

Gendered Violence

Fact Sheet

Distributed by Sociologists for Women in Society, December 2009
Prepared by Laurel Westbrook, Ph.D., Department of Sociology, Grand Valley State University

Gendered Violence

The study of gendered violence interrogates the processes through which violence is shaped by gendered beliefs and practices. Gendered constructions situate masculinity—and males—as strong, aggressive, powerful, and violent. By contrast, femininity—and females—are constructed as weak, vulnerable, and submissive. These formations influence beliefs about the appropriateness of using violence, including who should be violent and when to use violence to enforce gender norms. Gendered conceptions—which intersect with systems of race, class and sexuality—shape a wide variety of violences: male violence against other men; women’s violence; violence against gay, lesbian, and transgendered people; and institutional and state violence ranging from genital surgery on intersex infants to police actions and war.

Facts on Gendered Violence

Men, on average, experience more physical violence in their lifetimes than women.

- Adult men in the United States are twice as likely as women to have been punched or beaten in their lifetime.ⁱ
- Men are almost 4 times more likely than women to be murdered in the United States.ⁱⁱ

Men and women experience different kinds of violence.

- Women are most likely to be killed by a romantic partner or ex-partner. These sorts of killings account for 30% of murders of females and only 5% of murders of males.ⁱⁱ
- Men are most likely to be killed by a male friend or casual acquaintance.ⁱⁱ
- Women are more likely to experience (or report experiencing) a sexual assault than men. According to the Bureau of Justice Statistics, in the United States between 1992 and 2000 94% of reported rape victims were women.ⁱⁱⁱ
- Women are much more likely to experience violence from someone they know than are men. In 1994, 62% of female victims, compared to 37% of male victims, of reported incidents of violent crime knew their perpetrator.^{iv}

Men are much more likely to commit violent acts than women.

- Men are almost 10 times more likely than women to commit murder.ⁱⁱ
- Men are more than 6 times more likely than women to be the perpetrator of a non-fatal violent crime.^v

Men are more likely to engage in non-fatal violence against men. Women are more likely to engage in non-fatal violence against women.

- According to the Bureau of Justice Statistics: “Violent offenders most often victimized persons of the same gender. More than 3 out of 4 female offenders had a female victim; about 7 out of 10 males had a male victim. About 29% of violent offenders had a victim of a different gender; 9 out of 10 of these offenders were males with female victims.”^v
- The trend is different for homicides, where both men and women are more likely to kill males.ⁱⁱ The gender pattern is different for homicides in part because, when women kill, they are four times more likely than men to kill a spouse,^v and most women in the United States who are partnered, are partnered with men.

Violence against lesbians and gay men is gendered.

- Men commit most violent crimes against lesbians and gay men. In one recent survey, 77% of the known assailants were men.^{vi}
- Most of the victims of assaults on lesbians and gay men are men (about 65%).^{vi}
- This violence is often triggered by gender non-conformity; assailants attack masculine women and feminine men, assuming they are homosexual.^{vii}

Violence against transgender people is shaped by gender and sexuality.

- Most murders of transgender people are perpetrated by non-transgender men, and most victims are transgender women.^{viii}
- Violence against transgender people is often triggered by anger or fear about gender non-conformity. Murder of transgender people occurs most often in sexual encounters where the perpetrator of violence feels “deceived” by the transgender person’s gender presentation.^{vii}

School bullying is gendered and has serious consequences.

- Boys are more likely to both bully others and be victims of bullies.^{ix}
- Boys who are bullied are more likely to report being hit, slapped, or pushed, while girls report experiencing bullying in the form of rumors and sexual comments.^x
- Boys who are bullied tend to be “physically weaker” than their peers.^{ix}
- The vast majority of school shootings in the United States are committed by boys. Many of these young men have been bullied by others and commit violence in an attempt to prove their masculinity.^{xi}

Arenas in which men are violent against other men can foster a culture that results in violence against women.

- Men’s participation in highly masculinized spaces in which men are violent against other men has been shown to increase the likelihood that men will be violent against women.
- Men’s sports often value male aggression and violence. These values can affect relationships off the field, such as increasing the likelihood of male athletes’ violence against their romantic partners.^{xii}
- Similarly, other violent arenas, such as the military and law enforcement, have been shown to foster high rates of domestic violence. For example, about 40% of male law enforcement officers have been shown to commit domestic abuse.^{xiii}

Teaching Resources: Films on Gendered Violence

- *The Brandon Teena Story*. 1998. 89 minutes. [DVD]. Distributed by Bless Bless Productions.
 - A deeply troubling documentary about the violence done to Brandon Teena, a female-bodied person who lived as a man in Nebraska and was raped and murdered for his “gender deception.” More fact-based, and slightly drier, than the fictionalized film *Boys Don’t Cry*, made about the same events.
- *Girl Trouble*. 2004. 74 or 57 minutes. [DVD]. Distributed by New Day Films.
 - This documentary explores the violence done by and against three young women in San Francisco. It highlights how women can be violent and how experiencing violence can lead to one acting violently. For more information on the film, including suggested uses in the classroom, see the review by Wetzel et. al. in *Teaching Sociology* (2005) 33(4): p. 425.
- *Hip-Hop: Beyond Beats and Rhymes*. 2006. 61 minutes. [DVD]. Distributed by the Media Education Foundation.
 - Exploring the construction of black masculinity and femininity in hip-hop music and culture, this film highlights the dangers of valorizing a violent black masculinity that all too often takes other black men, as well as black women, as its target. Includes a discussion on the use of overt homophobia to construct a masculine identity. For more information on the film, including suggested uses in the classroom, see the review by Susan Alexander in *Teaching Sociology* (2007) 35(3): pp. 287-9.
- *Southern Comfort*. 2001. 90 minutes. [DVD]. Distributed by Next Wave Films.
 - A deeply touching documentary about the life and death of Robert Eads, a self-identified “hillbilly” and female-to-male transsexual. The film follows Eads as he falls deeply in love with Lola Cola, a male-to-female transsexual, and then dies of ovarian cancer after doctors refuse to treat him because he is trans. The documentary highlights gendered violence done by members of the medical profession
- *Tough Guise: Violence, Media & the Crisis in Masculinity*. 1999. 82 minutes. [DVD]. Distributed by the Media Education Foundation.
 - This film explores the construction of violent masculinity in the media and argues that a wide variety of violence done by men, including school shootings, need to be understood as part of a “crisis in masculinity.”
- *Wrestling with Manhood: Boys, Bullying & Battering*. 2002. 60 minutes. [DVD]. Distributed by the Media Education Foundation.
 - In this film Sut Jhally and Jackson Katz trace links between ideas of masculinity constructed by professional wrestling and school bullying, homophobia, and violence against women by men.
- *Yellow for Hermaphrodites: Mani’s Story*. 2004. 60 minutes. [DVD]. Produced by Greenstone Pictures, distributed by Accord Alliance.
 - Told in Mani Mitchell’s own words, this documentary tells her story about being diagnosed “intersex” and the surgeries forced upon her as a child to make her body conform to current sex norms. Like *Southern Comfort*, this film addresses gendered violence done by those in the medical profession.
 - For more recommendations of teaching films on intersexuality, please see the Intersex Fact Sheet, prepared by Maura Kelly for SWS (Spring 2007).

Suggested Readings

- Crenshaw, Kimberle W. 1994. "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color." *Stanford Law Review* 43: 1241-1299.
- Fausto-Sterling, Anne. 2000. *Sexing the Body: Gender Politics and the Construction of Sexuality*. New York: Basic Books.
- Harris, Angela P. 2000. "Gender, Violence, Race, and Criminal Justice." *Stanford Law Review* 52(4): 777-807.
- Helliwell, Christine. 2000. "'It's Only a Penis': Rape, Feminism, and Difference." *Signs* 25(3): 789-816.
- Hollander, Jocelyn A. 2001. "Vulnerability and Dangerousness: The Construction of Gender through Conversation about Violence." *Gender and Society* 15(1): 83-109.
- Kimmel, Michael S. and Matthew Mahler. 2003. "Adolescent Masculinity, Homophobia, and Violence: Random School Shootings, 1982-2001." *American Behavioral Scientist* 46(10):1439-1458.
- Messner, Michael A. 2002. *Taking the Field: Women, Men, and Sports*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press. (Particularly chapter 2: "Playing Center: The Triad of Violence in Men's Sports")
- Schilt, Kristen and Laurel Westbrook. 2009. "Doing Gender, Doing Heteronormativity: 'Gender Normals,' Transgender People, and the Social Maintenance of Heterosexuality." *Gender and Society* 23(4): 440-464.

For more information on violence against women, please see the SWS fact sheet "Violence Against Women," prepared by Kristenne Robinson and published in Spring 2009.

ⁱ In the General Social Survey conducted in 1994 (the most recent year in which the question was asked) 53% of men said they had ever been punched or beaten by another person, while 26% of women responded yes to the same question. For all years the question has been asked, the percentage is about the same, with an average of 53% of men and 22% of women saying "yes."

ⁱⁱ Bureau of Justice Statistics. 2007. "Homicide Trends in the U.S: Trends by Gender". Retrieved March 7, 2009 (<http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs/homicide/gender.htm>).

ⁱⁱⁱ Rennison, Callie Marie BJS Statistician. 2002. "Rape and Sexual Assault: Reporting to Police and Medical Attention, 1992-2000." Bureau of Justice Statistics Special Report. U.S. Department of Justice.

^{iv} Craven, Diane, BJS Statistician. 1994. "Sex Differences in Violent Victimization, 1994." Bureau of Justice Statistics Special Report. U.S. Department of Justice.

^v Geenfeld, Lawrence and Tracy Snell, BJS Statisticians. 1999. "Women Offenders." Bureau of Justice Statistics Special Report. U.S. Department of Justice.

^{vi} National Coalition of Anti-Violence Programs. 2009. "Hate Violence against Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender People in the United States." Retrieved October 23, 2009 (<http://www.ncavp.org/>).

^{vii} Namaste, Viviane. 2000. *Invisible Lives: The Erasure of Transsexual and Transgendered People*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

^{viii} Schilt, Kristen and Laurel Westbrook. 2009. "Doing Gender, Doing Heteronormativity: 'Gender Normals,' Transgender People, and the Social Maintenance of Heterosexuality." *Gender and Society* 23(4): 440-464.

^{ix} Batsche, G.M., & Knoff, H.M. 1994. "Bullies and Their Victims: Understanding a Pervasive Problem in the Schools." *School Psychology Review* 23(2): 165-174.

^x Nansel, T.R., Overpeck, M., Pilla, R.S., Ruan, W.J., Simons-Morton, B., & Scheidt, P. 2001. "Bullying Behaviors Among US Youth: Prevalence and Association With Psychosocial Adjustment." *Journal of the American Medical Association* 285(16): 2094-2100.

^{xi} Kimmel, Michael S. and Matthew Mahler. 2003. "Adolescent Masculinity, Homophobia, and Violence: Random School Shootings, 1982-2001." *American Behavioral Scientist* 46(10): 1439-1458.

^{xii} Messner, Michael A. 2002. *Taking the Field: Women, Men, and Sports*. Minneapolis, MN: Taking the Field: Women, Men, and Sports. University of Minnesota Press.

^{xiii} Neidig, P.H., Russell, H.E. & Seng, A.F. 1992. "Interspousal Aggression in Law Enforcement Families: A Preliminary Investigation." *Police Studies* 15(1): 30-38.