Situational determinants in intimate partner violence\textsuperscript{☆}

Deanna L. Wilkinson\textsuperscript{*,} Susan J. Hamerschlag

Department of Criminal Justice, Temple University, 1115 W. Berks Street (025-02), Philadelphia, PA 19122, USA

Received 27 May 2003; received in revised form 17 February 2004; accepted 5 May 2004

Abstract

A situational or event perspective examines the connections between unfolding events and their surrounding contexts. This perspective offers great promise for increasing our understanding of violence among intimate partners, yet, has been rarely applied to this problem. Using such an approach, this review summarizes what is known in this area and highlights gaps in our knowledge about the connections between specific event characteristics. Surprisingly, domestic violence researchers rarely examine domestic violence events per se. We suggest ways of doing this: By collecting rich data on the heterogeneity of violent events among intimate partners, we can close outstanding gaps in our knowledge of this problem.

© 2004 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

Keywords: Intimate violence; Event perspective; Situational factors; Weapons; Alcohol or drug use; Police

Contents

1. Introduction ............................................. 334
2. Theoretical framework: The interactionist or event perspective on violence. .................. 335
3. What is known about situational factors in IPV? .................................................. 335
   3.1. The relationship matters. .................................................................................................................. 335
   3.2. Situational definitions: Reasons, sparks, and motivations. ..................................................... 345
   3.3. Control ........................................................................................................................................... 346
   3.4. Jealousy and threats to the relationship ..................................................................................... 346
   3.5. Self-defense ..................................................................................................................................... 347
   3.6. Threats to identity ...................................................................................................................... 347

\textsuperscript{☆} A previous version of this paper was delivered to the National Academy of Science, National Research Council’s Violence Against Women Workshop, January, 2002.

* Corresponding author. Tel.: +1-215-204-7918.

E-mail address: deanna.wilkinson@temple.edu (D.L. Wilkinson).

1359-1789/$ – see front matter © 2004 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.
doi:10.1016/j.avb.2004.05.001
1. Introduction

Considerable evidence suggests a common set of situational, individual, and structural factors under a variety of violent situations, including violence in intimate relationships (Felson, 1993; Felson, 1996; Felson, Baumer, & Messner, 2000; Felson & Messner, 1998; Felson & Steadman, 1983; Luckenbill, 1977; Wilkinson, 2003). Many scholars, nonetheless, argue that a separate theory of intimate partner violence (IPV) is needed (Straus, 1999). It is our belief that existing perspectives generally applied to violence outside the home can be applied to violence in intimate relationships.

This review assesses the utility of one perspective largely ignored (see Dobash & Dobash, 1979, 1984; Eisikovits & Buchbinder, 2000; Eisikovits & Winstok, 2001). For reasons clarified below, we think that an event perspective can advance our understanding of IPV. To move such an agenda forward, we start by describing the event perspective framework. Then, we summarize work from several disciplines delineating the most relevant event domains: the nature and status of the relationship between offender(s) and victim(s), the motivations or sparks for dispute situations, the location, sequential actions of the actors, weapon use, the role of third parties, the role of substance use, law enforcement actions, event outcomes, event aftermaths, and the interactions of these domains. Next, reflecting on these domains, we consider the IPV
literature. We note that although many studies attempt to explore the role of these domains, they try to do so by examining the domain outside the context of the violent event. The majority of studies have gathered some evidence on a few situational domains while primarily pursuing other research questions. Thus, there is little known about interactions within and across domains. As shown in Table 1, most of the data on situational factors in IPV come from cross-sectional studies, relying on purposive samples of female victims only, official data sources such as the SHR, or a few experimental studies. Despite the volume of work to date, our understanding of the situational determinants in IPV is incomplete. We conclude by discussing the methodological issues associated with studying IPV from an event perspective.

2. Theoretical framework: The interactionist or event perspective on violence

Studying violence from an event perspective combines the study of offenders, victims, and social context to yield a more complete picture of its etiology (Meier, Kennedy, & Sacco, 2001). The event perspective considers the coproduction by victim(s), offender(s), and others of a violence experience. It emphasizes event precursors, the event as it unfolds, and the aftermath, including reporting, harm, and redress. The event perspective integrates concepts from symbolic interactionism, routine activity, and rational choice theories. Research from an event perspective on violent events among nonintimates shows that they can be explained by interactions between actors, situational context, and event facilitators (Felson, 1993; Luckenbill, 1977; Oliver, 1994; Wilkinson, 2003).

3. What is known about situational factors in IPV?

In this section, we review the literature on IPV through an event, or situational, perspective lens. We discuss the available data on violent events among intimates and identify the gaps in our current knowledge surrounding specific situational variables. We begin our discussion by focusing on how the nature of the relationship between the actors shapes violent events. Next, we describe the circumstances or sparks of violent events, the interactional exchange between intimates, including decision-making processes, the role of physical and social space, the role of third parties, weapon type and use, alcohol and drug use, the role of law enforcement, the event outcomes, and the aftermaths of violent events. There is little available information about how situational variables may have moderating impacts.

3.1. The relationship matters

The victim–offender relationship is a critical aspect for understanding violent events. A prior victim–offender relationship can affect the manner in which the actors behave towards...
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author(s)</th>
<th>Methodology and sample characteristics</th>
<th>Research question/purpose</th>
<th>Situational domain</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Babcock et al. (1993)</td>
<td>Experiment: 95 couples</td>
<td>Examined the link between power discrepancies in the marital relationship and violence; compared violent to nonviolent</td>
<td>Spark communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barnett et al. (1995)</td>
<td>Experiment: 180 males in cohabiting relationships</td>
<td>Examined whether maritally violent men are more jealous than maritally nonviolent men are</td>
<td>Spark: jealousy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baumgartner (1993)</td>
<td>Review of the ethnographic literature on domestic conflict cross culturally</td>
<td>Examined the role of third parties across cultures</td>
<td>Third parties</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Berk et al. (1983)</td>
<td>Two hundred sixty-two “domestic disturbance” incidents (heterosexual romantic relationships only), in which police were called</td>
<td>Explore the concept of mutual combat in intimate partner violence</td>
<td>Relationship matters; alcohol: third parties</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Berk et al. (1992)</td>
<td>Field experiments conducted in four cities—Milwaukee, WI, Omaha, NE, Dade County (Miami), FL, and Colorado Springs, CO</td>
<td>Examined the deterrent effect of arrest in incidents of spouse abuse</td>
<td>Police</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Block and Christakos (1995)</td>
<td>Included 2556 homicides in a 29-year Chicago intimate partner homicide data set</td>
<td>Examined long-term trends in homicide in Chicago</td>
<td>Relationship matters; spark: weapon type: alcohol</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Block et al. (2001)</td>
<td>Evaluation research: 210 Chicago women who had experienced violence by an intimate partner in the past year</td>
<td>Examined the effects of collective efficacy and community capacity to make a difference for battered women</td>
<td>Spark: place and time: weapon type: third parties; police, aftermath</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boyle and Vivian (1996)</td>
<td>Included 263 heterosexual couples, men seeking conjoint marital therapy, 49 community comparison matched on demographics. Reports of male violence were provided by both spouses</td>
<td>Focus on understanding the relationship between anger and violence. Perceptions of their general problem-solving skills as well as spouse-specific assertiveness skills</td>
<td>Spark communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Browne (1987)</td>
<td>Interviews with 42 U.S. women in 15 states who were charged with the murder or attempted murder of their mates. Compared to 200 other</td>
<td>Examined the contextual and situational factors that distinguished women who killed from women who did not kill their abusive partner</td>
<td>Third parties</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Author(s)</td>
<td>Methodology and sample characteristics</td>
<td>Research question/purpose</td>
<td>Situational domain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Browne (1987)</td>
<td>physically abused American women who did not kill their abusers</td>
<td>Examined trends and patterns in intimate homicide by disaggregating on key variables, e.g., relationship type</td>
<td>Place and time; weapon type: third parties</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burman et al. (1992)</td>
<td>Included 79 married couples; four types: physically aggressive, verbally aggressive, withdrawing, and nondistressed low-conflict couples</td>
<td>Examined interaction patterns of couples to identify differences across couple type</td>
<td>Roles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burman, Margolin, and John (1993)</td>
<td>Videotaped interactions in homes; 65 married couples. Four types: physically aggressive, verbally aggressive, withdrawing, and nondistressed low-conflict couples</td>
<td>Examined conflict styles of couples by type</td>
<td>Roles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cahn (1996)</td>
<td>Theory paper, outlines communication perspective</td>
<td>Offers some insights into dimensions of communication–aggression relationship</td>
<td>Spark identity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delsol, Margolin, and John (2003)</td>
<td>Latent class analysis; 153 couples were recruited from a large urban area</td>
<td>Tests the typology of male batterers of Holtzworth-Monroe and Stuart (1994) in a community sample.</td>
<td>Roles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dobash and Dobash (1979)</td>
<td>In-depth interviews with 109 women found in shelters in Scotland; reported on first, worst, last, and typical event. Also analyzed 933 police record cases of intimate violence</td>
<td>Examined the nature of violence against wives; grounded the problem in the legacy of patriarchy; uses a contextual approach to studying the problem.</td>
<td>Roles, spark, third parties, aftermath</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dobash and Dobash (1984)</td>
<td>In-depth interviews with 109 women found in shelters in Scotland; reported on first, worst, last, and typical event. Also analyzed 933 police record cases of intimate violence</td>
<td>A context-specific study of wife battering</td>
<td>Roles, spark, third parties, aftermath</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 1 (continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author(s)</th>
<th>Methodology and sample characteristics</th>
<th>Research question/purpose</th>
<th>Situational domain</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>17 Dobash et al. (1992)</td>
<td>A review article</td>
<td>Criticism of studies using homicide data and CTS to claim that intimate violence is symmetrical.</td>
<td>Spark identity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18 Dugan et al. (2003)</td>
<td>SHR 48 largest cities, resource data generated from survey and document review</td>
<td>Examined the extent to which social responses to domestic violence have impacted the problem.</td>
<td>Aftermath</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19 Eisikovits (1996)</td>
<td>In-depth interviews with 30 couples in Israel</td>
<td>Phenomenological study of violence among married couples in Israel</td>
<td>Relationship matters; aftermath</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20 Eisikovits and Buchbinder (2000, 1996)</td>
<td>Eighty in-depth interviews with 40 couples; unit of analysis is the couple</td>
<td>Phenomenological study of violence among married couples in Israel</td>
<td>Relationship matters; spark; third parties: police</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21 Eisikovits and Winstok (2001)</td>
<td>Sixty in-depth interviews with 30 couples; Policing handling study</td>
<td>Phenomenological study of violence among married couples in Israel</td>
<td>Relationship matters; spark; third parties; police, aftermath</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22 Fagan (1989)</td>
<td>Review paper</td>
<td>Examined the empirical evidence on the cessation of violence in the home</td>
<td>Spark, aftermath</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24 Fagan and Browne (1994)</td>
<td>Review paper</td>
<td>Examined the state of knowledge in the field crossing a broad range of data and topics</td>
<td>Spark, aftermath</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25 Fagan et al. (1983)</td>
<td>Included 270 face-to-face interviews with victims of domestic violence recruited from counseling or shelter service programs in four cities; 1980–1981</td>
<td>Examined the question of whether men are violent generally or just in their intimate relationships by looking at background and situational factors</td>
<td>Roles, alcohol, aftermath</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26 Felson (1996)</td>
<td>Analyses of 69 cases of nonweapon homicide among intimates</td>
<td>Examined the role of physical size and strength on victim precipitation</td>
<td>Roles; weapon type</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27 Felson et al. (2002)</td>
<td>Included 9176 victimization incidents between 1992 and 1998 collected by the National Criminal Victimization Survey</td>
<td>Examined factors that encourage and inhibit victims of domestic violence from calling the police</td>
<td>Police</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28 Felson and Messner (2000)</td>
<td>Included 2597 'pure' assaults involving a single unarmed offender and a</td>
<td>Examined the issue of threats proceeding violence to exert control.</td>
<td>Spark</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Author(s)</td>
<td>Methodology and sample characteristics</td>
<td>Research question/purpose</td>
<td>Situational domain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28 Felson and Messner (2000)</td>
<td>single victim reported in the National Crime Victimization Survey</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29 Felson and Messner (1998)</td>
<td>Included 2058 homicide cases in prosecutors’ files in the 75 most populated counties in the U.S.</td>
<td>Examined the role of victim precipitation in intimate partner violence</td>
<td>Spark</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30 Felson et al. (1999)</td>
<td>Data were derived from 1992–1994 U.S. NCVS incident files. Excluding robbery, rape, and burglary</td>
<td>Examined the effects of the victim’s relationship to the offender on the reporting of assaults to the police by either the victim or by third parties</td>
<td>Third parties, police</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31 Gottman and Levenson (1999a)</td>
<td>Experiment: 79 couples, longitudinal data over 4 years</td>
<td>Examined the predictors of deterioration in affective marital interaction over a 4-year period</td>
<td>Roles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33 Harris (1993)</td>
<td>Included 229 female and 187 male undergraduate students</td>
<td>Examined the differences in anger-provoking behaviors and in verbal insults as a function of gender</td>
<td>Spark identity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34 Hofeiler (1982)</td>
<td>Sample: experimental group (N=50)—some history as victims of wife beating comparison group (N=50)—in nonviolent marriages</td>
<td>Examined the psychological, social, and situational factors in wife abuse</td>
<td>Spark: weapon type: third parties</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35 Holtzworth-Munroe and Anglin (1991)</td>
<td>Experiment: three groups of husbands: 22 maritally violent and distressed, 17 nonviolent but maritally distressed, and 17 nonviolent and nondistressed</td>
<td>Examined the social skills of maritally violent men in responding to scenarios of potential marital conflicts</td>
<td>Spark</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36 Holtzworth-Munroe and Hutchinson (1993)</td>
<td>Experiment: three groups of husbands: 22 maritally violent and distressed, 17 nonviolent but maritally</td>
<td>Examined men’s attributions for negative wife behavior</td>
<td>Spark</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(continued on next page)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author(s)</th>
<th>Methodology and sample characteristics</th>
<th>Research question/purpose</th>
<th>Situational domain</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>36 Holtzworth-Munroe and Hutchinson (1993)</td>
<td>distressed, and 17 nonviolent and nondistressed</td>
<td>Examined the role of children as witnesses to intimate partner violence</td>
<td>3rd parties</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>37 Hutchinson and Hirschel (2001)</td>
<td>Extensive face-to-face interviews with 419 women in Charlotte, NC, who had reported to the police that they were involved in a misdemeanor spousal abuse incident</td>
<td>Tested the hypothesis that verbal aggression is a catalyst to violence when societal, personal, and situational factors are strong enough to produce a hostile predisposition.</td>
<td>Spark</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>38 Infante, Chandler, and Rudd (1989)</td>
<td>Comparative study of 60 abused wives found in one of four shelters in a midwestern state; 53 abusive husbands in group therapy SW part of same state; 82 nonabused women recruited in waiting rooms of doctor’s offices; and 80 male college students or factory workers.</td>
<td>Examined the affect, psychophysiology, and verbal content of arguments in couples with a violent husband. Looked at how wife behavior effect husband violence</td>
<td>Spark, roles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40 Johnson (1995)</td>
<td>Analyzed FBI UCR data on homicides in the U.S. between 1976 and 1987. A total of 215,273 homicides were studied</td>
<td>Examined the potential differences that distinguish homicides involving women as victims or offenders from those involving men</td>
<td>Weapon type, relationship matters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41 Kellermann and Mercy (1992)</td>
<td>Included 1860 homicides in Tennessee, Washington, and Ohio, interviewed proxy, compared with selected controls who were matched by demographic variables, generating a set of 388 matched pairs of homicide cases</td>
<td>Risk factors for homicide in the home</td>
<td>Weapon type, alcohol</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Author(s)</td>
<td>Methodology and sample characteristics</td>
<td>Research question/purpose</td>
<td>Situational domain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>43</strong> Leonard and Roberts (1998)</td>
<td>Experiment: 60 maritally aggressive and 75 nonaggressive men and their wives</td>
<td>Examined the marital interactions of couples under different conditions of alcohol consumption in the laboratory setting</td>
<td>Alcohol</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>44</strong> Leonard and Senchak (1996)</td>
<td>Longitudinal Buffalo Newlywed Study (BNS): 541 couples. Couples applying for a marriage license were recruited for a paid interview (US$5). 76% of those approached successfully completed the initial interview; 10% dropped out by Time 2.</td>
<td>Examined the social interactional model of husband marital aggression prospectively.</td>
<td>Roles, alcohol</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>45</strong> Lloyd (1999); Lloyd and Emery (2000)</td>
<td>Interviews with 43 women who were physically or sexually victimized by a man in dating or courtship situation. Recruited through flyers.</td>
<td>Examined relational courtship aggression specifically connections among power dynamics, verbal aggression, interaction patterns, issues of control and relationship dynamics, and physical aggression</td>
<td>Relationship matters; spark; spark communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>47</strong> Makepeace (1997)</td>
<td>Theory paper outlining integrated developmental theory</td>
<td>Study courtship as a process</td>
<td>Relationship matters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>48</strong> Margolin and Burman (1993)</td>
<td>Review of intervention programs for wife abuse</td>
<td>Efficacy of programs</td>
<td>Roles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>49</strong> Margolin, Burman, and John (1989)</td>
<td>Experiment: 73 couples: 17 physically aggressive (PA), 17 verbally aggressive (VA), 21 withdrawing (WI), and 18 nondistressed, low conflict (ND)</td>
<td>Examined natural progression of conflict styles in couples</td>
<td>Roles</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(continued on next page)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author(s)</th>
<th>Methodology and sample characteristics</th>
<th>Research question/purpose</th>
<th>Situational domain</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>50 Margolin, John, and Gleberman (1988)</td>
<td>Experiment: 78 couples: 19 physically aggressive (PA), 18 verbally aggressive (VA), 22 withdrawing (WI), and 19 nondistressed, low conflict (ND)</td>
<td>Compared the affective responses of couples during two 10-min problem-oriented discussions</td>
<td>Roles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>51 Maxwell et al. (2002)</td>
<td>Included 4032 cases drawn from Minneapolis’s Spouse Assault Replication Program (SARP). Victim interviews and other sources.</td>
<td>Examined the deterrent effect of arrest in spouse assault</td>
<td>Police</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>52 Miles-Doan (1998)</td>
<td>1992 Law enforcement data for Duval City, FL, and the 1990 U.S. Census</td>
<td>Examined the role that neighborhood context plays in explaining difference in intimate partner violence compared with other violence.</td>
<td>Third parties</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>56 Ptacek (1997)</td>
<td>Random sample of 100 cases filed in 1992; women seeking restraining orders; included original complaint forms and the court orders filed by judges</td>
<td>Analyzed the motives of men who batter from the perspectives of the women they battered</td>
<td>Relationship matters: weapon type</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>58 Renzetti (1997)</td>
<td>Literature review</td>
<td>Stressed importance of acknowledging the problem and doing research in the area. Discussed complex intervention issues in a homophobic society</td>
<td>Relationship matters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Author(s)</td>
<td>Methodology and sample characteristics</td>
<td>Research question/purpose</td>
<td>Situational domain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rosen (1996)</td>
<td>Qualitative interviews with 22 women who survived violent premarital relationships; recruited through newspaper ads, flyers reaching the general public as well as university students and referrals by clinicians.</td>
<td>Examined the seduction process in dating relationships that became abusive and the factors that galvanized women’s commitment to the relationships despite abuse</td>
<td>Relationship matters, spark identity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saltzman et al. (1992)</td>
<td>SHR</td>
<td></td>
<td>Weapon type</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sherman and Berk (1984a)</td>
<td>Field experiment testing the effects of arrest, advice, order to leave: sample of 314 cases; 205 completed interviews (1981–1982)</td>
<td>Examined the deterrent effect of arrest in misdemeanor spouse assault</td>
<td>Police</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sherman and Berk (1984b)</td>
<td>Field experiment testing the effects of arrest, advice, order to leave: sample of 314 cases; 205 completed interviews (1981–1982)</td>
<td>Examined the deterrent effect of arrest in misdemeanor spouse assault</td>
<td>Police</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sherman and Cohn (1989)</td>
<td>A survey of police agencies in 117 cities</td>
<td>Examined the extent to which police policy had changed in light of the Minneapolis Domestic Violence Experiment</td>
<td>Police</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sherman, Smith, Schmidt, and Rogan (1992)</td>
<td>Experiment conducted in 1987–1988, involved 1200 cases of misdemeanor domestic battery in four Milwaukee districts. Victim interview and arrest data.</td>
<td>Test of deterrence vs. labeling theory</td>
<td>Police</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
each other and shapes what each expects the other will say and do before, during, and after
the event. Despite the central influence of the intimate relationship on violent incidents, few
studies examine the qualities of those relationships.

When examining this domain, researchers often rely on official data, such as the Uniform
Crime Reports (UCR). For all forms of interpersonal violence, the victim–offender relationship
is most often treated as a dichotomous variable—stranger versus nonstranger—and thus, data
sources such as the UCR provide little information about the relationship. Furthermore, even
this minimal relationship variable is undetermined or missing in a large number of cases (see
Regoeczi & Riedel, 2003).

Self-report data better capture relationship qualities (Felson et al., 2000; Felson & Messner,
2000). For example, Felson et al. (2000), using data from the NCVS, analyze four categories
of the victim–offender relationship in robberies: family members (combining spouses, ex-
spouses, romantic partners, and ex-partners), nonfamily acquaintances (combining friends
and other well-known acquaintances, including neighbors, roommates, schoolmates, and
coworkers), acquaintances recognized by sight only, and strangers.

There have been some other improvements. Greenfield et al. (1998) operationalized the
relationship variable in domestic violence using NCVS and NIBRS data by aggregating the
data into three categories: spouse, ex-spouse, and other intimate. Within public health, the
National Electronic Injury Surveillance System (NEISS) includes four general categories with
more specific subcategories for additional clarity: stranger, acquaintance (friend, inmate/
patient, and other known), intimate (spouse, ex-spouse, and boyfriend/girlfriend), and other family (parent, child, sibling, and other relative; see Greenfield et al., 1998; Wiebe, 2003a).

For violence between intimates, the quality and stage of the relationship might be as or more important than the general relationship category. Violence affects many types of intimate relationships, ranging from unrequited interest to remarried to divorced (Makepeace, 1997; Moffitt, Krueger, Caspi, & Fagan, 2000; Renzetti, 1997; Tjaden & Thoennes, 2000). Relationships evolve; static-type variables are thus potentially problematic. Dobash and Dobash (1979, 1984) categorized 314 assaults perpetrated by husbands (first, worst, last, and typical) reported by 109 women and 513 cases content analyzed from police record data. They explored the role of violence in shaping the relationship over time. Based on their interviews with couples (male–female) in Israel, Eisikovits and Buchbinder (2000) disentangled the processes transforming violent events into a violent way of life over the course of the relationship. Thus, over time, it seems that violence shapes the relationship, and vice versa.

Abuse incidents are most severe after the couple has separated (Block & Christakos, 1995; Browne, Williams, & Dutton, 1999; Ptacek, 1997; Rennison & Welchans, 2000). A variety of studies have reported that estrangement plays a role in anywhere from 25% to 52% of intimate partner homicides of women (Browne et al., 1999; Crawford & Gartner, 1992; Goetting, 1995; Stout, 1993). Lethal violence motivated by estrangement reportedly occurs soon after the separation—within the first year (Wallace, 1986; Wilson & Daly, 1993) and, often, in less than 1 month (Stout, 1993). Block and Christakos (1995) found that males were more likely to kill their partner when the woman threatened or attempted to leave. Never having lived with an abusive partner protects against continued violence (Block, Skogan, Fugate, & Devitt, 2001). Berk, Berk, Loseke, and Rauma (1983) found that the use of restraining orders increases the likelihood that women will experience subsequent severe beatings compared with women who did not seek restraining orders. These studies suggest that having resided with an abusive partner may place women in greater danger when attempting to leave the relationship.

In summary, measurement of victim–offender relationships are complicated by inconsistent definitions, lack of precise indicators for relationship status and dynamics, and reliance on cross-sectional data from convenience samples of female victims. Future research efforts therefore need to examine not only the nature of the relationship, but also how individual-level characteristics interact, how the characteristics of the dyad influence interaction patterns, and how these factors change over time. Longitudinal research on violent couples with careful attention to relationship shifts and violent behavior within relationships and across victim–offender relationship (dyad) types would advance the field.

3.2. Situational definitions: Reasons, sparks, and motivations

The motivations or justifications offered to make sense of violent events are critical. Researchers have not moved far beyond Wolfgang’s “unsatisfactory taxonomy of motives” (Daly & Wilson, 1988, p. 173). Data on circumstances, motivations, or sparks for IPV come primarily from studies relying on small nonprobability samples, where victims provide the only report. The evidence is lean. To understand catalysts of violent events, we must examine
perceived imbalances in power, control dynamics, relationship problems, and communication patterns (Lloyd & Emery, 2000).

Dobash and Dobash (1984) reported the following frequency of sources for “typical” events among their sample: possessiveness and sexual jealousy (45%), expectations about domestic work (16%), money (18%), status problems (3%), sexual refusal (2%), woman’s attempt to leave (0%), relatives and friends (4%), husband’s drinking behavior (6%), children (4%), and other sources (3%). Interestingly, police record data corresponded more closely to the worst or last events, with less possessiveness and sexual jealousy (12%), more expectations about domestic work (37%), and notably more attempts by women to leave (17%). These differences reinforce the importance of collecting longitudinal event-level data (Dobash & Dobash, 1984, p. 273, Table 2).

Lloyd and Emery (2000) identified three prominent themes: threats to the relationship, stressful life events, and alcohol/drug use. The range of actions that led to a violent outcome “was precipitated by the woman engaging in a casual conversation with people waiting at a bus stop, wearing the ‘wrong’ clothes or too much makeup, saying no to the man’s sexual advances, an argument over drinking, and the woman’s request to go home early, to name just a few” (Lloyd & Emery, 2000, p. 51). Cross-cultural studies suggest sexual jealousy or infidelity sparks about half of these incidents and perceived that wifely duty failure accounts for about another quarter (Fagan & Browne, 1994, p. 121).

3.3. Control

Violent criminals (e.g., armed robbers) like having control over their victims (Wright & Decker, 1997). Felson and Messner (1998) argue that male attacks on female partners are especially likely to involve the control motive. Men are likely to issue threats before using violence in an attempt to change the woman’s behavior; threats of violence precede attacks in about half of the incidents (Felson & Messner, 2000). In intimate partnerships, violence links to control in four ways: domination of the argument, domination of the woman and the relationship, preventing the woman from leaving the relationship, and ownership and extreme control of the woman’s body (Lloyd & Emery, 2000).

3.4. Jealousy and threats to the relationship

Sexual jealousy is estimated to spark IPV between 7% and 41% of the time, depending on the data source (Barnett, Martinez, & Bluestein, 1995). Female victims of violence often indicate that jealousy was a key attacker motivation (Hofeiler, 1982; Lloyd & Emery, 2000). Block et al. (2001) found that 86% of the 210 women reported that their partner was jealous and did not want the woman talking to other men or women. Extreme incessant jealousy decreases the likelihood of violence cessation. Several studies consider sexual jealousy from the male point of view (Barnett et al., 1995; Holtzworth-Munroe & Anglin, 1991; Holtzworth-Munroe & Hutchinson, 1993). These studies tell us that maritally violent men are more jealous than their nonviolent counterparts are, and that jealous men attribute more negative motivations to women’s behaviors. Unfortunately, these studies focus on jealousy as an individual character-
istic rather than on how jealousy is evoked in a potentially violent situation. We need to learn, from the men’s and women’s perspectives, what triggers jealousy, what keeps it going, and when it does or does not feed violence.

3.5. Self-defense

When researchers began finding that women engage in violence in intimate relationships at similar rates as men, self-defense was often cited as the reason for the women’s acts of violence (Dobash & Dobash, 1979; Dobash, Dobash, Wilson, & Daly, 1992). Domestic homicides by women often involve a lethal assault upon a batterer whom the victim believes may kill her or her children if not stopped preemptively (Browne, 1987). Do women use violence only when violence is used against them, or is it also an attempt to prevent future physical harm and/or a sense of self within the abusive relationship (Emery & Lloyd, 1994)? Self-defense is a common feature in homicides committed by females, regardless of the relationship to the victim (Felson & Messner, 1998). Estimates regarding the use of self-defense in nonfatal incidents of IPV are currently inadequate. Therefore, it is impossible at this stage to assess the validity of the self-defense hypothesis as an explanation for women’s levels of violence in intimate relationships as equal those of men’s.

3.6. Threats to identity

Our social identities intertwine with our intimate relationships. Gender roles and traditional notions about the unequal power relationships between men and women make identity construction in intimate relationships a potential source of conflict (Straus, 1999). Identity concerns in intimate communication “include self-esteem, sexual esteem, a male’s manhood or masculinity, a female’s womanhood or femininity, impression formation and management, egocentrisms, appearing to be in control of others, perceptions of oneself, and traditional stereotypes regarding sex roles” (Cahn, 1996). The content of insults used to attack the identity of either males or females varies according to traditional gender roles (Harris, 1993). Romantic ideals, cultural messages about getting and maintaining relationships “at all costs” for women, and love story fantasies undergird contexts where staying in an abusive relationship becomes deeply entangled with personal identity for women (Rosen, 1996).

Another aspect of identity relates specifically to how violence and its meanings transform personal identities. Both victims and abusers have difficulty accepting a violent or victim identity (Eisikovits & Buchbinder, 2000). Violence also affects the identity of the couple as a unit. When it becomes publicly exposed, the relationship’s status as “normal” or “healthy” can be jeopardized (Eisikovits & Buchbinder, 2000).

3.7. Communication and argumentativeness

What precedes the violent event, and how does it connect to the event itself and help us understand the latter? Arguments precede about 80% of domestic violent events.
Batterers often call attention to women’s verbal aggression preceding physical violence (Eisikovits & Buchbinder, 2000). Given this connection, physical aggression may be “a conflict negotiation strategy that is enacted when other strategies have failed and the conflict has escalated out of control” (Lloyd & Emery, 2000, p. 56).

If it is true that violence among intimates is often the result of an argument that has escalated out of control, it becomes imperative to understand the communication patterns of the couple and the couple’s problem-solving capabilities, which may be deficient (Babcock, Waltz, Jacobson, & Gottman, 1993; Boyle & Vivian, 1996; Lloyd, 1999). Such deficits can affect the occurrence of violence if partners feel violence is the only dispute resolution option available.

Knowledge about the motivations and provocations of violence among intimates is complicated by who reports on motivation/provocation, often divergent interpretations or meanings attached to violent or potential violent situations by women and men in couples, and a failure in most studies to examine individual, dyadic, and event characteristics in the same study. Psychologists have made considerable headway in identifying personality traits that distinguish violent from nonviolent couples, but more empirical work needs to be done to explore the heterogeneity of motivations/provocations of violent events among intimates.

3.8. The violence process: Roles and sequential patterns

Violence, regardless of the particular context, is an interactive and perhaps goal-driven process (Tedeschi & Felson, 1994). Violence is often an escalation of reciprocal actions—verbal and physical (Dobash & Dobash, 1979). Interaction patterns between violent partners are most often reciprocal in a downward spiral: Negative behavior by one is followed by a negative counter attack (Burman, Margolin, & John, 1992; Gottman & Levenson, 1999a, 1999b; Margolin & Burman, 1993). There may be specific stages: verbal until the male feels threatened, female attempts to avoid attack, then violence (Dobash & Dobash, 1984). The violent escalation process between intimate partners can be viewed in a debts and balances framework (Eisikovits & Winstok, 2001).

A prominent feminist theory asserts that the violence between intimates is a continuous cycle of battering (Walker, 1984), which consists of three stages: “tension-building,” when the woman “walks on egg shells,” the “acute battering incident,” and the aftermath, when the batterer turns kind and contrite. The length of each of the three stages changes over time, as batterers become less likely to apologize and more likely to engage in victim blaming with the passage of time (Walker, 1983). But the model needs information from both males and females for full validation; others question the aftermath stage (Dobash & Dobash, 1984).

Consistent with other types of violence, researchers have found that victim behavior can increase the likelihood of attack. In a longitudinal study of 541 newly married couples, Leonard and Senchak (1996) found that marital conflict styles, husband alcohol use, and wife hostility account were predictors of marital aggression. In a study of 69 nonweapon homicide cases, Felson (1996) found that retaliation or counterattack did not occur as frequently as
expected and, when it did occur (in 25% of cases), men were more likely to retaliate when attacked by women than vice versa. Similarly, Straus (1993) found that when women used violence against an intimate partner, they faced an increased probability of retaliatory beating.

In reporting these data, the authors are not attempting to place blame on those enduring the violence committed by intimate partners. Rather, these data are explored to show that the characteristics and actions of both actors (those using violence and those enduring the violence) are important to consider when examining the context of the violent incident. The event framework places emphasis on the dynamics between actors in specific situational contexts. Women’s participation or involvement in violent relationships does not translate into provocation. By disentangling the role of individual characteristics, such as negative emotionality, dyad characteristics, conflict styles, and situational context variables, in instances of IPV, we may be better able to identify intervention points with couples.

3.9. Spatial patterns of IPV

Spatial and temporal patterns of violence are important from an event or situational perspective because these contextual variables potentially capture information about how violence is distributed across actors’ routine activities and life space. As expected, most IPV occurs in private dwellings and, most frequently, at the victim’s home. Current research using national level data has shown that anywhere from 63% to 80% of domestic violence incidents occurred in or near the victim’s home (Greenfield et al., 1998; Rennison & Welchans, 2000). Greenfield et al. (1998) found that 15% of incidents occurred in public settings, and Rennison and Welchans (2000) found that 8% of female victims and 11% of male victims were killed in public spaces. Dobash and Dobash (1984) found that 13% of self-reported violent events and 19% of official record cases occurred in a public setting.

Despite the consistence of these findings, our understanding of the role of place in IPV remains narrow. There are many unanswered questions in this domain. For example, was the contact between the actors routine or engineered by the abuser? Was the place legally off-limits to either partner via an order of protection? Was the victim trying escape, hide, or find a “safe place” away from the abuser? Again, longitudinal data from intimates are needed to disentangle these issues.

3.10. Type of weapon and weapon use

Although weapon-use violence among intimates is relatively rare, when weapons are used, the injuries are more severe (Ptacek, 1997; Tjaden & Thoennes, 1998). The availability of firearms and other weapons has been shown to increase the lethality of an assault. Studies report that firearms are used in between 35% (Block & Christakos, 1995) and 71% (Greenfield et al., 1998) of intimate partner homicides. One study showed that the presence of a firearm in the home might be a key factor in the escalation of nonfatal IPV to homicide (Saltzman, Mercy, O’Carroll, Rosenberg, & Rhodes, 1992). Based on a case-control study of 1860 homicide in three states, Kellermann et al. (1993) found that having a gun in the home increases the likelihood of a domestic homicide by threefold. The case-
control study of Wiebe (2003b) based on 1720 homicide deaths and 8084 controls supported the earlier findings reported by Kellerman et al. Browne et al. (1999) found that the availability of firearms in the home increased the risk of an incident becoming fatal by a factor of 2.7.

Studies using SHR data show that firearms are the most frequently used weapon by men and women to kill intimate partners (− 64.1% and 59.1% respectively; Kellermann & Mercy, 1992; Paulozzi, Saltzman, Thompson, & Holmgren, 2001). Spouses and ex-spouses are significantly more likely to use firearms in intimate homicide, while women in common-law spouse, boyfriend/girlfriend, or same-sex relationships used knives to kill their intimate partner almost as often as they used firearms. In nonfirearm homicides, men are more likely to be killed with knives than women are, while women are more likely to be killed with blunt objects or blows delivered by hands/feet, including strangulation (Block & Christakos, 1995; Paulozzi et al., 2001). Felson (1996) speculates that females may use weapons to overcome the inequity in physical size and strength.

Most nonlethal violence occurring among intimate partners does not involve the use of guns or other weapons. Walker (1984) found that only 10% of women reported being threatened with a weapon during an acute battering incident. Hofeiler (1982) found that only 14% of 100 women reported that their husbands had threatened them with a gun during an abusive incident. Block et al. (2001) found that while only 9% of the 210 women in their sample had been injured with a weapon, 56% had been choked or strangled by an abusive partner; 21% reported receiving severe beatings, being choked or strangled, or receiving severe injuries (burns or broken bones). They found that women who had a previous event in which choking or strangling was involved were at greater risk for additional violence.

3.11. Alcohol and/or drug use

Alcohol and, to a lesser extent, drug use has been shown to be associated with aggression of all types (Fagan, 1993; Leonard, 1993; Tedeschi & Felson, 1994; Widom, 1993; Wilkinson, 2003). Alcohol use at the time of a violent incident has been well documented (Block & Christakos, 1995; Fagan, Stewart, & Hansen, 1983; Greenfield et al., 1998); yet, the meaning of this pattern is still an empirical question. The role that alcohol use plays in IPV has been examined as both a distal and proximal factor (Leonard, 1999). Problem drinking can impact social, economic, and relational dynamics that exist between intimate partners, thereby increasing the level of stress in the relationship. Although researchers consistently find male problem drinking to be a distal risk factor for IPV (Block & Christakos, 1995; Leonard, 1999), research has produced mixed evidence concerning whether drinking at the time of the violent incident is an immediate and direct cause of violence. Some researchers report that alcohol is associated with physical violence (Fagan et al., 1983; Walker, 1984), while others argue that the relationship is spurious (Berk et al., 1983; Gelles, 1993). For example, Berk et al. (1983) showed no impact between whether either party had been drinking at the time of the conflict and the severity of the woman’s injuries.
Researchers have articulated two main hypotheses—the expectancy and the cognitive disruption hypotheses—to explain the role that alcohol use plays in violent events. The expectancy hypothesis proposes that alcohol acts as a cue that physical violence is expected and that alcohol use will excuse the actor from responsibility from his or her behavior. The cognitive disruption hypothesis focuses on the psychopharmacologic effects of alcohol on decision making in intimate interactions. According to this hypothesis, alcohol use impairs an actor’s ability to link cause and effect in conflict situations. Tests of these hypotheses have been limited to experiments sampling newlywed couples (Leonard & Roberts, 1998). In one such experiment, Leonard (1999) concluded, “Alcohol is neither a necessary nor a sufficient cause of marital aggression. The role of alcohol among newlyweds appears to be one of a facilitative nature, a contributing cause” (p. 132).

The effect of drug use in violent events among intimate partners is even less well understood. Fagan et al. (1983) found that according to victims, perpetrators used drugs in 16% of situations in which physical violence was used against an intimate partner. Walker (1984) found alcohol use to be more of a problem in physical violence against intimate partners than drug use. Because drug use is frequently combined with alcohol consumption, it becomes a challenge to disentangle its contribution to violent events among intimates. Future research exploring the role that substances play in violent events among intimate partners needs to examine the role of alcohol only, alcohol with drugs, drugs only, different types of drugs, and drug withdrawal.

### 3.12. The role of third parties

The roles of bystanders and third parties in the evolution of interpersonal disputes contribute significantly to their outcomes (Black, 1993; Decker, 1995; Felson, Ribner, & Siegel, 1984; Oliver, 1994; Wilkinson, 2003). In a public dispute, third parties constitute the audience, and their reaction has a strong effect on actors. In dispute situations, the identities and associations of observers of potential conflict can deeply influence the thoughts, feelings, and behavior of the actors. For example, Felson (1982) found that when a dispute occurred between parties of the same sex, the presence of third parties increased the likelihood that a verbal disagreement would turn into a physical fight.

It is often assumed that violence in intimate relationships is more likely than other types of violence to involve only the two partners. Researchers have found that compared with violence among nonintimates, third parties or adult witnesses are less likely to be present during a domestic violence incident (Felson, Messner, & Hoskin, 1999). Consequently, the role of third parties is often neglected, and our understanding of their actions in IPV is therefore less developed. Berk et al. (1983) argued that females’ injuries were less severe when third parties are involved in the domestic disturbance—interpreted as a deterrence process. Dobash and Dobash (1984) found that 75% of the arguments and violent events reported by 109 women occurred in the presence of third parties, mostly children. The women reported that third party action included attempts to calm down the male or stop the violence. Eisikovits and Buchbinder (2000) found that third party involvement occurs most frequently after one incident or between violent episodes.
Because the majority of violence between intimate partners occurs inside a private dwelling, however, it is likely that children residing in homes where there is violence are sometimes present during these violent events. Multiple studies have explored how having a child that resides with the couple can affect the occurrence of violence in the relationship. For example, Walker (1984) reported that children in the home added to relationship stress and increased the frequency of violent behavior; however, she found that the presence of adult children in the home acted as a deterrence to violence. In the 1993–1998 NCVS data, 43% of victims admitted that their children witnessed the reported IPV (Rennison & Welchans, 2000). No details, however, were provided about the roles that children might have played during these violent events. Hutchinson and Hirschel (2001) conducted one of the few studies that directly address the presence of children during violent events. They conducted extensive face-to-face interviews with a sample of 419 women who had reported to the police that they were involved in a misdemeanor spousal abuse incident. Results of this study indicate that the presence of children during a violent incident did not impact the degree of injury sustained, the decision-making process of women calling police, or police behavior once they responded to the call.

The absence of third parties in the lives victims and the resulting isolation away from others have been shown to be a common feature of severe battering relationships (Browne, 1987). Isolation may affect both the likelihood of the man using violence and the likelihood of the woman remaining in the violent relationship. One technique used to maintain isolation is financial; 45% of the women in one study reported that abusive partners limited access to family income, thereby cutting women off from outside activities. Isolation from social support networks affects women’s perceived efficacy in stopping the violence within their intimate relationships.

In her review of the cross-cultural ethnographic literature on domestic conflict, Baumgartner (1993) concludes that the evidence “indicates that the likelihood that a man will resort to violent self-help varies systematically with the amount of support that he and his wife are able to generate within their larger social networks” (p. 213). The strength and intimacy of social ties is important in determining the type of involvement that third parties may have with couples experiencing IPV. Women need what Baumgartner calls “partisan support” from close contacts that are not also close with the man so that the woman can get undivided support. In situations in which third parties offer “mutual support” for both the woman and man, they are more likely to attempt to make peace rather than promote dissolution. Baumgartner finds that when women face opposition from their own support network, they are more vulnerable to repeated abuse. She further argues that individuals who are isolated and have been abandoned by others are more likely to fall prey to IPV.

Browne and Williams (1989) further illustrate this point, finding that as the number of intimate partner homicides increase, the number of resources available to women in their communities decrease. Dugan, Rosenfeld, and Nagin (2003) found that intervention resources aimed at reducing women’s exposure to violence, including the availability of welfare funds, is linked to lower levels of intimate-partner homicide using macrolevel data from 48 large U.S. cities in 1976–1996. Using 1992 law enforcement data for Duval City, FL, and the 1990 U.S. Census, Miles-Doan (1998) found that neighborhoods with greater resource deprivation
also have much higher rates of IPV than for violent encounters between other family, friends, and acquaintances. Recently, however, one study found that Chicago women living in organized neighborhoods with high collective efficacy did not have an effect over and above the woman’s individual situation, on the type of help that she seeks and whether she can escape future violence (Block et al., 2001).

Eisikovits and Buchbinder (2000) described how women who sought help from social workers, therapists, and other counselors were often disappointed when their expectations of how the professional would help them did not match the help-seeking experience. Most notably, women felt betrayed when the counselors listened to the man’s side of the story and showed any signs of doubting the women’s side of the story. The authors warn that negative help-seeking experiences may force women deeper into the isolation, thereby facilitating additional violence.

3.13. The role of law enforcement

From the event perspective, law enforcement officers can play an important role in the social construction of violent events. The body of literature on police strategies for handling domestic violence incidents has grown in recent years and has sparked considerable policy debate (Maxwell, Garner, & Fagan, 2002). Fagan et al. (1983) found that 55% of men who had experienced informal police mediation and separation following a domestic conflict reported no subsequent assaults (Fagan, 1989). Using 1992–1996 NCVS data, Felson, Baumer, and Messner (2000) found that victims were significantly more likely to call the police on ex-spouses.

According to the 1993–1998 NCVS, slightly more than half of victims reported IPV to police (53% of women; 46% of men; Rennison & Welchans, 2000, p. 7). When asked why they had not reported the matter to the police, 36% of the women and 52% of the men felt that it was a private or personal matter, 19% of women were afraid of reprisal, 7% of women and 15% of men felt that it was a minor crime, 6% of women felt that the police would not bother with the incident, and 3% of women and 11% of men felt that the police would protect the offender (Rennison & Welchans, 2000).

Felson, Messner, Hoskin, and Deane (2002) used the NCVS data to test specific hypotheses regarding reasons for reporting to police in domestic violence situations compared with other types of violence. They found that victims of domestic violence are more likely to call police for self-protection and perceived assault seriousness, but are less likely to call out of fear of reprisal, privacy concerns, or a desire to protect the offender when compared with other victims of assault. The Behind Closed Doors Study found that contacting the police was the most common type of formal help seeking (Block et al., 2001), while 39% call the police after at least one violent incident.

Several well-known experimental studies were designed to examine the role that police officers’ actions played when the incident was reported or came to the attention of the police. The Minneapolis Domestic Violence experiment by Sherman and colleagues and the related Spousal Assault Replication Program (SARP) experiments have provided some evidence to support the deterrent effects of arrest for misdemeanor assaults (Berk, Campbell, Klap, &
Western, 1992; Maxwell et al., 2002; Sherman & Berk, 1984a, 1984b). In a recent pooled reanalysis of the SARP data, Maxwell et al. (2002) also found modest support for the preventive effects of arrest.

One study provides insights into how police involvement affects each of the partners in a violent relationship and how the affect of police action changes over time. Eisikovits and Buchbinder (2000) found that the first time a woman calls for police assistance, the experience is perceived as negative, generally because officers appear to be placing more value on the man’s nonserious definition of the situation. In most cases, police officers coached the man to calm down and the woman to think about the consequences of getting the law involved in a family problem. It is very likely that women would be reluctant to get the police involved in the future, unless the incident was more serious. On the other hand, the first experience was generally more positive for the man because he interpreted the actions and narratives of the police officers as supportive of his view of the woman’s contribution or blame in the incident. According to the authors, the second time the police came to the house, something very different happened. The police took action against the man either by taking him to the station or arresting him on the spot. This change in procedure left many men confused and angry. The second police action was obviously more satisfying to the woman, although she was not always prepared for the social and economic consequence of her husband’s arrest. The study showed that men, women, and police officers have different scripts about how violent events are to be handled. This study is an important first step in disentangling the complex problem of studying the effects of social control agents on violent relationships. Beyond the study just described, it is impossible to know how police involvement affects violent incidents from the data available.

3.14. Event outcomes and aftermaths

Previous research generally has neglected the importance of defining closure in violent events (see Oliver, 1994; Wilkinson, 2003 for exceptions). Data on the outcomes of violent events beyond the immediate incident generally are unavailable in official data sources. The issue of collecting data on event closure is especially problematic for violence among intimates, as this type of violence is often serial in nature that the ending of one violent encounter and its aftermath could clearly play a role in the beginning of the next violent event. One can imagine a variety of outcomes and aftermaths that follow violent events among intimates—injury, resolution, forgiveness, arrest, immediate separation, retaliation, escalation until next opportunity, verbal/psychological abuse, target substitution (e.g., aggressing toward children or other partners), relational distance, counseling/therapy, drug/alcohol abuse, suicide attempts, shelter stays, other interventions, and so forth. To have a meaningful discussion of event outcomes, researchers need to examine event-level data nested within individuals and dyads.

The types of help-seeking behaviors utilized by victims are often the most commonly explored event outcome by researchers in this subfield of violence. Greenfield et al. (1998) report that NCVS data for 1992–1996 show that more than half of victims reported the incident to police, about 17% sought help from a victim service agency, 10% of female victims of IPV sought medical care, and of those, 20% were treated for some type of injury.
Although the NCVS and the NEISS data sets are helpful for gauging the quantity of service utilization, data on the quality and nature of those experiences is needed. For example, Block et al. (2001) found that the most common type of help-seeking behavior utilized by women was to talk with a friend or other informal social network member. Only 17% of women said that they had consulted an agency or counselor about the violence, 23% sought medical aid, and 39% called the police at least once. Block et al. found a moderate correlation between the number of types of formal help seeking in the previous year and the end of the violence.

Overall, the complexities of the aftermath phase of a violent event are rarely studied. Eisikovits (1996) examines the aftermath component of a battering incident because it emerged as a meaningful theme in qualitative interviews with both partners in abusive relationships in Northern Israel. Content analysis of interviews with 20 couples revealed two extreme types of strategies that women used for handling the aftermath of violent events. The “rejecters” were women who actively rejected the violence and used the aftermath period to renegotiate the existing power structure and behaviors of the couple. The “surrenderors” were women who accepted the violence. For these women, the aftermath of the violent event was often short in duration and did not mark a significant period for them. This study provides preliminary insights into the importance of the aftermath stage of violent events for intimate partners who remain together. Future studies, however, should examine event aftermaths for intimates with other relationship statuses.

4. Discussion

The full utility of the situational or event perspective needs empirical exploration to illuminate the heterogeneity of violence among intimates. Specifically, research should examine the nature and status of the relationship between offender(s) and victim(s), the perquisites of events, the motivations or sparks for dispute situations, the location, time of day, sequential actions of the actors, weapon use, the role of third parties, the role of substance use, law enforcement actions, event outcomes, event aftermaths, and the interactions of these domains. The event perspective that we advocate has successfully shed new light on other types of violence, including robbery, assaults, and youth violence (see Meier et al., 2001; Wilkinson, 2003). By examining the violence process, including victims, offenders, and situations in context, research will be better able to explain the occurrence of violence and to inform policy. It is important to recognize that efforts to apply the situational or event perspective to IPV must not be built on assumptions that women’s behavior in male–female violent situations is identical to male–male violence (see Dobash & Dobash, 1984, pp. 284–286, for a different opinion).

Researchers need to confront the inherently difficult methodological issues that come with studying violence through an event perspective lens. Specifically, researchers must address concerns about gathering data on events from the actor(s)’ perspective rather than relying on the victims’ perception of events. This can be accomplished by developing research programs that move beyond the commonly used data sources, sampling frames, and quantitative measurement.
strategies. It is important that future studies of violence using an event perspective collect data on violent events among intimate partners as well as violence with nonintimates.

We recommend that researchers undertake primary data collection efforts to collect data on violent events among intimates by studying all participants in violent events. With couples as the unit of analysis, interviews with both partners would be ideal for the purposes of triangulation and convergent validity. Event data, as well as important background and contextual data, should be collected separately for each partner and then compared. The set of studies conducted by Eisikovits & Buchbinder (2000); Eisikovits & Winstok (2001) should be replicated in the United States. In addition, researchers should carefully study the approach taken by Dobash and Dobash (1979, 1984). Pilot studies should be done to refine existing measurement. An in-depth analysis is required to be able to advance our understanding of violence in context among intimates.

In terms of sampling strategies, to study the problem of IPV, the field must move beyond a reliance on small-scale purposeful or convenience samples. Studies with an adequately large and diverse sample of randomly selected couples are needed.

The evolving nature of violence within the context of relationships requires that researchers develop longitudinal data sets on violent events. Future research efforts therefore need to examine not only the nature of the relationship, but also how individual-level characteristics interact, how the characteristics of the dyad influence interaction patterns, and how these factors change over time. Longitudinal research on violent couples, with careful attention to measuring the fluidity of relationships, violent behavior within relationships, and violent behavior across victim–offender relationship (dyad) types, would advance the field. Longitudinal data will be important for examining the interaction of individual, situational, and contextual variables among people who are violent generally, violent only with intimates, and nonviolent. Although these types of inquiry will be costly and time consuming, they would likely lead to theory refinement, measurement improvement, and new suggestions for policy.

Official data sets will remain an important source for understanding the trends and patterns in IPV. Efforts should continue to maximize the collection of situational and contextual variables in official data sources. It may also be beneficial for researchers to partner up with local criminal justice officials to improve the quality of event-level data that is included in case investigation files. Additional efforts to conduct laboratory experiments on intimate conflict, decision making, and communication processes should be supported. Attention should be paid to the diversity of the sample with regard to relationship status and demographic factors. Intervention programs that focus on the communication dynamics and skill deficits of intimate partners should be evaluated with adequate sample sizes and control groups.

Acknowledgements

Acknowledgment is due to Robert Meier, Jeffrey Fagan, Terrie Moffitt, Carolyn Rebecca Block, Douglas Wiebe, Keith Gooch, Ellen Kurtz, and Ralph Taylor, who provided helpful comments on earlier drafts.
References


Gelles, R. J. (1993). Alcohol and other drugs are associated with violence—They are not its cause. In R. J. Gelles, & D. R. Loseke (Eds.), *Current controversies on family violence* (pp. 183–96). Newberry Park, MI: Sage.


