

# An Evaluation of Gender Differences in the Implementation and Impact of a Comprehensive Approach to Domestic Violence

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The primary goal of society's response to domestic violence is the protection of the victim from further abuse. Recently, the coordinated community response (CCR) has been developed as one example of an approach aimed at reaching this goal. Prior research has generally found support for the model, with male offenders recidivating at lower rates. The current study examines whether a comprehensive, community-based approach is capable of reducing recidivism rates among male and female offenders. Comparisons are made between 70 female and 131 male offenders. Specific attention is given to the intervention process, including differences in service or treatment component completion and recidivism by gender.

**Keywords:** *coordinated community response; domestic violence; gender*

The coordinated community response (CCR) to domestic violence was originally developed to address incidents of domestic violence involving a male offender and a female victim (Pence, 1999). Research examining the effectiveness of the CCR has generally supported the model, finding that male offenders who participated in such models recidivated at lower rates than those receiving standard treatment (Murphy, Musser, & Maton, 1998; Shepard, Falk, & Elliot, 2002; Steinman, 1988; Syers & Edleson, 1992; Tolman & Weisz, 1995). The current study examines whether a comprehensive, community-based approach to domestic violence that shares several important components with the CCR model can effectively affect recidivism rates of both male and female offenders. Before doing so, an overview of domestic violence policy will be presented, including a summary of the CCR model and its effectiveness. A description of female domestic violence offenders and comparisons to male domestic violence offenders will be provided. Specific attention will also be given to the implementation of this CCR-style intervention process in relation to female and male offenders. Finally, recidivism will be examined by looking at rearrest records for 70

female and 131 male domestic violence offenders involved in the comprehensive community-based process being evaluated here.

## **Background on Domestic Violence**

Prior to the advent of mandatory arrest policies in the 1980s, most police officers did not consider incidents of domestic violence as criminal acts, but rather domestic problems, which resulted in few arrests being made (Lucera & Lane, 2002; Steinman, 1991). Frustrated with the criminal justice system's traditional hands-off approach to domestic violence, victim advocates in the mid-1970s began to put increasing pressure on the criminal justice system, particularly the police, to do something about domestic violence. These grassroots organizations advocated for public officials to treat domestic violence as a crime.

## **Mandatory Arrest and Other Police Responses**

Mounting pressure to criminalize spousal abuse, coupled with the results of Sherman and Berk's (1984) landmark domestic violence study in Minneapolis, Minnesota, and the onslaught of civil liability cases against police departments for their failure to provide protection to domestic violence victims, resulted in the adoption of mandatory or preferred arrest policies across the nation (Lucera & Lane, 2002; Sherman & Berk, 1984; Steinman, 1991). Such policies mandate a police officer to make an arrest when called to the scene of an alleged domestic violence incident when there is probable cause.

An unforeseen consequence of mandatory arrest policies was the increasing number of women arrested for domestic violence (Chesney-Lind, 2002; Miller, 2001). In many cases where there is a female arrestee, her partner is arrested as well, in a process now known as "dual arrest." Dual arrests are often the result of the police officer's being unable to determine a primary aggressor at the scene of the incident (Hirschel & Buzawa, 2002). When such a distinction is not made, either because of a lack of training, lack of investigation time, or unwillingness of the female and/or male to cooperate with police questioning, both suspects are arrested (Miller, 2001).

In addition to mandatory arrest policies, other responses have also been adopted in addition to or in place of mandatory arrest. Responses include preferred arrest and warrantless arrest policies and the use of civil protection orders. Preferred arrest policies are similar to mandatory arrest policies in that they are based on the principle of probable cause, which allows the police officer to arrest a suspect when there is probable cause that an incident of domestic violence has occurred. If probable cause cannot be ascertained, an arrest is not made. However, unlike mandatory arrest policies, preferred arrest policies rely on police discretion to ultimately make an arrest when there is probable cause. Historically, police officers were required to

obtain a warrant for the domestic violence suspect before making an arrest. This meant leaving the scene of the incident, going back to the station to fill out paperwork, and then returning, often to find the suspect had left the scene. Warrantless arrests allow just that: arrest of a domestic violence suspect without filing for a warrant in advance of arrest (Sherman, 1992).

Civil protection orders were introduced in the 1980s as a complement to domestic violence arrest policies (Davis & Smith, 1995). Civil protection orders, sometimes referred to as restraining orders, are court orders that restrict the offender from having further contact with the victim for a set period. Such orders were seen as a secondary way of protecting the victim from the offender. The effectiveness of civil protection orders, however, has been questioned. Kleilitz, Davis, Efke, Flango, and Hannaford (1998) conducted an impact evaluation of the use of civil protection orders in Delaware, Colorado, and Washington, D.C. The study found that although the majority of victims reported general satisfaction with the protection order (i.e., felt safer, felt better about themselves, and had general life improvement after the imposition of the protection order), the order presented somewhat of a deteriorating deterrent effect on repeat incidents of domestic violence. Thus, protection orders appeared to be most effective in the period immediately after the issuance of the order. As time at risk increased, victims reported an increase in incidents of physical and psychological abuse (Kleilitz et al., 1998).

## Development of the CCR

Recognizing that police intervention alone is not entirely effective in reducing domestic violence (Kleilitz et al., 1998; Sherman, 1992; Sherman & Berk, 1984; Steinman, 1991), there has been a shift in the criminal justice community toward more of a coordinated response to domestic violence. Although the specific form that CCR programs take varies across communities, the premise of such an approach is that the coordination and integration of criminal justice, human service, and advocacy responses to domestic violence should reduce the incidence of domestic violence (Shepard et al., 2002). Objectives of a coordinated response include (a) improved system effectiveness, (b) delineation of services across agencies, (c) delivery of appropriate services to the victim with minimal distress, (d) protection of the victim, and (e) successful sanctioning of the offender (Adler, 2002). These objectives are typically met through the combination of several components, including preferred or mandatory arrest policies, aggressive prosecution of offenders, advocacy services for victims, and treatment services (Steinman, 1991). However, depending on resources, interagency relationships, and community awareness of domestic violence issues, the number, type, and delivery of CCR components vary across communities (Pence, 2001), as does the actual level of coordination of these various components.

Research that has examined the effectiveness of CCRs has generally found support for the model, with male offenders recidivating at lower rates than those not

participating in the model (Murphy et al., 1998; Shepard et al., 2002; Steinman, 1988; Syers & Edleson, 1992; Tolman & Weisz, 1995). In fact, many of these studies found that when men received a majority of the components of the CCR model (i.e., citations, arrest, pretrial diversion, successful prosecution, probation, treatment program, fines, time in jail), their recidivism rates were typically lower than male offenders receiving only some components of the model (Murphy et al., 1998; Steinman, 1988; Syers & Edleson, 1992). However, only a small percentage of male offenders typically receive the entire intervention, limiting confidence in these conclusions. For instance, in a study conducted by Murphy and colleagues (1998), only 4% of participants experienced the complete intervention. Thus, although Murphy and colleagues found support for the coordination of domestic violence responses, these research findings should be interpreted with caution because of the small number of participants receiving the entire intervention.

Studies that have examined batterer treatment programs operating alone (without the additional CCR components of aggressive prosecution, etc.) have found less success at reducing future recidivism among male domestic violence offenders (Davis, Maxwell, & Taylor, 2003; Feder & Forde, 2003; Gondolf, 2004; Harrell, 1991). Harrell (1991) compared men court ordered to receive domestic violence treatment with men ordered to undergo probation only and found no effect for treatment completion. Feder and Forde (2003) compared men ordered to treatment to those ordered to probation and found no differences in recidivism between these two groups of male offenders. Davis and colleagues (2003), on the other hand, found that men who attended a 26-week batterer intervention program had fewer incidents of violence against the same victim compared to offenders who either attended an 8-week batterer intervention program or had no treatment at all. Gondolf (2004) conducted a rigorous 4-year longitudinal analysis of batterer intervention programs in four U.S. cities and found that program effectiveness largely stems from the mode of treatment delivered (with cognitive-behavioral approaches seemingly most effective) and the broader coordinated intervention approach of which the treatment program is a part. Thus, as Gondolf and others suggest, it appears that treatment alone may be less effective than the full CCR intervention including treatment, in terms of reducing recidivism.

Previous research that has examined the impact of the CCR model related to domestic violence, and in particular its impact on future reoffending, has focused solely on male adult offenders in heterosexual relationships with their female victims. However, with the implementation of mandatory and proarrest policies across the United States and the potential consequence of increasing numbers of women processed by the criminal justice system for domestic violence, it is important to analyze what effect, if any, a coordinated approach to domestic violence has on female arrestees. Women arrested and prosecuted for domestic violence are presumably receiving the same components of the CCR model as do male offenders. However, this coordinated approach was initially developed as a response to violence by male offenders against female victims (see Pence, 1999). The exploratory study presented

here attempts to address the question of whether there are differences in the implementation and impact of a comprehensive, coordinated approach to domestic violence (similar in several ways to traditional CCR models) when the offender is female.

## **Female Domestic Violence Offenders**

Historical and cultural gender roles have typified men as aggressive and women as passive (McMahon & Pence, 2003). However, numerous studies have been conducted to examine whether there are similarities in violent offending between males and females. Of particular interest is the question of whether females participate in domestic violence (i.e., intimate partner abuse) in the same manner and to the same degree or frequency as males who batter their partners. Dasgupta (1999, 2002) examined the question of whether women are “just like men” and found that there are contextual differences that affect males’ and females’ use of domestic violence. Such differences are influenced by sociohistorical factors, including the historical use of violence to resolve conflict and power differentials based on gender, culture, economics, and physiology (Dasgupta, 1999, 2002). The use of methodology that takes into account these compounding factors, argues Dasgupta (1999), is crucial in understanding and explaining the use of violence in intimate relationships, specifically among females.

Few studies, however, have specifically examined the hypothesized similarities and differences between males and females involved in domestic violence (Barnett, Lee, & Thelen, 1997; Henning & Feder, 2004; Kimmel, 2002), and many of these are lacking in methodological rigor. For instance, Barnett and colleagues (1997) compared the characteristics of arrested male batterers (i.e., offenders) to battered females (i.e., victims) residing in women’s shelters. Using bivariate statistics, these authors found no differences in the frequency or forms of abuse used between the two groups, but the reasons given for the violence were significantly different. Although male offenders reported that they used violence against their partner to “show them who was the boss,” female victims reported that when they had used violence against their partner it was to protect themselves. Although these results are interesting, a more instructive comparison would have involved both males and females identified as offenders. In other words, the study could have tried to identify a sample of females who may have engaged in violence toward their partner that was not self-defensive to see if these women reported similar motives as did male offenders. Without a more appropriate comparison, this study can only hint at the idea that male and female offenders have different rationales for their use of violence and serves to demonstrate the lack of methodological rigor in much of this research.

Henning and Feder (2004) conducted a more appropriate comparison of men and women arrested for domestic violence in Tennessee using bivariate statistical analyses. They found that women offenders were more likely to be charged with a felony assault, to be unemployed, and to be younger in age than their male counterparts. Men, however, were more likely to have a prior offense record, to have threatened to

kill the victim or themselves, to have substance abuse problems, and to have been involved in prior extrafamilial violence. Henning and Feder conclude that based on their predictor variables, men pose a greater threat for the potential use of repeat violence against an intimate partner. It is important to point out that this study did not employ any actual measures of recidivism.

Research examining the issue of dual arrest is also seriously lacking (Hirschel & Buzawa, 2002; Martin, 1997; McMahon & Pence, 2003). In one example of the research on this question, Martin (1997) set out to describe the experiences of dual arrestees in Connecticut after the issuance of a statewide mandatory arrest policy. Bivariate statistics were used to analyze the relationship between the offender and the victim, the criminal incident itself, and the criminal justice system response to the incident. Dual arrestees were more likely to be women who were young, White, and cohabiting with, but not married to, the male coarrestee (Martin, 1997).

Other research related to female domestic violence offenders has examined their treatment needs (Buttelli, 2002; Henning, Jones, & Holdford, 2003). Henning and colleagues (2003) compared male and female arrestees who had completed a court-ordered domestic violence evaluation. Using bivariate statistics, they found differences in the prevalence of personality disorders among male and female arrestees, with a significantly higher percentage of females having such disorders than did males. Henning and colleagues suggest that these findings support the need for female offenders to undergo evaluation and treatment for interpersonal skills, including emotional regulation, such as anger management programs.

Buttelli (2002) evaluated women court ordered to undergo domestic violence treatment in Alabama. A traditional (i.e., designed for males) 12-week cognitive-behavioral batterer treatment program was administered to female offenders. The only change to the traditional curriculum was the adoption of gender-specific language (i.e., all references to victims were changed from "he/him" to "she/her") and discussion related to female offenders' past victimization. Comparing pre- and posttreatment assessments, Buttelli found the treatment program to be ineffective in changing the cognitive-behavioral patterns of female offenders. In addition, no reductions were found in the rearrest rates of female offenders having completed the treatment program. Based on the results of his study, Buttelli cautions against the use of a one-size-fits-all approach to treatment for female domestic violence offenders. These results highlight the need for a gendered approach to the criminal justice response to domestic violence, specifically the CCR.

## **The Current Intervention**

This study examines an example of a comprehensive, community-based (nonincarcerative) approach to domestic violence in a small urban community in North Dakota with a population of about 180,000. As described below, the comprehensive approach to domestic violence in this community is similar to other coordinated (CCR-style)

approaches across the country (Gamache, Edleson, & Schock, 1988; Murphy et al., 1998; Steinman, 1988; Syers & Edleson, 1992; Thelen, 2000; Tolman & Weisz, 1995). Such an approach relies on the involvement of various criminal justice and human service agencies, including the local police department, the state's attorney's office, victim advocacy groups, counseling and treatment agencies, and a community service agency, to carry out the separate but related interventions. Specific components of the approach used in this community are presented below.

*Police contact.* The first component of this intervention involves a probable cause arrest policy (North Dakota does not have mandatory arrest policies in place). This policy stipulates that the police are to make an arrest in all domestic violence incidents when probable cause, usually in the form of physical evidence (i.e., scratches, bruising, or other visible markings on the victim) or verbal confirmation, is obtained. Whether or not an arrest is made, police must file a report for each incident, and the report is forwarded to the state's attorney's office and to the community's victim advocate representative.

*Victim advocacy.* The victim advocacy agency receives a copy of the police report for every incident involving domestic violence, regardless of whether an arrest was made. In cases where an arrest is made, a victim advocate contacts the victim involved in the incident. In cases where an arrest is not made, a letter is mailed to the victim outlining resources available in the community, including shelter information and counseling contacts. In cases where the offender is then prosecuted, the victim advocate provides support to the victim, including accompanying the victim to meetings with the prosecutor and attending the domestic violence court hearing or hearings with the victim.

*No contact order.* Predisposition "no-contact" (or protection) orders are automatically placed by the state's attorney's office when a domestic violence arrest is made. These are criminal court judgments that typically stipulate no contact between the defendant and victim for a specified amount of time (usually 1 year). For the protection order to be lifted, the offender must undergo a screening (using the Domestic Violence Inventory, DVI) administered by the community corrections agency and complete any subsequent treatment recommendations. In addition to criminal no-contact orders, victims may also apply for a civil protection order, which is not subject to being lifted in response to the actions of the offender.

*Prosecution/sentencing.* If the offender is successfully prosecuted for domestic violence (resulting in a conviction), the sentence mandates that the offender must report to a local community corrections agency. This independent, nonprofit community agency monitors the offender's compliance with the completion of a clinical domestic violence assessment (conducted by a local treatment agency) and with any treatment that is deemed necessary by the treatment agency as a result of this assessment. In

some cases, the sentence may be deferred on successful completion of a domestic violence assessment and any subsequent treatment recommendations.

*Intake and screening.* Convicted offenders who appear at the community corrections agency as ordered by the court undergo an intake interview consisting of a brief consultation with the case manager. The case manager also collects demographic information, explains program expectations, and refers the offender to one of two local treatment agencies that will conduct the clinical assessment of his or her treatment needs. Following the intake interview, the offender completes a DVI screening tool. The screening tool consists of 155 questions and takes approximately 30 minutes to complete. The DVI screening tool includes several subscales to evaluate multiple aspects of the individual offender, including violence (i.e., lethality), control issues, stress coping abilities, and substance abuse needs (Davignon, 2003). Results of the screening tool are forwarded to the local treatment provider, who then conducts a full clinical assessment of needs.

*Clinical assessment.* Assessments are conducted by two agencies that specialize in providing domestic violence treatment. The assessments generally take 1 hour to complete and involve an interview with the offender and a review of the police report, the offender's criminal history, the court judgment, and the DVI screening tool. Recommendations and referrals for treatment are determined as a result of this assessment.

*Treatment.* When a recommendation for treatment ensues from the assessment, the recommendation becomes part of the court judgment, and the offender is required to complete it. In this jurisdiction, domestic violence treatment takes many forms. One of the most commonly used is a 24-week domestic violence treatment program that is available for male offenders only. Another commonly utilized intervention is a 5-hour anger management seminar that is available for both men and women. Other recommendations for treatment may include individual counseling, chemical dependency evaluation, chemical dependency treatment, or some other recommendation (e.g., meet with police, psychiatric evaluation). In about one fourth of the cases, a recommendation for no treatment is made.

*Research questions.* The current study expands on previous research by comparing male and female domestic violence offenders within the context of a comprehensive response to domestic violence. Although this community uses a comprehensive approach similar to those described in past studies of the CCR model, our study focuses on experiences of male and female offenders after they have been arrested and convicted. Specifically, it examines the implementation (and impact on recidivism) of several postconviction processes, including the local community corrections agency's intake and screening process, the clinical assessment and treatment recommendation,

and finally the completion of treatment and the overall court order. Three specific questions will be explored. First, are there differences between female and male domestic violence offenders in this sample? Second, are there differences in the manner in which these various intervention components are implemented with female and male offenders? Third, are there differences in the effectiveness of these components of the comprehensive intervention for men and women? In other words, does the coordinated approach reduce recidivism for both male and female offenders? This is an especially important question as to date the few studies that have examined female domestic violence offenders have not included measures of recidivism in their analyses.

## Method

### Sample

Data were initially collected during a 12-month period (January 1, 2003–December 31, 2003). The initial sample included 189 offenders (146 males and 43 females) court ordered to have an assessment evaluation monitored through the community corrections agency as part of the overall CCR model. To garner a large enough subsample of female offenders, data were collected for an additional 24 months (January 1, 2001–December 31, 2002), producing an additional 50 female arrestees.

Because this study attempts to examine the relationship between female and male violence in intimate heterosexual relationships (i.e., married, dating, and/or cohabitating heterosexual adults), the sample includes only incidents in which the victim and offender were in a heterosexual relationship. It should be noted that because of this criterion, 23 females and 15 males were excluded from the sample. These individuals were excluded because the nature of the relationship between the victim and the offender was either homosexual or familial. Thus, the final sample includes 131 males and 70 females ( $N = 201$ ).

### Measures

*Background variables.* Demographic information collected during the intake process at the community corrections agency included employment status (i.e., employed or unemployed), marital status (i.e., single, married, separated, divorced, or widowed), and offender's age. Other demographic information was gathered from official police and court reports, including the gender of the offender and the victim, age for both offender and victim, the offender's race (i.e., White or non-White), and the relationship between offender and victim (i.e., married, separated, divorced, cohabiting, and dating/not cohabiting). Whether or not the offender and victim had criminal histories was determined by obtaining arrest records (date and type of crime) on each party from the local police department.

*Offense variables.* Specific variables related to the domestic violence incident for which the offender was arrested were gathered from the police report, including primary charge (i.e., assault, interference with 911,<sup>1</sup> harassment, violation of protection order) and whether or not both the offender and victim were arrested (i.e., dual arrest).

*Prosecution/sentencing variables.* Records of court judgments were used to obtain data on the criminal assault charge (i.e., Misdemeanor Type B or Misdemeanor Type A),<sup>2</sup> whether or not a deferred sentence was imposed (and in cases with a deferred sentence, the length of the deferment in days), and whether or not a no-contact order was part of the court judgment.

*Process variables.* Variables representing completion of various stages of this comprehensive approach were collected from various sources (for all variables, 1 = yes, 0 = no). The first variable to be examined is whether or not the offender appeared at the community corrections agency as ordered. The second variable indicated whether or not an intake interview and screening tool were completed for those offenders who appeared at the community corrections agency as ordered. The third variable represented whether the offender successfully completed whatever was included in his or her court order (e.g., when treatment was recommended, did the offender complete the treatment recommendation). Finally, information related to how far the offender went in the process (i.e., intake interview, screening, assessment, treatment recommendation, completion of treatment recommendation) was also examined (a variable representing the sum of each previously described dummy variable was computed). Information used to determine each of these variables was collected from the community corrections agency's files.

*Recidivism measures.* Recidivism was tracked from official arrest records collected from the local police department. An offender was considered to have recidivated if he or she was rearrested at any time after the date of sentencing. The average time at risk for the entire sample was 10.4 months.<sup>3</sup> Information on both the date and type of any rearrests was recorded in a manner similar to that related to criminal histories. Any arrests for both the offender and victim that were domestic in nature were noted, and a separate dichotomous variable was created to represent this specific type of (domestic violence) recidivism.

## Results

### Comparisons of Male and Female Arrestees

The first issue examined in this article involves whether there were any differences between male and female domestic violence offenders in this sample. Female offenders constituted about one third of the total sample (34.8%) examined here.<sup>4</sup> As

**Table 1**  
**Gender Differences in Domestic Violence Offender Characteristics**

Variable	Females (%)	Males (%)
Age in years	29.6	31.1
Non-White	17.1	12.2
Educational attainment		
No high school diploma/GED	13.2	11.2
High school diploma/GED	41.5	47.2
Some college	32.1	36.0
College graduate	13.2	5.6
Unemployed**	43.3	23.3
Relationship with victim**		
Married	25.3	28.0
Divorced/separated	6.7	23.7
Cohabiting	34.7	28.0
Dating/not cohabiting	33.3	20.4
Previous offense*		
Yes—Domestic violence related	15.7	31.3
Yes—Not domestic violence related	17.1	20.6
No	67.1	48.1

\* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ .

depicted in Table 1, male and female domestic violence offenders appear quite dissimilar in terms of their demographic characteristics, with the exception of racial proportions, which were similar across genders.

On the whole, the sample was predominately White, with no significant differences between males (87.8% White) and females (82.9% White).<sup>5</sup> Although female offenders were slightly more likely to have not completed a high school education in comparison to males (13.2% vs. 11.2%, respectively), females were more likely to have completed a college degree (13.2% vs. to 5.6%, respectively). However, the differences in educational attainment were not statistically significant (see Table 1). Employment status, on the other hand, was statistically significant, with 76.7% of males being employed in contrast to 56.7% of females ( $\chi^2 = 7.155$ ,  $p < .01$ ).

In general, the male offenders in this sample also appeared to have more extensive criminal histories than did the female offenders. In particular, males had almost twice as many prior arrests for domestic violence (31.3% vs. 15.7%) compared to the females in the sample ( $\chi^2 = 7.591$ ,  $p < .05$ ). Male offenders were also more likely to have been arrested for any type of offense (51.9%) than were females (32.9%,  $\chi^2 = 6.683$ ,  $p < .01$ ). Interestingly, additional analyses (not presented in Table 1) revealed that females who were part of a dual arrest were less likely to have either prior arrests for domestic violence (33.3%) or any other type of prior arrests (28.6%) compared to women who were not dual arrested (53.3% and 33.3%, respectively). Although neither

of these differences was statistically significant, this pattern of results would generally support the suggestion that to some extent the dual-arrested women in this sample have less serious criminal histories than women who were not dual arrestees.

When the relationship between gender and the victim–offender relationship was examined, an interesting pattern emerged (Table 1). Male offenders were more likely to be married to (28.0% vs. 25.3%) or divorced/separated from (23.7% vs. 6.7%) the victim than were female offenders. Female offenders were more likely to be cohabiting with (34.7% vs. 28.0%) or dating but not cohabiting with the victim (33.3% vs. 20.4%) than were male offenders. These results were statistically significant ( $\chi^2 = 10.806, p < .01$ ).

### CCR Delivery by Gender

The second question examined in this study was whether the comprehensive approach employed in this community was different for female versus male offenders (see Table 2). Results reveal that women were more likely arrested as part of a dual arrest (31.8% vs. 19.8%) than were males ( $\chi^2 = 3.356, p < .05$ ). After arrest, the second component of this combined intervention is prosecution of the offender. Statistically significant differences between men and women were found for all aspects of the prosecution of these offenders. Males were more likely to be currently charged with criminal assault as compared to some other type of charge (75.4%) than were females (55.7%,  $\chi^2 = 20.229, p < .001$ ).

Differences were also found for the level of the criminal charge (Table 2), with more male offenders charged with the more serious Misdemeanor Type A offense (25.5% vs. 4.8%,  $\chi^2 = 11.240, p < .001$ ). In terms of the outcomes of these court proceedings, deferred sentences were imposed significantly more often for female offenders (45.5% vs. 22.2%) than male offenders ( $\chi^2 = 9.903, p < .001$ ), suggesting that judges identified cases involving females as more deserving of this form of lenient sanctioning. In cases with a male offender, no-contact orders were imposed 82.7% of the time, whereas only 70.0% of cases with a female offender had a no-contact order, again suggesting that judges were likely to deem male offenders as more potentially dangerous and in need of being restrained from contacting the victim. These differences in no-contact orders were also statistically significant ( $\chi^2 = 5.42, p < .05$ ).

After a court judgment is in place, offenders must appear at the local community corrections agency to start the process of monitoring their compliance with the order for completion of a DV assessment and any needed treatment. This process involves several cumulative steps: (a) intake interview and DVI screening, (b) clinical assessment and development of treatment recommendations, and (c) follow-through and completion of treatment recommendations (see Table 3). Overall, females offenders completed more components of the model (2.3 vs. 2.0) than did male offenders ( $t = -1.765$ ,

**Table 2**  
**Gender Differences in Criminal Justice System Processing**

Variable	Females (%)	Males (%)
Dual arrest*	31.8	19.8
Criminal charge***		
No high school diploma/GED	13.2	11.2
High school diploma/GED	41.5	47.2
Some college	32.1	36.0
College graduate	13.2	5.6
Criminal assault charge***		
Misdemeanor B	95.2	74.5
Misdemeanor A	4.8	25.5
Deferred sentence***	45.5	22.2
No contact order*	70.0	82.7

\* $p < .05$ . \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

$p < .05$ ). Differences in completion were further analyzed by the creation of separate dichotomous variables for each intervention component. Female offenders were more likely to appear for the intake and screening process (82.9% vs. 76.3%), although the differences were not significant. Males were marginally more likely to complete the DV assessment (58.1% vs. 41.9%) than were females ( $\chi^2 = 2.234, p = .067$ ). Female offenders, however, were significantly more likely to complete their court order regardless of the content of that order (45.5%) than were males (17.1%,  $\chi^2 = 8.4, p < .01$ ). Given that female arrestees overall were found to be more likely the subject of a dual arrest and were also less likely to have criminal histories, this result may suggest that these female participants were generally more law-abiding and thus more likely to conform to the requirements of the court order than were their more criminally involved male counterparts in this sample.

Recommendations for treatment were also significantly different for males and females (see Table 3). Female offenders were more likely to be referred to either anger management (29.4% vs. 15.5%) or some other type of treatment intervention, such as individual counseling (39.2% vs. 16.7%), than were males. Male offenders, on the other hand, were more likely to be sent to a domestic violence treatment group (36.9% vs. 2.0%) than were women. These differences in treatment recommendations were statistically significant ( $\chi^2 = 25.750, p < .001$ ). It is important to keep in mind that in this community, there are no domestic violence treatment programs for female offenders, which explains why women are less likely to be sent to the domestic violence group treatment and more likely to be sent to anger management or some other treatment. However, when treatment of any type was recommended by the treatment agency, female offenders were significantly more likely to complete it

**Table 3**  
**Gender Differences in the Implementation of**  
**This Comprehensive Intervention**

Variable	Females	Males
Average number of components completed*	2.3	2.0
% of clients completing each component		
Intake/screening (%)	82.9	76.3
Clinical assessment <sup>a</sup> (%)	41.9	58.1
Entire court order*** (%)	45.5	17.2
Clients' treatment recommendations***		
Anger management seminar (%)	29.4	15.5
Domestic violence treatment (%)	2.0	36.9
Other "treatment" (%)	39.2	16.7
No treatment recommended (%)	29.4	31.0
% completed recommended treatment**	46.9	18.9

a.  $p = .067$ .

\* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ . \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

(46.9%) than were males (18.9%,  $\chi^2 = 7.539$ ,  $p < .01$ ). This result, coupled with the less serious criminal histories and the tendency for the women in this sample to be more likely to complete their overall court orders again, tends to suggest that these women (who are often dual arrestees) are less criminally involved and more law-abiding and prosocial than the men in this sample.

### Differences in Recidivism

The third and final question addressed by this study was twofold. First, was there a difference in recidivism by gender? Second, was there a difference in the effectiveness of this comprehensive intervention by gender? As previously mentioned, recidivism was measured by the presence of an officially recorded rearrest. The type of rearrest was divided into two categories: (a) any rearrest charge and (b) rearrest for a domestic violence-related charge only. Although female offenders appeared to recidivate at a slightly higher rate when compared to male offenders (28.6% vs. 24.4% for any rearrest charge; 80.0% vs. 65.6% for domestic violence rearrests only), bivariate analyses did not find these differences to be statistically significant.

To address the second part of the question, whether this comprehensive approach affects recidivism differently for men versus women, logistic regression models were computed for each of the two rearrest measures (see Table 4). These models included categorical measures for the relationship between the victim and offender (0 = dating but not cohabiting, 1 = married, 2 = cohabiting, 3 = divorced/separated), dual-arrest status (0 = no, 1 = yes), race (0 = White, 1 = non-White), prior arrests

**Table 4**  
**Logistic Regression Coefficients for Recidivism Among the Entire Sample**

Independent Variables	Any Rearrest		Domestic Violence Arrest	
	$\beta$	(ExpB)	$\beta$	(ExpB)
Relationship with victim				
Married	-0.945	(0.389)	-1.698*	(0.183)
Cohabiting	-0.070	(0.933)	-0.329	(0.719)
Divorced/separated	-0.483	(0.617)	-0.225	(0.799)
Non-White	-0.476	(0.621)	-0.489	(0.613)
Prior arrest record	1.228**	(3.416)	1.333**	(3.792)
Age	-0.009	(0.991)	-0.018	(0.982)
Dual arrest	-1.628**	(0.196)	-2.104**	(0.122)
Female	-0.066	(0.936)	0.365	(1.441)
# of intervention components completed	-0.084	(0.919)	0.016	(1.016)
Time at risk	0.057*	(1.058)	0.054	(1.055)

\* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ .

(0 = no, 1 = yes), and variables representing age, time at risk, total number of intervention components completed, and gender (0 = male, 1 = female) as control variables. When looking at the logistic regression model for the likelihood of rearrest on any charge, including domestic violence, those offenders who had a prior arrest ( $b = 1.228, p < .01$ ) and greater time at risk ( $b = 0.057, p < .05$ ) had a higher likelihood of recidivating. Individuals who were involved in a dual arrest were less likely to recidivate ( $b = -1.628, p < .01$ ).

The results for the second logistic regression model predicting any domestic violence related rearrest revealed that the likelihood of recidivism was lower for offenders who were married to the victim in comparison to offenders dating the victim ( $b = -1.698, p < .05$ ) and for offenders in dual-arrest incidents ( $b = -2.104, p < .01$ ). The probability of rearrest for a domestic violence offense was also found to be significantly higher when the offender had a prior arrest record ( $b = 1.333, p < .01$ ). Neither gender nor the number of intervention components completed demonstrated statistically significant impacts on either recidivism measure. Thus, although women were more likely to complete their treatment recommendations and their entire court order, they were not less likely to recidivate. It also does not appear from these results that the comprehensive, community-based response to domestic violence being implemented in this jurisdiction reduced the recidivism (general crime or domestic violence) of either gender.

Finally, the same regression model presented in Table 4 (omitting the female variable) was estimated separately on the male and female samples to determine if the interventions' impact (or lack thereof) was similar for each gender. As in the results presented in Table 4 (showing no effect for this intervention), there was no significant

impact of the completed intervention components among either males or females (results not presented). Interestingly, in these models, the impact of dual arrest did vary by gender, with females involved in a dual-arrest incident being significantly less likely to recidivate, whereas dual arrest had no impact on male offenders' recidivism.

## Discussion

This study examined male and female domestic violence offenders and their experiences in a comprehensive, community-based intervention process for domestic violence arrestees. Results reveal that with the exception of race, males and females arrested for domestic violence in this jurisdiction differed on nearly every demographic characteristic examined. For instance, females were more likely to be unemployed and cohabiting with or dating their victims, whereas males were more likely to be married to, divorced from, or separated from their victims. Females were also more subject to dual arrest and also tended to have less extensive criminal histories than the men in this sample. These findings run contrary to other studies that have tended to find more similarity in the demographic characteristics of male and female offenders (e.g., Henning et al., 2003; Henning & Feder, 2004).

More important, these results suggest that the women being arrested and processed through this comprehensive community response to domestic violence may be less in need of such an intensive criminal justice system process than are the male arrestees. This seems to be true especially in light of these women's generally lower likelihood of having a criminal history and the fact that many of them may well have been arrested as a result of merely "defending" themselves against their partner's aggression (accounting for their disproportionate likelihood of being dual arrested). It is also interesting to note that many of these women had relatively high probabilities of completing their court orders, and any treatment recommendations incorporated into those orders, further supporting the contention that this group of female offenders was generally more law-abiding and willing or able to comply with the criminal justice system's expectations.

Further analyses examining relevant contextual factors may help explain some of these differences. For instance, Dasgupta (2002) has previously argued that there are inherent differences in the context of offending between the sexes, with females more often having been the victims of childhood physical and sexual abuse and experiencing ongoing abuse more often than men. Explanations for violence given by women also differ from those given by males (Barnett et al., 1997). In a series of in-depth interviews, Dasgupta (1999) found that the overwhelming theme of women's use of violence against their partner was not aggressive but rather self-defensive, a position that seems supported by the current findings related to women's probability of being the victim of a dual arrest and their lack of prior arrests. According to Dasgupta, "The most pervasive and persistent motivation for women's use of violence is ending abuse in their own lives" (p. 217). Future research including careful examination of police

reports (particularly in the case of dual arrests), victim interviews, and information taken from screening and assessment tools is needed to further examine these more qualitative differences in use and type of violence not captured in existing research that has relied heavily on comparisons of male and female offenders only in terms of traditional demographic information.

Conceptually, the CCR model (much of which is represented in the current comprehensive approach examined here) was developed to fit the cultural and sociohistorical needs of the male batterer and his female victim by protecting the victim through the sanctioning and treatment of the offender (Dasgupta, 1999; Pence, 1999). Although there has been some previous research suggesting the effectiveness of this sort of intervention, the current study posed a second question, specifically whether a model sharing many of the components of the CCR works in the same manner when the gendered nature of domestic violence is reversed (i.e., when the incident involves a female offender and a male victim, such as may be the case in a dual-arrest situation). Results revealed that there were significant differences in the experiences of this combined approach for female as compared to male offenders but that this particular combination of interventions did not reduce recidivism for either male or female arrestees.

The failure of this combined approach to produce any reductions in reoffending may be the result of inappropriately targeted and thus ineffective interventions for both males and females in this sample. For instance, women who are the recipients of arrest for what may well have been self-defensive violence are not in need of a coordinated approach to domestic violence where the goal is largely the sanctioning and treatment of batterers. Rather, these women, who are arguably more like victims than offenders, are in need of intervention services related to advocacy and empowerment. For example, one such program was created in Duluth, Minnesota, for domestic violence victims who had been arrested for misdemeanor assault. Women arrested for this self-defensive type of violence in Duluth are deferred by the prosecutor to an educational program that is designed not only to inform these women about legal issues related to the use of violence between intimate partners but also to provide support, advocacy, and empowerment without further criminalizing these women (McMahon & Pence, 2003).

Male offenders, on the other hand, are more likely in need of a comprehensive intervention that combines criminal justice system sanctioning in the form of arrest, prosecution, and sentencing with court-mandated batterer treatment. However, simply having these multiple components in place is not necessarily enough to produce reductions in recidivism. Gondolf (2004) argues that although the most effective type of treatment for male offenders appears to be cognitive-behavioral, this treatment must be combined with “swift and certain court response for violations, intensive programming for high-risk men, and ongoing monitoring of risk” (p. 623) for any treatment effects to be evidenced.

From the start, females experience this intervention differently than their male counterparts. As expected, more females were recipients of dual arrest than were males. The

adoption of a proarrest policy in this jurisdiction may partially explain this disparity in dual arrests, even though it appears that these female arrestees (and also the dually arrested females) are less serious offenders based at least on their criminal histories. The current study is unable to draw further conclusions about the causes for the differences in police response by offender's gender because of the lack of detailed incident information presently available in this data set. A forthcoming study that will collect and analyze the police reports for female dual arrestees will attempt to provide richer qualitative data that will help flesh out such differences in arrest for female offenders.

In any event, it may be that a move to a revised arrest policy, one that requires police to attempt to determine who is the primary aggressor in a reported instance of domestic violence, may help to alleviate the disparity in dual-arrest probability, which in this sample seems to operate to criminalize a number of women who are otherwise prosocial and law-abiding. In situations where both partners appear to be involved in the incident, primary aggressor laws authorize police officers to arrest the party most responsible for the incident or the party engaging in offensive but not defensive violence. Primary aggressor laws instruct officers to take into consideration prior domestic violence acts, criminal histories, and the potential for future violent behavior before making an arrest (Henning & Feder, 2004). However, primary aggressor laws by themselves may not be adequate to restrain police officers from arresting females for self-defensive violence. Mignon and Holmes (1995), for instance, argue that unless police departments provide adequate training to line officers in conjunction with the adoption of mandatory, proarrest, and primary aggressor policies, officers will continue to fail to arrest domestic violence offenders or make inappropriate arrests, as is the case with a majority of females arrested for domestic violence. According to Humphries (2002), this training should involve specialized education about the historical, political, and social complexities of domestic violence and the gendered nature of battering.

If the adoption of primary aggressor arrest policies is not successful in reducing the number of women arrested for self-defensive violence (or if this policy shift is deemed impractical or otherwise unacceptable), an alternative means for diverting female arrestees from the criminalizing effects of the legal system might be the expanded use of domestic violence courts, which have begun to emerge in recent years (Gover, MacDonald, & Alpert, 2003). These courts may be more effective in diverting these types of women into appropriate empowerment interventions rather than inappropriately criminalizing them for defending themselves (Gover et al., 2003). Domestic violence courts, which operate within the context of a coordinated community approach and the basis of therapeutic jurisprudence, are uniquely situated to take into account the gendered nature of domestic violence, including the important contextual differences and the needs and desires of both offenders and victims. As such, domestic violence courts are uniquely situated to "determine treatment needs for offenders and provide accountability of the sanctioned treatment" (Gover et al., 2003, p. 128).

In this study, prosecutorial and court processing were also quite different for males and females in the sample. Males were more likely to face a more serious criminal

assault charge (i.e., Misdemeanor Type A) and to have a no-contact order placed against them, restricting contact with the victim. It appears that the prosecution and court involved in this jurisdiction's combined approach recognize the more dangerous nature of male offending (including the tendency to deliver more lethality in force and the likelihood of having a prior criminal record) and respond by pursuing more serious charges and restricting males' access to female victims. Female offenders, on the other hand, were more likely to have a deferred imposition sentence, suggesting that the court recognizes that female offenders may be less blameworthy in terms of their involvement in what are more often dual-arrest situations. A second potential explanation may be suggested from this finding, in that perhaps this is an instance of courtroom "chivalry" (to protect the female offender), with the judge imposing a deferred sentence because of the offender's sex. Future research examining the motivations of judges when they make various decisions in their response to domestic violence would be useful, perhaps through a survey of judges regarding their goals in these sorts of cases.

Although male and female offenders were equally likely to appear at the community corrections agency for their intake or screening, female offenders completed more components of the overall intervention (e.g., appearing for the intake interview and DVI screening, assessment, and completion of court order). Again, this would seem to suggest that these female offenders were more compliant with the expectations of this program, as they may be more law-abiding and less generally criminally involved than were the men in the sample. If this is the case, it would suggest that an intensive criminal justice system-focused response may not be needed for these women. Criminalizing their often self-defensive behavior may not be the most effective way to help these women deal with the violence in which they are involved. Arrest coupled with other criminal justice system intervention components (e.g., prosecution, sentencing, assessment, and batterer programs) further isolates these women, adding to the stigma, confusion, and desperation these women experience. In addition, arrest for self-defensive violence, argues Martin (1997), "blames women for the battering" (p. 154). These women need advocacy and empowerment interventions that will not criminalize their actions but rather take into consideration the important contextual and gendered differences in the use of violence among intimates. However, provision of appropriate interventions for female arrestees in the form of empowerment and advocacy is seriously lacking in the community under study here. Instead, females in need of intervention were most likely to be sent to anger management programming, where they are told to restrict their emotional expression. Although this may be part of an intervention that is necessary for male batterers, women who are victims of abuse themselves are in need of services that are directed at making them more assertive, not less. In addition, intervention components for women should focus on empowerment. Specific intervention targets would include such issues as improved self-image, assertiveness, independence, and safety and protection issues.

When treatment was recommended, female offenders were also more likely to complete than male offenders. This finding is not surprising in light of the fact that the

majority of women arrested in this sample were generally less criminally involved and more prosocial than the males. In addition, these women may be less savvy when it comes to how the system works compared to male batterers. As such, McMahon and Pence (2003) argue that women arrested for domestic violence are more likely to comply with police questioning, including readily providing information, for instance about where they hit their partner and how hard. Male batterers, on the other hand, are less likely to comply with police questioning, denying any use of violence (McMahon & Pence, 2003). Female arrestees may also have more to lose by not being compliant with their court order, including employability, concerns over the custody and visitation of their children, and social stigmatization (Martin, 1997).

This study points not only to important contextual differences related to domestic violence incidents but also to the differential responses to criminal sanctioning that are largely gendered in nature. As such, current policies that attempt to administer similar sanctions and interventions without regard to these differences will not likely be productive in reducing the incidence of domestic violence. Rather, policies must address the differential use of violence within intimate relationships, including the need to identify a primary aggressor before an arrest is made. The identification of a partner who is more responsible should help reduce the number of women unnecessarily arrested for engaging in self-defensive violence (i.e., dual arrestees). As such, it should also reduce the number of women completing unnecessary or inappropriate intervention components (i.e., prosecution, sentencing, and batterer treatment).

The establishment of domestic violence courts that are responsible for monitoring and holding offenders accountable may also be an important next step in recognizing and combating the complexities of domestic violence. Domestic violence courts may provide another line of defense in prohibiting further criminalization of women who were arrested for engaging in self-defensive violence. This can be done through diversion of arrested women into intervention programs that are based on empowerment and education principles rather than male offender-based CCR interventions. Male offenders, on the other hand, should continue to be processed through a coordinated approach, so that these individuals continue to receive the message reinforced by the criminal justice system that domestic violence is illegal and socially unacceptable and that they will be held responsible for learning how to change their behavior. However, the key to the success of these types of coordinated approaches also seems to rely on the continued development of more effective batterer treatment (e.g., cognitive-behavioral approaches that are combined with ongoing risk monitoring by domestic violence courts).

## **Limitations and Future Research**

Although this study provides an important look at female offenders and their involvement in a comprehensive approach to domestic violence, it is not without its

limitations. First, the racial composition of this sample is unique in that it is predominately White (85.5%). Previous studies that have examined the context of female offending have been conducted primarily in the South with populations that were predominately African American (Henning et al., 2003; Henning & Feder, 2004). Thus, although the issue of generalizability of the findings perhaps is raised by the current sample (mostly Whites from the Midwest), the current study adds to the limited existing literature exploring female offender characteristics in a population that has previously been unstudied.

Second, this study includes only those offenders arrested and successfully prosecuted. A more robust examination would include a quasi-experimental design that compares offenders arrested but not prosecuted, or arrested but not charged. Inferences related to the impact of a coordinated approach to domestic violence for both male and female offenders would be more rigorous with such a design.

Third, the use of official records to measure criminal offending histories and recidivism in and of itself is somewhat problematic. It has been well documented that official records underreport the incidence of crime (Straus & Gelles, 1985). With the private nature of domestic violence, the disparity between official records and self-reports may be even greater. Thus, the measurement of the propensity to use violence, either in the past or future, is somewhat limited in this study.

Finally, the exclusion of various measures of social bonds, such as educational attainment, employment status, marital status, parental status, number of children, and familial background, in the multivariate analysis of recidivism is problematic. However, because of the nature of data collection, such variables were only collected for offenders who appeared at the community corrections agency for an intake interview. Thus, to include such variables in the statistical model introduces potential model misspecification and selection effects. Future research should address the issue of selection bias when examining the impact of comprehensive (CCR-style) interventions and treatment programs on recidivism.

The current study not only expands on previous literature that has examined the demographic and contextual characteristics of the female domestic violence offender, it also provides a much needed look at the involvement of female offenders in a comprehensive approach to dealing with domestic violence. Female and male offenders not only appear to differ in terms of their demographic characteristics, but they also appear to receive different components of this combined approach (e.g., different probabilities of being ordered to domestic violence treatment and being granted deferred sentences) and respond to these components differently (e.g., different probabilities of completing court orders and reoffending) as well. Such differences inherent in the process and outcome of the model by gender must be considered. Like differences in treatment needs for male and female offenders found by Buttell (2002), the current study suggests that the adoption of policies developed in response to male offenders may not be as appropriate as has been assumed for females arrested for domestic violence. Instead, policies that address the issue of violence between intimates must take into account important contextual

differences and the unique intervention needs of offenders and victims based on gender. Until then, the reliance on a one-size-fits-all approach to domestic violence will continue to unduly criminalize those for whom such policies were intended as protection.

## Notes

1. "Interference with 911" charges refer to a suspect's interfering with the victim's call to 911.
2. "Misdemeanor Type A" charges are generally more serious and involve incidents where the offender has caused substantial bodily harm and/or used a weapon in the incident.
3. Previous studies examining the impact that various coordinated community response components have on recidivism have ranged in length of time at risk from 6 months (Davis & Taylor, 1997; Sherman & Berk, 1984) to 18 months (Shepard, Falk, & Elliot, 2002; Tolman & Weisz, 1995). Because of the expanded time frame used to collect a larger sample of female offenders, time at risk differed for male and female offenders in this study. The average time at risk for female offenders was 14.9 months (range = 1.7-38.9 months), whereas the average time at risk for male offenders was 8.09 months (range = 0.57-13.4 months). Overall, the average time at risk in this sample is comparable to those periods examined in past research on domestic violence interventions; however, the results presented here may be interpreted as conservative estimates of the effects of similar interventions over periods longer than 10 months.
4. Data on female offenders were collected during the period of 36 months, in comparison to only 12 months for male offenders. In the 12-month period for which data were collected on both males and females in the sample, female offenders accounted for 29.6% of the initial sample.
5. These percentages are also representative of the racial composition of the community.

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