

## 12 Relationship Violence and Abuse

The World Conference on Human Rights, held in Vienna, Austria, in 1993, and the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women in the same year, concluded that civil society and governments have acknowledged that domestic violence is a public health policy and human rights concern. In the United States, according to the National Intimate Partner Sexual Violence Survey of 2010, 1 in 6 women suffered some kind of sexual violence induced by their intimate partner during the course of their lives.

—[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Violence\\_Against\\_Women\\_Act](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Violence_Against_Women_Act)

When we think of violence and victimization, many of us believe it is something that happens among strangers or acquaintances in faraway places. In fact, The mugging in a dark alley, the high school massacre, terrorist attacks, and the gang-related drive-by shooting have become the prototypes of violence in our culture. However, there is mounting evidence that, for women at least, the most dangerous place is the home, and her most likely assailant is her domestic partner. In 2005, the World Health Organization (WHO) released a summary of a 10-country study of domestic violence. Interviews with over 24,000 women revealed that between 15 to 71 percent of the respondents had experienced either sexual or physical abuse by their intimate partners. Moreover, 24 percent of the women surveyed in rural Peru, 30 percent of women in Bangladesh, and 40 percent of women in South Africa said their first sexual experience was nonconsensual. Annually, about 5,000 women in Bangladesh, Brazil, Ethiopia, Japan, Namibia, Peru, Samoa, Serbia and Montenegro, Thailand, and Tanzania are murdered by their families in the name of honor. Closer to home, a National Violence Against Women Survey (2000) conducted by the U.S. Department of Justice found that 17.6 percent of the women reported they had been sexually assaulted. In addition, 22.1 percent of women (compared to 7.4 percent of men) reported that they had been abused or assaulted by an intimate partner. Estimates put the number of women assaulted by an intimate partner annually in the U.S. at 1.3 million as compared to 835,000 men. Sexual violence has been an especially vexing problem on college campuses where, by some estimates, 1 in 5 women are the victims of sexual assault. College presidents and politicians alike are grappling with how to solve this problem.

These prevalence numbers are startling, and, if anything, they may underestimate the scope of the problem. Although many studies conducted in the United States derive their estimates from probability samples, others rely on convenience samples in which women of color, the very poor, the homeless, and those who do not speak English are under-represented. But even true probability samples ultimately gather their data from those who are home when the interviewers call, who are willing to talk to them, and, perhaps

most importantly, who are willing to report having been assaulted. Regardless of what the actual numbers may be, physical assault against women perpetrated by their partners represents the most dramatic and perhaps most dangerous form of relationship violence. It is one type of abuse that also includes neglect, verbal put-downs, intense criticism, intimidation, restraint of normal activities and freedoms, and denial of access to resources (e.g., Pagelow, 1984; Walker, 1979). And although it can be directed at anyone in the relationship, including children and the elderly, domestic partners are its most common victims. Of course, any discussion of domestic violence should necessarily include sexual aggression, as well, including sexual harassment, along with date rape and marital rape.

## Relationship Violence: Its Definition and Measurement

At first glance, to define relationship violence seems like a silly endeavor. After all, physical acts like punching, shoving, kicking, and so on seem like obvious signs of violence and abuse. However, if we chose a number of women or children at random and asked them if they had been subjected to violent behavior from their partners or parents, few would probably say yes, even though several of them may have been subjected to some form of physical abuse.

The problem is that violent behavior can be interpreted in many ways. Those on the giving end may believe that a slap in the face is a form of disciplining, and those on the receiving end may interpret a shove as an expression of nothing more than temporary frustration. The presence or absence of physical injury is fraught with a set of different problems. Some victims may be subjected to consistent and prolonged violence at levels that never result in bruises or visits to emergency rooms. Others may be subjected to occasional yet extremely violent behavior resulting in severe physical injury. The bottom line is that we cannot define domestic violence through intent to harm, frequency, or severity of injury. Instead, whether or not it occurs in a relationship is a matter of what actual physical acts are or have been committed.

Regardless of the specific physical acts that are committed, it is possible to distinguish relationship violence by looking at how both partners use it as a means of control over the other (Johnson, 2006). In **intimate terrorism**, the individual is violent and controlling while the partner is neither. In **violent resistance**, the individual is violent but not controlling while the partner is both violent and controlling. In **situational couple violence**, the individual is violent, but neither the individual nor the partner are controlling. Finally, in **mutual violent control** both partners are violent and controlling.

Analyzing data from a survey of 330 married couples in which wives had reported violence, Johnson (2006) found that situational couple violence was the most common form of violence while mutual violent control was the least. Moreover, while both husbands and wives were equally guilty of committing situational couple violence and mutual violent control, a very different picture emerged for intimate terrorism and violent resistance.

As one might expect, men overwhelmingly commit acts of intimate terrorism in the service of controlling their wives. As one might also expect, violent resistance is almost entirely a woman's type of violence. This is not surprising because in these kinds of relationships almost all the intimate terrorism is perpetrated by men. Violent resistance represents cases in which women do respond with violence in order to defend themselves rather than gaining control.

The most frequently used measures to assess relationship violence are primarily designed to tap into situational couple violence. The Revised Conflict Tactics Scale (CTS2) (Straus,

Hamby, McCoy, & Sugarman, 1996) includes a subscale for physical violence. Several items (throwing something, pushing or shoving, grabbing, slapping, and twisting a partner's arm) are considered indications of *minor* violence. Other items (kicking, biting or hitting with a fist, hitting with an object, beating up, threatening with a weapon, using a weapon, choking, slamming a partner against the wall, and burning or scalding) figure prominently in the *severe* violence subscale.

In general, the CTS2 does a good job of determining whether violence has occurred in a relationship; however, it also has a number of shortcomings. Because it was initially designed to be a measure of how people respond to conflict, it asks respondents to indicate the extent to which the behaviors occurred as a result of a conflictual situation. Consequently, it may do a less-than-adequate job measuring violence that is not a result of conflict, such as patriarchal terrorism. Conflict is a sufficient cause for violence, but it is by no means a necessary one. In other words, violence can come about for many reasons. Thus, by tying the measure to conflict, instances of violence caused by something other than conflict may go unreported. Furthermore, the CTS2 gives little consideration to the seemingly obvious fact that violent acts committed by men against women often have different implications than acts of violence committed by women against men. On average, men tend to be larger and stronger than women, and consequently the same violent act may be more or less severe. In other words, a man's shove may be just as severe as a woman's kick.

Regardless of how one measures relationship violence and abuse, their prevalence gives rise to at least three important questions: What are the consequences of relationship violence on its victims, perpetrators, and the relationship itself? What causes violence in relationships? What, if anything, can be done to reduce the level of relationship violence?

## Consequences of Relationship Violence

Violent victimization has numerous and often grave physical and psychological consequences. Obviously, being subjected to even mild forms of violence can result in *direct* physical injury. Typical injuries range from bruises, cuts, black eyes, concussions, and broken bones, to permanent injuries such as damage to joints, scars, and loss of hearing or vision. In some cases, the injuries sustained may not be limited to the victimized woman. The 1985 National Family Violence Survey revealed that one-third of victimized women had been physically assaulted while they were pregnant (Gelles, 1988). In addition, there are indications that violent victimization may also have *indirect* physical consequences. Extrapolating from rape victims, those subjected to violence report more symptoms of illness and visit their physicians twice as often as women who were not victimized (Browne & Williams, 1989). Furthermore, victims of relationship violence are likely to engage in a number of negative health behaviors, such as smoking, alcohol use, and failure to use seat belts (Koss, 1993).

Not surprisingly, physical violence causes a great deal of psychological harm to its victims. Growing evidence shows that victims of violence suffer from posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), a clinical diagnosis initially reserved for survivors of military combat and natural disasters (Browne, 1993; Koss, 1993). Like combat veterans, survivors of relationship violence often suffer from any or all of the following: fear and terror, flashbacks of the traumatic event, denial and avoidance, loss of memory for the traumatic episode, constricted affect, chronic anxiety and hypervigilance, insomnia, and nightmares (Browne, 1993; Dutton, 1992). Despite these similarities, there is one important difference between combat veterans and battered women. In the case of combat veterans, the

traumatic event leading up to PTSD is generally known, thus facilitating the appropriate diagnosis. However, battered women do not receive a Purple Heart, and mental health professionals rarely screen for relationship violence. As a result, symptoms are often treated without considering the underlying cause. And although prescribing tranquilizers for a woman who complains about sleeplessness may take care of the immediate symptoms of insomnia, tranquilizers do little in terms of alleviating the conditions that brought on the sleeplessness in the first place (Browne, 1993; Herman, 1992).

## Causes of Relationship Violence

The extraordinarily high prevalence of relationship violence and the realization of the grave consequences for its victims have resulted in several important initiatives. In the early 1990s, the American Psychological Association established a task force to conduct research on possible intervention strategies aimed at decreasing relationship violence of any kind. In 1993, the U.S. Senate passed legislation that treats violence against women as civil rights violations, thus rendering it equivalent to a hate crime based on gender. Of course, any attempts to resolve the problem of relationship violence ultimately hinge on finding its underlying cause. In other words, if we are to find ways to get men to abstain from subjecting women to violence, we have to understand what compels them to do this in the first place.

### *Common Beliefs and Realities*

Speculations about the underlying causes of violence against women have been around for some time. They can be found in the psychological literature as well as in advice columns, daytime talk shows, and made-for-TV movies. Depictions of relationship violence in these media revolve around a number of more or less interrelated themes. Many people believe that violence is something that happens to other people, mostly those with a lower socioeconomic standing. Very little evidence supports such a claim, however. In fact, one study that looked at relationship violence in families of varying incomes (Makepeace, 1987) found that violence occurred just as frequently in high-income families as it did in low-income families. According to Marshall and Vitanza (1994), one reason for our perception that relationship violence is more likely to occur in low-income families has to do with differences in the living conditions between those with and without wealth. A neighbor is more likely to respond to violence when it occurs on the other side of an apartment wall than when it occurs in a home that is several hundred feet away. Thus, rather than reflecting true population differences, any variations in relationship violence among families of diverse income levels is likely the result of a reporting bias.

A related belief about relationship violence holds that its victims enable their abusers by not telling anyone about the violence. However, several studies of dating relationships among undergraduate students (e.g., Olday & Wesley, 1988; Pirog-Good & Stets, 1989) indicate that they tell others about dating violence quite openly. Nationally, the picture looks a little bleaker. One study indicates that women, not surprisingly, tell others (friend, family member, police) about being victimized at a higher rate than men, but the percentages were only 13.4 and 9.4, respectively.

Conventional wisdom holds that relationship violence is something committed primarily by men. But the results of several studies corroborate the suspicion that both men and

women inflict and sustain violence (e.g., Johnson, 2006; Kimmel, 2002; Stuart, Meehan, Moore, Morean, Hellmuth, & Follansbee, 2005). In a national sample of married couples (Straus and Gelles, 1986), 11 percent of respondents reported at least one act of husband-to-wife violence, whereas 12 percent reported at least one act of wife-to-husband violence. Similar results were obtained in studies looking at violence in dating relationships (Marshall & Rose, 1987; Pipes & LeBov-Keeler, 1997). Even though the frequency estimates vary widely depending on the question that is asked (e.g., threatened violence versus actual violence), men and women generally inflict violence at a similar rate. Of course, in light of such data, one might ask why there are few, if any, shelters for battered men. One of the reasons has to do with the different ways in which men and women express violence. With the exception of lethal violence, men generally cause more harm to their victims than women. As a result, female victims of relationship violence are generally in more need for places that allow them to avoid violence from their partner.

Much has been made of the role of violence in the family of origin to account for why people would become both physically abusive and endure abuse. Social learning theory (e.g., Bandura, 1965) teaches us that we learn our own behavior from observing relevant models. When it comes to modeling close relationship behavior, our own parents can play an important role. Assuming they stay together, they are the most prevalent and enduring relationship models available to us. Accordingly, watching Dad physically abusing Mom might give little boys the idea that the infliction of violence is part of the male relationship role. By the same token, little girls might come to believe that enduring violence from one's partner is part of their role.

There is some evidence for the intergenerational transmission of violence. Children with violent parents have difficulty relating to peers. They struggle with cooperative play and with managing their emotions (Katz & Low, 2004). They are also more blaming and have more pessimistic expectations for conflict resolution. As such, they are prone to perpetuate the conflict escalation patterns modeled by their parents and are more likely to commit partner violence in adulthood (Duggan, O'Brien, & Kennedy, 2001; O'Hearn & Margolin, 2000). Sadly, these effects are not limited to watching Dad hit Mom and getting away with it. Instead, being subjected to corporal punishment similarly models violence and results in adult domestic violence (Smith & Mosby, 2003).

Another popular conception related to violence in relationships is that the occurrence of violence is somewhat cyclical. Walker (1984) described this cycle as consisting of several components. During a period of rising tension, the woman withdraws to avoid any behavior that could anger her partner. This generally does not lead to the desired outcome, but instead to an acute incident of battery in which the batterer unleashes a barrage of physical and verbal violence. Then, after the dust settles, the batterer engages in loving contrition, complete with profuse apologies, affirmations of remorse, acts of kindness, and gifts and compliments. Even though the idea of a cycle of violence seems to have some face validity, it may not be a good description of what actually happens. One problem is that Walker's (1984) hypothesis is based on a small sample of women in therapy. Another problem has to do with the interpretation of the seeming cyclical events. Even in the most abusive relationship, violence does not occur on a constant basis. Instead, abusive episodes may be interspersed with periods marked by relative normalcy and even signs of kindness and affection. Consequently, the perceived cycle of violence may simply be a result of such fluctuations in the interactions between the abuser and the abused. See Table 12.1 for a summary about the myths and facts of violence in relationships.

Table 12.1 Myths and Facts about Intimate Partner Violence

Myth or Fact?	Research Shows . . .
<i>Violence is tied to poverty.</i>	Violence occurs across income levels.
<i>Victims enable abusers through silence.</i>	Not all are silent: 13.4% of women tell others about the abuse.
<i>Men are the primary abusers.</i>	Surveys reveal a comparable rate of wife-to-husband violence, but men are more likely to use lethal violence.
<i>Children learn by observing parental abuse.</i>	Some evidence supports the intergenerational transmission of violence.
<i>Violence is cyclical: Tension leads to violence, which yields to apologies and reaffirmations, which lead to tension . . .</i>	Perceived circular nature of violence might be due to the misinterpretation of the fact that violence cannot occur constantly.

### Alcohol and Relationship Violence

The use of alcohol is often implicated as a contributor to relationship violence, partly because there is overwhelming evidence that alcohol can increase all forms of human aggression (Bushman & Cooper, 1990; Ito, Miller, & Pollock, 1996). Alcohol has disinhibiting effects, and thus its consumption by an already hostile partner may loosen any existing constraints on exerting violence. Additionally, alcohol has been shown to lead to **myopia** (Critchlow, 1983; 1985), a condition in which the range of behaviors deemed appropriate in a given situation is narrowed. During periods marked by tension, resentment, and anger, alcohol myopia may restrict the perception of means of resolution other than inflicting violence. Interestingly, little evidence exists for such a straightforward link between alcohol use and relationship violence. Several studies of batterers (Eberle, 1982; Fagan, Barnett, & Patton, 1988) report that alcohol is involved in only about one-third of battering incidents. Although alcohol does not account for all instances of battering, its impact on relationships occurs on many levels. See Table 12.2 for a list of alcohol's physical and cognitive effects.

Just how is alcohol related to relationship violence? There is growing empirical evidence that *high* levels of alcohol often precede intimate partner violence (Murphy, Winters, O'Farrell, Fals-Stewart, & Murphy, 2005). Relative to men who don't drink, partner assault is three times higher in those who are frequent binge drinkers (Kantor & Straus, 1987). Looking at chronic alcohol use contributes an added layer of complexity to the relationship between alcohol and violence. Specifically, it appears that alcoholics prone to relationship violence differ from their nonviolent counterparts in several important respects.

First, violent alcoholics tend to become alcoholics at an earlier age than nonviolent alcoholics. They also tend to have a history of antisocial behavior, are more likely to have been arrested, and generally experience a variety of problems associated with drinking. Second, it appears that this type of alcoholism, known as *Type II Alcoholism Syndrome*, is inherited primarily by males (Gondolf & Foster, 1991). Thus, relationship violence is most common among male alcoholics who fit this particular profile (Murphy & O'Farrell, 1994, 1996). Furthermore, unstable drinking *patterns* rather than drinking per se are causally related to relationship violence. Specifically, binge-drinking alcoholics have higher rates of relationship violence than steady-drinking alcoholics, even though steady drinkers may consume more alcohol in the long run (Murphy & O'Farrell, 1994).



Table 12.2 The Problem With Alcohol

Problem	Problem for Men	Problem for Women
<i>Alcohol reduces inhibitions, but it also reduces physiological performance.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Decreased penile engorgement.</li> <li>• Higher incidence of erectile dysfunction.</li> <li>• Lack of sexual desire.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reduced vaginal blood flow.</li> <li>• Decreased intensity of orgasm.</li> </ul>
<i>Alcohol damages liver and heart tissue, leads to weight gain around midsection, and hurts sexual performance.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Chronic heavy drinking causes imbalances in hormone levels.</li> <li>• Leads to feminization: breasts enlarge, testicles shrink, body hair thins.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can result in <i>fetal alcohol syndrome</i> for a woman's developing fetus if she is pregnant.</li> <li>• Toxic effects on the ovaries and pituitary.</li> </ul>
<i>Alcohol impairs judgment.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increases likelihood to assault by reducing sexual inhibitions, social concerns, and responsibility.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increases the risk for sexual assault by reducing alertness, judgment about high-risk partners, and ability to resist attack.</li> </ul>
<i>Alcohol is a psychoactive depressant and can alter mood and perceptions. It can make a person feel more relaxed and also lead to impaired judgment.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Both men and women who drink have heightened beliefs that sex will occur.</li> <li>• Less likely to engage in safe-sex practices such as having protected sex.</li> <li>• More likely to engage in risky behaviors such as sex with multiple partners.</li> <li>• Makes it difficult to achieve truly satisfying relationships by clouding true feelings.</li> <li>• Binge drinking is associated with high mortality rates and poor performance at school and work.</li> </ul>	

Source: *The Effects of Alcohol* (2009). Retrieved October 20, 2009, from: [www.soc.ucsb.edu/sexinfo/category/the-effects-of-alcohol](http://www.soc.ucsb.edu/sexinfo/category/the-effects-of-alcohol).

In addition to differences in the nature of the alcohol problem and the pattern of alcohol consumption, violent and nonviolent alcoholics also differ in their beliefs about the effects of alcohol. Violent alcoholics and their partners tend to believe that alcohol causes marital problems. At the same time, violent alcoholics believe they cannot weather interpersonal conflict without drinking (Murphy & O'Farrell, 1994). Interestingly, when alcoholics who are prone to relationship violence are asked to discuss problems under sober conditions with their spouses, they tend to display higher levels of hostility and defensiveness than their nonviolent counterparts.

The bottom line about alcohol and relationship violence is that alcoholics who abuse their partners differ in important ways from alcoholics who are not violent. See Table 12.3 for a list of characteristics of violent alcoholics. The pattern of risk for relationship violence appears to hinge on the nature of the alcohol problem, consumption patterns, beliefs about alcohol's ability to cause harm to a relationship, and relationship-specific communication patterns. Furthermore, the findings discussed thus far suggest that relationship violence is multicausal. No single set of factors can explain why violence occurs in relationships, and consequently it is difficult to come up with a magic wand that would make the problem go away.

**Table 12.3** Characteristics of a Violent Alcoholic

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- Predominantly male; commonly associated with binge drinking; the binge drinker believes that alcohol is at the root of relationship problems.
  - High in novelty seeking, high in harm avoidance, and low in reward dependence.
  - Violent alcoholics have more violent childhoods than do nonviolent alcoholics.
  - More likely to have fathers who were alcoholics.
  - Violent alcoholics start drinking at a younger age.
  - Twice as likely to have a history of engaging in violent behavior—especially toward women.
  - More likely than nonviolent alcoholics to have attempted suicide.
  - Drug addiction more common in violent alcoholics.
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Source: Bergman and Brismar (1994); Tikkanen, Holi, Lindberg, and Virkkunen (1994).

Looking at the issue more broadly, it appears that whether violence and abuse find their way into a relationship may depend on three sets of variables. There are person and relationship variables of the kind just discussed. Also, since relationships do not exist in a vacuum, how people conduct themselves is to some extent influenced by the macrocontext in which their relationships exist (Levinger, 1994). Additionally, broad individual dispositions also influence people's behavior in a variety of situations. We consider these next.



### Thinking Critically About Relationship Issues, Theories, and Research

- Relationship abuse includes physical assault, as well as less physical behaviors, such as neglect, verbal put-downs, and severe criticism. Do you think these behaviors can be legitimately put together in the same category? Why or why not?
- Being a victim of relationship violence is correlated with negative health behaviors, such as smoking, drinking alcohol, and not using seat belts. As you know, correlation does not imply causation. Make a case for different causal directions between relationship violence and negative health behaviors. Which one seems more likely to you?
- Various intervention programs aim to reduce the incidence of relationship violence. In the case of alcohol-related violence, its occurrence seems to be at least partially due to genetically inherited causes. Do you think this limits the effectiveness of intervention programs?

### *The Macrocontext of Relationship Violence*

In 1999, a judge in Fort Worth, Texas, sentenced Jimmy Dean Watkins to 4 months in prison for murdering his wife. Not to give the impression that Watkins' jury was soft on crime, he was also sentenced to 15 years in prison for wounding his deceased wife's boyfriend, Keith Fontenot, in the same attack. Watkins' case illustrates a legal double standard for violence among strangers and violence among intimates. Instead of treating them the same, intimate partner violence is often considered a "domestic" issue to be dealt with



by the parties involved. Perhaps this is one of the reasons why the United States has far more shelters for animals than shelters for abused women (Biden, 1993).

This view of domestic violence is further exacerbated in cultures that preserve traditional gender roles and place a premium on the maintenance of male honor (Vandello, Cohen, & Ransom, 2008; Vandello & Cohen, 2003). Honor cultures include Mediterranean societies (e.g., Greece, Italy, Spain), Arab cultures, Latin and South American cultures, and the American South and West (Vandello & Cohen, 2003). In such cultures, a man's honor and status are linked to a wife's fidelity. And, in the case of a wife's infidelity, members of honor cultures condone and even encourage the use of violence to restore honor. Wives, on the other hand, are expected to remain loyal (and silent) in the face of their husbands' infidelity (Vandello & Cohen, 2003). In addition to internalizing these values, men in honor cultures are more likely to believe that others in their culture endorse their views and use of aggression (Vandello et al., 2008). Although non-honor cultures may not endorse aggression as a way to restore honor, there is reason to believe that many take a "hands off" approach to domestic violence.

Law enforcement has traditionally been reluctant to make arrests for domestic violence unless the victim demands it or the suspect insults or assaults the officer (Sherman, 1980). To be sure, this reluctance is not borne out of callousness. Rather, it represents the response of police officers to the different options demanded by different groups. For instance, women's advocacy groups might recommend that the officer protect the victim, whereas colleagues and trainers might recommend forced separation or mediation as a short-term solution to the problem at hand.

Considering that relationship violence continues to be a problem, one might ask what would happen if violent offenders were to be arrested rather than talked to or forcibly separated from their victims. This question was first addressed in a field study conducted with the help of the Minneapolis Police Department (Sherman & Berk, 1984). Some 33 police officers stationed in the two precincts with the highest rate of domestic violence agreed to respond to calls of misdemeanor domestic assault by (1) arresting the offender, (2) separating the offender and victim for at least 8 hours, or (3) dispensing advice, including mediation. In order for the experiment to have the highest possible internal validity, how officers responded to calls was not left within their control. Rather, their responses were designated by a prearranged random assignment plan. Over a 17-month period, this plan of action produced 98 cases in which an offender was arrested, 114 cases in which officers separated the offender and the victim, and 108 cases in which officers responded by dispensing advice. To check for the effectiveness of the different responses (i.e., the likelihood that the offender refrained from violence), additional data were collected in the form of police reports as well as interviews of the victims within 6 months of the initial incident.

The results strongly suggested that arrest, compared to separation and advice, acted as a deterrent to further relationship violence, at least over a period of 6 months. Of all three experimental groups, offenders who had been arrested were least likely to commit another domestic assault. Those who had been separated were most likely to assault their partners again, and those who had received advice or mediation fell somewhere in between. Based on these findings, 15 states passed laws that made arrest mandatory for all cases of domestic violence. However, the results of several subsequent replications of the original Minneapolis experiment suggest that such legislation may have been premature and further call into question the generalizability of the Minneapolis findings (Sherman et al., 1992). Although replications in Colorado Springs and Dade

County found a deterrent effect of arrest in line with what the Minneapolis study had found, replications in Omaha, Charlotte, and Milwaukee not only failed to find a *deterrent* effect, but they found an *escalating* effect of arrest. In other words, rather than reducing future domestic violence, getting arrested made an offender more likely to become violent again.

If nothing else, this example should teach us not to devise public policy on the basis of the outcome of one single study. An important question remains, however: Why did what seemed to have worked in Minneapolis fail so miserably in other places? The answer seems not to have anything to do with geography at all. Rather, it appears that punishment, such as being arrested for domestic assault, affects different people in different ways. Specifically, arrest works best as a deterrent for those who have a lot to lose. For people who have a job or are married, the stakes are particularly high, as repeated arrests could adversely affect their occupational and marital status. Together, these stakes constitute important forms of informal control to work in conjunction with the formal control of the law. From this perspective, it is not surprising to learn that those individuals with jobs and marriages were deterred from future violence by being arrested, compared to their counterparts who received advice or were separated from their victims.

Quite a different picture emerges for those people for whom the stakes are relatively low. Offenders who were unemployed or unmarried and who were arrested for domestic assault became more likely to become violent again in the future. Several reasons are possible for why this may have happened. The initial arrest may instill in the offenders the belief that they are deviant, and thus they change their identities accordingly. Repeated punishment may have further led to the discovery that the legal threat is overstated and relatively tolerable. In support of this point, in the Milwaukee experiment, only 1 percent of arrested offenders were eventually convicted. Finally, repeated punishment may have led to anger and resentment against the victim, the law, or society, resulting in future aggression and violence.

Thus, to some extent, the prevalence of relationship violence may be due to the vestiges of a system that has traditionally considered women to be possessions of their male partners. Changes in laws governing relationship conduct can contribute to a decrease in the prevalence of relationship violence, but only within limits. For one thing, as we have seen, laws and their enforcement affect different people in different ways. Consider further the draconian laws against drugs enacted during the 1980s and 1990s. They did little, if anything, to decrease drug-related violence. To make laws against domestic violence work, it will ultimately take a collective reorientation in terms of how society looks at the nature of domestic relationships.

Finally, the macrocontext of our relationships provides us with myriad stressors that can lead to acute and chronic stress. **Acute stress** results from distressing events that have a clear-cut beginning and end. This might be something like failing a class or trying to complete your income tax returns on April 14. **Chronic stress**, such as living in poverty, is long-term and has no clear onset or termination.

How do acute and chronic stress impact relationship violence? Looking at self-reports from 82 newlyweds, Frye and Karney (2006) found that levels of stress fluctuated over time, perhaps contributing to the perception of the cyclical nature of relational violence. However, physical aggression did not result from acute stress alone, but instead resulted from an interaction between acute and chronic stress. Only husbands for whom acute stress occurred against the backdrop of high levels of chronic stress responded with

physical aggression (Frye & Karney, 2006). Thus, the effects of stress are not straightforward. We will see that stress interacts with other individual characteristics as well to produce interpersonal aggression.

### *The Microcontext of Relationship Violence: Individual Dispositions*

Any union between two people ultimately involves two individuals who bring a multitude of characteristics, traits, and dispositions that uniquely affect the nature and quality of their relationship. For example, we have already seen how love styles and attachment styles of individuals can affect their relationships with others. What individual disposition could lead people to become violent and abusive? Many lay theories hold that violence and abuse are somehow related to power. *Power* has been defined by some as the ability to elicit compliance from others (Weber, 1976). Others have defined it as a general concern for (1) having an impact on others, (2) arousing strong emotions in others, and (3) maintaining a reputation and sense of prestige (Winter, 1988). However one looks at power, force can be a means of establishing, maintaining, or restoring the balance of power in a relationship.

#### *The Need for Power*

The balance of power in a relationship can be based on many things, including differences in socioeconomic resources. An alternative way of understanding power is to look at it as a social motive. In other words, just as people have needs for affiliation, belonging, achievement, and so forth, they also have needs for power. And, as is the case with all social motives, there is considerable variation among people in their **need for power**. In the majority of cases, relationship violence in heterosexual couples is initiated by the male partner; therefore, one might suspect to find the root cause of the problem in men's higher need for power. However, as intuitive as this idea may be, research has shown it to be wrong, at least in this simple form.

In a now classic study, Winter (1988) measured the need for power (referred to as  $n(\text{pow})$ ) in a sample of college women and men by having them create stories to describe what was happening in drawings of ambiguous situations. This projective test, known as the Thematic Apperception Test (TAT), is predicated on the assumption that people's needs will manifest themselves in their fantasies. A research participant who responds to a series of pictures with power-related themes ("He is telling her what to do," "He is demanding an explanation") would be considered to be high in  $n(\text{pow})$ , compared to someone who responds to the same pictures without reference to power-related themes ("He's telling her about a movie he just saw," "He's asking how her kids are doing").

Not surprisingly, the study found that people varied greatly in terms of their need for power. However, men and women did not differ in the nature and level of  $n(\text{pow})$ . In other words,  $n(\text{pow})$  is equally present (or absent) in both sexes. What differed between the sexes were the actions associated with a high need for power. On the extreme end, men high in  $n(\text{pow})$  had proclivities for alcohol and drug use, physical and verbal aggression, gambling, and precocious and exploitative sex (including a liking for magazines such as *Hustler*). In addition, or perhaps because of these proclivities, men high in  $n(\text{pow})$  were found to have difficult and less stable intimate relationships, and they tended to oppress women in general, both economically and psychologically. Such

psychological oppression can manifest itself in a variety of ways, such as cutting a woman off during a conversation or touching her in nonsexual yet nonetheless inappropriate ways.

This pattern of profligate impulsivity was not obtained for the women who were high in need for power. Instead, it appeared that they expressed their need for power primarily in socially responsible ways. Women high in *n(pow)* tended to hold office in student government or attained high visibility by other means, such as writing letters to the editor of the student newspaper. In addition, they had a proclivity to acquire possessions associated with high prestige, such as televisions, stereos, and framed pictures (remember, this is a study of college students). Finally, women high in *n(pow)* indicated that they were planning to have careers, especially power-related careers, in such fields as teaching, therapy, journalism, business management, and the clergy. For those readers who are wondering how owning framed pictures and wanting to be a teacher or a minister is related to a need for power, remember that the definition of power emphasizes concerns with having an impact on others as well as maintaining a sense of prestige. Because teachers, journalists, therapists, and clergy have the ability to affect the lives of others in substantial ways (for better and worse), aspiring to these types of careers is considered related to a need for power. Similarly, posters of Monet's water lilies or Michael Jordan dunking a basketball are just that; however, in a frame, they become pieces of art.

It is one thing to demonstrate meaningful and reliable gender differences; explaining their origins is an altogether different matter. One might argue that gender differences, including those in the expression of need for power, are innate. But such an attempt would still fall short of pinpointing the origins of such differences, unless one could find something akin to a genetic marker. However, the observation that gender differences related to power are not so much a matter of differences in the need for power, but instead in the ways in which this need is expressed, suggests their origins may be social in nature.

In several studies, Winter (1988) managed to trace the differences in how men and women express their need for power to differences in how males and females are socialized. Specifically, women are socialized to express their need for power in socially responsible ways because throughout their upbringing they receive more responsibility training than their male counterparts. For example, girls are more likely to be asked to help in the care of younger siblings than are boys. Consistent with this speculation, the highest level of responsible nurturance was observed among women who had grown up with younger siblings. Moreover, more profligate impulsivity was found among women who did not have younger siblings and thus had been deprived of relevant opportunities toward social responsibility training. Put a slightly different way, women express a high need for power in socially responsible ways to the extent that they had opportunities for social responsibility training during childhood and adolescence. In the absence of such opportunities, they are very much like their male counterparts who are high in need for power.

Does this mean that men high in *n(pow)*, especially those without younger siblings, are condemned to a life of substance use and gambling? Not necessarily. When all our rowdy friends are settling down, it is often because they have children of their own. It appears that being a parent can provide the social responsibility training that may have been missing from one's earlier years. Although parenthood may do little to change one's need for power, it can substantially alter the way it is expressed.

### *Power and Abuse*

How is need for power tied to relationship violence and abuse? One might suspect that profligate impulsivity could be at the core of the problem. From this perspective, both men *and* women who are high in need for power and who lacked opportunities for social responsibility training might be predisposed toward violence. However, not every person who fits this pattern will become violent. Thus, we need to look at other variables that might play a role in the connection of power and abuse.

One such attempt was made in a study that looked at a number of personality characteristics to predict the occurrence of relationship violence (Mason & Blankenship, 1987). Along with the need for power, the researchers measured the need for affiliation, activity inhibition, and stress, through appropriate tests. In addition, the researchers kept track of the length of relationships. The general idea was that the occurrence of relationship violence could be predicted by unique combinations of these variables. For example, it might be the case that violence will be inflicted primarily by those high in need for power, low in need for affiliation, and low in their ability to resist their violent impulses. Moreover, it might be that different combinations predict whether men and women will become violent.

The results suggest that relationship violence does in fact have multiple causes and that the nature of the causes is somewhat different for men and women. High need for power was significantly correlated with the infliction of abuse among men but not women, suggesting that profligate impulsivity stemming from a high need for power is the major reason men become violent. For women, the story is considerably more complex. Need for power did not predict the infliction of violence, as one might suspect. Instead, need for affiliation and level of activity inhibition moderated the effects that stress had on the infliction of abuse. In other words, women who were under a lot of stress, high in need for affiliation, and low in activity inhibition were most likely to inflict abuse. Of course, given the correlational nature of the study, the opposite is also true. Women who were under a lot of stress but were low in need for affiliation or high in activity inhibition were not particularly likely to inflict abuse.

### *Individual Differences and Interaction Variables*

An individual's attachment orientation can also mediate domestic aggression (Rogers, Bidwell, & Wilson, 2005). As discussed in Chapter 8, adult attachment has implications for how we initiate, approach, and manage our intimate relationships. Current research suggests it can also predict who is likely to engage in relational abuse and when it will occur (Allison, Bartholomew, Mayseless, & Dutton, 2008). Specifically, women in abusive relationships had higher levels of preoccupation and were high in attachment anxiety (Allison et al., 2008). Men in abusive relationships, while also high in preoccupation, were more dismissing. Moreover, attachment orientation can also predict responses to abuse. Preoccupation, for instance, is associated with approach and pursuit, such as clinginess, nagging, and even abuse. A dismissing style is associated with distancing behaviors such as compliance, avoidance, and even physical abuse (Allison et al., 2008).

Another study on the link between attachment and aggression compared violent to non-violent couples (Babcock, Jacobson, Gottman, & Yerington, 2000) and found that 74 percent of violent husbands were marked by insecure attachment orientations. Although secure husbands in this sample were more defensive in conflicts, dismissing men were more



controlling and distancing. Moreover, their violence was triggered by their wife's defensiveness, and their aggression was used to reassert their control. On the other hand, preoccupied batterers were more violent in response to their wife's withdrawal or avoidance, and their aggression stemmed from their fears of abandonment (Babcock et al., 2000). Attachment orientation also interacted with need for power to predict abuse. Rogers, Bidwell, and Wilson (2005) found that individuals with an avoidant-fearful orientation resorted to physical aggression when their relationship power was threatened. Conversely, individuals with a preoccupied orientation resorted to physical abuse only when they felt themselves in positions of relational power.

Negative emotionality, that is, being prone to experiencing sadness, anxiety, and anger, also contributes to relationship violence and abuse. Although there appears to be no direct link, a study of 169 newlyweds (Hellmuth & McNulty, 2008) found that individuals high in negative emotionality aggressed against their partners *only* when they lacked good problem solving skills and experienced high levels of stress (Hellmuth & McNulty, 2008).

Other individual differences in intimate partner violence cleave to sex and gender differences (Fitzpatrick, Salgado, Suvak, King, & King, 2004). For example, women who had been abused are more likely to prefer domineering, possessive men. Male abusers are more likely to prefer and seek out highly anxious women—i.e., women they could abuse (Zayas & Shoda, 2007). Further, male aggression has been reliably linked to relationship dissolution, but not female aggression (DeMaris, 2000). In terms of severe violent aggression, male batterers often have a history of violent aggression or criminal histories that could serve as warning signs of partner abuse (Busch & Rosenberg, 2004; Henning & Feder, 2004). Conversely, female batterers generally react in self-defense (Busch & Rosenberg, 2004), exemplifying Johnson's (2006) violent resistance.

Clearly, inflicting violence on one's partner has different consequences for the sexes. Men, by and large, get away with it; women who strike their partners get struck back. Interestingly, relationship violence most often occurs in mature, committed relationships. This finding is of some interest, as it begs two questions: Why do committed members of a couple resort to violence and abuse? Why do the victims of such violence remain in the abusive relationship? Psychologists have traditionally tried to address the second question yet have paid scant attention to the first. Cynics might argue that this is due to a bias that puts the onus on women for a pattern of behavior for which men are behaviorally and morally responsible. A more benevolent interpretation would suggest that any bias may be the result of a primary concern with the victims of relationship violence rather than the perpetrators.

If we look at the issue from a couple perspective we can identify several reasons why committed people, in particular, might be mired in abusive and violent relationships. As a relationship matures over time, the investment individuals have in it increases, as well. Thus, abused partners may find themselves engaged in some calculus that balances the costs of staying against the costs of leaving. Furthermore, over time, the number of alternatives may decrease, as well. This may ultimately lead to a lowered comparison level for alternatives ( $CL_{Alt}$ ) (Thibaut & Kelley, 1959), thus increasing one's dependency on the relationship. Finally, as relationships mature, the number of material and psychological barriers in general increases to the point where leaving even an abusive relationship may be difficult (see Table 12.4 for a list of signs you might be in an abusive relationship). We will address these and other issues in the next chapter. For now, let us turn our attention to sexual violence and its relationship to power.



Table 12.4 Signs You Are in an Abusive Relationship

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*You are in an abusive relationship if your partner . . .*

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- Withholds affection or approval as punishment.
  - Criticizes you, shouts at you, or calls you names.
  - Ignores your feelings or insults your beliefs, ideas, or values.
  - Lies to you or manipulates you.
  - Insists you look a certain way to please him or her.
  - Humiliates you in public.
  - Keeps you from seeing friends or family.
  - Takes away resources such as money or the car.
  - Puts you in a dangerous situation (e.g., reckless or drunk driving, abandoning you).
  - Locks you out of the house.
  - Throws things at you, hits or punches you.
  - Rapes you.
  - Threatens to commit suicide if you leave or to kill you if you leave.
- 

Source: University of California, Santa Barbara, *Characteristics of an abusive relationship* (2007). Retrieved June 29, 2009 from: [www.soc.ucsb.edu/sexinfo/article/characteristics-of-an-abusive-relationship](http://www.soc.ucsb.edu/sexinfo/article/characteristics-of-an-abusive-relationship)



### Thinking Critically About Relationship Issues, Theories, and Research

- The need for affiliation represents our desire to establish ties with others and to have positive, pleasant interactions with them. In view of this, the positive correlation between women's need for affiliation and inflicting abuse is rather counterintuitive. How would you explain the relationship between the two?
- It is easy to see how preoccupation can lead to abuse. But how would you account for the link between the dismissing orientation (involving distancing behaviors such as compliance and avoidance) and physical abuse?
- It would seem reasonable to expect that women who had been abused would avoid domineering, possessive men. However, research shows the exact opposite tendency. How could you explain this finding?

## Sexual Violence

We can think of sexual violence as manifested in two ways. *Sexual harassment* refers to unwanted sexual advances between strangers or acquaintances, often in such settings as the workplace and school. Although sexual harassment does not generally occur between intimates, the harasser often desires some sort of intimacy with the victim, and thus it is included in this discussion. *Coercive sex* refers to sexual encounters without the consent of one partner. It can occur between strangers, acquaintances (date rape), or intimates. Sexual harassment and coercive sex have profound implications for their victims. The psychological and physical scars they leave are often just as severe as the scars resulting from the type of abuse we have discussed.

**Sexual Harassment**

Although the earliest published accounts of sexual harassment go as far back as the 1730s (Foner, 1947), it was not illegal until the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. And a legal definition of what constitutes sexual harassment was not issued until 1980, when the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission outlined two broad categories of prohibited behavior. **Quid pro quo harassment** refers to attempts to extort sexual cooperation by means of subtle or explicit threats of job-related consequences. **Hostile environment harassment** refers to pervasive sex-related verbal or physical conduct that is unwelcome or offensive, even when not accompanied by threats of job-related consequences. In light of these guidelines, sexual harassment is now generally understood as “any deliberate or repeated sexual behavior that is unwelcome to its recipients, as well as other behaviors that are hostile, offensive, or degrading” (Fitzgerald, 1993, p. 1070).

That sexual harassment can be quite severe and even hostile has been documented in a number of high-profile court cases. For example, in *Meritor Savings Bank v. Vinson* (1986), Michele Vinson, an employee at Meritor Savings Bank, testified that her boss had repeatedly raped and fondled her and followed her into the restroom at her place of employment. In *Robinson v. Jacksonville Shipyards* (1991), Lois Robinson went to court after company officials repeatedly ignored her complaints regarding the widespread display of pornographic pictures and sexually degrading graffiti in her workplace. However, the vast majority of sexual harassment is not quite so dramatic but instead consists of intrusive and unwanted sexual attention from superiors and coworkers. In one study of several thousand female government employees (U.S. Merit System Protection Board, 1981), 33 percent of the respondents reported having been subjected to repeated sexual remarks, 26 percent had been subjected to physical touching, and 15 percent had been pressured for dates.

Although many workplaces have strict prohibitions against sexual harassment, it is nonetheless important to find out why it occurs. Because most cases involve the sexual harassment of women by men, several accounts are plausible. According to one hypothesis, sexual harassment of women at work is the result of **sex-role spillover**, which is defined as the carryover of gender-based expectations for behavior into the workplace (Gutek & Morasch, 1982). Sexual harassment due to sex-role spillover is most likely to occur when the sex ratio at work is skewed toward males. In these settings, women take on the status of “role deviates” and are treated differently from male workers. In other words, in male-dominated settings, men tend to treat women based on gender-based expectations that are largely irrelevant to the work setting but might be appropriate in other settings. From this perspective, whether a behavior is considered sexually harassing depends in large part on the context. For example, a request for a date may be perfectly reasonable when it is issued at a party, but it becomes an issue of harassment when it is issued in the workplace.

The sex-role spillover hypothesis is not without empirical support (Gutek & Morasch, 1982; Sheffey & Tindale, 1992), and it helps explain why it often occurs in work settings that are dominated by males, such as the military (Pryor, 1995), medical training (Komaromy, Bindman, Haber, & Sand, 1993), and firefighting (Rosell, Miller, & Barber, 1995). On the other hand, although some forms of sexual harassment, such as asking for a date or complimenting a woman about her appearance, might be the result of applying behaviors based on gender expectations in the wrong setting, the sexual spillover hypothesis has a harder time accounting for a number of phenomena related to sexual harassment.

For one thing, not all men are equally likely to sexually harass women in the workplace. Instead, it appears that men vary in their proclivity to sexually harass. But even those

with a high proclivity may not display harassing behaviors. Whether sexual harassment occurs depends additionally on cues in the situation that either permit or prohibit harassing behavior. To test this idea, Pryor, Giedd, and Williams (1995) recruited males, who had previously completed a measure indicating their likelihood to sexually harass, to participate in a study on employee training. The participants' job ostensibly was to instruct female participants in some basic office skills. Prior to conducting the training session, participants saw one of two short videos in which a model demonstrated how this was to be done. In one video, the male model complimented the female model on her appearance and touched her frequently while describing the task. In the other video, any sexually harassing behaviors were omitted.

Consistent with the hypothesis, male participants who scored high in the likelihood to sexually harass *and* who had seen a model get away with sexually harassing behaviors were most likely to sexually harass the woman they were supposed to train. Interestingly, men with a high likelihood to sexually harass who were exposed to a nonharassing model were just as likely (or unlikely) to harass their "trainee" as men who were low in the likelihood to sexually harass.

From a practical point of view, Pryor et al.'s (1995) study suggests that the incidence of sexual harassment, even from the most determined harassers, might be lowered by workplace policies that do not permit or even punish sexual harassment. From a theoretical point of view, the study prompts a more complete account of the kinds of things that make some men more likely to sexually harass than others. At this point, it appears that the behavior of men who sexually harass is strongly motivated by a need for power and dominance, particularly when it comes to interacting with women (Bargh & Raymond, 1995). Moreover, men who are likely to sexually harass appear to have a mental association that links power with sex. Thus, when the power end of this association is activated (e.g., by virtue of someone's position in the workplace), the sex end will be automatically activated, as well (Pryor & Stoller, 1994). As a consequence of the activation of this power-sex association, female coworkers are often perceived as more attractive, which can then bring about sexually harassing behaviors (Bargh, Raymond, Pryor, & Strack, 1995). Of course, whether sexually harassing behavior will ultimately ensue may in part depend on additional signals indicating that the setting will either permit or prohibit it, as indicated by the Pryor and colleagues (1995) study.

Sexual harassment necessarily involves a perpetrator and a victim. So far, we have concentrated on illuminating the reasons why some men sexually harass women at work. But how does sexual harassment affect its victims? Obviously, severe and violent sexual harassment (e.g., *Meritor Savings Bank v. Vinson*, *Robinson v. Jacksonville Shipyards*) is likely to have devastating consequences for its victims. But even harassment that does not include an overt form of sexual coercion affects women profoundly. One study of 10,000 working military women found that those who had been subjected to sexual harassment (59 percent) displayed lower productivity, negative attitudes about their workplace, and negative emotional reactions and problems with relationships in the family (Pryor, 1995). Yet only a small minority of women who experience sexual harassment report it (Komaromy et al., 1993).

The underreporting of sexual harassment may occur for several reasons. *Quid pro quo* sexual harassment is likely to increase the possibility of losing one's job; thus, women subjected to this form of harassment may fail to take action primarily out of fear. But this is not the whole story. Sexual harassment is often surrounded by a great deal of ambiguity due to differences in men's and women's lay definitions of what constitutes sexual harassment

in the first place. In general, men's definitions tend to be narrower and less inclusive than those of women (Fitzgerald, 1993). In other words, whereas a woman may think of a touch or a verbal comment as a form of sexual harassment, men often interpret such actions as an expression of mere friendliness. In light of these divergent perceptions, the legal system has supplemented the burden of proof on the part of the victim with a "reasonable woman standard," which holds the victim responsible for responding appropriately (Fitzgerald, Swan, & Fisher, 1995; Gutek & O'Connor, 1995). Although these legal hurdles protect the accused (as intended by the legal system), they make many women wonder if they would find justice as a result of filing a complaint (Rudman, Borgida, & Robertson, 1995). Consequently, women are often compelled to suffer in silence, especially when the harassment is not severe, when it does not come from a supervisor, and when the workplace lacks adequate policies on sexual harassment (Gruber & Smith, 1995).

### *Stranger Harassment*

Although policies can help women from being sexually harassed at school and in the workplace, they do little to prevent women from being harassed by strangers. Sexual harassment of this kind includes verbal behaviors such as catcalls and sexual remarks as well as nonverbal behavior such as leering and fondling. In the U.S., 31 percent of college women and 29 percent of non-college women report experiencing some form of stranger harassment every few days (Fairchild & Rudman, 2008; Fairchild, 2010). This has a host of adverse consequences. There is evidence that victims perceive being harassed by a stranger as more severe and emotionally devastating than being harassed by a coworker or fellow student (McCarty, Iannone, & Kelly, 2014). Moreover, women often internalize the objectification inherent in stranger harassment, which can lead them to increasingly objectify both other women and men (Davidson, Gervais, & Sherd, 2015). Women lower in self-esteem are more likely to make benign attributions for stranger harassment and engage in self-blame (Saunders et al., 2016).

What about men who think harassing strangers is appropriate? Results from a sample of college men suggest that they score high in the Likelihood to Sexually Harass (LSH) scale, as one might expect. In addition, they are most likely to engage in stranger harassment when they are in a group because it affords them anonymity along with opportunities for group bonding (Wessellmann & Kelly, 2010).

### *Coercive Sex*

**Rape** has been legally defined as the nonconsensual oral, anal, or vaginal penetration, obtained by force, by threat of bodily harm, or when the victim is incapable of giving consent (Searles & Berger, 1987). Researchers have looked at characteristics of rapists in order to try to gain a better understanding of how to prevent such violent acts. In terms of who rapes, researchers have found that rapists lack empathy for their victim (Bushman, Bonacci, van Dijk, & Baumeister, 2003) and have poor empathic accuracy for their victims (Clements, Holtzworth-Munroe, Schweinle, & Ickes, 2007). Men's attitudes toward women also influence their proclivity to commit rape and shape their views of rape victims. For example, men were more likely to commit rape if they had first made insulting, derogating comments to their partners (Starratt, Goetz, Shackelford, & McKibbin, 2008). Moreover, men who were "benevolent sexists" (i.e., men with sexist views but positive feelings toward women) were more likely to blame the

victim in an acquaintance-rape scenario. Hostile sexists (i.e., men with sexist views and negative, antagonistic feelings toward women), though, indicated that they had a greater inclination to perpetrate acquaintance, but not stranger, rape (Abrams, Viki, Masser, & Bohner, 2003). Rape, it seems, is more widespread than this personality profile might suggest. Situational and context factors may also influence with who and when sexual coercion occurs.

Contrary to popular belief, rape is not something that happens between strangers in a dark alley. Instead, as WHO and U.S. Justice Department statistics confirm, most incidences of rape occur between people who know each other. Quite simply, a woman is far more likely to be raped by her husband than by a stranger (Greeley, 1991; Russell, 1982). Coercive sex may be most common among acquaintances and dating couples. In one study of over 3,000 female college students, 54 percent reported that they had been subjected to some form of coerced sexual contact, and roughly half of those cases occurred on dates (Koss, Gidycz, & Wisniewski, 1987).

In some ways, it is not surprising that a woman would be more likely to be raped by a close acquaintance other than a stranger. After all, husbands, cohabitators, and dating partners have frequent contact with their partners, and the rape can be committed in relative privacy (Browne, 1993). At the same time, sexual coercion among intimates appears to be incompatible with the characteristics of a close relationship and thus requires explanations for its occurrence. One way to account for this phenomenon is to attribute rape to sexual communication gone awry. In line with data from Abbey and Melby (1986), a man may be compelled to rape because he interprets a woman's flirtatious behavior as indicating sexual intent. However, rape frequently occurs and continues even after a woman has clearly indicated she does not wish to have sex. Thus, overperception of sexual intent tells only part of the story. Additionally, men who commit rape approach women with the general notion that women's communications about sex and romance cannot be trusted, and these men fail to recognize negative reactions from others appropriately (Malamuth & Brown, 1994). These characteristics themselves appear to be part of a larger problem. Sexually aggressive men tend to subscribe to the myth that deep down women like to be handled roughly (Burt, 1980). Furthermore, these men tend to endorse interpersonal violence and generally hold adversarial sexual beliefs, often thinking of sex as a conquest or a battle (Malamuth & Brown, 1994).

A more controversial account for the occurrence of coercive sex proposes that men's proclivity to rape is an outcome of an evolutionary adaptation to procreation (Thornhill & Palmer, 2000). In other words, men are biologically predisposed toward rape because it has been adaptive to the different mating strategies employed by men and women. As we discussed at length in Chapter 3, in most mammalian species, a male's primary reproductive goal is to mate early and often so as to ensure the survival of his genes in future generations. Females, on the other hand, are primarily interested in ascertaining this genetic survival once conception has occurred, and thus they restrict sexual interactions to males whom they perceive to be maximally capable of providing resources necessary for childrearing. From this perspective, rape is adaptive to males across many species (Crawford & Galdikas, 1986) because it helps subvert females' gate-keeping tendencies, thus increasing the chances of meeting their reproductive goals.

In partial support of this general hypothesis, Goetz, Shackelford, and Camilleri (2008) identified five different contexts of rape that produce different motivations for rape. *Disadvantaged men* are low in attractiveness and rape because they have no other access to women. *Specialized rapists* commit rape because they are aroused by violent sex.

*Opportunistic rapists* commit rape when women reject their advances and the costs are low. An example of this is rape that occurs during wartime. *High-mating-effort rapists* are sexually experienced, aggressive, domineering, and psychopathic. They are not particularly sensitive to contextual and situational cues and therefore are likely to commit rape regardless of the context. Finally, *partner rapists* commit rape in long-term, committed relationships. They are motivated by concerns with sperm competition and displacement. If they believe their partner has had extra-relational copulation, they will rape in an attempt to displace the interloper's sperm (Goetz & Shackelford, 2006; Goetz et al., 2008). However, not all men who suspect infidelity are sexually coercive (Starratt, Popp, & Shackelford, 2008). Only men who perceive themselves as more desirable a mate than their wives are prone to meet doubts about fidelity with sexual coercion.

The evolutionary approach to rape is controversial for several reasons. With regard to its implications, many object that explaining rape in terms of its adaptive value merely justifies the status quo and absolves men from any responsibility (e.g., Travis, 2003). But even if a case could be made that these implications were unintended or even false, it is not clear how rape is an adaptive mechanism on the level of the species as a whole. Rape may have reproductive benefits for men, but it has substantial costs for women. Specifically, women who are in the prime of their childbearing years are most traumatized by rape and therefore are most likely to develop strategies to reduce the likelihood of being raped. During the fertile period of their menstrual cycle, women have been found to behave more cautiously and to take fewer risks. They also become more vigilant in detecting sexual coerciveness in strange (but not familiar) males. Perhaps the most helpful adaptation is one that compels women to seek out the protection of strong and domineering male relatives or to seek the company of a band of female friends (Starratt, Popp, & Shackelford, 2008).

Why men feel compelled to rape is likely to be subject to continued theoretical debate among behavioral scientists. This debate is important because in order to generate prescriptions aimed at the prevention of rape, we need to have a clear theoretical understanding of why it occurs in the first place. Approaches that treat rape as an adaptation to evolutionary pressures provide insights into its ultimate causes and, in combination with considerations of its proximate (or immediate) causes, may help us better understand why rape occurs (Goetz et al., 2008).



### Thinking Critically About Relationship Issues, Theories, and Research

- Sexual harassment has been linked to the need for power that is expressed differently by men and women. Does this necessarily mean that female-to-male sexual harassment will never occur?
- Everyday communication is possible only under the assumption that people mean what they say. It is an implicit expectation we have for all our social interactions. What do you think gave rise to the idea that when it comes to sex, women's communication cannot be trusted?
- In addition to its ultimate causes, what proximate causes may need to be considered for a comprehensive account of why rape occurs?



## Summary

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- |                 |   |
|-----------------|---|
| <b>Issues</b>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How can intimate partners—whose relationship is based on love, trust, and caring—inflict harm on each other?</li> <li>• What is the frequency of intimate partner violence worldwide?</li> <li>• How can defining and measuring domestic violence complicate our understanding of it?</li> <li>• What are the origins of intimate relationship violence? How do we separate the “myth” from the reality?</li> <li>• How can a multicausal approach help us understand relationship violence?</li> <li>• What role do dispositions, context—the macrocontext—play in relationship violence?</li> <li>• What is the role of stress in relationship violence?</li> <li>• What effects do sexual harassment and other forms of sexual coercion have on their victims?</li> </ul>   |
| <b>Theory</b>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Popular theories about the causes of relationship violence erroneously suggest that violence is:             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Found mainly in low-income families</li> <li>• Hidden by the abuser and his or her victim</li> <li>• Committed mostly by men</li> <li>• Related to familial patterns of abuse</li> <li>• Cyclical in nature</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Alcohol abuse contributes to relationship violence</li> <li>• Macrolevel theories: Relationship violence is promoted by a culture of honor and the lack of social and legal consequences for its perpetrators</li> <li>• Individual difference theories focus on the need for power, lack of empathy, and sexism as sources of domestic violence</li> <li>• Sexual harassment is explained in terms of sex-role spillover and the mental association between power and sex for the harasser</li> <li>• Evolutionary explanations suggest that rape is an adaptive mechanism and define different contexts for rape</li> </ul> |
| <b>Research</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Descriptive research suggests relationship violence is universal</li> <li>• Relationship violence takes four forms (Johnson, 2006)             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Intimate terrorism: The individual is violent and controlling while his or her partner is not</li> <li>• Violent resistance: One partner is violent and not controlling, while their partner is both violent and controlling</li> <li>• Situational couple violence: The individual is violent, but neither the individual nor the partner are controlling</li> <li>• Mutual violence: Both are violent and controlling</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Little support for popular theories of relationship violence</li> </ul>   |

- Community-based interventions—e.g., increasing penalties—work primarily for perpetrators who have a lot to lose (Sherman et al., 1992)
- Acute stress interacts with chronic stress to predict violence in men but not in women (Frye & Karney, 2006)
- Need for power is a fairly straightforward predictor of relationship violence in men
- Violence in women, however, depends on a complex interaction among needs for affiliation, impulse control, and stress
- Spillover theory in sexual harassment supported by research that looks at sexually harassing behaviors in settings with varied gender ratios (Gutek & Morasch, 1982)
- Studies that surreptitiously prime power in men who then rate the attractiveness of female coworkers support the association between power and sex (Bargh et al., 1995)
- Evolutionary explanations are supported in part by the pervasive nature of coercive sex among all mammalian species (Goetz et al., 2008)
- Rape is likely to be committed by men who subscribe to the rape myth, endorse interpersonal violence, and hold adversarial sexual beliefs

## Key Terms

*Intimate terrorism*: a situation in which an individual is violent and controlling, while the partner is neither.

*Violent resistance*: a situation in which the individual is violent but not controlling, while the partner is both violent and controlling.

*Situational couple violence*: a situation in which the individual is violent, but neither the individual nor the partner is controlling.

*Mutual violent control*: situation in which both partners are violent and controlling.

*Myopia*: a condition in which the range of behaviors deemed appropriate in a given situation is narrowed.

*Acute stress*: results from distressing events that have a clear-cut beginning and end.

*Chronic stress*: long-term and has no clear onset or termination.

*Need for power*: a general concern for (1) having an impact on others, (2) arousing strong emotions in others, and (3) maintaining a reputation and a sense of prestige.

*Quid pro quo harassment*: attempts to extort sexual cooperation by means of threats of job-related consequences.

*Hostile environment harassment*: pervasive sex-related verbal conduct that is unwelcome or offensive.

*Sex-role spillover*: theoretical position that proposes that sexual harassment of women at work is the result of a spillover of gender-based expectations for behavior into the workplace.

*Rape*: nonconsensual oral, anal, or vaginal penetration, obtained by force, by threat of bodily harm, or when the victim is incapable of giving consent.