



SHUTTERSTOCK

**“What’s love got to do with it”: How do perpetrators and survivors explain violence in intimate relationships?**

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# Overview

- Facts and figures about domestic violence / intimate violence perpetrators.
- How do perpetrators and survivors explain or give account of violence?
- How are they similar? Different?



# Some key facts

- Globally:
  - 1 in 3 (35%) of women worldwide have experienced either physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence or non-partner sexual violence in their lifetime. (WHO, 2013)
  - Worldwide, almost one third (30%) of women who have been in a relationship report that they have experienced some form of physical and/or sexual violence by their intimate partner. (WHO, 2013).



# Key facts

- Iceland:
  - According to statistics from the Police department in Reykjavik, capital of Iceland, there were 422 calls because of domestic violence in 2015.
  - A survey conducted in 2007-2008 found that about 42% of women in Iceland, 16 years of age, had during their lifetime experienced violence, usually within their homes.



# Research questions

- How do perpetrators and survivors of violence explain violence in intimate relationships (domestic violence)?
- How do they construct themselves and give account of their actions and/or themselves?



# Pro-feminist perspective

- Violence in intimate relationships / domestic violence have their roots in the patriarchy:
  - Dobash and Dobash (1979). Violence Against Wives: A Case Against the Patriarchy.
  - Dworkin (1982).
  - Pro-feminist perspective.



# EXPLAINING VIOLENCE – TWO MODELS





# Jeff Hearn, 1998

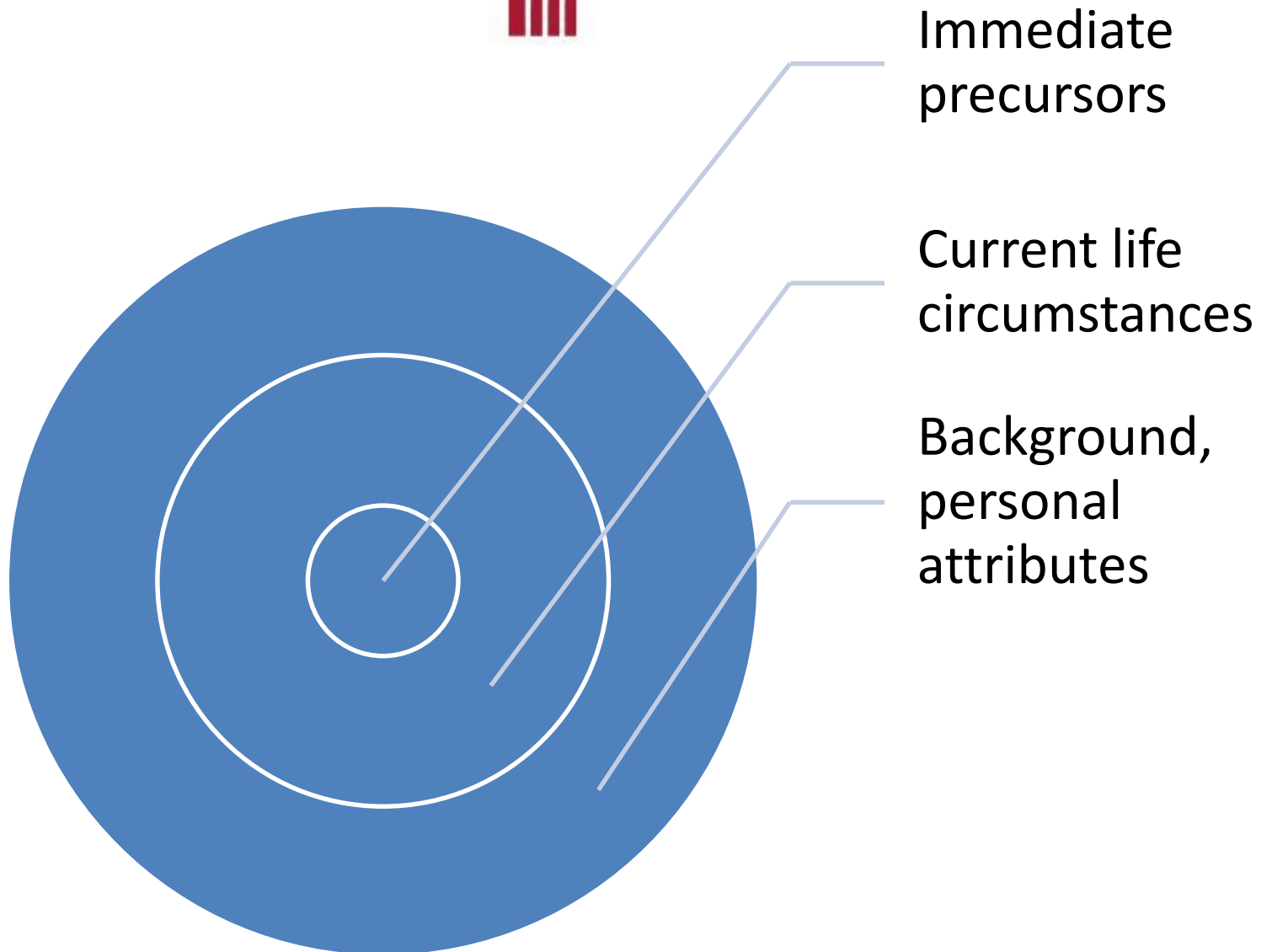
- Jeffrey Hearn:
  - Repudiations.
  - Quasi-repudiations.
  - Excuses and justifications.
  - Confessions.





# Flynn & Graham, 2010

- Background, personal attributes
  - Attitudes, mental health, personality etc.
- Current life circumstances
  - Children, economic and marital problems
- Immediate precursors
  - Alcohol and drugs, asserting power, communication issues, provocation





# Methods

**“For men to critically interview men on violence involves attention, listening, empathy, but also critical distance and critical awareness, rather than collusion.” (Hearn, 1998, p. 55)**

- **Data:**
  - 10 interviews with male perpetrators.
  - Age: 18 to 50.
  - 7 interviews with survivors (5 female, 2 male)
- **Analysis:**
  - Thematic analysis.
- **Approach:**
  - Post-structuralism.
  - Pro-feminist.



# FINDINGS - PERPETRATORS





# Giving account of violence – explaining violence

- Take responsibility – admit violent act.
- Take responsibility but not blame.
- Blaming it on the spouse / partner.
- Blaming it on past experience, upbringing or personal attributes.



# Take responsibility – admit violent act.

- “I find this fucking disgusting but I could not help it. I was totally sober in all instances. So I cannot use it as an excuse of being drunk.”



# Blaming it on the spouse / partner.

- “She is the most flawed thing I have ever been with. She sucked everything out of me. I was totally finished.”



## **Blaming it on past experience, upbringing or personal attributes**

- "Well I cannot excuse my behavior at all. But, I have tried to seek some explanations why I did this. And it is somehow connected to my mood or temper ... you know ... Normally if someone does something to me, betrays me or something, I just snap."





# **Blaming it on past experience, upbringing or personal attributes**

- “I cannot control myself when I am drunk ... you know. I just go too far, I have no control whatsoever.”



## Blaming – personality - partner

- “If I am not trusted I become very angry.”
- 
- “If I am not trusted ... I become angry because I think I deserve being trusted. But after this incident I don't deserve to be trusted at all.”



- “When I am drunk I just become crazy ... I start hearing things and imagine all kind of things. And then I am out of control.”





# Upbringing - personality

- “In the end I had nothing. My self-esteem was in ruin. I have bad temper, always getting into fight at home. I was somehow always defending myself. I felt as being cornered.”



# FINDINGS - SURVIVORS





# Survivors- Background and personal attributes

- Attitudes
- Anger
- Jealousy
- Mental health problems
- Past experiences
- Personality
- Upbringing





# Attitudes

- Traditional gender roles make men dominant, women need to accept that, challenging them leads to violence:
  - *“He says something like: “You women are the weaker sex and you just have to accept that. This is a patriarchy, you just have to get that into your head.”*
- Men are supposed to physically control women:
  - *“Sometimes I get bruises when I accidentally bump into things. Then he was always: “Who is, what man did that to you?...Who have you been seeing?””*



# Anger

- Perpetrator anger
  - *“When you are angry, you want to hit something, you know? I think everyone feels like that. And either you take control of it or not.”*
- Survivor anger
  - *“This was the first person in a long time that could make me so angry.”*





# Jealousy

- Accusing survivor of hiding things or keeping secrets:
  - *“I am always supposed to be doing something wrong, even though I am not.”*
- Perpetrator jealousy can prevent survivors from having a new partner after break-up



# Mental health problems

- Psychopathology
  - “If he doesn’t feel bad about this, then something is wrong.”
- Self-esteem
  - “She just really, needs self-confidence, which comes out in violence.”
- Bipolar



# Mental health problems

- Psychotic episodes
  - *“There were knives all over the apartment because he was going to die and kill everyone who came into the apartment.”*
- Self-harming, threats of self-harm



# Personality

- Manipulators:
  - *“He knew exactly what he had to say to get me to do what he wanted.”*
- Evil:
  - *“I feel like I have helped him so much, I have been so good to him, then I feel like, he has made me feel so bad...just been so evil. I don't feel like I deserve it.”*



# Personality

- Lack of control:
  - *“I sincerely believe that she is not evil, this is something inside or that she just cannot control.”*
- Survivor co-dependence, contributes to future violence.
- Lack of empathy



# Past experiences and upbringing

- Trauma:
  - *“She was a completely broken person, even before we met”*
- Upbringing, perpetrator family has
  - Violence
  - Substance abuse
  - Mental health issues



# Current life circumstances

- Children
  - Cause stress that can contribute to violence
- Economic problems
  - *“It had a big impact if we were broke...he is a lot of fun when he is happy and has lots of money.”*
- Marital unhappiness, break-ups



# Immediate precursors- Alcohol and drug abuse

- Perpetrators:
  - *“He started having problems with violence when he was under the influence of alcohol.”*
- Survivors:
  - *“It was the worst when I was under the influence...things are completely different now that I don’t drink anymore”*





# Asserting power or authority

- *“He says to me that I am supposed to sleep on the floor and I was like “What? What do you mean? Sleep on the floor?” Because I was supposed to sleep on the floor for the next 7 days...I was supposed to have on underwear, nothing over me, no pillow or anything. And I kind of just do it...(then later I got a duvet) and he tries to grab it from me...and then he starts beating my back.”*



# Provoking or aggressive acts by partner

- Couples fighting, both verbally and physically:
  - *“As soon as I pushed him away he just attacked me, you know? Much bigger and stronger than me. But I will admit that I was, you know, aggressive.”*
- Survivors worried that they are causing the violence:
  - *“Am I doing something? Am I maybe verbally abusive, you know, am I provoking this?”*



# Survivor summary

- The most common explanations refer to background and personal characteristics
- However, for each couple there is a complex combination of background, circumstances and immediate precursors



# How are perpetrator and survivor explanations similar?

- Both survivors and perpetrators explain violence in many different ways
- Some of these are stable factors, while others are more immediate stressors
- Perpetrator personality
- Role of alcohol and drugs



# How are perpetrator and survivor explanations different?

- Blame and responsibility seen differently by the groups
- Perpetrators more likely to directly blame themselves/partner
- Survivors sometimes also talk about these, but also refer to other factors, such as money problems
- More diversity in survivor accounts



# What does this mean for our understanding of violence?

- We cannot say that one viewpoint is right and one is wrong
- Rather, understanding unique characteristics of each group may be useful to intervene and help them



# Conclusion





# Thank you!

- Any questions?

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