women themselves, even violence is not limited to domestic settings or relationships. Knowledge and theorizing are not purely for academic debates, but resonances with the realities experienced are clearly important. Naming is not innocent.

Different namings and framings link closely with questions of definition of what violence is in and around situations of intimacy, and of explanation more broadly. Different researchers tend to reduce or broaden definitions of domestic violence (Bufacchi, 2005). While domestic violence can be understood in terms of certain acts of usually direct physical or sexual physical violence, not least in law and in many prevalence surveys (see Martinez and Schrötle et al., 2006), to focus only on these is not enough. Who defines violence and how it is defined is crucial. Women experiencing violence in intimate relations recognize a vast array of violences that are separate or merged, as: physical and threats thereof; sexual; emotional/verbal/psychological; economic/nutritional; reproductive/medical; social; spatial, temporal; and representational (Hanmer, 1996). Pluralizing violence to violences seeks to acknowledge this. Men violators tend to have narrower definitions, focused on 'incidents' of physical violence at specific times and places, that are more than a push, or that involve convictions, or are likely to cause damage, or that not seen as specifically sexual; these are this separated off from rest of life. Significantly, there are often close parallels between men's accounts of their own violence, and how men have often developed social theory.

Violence is constructed as occurring in 'incidents', as 'incidental'; it is incidentalized.

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Instead there is a wide range of violences and violations, including degradations, threats and controls. Moreover, the more violence, the less those actions are likely to be perceived as violence; and the more physical violence, the less there may be need for such violence to maintain control. Domestic violence, as understood by most feminists and many practitioners, involves a pattern of coercive behavior exerting power and control in an intimate relationship through intimidating, threatening, harmful or harassing behavior (Carmody, 2006; Stark, 2007; Brush, 2009). This therefore depends upon the notion of harm experienced by the violated person(s). It is thus better seen as material, bodily and damaging processes over time, rather than health- or legally-defined specific behaviors (*pace* the 1999 Swedish Penal Code offence of 'gross violation of integrity').

There are also less studied violences, such as from children, often sons, to parents, often mothers, or maternal alienation where the man destroys mother-child relations (Morris, 2008). New forms of domestic violence arise via information and communication technologies (ICTs). Especially important are transnational patriarchal processes and virtual violences in intimacy through ICTs, such as forced use of pornography, use of pornography with children, digi-bullying, cyberstalking, internet harassment, 'happy slapping', threatening blogging, and so on. The use of sex dolls, sex robots and teledildonics creates further possibilities for violence and abuse (Levy, 2007).

To focus only on specific pre-determined acts of physical violence may neglect other violations. What counts as violence or violation involves previous and potential violences, assumed or actual threat and intimidations, violence embedded in social relations, processes of accumulation of violations over time, and various psychological, emotional, verbal and subtle violations and controls, feelings of fear, degradations, intimidations, humiliations, isolations, entrapments, virtual or actual imprisonments, and the sense of people, surroundings and events being uncomfortable and out of control. Naming, framing and
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defining such violence highlight difficulties in understanding social phenomena outside social context. Their sociological significance is in showing tensions between clear power-laden societal and interpersonal patterns, the *undecidability* of *specific* behaviours, effects experienced, and the nature of control, even if that involves no more than a look or raising an eyelid as a warning. The narrowly empirical, *a priori* behavioral, are, in this sense, not enough in naming, framing and defining domestic violence, and sometimes even dangerous.

Explanation, Responsibility and Agency

A fourth area of sociological significance also concerns tensions, even paradox, namely the relation of the ethico-political question of responsibility and the analytics of explanation. Different namings, framings and definitions feed into and suggest different explanations that are also more or less gendered and/or intersectional. These include individual, psychological and psychodynamic explanations; family, community, environmental, (sub)cultural, systemic and ecological theories; societal, structural, patriarchal, poststructural, postcolonial, and intersectional approaches. International research on 'risk factors' of 'domestic violence' has been summarized as: previous domestic assault; minor violence predicting escalation to major violence; separation; gender inequalities in relationships;² poverty, social exclusion; women's employment status; pregnancy; ill health, disability; violence in family of origin/witnessing of violence; criminal career; co-occurrence of child abuse; youth (Walby and Myhill, 2001). Physical partner violence has also been linked with risky sexual practices, including outside the sexual relation concerned (Jewkes et al., 2011). Various explanations may co-exist and contradict, with different violences demanding different approaches.

However, constructions of explanation have to proceed with caution. Any explanation can be employed by a violator as an explanation-in-use, even a diversionary rationalization.

Violence and intimacy can both appear as paradoxical forms of action, with or without
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agency. When a man is violent to a woman 'he loves' or 'has a sexual relationship with', the violence is usually constructed, by men, as aberrant. Violence may appear to him to 'happen' without agency or responsibility, as expressed by a UK man interviewed on his violence: '... up to the last couple of years, I wouldn't have thought that were a violent incident when I pinned her to the wall, *just something that happened all the time ...*' [my emphasis]. (cited in Hearn, 1998: 119).

In contrast, violence can be seen as an effect of agency, a choice and intention to do harm, for which (usually) men are (individually) responsible, as in legal discourse. Yet developing an adequate theory of agency, choice and responsibility in relation to violence is problematic. Notions of individual responsibility are invoked in both conservative and social democratic ideologies: in the former, in as atomized, non-gendered economic individuals; in the latter, as 'responsible individuals' located in social market forces.

Feminist approaches to responsibility complicate the picture further. Feminist theory/practice asserts men's responsibility for their violence. But notions of choice and responsibility need to be used with care, as they can feed liberal individualism, itself subject to feminist poststructuralist critique of autonomous, unified, rational non-gendered individuals, as well as facilitating neglect of the structural. This is especially so with the dispersal of domestic violence in separate households. Without a more societal rather than agentic discourse, understandings of domestic violence are easily reduced to particular behaviors without attention to meanings or social forces that construct intersectional gender relations. Yet here the problem of responsibility appears in a different guise, if domestic violence is seen as simply structural violence without agency.

Gender, Hegemony and Discourse

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A fifth area of tension and paradox with strong implications for change concerns its place in relation to societal patriarchal gender hegemony (Hunnicut, 2009), and the complexity of intersectional gender relations and discourses. This is not to see 'domestic violences' as specific behaviors, a 'thing', to be explained, but as deeply embedded political-economic-cultural phenomena with wider social formations. This latter perspective is antagonistic to both approaches that place 'domestic violences' *within* political economy, and those that fail to recognize their political-economic character. Hybrid and multi-causal explanations that combine several factors or realms take important steps in this direction, for example, economy, labour market exclusion, isolation, housing situation, men's inability to fulfill breadwinning, stress, and patriarchal male peer support (DeKeseredy and Schwartz, 2002, 2005); or social isolation, unintegrated support networks, unequal access to resources, centralized authority, and lack of access to non-violent networks (Michalski, 2004) or macro, meso, micro and ontogenetic levels (European Commission, 2010, ch. 5).

Contrary to some media and academic debates, violence in intimacy is characterized by strong gender asymmetry (Walby and Allen, 2004). In prevalence surveys where data is reanalyzed in terms of frequency and extent of impact the gendered distribution of victimization is clear. The most typical form of adult violence within families, households, co-habiting, intimate relationships, and their subsequent break-up or re-forming, is men's violence to women and children. In most societies men perform most violence, especially that which is *planned, premeditated, heavy, physically damaging, causing lasting damage, physically threatening, long-term, escalating, accumulative, sexual or sexualized, persistent, non-retaliatory, non-defensive, coercively controlling*, as well as most *collective, institutional, organized, and military violence*, which themselves are sometimes 'domestic', and may form contexts for men's domestic violences (Hearn and McKie, 2010). While

frequency and severity of violence by men partners is much greater, women can be and are

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violent; however, an estimated three-quarters of women's violent acts are in self-defence, with estimated 90% of all violence, in public spaces, in and round the home and intimate relationships, by men (Kimmel, 2002). Thus, in this section I focus specifically on men's violences to known women and children, rather than the gender-neutral 'domestic violence'.

In saying this, it might be argued it is not really 'men' who perform most violence to women, but that states, markets and social structures are responsible for divisions of labor that entail differentiated violence on male and female bodies. However, states, markets and social structures are not disembodied, agendered entities, but are usually dominated by men. To focus in this way is certainly not to attribute essentialism or naturalization to men or men's violence; rather, it is to consider social contextualizations of and variations in men and men's violences. Though violence may be a centre of patriarchal relations, men and violence are not equivalents, and men are not deterministically violent. 'Men' are conceptualized here as a non-essential social category. This is not a matter of biological sex or cultural gender, but the 'post-construction' of embodied material-discursive gender/sex, or simply 'gex' (Lykke, 2010b; Hearn, 2012a).

In recent critical studies on men and masculinities the concept of hegemony has featured prominently, as in 'male hegemony', 'masculine hegemony', and so on. However, it is the framework of 'hegemonic masculinity' that has become almost hegemonic, especially in Anglophone research. The most cited definition of hegemonic masculinity is 'the configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and the subordination of women' (Connell, 1995: 77). However, with men's violence to known women, from whom and how is legitimacy obtained? It is often unclear whether such violence is part of the legitimizing configuration of practice called hegemonic masculinity or is undermining such 'hegemony' in disrupting the taken-for-granted.

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To rely on hegemonic masculinity to explain men's violence to known women may shift the focus from men's material power within patriarchies to 'masculinities' as the basis of legitimation. This moves analysis away from a Gramscian political-cultural-economic hegemony of men's embodied material-discursive power to a masculinity qualified adjectivally as 'hegemonic' (intuited hypothetically) seen as a configuration of practice that legitimates gender domination. Moreover, while hegemonic masculinity is elusive, seen variously as *configuration of practice, aspirations, cultural ideals, ways of being a man* and *types of men* (with different implications for patriarchal legitimacy), men's violence against known women is *absolutely achievable*. Such violence concerns much more than reference to hegemonic masculinity. Rather, I outline a broader view of hegemony and a multi-faceted power analysis of the relations of men, masculinities and men's violences to known women (Hearn, 2012b). Theorizing men's violence is a key issue in evaluating theorizations of men and masculinities (McCarry, 2007).

Intersectional gender formation. In most analyses of masculinities the concept of hegemony has been used restrictedly to invoke the formation of 'masculinities' rather than gender 'groupings' and categories (Carrigan et al., 1985: 594). However, the category of 'men' is far more hegemonic than masculinity/ies (Hearn, 2004a). The hegemony of men involves addressing the double complexity that men are both a social category, and dominant collective and individual agents of social practices (Hearn, 2004a, Aboim, 2010; Lykke, 2010a). The category of men is (re)created in concrete everyday life and institutional practices, and in intersections with other social categories such as class, ethnicity and sexuality (Lykke, 2010a: 64). Like 'women', 'men' is a social category open to plural interpretations and contestations (Butler, 1994); 'men' is a powerful abstraction, in a structural gender relation to women, that effects social distributions and arrangements

(Gunnarsson, 2011), and invested with power, including violence to women, by association or potential. Men's domestic violence occurs within relations between the formation of 'men', 'women' and other genders in gender hegemony, and hegemonic differentiations among men. While in the hegemonic masculinity framework violence is generally portrayed as a means to pre-existing ends, and instrumental or strategic in nature (Connell, 2005: 83, 84; Gadd, 2003: 334), men's violences to women are also constitutive of gender relations (Lundgren, 1995). Violence can be an accepted, if not always acceptable, way of being a man; it may act as a reference for boys, men, being a man, a powerful performative way of demonstrating someone is a man, in both generic quality of violence, and more so men's violence to women. In speaking and showing difference from women (Bourdieu, 2001; Anderson, 2009), men are often made specialists, experts, in violence, although some forms, such as female genital mutilation, may be the preserve of women.

Intersectional gender structures. The prevalence of men's violence against women is related to the ideological and institutional strength of unequal intersectional gender structures (Lundgren et al., 2001; Walby, 2009), including such structural violences, as effects of state and related institutions; war and inter-communal violence; poverty and inequalities, including globally; and social structural relations of institutions that historically have been violent or have underwritten or been underwritten by violence, for example, capitalism. The extent to which men's violence to women figures as part of or overlaps with 'hegemonic masculinity' is likely to be different according to societal context. In some societies and social milieux, such violence may seem undermining of the *legitimacy* of men's dominance; in others, the opposite may apply. In societies with higher levels of interpersonal violence, men's violence to women may be argued to be a feature of hegemonic masculinity (Morrell et al., 2012);³ in those with lower levels of violence and a more embedded gender equality ideology, the inappropriateness of this link has been suggested (Hearn et al., 2012). Increasingly, violence

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needs to be understood transnationally, with multiple forms within trans(national)patriarchies.

Men's plural material practices. The various structures of violences involve systems of distinctions and categorizations between different intersectional forms of men and men's material practices to women, children and other men. The multi-factoredness of power pertains in the wide variations in violences, from more common forms to relatively rare forms, such as murder. Rather than seeing forms of violence as on a continuum, different violences may be characterized as clusters or sediments of actions. This demands a complex view of intersectional gender hegemony. Hegemony entails the most widespread, repeated forms of men's practices relevant to violence. Those called 'complicit' are central in constructions of men and ways of being men in relation to women, children and other men. Perhaps it is the complicit that is hegemonic, as in everyday violences in sport, amongst some boys, or around separation.⁴

There are plural ways of being men that perpetuate violence. Interestingly, three of the most recognized, yet contrasting, masculinities might be conducive to men's violence to women: hegemonic as legitimating patriarchy; complicit as condoning; subordinated as compensating for relative lack of power. Such practices link with class position and other social intersections. In some societies the symbolic violence of class – systems of meaning presented as exclusively legitimate and imposed on others to maintain power relations – stems partly from both physical violence and symbolic violence itself not being recognized as such among upper class persons, while violence, especially physical and sexual violence, may be largely or solely recognized among working class people. Accordingly, one can ask which men's practices in the state, religion, media and so on, nationally and transnationally, are most powerful in setting agendas of systems of differentiations and recognitions of violence. Men's domination persists in violent institutions and state control of violence, in Jeff Hearn 'The sociological significance of domestic violence: tensions, paradoxes, and implications', *Current Sociology*, Special issue 'Violence and society: Introduction to an emerging field of sociology', 16(2), 2013, 152-170.

constructions, identification, naming and defining of violence. The very construction of what counts as violence is related to historical intersections of gender power, social divisions, ideology, and hegemony.

Men's plural material discourses. Men's variable, often contradictory, discourses persist in relation to particular forms of violence and violent masculinities. Men's variable everyday, 'natural(ized)' and most taken-for-granted practices and discourses include multiple, sometimes contradictory, rationales for violence. Men's violences can be sources of pride, be shameful or routine in reaffirming power, or be backlash reactions to loss of or perceived threat to power. Constructions of men, masculinity and violence may be contradictory, with complex connections between 'responsibility' and 'violence', 'honour' and 'violence', 'respect' and violence'. Men's violence to known women can be an attempt to enforce an ideology that is already beyond incredulity: such as an ideology of love in marriage. Violence can be enacted for almost opposite reasons: brutal showing of raw power, so that thereafter violence may no longer be necessary to enforce compliance; and reassertion of what is considered as loss of power, a response to challenges of that authority, when women *do not do* what men expect, in childcare, housework, sexuality, in which case violence may seem as a sign of (potential) weakness. It can also be both. Using violence may be shameful. As Jefferson (2002: 71) notes, batterers rarely boast of their violence; they are not usually cultural heroes. In many contexts violence against women is far from 'the most honoured way of being a man'. Alternatively, condemnation of violence might revalorize other or dominant forms of men/masculinity, such as 'superiority' of non-violent or less obviously violent men/masculinity. These combinations contribute to the construction of men. Material-discursive analysis of such violence is necessary that do *not* reduce the body, violated and violating, to text. Men's violence to known women involves both violence and talk about violence, both of which are *simultaneously material and discursive*.

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Concluding Remarks: Violence and Knowledge

Domestic violence is of sociological significance as a paradoxical phenomenon, in its naming and framing, in terms of explanation and responsibility, and as embedded in hegemonic social formations. More specifically, men's violence to known women needs to be understood as much more than as the result of hegemonic masculinity, but rather through multi-faceted power analysis of the place of violence within hegemony.

In analyzing domestic violence there is a continual temptation to try and explain domestic (usually men's) violence *by reference to 'something else'*, other social divisions, principally divisions of economic class, but also age, locality, religion, sexuality. This may seem obvious enough, but this does not quite capture the autonomy and self-reproducing nature of violence and systems of violence. Violence is not always simply a subset of some other social division. This is a change of perspective from seeing violence as always 'caused' by something else, to one in which the practice of violence is itself a form of social inequality, an unequal and unequalizing social structural division and relation *of its own*. Violence is a social distribution of *who does what to whom*. It is often a means to an end, in men's control of women and maintaining patriarchal institutions and power, and other intersectional systems, and, at times an end in itself, 'autotelic', for its own sake (Schinkel, 2010). Violence is a means of enforcing power and control, and power and control in itself. Violence *distinguishes* people, individually and structurally, a form of profound bodily discrimination. Domestic violence entails both detailed specificities of brutal and subtle everyday agentic control over time, and societal, comparative and transnational processes. Men's violence to known women is structure, practice, process, and outcome of domination.

Violence is also *a form of knowledge*, itself affected by previous violence, societal and interpersonal. The experience of being, even being alive, is affected by what counts as valid

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knowledge about violence. Violence constructs knowledge, creates knowledge for the violated, and reduces voice, sometimes even totally, if killed. These constructions provide criteria for judging reliability of further knowledge about violence or not. Sociology and sociologists should seek to be violence/violation-free, not just in codes of ethics researching “others”, but as a discipline, institution, and in everyday practices outside public view.

Acknowledgements

I am grateful to Sylvia Walby and anonymous reviewers for their constructive comments on a previous version of this paper.

1. Intersectional analysis suggests different lines of power inequality between gendered intimate partner violence, and age- and generation-related violence of adult women and men towards children, with women as victims of men’s gender sexual violence, on one hand, and women and men as potential and actual perpetrators of violence in relation to children, on the other, respectively.
2. Positive relations between inequalities in domestic decision-making and division of labour, and domestic violence have been reported from recent Norwegian research (personal communication, Øystein Gullvåg Holter, 30 December 2011; see Michalski, 2004).
3. For example, in South Africa, in a recent survey of over 1700 randomly surveyed adult men 27 percent reported they had raped a woman or girl (Jewkes et al., 2011),
4. In Finland, a Nordic welfare society, the first national survey of violence against women found that ‘violence or threats [of violence] by their ex-partner had been experienced by 50% of all women who had lived in a relationship which had already terminated.’ (Heiskanen and Piispa, 1998: 3).

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