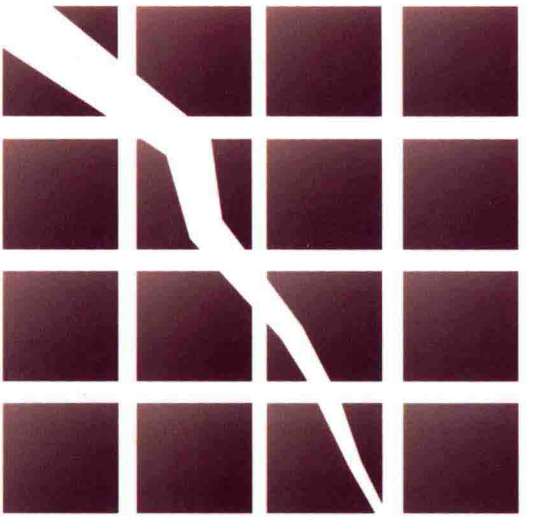
VIOLENCE IN INTIMATE RELATIONSHIPS



XIMENA B. ARRIAGA
STUART OSKAMP
editors

The Claremont Symposium on
Applied Social Psychology

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PART I

Nature of Violence

1

The Nature, Correlates, and Consequences of Violence in Intimate Relationships

Ximena B. Arriaga
Stuart Oskamp

One of the greatest contradictions of human nature is that some of the most personally injurious behaviors occur among loved ones. Rates of physical assault between intimate partners are disturbingly high. Estimates of the percentage of couples that engage in behaviors such as hitting, pushing, or shoving–what has recently been labeled "common couple violence" (Johnson, 1995)–range from 12% (e.g., Straus & Gelles, 1990) to 57% (e.g., O'Leary et al., 1989) and even higher. Sad to say, more severe forms of assault against women, resulting in physical injury and even death, are also not uncommon. Indeed, women in the United States are more likely to be killed by a male intimate or acquaintance than by a stranger (Federal Bureau of Investigation, 1993).

Perhaps because violence in intimate relationships can have such devastating consequences, this has been a topic of long-standing interest and great concern for behavioral and social scientists. The last three decades have seen substantial research on the dynamics of violent relationships–research that has promoted and will continue to advance the development of effective programs to end violence. More recently, concern over the prevalence and severity of domestic violence has become widespread in the U.S., leading to an increased sensitivity among the general public. For instance, law enforce-

ment officers are less likely to treat instances of domestic violence as "private affairs" and more likely to arrest batterers; public officials are implementing tougher laws against convicted rapists; and funding institutions increasingly seek to support projects on intimate violence. Even public perceptions regarding relationship violence have dramatically changed. Previously, there was a widely shared belief that domestic "incidents" should be kept secret, for fear they undermine a family's image of public respectability (Gelles & Loseke, 1993). Today, the public endorses open discussion of domestic violence as an important topic to be addressed in talk shows, newspaper cover stories, and even movies (e.g., "What's Love Got To Do With It?" Gibson, 1993).

Despite the general acknowledgment that violence in intimate relationships is a serious problem and despite a widespread desire to eliminate it, there is little agreement over how to effectively and permanently end such violence. Many controversies have plagued the field of interpersonal violence (cf. Gelles & Loseke, 1993). Researchers have disagreed, for instance, about what constitutes violence as well as who inflicts and who sustains violence. Despite such disagreements among scholars, much has been learned concerning the nature, correlates, and consequences of violence. This volume brings together the recent work of leading investigators on these topics.

In this chapter, we provide a foundation for understanding research on violence by describing key facts about the nature of violent relationships. We also outline the approach taken by each of the authors to address particular aspects of violent relationships, and we underscore ways in which these chapters individually and collectively contribute to documenting, understanding, and ameliorating violence in intimate relationships.

THE NATURE OF VIOLENT RELATIONSHIPS

Describing the nature of violent relationships can be a difficult task, primarily because several distinct conceptualizations of violence have been used in the professional literature. For many family researchers, behaviors such as pushing, slapping, and shoving constitute violence (also referred to as "abuse" and "physical aggression"), albeit mild forms thereof (O'Leary, 1993; Straus, Gelles, & Steinmetz, 1980, pp. 20). Criminologists adopt a different standard, categorizing incidents as "violent" only when they lead to physical injury or can otherwise be considered a crime (cf. Straus, this volume). Yet another perspective on relationship violence has been adopted by feminist scholars, who have suggested that such violence involves male attempts to overpower and terrorize female victims. This view makes severe psychological abuse and intimidation as much a component of violence as is physical assault (Yllö, 1993).

These different conceptualizations have resulted in discrepant reports concerning societal rates of violence, the reciprocal versus one-sided nature of partner violence, the underlying causes of violence, how it escalates, and most importantly, what might be required to end it (Johnson, 1995; Straus,

this volume). For instance, whereas researchers studying relationship violence may view couple therapy as an important step to ending violence, others focusing on criminal behavior may point to jail as the solution, while those focusing on power dynamics may see a primary need for resources to aid in removing women from their batterer's control. These disagreements over conceptualizations of violence have contributed to bitter debates over how to end violence in our society.

Only recently has it become increasingly clear that there are different types of violence, which call for different types of interventions (cf. Emery & Laumann-Billings, 1998; O'Leary, 1993). In an analysis of the nature of violence, Johnson (1995) has begun to resolve these disagreements by stressing that extreme, life-threatening behaviors are dramatically different from hitting or pushing behaviors, and that these two types of behaviors constitute distinct phenomena (see also Straus, this volume). The first of these phenomena comprises physically assaultive behaviors that occur when, over the course of a conflict, couple members "lose control" and consequently hit, push, or kick a partner. Such common couple violence rarely escalates into more injurious or life-threatening behaviors (Johnson, 1995; cf. also O'Leary, 1993, p. 19). Moreover, many of the couples who display it do not persist in violent interaction patterns over time (cf. Bradbury & Lawrence, this volume).

On the other hand, a different type of violence stems from deeply-rooted "patriarchal traditions of men's right to control 'their' women" (Johnson, 1995, p. 286). In addition to physical abuse, this violence involves economic subordination, extreme coercion and intimidation, isolation, and a host of other control tactics–a form of violence that Johnson (1995) refers to as "patriarchal terrorism." Moreover, severe batterers tend to escalate the severity of their violent acts over time (Johnson, 1995). Whereas couple violence, in a majority of cases, is instigated by both partners (Bradbury & Lawrence, this volume), extreme psychological and physical abuse is a pattern perpetrated almost exclusively by men (Johnson, 1995).

Mild or moderate forms of violence occur in a larger number of households than do severe forms of violence, such as those resulting in injuries that require medical attention (Johnson, 1995; see also Strauss this volume). However, the frequency and intensity of attacks by severe batterers are much greater than are the frequency and intensity of violence in common couple conflicts. Research has shown that, in couples where both members engage in less severe forms of violence, the partners assault each other an average of six times per year. In contrast, male batterers who engage in extreme psychological and physical violence assault their wives an average of 65 times per year (Johnson, 1995). Thus, at least two serious social problems can be identified: (1) For a large number of couples, it is not uncommon to engage in violent behaviors–behaviors that should not be labeled "harmless" (see Straus, this volume); and (2) a number of men inflict much more serious physical assaults and severe psychological abuse on their partners–a more

critical social problem, which deserves immediate attention lest the rate of women killed by male partners increase even further.

Recent research has led to an increased understanding of the factors that are correlated with each type of violence. In an important early effort to document factors associated with dating violence, Sugarman and Hotaling's (1989) review of the literature yielded an extensive list of factors associated with being the target or perpetrator of violent behaviors. These included sex-role attitudes, self-esteem, experiencing and witnessing violence in one's family of origin, the status of a dating relationship, past experiences in relationships, interpersonal communication, and so on. Although identifying factors was an important first step, these authors noted the lack of consistent findings, which they attributed, to some extent, to methodological differences among studies (Sugarman & Hotaling, 1989). In addition to such differences, it is now clear that inconsistent findings may have resulted from (1) not differentiating among types of violence, and (2) a lack of complex models and multivariate analyses to assess the *relative* role of each correlate of violence and the *process* by which various correlates relate to violence.

Social and behavioral scientists are making significant contributions to understanding the factors that are correlated with different types of violence. For instance, recent attempts to characterize batterers (e.g., Holtzworth-Munroe, Meehan, Herron, & Stuart, this volume; Dutton, this volume) are advancing our ability to discriminate among the types of individuals who engage in violent behaviors and to design appropriate treatments. Other research that examines the dynamics of marital interactions has revealed that couple violence may be rooted in specific communication problems (cf. Lloyd, this volume), which unfold most noticeably in the context of elevated levels of relationship distress (cf. Bradbury & Lawrence, this volume). In addition, social norms provide the broader context through which violent behaviors become sanctioned (Straus, this volume). Researchers are designing increasingly sophisticated models to identify the complex processes that precede violence, such as an analysis of distal versus proximal predictors of violence (cf. Holtzworth-Munroe et al., this volume; Leonard, this volume). Equally sophisticated models are being developed to assess mechanisms for coping with violence (e.g., Arias, this volume). Finally, researchers have begun to use the current accumulation of information on domestic violence to implement changes in the treatments offered by service providers (cf. Sharps & Campbell, this volume).

SUMMARY OF CHAPTERS IN THIS VOLUME

Each chapter in this volume contributes to advancing our understanding of violence in intimate relationships. Part I, on the nature of violence, establishes the "what" and the "who" of violence. Chapter 2 by Straus offers a conceptu-

alization of violence that parallels and complements the one stated previously in this chapter. Straus further addresses the question of who is violent. His analysis of discrepant findings on the prevalence of violence among male and female intimate partners lays the foundation for a broader examination of the sociology of violence research. Consistent with Johnson's (1995) analysis, he asserts that discrepant findings can be reconciled by noting that violence resulting in injury tends to be perpetrated primarily by men, but less severe forms of abuse are equally perpetrated by men and women. By exploring the forces that have sustained controversy over female/male prevalence rates, he provides a useful clarification of the surrounding context and underlying assumptions of violence research.

Two chapters focus more specifically on who is violent. Chapter 3 by Holtzworth-Munroe and colleagues summarizes preliminary findings to test empirically her recent groundbreaking model of abusive men (Holtzworth-Munroe & Stuart, 1994). This chapter describes batterer subtypes (i.e., family only, dysphoric/borderline, generally violent/antisocial) that can be identified using three descriptive dimensions (severity of marital violence, generality of violence outside the marriage, and personality disorder/psychopathology). The authors propose a developmental model of husband violence and they suggest that the batterer subtypes differ on distal correlates of violence (i.e., genetic/prenatal factors, family of origin environment, and association with deviant peers), as well as proximal ones (i.e., attachment/dependency, impulsivity, social skills, and attitudes toward violence and toward women). The preliminary findings support hypotheses derived from the model and also extend the model in important ways. Chapter 4 by Dutton examines in more detail one of these batterer subtypes–ones displaying borderline personality organization and phasic behavioral patterns in which a build-up of anxiety over interactive intimacy leads to an episode of battering and then to a period of contrition. In this analysis, he emphasizes the limitations of adopting a strict social learning model to explain male aggression.

Part II of this volume, on correlates of violence, examines the interpersonal and situational context that may contribute to violent interaction–that is, it focuses on issues of "how" and "why" that underlie violent interactions. In Chapter 5, Lloyd approaches violence in intimate relationships from a communications perspective. She conceptualizes violence as a gendered, communicative act designed to exert control in a relationship. In this chapter, Lloyd reviews several sets of findings, including studies that underscore the social-skills and problem-solving deficits of violent men, research that examines conflict patterns and "everyday" interactions in abusive marriages, research on the negative affective styles of violent husbands, and studies on patterns of dominance and power dynamics. A central theme of this chapter is that each of these types of communication problems can create a context conducive to violent behavior.

In Chapter 6 Leonard demonstrates that an important situational factor contributing to violent interaction is alcohol use. He shows that men who engage in domestic violence are more likely to be heavy drinkers than men who do not engage in such violence, and importantly, violent men are also likely to have been drinking prior to violent outbursts. Leonard's well-supported model for understanding the association between drinking and domestic violence differentiates drinking patterns as a distal variable–an individual-difference variable and factor that contributes to marital discord–from drinking behavior as a proximal variable, occurring just prior to a violent event. He presents compelling results from a longitudinal study that compared the distal and proximal role of alcohol consumption in the occurrence of domestic violence among newlywed couples.

Part III, on the consequences of violence, provides an account of what happens to victims as a result of physical and psychological abuse, and how relationships change following violent interactions. Chapter 7 by Arias begins with a thorough review of the literature on adverse effects of violence on victims' physical and psychological well-being and the effects on their children. Arias summarizes results from two of her own studies, in which she examined effects of psychological abuse that occur independently from the effects of physical abuse. She also reports findings on women's responses to their victimization. Particularly noteworthy are results suggesting that whether women are sufficiently motivated and able to leave an abusive relationship depends largely on their styles of coping. Finally, Arias discusses the implications of her research for designing effective interventions.

In Chapter 8, Sharps and Campbell examine the effects of physical and sexual violence on the health and well-being of women. After discussing the high prevalence rate of intimate partner violence, they provide an extensive review of the literature which documents health consequences of violence for women and female teenagers. They also review studies on violence during pregnancy and its consequences for the mother and fetus. Chapter 8 provides important messages to health care providers, for it concludes with suggestions concerning health provider practice, intervention, and research that may begin to reduce women's risk for violence and its subsequent health consequences.

The final chapter by Bradbury and Lawrence provides an elegant analysis of the longitudinal course of violence in intimate relationships. In effect, it provides a method for "glimpsing into the future" of intimate relationships that are plagued by violence. The authors place primary emphasis on predicting whether violent relationships will persist over time. They examine the longitudinal course of aggressive and nonaggressive marriages, observing the fluctuations in interspousal aggression over time. A key idea in this chapter is that aggression is not a static, stable property of marriages but instead is best viewed as a dynamic, changing phenomenon. They discuss the implica-

tions of this view for models of marital dysfunction and for programs designed to prevent adverse marital outcomes.

EMERGING THEMES

Together, the chapters in this volume highlight a number of common themes. Across the contributions, shared points of emphasis can be identified on the nature and causes of violence; trends in the theories and methods used to study violence; and advances in the areas of prevention, intervention, and treatment.

Nature and Causes of Violence

First, several authors describe categorization schemes to characterize violent individuals and behaviors. For instance, Dutton (Chapter 4) suggests that the behaviors of male batterers typically warrant a diagnosis of borderline personality disorder. The typology advanced by Holtzworth-Munroe and her coauthors (Chapter 3) emphasizes the usefulness of categorizing male batterers in terms of personality characteristics, severity of violent behavior, and prevalence of violent behavior outside of the marriage. However, these authors acknowledge that some of these categories may not comprise independent groupings, and may instead incorporate continua of more/less psychopathology and higher/lower levels of violence. Arias (Chapter 7) and others (cf. Stets, 1990) have differentiated psychological and verbal abuse from physical abuse. However, they suggest that individuals within each of these categories vary in the degree to which they exemplify the characteristics comprising that category. The issue is not whether investigators prefer categories or find it easier to conceptualize categories; rather, it concerns the extent to which distinct, non-overlapping violence phenomena truly exist (cf. O'Leary, 1993). Ultimately, whether violent actions reflect distinct phenomena, or vary in terms of degree only, is an empirical question to be answered in future research and in careful re-analysis of existing data.

Some authors highlight the functions of violent behaviors. Dutton (Chapter 4) emphasizes the expressive nature of violence, noting that for many batterers, violent behaviors represent "outbursts." On the other hand, Lloyd (Chapter 5) asserts that violence may reflect an attempt to control the partner. She suggests that violence is as much an instrumental behavior aimed at control as it is an expressive action reflecting anger.

In conceptualizing the causes of violence, many of the authors share the view that there are multiple paths to violent interaction. Several individual-level characteristics have been shown to be associated with violence (Dutton, Chapter 4; Holtzworth-Munroe et al., Chapter 3; Lloyd, Chapter 5). Moreover, some batterers are violent in all contexts whereas others are violent only in their intimate relationships (Holtzworth-Munroe et al., Chapter 3). Indeed,

there are a multitude of relationship dynamics that may contribute to violence. For instance, violence may occur as a result of an emotionally charged conflict or simply occur in the course of everyday interaction (Lloyd, Chapter 5). Multiple communication problems may emerge, any one of which, or the combination of which, may cause violence. Drinking behavior (Leonard, Chapter 6) and high levels of marital distress (Bradbury & Lawrence, Chapter 9) may exacerbate conflicted interactions. However, it seems that none of these factors (e.g., alcohol) create necessary or sufficient conditions for relationship violence to occur (Leonard, Chapter 6).

Trends in Theories and Methods For Studying Violence

The shared emphasis across chapters on the multiple pathways to violent relationships underscores the need to examine complex models of prediction. It also becomes necessary to consider more elaborate study designs and sophisticated analytic techniques. The contributions in this volume exemplify a trend in research on violence toward multilevel theoretical models, longitudinal designs, and relatively novel analytic strategies (e.g., survival analysis, cluster analysis, growth curve analysis).

Several authors have adopted theoretical models that can accommodate high levels of complexity. None of the chapters assume that there is a simple list of factors that explains violence (e.g., a main effects model), or that there is only one consequence of violence (Arias, Chapter 7; Sharps & Campbell, Chapter 8). Indeed, several authors have adopted process models of abuse, specifying how distal influences may create conditions under which proximal influences on violence exert effects (Holtzworth-Munroe et al., Chapter 3; Leonard, Chapter 6). Chapter 7 by Arias provides an example of this by advancing models that identify causal mechanisms (i.e., mediators) as well as factors that qualify key associations (i.e., moderators). For instance, it was only by adopting a more complex model that she was able to determine that a father's psychological abuse of the mother undermines her psychological adjustment, which in turn, adversely affects their child's levels of depression and self-esteem.

Attempts to refine theoretical accounts of violence have led some of the contributors to critically examine a number of commonly held assumptions. First, many scholars have assumed that, upon observing another person (e.g., a role model) who has behaved violently, an individual becomes more inclined to mimic this behavior–that is, many scholars have adopted a social learning theory (Bandura, 1979) account of violence. However, Dutton (Chapter 4) outlines the limitations of these assumptions, explaining why social learning theory cannot easily account for commonly observed characteristics among male batterers. Yet another set of commonly held assumptions concerns the association between physical and psychological abuse.