

Violence Against Women Theory

Theories of why violence against women occurs provide insight into the changes necessary to prevent and eradicate that violence. At Transforming Communities (TC), we start our analysis with looking at the fact that the vast majority of violence committed against women is committed by men. This raises the question, “Why do men batter women?” We believe that a root cause of woman abuse is the pervasive social belief system that posits male superiority over women as natural and preferred. Furthermore, there exists a broad-based social belief that women are inferior and that it is their role to be subservient to men. We also acknowledge that this belief system of “domination over” can be adopted by women as a framework for relationships to men as well as their relationships with one other. Because these beliefs pervade so much of our society and its institutions, eradicating violence against females will require changes at the most fundamental levels of society. These changes must eliminate policies and practices perpetuated by the male-dominated culture that sexualize women as objects, demean their value, restrict their participation in decision making, dehumanize them with labels, control their rights over their own bodies, and marginalize and demean their presence.

Changing these underlying patriarchal beliefs and practices will lead to changes in social norms and behaviors, bringing positive benefits to both women and men, and all forms of relationships. At TC, we choose community mobilization strategies that reflect the values of safety, equality, and justice for women and girls. We seek to promote women’s personal safety as a matter of public safety and as a basis for intimate relationships and recognize the role of the social environment in changing beliefs and behaviors.

Gender-Based Theories of Violence Against Women

Excerpted from “Transforming the Culture” by Donna Garske, in Preventing Violence in America (Robert L. Hampton, Pamel Jenkins, & Thomas P. Gullotta, editors). © 1996, Sage Publications.

The violence against women approach ...focuses on the belief system prevalent in relationships between women and men, wherein the male believes he is entitled to be superior to women. Thus, he is willing to control and coerce the female by a variety of means, including violence, in order to maintain that authority. The gender-based analysis holds men accountable for stopping their own violent behaviors. Moreover, it recognizes the ways in which women are undervalued and have been conditioned via the female role belief system to believe in their own inferiority in relationship to men. The gender-based violence against women theory emphasizes the importance of educating women and men as to the dangers and limitations of gender role

conditioning and the supporting belief systems specific to those roles.

The violence against women perspective connects all forms of male violence against women—such as child sexual abuse, rape, sexual harassment, workplace violence, beatings, and homicide— across the age spectrum of women’s lives. It also acknowledges a connection between male violence against women and other forms of domination based on race, sexual orientation, class, and other social constructs. This perspective implies an intimate interrelationship between women’s freedom from violence and their freedom from political, economic, and social exploitation.

