Introduction
Domestic violence is an issue that affects men, women, and children from all backgrounds, with over one million reported cases each year in the United States alone (Center for Disease Control, 2003). While a majority of victims continue to primarily be heterosexual females, no person is immune to domestic violence. The prevailing cultural notion that domestic violence is a private or personal family matter rather than a justice issue, along with shame and fear often cited by victims, prevents many from coming forward to report these crimes. The lack of accurate statistics and the lack of awareness regarding the complexities surrounding domestic violence (in particular the effects of the batterer’s attempts to exert power and control over their partners) have led to misconceptions about domestic violence. This can be detrimental, because societal perceptions of domestic violence can have an effect on the support for social policy and services provided to survivors of what is often termed intimate partner violence.

Definition
The term battering has been coined by the battered women’s movement to describe the pattern of abuse committed against one’s partner in an attempt to control, coerce, and intimidate (Praxis International, 2003). Intimate partner violence can take the form of emotional or physical abuse and can result in psychological trauma, physical injury, and even death (Domestic Violence Abuse Intervention Project, n.d.). Often periods of violence are followed by a period of calm and resolution lasting upwards of one year (Walker, 1979).

There is not one agreed-upon theory explaining the causes of domestic violence (Hanna, 2002). One theory stems from the idea that the act is one of displaced aggression, i.e., when men lack power in other areas of their lives, they become frustrated and sometimes take it out on those that they can control (Haaken, 2010). With this in mind it is not surprising that we most often hear of men from marginalized social groups, who lack power in society, being arrested for domestic violence. However, the higher proportion of arrests made to men from marginalized groups might be attributed to the fact that they are already targets of police scrutiny or the fact that the stereotypes of their social group include the notion that they are violent men (Oliver, 2003). Other theories blame patriarchal society and traditional gender-role ideology for the acts of dominance (Brownridge, 2002). For example, traditional male gender-roles are associated with dominance, often leading both men and women to minimize or deny the violent acts and instead see them as normative (Fine & Weiss, 1998).

Keywords
Physical abuse, emotional abuse, battering, intimate partner violence

Traditional Debates
In the past, domestic violence was only associated with physical battering. If battered persons did not have outward physical evidence of domestic violence (e.g., a broken arm, a black eye), laws did not protect them. This belief carried over the general public. What most failed to realize is that emotional abuse or the threat of physical violence in intimate relationships can actually be more detrimental than physical violence (Domestic Violence Abuse Intervention Project, n.d.). The World Health Organization provides accounts of women who claim that they can heal from a physical wound, but continued
psychological abuse and subsequent internalization and self-blame had more damaging and long-lasting effects. To illustrate the typical pattern of psychological and physical abuse, Lenore Walker (1979) developed a theory of the cycle of violence. The cycles manifest in tension building, abusive incident, and finally a honeymoon period in which attempts at reconciliation occur. It is during this time that many victims question their own role in the violence (Domestic Abuse Intervention Programs, n.d.).

Upon hearing of battered women’s accounts of self-blame, the Domestic Abuse Intervention Programs (DIAP) developed the Duluth Model. The Duluth Model takes the accountability off the victims and places the blame on the perpetrator. The research and community work of DIAP, which includes Power and Control Wheel, has already changed the views of domestic violence in the legal system and among social workers. As a result, less of an emphasis has been placed on interventions that empower victims of abuse, with more of an emphasis placed on changing the behaviors of the perpetrators.

There are many different models and theories to mediate domestic violence. Some focus on the victim (e.g., social support theory, empowerment theory), while other mediation focuses on the batterer. While batterer’s intervention programs do exist there is inconclusive evidence regarding whether they are effective or not (Healey, Smith, & O’Sullivan, 1998). These varying models, while situationally effective, do not address the more pertinent issues involving societal perceptions of victims and how we can help. By confronting societal stigmas, we can better legislate and support abuse victims and their families.

**Critical Debates**

In recent years, psychologists and health officials have called on public officials to make domestic violence a top priority on the public health agenda. Injecting domestic violence in the agenda to increase awareness, will inform the public of the consequences of domestic violence as well as the prevalence (Vine, Elliot, & Keller-Olamen, 2010). It will also encourage the implementation of preventative programs, education on the issue, and better resources for victims of battering. More than one million incidents of domestic violence are reported each year and surveys have suggested that between 20-25% of women are victims of physical abuse by their partners; therefore, domestic violence can no longer be viewed as a personal problem (Bornstein, 2006). Domestic violence has social and economic consequences as well. Cost estimates range from 2-10 billion dollars annually, but many researchers think these results underestimate the true cost of domestic violence (National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, 2003). Because these reports rely on victims coming forward, it is difficult to tell how many cases go unnoticed. Since advocates of domestic violence victims are often from feminist or women’s organizations, the data collected is often focused on female victims and male perpetrators. Womenslaw.org states that 95% of victims of domestic violence are women; however, many psychologists suggest that the disparity between the genders of victims is much less apparent (Dutton, 2007). Some psychologists are proponents of utilizing social networking as a resource for victims of battering as a way to provide them with social support and encouragement to come forward without concern for the stigma or fear of their abuser (Smythe & Goodman, 2011).

The World Health Organization (WHO) reminds us that domestic violence is a global problem. The overarching cultural values, legal system, and interpersonal norms of each nation effect the framing of the issue. The varying expectations for the role of women role in the family have might an effect on whether or not women report intimate partner violence. The WHO reported that Latina women often work to maintain the family unit for what they felt was the betterment of their children, which lends itself to underreporting. Additionally, women might fear that disclosing abuse will bring shame upon their family—a particular fear in many collectivist countries. Despite the fervor with which many nations prosecute perpetrators of domestic violence, several nations have what appears to be a culture of tolerance. Illustration of these cultural values is highlighted by a survey of Nicaraguan women which
suggests that nearly a third believe it is appropriate for a husband to beat his wife if he even suspects she is cheating on him. A combination of providing resources to empower victims, intervention programs for abusers, and education about the consequences of domestic violence, will likely be the most effective in eliminating the problem as a global health issue.

References


Online resources

Domestic Violence Around the World: http://www.someplacesafe.org/DV01.htm

Domestic Violence Resource Center: http://www.dvrc-or.org/domestic/violence/resources/C61/

The Duluth Model: http://www.theduluthmodel.org/about/index.html

National Online Resource Center on Violence Against Women: http://www.vawnet.org/research/

