What is special in relationships between men and women? One of the answers to this question might be that it is the only relationship where the dominant and the dominated are supposed to, and in fact often do, love each other, whatever ‘love’ means for an individual. It is not surprising, therefore, if both sociologists and psychologists work to understand this relationship. Many of the former insist on the power dynamics of gendered, hierarchical relations between men and women, while the latter focus on the subjective aspects of object relations. As can be expected, the debate between these approaches is a very conflictual one.

A social and feminist perspective

Feminist researchers basically see intimate partner homicide as the paroxysm of domestic violence, and they stress that in many cultures the husband battering his wife is a normal, and in some circumstances, even recommended practice. Of course, ostensibly, this is not the case in western liberal democracies. However, in these societies the practice is so pervasive that the « abnormality » of the phenomenon can be questioned. For example, in the United States, between 21% and 34% of all adult women will experience violence from a male partner (Koss et al., 1994). The same can be said of lethal violence against women in intimate or domestic situations. According to the United States Federal Bureau of Investigations statistics
(Department of Justice, 1996), over 30% of female homicide victims are killed by their intimate partner. Between 1976 and 1996, over 30,000 women were victims of intimate partner homicide. Nonetheless, the social ‘legitimacy’ and visibility of violence against women vary from one society to another.¹

The idea that intimate partner homicide has to do with ‘normality’, rather than with marginality is reinforced by the fact that the traditional predictors of homicide (social disorganisation, poverty, etc.) have an overall low predictive value in terms of intimate partner homicides, as well as domestic violence. Nevertheless, male batterers, men who kill their partners and battered women (whether they kill or not) all have a history of violence in their family (Johnson, 1996) and their high power and control needs may arise from a sexist gender socialization that is more accentuated than usual.

Therefore, feminists 1) analyse intimate partner homicide as an asymmetrical phenomenon, caused by men’s domination over women; and 2) consider that psychopathological or even merely psychological explanations (references to passion or jealousy, for instance) mask the social dynamics of the phenomenon, and more specifically the reality of domination. Research carried out in this field within this perspective over the past twenty years or so, can be divided under two distinct themes, namely, studies dealing with femicide, and those focusing on battered women who kill. Most research however appear to focus on the latter.²

Femicide

According to Russel and Harmes (2001) the concept of femicide specifically designates the

---

¹ Consider here the apparent legitimacy of “crimes of honour” in arabo-muslim societies, as opposed to the legal and social proscription of all forms of lethal retribution in other societies.

² This is probably because as it reverses the dominant stereotype of women.
killing of females by males (or in some situations by females) because they are female. To a certain extent, this definition challenges the popular conception that the murder of a woman or a girl is a private affair or a pathological aberrance. Furthermore, it highlights the understanding that when men kill women, power dynamics, and specifically the power dynamics underscoring misogyny or sexism, are always implicated. The killing of a woman by her partner is seen as femicide because it has to do with power and control: Batterers kill not because they lose control (of themselves, as the ‘passion’ explanation of the murder suggests), but because they want to exert control over their partner. Thus, symptomatically, women are more at risk of being killed just after leaving their partner. This can be seen as an extreme manifestation of particularly men’s attempts to assert their ownership and control of the sexuality and reproductive capacity of their female partners (Wilson & Daly, 1992).

**Battered women who kill**

Studies generally show that female intimate homicide frequently take place within the context of abusive relationships. For example, it has been found that between 40 and 55% of female intimate homicides occur within the context of a male partner assaulting the woman.

According to Walker (1979, 1989) abusive relationships are characterised by a cycle of violence consisting of the following phases: Phase 1 is called ‘tension building’, and it includes verbal and minor physical abuses from the man, with the woman trying to placate him in order to prevent more serious abuse. Phase 2 consists of an acute battering incident. During phase 3, termed ‘loving contrition’, the apologetic batterer assures the woman that the violence will not be repeated. He explains that the violence would not be repeated, and that it would not have occurred, if only she would do what he wants her to do. However, after this ‘honeymoon’ period, tension starts building again and the cycle recommences.
As the cycle of violence is repeated, the ‘loving contrition’ phase becomes shorter and shorter, and the violence becomes increasingly severe. According to Walker (1979, 1989), any woman may find herself in an abusive relationship with a man once, but a woman who has been exposed twice to this cycle and remains in the relationship presents the battered woman syndrome, characterised by learned helplessness. Repeatedly exposed to painful stimuli over which they have no control and from which there is no apparent escape, these women eventually cease trying to recognize or take advantage of available opportunities to transform their situation. Besides, in order to placate their jealous and possessive partners, they often become increasingly isolated, and therefore progressively more dependent and vulnerable. It is important to stress that in this relationship the woman often tries to placate the man, frequently because of the widespread notion that the violence displayed by men towards their female partners is a response to a provocation; in other words, that the woman in a way seeks his violence.

The learned helplessness theory is meant to answer the question: ‘Why do battered women stay in an abusive relationships?’ To a certain extent, it might in fact describe some of these women’s feelings of helplessness and dependency (‘Where could I go to?’ ‘How will I feed my children?’ etc.). However, recent research tends to criticise this theory (Gondolf and Fisher, 1988; Browne, 1987; Busch, 1999). Battered women are no longer seen as resigned, but instead as active survivors thwarted in their attempts to leave by very real legal and social obstacles (mostly indifference, or even active hostility from the medical profession, the police, the justice, and sometimes even from friends and relatives). Their psychological condition might be compared to that of victims of torture or of war, and may reflect Post-traumatic Stress Disorder symptomatology.

The above-mentioned research also stresses that leaving does not always efficiently end the violence, and in fact often precipitates more violence in the form of ‘separation assault’ (referring
to the reality alluded to above that women are often at greater risk of assault after they had left their partners. Besides, focusing on the woman’s helplessness, as the learned helplessness theory does, can be seen as yet another, and in a way quite traditional, manner of stigmatising women.

**Justice and intimate partner homicide**

It has been argued by feminist researchers and advocates that battered women who kill are actually in a situation of self-defence, even in the (not so rare) case in which, after a particularly threatening and intense outburst of violence from their partner, they kill him while he is asleep (Gillespie, 1989). This conception demands an extension of the notion of self-defence, which relies on an overall idea of ‘reasonableness’: e.g. the use of equal force (you can only use a weapon to defend yourself from an armed person) and the duty to retreat in the face of imminent danger (you must seek all means of escape before using deadly force). As indicated earlier, there are many reasons why they women do not leave abusive relationships, including economic dependency, and the fact that leaving may lead to more violence).

There are those (including some feminist researchers and advocates) who think that the extension of the traditional conception of self-defence leads to the unequal treatment of men and women, as within the extended definition, self-defence is differentially evaluated according to the killer’s and victim’s gender. However, it can be argued that society on the whole being unequal, the extension of the traditional definition of self-defence is basically a way of finding a balance: the socialisation of women as gentle, weak, etc. makes them respond to violence in a specific way.

It has been broadly demonstrated that the judicial system is deeply influenced by the gender
bias. More specifically, reasonableness is defined in male, and not female terms. For instance, with the idea of provocation so often used by men in the case of *flagrante delicto* betrayal, English common law relies heavily upon a conception of the way in which a reasonable man is supposed to react; the only provocation invested of the same power to mitigate a killer’s responsibility is a direct physical assault or that of a relative (Daly and Wilson, 1988). The new definition of self-defence reverses this idea of provocation, relying on a conception of the way in which a reasonable woman is supposed to react.

Ewing (1990) has argued that in the case of battered women who kill, one should consider the idea of psychological self-defence: the abuse is a life or death attack on her psychological self. This argument has been broadly criticised, even by feminists. Understanding the motivations for murder is different from excusing it, and it is, enfin, patronising to women and could result in abused women being further pathologised.

The influence of social evolution
In her ecological analysis, Stout (1992) examines intimate partner homicide in various states in the United States, and notes that intimate femicide tends to decrease under the following conditions: 1) when the economic situation of women is ‘average’ (neither very favourable nor very unfavourable); 2) in states that promote gender equality and social justice for women and; 3) when shelters for abused women exist. Furthermore, she observes that after a period of substantial expansion in services for abused women, men’s risk of being killed by their intimate partners decreased significantly. However, women’s risk of being killed did not. Thus, the expansion of services may have resulted in the protection of abusive men from defensive

---

3 For a South-African approach of these biases, see Mills, 2001, who shows that this influence continues, notwithstanding the improvements introduced by the new constitutional order in South-Africa, with its emphasis on the right to equality, and the formation of a Commission on Gender Equality in 1997.
violence by their female partners, without succeeding in protecting women from the violence of their male partners (Gartner, Dawson & Crawford, 2001).

As noted above, the traditional indicators of homicide generally are better predictors of female, rather than male intimate partner homicide. There is only one exception: population density is negatively related to the rate of female intimate homicide, perhaps because the lack of population density provides a greater barrier to assistance and community support that could help abused women before lethal violence occurs (Jensen, 1996)

Jensen (2001) provides a more definitive definition of gender equality than Stout (1992). According to her, gender equality refers to the situation in which men and women have equal access to valued resources. More specifically, she posits, gender equality can be conceptualised in terms of three categories, namely, economic equality (i.e. equality in terms of wages, economic opportunities, education, etc), political and legal equality (i.e. equality in terms of representation in the political sphere, fair treatment by the legal and justice system, etc), and social equality (i.e. equality in terms of social interaction, expected roles and behaviours, the acceptance of crossover roles and behaviours, etc). She uses existing state-level indices to evaluate economic and political/legal gender equality, and constructs her own indicators to measure social gender equality, including measures of non-traditional living arrangements, such as divorce and men rearing children (The latter does not necessarily follow from the former). The assumption is that such variables reflect the degree to which traditional values are emphasised, and therefore the levels of social freedom women have. On this basis, she shows that the breakdown of traditional conjugal norms and expectations does more to decrease the rates of female intimate partner homicide than economic equalities between men and women as a whole – whether because it provides fewer restrictions for women who need to get out of abusive situations, or because non-traditional views of men’s and women’s partnership roles decrease the likelihood of abusive
situations.

Under societal conditions of increased gender equality, traditional divisions of power in relationships may shift, influencing the levels of violence, including lethal violence, within relationships. For example, greater gender equality could be presumed to: 1) increase intimate partner homicide by males seeking to re-establish control (the ‘backlash’ theory); 2) to decrease intimate partner homicide by males because of the greater resources available to women seeking to escape violent relationships (the ‘resource’ theory); 3) to increase intimate partner homicide by females who can more readily assert their power (the ‘power corrupts’ theory); or 4) to decrease intimate partner homicide by females who can escape relationships without resorting to homicidal self-defence (the ‘resource’ theory) (Dupong, 1999).

**A psychodynamic approach**

To understand the process leading to intimate partner homicide from a psychodynamic angle, one must articulate two broad fields of thinking: the dynamics of violence and the dynamics of object relations. As it is completely impossible to give even a rough overview of this field within the confines of a chapter such as the present, we chose to present some very basic texts which are (with a few exceptions) available in English.

**Freud and love**

In Freud’s basically pessimistic view, the existence of violence is hardly exceptional in any kind of interpersonal relationship: ‘The evidence of psycho-analysis shows that almost every emotional relation between two people which lasts for some time – marriage, friendship, the relations between parents and children – leaves a sediment of feelings of aversion and hostility, which only escapes perception as a result of repression’ (Freud, 1921, p. 101). To explain this
ambivalence Freud, in *Group Psychology and the Psychology of the Ego*, makes reference to the numerous occasions of conflict of interest that arise in intimate relationships. *En passant,* his preoccupation with intimacy is intertwined with thoughts about how small differences lead groups to hostility: One cannot form a group (or a couple) without accepting a limitation of one’s narcissism, and if a group or a couple lasts, a tension will always remain between similarities and differences, narcissism and libidinal bonds.

In the same paper, Freud analyses love as idealisation, meaning that a considerable amount of narcissistic libido overflows onto the object until at last it takes possession of the entire self-love of the ego: The object has been put in the place of the Ego Ideal, as in hypnosis, and unlike in identification (in which the object is put in the place of the Ego). But this idealisation coexists with what he referred to earlier as the universal tendency to debasement in the sphere of love: two currents, affectionate and sensual, have to be united. For instance, some men cannot express sexuality but with a debased object, which means a splitting of the two currents, between mother and whore. Freud however does not provide any examples of women considering men as debased objects. Instead, he argues (somewhat neutrally) that, ‘there are only very few educated people in whom the two currents of affection and sensuality have become properly fused’ (Freud, 1912, 185).

Women’s hostility towards their lovers is mentioned in *The taboo of virginity* (Freud, 1918). Some women show hostility towards the man after intercourse. Defloration is seen as a narcissistic injury, leading to a wish by the woman to castrate the man and keep his penis for herself. It is analysed again, in quite a different way, in his study on femininity (Freud, 1932). A woman’s first experience of love is her very ambivalent pre-Œdipus attachment to the mother. Sometimes,
when she turns to her father, the hostility of this relation remains with the mother, but it also happens that the hostility follows in the footsteps of the positive attachment and spreads to the new object. The woman’s husband can inherit from her father, but also from her mother. And of course, for men and women, love has to do with jealousy, whether normal-competitive, projected (I am not tempted by unfaithfulness, she/he is), or delusional (i.e. homosexual, I do not love him/her, she/he does) (Freud, 1922).

Another trend of thought leads Freud to establish a typology of object relations, whether anaclitic or narcissistic. The anaclitic or attachment object-choice is directly derived from self-preservation: Love of someone who takes care of the subject, the woman who feeds him/her, the man who protects him/her. In the narcissistic object-choice, the subject seeks himself or herself as a love-object, what he himself/ she herself is, was, would like to be, or someone who was once part of himself/herself (Freud, 1914).

Psychoanalytic family and couple therapists later developed and transformed this typology. Eiguer (1984, 1998) identifies different types of couples, namely, narcissistic (or psychotic), perverse, anaclitic, and neurotic (or ‘normal’) couples. Narcissistic couples feel that love is a form of merging and aim at abolishing all the differences that threaten this view. Therefore, the relationship is marked by control, devalorisation, sacrifice, etc. Perverse couples focus on sexual scenarii, supposed to procure exceptional pleasure and value for those who experience this pleasure. The relationship is asymmetrical (sadistic-masochistic, voyeuristic-exhibitionist) and participation in the perverse scenarii is a necessary condition for relationship. Anaclitic couples are confronted with a fear of abandonment, and see their relationship as a way of being stronger. They tend to avoid changes and conflicts. However, after a few years, their basic complaint is

4 If the woman is not seen as a whore, then she reminds them of the mother. Since sex with the mother is forbidden, she has
boredom. In neurotic couples, the other is seen as a whole object and loved because he or she is different. Conflicts arise from sexual jealousy, professional rivalry. In narcissistic and anaclitic couples – albeit in different ways – the object is seen as a potentially good parent for the subject; whereas in neurotic couples, the object is seen as a prospective good parent for the subject’s children.

The Kleinian school and violence

The Kleinian approach to the development of the self and of object relations is especially useful in understanding violence in general and intimate violence in particular. In Klein’s view (1946), the infant evolves from merging with the mother to becoming a separate and integrated self by passing through two positions: firstly, the schizo-paranoïd position, characterised by splitting (i.e. the satisfying part of the mother and the frustrating one are seen as two distinct imagos, the ‘good mother’ or ‘good breast’ versus the ‘bad mother’ or ‘bad breast’); and secondly, the depressive position, which entails an integrative experience of both the mother and the infant himself/herself as a whole person, both good and bad at the same time.

People who cannot bear the idea that good and bad coexist in the same person, subject or object, stay in the schizo-paranoïd position, and fail to reach the depressive position. Many factors may make the integrative evolution impossible or more difficult. Following Klein, Winnicott (1960) shows how deeply the possibility of this integrative process is rooted in the early quality of the mother’s care. A reliable empathic holding provides the child with an unobtrusive but necessary ego-support, and consequently a sense of continuity of being. Failures in maternal care (loss, but also intrusion) interrupt the continuity of going-on-being, which constitutes an experience of

to be debased to become an object of sexuality.
annihilation for the infant (Winnicott, 1960), an unthinkable anxiety, e.g. going to pieces, falling for ever, having no relationship to the body, having no orientation (Winnicott, 1962).

To Bion (1962, 1963), violence has to do with the mother’s function of containment: as container the mother is able to transform the child’s incoherent emotional experiences (undigested sensations, β elements) into meaningful feelings and thoughts. This occurs if the mother can sustain intolerable behaviours long enough to decode and detoxify them (Bion, 1962, 1963). The mother’s inability to contain β elements exposes the infant to extreme experiences of annihilation. This unthinkable anxiety, experienced again every time the subject has to face object loss or the intrusion of the other in his/her psyche, is one of the most common sources of violent acting-out: the subject kills to avoid being annihilated, in other words, the subject acts crazy to avoid going crazy (Balier, 1988).

This tragic dependency of the subject upon external events and object relations is a symptom of his/her poor ego-relatedness. To Winnicott (1958), ego-relatedness depends on the subject’s capacity to be alone in the presence of the mother, even (as is usually the case with adults) if her presence is represented by something else, or an atmosphere (for instance, when you feel so deliciously ‘at home’ in your worn out pyjamas). This capacity to neither withdraw, nor make direct demands for the mother, like for instance enjoying a concert with a friend, depends on the existence of a good object in the psychic reality of the individual. The relationship of the subject to this internal good object provides a sufficiency of living (Winnicott, 1958).

Ego-relatedness is also a condition for the subject to recognise, to feel concerned by, the object’s subjectivity. The immature child has two mothers: the object-mother who satisfies the infant’s
needs (related with id-tension) and the environmental-mother, who wards off the unpredictable, and provides holding, handling, etc. The link between the destructive elements in drive-relationships to objects and the positive aspects of relating can be called concern. The object-mother is ruthlessly used (for instance, eaten), which causes anxiety to the infant (fear of loss). If she survives, and if the environmental-mother continues to be empathic and pleased by her interactions with the infant, then the infant can contribute to and sustain the relationship. This cycle leads to the capacity for concern. Failure in this cycle will lead to crude anxieties and crude defences such as splitting (Winnicott, 1963).

The process can also be stopped by deprivation, as in the case when an experience of loss is so long and intense that the child cannot keep the mother alive inside himself/herself. Deprivation leads to antisocial tendencies and attempts to reach back beyond the experience of deprivation to the lost object. So, individuals who fail to reach the depressive position evacuate unwanted parts of themselves onto the other (projective identification). The other is, up to a certain point, compelled to behave according to the projections he/she has received. This concept is most appropriate in understanding the interactive dynamics in the batterer-battered couple. He absorbs her violence, she absorbs his feeling of inadequacy, helplessness and self-contempt, but all these feelings, although suppressed and enacted in a polarised relationship, are actually shared by both partners. She can represent for him a powerful persecutory maternal figure, constantly reminding him of his own deprivation, and his fear of abandonment. The more she identifies with his deprivation, the more she finds it difficult to leave him. Moreover, she is unconsciously aware of his dependency (on her) (Motz, 2001).

Battered women who kill project their murderous desires onto their partner (and others) and retaliate when it becomes unbearable. That which leads a battered woman to kill is her own perception of her situation, her subjective experience of degradation, isolation and terror. If a
drunken man is threatening her life, and if there is a weapon at hand (for him to kill her or her to kill him with), then there is an important risk. More importantly, psychological abuse – the feeling of humiliation or degradation – increases feelings of self-loathing and worthlessness, and therefore suicidal feelings, which are deeply linked to homicidal acting-out.

Women who have had disturbed early experiences may be more likely to enact their violence than others (Browne, 1987). This is because they have not been able to integrate their murderous feelings: early maternal loss, parental violence, or a mother who cannot provide the containment of the infant’s projection, thus allowing her/him to symbolise her/his feelings. This makes these women more likely to have unplanned pregnancy in adolescence, to develop depression in adulthood, to be victimised in their intimate relationships, and to be disadvantaged in terms of alternative or escape solutions from an abusive relationship: when they engage in an abusive relationship, they develop learned helplessness (Motz, 2001).

**Reconciling psychological research with equalitarian advocacy**

The split between feminist and clinical approaches is an obstacle to a true understanding of the problem. We aim to articulate them instead. We will do so in regard to the following specific questions: Why do so-called passion crimes occur? What kind of pain leads a man or a woman to kill his or her partner (or connected persons)? What underlying models can provide a deeper explanation for these crimes? Finally, we will compare the motives of men and women who resort to the murder of their partners.

The study reported here is based on an analysis of the 558 articles relating to 337 ‘so-called passion crimes’ in two popular regional French newspapers (*Le Progrès* and *Le Dauphiné Libéré*) from 1986 to 1993. As we were interested in what is called a ‘passion crime’, but could not and
refused to accept *a priori* the notion of passion crimes as obvious, our selection criteria when choosing the cases were as follows: Any crime involving people who are married, or live together, or ‘go out together’, or whose relationship is in any way based on love or sex. Most of the situations, therefore, concerned current or former intimate partners, but we have decided that some marginal cases were relevant and had to be included in the corpus: for instance, a man who kills the woman who refuses to have a relationship with him. Our definition is also broader than what many researchers call intimate partner homicide because we have included multiple or different victims (and not only the partner as victim) in the final corpus of texts analysed: for instance, a man whose wife announces that she will leave him, and who kills her, their children, and possibly himself; or a man who kills his wife’s lover or his girlfriend’s family (whom he sees as posing a threat to their relationship); or even a woman who kills her rival’s daughter (because to her, this is the worst form of punishment she can inflict on her rival). We have included homosexual relationships, but as only two situations had to do with homosexuality (a woman prisoner who kills her cell-mate and lover, a man who kills his wife who is leaving him to live with a woman), it is best to admit that our research essentially deals with heterosexual crimes. The notion of crime was not obvious either. Most of the crimes reported were of course homicides or attempted homicides. However, we have included other kinds of crime such as, a man who explains that he has been left by his girlfriend and seeks revenge,kidnaps an unknown woman, threatens to kill her and rapes her.

We have used this corpus in three different ways:

1) We have analysed the 337 crimes from a quantitative and sociological point of view, our primary goal being to compare men’s and women’s crimes: i.e. who they are (e.g. age, socio-professional situation, etc.), what kind of relationships they are involved in (e.g. marriage, engagement, or cohabitation), who they kill (e.g. partner, children, rival, others, etc.), for what reasons they murder (as far as we will ever know!), and when, how, where?
2) As about 50 of these crimes have been judged in Lyon’s court, we have gathered all the documents constituting the inquiry into these specific cases. These include statements, testimonies, and forensic reports. This information provides an in-depth view of the cases, and constitutes the primary basis of our clinical approach. These documents are also interesting insofar as they inform us about the procedure, and the institutional (and therefore social) treatment of such cases: for instance, whose testimony is a priori considered relevant? What do police officers or expert psychiatrists consider normal or abnormal, healthy or pathological, behaviour in a man or a woman?

3) We have focused on the articles relating to a trial in the most popular of the newspapers (176 articles in *Le Progrès*) in order to study the social representations of passion crimes, love, the couple, etc, through a discursive and narrative analysis.

In our corpus, it was reported that men are most frequently the authors of intimate partner homicide. Specifically, 78% (264) of the authors of intimate partner homicides are men, and 22% (73) are women. Historically, this ratio seems fairly stable. For example, a study on intimate homicides in Paris in the nineteenth century reported a comparable figure, with 82% these homicides committed by men (Guillais, 1986). The proportion of male criminals is even greater if we include accomplices: 25% of the women (17) in the present study had male accomplices, usually relatives, such as a brother, a father, a son, or a lover, and occasionally, a hired assassin. In this study it was also found that men also killed more people in crimes of passion cases. For example, 72 of the women murderers whose cases were included in this study had one victim, while one of them killed three people. On the other hand, 60 of the men (23%) whose cases were included in this study killed two to seven persons. In sum, 264 men killed 383 persons, including their partners and/or children, rivals, and their partner or rival’s family.
Obviously, masculine violence must be a primary focus in analysing this phenomenon, but one could also argue that number of women murderers whose cases were examined in this study (22% of the total sample) is a significant proportion; especially when we consider that the ratio of male to female criminals generally is 8:1 (Cario, 1997). Not surprisingly, female criminality takes place in private life spaces more than in public life spaces. It has been shown that proportionally, women kill family members and intimate partners more often than men, although the overall total of victim-offender categories is higher for men than for women (Holmes & Holmes, 1994).

Establishing the motives in these crimes relying on journalistic data alone is, of course, very difficult. We generated our own typology (see Table 1) after reviewing all the available information, and found it impossible to decide in one-fifth of the cases.

---

5 This part of the research will not be presented here. Readers interested in this aspect of the study are however referred to Mercader, Houel and Sobota (2003).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Motives</th>
<th>F Perpetrator</th>
<th>M Perpetrator</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jealousy (whether the infidelity of the partner is actual or imaginary)</td>
<td>10 16%</td>
<td>111 53%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Actual, impending or feared estrangement from a partner</td>
<td>2 3%</td>
<td>115 55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hatred, quarrels, abuse, tyranny of the partner</td>
<td>31 55%</td>
<td>49 23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The author does away with an obstacle to achieving his/her aims</td>
<td>10 16%</td>
<td>8 4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Defending personal interests (financial, custody over children...)</td>
<td>6 10%</td>
<td>18 9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Get rid of an unwanted admirator</td>
<td>6 10%</td>
<td>3 1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feelings of devalorisation</td>
<td>12 6%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The author defends the loved one</td>
<td>4 2%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The author takes revenge on a stranger</td>
<td>11 5%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The percentages were calculated using the number of cases in which at least one motive is known, i.e., 211 cases of male homicide and 62 of female homicide. The same case can include a combination of two different motives.

The remaining cases clearly show that men and women do not kill for the same reasons. More than half of the men killed as a result of jealousy (whether their rival is real or imaginary), and more than a half because their wife or partner was leaving them (three-quarters of the men gave one of these motives or both). Only one-quarter of the men killed because they found the relationship itself unrewarding and characterised by hatred, quarrels, and abuse. Conversely, more than half of the women killed as a result of abuse, and only two of them killed because their partner was leaving them. They were also married in more cases than men, and were more likely than their male counterparts to be living with their partners (70% of the women and only
48% of the men killed in a couple that was cohabiting. In the case of men, the importance of the theme of abandonment suggests that they see the couple as indissoluble, that the woman’s decision to end it does not end the man’s feeling of proprietorship (love as possessing or belonging to the partner) and that men keep trying to control the woman after she has left: 13% killed their former partner.

Conversely, 82% of the women killed their current partner (see Table 2). For example, after twenty-four years of marital life characterised by violence, Liliane L. killed her tormentor as well as her two daughters. Jacqueline S. murdered her husband who had threatened to take her life six months earlier. Battered and kept under tight surveillance for years, she saw no other way out of her marital prison: ‘If I had left, he would have found me’. Myriam F.’s case is similar: She had two children at the time she met her compagnon, and some time later had a third child with him. From this time onwards, he became brutal and violent towards her two eldest children. She killed him to put an end to the situation.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Relation Victim/Perpetrator</th>
<th>F Perpetrator</th>
<th>M Perpetrator</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Current partner</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>180</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>82%</td>
<td>68%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Envisaged partner</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Former partner</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent-child</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rival</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partner’s or rival’s family</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Author’s own family</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Grand Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>75</strong></td>
<td><strong>382</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>103%</strong></td>
<td><strong>144%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Percentages were calculated on the basis of the number of different cases and not the victims.

If men tend to kill more than one person, it is because they often choose different types of victims, a phenomenon which is much less salient among women. Besides their female partners, men’s most likely victims are children. The age range of men’s victims indicates that one out of six is younger than 16 years of age. In other words, and quite paradoxically, in the case of males, passion crimes do not merely concern the partners in the ‘tête-à-tête’ love relationship. They are in fact a family matter. A group of people are implicated in the break-up of a relationship, and can sometimes be held responsible for it in the eyes of the author of such a crime. The case of D, which *Le Monde* referred to as ‘le crime passionnel par excellence’ (the passion crime *par excellence*) provides an interesting example. Rejected by the young woman whom he had been seeing for over a year and had hoped to marry, a young man of twenty-three decided to do away with the former. The young girl lived with her parents and her family intervened. Pascal D. murdered his
ex-girlfriend, her parents, her grandparents, one of her brothers, and injured the other brother who managed to escape.

However, men are often their own victims: 19% committed suicide immediately after committing the murder (and half of the suicides occurred after a collective murder). In the case of women, suicides are much less frequent, and occur a lot later. Only three women committed suicide, two of them in prison.

These figures definitely suggest that, on the whole, men and women kill their partners for very different reasons: women to get rid of their partners, men more often, and paradoxically, to ‘keep’ them. Therefore, they are perfectly consistent with the ‘femicide vs battered woman who kills’ asymmetrical approach.

The underlying models of love

When we approach the cases included in this study from a clinical perspective, we see that the deeper reasons for the crime is the (often unstated) meaning the murderers attribute to love, the underlying models of love, family and the relationships they base their lives upon; and this model is the same for men and women: It is made of merging (love as annihilation of all differences) and proprietorship.

It is interesting to note, in conclusion, that these types of crimes arise in families that show similar characteristics to those of abusive and incestuous families. The drama develops over several generations, from the grandparents to the grand-children, through the repetition of a dysfunctional parenting. The parental identifications appear unclear and lacking (uncertain
filiation, experiences of abandonment or of separation, losses (mourning), lack, etc.) and are constituted on the basis of rigid and violent models (archaic perceptions of the paternal role and of marriage as indissoluble, the playing out of a domestic tyranny). The family’s internal functioning is persecutory, with each family member the object of control and appropriation, which forbids all search for autonomy. An adhesion to the all-powerful internal law of the family prevents a recognition of the social law as one which is applicable to all members of the family. The family unit, constrained within a form of huis clos, tends to organise generations on the basis of the confusion/fusion of the sexes.

Conclusion

The study on which this chapter is based points to the complex interplay of social, intrapsychic and intergenerational factors in the development (on in consequence, the prevention and treatment) of violence in the sphere of gender and family relations. Any attempt to reconcile psychological research with equalitarian advocacy, to create links between feminist and clinical approaches, must understand how society encourages the merging and proprietorship model. For instance, in a story of a man who kills his wife and their children, a French newspaper well known its leftist egalitarian stance publishes the story under the title ‘A family commits suicide’ (Libération, 05/21/1993). This is a fusional representation of the family, one in which the pater familias decision is considered as the decision of all members.

REFERENCES


