

# *A Typology of Women's Use of Violence in Intimate Relationships*

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*Women's use of violence in intimate relationships is not well understood. This study examined women's violence in relation to their male partners' violence against them. The sample consisted of 108 women who had used physical violence with a male partner in the previous 6 months. Almost all the women experienced physical abuse from their male partners. Whereas the women in the sample used more emotional abuse and moderate physical violence than their partners, the women were more often victims of sexual violence, injury, and coercive control. Three types of relationships were identified: women as victims (34%), women as aggressors (12%), and mixed relationships (50%), which were of two subtypes—mixed-male coercive (32%) and mixed-female coercive (18%). The study illustrates that women's violence needs to be examined within the context of male violence and abuse. The implications of the findings are discussed for researchers and practitioners who work with domestically violent women.*

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He came home drunk one night and started harassing and abusing me. I told him to get out. I was 6 months pregnant at the time. He sat on my stomach. He followed me into the kitchen. I grabbed a knife and told him to get out of my house. When he turned around, I stabbed him in the back. I was protecting myself and my unborn child. He had to go to the emergency room to get stitches. (Jane S., participant in the Family Violence Education Program, New Haven, CT)

He beat my ass for 18 years. I finally got my revenge. I got drunk to get my courage up, and I waited for him to get home. (Mary L., participant in the Family Violence Education Program, New Haven, CT)

Part of my problem is that I am a strong Black woman. . . . So even though he beat me almost to death, I beat him too . . . the broken

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bones, the scar where he cut my face . . . all of those are because he was stronger outside, and I was stronger inside. By that I mean I'm no regular battered woman, because he got his share of licks. It wasn't until he started playing the mind games on me that I was really vulnerable to him. (Johnetta, a participant in Richie's [1996] study of battering in the lives of incarcerated women)

Women's use of violence in intimate relationships is an issue that is not well understood. More than 100 studies have found that women self-report as much perpetration of physical aggression as men (Straus, 1999). For example, the National Family Violence Survey (Straus & Gelles, 1986), a representative study of 3,520 men and women, found that in the year before the survey, 12.5% of wives self-reported that they used violence against their husbands compared to 11.3% of husbands who self-reported using violence against their wives. Furthermore, 4.4% of wives reported using severe violence against their husbands, whereas 3% of husbands reported using severe violence (Straus & Gelles, 1986). Studies of young couples have found even higher rates of violence, especially by women. The National Youth Survey, a longitudinal cohort study of a probability sample of 1,725 youth in the United States, found that for respondents between the ages of 27 and 33, 27.9% of women reported using violence against their partners as compared to 20.2% of men (Morse, 1995). Furthermore, women were much more likely than men to use severe violence—13.8% of women as compared to 5.7% of men. Similar results have been found in studies of newlyweds (O'Leary et al., 1989), dating couples (Bookwala, Frieze, Smith, & Ryan, 1992; White & Koss, 1991), and a large New Zealand youth sample (Magdol et al., 1997). A recent meta-analysis (Archer, 2000) of gender differences in rates of physical aggression with intimate partners also found equivalent rates of aggression by men and women. However, the meta-analysis did not include studies of sexual assault or crime surveys, which tend to find higher rates of violence committed by males (White, Smith, Koss, & Figueredo, 2000).

Data from domestic violence arrests add to the controversy around women's violence. Although the majority of those arrested for domestic violence offenses are still men, women are being arrested in increasing numbers. In Concord, New Hampshire, 35% of domestic violence arrests in 1999 were of women

compared to 23% in 1993. In Vermont, 23% of arrests in 1999 were of women compared with 16% in 1997 (Goldberg, 1999). And in Connecticut, 20% of persons classified as domestic violence offenders were female in 1999 (Connecticut Department of Public Safety, 1999), and approximately 22% were charged in dual arrests (G. Lopez, personal communication, January 4, 2001).

The large numbers of female arrests are the unforeseen consequence of the "mandatory arrest" domestic violence legislation enacted in many states in the 1980s and 1990s. For example, in Connecticut, an officer on a domestic violence call is mandated to make an arrest if there is "probable cause" of violence, namely, injuries, disheveled clothing or furniture, and/or a victim who states that she or he was hit or threatened or is frightened and upset. The law was passed to protect victims from police inaction, making police liable if they fail to make an arrest and someone gets hurt. However, on some calls, both parties appear disheveled and angry, perhaps smelling of alcohol, each claiming that the other is the perpetrator. The officer may then make a dual arrest.

The purpose of this study is to examine women's violence in the context of their male partners' violence against them. Structured quantitative interviews were conducted with a sample of 108 low-income, urban, primarily African American women who had used some form of physical violence against a male intimate partner in the previous 6 months. Based on the women's reports, the following three overarching types of women's violence in relationships emerged: (a) victims—women who were violent but whose partners were much more abusive, (b) aggressors—women who were much more abusive than their partners, and (c) mixed relationships—consisting of two subtypes: mixed-male coercive, in which women's use of physical violence was greater than or equal to that of their partners but partners used more coercive control, and mixed-female coercive, in which partners' use of physical violence was greater than or equal to women's but women used more coercive control.

#### **HOW DOES WOMEN'S PARTNER VIOLENCE DIFFER FROM MEN'S VIOLENCE?**

Johnson (2000) argued that there are four qualitatively different types of violence between intimate partners and found gender

differences in the commission of these different types of violence. The most serious type, *intimate terrorism*, is characterized by severe, frequent violence that tends to escalate over time. Intimate terrorism, perpetrated almost exclusively by men, is a result of

patriarchal traditions of men's right to control "their" women. . . . It is a form of terroristic control of wives by their husbands that involves the systematic use of not only violence, but economic subordination, threats, isolation, and other control tactics. (Johnson, 1995, p. 284)

Estimates of the annual rate of violence of this type in the U.S. population range from 0.2% to 1.1% (Straus, 1999). *Common couple violence*, in contrast, is defined as "an intermittent response to the occasional conflicts of everyday life, motivated by a need to control in the specific situation but not a more general need to be in charge of the relationship" (Johnson, 1995, p. 286). This type of violence usually does not escalate, is conflict based, and happens on average once every 2 months according to Johnson's (1995) estimate. Moreover, it seems to be equally initiated by men and women (Johnson, 2000; see Stark & Flitcraft, 1996, for a similar typology). The vast majority of both women's and men's violence falls into the common couple violence category.

The third type of violence Johnson (1995) identified, *violent resistance*, refers to physical aggression committed by a person who is violent but not controlling. The aggression is committed against a partner who is both violent and controlling. This type of violence is almost exclusively committed by women who are the partners of male intimate terrorists. Johnson's final type, *mutual violent control*, refers to a relationship in which both the man and the woman are violent and controlling. This was the least common type of violence Johnson (2000) identified in his sample.

Johnson's (2000) typology indicates the importance of two dimensions of intimate partner violence that are often overlooked and are explored in this study. First, abusive relationships vary widely along dimensions of coercive control and emotional abuse as well as physical violence. A partner who is more physically abusive than his or her mate may or may not be the person who is "in control" of the relationship; coercively controlling behaviors must be examined. And second, to understand abusive relationships, it is critical to look at the history of abusive behavior of both

partners and to compare them to each other. We argue that examining abuse relationally is particularly important in developing an understanding of women's violence, as several studies indicate that the majority of women are violent in the context of violence against them by their male partners. For example, in Hamberger and Potente's (1994) study of women arrested for domestic violence and mandated to treatment, almost all of the women had experienced significant victimization from their partners. Only 3 out of 67 women clearly exhibited primary perpetrator characteristics. Dasgupta's (1999) study of women arrested for domestic violence found similar results. Another study that compared women arrested for domestic violence with female victims in shelters found that the women who were arrested and the women in shelters did not differ in terms of victimization history (Abel, 1999), indicating that the women arrested for domestic violence also had been abused extensively.

#### **Fear, Injury, and Sexual Assault**

Several studies have found that women are more likely than men to report fear in domestic violence situations (Barnett, Lee, & Thelen, 1997; Foa, Cascardi, Zoellner, & Feeny, 2000; Jacobson et al., 1994; Langhinrichsen-Rohling, Nedig, & Thorn, 1995). The National Youth Survey data indicated that 30% of female respondents felt they were in danger of getting hurt during fights with their partner as opposed to 14% of men (Morse, 1995). This fear is not surprising: In domestic violence situations, women are much more likely than men to be injured and injured severely (Archer, 2000; Brush, 1990; Langhinrichsen-Rohling et al., 1995; Makepeace, 1986; Morse, 1995; Sorenson, Upchurch, & Shen, 1996). For example, an analysis of 7,506 participants in the National Survey of Families and Households found that of those individuals reporting injury from domestic violence, 73% were female (Zlotnick, Kohn, Peterson, & Pearlstein, 1998).

Another important component of women's fear of domestic violence is the high rate of sexual assault among battered women. It has been estimated that 10% to 14% of married women and at least 40% of battered wives have been raped by their husbands (Finkelhor & Yllo, 1987). Physical assault by men may be a significant risk factor for rape. In a study of 317 college students, men's

self-reported physically assaultive and sexually coercive behaviors were correlated .90, indicating that men who were more physically violent were also more likely to use sexual violence (Straus, Hamby, Boney-McCoy, & Sugarman, 1996). In Makepeace's (1986) student sample, although women reported perpetrating as much psychological and physical violence as men, women reported being forced to have sex (24%) at much higher rates than men (3%); similar results were found by Cantos, Neidig, and O'Leary (1994).

### **Coercive Control**

Coercive control refers to the nonphysical tactics used by abusers to maintain control over their partners. Coercive control tactics include the use of intimidation, isolation, economic control, and controlling the partner's activities and decisions. As Dasgupta (1999) discussed, culturally dictated norms greatly limit a woman's ability to maintain absolute control over a male partner using these tactics. Most women are not socialized to control men in this way, and even if they try, these powerful social norms work against them. For example, severely abusive men may make their partners prisoners in their homes by forbidding working or seeing friends and family. Such restrictions are supported by traditional beliefs that a woman's place is in the home. An abusive woman may try to limit her partner's contact with others, but she can seldom keep him entirely isolated in the home in this manner, and there are no traditional gender stereotypes to aid her. Similarly, men have historically been the primary wage earners in families and thus are "entitled" by tradition to control money. Although more women are working, and some women support their partners, few can deprive their male partners of financial independence. Abusive men are also aided by traditional norms that a man's home is his castle, justifying his control of what goes on in the home. Again, a woman may try to achieve this kind of control over her partner, but powerful social norms work against her. Finally, some severely abusive men can terrify their partners with gestures or even looks that signal the threat of physical or sexual abuse. Rarely can women engender this kind of fear in men. With some exceptions, men generally do not perceive

women as intimidating or frightening (Jacobson et al., 1994; Langhinrichsen-Rohling et al., 1995; Morse, 1995).

### **SOCIAL DESIRABILITY**

This study used women's self-reports to assess both women's and partners' use of violence. One meta-analysis of reporting agreements between partners who both completed the Conflict Tactics Scale found, not surprisingly, that individuals tend to self-report less of their own physical aggression than what their partners report about them. This underreporting bias was less pronounced for women than for men, but the effect was significant for both sexes (Archer, 1999). Is the measurement of social desirability a useful way to account for this reporting bias? A meta-analysis of the relationship between self-reported aggression toward one's partner and social desirability suggests that it is; the meta-analysis found a small but statistically significant negative relationship between the variables, indicating that individuals with a higher need to appear socially desirable tend to report less physical aggression toward their partners (Sugarman & Hotaling, 1997). In the current study, a social desirability measure was administered to explore this reporting bias.

### **HYPOTHESES**

Based on this review of the literature, the following hypotheses were developed:

*Hypothesis 1:* The majority of women's partners will commit physical aggression against the women.

*Hypothesis 2:* Overall frequencies of physical abuse will be similar for women and their male partners. However, male partners will commit higher levels of sexual abuse, injury, and coercive control than women commit against them.

*Hypothesis 3:* A typology of women's abusive relationships based on variations along dimensions of physical abuse and coercive control will be detectable from the data.

*Hypothesis 4:* This typology will include a higher number of female victims than female aggressors.

*Hypothesis 5:* Relationships in which women are aggressors will be less violent overall than relationships in which male partners are aggressors.

## METHOD

### SAMPLE

The 108 participants were recruited from four locations in a moderately sized New England city. The first group of participants was women who had been arrested for a domestic violence offense and were court mandated to attend a family violence program. These women were contacted via a letter inviting them to participate in a study of relationship conflict. The letter gave a phone number for women to call with questions or to request not to be contacted. The letter clearly stated that the study was separate from the program and their decisions regarding participation would have no bearing on their court case or the program. A sign advertising the study also was posted in the waiting rooms of the following three sites: a large inner-city health clinic for low-income residents; a division of family court that provides services for people with domestic violence, divorce, and child custody cases; and a local domestic violence shelter. Women interested in participating in the study left their names and phone numbers in a box posted next to the sign.

The criterion for entry into the study was that the woman had to have used some form of physical violence against a male intimate partner within the previous 6 months. Women were screened over the phone with items from the Conflict Tactics Scale (Straus et al., 1996) to determine if they met the criterion. A face-to-face interview was scheduled with women who met the criterion and agreed to participate. Before the interview began, women were informed that their participation was voluntary and that they could discontinue the interview at any time. Women were paid \$45 for participating in the approximately 2-hour in-depth interview. Assessments included current and past partner violence and abuse, motivations for violence, childhood trauma, coping styles, use of domestic violence resources, psychological symptoms, and social desirability. Only the partner abuse and social desirability variables are examined in this study. At the end of the interviews, participants were given a list of referrals in the community. Participants who became distressed from the interview or who needed further assistance were referred to appropriate community resources.

### Participants

The majority of the 108 women in the sample (73%) were patients of the inner-city health clinic. Sixteen percent of the participants were recruited from the family violence program, 10% were women recruited from the family court waiting room, and 1 was residing in a domestic violence shelter. Seventy-one percent of the 108 participants were African American, 14% were White, 10% were Latina, and 5% were bicultural or other. The majority of participants (65%) were between the ages of 25 and 40, 18% were younger than 25, and 17% were older than 40. Twenty-two percent of the sample had not completed high school, 42% did complete high school, 8% graduated from a vocational school, 18% had attended some college, and 6% had a college or graduate degree. Overall, the income range of the women was quite low, with 68% earning less than \$10,000 per year, 19% earning between \$10,000 and \$19,999, and 13% earning \$20,000 or more. Seventy-five percent of the sample were unemployed, 11% had some part-time work, and 14% worked full time. Sixteen percent had no children, 43% had one or two children, and 42% had three or more children.

### Partners

All partner information was obtained from the women's reports. The racial/ethnic characteristics of the women's partners were similar to those of the women themselves. Seventy-three percent of the 108 partners were African American, 9% were White, 10% were Latino, and 8% were bicultural or other. The women's partners were somewhat older: Fifty-three percent were between the ages of 25 and 40, 17% were younger than 25, and 30% were older than 40. In terms of education, 20% of the women's partners had not completed high school, 55% did complete high school, 5% graduated from a vocational school, 12% had attended some college, and 9% had a college or graduate degree. Whereas the majority (75%) of the women were unemployed, most of their partners were working, either full time (55%) or part time (8%). Thirty-five percent were unemployed.

## MEASURES

### Women's Violence and Victimization

The following dimensions of partner abuse were assessed: physical abuse, sexual coercion, and injury using items from the Conflict Tactics Scale-2 (CTS-2) (Straus et al., 1996) and coercive control using items from the dominance/isolation subscale of the Psychological Maltreatment of Women Inventory (PMWI) (Tolman, 1989). Items from the CTS-2 and the PMWI were used to assess emotional abuse. Participants were asked if they had committed each of the behaviors in the past 6 months. The response scale ranged from never, once, twice, 3 to 5 times, 6 to 10 times, and more than 10 times in the past 6 months. If the behavior did not happen in the past 6 months, participants were asked if it had ever happened before the past 6 months. Following each item assessing her own behavior, participants were then asked if her partner had ever done that to her, using the same response scale.

The Conflict Tactics Scale is the canonical measure of family violence and has been used in hundreds of studies since 1972 with more than 70,000 participants of diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds around the world (Straus et al., 1996). The CTS-2 has been shown to have good internal consistency and validity (Straus et al., 1996). The Psychological Maltreatment of Women Inventory (Tolman, 1989) was used to assess emotional abuse and coercive control behaviors. This scale has also been shown to have good reliability and validity with a sample of primarily White and African American women (Tolman, 1999). In the present study, although the reliability of the coercive control subscale for women's victimization ( $\alpha = .83$ ) was comparable to that found by Tolman (1999) ( $\alpha = .88$ ), the physical abuse, sexual abuse, emotional abuse, and injury subscales had fewer items than in the CTS-2 as well as somewhat lower internal consistencies. Reliabilities for the physical abuse, sexual abuse, emotional abuse, and injury victimization subscales (i.e., the partner's abusive behavior toward the woman) ranged from  $\alpha = .60$  to  $\alpha = .79$ . The physical abuse, sexual abuse, emotional abuse, and injury aggression subscales (the woman's abusive behavior toward the partner) had internal consistencies ranging from  $\alpha = .56$  to  $\alpha = .75$ .

### Social Desirability

A 10-item social desirability measure based on the widely used Marlowe-Crowne scale was administered, containing items such as "No matter who I'm talking to, I'm always a good listener" and "There have been occasions when I took advantage of someone" (Greenwald & Satow, 1970). The response scale ranged from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). The reliability of the measure in the present study was  $\alpha = .74$ .

### ANALYTIC STRATEGY

To develop a typology of the different types of abusive relationships in which women were violent, women's perpetration and victimization scores were examined across the following four categories of abuse: (a) severe violence, which included severe physical abuse, severe sexual coercion, and severe injury; (b) moderate violence, consisting of moderate physical abuse, moderate sexual coercion, and moderate injury; (c) coercive control; and (d) emotional abuse. Specifically, a difference score of the number of times the woman committed the act against her partner minus the number of times the partner committed the act against her was computed for each category of abuse. A woman's score was considered to be discrepant from her partner's score if the difference was greater than one fourth standard deviation. For example, one fourth of the standard deviation of severe violence is 2.64. If a woman reported that she committed six acts of severe violence against her partner and her partner committed one act of severe violence against her, then she would be classified as more violent than the partner on this particular category of abuse as the difference score ( $6 - 1 = 5$ ) is greater than 2.64.<sup>1</sup> The same method was used for moderate violence, coercive control, and emotional abuse.

To classify relationships into those in which the woman was the victim, the aggressor, or otherwise, severe violence (i.e., severe physical abuse, severe sexual abuse, and severe injury combined) and coercive control were used as benchmarks. The decision rule was that if the woman committed more acts of severe violence and coercive control than her partner committed against her (i.e., the difference score was greater than one fourth standard deviation

for both categories of behavior), she would be classified as an aggressor. If the partner committed more acts of severe violence and coercive control against her (i.e., the difference score was greater than one fourth standard deviation in both instances), she would be classified as a victim. If the woman committed more severe violence, but the partner committed more coercion, or vice versa, the relationship was classified as mixed.<sup>2</sup>

## RESULTS

### ARREST HISTORY

Although only 16% of the sample were recruited from the court-mandated family violence program, the majority of participants had some previous involvement with the criminal justice system. Seventy-five percent of the overall sample had been arrested at some time. This included 71% of the women recruited from the health clinic, 64% of the women recruited from the Family Relations waiting room, and (by definition) all of the family violence program participants. Thirty-one percent of the women had been arrested in the previous 6 months ( $M = .39$  arrests,  $SD = .65$ ). The majority (85%) of the arrests within the previous 6 months were for domestic-violence-related charges; 58% of these were dual arrests. Sixty-four percent of the women had been arrested between 1 and 16 times prior to the past 6 months ( $M = 1.80$  arrests,  $SD = 2.66$ ). Of these, 34% were for domestic-violence-related charges, ranging from 1 to 10 arrests.

### PARTNER'S ARREST HISTORY

The majority of women's partners had also been involved with the criminal justice system. In general, the partners had a greater number of arrests than the women. Eighty-three percent had been arrested at some time, 45% in the previous 6 months ( $M = .72$  arrests,  $SD = 1.14$ ). The number of partners' arrests in the prior 6 months was significantly greater than the number of women's arrests ( $t = -3.0, p < .01$ ). Similar to the women, the majority (72%) of partners' recent arrests were for domestic violence charges. Of the women who knew their partners' criminal history, 72%

reported arrests prior to the past 6 months ranging from 1 to 30 times ( $M = 3.22$  arrests,  $SD = 4.56$ ). The number of partners' arrests prior to the past 6 months was also significantly greater than the number of women's arrests ( $t = -2.90, p < .01$ ). Fifty-four percent of the partners' prior arrests were for domestic violence, ranging from 1 to 20 times.

#### **WOMEN'S VIOLENCE TOWARD THEIR PARTNERS AND PARTNERS' VIOLENCE TOWARD THEM**

On average, the rates of abusive behaviors in the women's relationships were high. According to the women's reports of their own and their partner's violence, women committed a mean of 58.06 ( $SD = 39.83$ ) abusive behaviors against their partners in the previous 6 months. This number includes all incidents of emotional abuse, coercive control, physical abuse, and sexual coercion. However, the women reported that their partners committed significantly more abuse, with a mean of 74.12 ( $SD = 51.17$ ) abusive behaviors in the past 6 months ( $t = -3.25, p < .01$ ). These results provide support for Hypothesis 1, that the majority of the women's partners will commit physical aggression against them. Only 6 of the 108 women in the study experienced no physical victimization or injury from their partners.

Women's violent behavior toward their partners next was compared with women's victimization (i.e., the partners' violent behavior toward the women) for each of the categories of abuse using paired samples  $t$  tests. The results, based on women's self-reports of their own and their partners' behaviors, are shown in Table 1 at the subscale level and Table 2 at the item level. As shown in Table 1, women's commission of emotional abuse did not differ from the emotional abuse they received from their partners ( $t = .06, p > .10$ ). As detailed in Table 2, women insulted, swore, and stomped out of the room more often than their partners, and their partners did something to spite them and tried to make them feel crazy more often.

Hypothesis 2 states that overall frequencies of physical abuse will be similar for women and their male partners and was not supported. In fact, women committed significantly more acts of moderate physical violence against their partners than their partners committed against them ( $t = 2.56, p < .05$ ). Specifically,

**TABLE 1**  
**Women's Victimization and Women's Violence Toward Their Partners**

	<i>Women's Victimization in Past 6 Months</i>			<i>Women's Aggression in Past 6 Months</i>			<i>Ratio of Women's Victimization to Women's Aggression (Using Means)</i>
	<i>Percentage of Partners Who Abused</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Percentage of Women Who Abused</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	
Emotional abuse	98	21.7	12.5	100	21.7	12.3	0.9
Moderate physical violence*	91	9.8	9.7	99	12.8	10.2	0.8
Severe physical violence	57	4.6	7.1	57	3.2	5.4	1.4
Coercive control**	94	34.7	27.7	86	19.0	17.8	1.8
Sexual coercion**	46	3.3	5.2	28	1.3	3.3	2.5
Injury**	61	3.5	5.4	54	2.2	3.7	1.6

NOTE: Means represent the average number of times an act occurred in the previous 6 months.

\* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ .

women threw things at their partners and threatened to hit them more frequently. However, the women's partners committed almost one and a half times as many acts of severe physical violence against them than vice versa, although this effect reached only a trend level of statistical significance ( $t = -1.75, p = .08$ ). As Table 2 reveals, this effect was based on the significantly greater number of choking incidents committed by men.

Hypothesis 2 also states that male partners will commit higher levels of sexual abuse, injury, and coercive control than women will commit against them, and this prediction was supported. The women's partners committed close to twice as many acts of coercive control ( $t = -5.90, p < .001$ )—indeed, male partners committed significantly more of 11 of the 14 controlling items. Male partners also committed two and a half times as much sexual coercion ( $t = -3.40, p < .01$ ). At the item level shown in Table 2, this finding is based on the greater number of times men insisted on sex when the women did not want to (but did not use force). Male partners perpetrated over one and a half times as much injury ( $t = -2.68, p < .01$ ), including injuries that still hurt the next day, caused the women to pass out, see a doctor, or need to see a doctor.

**TABLE 2**  
**Average Number of Times Women Reported That Their Partners**  
**Committed an Abusive Act (Women's Victimization) and Their Own**  
**Commission of the Act (Women's Aggression) in the Past 6 Months**

<i>Item</i>	<i>Women's Victimization</i>		<i>Women's Aggression</i>	
	M	SD	M	SD
Emotional abuse				
Insulting or swearing at partner	6.8	3.6	7.5	3.3 <sup>†a</sup>
Telling your partner he or she couldn't manage without you	2.8	3.7	3.1	4.2
Destroying something belonging to partner	1.5	2.5	1.4	2.2
Stomping out of the room during a disagreement	4.1	4.0	5.5	4.0 <sup>**</sup>
Doing something to spite your partner	3.5	3.7	2.8	3.5 <sup>†a</sup>
Trying to make your partner feel like he or she is crazy	3.0	3.8	1.4	3.0 <sup>**</sup>
Moderate physical abuse				
Throwing things at partner that could hurt	1.6	2.7	3.1	3.5 <sup>**</sup>
Pushing and shoving	3.6	3.6	3.8	3.3
Threatening to hit or throw something	2.8	3.2	3.6	3.6 <sup>*</sup>
Slapping	1.9	2.9	2.4	3.1
Severe physical abuse				
Beating up	1.9	3.1	1.3	2.7
Hitting or punching partner with something that could hurt	1.5	2.7	1.4	2.6
Choking	1.0	2.0	0.4	1.1 <sup>**</sup>
Using knife or gun	0.2	1.1	0.1	0.3
Coercive control				
Not wanting partner to see friends	4.3	4.3	2.0	3.4 <sup>**</sup>
Restrict use of car/telephone	1.5	2.2	0.9	1.6 <sup>*</sup>
Jealous or suspicious of partner's friends	5.4	4.4	3.5	4.3 <sup>**</sup>
Monitor partner's time, make partner account for whereabouts	5.1	4.3	3.6	4.1 <sup>**</sup>
Keep partner from school or other self-improvement	0.9	2.3	0.2	1.3 <sup>**</sup>
Keep partner from family	1.0	2.6	0.1	0.3 <sup>**</sup>
Not allow partner to leave the house	3.2	3.9	1.3	2.4 <sup>**</sup>
Keep partner from medical care	0.1	0.4	0	0
Follow partner to check on what he or she is doing	1.9	3.3	1.2	2.7
Demand partner stay home and take care of children	2.2	3.6	1.3	2.9 <sup>*</sup>
Treat partner like an inferior	2.0	3.4	1.2	2.7 <sup>†a</sup>
Act like partner was your personal servant	3.1	4.1	1.4	3.0 <sup>**</sup>
Get upset if housework was not done when you wanted	3.0	4.1	2.2	3.4
Keep partner from doing things to help himself or herself	0.5	1.7	0	0 <sup>**</sup>
Moderate sexual coercion				
Insist on sex when partner did not want to (but no force)	2.5	3.5	0.9	2.2 <sup>**</sup>
Severe sexual coercion				
Using threats to make partner have sex	0.8	2.4	0.4	1.7

TABLE 2 Continued

<i>Item</i>	<i>Women's Victimization</i>		<i>Women's Aggression</i>	
	M	SD	M	SD
Moderate injury				
Sprain, bruise, or small cut	1.3	2.1	1.3	2.2
Feel physical pain that still hurt the next day	1.5	2.4	0.8	1.6**
Severe injury				
Passing out from being hit on the head	0.1	0.3	0	0.1 <sup>a</sup>
Going to the doctor for injuries	0.3	1.0	0.1	0.3 <sup>a</sup>
Needing to see a doctor but not going	0.3	0.8	0.1	0.5*
Broken bone	0.1	0.4	0	0.1

a. This difference becomes nonsignificant when participants with high social desirability scores are removed from the analyses.

\* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$  using paired samples  $t$  tests.

### A TYPOLOGY OF WOMEN'S VIOLENCE

Women's relationships were classified as victim type, aggressor type, or mixed type according to the analyses described earlier, confirming Hypothesis 3, that a typology of women's abusive relationships will be evident from the data. The typology is depicted in Table 3. Although all of the women in the sample had committed at least one act of physical violence against their partners, 34% of the women were classified as victims (i.e., their partners committed more severe violence and coercion against them than vice versa). The victim type was further classified into the following two subtypes: Type A victims, in which the partner committed more of all types of violence than the woman committed against him, including moderate violence and/or emotional abuse (19% of the sample); and Type B victims, in which the partner committed greater levels of severe violence and coercion, but the woman committed more moderate violence and/or emotional abuse (15%).

Only 12% of the women were classified as aggressors. Considering that women were recruited into the study based on their violent behavior, this was a surprisingly small number. This finding confirmed Hypothesis 4, that among women who use violence, there are a greater number of female victims than female aggressors. The aggressor type was classified into subtypes that paralleled the victim subtypes described earlier: Type A

**TABLE 3**  
**Typology of Women's Violence in Intimate Relationships**

<i>Type</i>	<i>Severe Violence</i>	<i>Coercive Control</i>	
Victim ( <i>N</i> = 37; 34%)	Partner > Woman	Partner > Woman	Type A, <i>n</i> = 21 (19%): Partner commits more of every type of violence than the woman commits against him. Type B, <i>n</i> = 16 (15%): Partner commits more severe violence and coercion. Woman commits equal or greater moderate violence and/or emotional abuse.
Aggressor ( <i>N</i> = 13; 12%)	Woman > Partner	Woman > Partner	Type A, <i>n</i> = 8 (7%): Woman commits more of every type of violence than the partner commits against her. Type B, <i>n</i> = 5 (5%): Woman commits more severe violence and coercion. Partner commits equal or greater moderate violence and/or emotional abuse.
Mixed-male coercive ( <i>N</i> = 35; 32%)	Woman ≥ Partner	Partner ≥ Woman	Woman is equally or more violent than partner. Partner is more coercive than woman.
Mixed-female coercive ( <i>N</i> = 19; 18%)	Partner ≥ Woman	Woman ≥ Partner	Partner is equally or more violent than woman. Woman is equally or more coercive than partner.

NOTE: Four participants (4%) were not able to be classified.

aggressors, in which the woman committed more of all types of violence than the partner committed against her, including moderate violence and/or emotional abuse (7% of the sample); and Type B aggressors, in which the woman committed greater levels of severe violence and coercion, but the partner committed more moderate violence and/or emotional abuse (5%).

Mixed relationships, in which one partner was more violent, but the other was more controlling, comprised the largest type (50%). Mixed-male coercive relationships were those in which the partner was more coercive than the woman, but the woman's use of severe violence was equivalent to (18%) or greater than (15%) the partner's. These results indicate that even when women inflicted more severe violence than their partners used against them, they were not necessarily in control of their partners' behavior. In fact, although these women were just as or more violent, the partners were still controlling the women's behavior.

Mixed-female coercive relationships were those in which the woman's use of coercion was equivalent to or greater than her partner's. In 10% of the relationships, the woman and her partner were equivalent in their use of severe violence and coercion; in 7%, the woman was more coercive than her partner, whereas the partner was just as or more violent than the woman.

#### **DIFFERENCES BETWEEN WOMEN'S AND MEN'S VIOLENCE IN THE FOUR TYPES OF RELATIONAL VIOLENCE**

The next set of analyses addressed questions about the magnitude of differences between men's and women's violence across the different types. As shown in Table 4, difference scores (woman's score-partner's score) for the categories of abuse (severe violence, moderate violence, emotional abuse, and coercion) were compared among the four types of relational violence.

##### **Are Female Aggressors as Abusive as Male Aggressors?**

As expected, female aggressors' means were positive and significantly greater across the four abuse categories than means for the victim and mixed types. Similarly, victims' mean scores were negative and significantly lower across all four categories of

**TABLE 4**  
**Mean Difference Scores (Woman's Score – Partner's Score) for Each Type of Relational Violence**

<i>Type of Relationship</i>	<i>Category of Abuse</i>											
	<i>Severe Physical, Sexual, and/or Injury Combined</i>		<i>Moderate Physical, Sexual, and/or Injury Combined</i>		<i>Emotional Abuse</i>		<i>Coercive Control</i>					
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD				
Victim type ( <i>N</i> = 37)	A	-11.8	10.7	A	-12.6	16.2	A	-10.0	8.9	A	-36.3	24.7
Mixed-male coercive ( <i>N</i> = 35)	B	1.5	3.4	B	7.1	9.9	B	1.7	10.1	B	-22.5	15.3
Mixed-female coercive ( <i>N</i> = 19)	B	-0.3	1.7	B	2.2	5.2	B	0.8	6.3	C	9.2	13.5
Aggressor type ( <i>N</i> = 13)	C	11.2	9.6	C	18.8	17.3	C	13.9	11.0	C	20.3	14.4
Value of ANOVA <i>F</i> statistic	<i>F</i> = 36.90, <i>p</i> < .00		<i>F</i> = 24.30, <i>p</i> < .00		<i>F</i> = 42.94, <i>p</i> < .00		<i>F</i> = 24.29, <i>p</i> < .00					

NOTE: Different letters indicate means that differ significantly as determined by Bonferroni post hoc comparisons. A positive mean indicates that on average, women committed the behavior more often than their partners. A negative mean indicates that on average, partners committed the behavior more often than women. The larger the absolute value of the mean, the larger the discrepancy between the women's and partners' scores.

abuse than means for the other types, indicating that male aggressors committed these types of abuse at much greater frequencies than their victims. Generally, the absolute value of aggressors' and victims' means were similar, indicating that in relation to their victims, the female aggressors were about as abusive as the male aggressors, with the exception of coercive control. The male aggressors committed, on average, 16 more coercive behaviors within the past 6 months than the female aggressors. Thus, female aggressors committed as much violence and emotional abuse as male aggressors but much less coercion.

#### **How Did the Mixed-Female Coercive and the Mixed-Male Coercive Types Compare?**

The two mixed types did not vary significantly from each other in the amount of severe violence, moderate violence, or emotional abuse. Generally, the values in these scales were slightly positive, indicating that women committed more of each category of abusive behavior than did male partners. However, the mixed types did differ in terms of coercive control, as would be expected from the way the categories were created. Women in mixed-male coercive relationships experienced a high level of coercion from their partners (with the partners committing 23 more coercive acts than the women). Women in mixed-female coercive relationships were more coercive than their partners, but the disparity was much less pronounced, with the women committing 9 more coercive acts than their partners. Thus, the mixed relationships were similar in terms of violence and emotional abuse but differed in levels of coercion. Men in mixed-male coercive relationships were much more controlling than women in mixed-female coercive relationships.

#### **TOTAL LEVELS OF ABUSE ACROSS THE FOUR TYPES**

To get a sense of the overall magnitude of violence in the women's relationships, Table 5 portrays the sums and differences of the women's and partners' abusive behaviors across all categories of abuse.

**TABLE 5**  
**Indices of Violence Across the Four Types**

<i>Type of Relational Violence</i>	<i>All Categories of Abuse</i>											
	<i>Total Abuse: Women's + Partner's Score</i>		<i>Sum of Women's Abusive Behaviors</i>		<i>Sum of Partner's Abusive Behaviors</i>		<i>Difference: Women's Versus Partner's Score</i>					
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD				
Victim type ( <i>N</i> = 37)	A	174.1	77.4	A	51.7	35.1	A	122.4	53.4	A	-70.7	46.5
Mixed-male coercive ( <i>N</i> = 35)	A	131.8	65.7	A	59.8	32.1	B	72.0	37.8	B	-12.3	24.4
Mixed-female coercive ( <i>N</i> = 19)	B	61.2	37.6	A	36.5	23.7	C	24.7	16.4	B	11.8	15.7
Aggressor type ( <i>N</i> = 13)	A	162.9	92.0	B	113.5	57.7	B	49.4	38.9	C	64.1	35.1
Value of ANOVA <i>F</i> statistic	<i>F</i> = 11.55, <i>p</i> < .00		<i>F</i> = 12.93, <i>p</i> < .00		<i>F</i> = 26.56, <i>p</i> < .00		<i>F</i> = 59.13, <i>p</i> < .00					

NOTE: Different letters indicate means that differ significantly as determined by Bonferroni post hoc comparisons. A positive mean indicates that on average, women committed the behavior more often than their partners. A negative mean indicates that on average, partners committed the behavior more often than the woman. The larger the absolute value of the mean, the larger the discrepancy between the women's and partners' scores.

#### **How Did Total Levels of Abuse Differ Across the Four Types?**

The Total Abuse column of Table 5 portrays the sum of all abusive behaviors committed by both the woman and her partner in the past 6 months. It is evident from these results that on average, the women's relationships were very abusive. Across all four types, at least 60 acts of abuse were committed by the woman and her partner within the previous 6 months. Interestingly, the most abusive relationships were the victim and aggressor types, those with the greatest disparity between the partners' abuse. The least abusive relationships were the mixed-female coercive, which had the lowest disparity between partners' abusive behaviors.

#### **How Violent Were the Women in Each of the Four Types?**

The Sum of Women's Abusive Behaviors column of Table 5 portrays the mean number of abusive behaviors committed by women for each type of relational violence. Female aggressors were very abusive, committing an average of 113 abusive behaviors within the past 6 months, significantly more than women in the other types. The frequency of women's abuse did not differ significantly across the other three types, although women in mixed-female coercive relationships committed the lowest number of abusive acts.

#### **How Violent Were the Men in Each of the Four Types?**

The Sum of Partner's Abusive Behaviors column of Table 5 portrays the mean number of abusive behaviors committed by male partners for each type of relational violence. Male aggressors were also very abusive, committing an average of 122 abusive behaviors within the past 6 months. Men in mixed-female coercive relationships were the least abusive, committing an average of 25 abusive acts.

Difference scores (women's mean scores vs. partners' mean scores) are shown in the last column and illustrate the disparity between partners' abuse across the four types of relationships. Women were more abusive than their partners in the aggressor and mixed-female coercive relationships, whereas men were

more abusive in the victim and mixed-male coercive relationships. Interestingly, mixed-male coercive relationships had very high levels of total abuse, as shown in the Total Abuse column; in fact, this category did not differ from the victim or aggressor types in terms of total abuse. In contrast, mixed-female coercive relationships had the lowest levels of total abuse and the lowest levels of abuse committed by the women and men.

Hypothesis 5 (relationships in which women are aggressors will be less abusive overall than relationships in which men are aggressors) received partial support. As shown in the Total Abuse column of Table 5, the total abuse scores for relationships in which men were aggressors (174) and those in which women were aggressors (163) did not significantly differ. And, the total number of abusive behaviors committed by female aggressors (114) was only slightly less than the total number of abusive behaviors committed by male aggressors (122). As the Difference column indicates, female aggressors committed an average of 64 more abusive behaviors than their male partners. This differed little from male aggressors, who committed an average of 71 more abusive acts than their female partners. In terms of overall indices, male and female aggressors committed similar levels of abuse. But male and female aggressors did have one important difference: Male aggressors committed more coercive control than female aggressors, as shown in Table 4. Male aggressors perpetrated an average of 36 more coercive acts than their partners, whereas female aggressors perpetrated an average of 20 more coercive acts.

### **SOCIAL DESIRABILITY**

Intercorrelations between social desirability and women's victimization and aggression are shown in Table 6. Five of the six aggression subscales are negatively and significantly correlated with social desirability, indicating that women who had a greater tendency to portray themselves as socially desirable reported less aggression. Social desirability correlated with only one of the victimization subscales, emotional abuse. These results indicate that social desirability may be a more important factor in biasing the self-reports of the commission of physical aggression rather than

**TABLE 6**  
**Correlations of Social Desirability With**  
**Women's Aggression and Women's Victimization**

	<i>Social Desirability (N = 106)</i>
Women's aggression	
Emotional abuse	-.406**
Coercive control	-.451**
Moderate physical violence	-.249**
Severe physical violence	-.347**
Sexual coercion	-.274**
Injury	-.112
Women's victimization	
Emotional abuse	-.227*
Coercive control	-.130
Moderate physical violence	-.154
Severe physical violence	-.039
Sexual coercion	.032
Injury	-.111

NOTE: Social desirability scale coded such that higher scores equal greater social desirability.

\* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ .

victimization. Thus, some women in the study may be under-reporting their own commission of physical aggression.

To explore how social desirability may have affected the results of the study, analyses were re-run taking this variable into account. First, the paired samples  $t$  tests presented in Tables 1 and 2 were re-run after removing the 15 individuals with social desirability scores greater than 1 standard deviation above the mean from the data set. The removal of these individuals did not affect the relationships presented in Table 1. The analyses presented in Table 2 were affected slightly with the removal of these 15 individuals; the difference between women's and partners' aggression became nonsignificant for 5 of the item comparisons. These items are indicated in Table 2. Even with these changes, the general pattern of results remains the same.

The one-way ANOVAs presented in Tables 4 and 5 were re-run with social desirability entered into the model as a covariate. The effect of social desirability was not significant in the Table 4 ANOVA. However, social desirability was a significant covariate in the Table 5 ANOVA, significantly affecting the scores in the Total Abuse column ( $F = 9.04, p < .01$ ), the Sum of Women's Abusive

Behaviors column ( $F = 11.58, p < .01$ ), and the Sum of Partner's Abusive Behaviors column ( $F = 4.42, p < .05$ ). Despite this effect, the model still revealed a highly significant effect of relationship typology on these three dependent variables, with the pattern of results remaining constant.

## DISCUSSION

This study demonstrates the importance of examining women's violence within the context of violence by their male partners. Even in relationships in which women were the aggressors, the women usually experienced significant violence from their partners. Women's violent behavior can only be understood when placed in the context of their male partners' violence against them.

In general, the women in this study reported committing substantial levels of abusive behavior. Almost all of the women committed moderate physical violence; 57% committed severe violence, 54% injured their partners, 28% used sexual coercion, and 86% used some form of coercive control. Although women committed equivalent levels of emotional abuse and more moderate physical abuse as compared to their partners, they reported that their male partners committed significantly more of the following classic battering behaviors: sexual coercion, coercive control, injury, and severe physical violence.

The 28% of women who admitted to using sexual coercion is a particularly surprising finding. An examination of the items comprising this subscale reveals that the majority of women who used sexual coercion insisted on sex when their partner did not want to but did not use force (see Table 2). Only 8% of the women used threats to make their partners have sex. In contrast, 46% of the women were victims of sexual coercion, and 14% of the women's partners used threats to make them have sex. Another study conducted with a similar population of women found that 10% of participants admitted to subjecting their partners to forced genital fondling, and 7% said they forced their partners to have intercourse (West & Rose, 2000). Again, the women in the West and Rose (2000) study experienced much higher rates of these types of sexual abuse from their male partners: Sixteen percent had been the victims of forced genital fondling, and 15% were the victims of

forced intercourse. What is not known is how women's commission of unwanted sexual behavior differs from men's and the meaning of these types of experiences for male victims. Does being coerced into unwanted sexual activity have the same consequences for men as it does for women? Future research should examine this issue.

The typology of women's violence that emerged reveals several interesting findings. The first is that although women were selected for the study based on their violent behavior, approximately one third of the sample was classified as victims. Only 12% of the women were aggressors. The women in this study were almost three times as likely to be classified as victims of abuse than as aggressors. Mixed relationships, in which one partner was more violent while the other was more coercive, comprised the largest proportion of relationships (50%). Within the category of mixed relationships, male partners were almost twice as likely to use greater coercive control than women.

An unexpected finding was that female and male aggressors differed little from each other, with the important exception that male aggressors were significantly more coercively controlling than female aggressors. In both the victim and aggressor types, there was a large disparity between partners' frequencies of abuse. These relationships may match Johnson's (2000) intimate terrorism type and suggest that the most dangerous and violent relationships are those with a very skewed distribution of power and control. However, female aggressors—even those who are very violent—still lack the patriarchal power structure that aids male intimate terrorists in achieving absolute control over their victims.

To truly determine if the female aggressors in this study are intimate terrorists, however, we would need to find out if their partners behave like victims. That is, we would need to assess the partner's level of fear of the woman, the extent to which he modifies his behavior to avoid setting her off, the extent to which he feels he is controlled by her, and his sense of disempowerment and helplessness. Even when women are clearly the aggressors in relationships, their male partners may or may not exhibit these types of classic victim responses. In most cases, women simply do not inspire fear in men or succeed in controlling their behavior. Quite a bit of evidence suggests that female victims of male

intimate terrorists exhibit these kinds of victim responses; little is known regarding male victims.

The mixed-female coercive relationships reflect more balanced levels of abuse. In these relationships, women and partners were roughly equivalent in their levels of abuse, although women committed an average of nine more coercive behaviors than partners. These relationships had by far the lowest levels of total abuse as well as the lowest frequencies of abuse by the women and their male partners. Perhaps the relatively balanced levels of abuse in these relationships reflect a balance of power that serves to keep abuse in check; neither partner has the upper hand. These relationships may fit what Johnson (2000) called common couple violence, in which abuse is based more on conflict than a means to maintain control of one's partner.

Mixed-male coercive relationships reflect quite a different pattern. In these relationships, women and partners were also roughly equivalent in their levels of abuse, although men committed an average of 22 more coercive behaviors than the women. These relationships had very high levels of total abuse; in fact, the frequency of total abuse did not differ from the victim or aggressor categories. These relationships do not seem to have the balance of power as in mixed-female coercive relationships. Rather, the male partners seem to have the upper hand. The women may be what Johnson (2000) called *violent resisters*, that is, women who fight physically against a partner who attempts to coercively control them.

The present study suggests that the abusive behaviors that women commit are different from men's abuse. The scales used in this study were designed to assess men's abusive behavior toward women, not women's abusive behaviors. The generally lower reliabilities found for the women's aggression subscales ( $\alpha = .56$  to  $\alpha = .75$ ) as compared to the women's victimization subscales ( $\alpha = .60$  to  $\alpha = .83$ ) suggest that perhaps a new scale particular to women's violence is needed. Koonin and Cabarcas (2000), in their excellent curriculum for use with court-mandated domestically violent women, have developed a comparison of how women's and men's abuse differs. Examples, such as "He uses his physical power/she uses her verbal power," "He raises his fist/she raises a knife," "He controls her spending/she runs up the credit cards," and "He quizzes the kids about her/She

denies visitation" illustrate that abuse, similar to all human behavior, is situated within gender roles and cultural expectations regarding gender.

#### **ETHNICITY, SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS, AND WOMEN'S VIOLENCE**

Seventy-one percent of the participants in this study were African American, and two thirds of the women earned less than \$10,000 per year. Clearly, ethnicity and socioeconomic status are important contextual variables. Although the study did not focus on these variables per se, some literature suggests ways that these contextual factors may impact women's violence. For example, financial stress, poverty, and economically disadvantaged neighborhoods have repeatedly been found to be associated with higher levels of domestic violence (Benson & Fox, 2000; Browne & Bassuk, 1997; Hotaling & Sugarman, 1990; Salomon, 2000). The stress of poverty will almost certainly impact women's as well as men's use of violence with their intimate partners. For poor women living in very disadvantaged neighborhoods, there may be a particularly strong relationship between women's victimization and women's violence. Women (as well as men) in these neighborhoods may be accustomed to using violence as a survival strategy and may be likely to respond with violence to a partner's violence against them or in some cases to initiate violence.

Some literature on intimate partner violence in African American families suggests that gender roles in these families are not as rigid and polarized as the gender roles of Whites and other ethnic groups (Asbury, 1987; Barnes, 1999; Campbell & Gary, 1998; West & Rose, 2000). African American couples may be more egalitarian in some respects (e.g., acceptance of women's employment and more equitable distribution of child care) than other ethnic groups. We speculate that perhaps some of the African American women in this study who were victims of violence may have hit back because the balance of power in their relationships was relatively equal. That is, if the couple believes that women can be strong too, then if he hits her, she has the right to hit him back. Likewise, perhaps some of the African American male partners who did not escalate into severe violence upon being hit by women accepted that if he hit her, he had to expect that she would

retaliate in kind. Some have speculated that African American women have relatively greater access to economic resources as compared to African American men and therefore may be less tolerant of abuse and may be empowered to retaliate with violence (Hampton, Gelles, & Harrop, 1989). This area is clearly in need of further study.

### LIMITATIONS

The present study relied on women's self-reports for estimates of the women's commission of abusive behaviors as well as their male partner's behavior. How reliable are the women's self-reports? Studies comparing couples' reports of abuse suggest an answer. Archer (1999) conducted a meta-analysis of six studies that assessed correlations between couples' reports of each other's abusive behaviors. The meta-analysis found significant, moderate-sized correlations between men's and women's reports of women's abuse (.53) and men's abuse (.55). In most cases, asking one person about the abuse of both himself/herself and the partner will probably yield a somewhat accurate but incomplete assessment of the abuse (Heckert & Gondolf, 1997).

The present study assessed social desirability in an attempt to compensate for any underreporting of the women's (or their partners') abuse. Consistent with the literature (Sugarman & Hotaling, 1997), we found significant, small-to-moderate correlations with women's aggression, indicating that women who wished to appear more socially desirable reported less aggression. Social desirability was not related to women's reports of their partners' aggression toward them (with the exception of a small negative correlation with emotional abuse). However, subsequent analyses taking the effect of social desirability into account did not change the basic pattern of results. But is the desire to appear socially acceptable what drives women's (and men's) underreports of their abusive behavior? This question needs to be examined in further research. Future studies should also compare data from both partners in addition to social desirability measures to explore how to obtain the best estimate of abuse.

This study used the controversial Conflict Tactics Scale, which has been criticized for its failure to measure the context, meaning,

and motive behind the abusive acts it details (Schwartz, 2000). The contextual and motivational data collected in this study are reported elsewhere (Swan, 2000) and certainly are essential to understanding women's (and men's) violence. The Conflict Tactics Scale also does not measure coercive control, which we and others argue is absolutely critical to understanding abuse in relationships (Stark, 2000). However, it is interesting to note how much can be learned simply by measuring other categories of abuse besides physical violence, including sexual abuse, injury, emotional abuse, and coercion (measured in the present study by the Psychological Maltreatment of Women Inventory). Although this study used the same frequency-based items that have been the object of so much criticism, the results are rich with gender differences that make theoretical sense.

Finally, this study examined violence in heterosexual relationships. The factors related to violence in lesbian relationships may vary along important dimensions. Most relevant to this article, it would be interesting to see if the typology found here applied to abusive lesbian relationships.

## CONCLUSIONS

The typology that emerged from this study has important applications for practitioners who work with women who are domestically violent. Clearly, all violent women are not alike, just as all violent men are not alike. A woman who is arrested for domestic violence but is clearly a victim needs a different intervention than a woman who is clearly an aggressor. Just as one-size-fits-all interventions for domestically violent men have been criticized (Holtzworth-Munroe & Stuart, 1994), interventions for domestically violent women need to take these contextual factors into account.

Furthermore, coercive control is a critical component of domestic violence that is often overlooked as practitioners concentrate on addressing the physical violence. However, some evidence suggests that coercion may be at least as damaging to victims' psychological health as physical abuse (Stark & Flitcraft, 1996). In the present study, women who were more violent than their male partners were not uncommon: Fifty-eight percent of the women used just as much or more physical violence than their partners.

However, many fewer women were more coercive than their male partners; only 30% used just as much or more coercion. Once again, abuse is situated within gender roles and cultural expectations regarding gender. What is it about the female gender role that is more permissive of physical violence by women than coercive control?

This article provides a first step in understanding the different types of women's violence and argues that women's violence needs to be understood in the context of male violence and abuse. The study also illustrates the need for theory development in this area that examines the motivations, broader social and cultural context, antecedents, and outcomes of women's violence as well as how women's aggression differs from men's aggression.

## NOTES

1. If the difference between the woman's and man's score was less than one fourth standard deviation but the man's score was 0 and the woman's score was greater than 0, the woman would be classified as more violent than the partner on that category of abuse. Similarly, if the difference between the woman's and man's score was less than one fourth standard deviation but the woman's score was 0 and the man's score was greater than 0, the man would be classified as more violent than the woman on that category of abuse.

2. If there was no severe violence committed by either the woman or her partner, the difference score on moderate violence was used instead. Twenty of the 108 women reported no severe violence.

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