

Intimate Partner Violence

New Directions

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ABSTRACT: This review examines multiple forms of intimate partner violence, including women's use of violence, and argues for development of more complex conceptualizations of intimate partner violence. As new victims are identified, partner violence has been reconceptualized. Research findings indicate that women are both victims and perpetrators in intimate partner violence, challenging previous conceptualizations and explanations. The authors argue that how researchers conceptualize intimate partner violence influences how they study and measure it. The authors call for researchers to develop more complex constructions of gender, and to distinguish between distinct forms of intimate partner violence.

KEYWORDS: domestic violence; women; batterer

INTRODUCTION

Overview

Since the 1970s when feminists called attention to the problem of husbands beating their wives, widespread changes have occurred in our consciousness concerning this phenomenon. Over the past 35 years, approaches to domestic violence have evolved from viewing the problem as limited to a very few problematic marriages, and disbelieving and blaming battered women, to recognizing the prevalence of serious levels of physical violence and psychological abuse in many intimate relationships. Within the research on partner violence, some topics like the prevalence of violence against women and the characteristics and reactions of the victim have received extensive attention. Generally, there has been less attention on the batterer and other topics such

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as the degree to which women use violence with their intimate partners has only more recently become the focus of study. The explosion of research on intimate violence makes a review or an overview a difficult job. The following review examines the multiple forms of intimate abuse, including women's use of violence, and argues for viewing intimate violence in a sociocultural context.

Naming the Violence

What we name a phenomenon both reflects and determines how we conceptualize it. Without a name, we have difficulty discussing our experience. As our conception of the problem develops or changes, so does our vocabulary. Early researchers used terms like *wife abuse* and *domestic violence*; this reflected the initial focus on the physical violence experienced by married, heterosexual women. Once the silence about battering was broken, additional victims were identified (including lesbians and gay men, unmarried cohabitating couples, dating couples, and women in the process of separation and divorce). Terms such as *wife abuse* and *wife battering* are not inclusive enough to cover all these experiences. Many women are battered by intimates in nonmarital relationships.

Today researchers do not agree on what to call this phenomena; this reflects differences in their conceptualization of partner violence. Debates about definitions and labels are struggles about conceptualization and ideology (McHugh, Livingston, & Ford, 2005). For example, some researchers continue to use the terms "*domestic violence*," "*family violence*," and "*spouse abuse*." These individuals generally view violence as gender symmetrical that is equally likely to be perpetrated by men and women. Feminist researchers prefer terms such as *women battering* and contend that generic terms such as *domestic violence* and *spouse abuse* do not distinguish between battering and mutually combative relationships, ignore the nature and consequences of violence, and obscure the dimensions of gender and power that are fundamental to understanding the abuse of women (Breines & Gorden, 1983; Schechter, 1982).

The emergence of new terms such as *dating violence* and *lesbian battering* reflects our realization that women other than wives experience violence in their relationships. While it is important to include such relationships in our analysis, giving each form of violence experienced by women in their intimate relationships a different name or term may obscure the persistent and pervasive nature of such violence and may prevent us from examining such violence for underlying causes. Assigning different labels to different women for their experienced violence may divide and isolate them. In our review, we use the term *intimate partner violence* to refer to physical injury to one's partner in the context of intimate (romantic/sexual) relationships; *intimate partner abuse* refers to physical, psychological, and/or sexual coercion perpetrated in the context of an intimate relationship.

Estimated Prevalence

Estimates are that more than one-fourth of intimate relationships involve at least one incident of physical assault. Koss (1990) reports that 25–33% of married individuals engage in some form of domestic violence at some point in their relationship. Straus, Gelles, and Steinmetz (1980) report 28% in their national survey of more than 2,000 homes. Russell (1982) reports 21% for her San Francisco sample of currently or previously married women. Frieze and her colleagues found that 34% of a general community group of ever-married women reported being attacked at least once by a male partner (Frieze, Knoble, Washburn, & Zomnir, 1980). Others indicate lifetime prevalence rates of being a victim of domestic violence at between 18% and 30% of women, with yearly rates of husband-to-wife violence at 10–12% (Hotelling & Sugarman, 1986; Schulman, 1979; Smith, 1987). A Canadian national population survey of 12,300 women conducted in 1993 indicated that 29% of ever-married women have been assaulted by a spouse, and 16% of women had been assaulted by a date or boyfriend (Johnson, 1998).

In the past decade we have come to realize that violence is as prevalent among cohabitating and dating couples as it is among married couples. Prevalence rates for violence among nonmarried heterosexual couples are consistently about 25% (Cate, Henton, Koval, Christopher, & Lloyd, 1982; Makepeace, 1983), but some research suggests an even higher rate. For example, Deal and Wampler (1986) report that 47% of their college sample has some experience with violence in dating relationships.

Rates of intimate abuse have been found to differ among various cultural and ethnic groups. African American women experience intimate violence at a higher rate than European Americans (Cazenave & Straus, 1979) and are more likely to be killed by a partner or former partner (O'Carroll & Mercy, 1986). Latina women also have a greater risk of partner abuse than Anglo women, but less risk than African American women (Neff, Holaman, & Schluter, 1995). Latina women are likely to experience violence for a longer duration and may feel cultural pressure to remain in a violent relationship (Gondolf, Fisher, & McFerron, 1991). Native Americans in urban areas have been found to have histories of family violence as high as 80% (Chester, Robin, Koss, Lopez, & Goldman 1994). While Asian women may have lower rates of intimate abuse than other ethnic groups (Koss, Goodman, Browne Fitzgerald, Keita, & Russo, 1994), some Asian women such as military wives and mail order brides may be particularly vulnerable to abuse (Jang, 1994).

Violence is also prevalent in gay male and lesbian relationships. In a study of 90 lesbian couples, Coleman (1991) found that 46% used repeated acts of physical abuse. Research has indicated that violence occurs in lesbian relationships at the rate of 25% (Brand & Kidd, 1986) to 48% (Gardner, 1989), which are comparable to the rates established for heterosexual relationships. Gardner (1989) explicitly compared the rates of violence reported by individuals in heterosexual (28%), gay male (38%), and lesbian couples (48%). Like

the violence in heterosexual couples, violence in lesbian couples increases in frequency and severity over time (Renzetti, 1988)

A substantial amount of research effort has focused on the prevalence of woman battering, and this question continues to be a central and controversial issue. Early estimates of both incidence and prevalence were based on reports from intact couples, and were applied only to abuse occurring within current marital relationships. Later, community (urban) samples yielded higher estimates when women respondents were asked if they had ever been assaulted. Incidence rates are further increased if we include women who are battered in the context of nonmarital relationships.

By providing statistical evidence of the extent of wife abuse, researchers have played a critical role in making this a social issue. Estimates of intimate abuse are necessary for obtaining resources to address the issue on a local or societal level such as funding for shelters and additional research. Incidence and prevalence rates can be used to document increases and decreases in the phenomena over time. Incidence rates also have important etiological and intervention implications. The perspective that abuse of women by their partners is the result of individual pathology is less convincing as an explanation for a phenomenon that occurs in approximately one-fourth of relationships. High incidence rates are typically interpreted as indicating the existence of structural or societal causes such as societal support of male aggression and relationship scripts that include violence. McHugh and her colleagues (McHugh & Bartoszek, 2000; McHugh *et al.*, 2005) argue that existing theoretical explanations are not adequate to explain the varied and extensive forms of intimate partner violence.

Measuring Intimate Violence

While many validated and standardized scales to measure partner mistreatment have been published (Gondolf, 1998), most of the research has relied on the use of the Conflicts Tactics Scale (CTS) designed by Straus (1979) and used extensively by Straus, Gelles, and their colleagues (e.g., Straus, 1979; Straus & Gelles, 1986; Straus *et al.*, 1980). Continued use of this scale allows for comparability of results, but also perpetuates inadequacies in the literature. The scale asks one of the members of a couple about a list of specific things he or she did during a conflict or disagreement with the other. This person also reports on what the other member of the couple did during their disagreements. There are three categories of behaviors: rational discussion, expressions of anger, and physical violence. The specific behaviors listed range from trying to discuss the issue calmly; to argued heatedly, but short of yelling; to various violent actions such as throwing something at the partner, pushing, grabbing or shoving the partner, or hitting the partner. Violent actions and threats of such actions are included. Individuals are generally given a score depending on how many of the violent actions or threats of violent actions they have done.

In most cases, couples are classified as “violent” if they have *ever done any* of the violent behaviors. Researchers may also count up the number of violent incidents to get an overall measure of the level of violence. This means that slapping or pushing someone once results in the label “violent” being applied to this person and to the relationship.

The use of the CTS has been criticized by many researchers (see Frieze, 2005 or McHugh, 2005 for a fuller discussion of these issues). The scale neither differentiates initiated violence from acts of self-defense nor does the CTS assess the seriousness of the injuries inflicted. The CTS does not allow for consideration of the victims’ ability to repel or restrain offenders, or to retaliate against them.

Furthermore, by endorsing any violence on the CTS, the person is labeled as an “abuser” or as a “batterer” by the researcher, and the targets of the acts are classified as “victims” or as “battered.” Such labels may not reflect how the person sees him or herself. This discrepancy between the labels applied by the researchers and by the individuals involved in the situation can be seen in a study of female employees at a large southeastern university. Women in this study were asked if they had experienced any of a list of violent actions (a procedure similar to the CTS). Then, for each of the events they experienced, they were asked if this was an instance of physical abuse and if they thought of themselves as a “victim of violence.” They were also asked if they thought of themselves as a “battered woman.” More than one-third of the women did not accept any of these three types of labels for the acts they had experienced. Others accepted one or more of the labels, but not all of them (Hamby & Gray-Little, 2000).

Another problem with the CTS measure of couple violence is that the focus of this measure is on violent behaviors, but not necessarily on the meanings of those actions or the effects of these behaviors (Brush, 1990). Thus, a large strong man might slap a woman and injure her severely. A small woman might slap a larger man and he would hardly notice it, with no real injury at all. With the CTS, both actions would be weighted equally. Because of this criticism, Straus has revised his measure, calling it the CTS2 (1996). Both the CTS and the CTS2 assume that couple violence is associated with disagreement and conflict. The CTS2 includes questions about violent actions, like the original CTS. In addition, there are questions about how serious one’s injuries are. Another criticism of the CTS is that it includes only a small number of possible violent behaviors (Marshall, 1994). CTS severe violence items ask about kicking, biting, or hitting with a fist, hitting with an object, beating someone up, and using a knife or gun. Three items assess “minor” violence: throwing something, pushing, grabbing or shoving, and slapping. Because of this limitation, many researchers create new items when they use the CTS or a modified version.

Partly as a result of reliance on the CTS, little research has been conducted on the effects of psychological and sexual abuse within intimate relationships.

Psychological abuse has primarily been studied as an aspect of a physically abusive relationship (e.g., Tolman, 1992; Walker, 1979). There is increasingly an understanding of both the prevalence and the seriousness of psychological abuse (Chang, 1996; Tolman, 1992). More than one-half of women reported emotional abuse as the reason for divorce (Cleck & Pearson, 1985), and 27% of college women characterized at least one of their dating relationships as abusive (Raymond & Brushi, 1989).

Alternative measures have been developed. For example, the Spouse Abuse Index (ISA) developed by Hudson and McIntosh (1981) is recommended by Gondolf (1998). The 30 items of the ISA addresses psychological as well as physical abuse. Instruments like the ISA may be administered as a follow-up to screening questions about violence. However, these scales are less likely to be used. Reliance on a single scale, the CTS, has limited our understanding of intimate partner violence (McHugh *et al.*, 2005).

The self-reports that are relied on in the CTS and in other measures of interpersonal violence are affected by people not wanting to make themselves look bad and perhaps not wanting their partners to look bad (Hui, 2001). They may also be inaccurate because they depend on the person having a good memory of the events being measured. Such limitations are a problem any time we rely on self-reports of behavior to know what people are actually doing. But, the limitations of self-reports are a special problem in studying violence and aggression (see Yllo & Bograd, 1988).

Some forms of violence may not be recognized as something memorable and are simply forgotten. Thus, if a friend pushes us at a party and laughs about it, we may not take this seriously and will forget about it. But, such pushing would be labeled as “violent” by researchers. This type of situation of unrecognized acts of physical aggression probably occurs for much low-level violence among acquaintances and partners—it is not extreme, no one is injured, and everyone laughs when it happens. There is no reason we would tend to remember this happening and we would never consider reporting this on a crime victimization survey or to the police or to researchers asking about “violence” directly.

FOCUS ON THE WOMAN AS VICTIM

Early research focused on the characteristics of women who were battered. Initially battered women were seen as causing their own suffering. Subsequently feminist research challenged misconceptions about the identity of battered women. Research documented that abuse can occur across regional, occupational, ethnic, racial, and class groups. A review of the first 15 years of research indicated that the characteristics of the battered woman did not predict the violence (Hotaling & Sugarman, 1986; Sugarman & Hotaling, 1989).

“*Why does she stay?*” is probably the most often asked question about woman abuse. In class discussions, public forums, and research literature, people

continue to voice this question first and foremost. This question reveals a basic premise about woman battering—if the woman would leave, she would not get beaten. Often the intervention strategy is focused on the victim; the solution is to physically and psychologically relocate the woman. This perspective may be both victim blaming and counterproductive. The batterer may continue to stalk or terrorize her after leaving, or he may go on to batter someone else.

Early research focused on the logistical reasons why some women did not leave an abusive husband. For example, the woman may have stayed due to a lack of money, transportation, or a safe place to go (Bowker, 1983; Browne & Williams, 1989). Others have suggested that social factors such as loss of social status, disapproval of family and friends, and feelings of failure or guilt for abandoning the relationship limit her options for leaving (Dobash & Dobash, 1979; Frieze, 1979; Walker, 1979). Abused women's perceptions of alternatives may be influenced by societal expectations related to gender and role relationships that encourage women to be self-sacrificing and adaptive, and to care for and protect those close to them regardless of the cost (Browne, 1987; Walker & Browne, 1985). Researchers have also emphasized psychological factors underlying women's decisions not to leave. Walker's work suggested that battered women have learned helplessness (Walker, 1979, 1983, 1984). In this model, women have developed motivational, cognitive, and behavioral deficits as a result of the battering. Chandler's (1986) phenomenological analysis of battered women's experiences suggests that overriding fear and a loss of a sense of self characterize the severely battered woman. Other research perspectives emphasize the emotional bonds that battered women form with their abusers (Browne, 1987; Dutton & Painter, 1981; Walker, 1983).

Some researchers have challenged this view of battered women as helpless and resigned to being battered. Some research emphasizes the help seeking, coping mechanisms, and survival skills of battered women. For example, Gondolf and Fisher (1988) critique the learned helplessness model of wife abuse, and examine the ways in which battered women in their Texas sample acted assertively and logically in response to the abuse. The women in their sample, like the women studied by Bowker (1983), persistently sought help from a wide range of sources. The more intensified and prolonged the abuse, the greater the variety and the extent of their help seeking. These studies suggest that individuals and agencies have failed to adequately respond to battered women's requests for help. Many women return to or remain with their abusers because they lack access to community resources (Gondolf, 1988; Sullivan, Basta, Tan, & Davidson, 1992).

The fact that women stay in relationships because they fear retaliation from the violent partners has been obscured by our attention to economic, social, and psychological factors. Some battered women fear that their violent husbands will retaliate against them and their children if they try to leave (Ridington, 1978). Threats of kidnapping and custody battles are common tactics used by abusive partners to keep women in violent relationships (Stahly, 1996). This fear is a realistic one. Women who have left an abusive partner have

been followed and harassed for months or even years, and some have been killed (Browne, 1987; Jones, 1981; Pagelow, 1981). Evidence suggests that in many cases the man's violence escalates in response to a separation (Fields, 1978; Fiora-Gormally, 1978; Pagelow, 1981). Stahly (1996) reports the National Crime Survey of the Department of Justice documenting that 70% of domestic violence crime does not occur until after the relationship has ended. Walker (1995) reports that women are at increased risk for severe violence and homicide after leaving the batterer.

As a result of research documenting the prevalence and seriousness of intimate partner violence against women, a national network of shelters have been established. Over the years these agencies have sheltered millions of women from violence. Yet, the shelters cannot accommodate all battered women and may have inadvertently limited our attempts to intervene in intimate partner violence. Shelters have led researchers to focus on women as victims and at the same time hold women responsible for solving intimate partner violence. Krennek (1998) addresses the inadequacy of shelters as THE solution to partner violence. She points out that now police and prosecutors may expect the battered woman to go to the shelter, and to leave the abuser and the domicile. She suggests that in some localities police punish women who do not leave by arresting them. Krennek (1998) and Stahly (1996) both ask the same question: *Why should a woman and her children have to leave home to feel safe?*

FOCUS ON THE MAN AS BATTERER

Who are these men that batter their intimate female partners? One of the most consistent findings with regard to batterers is that they are more likely to have a history of violence in their family of origin (Hotaling & Sugarman, 1986). Men who have witnessed parental violence and men who have been abused as children or adolescents are more likely to become batterers than those who have not (Caesar, 1988; Coleman, Weinman, & His, 1980; Fitch & Papantonio, 1983; Hastings & Hamberger, 1988; MacEwen & Barling, 1988; Rosenbaum & O'Leary, 1981; Sugarman & Hotaling, 1989; Telch & Lindquist, 1984). Witnessing parental violence has been found to be more predictive than experiencing abuse as a child (Tolman & Bennett, 1990). As many as three-quarters of men seeking counseling for battering witnessed abuse between their parents, whereas half were abused as children (Fitch & Papantonio, 1983).

Drug and alcohol use has been found to be a consistent risk marker for use of violence toward a female partner (Coleman *et al.*, 1980; Hotaling & Sugarman, 1986; Telch & Lindquist, 1984). There is, however, no direct relationship between the amount of alcohol consumed and battering (Leonard, Bromet, Parkinson, Day, & Ryan, 1985; VanHasselt, Morrison, & Bellack, 1985), and the violence/battering occurs independently of alcohol and drug abuse. Chronic alcohol abuse is more predictive of battering than acute intoxication, although

both are predictive (Tolman & Bennett, 1990). Binge drinkers have the highest rates of battering (Gelles, Lackner, & Wolfner, 1994).

While researchers have been unable to identify a unitary batterer personality profile (Hastings & Hamberger, 1988), higher rates of certain psychiatric conditions have been found among batterers (Rosenbaum *et al.* 1997). Personality disorders and characteristics such as antisocial, borderline, and narcissistic occur at higher rates among batterers (Hamberger & Hastings, 1991; Hart *et al.* 1993; Hastings & Hamberger, 1988).

Generally, men who batter are more likely than nonviolent partners to be violent or aggressive in other ways and with other people. They are more likely to have a criminal history (Roberts, 1987; Bland & Orn, 1986; White & Straus, 1981) and to have used violence outside of the home (Graf, 1979; Hotaling & Sugarman, 1986; Rouse, 1984; Shields, McCall, & Hanneke, 1988). White and Straus (1981) report that batterers are twice as likely as nonviolent husbands to have an arrest record for a serious crime, and Gayford (1975) reports that 50% of his sample of male batterers had spent time in prison. Somewhere between one-third (Flynn, 1977) and 46% of batterers (Fagen, Stewart, & Hansen, 1983) have been arrested for other violence. Batterers have consistently higher rates of committing child abuse than men who are not violent with their partners (Hotaling & Sugarman, 1986). Thus, the violence and aggression used by at least some batterers is not confined to their partner.

The clearest conclusion one can draw from the available literature, however, is that batterers are a heterogeneous group, and there is a great deal of inconsistency in the literature. It makes sense that not all batterers are alike. There may be various types of batterers with different etiological and abuse patterns and with implications for diverse interventions (Dutton, 1988; Gondolf, 1988; Saunders, 1992). Furthermore, the results of a particular study may depend on how the sample was recruited. Batterers who have been reprimanded by the courts to batterer groups may differ significantly from men in a community survey who admit to use of violence toward their partner.

PATTERN OF VIOLENCE

Battering has been constructed as a pattern of domination, intimidation and coercive control (Dutton & Goodman, 2005; Pence & Paymar, 1993; Dasgupta, 2002). Research on women who have experienced serious physical violence has resulted in the identification of some patterns of battering within intimate relationships. One pattern is that the physically abusive partner often physically and socially isolates his victim, perhaps even prior to the use of any physical violence. Women are often discouraged from daily calls home or other interactions with immediate family. They report that their partner criticized their friends and limited their social interactions. Sometimes the partner provided transportation to and from classes or work thus limiting socializing afterward.

Browne (1987) and Walker (1984) note that abused women report that their partners were extremely attentive and affectionate early in the relationship. They showed great interest in the women's whereabouts, a desire to be with them all the time, intense expressions of affection and jealousy, and wanted an early commitment to a long-term relationship. Over time these behaviors that were initially seen as evidence of love became intrusive, controlling, and triggers to assault. The women have become emotionally and geographically isolated, making them vulnerable to abuse. The abuser's concern for the wife's whereabouts becomes a form of surveillance, and the batterers are often described as evidencing severe and delusional jealousy (Frieze *et al.*, 1980; Hotelling & Sugarman, 1986).

Similarly, psychological abuse often precedes physical violence. Continuing criticism, correcting, and humiliation undermine the woman's confidence. Increasingly she sees herself as someone who is not competent or capable enough to live independently. She is encouraged to view the world as hostile and to see others as not interested in her.

Partner violence often escalates in severity and frequency over time (Pagelow, 1981, 1997). Intimate violence may end in death. Approximately 4,000 women are killed by their spouses or lovers each year (U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Statistics, 1994, as cited in Stahly, 1996). This is one pattern of intimate violence that is recognized based on extensive interviews with battered women, often in a shelter situation. Some researchers have begun to identify this as the pattern of violence, suggesting that a single episode of violence is an indication that the violence will escalate and is likely to be accompanied by psychological abuse. Recent research suggests that this may not be the only or the most likely pattern of violence in intimate relationships.

WOMEN'S USE OF VIOLENCE

Recent evidence suggests that women's participation in and even initiation of violence is higher than we originally thought. When we review the empirical data, using the CTS or other similar methods, a large number of studies have reported that both sexes admit to using violence against their intimate partners (Frieze, 2005; McHugh, 2005). Straus and his colleagues (e.g., Straus *et al.*, 1980) presented some of the first indications that not all relationship violence was perpetrated by men to women, and that some women were violent toward their husbands. Using the CTS in a nationally representative sample, Straus and his colleagues (Straus & Gelles, 1986; Straus *et al.*, 1980) report that women initiate both minor and severe forms of physical violence with the same frequency as men. Saunders (1986) indicates that as many as 75% of battered women report using minor forms of violence as measured by the CTS.

Partly as a result of measurement inadequacies, use of the CTS has led to confusion over the mutuality of domestic violence. Strauss (1979) and Steinmetz

(1978) have interpreted symmetry in incidences reported by males and females as indicative of mutual violence. Others (Browne, 1989; Browne & Dutton, 1990; Dobash, Dobash, Cavanagh, & Lewis, 1998) have challenged this conclusion. The interpretation that men and women are equally combative ignores the physical and economic power disparities between men and women, and fails to consider the motive for or consequences of aggressive acts (Johnson, 1998). The CTS does not distinguish between use of violence and initiation of violence. Women defending themselves against hostile or even deadly attacks would be classified as engaging in mutual domestic violence in this research. Furthermore, for example, a woman pushing or slapping her partner may be viewed as the primary aggressor. However, our label and interpretation may be different when we know that she has been battered on a regular basis for 16 years and has just recently begun to retaliate or to defend herself.

In a study of women arrested for domestic violence, Hamberger (1997) found that about two-thirds of the women were battered and used violence to protect themselves or to retaliate. Although many of the women acknowledged initiating violence, they generally did so in the context of a relationship in which the male partner initiated violence more often and was likely to have initiated the overall pattern of violence. Studies have found that women are more likely to use violence in self-defense or retaliation and are significantly more likely to sustain injuries (Makepeace, 1986). Men, however, are more likely to use violence for intimidation and forced sex and use more severe forms of violence (Bookwala *et al.*, 1992; Makepeace, 1986). Frieze and McHugh (1992) document the impact that male violence has on the power dynamics within marriage. Abusive husbands, by their own admission, use force to get what they want (Bograd, 1998), whereas women report using violence in self-defense (Saunders, 1986). Hamberger (1997) argues that asking who initiated the violence is too simplistic. He argues that it is necessary to understand partner violence as having occurred in a context. The history of the violence, the development and patterns of the violence, and the personal definitions of the individuals involved are part of this context (Hamberger, 1997).

Given these perspectives, we must still acknowledge the existence of female-initiated violence. In his study of women arrested for domestic violence, Hamberger (1997) found that 25% of the women reported starting the violence 100% of the time and that one-third of the sample could not be classified as battered women. Similarly, Pagelow (1985) acknowledges the existence of violent women who "create an atmosphere of fear for their husbands" (p. 274).

Over time there has been more and more research and clinical evidence that women are sometimes violent toward their intimate partners. Some of this evidence came from continuing studies of married couples. For example, in a recent analysis of a national representative sample, Anderson (2002) found that 10% of all couples reported some type of violence to each other in the last year. Looking at the patterns of violence in more detail, it was noted that in 7% of the couples both were violent. For 2% of the couples, only the woman was violent, and for 1%, only the man was violent. This study shows the same general

pattern of more women reporting engaging in violent acts toward their partner than men seen in results reported by Straus and his colleagues (1980). Other studies of couples living together show similar patterns (see a meta-analysis by Archer, 2000).

Williams and Frieze (2005) found similar data, again using a nationally representative sample of 3,505 men and women in stable couple relationships. Overall, 18% of the sample reported some violence in their relationship. To address questions raised about whether the violence was mutual and who was the more violent, the man or the women, the violence group was divided into mutual and one-sided violence relationships. About 4% of the sample reported that both they and their partners used severe violence and 5% reported mutual low-level violence. More men than women reported being the targets of one-sided violence, and more women than men reported being the violent one in the couple. Recently, other researchers have similarly documented multiple patterns of mutual violence in heterosexual couples (Milan, Lewis, Ethier, Kershaw, & Ickovics, 2005; Weston, Temple, & Marshall, 2005).

These data indicating female "violence" toward intimate partners cannot and should not be ignored (McHugh, 2005). The question is how these data should be interpreted. Feminists contend that gender and unequal distribution of power between men and women are important explanatory factors in intimate violence (e.g., Dobash & Dobash, 1979). Others have consistently argued that intimate violence is a human issue, and that women are as likely as men, or even more prone than men, to use physical violence in intimate relations (McNeely & Mann, 1990). Bograd (1990) argues that the importance of gender in understanding violence is not contingent on data establishing men as the (only) batterers. Acknowledging that women are (increasingly) violent has profound implications for both individuals and social movements (Hamberger, 1997). Even while rejecting the conclusion that women's violence is equivalent to men's, we may need to rethink our conceptions of gender issues in partner violence. Three recent special issues of professional psychological journals have focused on the questions raised by research documenting women's use of violence in intimate relations and the gender issues raised by this research (Frieze & McHugh, 2005; McHugh & Frieze, 2005).

TOWARD NEW CONCEPTUALIZATIONS AND EXPLANATIONS

Recent research that challenges our conceptions of who is a victim and who is a perpetrator also argues for new conceptualizations of intimate violence. As Richardson (2005) points out, we have been slow to recognize or acknowledge that some women use physical aggression against others. The idea that women use violence is resisted in part because women violence disputes our representation of interpersonal violence; demonstrates methodological and measurement shortcomings in our research; questions the adequacy of our

explanatory theories of violence; challenges our notions about men and women; and contests our conceptions of gender (McHugh, 2005). McHugh and her colleagues (McHugh *et al.*, 2005) argue against the conceptualization of intimate violence as a single truth or as a debate between polarized positions, and reject either/or dichotomies as simplistic and not helpful, and have encouraged researchers to recognize how research methods, questions, and measures may impact our conclusions about the mutuality of violence versus battering (McHugh & Bartoszek, 2000; McHugh *et al.*, 2005; McHugh, 1993, 2005). In samples drawn from samples of women in battered women's shelters, we are most likely to find a high percentage of severely abused women. Probably very few of these women, if any, are intimate abusers or mutual combatants. However, in samples of women from the community or in samples drawn from college populations, we may be more likely to see a range of intimate abuse situations that include women who abuse their partners and mutually violent couples. Even within a small clinic sample, Vivian and Langhinrichsen-Rohling (1994) identified three subgroups of spouses: a large number of couples who reported mutual but low-level violence; a small subgroup of battered men (by female partners); and a substantial number of couples identified as battered wives and male batterers. Furthermore, age or cohort effects might account for some of the differences in findings. Female initiated and mutual violence may be more common among younger women. One interpretation is that postfeminist young women see violence as a gender-neutral behavior.

One of the difficulties in understanding inconsistencies in data relates to the ways in which "intimate partner violence" is measured. As mentioned earlier, any acts of physical aggression, no matter how minor, are labeled by researchers as "violence." Much of this "violence" is not severe and does not lead to injury. The label of "violence" for such situations is misleading and has led to the mistaken idea that the findings of empirical research identifying female violence indicate that women, more than men, are severely injuring their partners. This is not the case. Most of the female aggression is low level as is the case for men. There are a few very violent women and probably a larger number of very violent men, but the large majority of couple "violence" is not what one would generally associate with the label of "violent." For example, research indicates that women who report having hit their partners do not necessarily see themselves as using violence and men having been hit or pushed by their women partners may not view themselves as victims of violence. Is hitting violence regardless of the experience and meaning it has for the participants? Alternatively, women, whose clothes have been trashed, may see this as more violent than a slap; yet this act is not counted as violence in research because it is not recorded by the scales used to measure partner violence. How many times did he slap you? may not be the most important question we need to ask about intimate conflict. McHugh and her colleagues (McHugh *et al.*, 2005) argue that different conceptualizations of violence and

abuse can contribute to a pluralistic, complex, and multilayered conception of intimate partner abuse. Reliance on a single measure that oversimplifies, reduces, or reifies our construction of violence would be viewed as problematic.

Who we study as victims or perpetrators turns out to be critical to our construction of interpersonal violence. Studying wives as victims leads to the construction of wife abuse, the idea that helpless women are victimized by abusive male partners, whereas studying lesbian partners engaged in mutual violence leads to alternative conceptualizations. Others (Hamby, 2005; Johnson, 1995; Saunders, 2000) have argued that sample differences between family conflict and violent crime studies, and between shelter and clinical samples and community samples can at least partly explain finding unilateral "battering" versus retaliatory or mutual abuse (e.g., Johnson & Ferraro, 2000; Swan & Snow, 2003). The identification and documentation of varied types and patterns of intimate partner violence (e.g., Johnson & Leone, 2005; Weston, Temple, & Marshall, 2005; Williams & Frieze, 2005) has been suggested as a way to reconcile inconsistencies in the findings. Who we study turns out to determine our conceptualization of intimate violence. Thus, we need to carefully consider which populations of people are neglected by our research and why. One sample characteristic we have not attended to carefully in this issue is age. Much of the existing research on relationship violence over-represents young adults. There are reasons to believe that interpersonal violence is influenced by age and life span development (Frieze, 2005). Seniors are one example of a neglected population. Senior couples were found to be less violent (Bookwala *et al.*, 2005). There is also evidence for cultural and ethnic variations in patterns of intimate violence, too complex to be reviewed here (McHugh & Frieze, 2005).

The patterns of violence may be affected not only by the composition of the research sample, but also by the larger sociohistorical context of the research. The respondents live in a particular time and place. Young people differ from older individuals, not only by age, but also in the sociohistorical context in which they were socialized. For example, young men and women in the United States today were raised in an era of television viewing and video games that were not a part of the childhoods of people over 50 years of age. Research has documented that exposure to media violence impacts the acceptability and use of violence, and yet this understanding is rarely raised as a factor in the literature on relationship violence. We often fail to connect intimate violence with other forms of violence, even though the studies reported here indicate that as our experience of violence increases, so does the likelihood of our using violence (Fagan & Wexler, 1987; Sullivan, Meese, Swan, Mazure, & Snow, 2005; Tiftt, 1993). Social norms about violence and particularly about gender and violence change over time, and may differ by region and culture.

One approach to IPV is the construction of theoretically or empirically based patterns to classify violent couple relationships (e.g., Frieze, 2005; Johnson, 1995; Johnson & Leone, 2005; Williams & Frieze, 2005; Weston *et al.*, in press). Men and women may perform different patterns of violence,

or they may experience violence victimization differently even when the violent actions are the same. For example, Johnson (1995) posits a typology of common couple violence and patriarchal terrorism to explain conflicting data on intimate abuse. The more gender-balanced violence found in community samples may fit into the pattern of common-couple violence which is typically mild in nature. The more severe and commonly male-perpetrated violence epitomized by the "battered woman" and evidenced in clinical samples may fit the patriarchal terrorism pattern. Johnson's patterns emphasize the importance of distinguishing between overlapping, but divergent phenomena. Similarly, using community samples, Williams and Frieze (2005) and Weston and her colleagues (2005) have identified several patterns or types of couple violence based on frequency and severity of the violence. Weston and her colleagues (Weston *et al.*, 2005) demonstrate that among women who were involved in mutual violence, the most commonly reported pattern was for their male partners to be the primary perpetrator based on frequency and severity descriptions.

CONCLUSIONS

Implicitly or explicitly the research we conduct on intimate violence and our intervention efforts reflect underlying ideological perspectives. The focus of our research, the terms and measures we use, and the intervention strategies we employ both inform and are directed by our theories of intimate violence. An initial focus on wife beating led to theories of marital dynamics and deficiencies in the wives who were beaten, and intervention efforts entailed sheltering and counseling the abused wife. Research that employs the terms and measures of the domestic violence perspective emphasizes the mutuality and interactive aspects of intimate violence and supports interventions directed toward dyadic or family conflict resolution. Feminist research has directed our attention toward the (male) batterer and has coined terms that embody the gendered aspects of intimate violence. Heterosexist biases rendered violence in gay and lesbian relationships invisible.

The research documenting the prevalence of violence across all forms of intimate relationships and research increasingly indicating that women can be perpetrators calls for new theoretical perspectives. Research demonstrating gender similarities in use of violence in intimate relationships (as reviewed by Archer, 2000 and Frieze, 2005) challenges our stereotypic understanding of relationship violence as unilateral and requires us to explore the complexities of interpersonal violence. Along with Anderson (2005), we call for researchers and theorists to develop more complex constructions of gender as one path to understanding violence in interpersonal relationships. Both Anderson (2005) and Brush (2005) point out that feminist and sociological conceptions of gender have progressed to become more complex and interaction oriented, but on the research on intimate violence, gender continues to be treated as a dichotomous categorization equivalent to sex and to be seen as an inherent characteristic of individuals.

The incidence of intimate violence indicates the futility of intervening at the individual level. Intimate partner violence neither exists in a vacuum nor limits itself to easy definitions and simplistic categories. Current research attests to the importance of considering the context of intimate violence, including the type of relationship in which violence occurs, the relevant gender roles and norms, and other aspects of the sociohistorical context. To find ways to reduce the levels of violence experienced in our lives and in our intimate relationships, we must adopt complex models of intimate partner violence and use multiple methods, measures, and perspectives in our research.

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