

Gender Inequality and Patterns of Abuse Post Leaving

Lorraine Davies · Marilyn Ford-Gilboe ·
Joanne Hammerton

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Abstract Drawing on Connell's (*Gender and power: Society, the person and sexual politics*. California: Stanford University Press, 1987; *Masculinities*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1995) model of gender relations, this paper examines patterns of intimate partner violence among women who have recently left an abusive partner. In so doing, we attempt to better understand the social structural factors that shape the relations of power and control in intimate violent heterosexual unions. The data come from the first wave of a longitudinal prospective survey of 309 women who had left an abusive partner in the previous 3 years. Our data suggest that structured relations of inequality, namely relations of production, power and cathexis, shape women's risk of abuse and harassment after leaving, and do so in ways that shape relations of coercive control. These results have implications for understanding the social context within which male violence against women occurs, and how this context constrains and/or enables women's strategies for leaving and safety.

Keywords Intimate partner violence · Gender inequality · Patterns of abuse

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L. Davies (✉)
Department of Sociology, The University of Western Ontario,
London, ON, Canada
e-mail: ldavies@uwo.ca

M. Ford-Gilboe · J. Hammerton
School of Nursing, The University of Western Ontario,
London, ON, Canada

Women negotiate intimate relationships within a broader context of gender ideologies that romanticize and make invisible male power and privilege. Reflecting and reinforcing intersecting inequalities of gender, race/ethnicity and social class, the institution marriage and the nuclear family are idealized as inherently gratifying arrangements of consensus and harmony. Other family forms carry with them negative overtones and, therefore, are viewed as less desirable ways of living (McMullin et al. 2002). These dominant belief systems matter; they affect social policy and ultimately influence how family life is experienced. For example, women do not enter into marriage or cohabitation expecting conflict and/or dissolution. They are not encouraged to consider the possibility that they may find themselves in abusive relationships, even though it is a disturbingly common experience (Kurz 1996). This makes it exceedingly difficult for women who then find themselves with a violent partner to recognize and acknowledge the abuse, and to figure out what to do about it (Mahoney 1991). Because awareness that intimate partner violence is embedded within broader arrangements of power and control is still lacking today, the tendency to blame women (and for women to blame themselves) dominates. Knowledge about how systemic gender inequalities make disentangling from abusive partners challenging and often dangerous is critical to bridging the gap between hegemonic beliefs and a realistic appraisal of intimate social worlds.

Feminist scholarship has moved the field of woman abuse beyond previous individual and family based models of violence, arguing pervasively that intimate partner violence emerges out of the social context that surrounds peoples' lives (Dobash and Dobash 1998; Kurz 1996; Mahoney 1991; Varcoe 2008). This is important because it shifts our focus away from individual explanations, and encourages research aimed at recognizing and understand-

ing the culture that simultaneously perpetuates and hides male partner violence against women. Three well-established conclusions emerge from this body of literature. First, intimate partner violence is rooted in gender inequality and social location (Varcoe 1996, 2008). Second, violent intimate relationships emerge from gendered coercive relations of power and control (Mahoney 1991; Wuest et al. 2003; Fleury et al. 2000). Third, leaving an abusive relationship is not synonymous with the cessation of that abuse (Anderson and Saunders 2003; Fleury et al. 2000; Tjaden and Thoennes 2000). This paper focuses on the intersection of these three findings and examines the relationships among gender inequality, relations of power and control, and patterns violence after leaving, in a community sample of 309 Canadian women. Before leaving, all of the women had experienced intimate partner violence (IPV), defined in this study as “repeated physical, sexual and/or emotional abuse by an intimate partner in the context of coercive control” (Tjaden and Thoennes 2000). All of the women had recently left their abusive partners. With this as our framework, this paper helps to answer the question “What happens when she leaves?” (Hardesty 2002, p. 599).

The Process of Leaving and Gender Inequality

The predominant societal impression that leaving is a solution for intimate partner violence rests upon the widely accepted misperception that women and men are equal partners in romantic unions. It wasn't until 1991 that the term ‘separation assault’ was introduced in an attempt to make visible the relations of inequality and coercive control that give rise to men's continued use of violence against their partners after break-up (Mahoney 1991). Indeed, the 1993 Statistics Canada National Violence Against Women Survey revealed that almost 20% of separated wives reported being physically abused after they left their partners, and among these women, 35% reported more frequent abuse (Johnson 1995 in Wilson et al. 1995, p. 340). Drawing on a violence against women survey of a community sample of women in Finland, Piispa (2002) similarly found that almost 20% of women who had left a relationship previously in their lives reported violence after leaving. Stalking, one form of continued harassment experienced by women, is more common among former than current partners (Tjaden and Thoennes 2000) and has been associated with both attempted femicide and femicide (McFarlane et al. 1999). Furthermore, being murdered by one's spouse was found to be approximately five times more common for women who left their relationship than for those still in the relationship (Wilson and Daly 1993).

In addition to these retrospective studies, a few longitudinal studies have examined the relationship between leaving

and abuse over time. Campbell et al. (1998) interviewed 31 women who were involved with a violent intimate partner three times over 3 years. Among the women (53%) who had left the relationship by the end of the study, many experienced increased violence in the aftermath. Fleury et al. (2000) followed women for 2 years after leaving a shelter. Among this group of 135 survivors, over 1/3 experienced abuse by their former partner during this time.

The fact that women are so constrained in their efforts to free themselves from abuse even after leaving exposes the power imbalance inherent in marriage and common-law unions that privileges men, an imbalance that is connected to broader gender disparities woven throughout the organization of society generally (Tichenor 1999). Simply put, a link exists between structural factors and the distribution of power, which are apparent at the individual level in feelings of control and entitlement by gender. Yet, to date, little attention has focused on “the larger social forces that contribute to a woman's continued victimization or harassment” or to the course of their lives in the aftermath of leaving (Anderson and Saunders 2003, p. 177). Such information is critical to support social change aimed at ending violence against women. It must also be informed by a well-established theoretical model of gender relations, such as that developed by Connell (1987, 1995).

Connell (1995) identifies three major structures that constitute the system of gender inequality: production relations, cathexis, and power relations. When applied to the experience of abuse after leaving, this conceptual model is particularly relevant because it is based on the assertion that “gender...structures social practice” (Connell 1995, p. 75). Rather than an individual focus, men's continued control and abuse of women throughout the process of leaving (and women's experiences of real and perceived empowerment to free themselves of these coercive relations) can be understood in the context of the sphere of paid and unpaid work (production relations) which interact with the structure of power relations, both of which are bound by the social world of emotional and sexual bonds between intimate partners (cathexis) (Connell 1987, 1995). Individually, and in combination, these social forces shape the continued sense of entitlement by male abusers over their partners after leaving, and therefore affect patterns of abuse experiences.

Gendered Relations: Mothering and Economic Position

In relations of production, the division of labor has consequences for women's lives (Connell 1987, 1995), and, therefore, it is reasonable to expect that this dimension shapes patterns of abuse after leaving. The presence of children is a key factor transforming the nature of an intimate relationship before and after leaving. Children

complicate the leaving, creating a fertile ground for continued harassment (Wuest et al. 2003). Indeed, threatening to harm or kidnap the children if women leave are common strategies used by abusive men to keep their partners in the relationship (McCloskey 1996). For women, decisions to leave and to stay both reflect consideration of their children's best interests (Jaffe et al. 2003; Varcoe and Irwin 2004). Unless a man desires no contact with his children, mothers who leave an abusive partner must negotiate with their former partner around parenting and visitation for many years. As numerous studies attest, the negotiation of custody and access to children, as well as continued contact with children after separation, provide fathers with ample opportunities to continue to control and abuse their former partners (Hardesty and Chung 2006; Wuest et al. 2003, 2006; Wuest and Merritt-Gray 1999), undermining the efforts of women and children to create a new life after leaving (Ford-Gilboe et al. 2005; Wuest et al. 2004). Kurz (1996, p. 76) describes women's experiences of "custody blackmail." Fathers blackmail mothers into lowering or terminating their demands for child or spouse support by threatening to fight for custody that they otherwise have little interest in (see also Arendell 1995; Wuest and Merritt-Gray 1999).

Because of the accepted importance of joint parenting after divorce, and the belief that intimate partner violence has no bearing on children, the legal system has yet to recognize that children are being used by men as a means of continued partner abuse (Wuest et al. 2006; Hardesty and Chung 2006). A history of domestic violence is rarely identified in marriage dissolutions, even when police or court documentation exists (Kernic et al. 2005). Entitlement over continued relationships with children after divorce or separation, therefore, inadvertently legitimizes men's sense of continued entitlement over former partners in ways that facilitate further abuse and/or harassment (Varcoe and Irwin 2004; Wuest et al. 2004, 2006). Thus, we anticipate that mothers will be more likely than non-mothers to experience continued abuse and harassment after leaving.

Because intimate partner violence is relational and based on a power differential, the social world of the male perpetrator must be considered to fully understand the survivor's social world (Piispa 2002). With this in mind, we turn to the second dimension of Connell's (1995) relations of production—which we operationalize as socioeconomic position. Krieger et al. (1997, p. 345) describe socioeconomic position as "an aggregate concept that includes both resource-based and prestige-based measures as linked to... adult social class position." In other words, socioeconomic position is associated with, but not equivalent to, social class. Socioeconomic position is gendered such that its effects are differentially distributed among women and men as a result of the social organization of paid and unpaid

work. As Connell (1995) notes, this is relevant because "the economic consequences of gender divisions of labor, ... [represent a]...dividend accruing to men from unequal shares of the products of social labor" (Connell 1995, p. 74). This dividend is made up of two interwoven advantages that men have over women: power and income. Indeed, it is generally accepted that, of the three socio-economic status indicators, "income is probably the most direct and obvious indicator of power—the ability to achieve one's ends" (Ross and Sastry 1999, p. 377).

This is perhaps most obvious from studies on income level after separation and divorce. For example, there is evidence that women's average income after separation drops significantly while men's average income is minimally affected (Andreb and Brockel 2007; Arendell 1995; Statistics Canada 1997). In the context of intimate partner violence, this discrepancy has direct consequences for women's ability to navigate a clean break from her partner. Men with greater financial resources are in a better position than those with less income to harass former partners (Wuest et al. 2003; Hardesty and Chung 2006). Indirect support is provided by Arendell's (1995) study of divorced fathers in which the practice of hiring attorneys was found to be a viable, effective and imposing strategy used by men in better economic circumstances to make their expectations or desires known. We suggest that financial resources and gender relations intersect to affect women's lives post leaving as follows. Women commonly experience a deterioration in their economic situation after leaving. Leaving, therefore, exacerbates the income gap between partners, reinforcing gender inequality. This is particularly beneficial for men with greater economic resources (i.e., from higher status positions) because income translates into power. Resources and status provide men from the highest socioeconomic positions with the power to use the opportunities provided by the separation process to continue coercive control. As a result, we hypothesize that women from higher socioeconomic positions before leaving will experience more abuse after leaving than those from lower positions.

Gender and Relationship Characteristics as Indicators of Cathexis

Connell (1987, p. 112) describes cathexis as "emotionally charged social relations with ...other people...in the real world." The heterosexual intimate couple is the most visible form of adult emotional attachment in North American society. It is a dimension of the structure of gender because of the inequality inherent in the "social patterning" of sexual desire (Connell 1987). The structure of cathexis captures the complicated emotional attachments that make leaving a violent relationship so very difficult, and helps

explain the very real dangers created by this decision. Leaving brings up simultaneous and complicated feelings for women. For example, women may feel some continuing sense of love for their former partners, grief at the loss of their dream for “a happy life with a loving partner” (Anderson and Saunders 2003, p. 175), fear for their safety (Wuest and Merritt-Gray 1999) and worry as they negotiate the uncharted waters of a new life (Wuest et al. 2003). The structure of cathexis also captures the emotional attachments that help explain the batterer’s continued pursuit of his partner after leaving. For example, for many years after divorce, a considerable number of the divorced men express anger and resentment at their former wives, which fuel their desires for continued conflict and confrontation (Arendell 1995). In short, these men remain emotionally invested in their former partners (Arendell 1995).

Moreover, as Connell’s (1987, 1995) model of gender relations acknowledges, the emotional attachment or investment (of both the batterer and survivor) are constituted by structural factors. Characteristics of relationships such as partner status (marital versus cohabitation) and duration of relationship (longer versus shorter) affect and reflect the degree of emotional attachment between partners. To our knowledge, research has not specifically examined relationship characteristics as indicators of emotional attachment in the context of understanding continued abuse and harassment post leaving. Yet, in the aftermath of intimate partner violence, these factors are critical because they ‘legitimize’ men’s emotional investment in their partners and simultaneously reinforce men’s sense of entitlement and increase women’s risk of being abused and/or harassed. Thus, we hypothesize that women who married their partners, those who have been with their partner for a longer period of time, and those who have been out the shortest period of time, will be at increased women’s risk of experiencing abuse after leaving.

Gender, Power Relations and Intimate Partner Violence

Connell’s (1987, p. 107) concept of power challenges us to look beyond the individual acts of domestic violence perpetrated against woman, and, instead examine the “structure of power, a set of social relations with some scope and permanence.” Feminists have argued for many years that intimate partner violence is a consequence of a broader system of power and gender inequality that privileges masculinity at an ideological as well as a structural level, thus affording men violent access to women without serious sanctions (Dobash and Dobash 1998). Such power is manifested within intimate partner relationships as male control over women, but the concept of control at the individual level must not be disconnected

from its structural roots (Stark 2006). Attempts to measure gendered relations of coercive control are few and consensus about how best to do this does not exist (Johnson 2006). Assessing the power relations inherent in intimate partner violence is complex and made more difficult because power relations are not fully captured by discrete acts of violence or harassment.

We argue that assessing the power relations of coercive control that characterize the violent intimate relationship (while women are in a relationship and after leaving) necessitates valuing the woman’s perceptions of her relations with the perpetrator. As the woman re-negotiates her life away from her former partner, and regains her own sense of power, her perspective is a trustworthy indicator of his continuing power over her. In this regard, it is expected that the absence of violence in the aftermath of leaving will be associated with fewer feelings of powerlessness among women, both while in the relationship, and after leaving.

Patterns of Abuse and the Process of Leaving

To date, we have limited knowledge about women’s lives after leaving. Greater attention to the social structural factors that shape women’s experiences of abuse and, therefore, the underlying relations of power and coercive control, is needed (Johnson 1995, 2006; Stark 2006; Se’er 1997; Hardesty 2002). We contribute to this literature by examining different patterns of abuse after leaving in a community sample of 309 women who had recently left an abusive partner. Based on the literature review we have provided, it is reasonable to hypothesize that women’s experiences of abuse after leaving will be shaped by the gendered structural characteristics of their lives. This premise allows us to make the following more specific hypotheses:

- Hypothesis 1: Mothers will be more likely than non-mothers to experience continued abuse and harassment after leaving.
- Hypothesis 2: Women from higher socioeconomic positions before leaving will experience more abuse and harassment after leaving than those from lower positions.
- Hypothesis 3: Women who leave relationships characterized by greater emotional investment will be more likely to experience abuse and harassment after leaving.
- Hypothesis 4: The absence of violence in the aftermath of leaving will be associated with fewer feelings of powerlessness among women, both while in and out of the relationship.

Method

Sample

The data for this study come from the first wave of a longitudinal, prospective survey of 309 women who, at baseline, had left an abusive partner in the previous 3 years and were recruited from three Canadian provinces (Ontario, British Columbia and New Brunswick). The target population was a community sample of adult women (over age 18) who were no longer living with their abusive male partner. Exposure to intimate partner violence from the woman's former partner was confirmed using a modified version of the Abuse Assessment Screen (AAS) (Parker and McFarlane 1991). The four items on the AAS capture varied dimensions of intimate partner violence (i.e., physical abuse, forced sex, fear of partner, controlling behavior); a 'yes' response to at least one item was considered positive for intimate partner violence. Various strategies were used to recruit a community sample, including: (a) distribution of recruitment information through local shelters and services for battered women, primary health care providers, and social service agencies; (b) advertisements in community settings; (c) asking participants to provide information to known contacts, and (d) media coverage. Women having various cultural, geographic and socioeconomic characteristics were purposefully targeted in an attempt to capture a diverse sample. Women who were interested in participating in the study contacted the research team directly by telephone or email. Our procedures resulted in completion of interviews with a sample of 309 women at baseline. Not all of the questions in the questionnaire were answered by everyone in the sample. For example, some women did not know their family income the year before leaving. The analysis presented in this paper draws on data provided by 287 women for whom complete data were available on all of the variables used in the multivariate analyses.

Measures

Structured interviews and life history calendars were administered by trained Research Assistants and Registered Nurses while health assessments were conducted by Registered Nurses. The structured interview included measures of women's personal, social and economic resources, service utilization and demographic characteristics. The life history calendars documented patterns of living arrangements and locations, employment and income sources from the first month that the informant began living with the abusive partner to the current month of interview (i.e., up to 37 years later). The health assessment included a detailed abuse history with measures of past and current

exposure to and severity of intimate partner violence from the woman's ex-partner. In addition, a wide range of self-report and biophysical health measures were used to capture various dimensions of mental and physical health. The analyses for this paper draw on the data related to patterns of abuse after leaving, relations of power and control, and structural indicators of gender inequality (i.e., mother status, socioeconomic position, relationships investment).

Abuse Patterns

The abuse pattern variable was developed to assess women's exposure to continued abuse after leaving up to and including harassment in the past month and consists of four, mutually exclusive patterns: *Pattern 1*—No abuse or harassment after leaving and currently (also referred to as 'clean break'); *Pattern 2*—Continued abuse after leaving and current high levels of harassment (also referred to as high harassment); *Pattern 3*—Continued abuse after leaving and current low level of harassment (or low harassment); *Pattern 4*—Continued abuse after leaving but no current harassment (or no harassment). The ordering of the four categories is purposeful, in an attempt to mimic the assumed experiences of women who leave abusive relationships. Ideally, women become free of all abuse upon leaving (pattern 1). If not, there is increased risk for elevated abuse and harassment (pattern 2), which diminishes over time (Patterns 3 and 4).

To construct this variable, we drew on a number of variables. First, we asked the participants whether or not their former partner had continued any of the abusive behaviors experienced while in the relationship, after leaving (yes/no response). Second, we also asked whether or not they had experienced harassment by their former partners after leaving (yes/no response). These questions allowed us to identify women who experienced a clean break (no abuse or harassment since leaving) and those who did not.

Among women who reported abuse and/or harassment after leaving, we then examined variation in current exposure to harassment. The conceptualization and measurement of harassment was based on work by Sheridan (1998). Harassment is defined as "a persistent pattern of behavior by an intimate partner that is intended to bother, annoy, trap, emotionally wear down, threaten, frighten, terrify and/or coerce a woman with the overall intent to control her choices and behavior about leaving an abusive relationship" (Sheridan 1998). Women were asked to rate the past month frequency of 24 harassing behaviors from the HARASS on a scale that ranged from 0 (never true) to 4 (very frequently true). Using women's responses, we identified three mutually exclusive groups: 1. No harassment: those who reported no harassment (0 on all items); 2.

High frequency harassment: those who reported experiencing at least one item frequently or very frequently in the past month); and, 3. Low frequency harassment: those who reported experiencing at least one item rarely or sometimes with no items experienced frequently or very frequently.

By combining the information about abuse/harassment since leaving and current level of harassment, we created the Abuse Pattern variable. Figure 1 presents the sample distribution by pattern of abuse and harassment post leaving. The box in the top row includes all of the women for whom complete data are available ($n=287$) while the boxes in the second row identify the percentage of women in the sample who experienced each of the four patterns of abuse. Only a small minority of women in our sample ($n=33$ or 11.5%) experienced no abuse or harassment after leaving their partner (i.e., made a ‘clean break’). The vast majority of participants (88.5%) experienced abuse after leaving but varied in their exposure to current harassment, with the largest group experiencing no current harassment (38%, $n=109$), followed by lower and more similar rates of high and low frequency harassment (27.2% and 23.3%, respectively). Importantly, half of the sample (50.5%) reported continued harassment at the time of interview.

Mother Status

Mother status is a two category variable (0=not mother and 1=mother). Any woman who lived with a child for a month or more at any point since she began living with the abusive partner was identified as a mother.

Socioeconomic Position

Socioeconomic position represents the participants’ economic status before leaving relative to the other women in the study. It is based on family income the year before she left her partner and operationalized using the following

three categories: lower ($\leq \$20,000$), middle ($\$20,001–39,999$) and higher ($\$40,000+$). These are broadly construed categories intended to capture gross differences in position and resources among the women, relative to each other. To restate more simply, this variable allows us to compare those who are ‘best off’ in terms of socioeconomic status before leaving, to those who are ‘better’ and ‘worse off.’

Relationship Investment

The following three dimensions of the abuser’s relationship investment were assessed: 1) partner status (cohabitating or married); 2) relationship length (number of months lived with partner); and 3) recency of leaving/time out (assessed by both number of months since leaving and year out (1, 2 or 3). These items are proxies for the structure of cathexis (or relationship investment), with longer unions, marital unions, and more recent unions representing markers of greater investment or attachment.

Relations of Power and Control

We included a measure of power and control while in the relationship and currently (i.e., in the past month). Power and coercive control while in the relationship was assessed using a 10-item summated rating scale, the Women’s Experiences of Battering (WEB) Scale (Smith et al. 1995). The conceptualization of abuse captured by the WEB is “a process whereby one member of an intimate relationship experiences vulnerability, loss of power and control, and entrapment as a consequence of the other member’s exercise of power through the patterned use of physical, sexual, psychological and/or moral force” (Smith et al. 1998 in Smith et al. 2002). Participants were asked to rate their extent of agreement with 10 items representing their responses to the abuse they had experienced from their ex-partners while in the relationship on a 6-point likert scale ranging from agree strongly (1) to disagree strongly (6). Sample items include: ‘He makes me feel unsafe even in my own home’; ‘He makes me feel like I have no control over my life, no power, no protection’; ‘He can scare me without laying a hand on me’. Items were reversed scored and their values summed to produce a total score ranging from 10 to 60. Internal consistency of the WEB in this study was .82.

To assess continuing power and control from the woman’s ex-partner, each woman was also asked if she had experienced any of the responses assessed by the WEB in the past month (yes/no). This allowed us to identify women who were currently free from former partner relations of power and control, and those who were not.

Patterns of Abuse Post Leaving

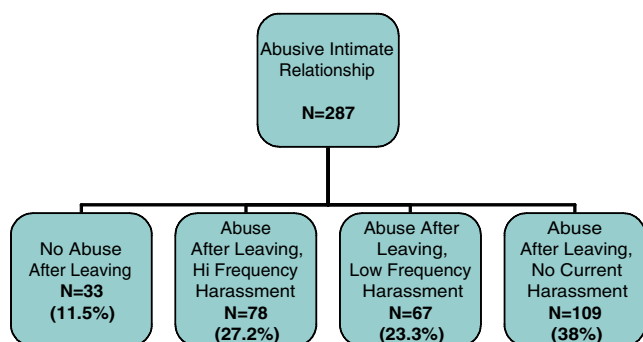


Fig. 1 Patterns of abuse post leaving

Results

The analyses presented here examine patterns of abuse and harassment after leaving in an attempt to understand their relationship to the structural context of women’s lives and gender inequality generally. Ultimately, we are interested in better understanding which social factors empower women to break free of male relations of coercive control.

Variations in Gender Inequality by Pattern of Abuse

We proposed that the indicators of gender inequality will be associated with women’s experiences of abuse after leaving. We begin this analysis by first presenting the distribution of the indicators of gender inequality suggested by Connell’s (1987, 1995) theoretical model for the whole sample and by the pattern of abuse, and then testing whether there are significant differences in the distribution of each indicator by abuse pattern using ANOVA (Table 1).

Mother Status The first row of Table 1 shows the percentage of participants in each abuse pattern group who were mothers. Although 74.9% of women in the sample were mothers, only 58% of women in the no abuse group were mothers. Mothers were significantly more

likely to experience ‘continued abuse after leaving and high frequency harassment’ (86%) than either ‘no abuse’ (58%) and ‘continued abuse after leaving and no current harassment’ (68%) based on ANOVA analysis. This suggests that being a mother may increase women’s risk of continuing abuse after leaving.

Socioeconomic Position Intriguing differences are also evident when we examine the relationship between socioeconomic position and pattern of abuse. In the row on Table 1 representing ‘low’ socioeconomic position, we see that the percentage of low SES women in the ‘no abuse’ pattern (45.5%) was significantly greater than the percentage of women in the ‘continued abuse and low harassment’ category (14.9%). In contrast, in the “medium” SES group, no differences were found in the percentage of women located across the abuse patterns. In the ‘high’ socioeconomic position, significantly greater percentages of women were located in the ‘high frequency’ (55.1%) and ‘low frequency harassment’ (58.2%) groups than in the ‘no abuse’ group (24.2%). Thus, comparing the socioeconomic situations of women before leaving suggests that experiencing abuse after leaving may be more common among those from higher status positions.

Table 1 Distribution of mother status, socioeconomic position, relationship investment, and relations of power and control by pattern of abuse since leaving

	Abuse patterns				Total sample
	No abuse ^a	Continued abuse after leaving			
		High harassment ^b	Low harassment ^c	No harassment ^d	
Mother Status (%)					
Mother	58.0 ^b	86.0 ^{a,d}	82.0	68.0 ^b	74.9
Socioeconomic position (%)					
Low	45.5 ^c	24.4	14.9 ^a	33.9	28.2
Medium	30.3	20.5	26.9	26.6	25.4
High	24.2 ^{b, c}	55.1 ^a	58.2 ^a	39.5	46.3
Relationship characteristics					
Year 1 (%)	33.3	38.5 ^d	35.8 ^d	16.5 ^{b, c}	28.9
Year 2 (%)	21.2	32.1	28.4	31.2	29.6
Year 3 (%)	45.5	29.1 ^d	35.8	52.3 ^b	41.5
(\bar{X}) Duration in (months)	64.3 ^{b, c}	129.4 ^a	122.0 ^a	97.4	108.0
Common-law ^c (%)	78.8 ^{b, c}	46.8 ^a	48.5 ^a	58.9	55.5
Relations of power and control					
(\bar{X}) In relationship	54.9	53.6	51.4	53.7	53.3
None in past month (%)	100.0 ^{b,c}	35.0 ^{a,d}	54.0 ^{a,d}	83.0 ^{b,c}	64.8
N	33	78	67	109	287

^a Significantly different from no abuse

^b Significantly different from high harassment

^c Significantly different from low harassment

^d Significantly different from no harassment

^e n=283

p<0.05

Relationship Characteristics The first three rows in this section report the percentage of women who were in their first, second and third year out of the violent relationship according to their abuse patterns. In year 2, women were equally distributed across the abuse patterns. In Year 1, the highest percentage of women were in the ‘high’ (38.5%) and ‘low’ (35.8%) harassment groups and this was significantly different from the percentage of women in the ‘continued abuse after leaving and no current harassment’ group (16.5%). In Year 3, the pattern reverses and a greater percentage of women report ‘continued abuse after leaving but no current harassment’ (52.3%) than ‘high frequency harassment’ (29.1%). Although not a clear, strong relationship, these results suggest that time away from an abusive partner may be associated with less harassment.

Significant differences in average relationship duration (*Duration In*) by pattern of abuse were found, with women in the ‘no abuse’ after leaving group reporting significantly shorter relationships (64.3 months) and those who were experiencing ‘high’ (129.4 months) and ‘low’ (122.0 months) harassment. In other words, those experiencing current harassment, on average, had been in their relationships longer than women who made a clean break. Furthermore, women who did not marry their abusive partners (% Common-Law) were significantly more likely to experience a clean break (78.8%) than to experience ‘continued abuse and both high and low harassment’ (46.8% and 48.5%, respectively).

Relations of Power and Control Women’s appraisal of negative relations of power and control while in the relationship (as assessed by the WEB) did not vary by pattern of abuse after leaving (see first row in Relations of Power & Control section of Table 1). However, turning to the ‘none in past month’ row, all of the women who experienced a clean break (100%) reported currently feeling free from coercive control and this percentage was higher than the 83% of women who reported no current harassment, with a monotonic decline as harassment increased.

Together, these descriptive results suggest that patterns of abuse post leaving are structured by indicators of gender inequality. Specifically, mothers, those from higher socioeconomic positions before leaving, those from longer unions, who are more recently out of the relationship, have married, and are still experiencing coercive control may be at a higher risk of experiencing abuse and harassment after leaving.

Indicators of Gender Inequality as Predictors of Current Harassment

The next step in our analysis involved determining the relative impact of each indicator of gender inequality on the likelihood of being free from harassment post leaving, controlling for age. The dependent variable is current

harassment (yes/no coded as 0/1). Women with the abuse patterns of ‘no abuse’ and ‘continued abuse since leaving and no harassment’ ($n=142$) were included in the ‘no’ current harassment group, while those in the abuse patterns of ‘high and low frequency harassment groups’ ($n=145$) were included in the ‘yes’ harassment group. Since the dependent variable is dichotomous, logistic regression was used, with the independent variables added to the analysis in steps to create the 4 models shown in Table 2. These models provide a more direct test of the hypotheses derived from the literature review.

Our initial two hypotheses were that mothers will be more likely than women who are not mothers to experience harassment after leaving, as will women from higher socioeconomic positions before leaving compared to those from lower positions. The first model in Table 2 includes Mother Status and the Socioeconomic Position variables. The Mother coefficient (-1.06) was significant and negative, indicating that mothers were less likely than non-mothers to be currently free from harassment. Furthermore, women from the High socioeconomic group (-1.12) were also less likely than those from lower economic positions to be free from harassment after leaving. Thus, hypotheses 1 and 2 were supported.

Model 2 addresses the third hypothesis, which states that those who had left relationships characterized by greater emotional investment will be more likely to experience harassment after leaving. At this step, the relationship characteristic variables (Year 2, Year 3 and Duration In) were added to Model 1. In Model 2, Mother Status and Socioeconomic Position remained significant in the model when the relationship characteristics were introduced. Furthermore, compared to those who had been out 1 year, women who were in their third year out (or Year 3, $B=1.22$) were significantly more likely to be free from harassment. Relationship length, as assessed by the variable ‘Duration In’ was not a significant predictor of current harassment. The variable ‘Partner Status’ (see Table 1) was not included in this analysis due to its high correlation with relationship length. Thus, the hypothesis that greater emotional investment increases risk for violence after leaving was partly supported.

In Model 3, ‘Relations of Power & Control’ were added to Model 2 in order to test the final hypothesis that the absence of harassment in the aftermath of leaving will be associated with fewer feelings of powerlessness both while in and out of the relationship. The variable ‘In Relationship’ assesses the woman’s feelings of loss of power and control while in the relationship (using the Women’s Experiences of Battering Scores) and we also assessed feelings of loss of power and control in the past month (None in Past Month, yes/no). Both variables contributed significantly to explaining freedom from harassment suggesting that

Table 2 Logistic regression of current harassment (1=no harassment) on mother status, socioeconomic position, relationship investment, and relations of power and control

	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4	
Mother status								
Mother	-1.06*	(0.30)	-0.97*	(0.33)	-0.95*	(0.35)	1.02	(0.62)
Socioeconomic position ^a								
Medium	-0.52	(0.34)	-0.50	(0.36)	-0.54	(0.40)	2.48	(0.89)
High	-1.12*	(0.30)	-1.11*	(0.34)	-0.90*	(0.37)	0.66	(0.68)
Relationship characteristics ^b								
Year 2			0.62	(0.35)	0.43	(0.38)	0.61	(0.39)
Year 3			1.22*	(0.33)	0.89*	(0.36)	1.04*	(0.36)
Duration in			-0.00	(0.00)	-0.00	(0.00)	-0.00	(0.00)
Relations of power and control								
In relationship					-0.04*	(0.02)	-0.04*	(0.02)
None in past month ^c					1.96*	(0.33)	2.12*	(0.34)
Mom*medium							3.98*	(1.03)
Mom*high							-2.11*	(0.85)
Constant	1.19	(0.59)	0.21	(0.66)	-3.72*	(1.44)	5.62*	(1.54)
Model X ²	26.66*		46.99*		93.12*		107.80*	

Standard errors are in parentheses. Each equation controls for age

^a Low socioeconomic position is the reference category

^b Year 1 is the reference category

^c Yes in past month is the reference category

**p*<0.05

the more controlled women felt in their relationship (-0.04), the less likely they were to be currently free from harassment. In contrast, the coefficient for the variable ‘None in Past Month’ (1.96) was positive, indicating that women who were currently free from coercive power and control were more likely than those who were not to be free from harassment. Thus, hypothesis 4 was supported.

Theoretically, Mother Status and Socioeconomic Position both represent Connell’s (1987) production relations, and as such, shape male entitlement over women in overlapping ways. In order to capture the connections between mother status and socioeconomic position, we created interaction terms between these two variables. Because Socioeconomic Position is a categorical variable, two interaction terms were created: ‘mom*medium’ and ‘mom*high.’ In adding these variables to Model 4 (Table 2), significant effects were noted (mother*medium, *B*=3.98; mother*higher, *B*=-2.11).

To more easily interpret these interactions, we conducted separate logistic regression analyses for women who were mothers and those who were not mothers. All of the independent variables used in the previous full sample analysis were included in these 2 subgroup analyses (Table 3). Model I in Table 3 includes women who are not mothers, while model 2 focuses on mothers. Among non-mothers, those from the Medium socioeconomic position were more likely than those in the lower socioeconomic position to be currently free from harassment. In contrast, mothers in the Medium and the Higher

socioeconomic positions were less likely that those in the lower position to be free from harassment. These results suggest that higher socioeconomic positions before leaving disadvantage mothers more than non-mothers in their attempts to break free from an abusive partner.

Discussion and Conclusion

We applied Connell’s (1987, 1995) model of gender relations to the study of women’s experiences of continued abuse and harassment in the aftermath of leaving an abusive intimate relationship. We argue that women’s individual attempts to negotiate a ‘clean break’ from their violent partners must be understood within a broader context that recognizes their position within structured gendered relations of inequality. Broadly speaking, we need to better understand how the construction of masculinity both fosters a sense of male entitlement over women, and creates the societal circumstances that allow intimate partner violence to occur. Connell’s theoretical contributions in this area, specifically his conceptualization of relations of production, cathexis and power, provided valuable conceptual direction for considering the role of gender inequality in shaping continued exposure to abuse, and a practical guide for selecting indicators to assess the structural context of women’s lives. Importantly, this paper moves us forward in identifying some of the structural factors that shape women’s experiences of abuse in the aftermath of leaving.

Table 3 Logistic regression of current harassment (1=no harassment) on socioeconomic position, relationship investment, and former partner relations of power and control by mother status

	Model I		Model II	
	Not mothers		Mothers	
Socioeconomic position ^a				
Medium	2.76*	(1.01)	-1.50*	(0.48)
High	0.39	(0.75)	-1.43*	(0.43)
Relationship characteristics ^b				
Year 2	0.99	(0.83)	0.60	(0.46)
Year 3	2.17*	(0.85)	0.85*	(0.42)
Duration in	-0.00	(0.01)	-0.00	(0.00)
Relations of power and control				
In relationship	-0.05	(0.05)	0.06*	(0.03)
None in past month ^c	1.54*	(0.72)	2.21*	(0.40)
Constant	-0.76*	(3.21)	-5.79*	(1.74)
Model X2	22.26*		78.04	

Standard errors are in parentheses. Each equation controls for age

^aLow Socioeconomic Position is the reference category

^bYear 1 is the reference category

^cYes in past month is the reference category

* $p < 0.05$

The first key finding from our analyses is that only a small minority (11.5%) of the women included in the analyses experienced a clean break (no abuse after leaving). In other words, almost 90% reported some form of harassment or continued abuse, with 50% reporting harassment at the time of interview. This is a much higher rate than previously reported in the literature, and suggests that we may be underestimating the frequency with which women experience abuse by a former partner. In this regard, it is important to consider the conceptual and methodological factors that may help explain our findings. On a conceptual level, the definition of abuse we employed in this study includes physical and sexual abuse commonly addressed in other studies, but also incorporates lesser examined dimensions of abuse, specifically psychological abuse and harassment. Our intent was to cast a wide net in order to capture both the obvious and more subtle ways in which violence is experienced by women after leaving. Harassment, in particular, may be the vehicle for men to exert continued power and control over the ex-partners in the absence of close physical proximity, yet the dynamics and full impact of harassment are poorly understood and require further study.

Methodologically, we incorporated questions that would tap into continuing abuse in a broad way. We expected that how we asked the questions about abuse and harassment after leaving would improve recall. These questions immediately followed a series of questions asking about type and severity of abuse while in the relationship. As such, we had just provided women with clear examples of

abuse and harassment that are typically experienced in violent relationships. This approach provided women with a marker to help them consider their exposure to ongoing abuse after leaving, possibly improving the precision of our measurement.

Finally, the characteristics of the women in our non-probability, community sample may also have affected our findings. Part of the selection process for becoming involved in the study required women to self-identify as a person who has recently left an abusive relationship, and then call a study phone number to ask about participating. Each woman was screened for abuse and eligibility for the study using a number of questions. It seems reasonable to expect that the selection process for women to be in the study could have both encouraged and discouraged women who had been abused after leaving from participating. On the one hand, women who have recently or are currently experiencing abuse or harassment from their former partner may be less likely to volunteer to participate in research on violence. They are, or have recently been in a dangerous situation and involvement in a study could pose a real risk to their safety. On the other hand, recency of violence by a partner could motivate women to take part in a research project in the hope that this could contribute to change and promote women's safety.

Knowledge that the social construction of masculinity privileges men with a sense of entitlement over women, and the understanding that intimate partner violence is connected to male economic, sexual, physical and social privilege help us understand patterns of continued abuse

after leaving. Indeed, the second key finding from our results is that the structural characteristics of women's lives (i.e., gender inequality) do shape their risk of abuse after leaving. Our findings suggest that economically privileged men may be more likely to continue to abuse their former partners. This finding is in stark contrast to results of studies that have examined women's risk of abuse while *in* a relationship, where low status employment increases women's risk of partner abuse (Fox et al. 2002). While this is an important finding, we must not conclude that being at a lower risk for violence while in a relationship means that higher status women are immune from partner abuse. Indeed, our findings suggest that, among women who are in violent relationships, leaving may be more difficult for women in higher socioeconomic positions because they are at increased risk of continued abuse and harassment. The use of a community sample in this study resulted in reasonable variation in women's socioeconomic position, enabling us to assess the relationship between socioeconomic position and ongoing abuse. The tendency of much prior research to recruit women from shelters, who may be less diverse in socioeconomic position, may, in part, explain why such a finding has not been documented elsewhere. It is noteworthy that our recruitment strategies targeted women across a range of socioeconomic statuses, ages, marital and parental status. This cross-section of women improves our understanding of the prevalence of abuse after leaving in the broader community of survivors.

Mothering also appears to shape patterns of abuse, placing women who are mothers at an increased risk. In the literature on custody and access, it is argued that issues related to children provide numerous opportunities for men to continue to coercively control and therefore abuse their former partners. Our finding, that patterns of abuse vary by mother status and put mothers at risk of abuse, supports this premise and suggests that greater attention focus on the power dynamics that underlie the renegotiation of mothering and fathering children after a relationship ends, as well as the impact on the children. Furthermore, our findings call into question the current policy doctrine in both the U.S and Canada which, on one hand, is guided by the principle of making custody and access decisions which are in the "best interests of the child" (Wuest et al. 2006) while, on the other hand, clinging to the ideology that fathering is neutral activity and abusive men can be good fathers. Such a doctrine implicitly reifies male power and privilege by enabling continuing abuse and domination of mothers through state sanctioned contact with their abusive ex-partners.

We also find that socioeconomic position and mother status interact in their effects on patterns of abuse after leaving. The relationship between higher socioeconomic

position and risk of abuse is most specific to mothers. For women in an abusive relationship, this means that a higher socioeconomic position before leaving may increase their risk of abuse after leaving more if they are mothers. If mothering already places women in a structurally vulnerable position for continued abuse and harassment because of the need for some kind of a continued relationship with the father of their children, then having former partners with greater economic resources may further exacerbate this vulnerability.

There are a few caveats to these findings. To our knowledge, this is the first study to examine the effects of socioeconomic position before leaving on risk of abuse after leaving. Furthermore, we used family income the year before leaving (as a three category variable) as the indicator of socioeconomic position. Admittedly, this is a gross and, therefore, preliminary indicator of socioeconomic status. Therefore, while our findings suggest a clear effect of socioeconomic position on patterns of abuse after leaving, these findings should be viewed with caution. As such, we encourage further studies which expand upon our work. For example, it would be valuable to examine the role of other indicators of the relations of production before and after leaving on pattern of abuse. This would also allow one to consider how women's and men's economic circumstances change after the relationship ends, and the effect of this change on the risk for continued abuse.

With respect to relationship characteristics, our findings provide some descriptive evidence that marriage, length of union, and length of time out (as indicators of emotional investment) all increase women's risk of abuse after leaving. At the multivariate level of analyses, time out (in years) emerged as the significant predictor of being free from harassment. Not surprisingly, those in their third year out are more likely than those in their first year to be free from abuse. In previous qualitative research (Wuest et al. 2003), harassment after leaving was found to decrease over time after leaving for many reasons: ex-partners lost interest, custody and access disputes were settled, or partners moved on to new relationships. Thus, our findings provide some support for our expectation that former partners' emotional investment, in part, underlies women's risk of abuse after leaving.

Finally, we examined the relations of power and coercive control that characterize intimate partner violence. While acknowledged theoretically as a distinguishing characteristic of abusive relationships, there has been surprisingly little attention to its operationalization empirically (for exceptions, see Wilson et al. 1995; Johnson 2006). As such, our understanding of how these relations change after leaving, and vary according to different patterns of abuse (physical

and non-physical) and harassment experienced is limited. At the bivariate level, women's reports of male partner power and control while in the relationship varied little by patterns of abuse after leaving. However, after controlling for the other key indicators of gender inequality (i.e., mother status, socioeconomic position and relationship characteristics) those who reported feeling more controlled while in the relationship were more likely to be experiencing current harassment. As suggested previously, it may be that harassment is the key mechanism through which abusive men attempt to exert continued power control over the ex-partners.

Our findings also suggest that the woman's perception of her former partners' power and control after leaving varies directly with the intensity and presence of abuse and harassment. As the physical, non-physical and harassment dimensions of violence stop, her feelings of empowerment and control may be restored. We know from previous research that survivors actively engage in numerous strategies of personal empowerment after leaving (Campbell et al. 1998) and that intrusion from ongoing abuse and harassment interferes with women's efforts to create a new life after leaving (Ford-Gilboe et al. 2005). These findings speak to the importance of building community capacity to publicly acknowledge women's risk of continued abuse and harassment after leaving, to enforce strong sanctions against such behavior and to support women in reclaiming their sense of self.

In conclusion, studies on intimate partner violence are unequivocal in concluding that most women leave their abusive partners (Bowlus and Seitz 2006). What remains unclear is our understanding of the leaving process, including the factors that increase women's risk of continued abuse and harassment. Part of the challenge in doing this research is that leaving is not a discrete event. As others have shown, leaving involves breaking psychological, emotional and physical connections that do not necessarily coincide with one another (Campbell et al. 1998). Moreover, this process of disengagement is characterized by periods of being "in-versus-out" and, in our observation, women themselves often find it difficult to pinpoint exactly when the relationship ended. Overall, this paper adds to the literature by underscoring that if women could be assured of a 'clean break' (i.e., no more abuse), then the leaving process would be simplified. As others have pointed out, such assurances involve attention to the structural weaknesses in the system that "create, exacerbate and then don't compensate for problems women face" (Varcoe and Irwin 2004, p. 77). The results presented here add to this work by identifying structural indicators of inequality that shape women's experiences of abuse after leaving. As such, we add to the evidence that challenges

dominant societal beliefs about intimate partner violence being a personal problem rather than a societal issue.

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