Violence Against Women

The Development of a Theory of Women's Use of Violence in Intimate Relationships

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What is This?

The Development of a Theory of Women's Use of Violence in Intimate Relationships

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Reports have appeared in the popular press in recent years concluding that women are just as violent as men. These reports stem from acontextual survey studies comparing prevalence rates of women's and men's physical violence. The authors contend that the above conclusion is simplistic and misleading, and that a theoretical framework that embeds women's violence in the context in which it occurs is sorely needed. This article proposes a model that includes women's violence in the context of their victimization by male partners, motivations for violent behavior and how they cope with relationship problems, experiences of childhood trauma, and outcomes of depression, anxiety, posttraumatic stress disorder, and substance use. The model is then examined within the context of gender, race, and class. The cultural context of domestic violence for African American and Latina women is reviewed. This literature reinforces the need to place women's violence in a broader sociocultural context.

Keywords: intimate partner violence; women's use of violence in intimate relationships

> He put his hands on me first. I had never had that happen to me before. My reasoning was, if you touch me, I'm going to try to kill you. We'll be two fighting people, not you beating me.
>
> *African American female participant of the Family Violence Education Program, New Haven, CT, 2002*

Several reports appeared in the popular press in the late 1990s concluding that women are just as violent as men (e.g., Young, 1999; Zuger, 1998). These reports often cite the many studies of self-reported physical aggression based on data from the Conflict Tactics Scale (CTS), a widely used measure of physical aggression between intimate partners (Straus, 1999). Indeed, a meta-analysis (Archer, 2000) of gender differences in rates of physical abuse found that women were slightly more likely than men

to use physical aggression against intimate partners. These findings have generated a great deal of controversy, in part because there has been no theoretical framework to explain women's violence (Bible, Das Dasgupta, & Osthoff, 2002; Straus, 1999).

The conclusion that "women are just as violent as men" is problematic. The studies on which these media reports are based typically examined only physical aggression, not other types of abuse; and they do not place the occurrence of women's violence within a broader social, cultural, or historical context. For example, Archer's (2000) meta-analysis did not examine sexual assault, stalking, or coercive control; studies that include such behaviors tend to find higher rates of these types of violence committed by males, as do crime surveys (Straus, 1999; Tjaden & Thoennes, 2000). A theoretical framework to guide research on intimate partner violence (IPV) and, therefore, the popular discourse on women's violence, is sorely needed (Renzetti, 1999). A comprehensive theory of women's violence with intimate partners should include all types of abuse, not just physical aggression; the woman's abuse against the partner and the partner's abuse against the woman; the woman's relationship history, including experiences of childhood abuse or previous adult relationships that were abusive; her motivations for using abuse; the outcomes of her abuse, for herself, her partner, and her children; and the larger cultural context of gender, race and ethnicity, and social class (Das Dasgupta, 2002; Gilbert, 2002). Without an understanding of women's violence in context, policy makers and others will draw erroneous conclusions from the data and will implement misguided "gender neutral" policies that penalize women and place them in increased danger.

In fact, "gender neutral" applications of domestic violence (DV) law already harm women. Although dual arrests and mutual restraining orders are necessary in some cases, the overreliance on these practices in some courts is misinformed at best, and at worst, it penalizes women who call on the criminal justice system because their lives are in danger (Hirschel & Buzawa, 2002; Martin, 1997; Miller, 2001). Renzetti (1999) argued that our cultural conception of a *battered woman* is that she deserves sympathy and protection by the law; however, a woman who fights back against her partner's violence violates our notion of acceptable feminine behavior (Gilbert, 2002). She thus shares the blame for her own victimization (Ferraro, 2003). However, it is likely that many battered women have used violence against their partners at some time, as a survival strategy and in retaliation for abuse and humiliation. For example, one study found that 33% of women residing in a DV shelter reported having used minor violence against their partners, and 24% reported using severe violence (Hamberger & Guse, 2002). Renzetti further argued that intimate violence is gendered; that is, women's motivations for violence and the context in which the violence takes place are qualitatively different than those of men. A gendered, feminist theoretical approach, that is, one that "uses gender as a central organizing variable for understanding human behavior and social organization" (Renzetti, p. 45), is needed to understand women's violence.

The goal of this article is to provide an interpretive framework for women's violence by proposing a comprehensive, contextual model of women's violence in intimate relationships. A major emphasis is placed on the need for contextualism in the

development of such a theory. Contextualism underscores that human behavior does not develop in a social vacuum but is situated within a sociohistorical and cultural context of meanings and relationships, like a message that makes sense only in terms of the total context in which it occurs (Rosnow & Georgoudi, 1986). Without a focus on context in our development of theory, methods of inquiry, and interventions, there continues to be a strong tendency to locate problems in individuals. This increases the likelihood of "blaming the victim" (Ryan, 1971) and leaves us with limited understandings of complex social phenomena.

Based on these principles, the model of women's violence presented here includes: (a) women's violence in the context of their victimization by male partners; (b) factors that influence women's violence and victimization, namely, women's motivations for violent behavior and the coping strategies women utilize in response to relationship problems; (c) the historical context of women's experiences of childhood trauma; and (d) outcomes of depression, anxiety, posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and substance use. This article briefly reviews the literature on each of these dimensions and presents a comprehensive model of women's violence and victimization, its antecedents, and its consequences. When developed, the model is examined within the context of *intersectionality*, that is, the intersection of important status variables, such as gender, race, and class that shape the experiences of women in violent relationships (Crenshaw, 1994).

Women's Violence in the Context of Their Victimization

The evidence gathered to date strongly suggests that women are almost always violent in the context of violence against them by their male partners (Abel, 2001; Das Dasgupta, 1999; Hamberger & Guse, 2002). Women's violence must be studied within this context. For example, in a study of 108 women who had recently used violence against an intimate male partner (Swan & Snow, 2002), women's self-reported rates of different types of violence were examined, including moderate and severe physical violence, sexual violence, emotional and/or verbal abuse, and coercive control behavior. Women reported the frequency of their male partners' commission of these behaviors as well. Swan and Snow (2002) found that only six of the 108 participants experienced no physical victimization or injury from their male partners.

The types and prevalence of abusive behaviors committed by women also differ from those committed by men. Swan and Snow (2002) found that women in their sample used equivalent levels of emotional and/or verbal abuse (e.g., yelling and screaming, name calling) as their partners used against them. Women also committed significantly more moderate physical violence (e.g., throwing something, pushing and/or shoving) than their partners used against them. However, women were more often victims of quite serious types of abuse, including sexual coercion, injury, and coercive control behaviors (e.g., restricting social contact, controlling the partner's activities and decisions).

Figure 1
Model of Women's Violence and Victimization, Motivations
for Violence, Coping, Childhood Trauma, and Outcomes
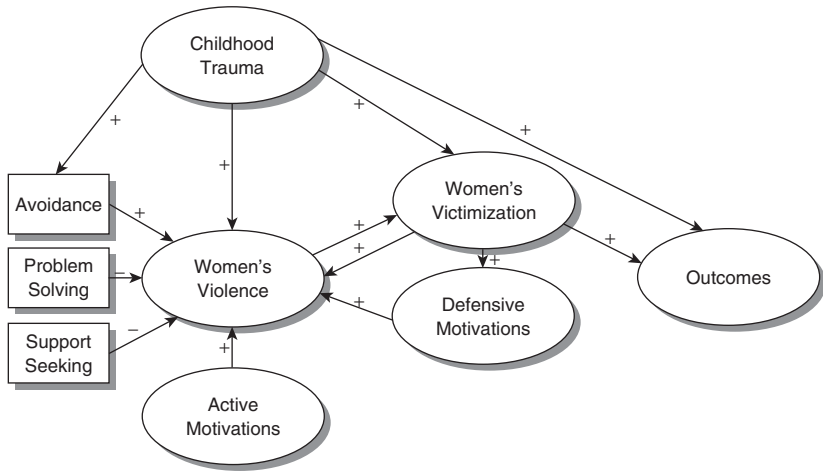
These findings illustrate how the picture of women's violence changes with a more detailed examination of severity, frequency, and type of violence committed by both partners. In the Swan and Snow (2002) study, women and men engaged in put-downs, insults, and yelling at equivalent rates. However, men much more frequently used coercive control tactics than women. This is not to say that women cannot be jealous or controlling; rather, it is much less common for a woman to have the ability to maintain significant control of a man's behavior because this type of control is maintained through fear (Das Dasgupta, 1999; Jacobson, 1994). As a general rule, women simply do not inspire fear in men (Hamberger & Guse, 2002; Morse, 1995). Women in the Swan and Snow study (2002) were more frequently victims than perpetrators of the kinds of experiences that inspire terror, such as sexual violence and injury. Clearly, we cannot fully understand the nature, extent, and meaning of women's violence without considering the overall patterns of violence that occur in their intimate relationships.

Figure 1 illustrates the relationship between women's violence and victimization (i.e., their male partners' violence against them). The model portrays a bidirectional path between the woman's violence and her partner's violence—that is, as the violence of one partner increases, the violence of the other partner will increase as well (Hendy et al., 2003; Siegel, 2000). A study demonstrated a bidirectional relationship between women's violence and their male partners' violence against them in a path model (Sullivan, Meese, Swan, Mazure, & Snow, 2005).

Women's Motivations for Violent Behavior

Self-defense. Research suggests that the motivations for women's violent behavior in intimate relationships are often quite different from those for men. Several studies have found that women cite self-defense as a motivation for violence more frequently than men (Barnett, Lee, & Thelen, 1997). For example, one study comparing the motivations for violence of college students found that 36% of women listed self-defense as a motivation compared to 18% of men (Makepeace, 1986). In an analysis of women's motivations for violence (Swan & Snow, 2003), self-defense was the most frequently endorsed motive, with 75% of participants stating that they had used violence to defend themselves.

Fear. Women also are more likely to report fear in DV situations (Morse, 1995). In a study of men and women court ordered to a DV treatment program and women residing in a DV shelter, both samples of women reported greater fear of their partner's violence than the male sample (Hamberger & Guse, 2002). This fear is well founded: In DV situations, women are much more likely than men to be injured, and injured severely (Archer, 2000). In a study of 199 military couples mandated to DV treatment, 33% of the husbands reported injuries compared to 65% of wives (Langhinrichsen-Rohling, Neidig, & Thorn, 1995). Consistent with this finding, wives reported feeling significantly more fear of their partners than husbands. Thus, some women's violence occurs in the context of fear of assault from their partners and the need to protect themselves from physical harm.

Defense of children. It has been estimated that 30% to 60% of children whose mothers are battered are themselves victims of abuse (Edleson, 1999). Children living with an abused mother have been found to be 12 to 14 times more likely to be sexually abused than children whose mothers were not abused (McCloskey, Figuerdo, & Koss, 1995). The effects of family violence on children, in terms of actual physical abuse of children and what children witness, affect how women behave in violent relationships (Das Dasgupta, 2002). Some women behave violently toward their partners to protect their children and themselves (Browne, 1987).

Control. Studies consistently show that men are more likely than women to use violence to regain control of the relationship or a partner who is challenging their authority (Barnett et al., 1997; Ehrensaft, Langhinrichsen-Rohling, Heyman, O'Leary, & Lawrence, 1999; Makepeace, 1986). Findings from the Hamberger and Guse (2002) study of men and women court ordered to a DV treatment program indicated that men were more likely to initiate and control the dynamics of violence, whereas women used violence but did not control those dynamics. However, this does not mean that control motives are completely absent from women's violence. Swan and Snow (2003) found

that 38% of women stated that they had threatened to use violence at least sometimes to make their partner do the things they wanted him to do; of those, 53% stated that the threats were effective at least some of the time.

Retribution. Finally, several studies suggest that retribution for real or perceived wrongdoing is a common motivator of women's and men's violent behavior. Forty-five percent of the women in the Swan and Snow (2003) study stated that they used violence to get even with their partners for something they had done. However, the reasons for men's and women's desires for retribution may differ. In a study of 66 women and 215 men court referred to a DV program, Hamberger, Lohr, Bonge, and Tolin (1997) coded participants' open-ended responses to the question, "What is the function, purpose, or payoff of your violence?" Although men and women reported using violence for purposes of retribution, the reasons differed by gender. Women and men stated they used violence in retribution for their partners' attacks against them. However, men also reported using violence in retribution for their partners' unwanted behavior, such as infidelity or lying, while no women reported this motivation. In contrast, women stated they used violence in retribution for the partners' emotionally abusive behavior (e.g., "punishment for his insults"), while men did not. Similarly, Follingstad, Wright, Lloyd, and Sebastian's (1991) study of dating violence among college students found that 56% of women who used violence did so in retaliation for being emotionally hurt, as compared to 25% of men.

These motivational variables are included in the model shown in Figure 1. The motivations are divided into two factors. Defensive motivations (self-defense, protecting children, and fear) involve defending oneself and one's children from physical harm. Active motivations (control and retribution) refer to motivations that go beyond self-defense and encompass anger, revenge, and a desire to control the partner.

Women's Coping With Violent Relationships

The issue of how women cope with an abusive partner has received some attention in the DV literature; however, little research from a stress-and-coping framework has been conducted. In the general literature, coping is often grouped into three types: avoidant, problem solving, and support seeking (Amirkhan, 1990). Studies relating coping to a variety of psychological and physical health outcomes typically find that avoidant strategies are related to poorer outcomes, and problem solving and support seeking are related to positive outcomes (Ingledew, Hardy, & Cooper, 1997; Snow, Swan, Raghavan, Connell, & Klein, 2003). Among victims of DV, avoidant coping strategies have been associated with the development of psychological problems (Foa, Cascardi, Zoellner, & Feeny, 2000; Valentiner, Foa, Riggs, & Gershuny, 1996) such as depression (Mitchell & Hodson, 1983). Problem-solving coping, on the other hand, has been related to well-being (Foa et al., 2000). Several studies document the variety

of active coping strategies battered women use in response to abuse (Campbell & Gary, 1998; Goodman, Dutton, Weinfurt, & Cook, 2003; McFarlane, Soeken, Reel, Parker, & Silva, 1997). Social support has also been found to be a protective factor for battered women; it has been found to be related to reduced symptoms of PTSD (Astin, Lawrence, & Foy, 1993) and depression (Tan, Basta, Sullivan, & Davidson, 1995).

Swan (1999) assessed the extent to which three types of coping were utilized in relation to a recent problem or conflict in women's relationships. Problem-solving coping was negatively correlated with women's violence, indicating that the more problem-solving strategies women employed, the less violence they used. Avoidance coping was positively correlated with violence. Figure 1 depicts the relationship between coping and other variables in the model. Avoidance coping is depicted as predicting higher levels of women's violence, whereas problem-solving and support-seeking coping are portrayed as reducing the likelihood of women's violence.

Childhood Trauma

Evidence from several different studies indicates that rates of childhood trauma and abuse are very high among women who use violence. Swan and Snow (2003) assessed childhood traumatic events by asking participants about their experiences of emotional, physical, and sexual abuse while growing up. Examining only events that were rated as having a major or extreme impact on the participant's life, 35% of the women experienced physical abuse, 37% experienced emotional abuse, and 35% were sexually abused.[1] High rates of childhood abuse have also been found in other studies of women in court-mandated treatment for DV (Hamberger & Potente, 1994; Leisring, Dowd, & Rosenbaum, 2003).

Several studies have found that experiences of childhood abuse are a risk factor for violent behavior and victimization as adults (Straus, 1990; White & Humphrey, 1994). A longitudinal study of 136 women who were treated at a hospital for sexual abuse as children examined the impact of childhood abuse on the women as adults (Siegel, 2000). Childhood experiences of sexual abuse predicted women's use of violence against partners and their victimization from partners. Experiences of being hit or beaten by a parent also predicted women's violence against their partners. Swan (1999) also found that different types of childhood trauma correlated with women's violence and other related variables. Experiencing childhood sexual and physical abuse was positively correlated with women's use of violence and women's sexual victimization from their partners. Childhood emotional abuse experiences correlated with women's coercive control behavior and their use of avoidance coping strategies to deal with relationship violence.

Figure 1 depicts the addition of childhood trauma to the model. Higher levels of childhood trauma are shown as predicting greater use of avoidance coping and higher levels of women's violence and victimization.

Outcomes

Four psychological outcomes have been associated with traumatic experiences in general, and DV victimization in particular: depression, anxiety, substance abuse, and PTSD (Foa et al., 2000). Swan and Snow (2003) found that 60% of the women who had used violence against an intimate partner in their sample met criteria on a depression screen. In a meta-analysis of IPV as a risk factor for mental disorders, the weighted mean prevalence of depression among battered women was approximately 50% (Golding, 1999). Battered women have a higher prevalence of anxiety disorders compared to the general female population (Foa et al., 2000). Battered women are also at risk for substance abuse (Watson et al., 1997). In the Swan and Snow (2003) study, 24% of the women met criteria for problem drinking. Finally, the rate of diagnostic PTSD among women who experience IPV is around 40% (Dansky, Byrne, & Brady, 1999; Kocot & Goodman, 2003). The model shown in Figure 1 predicts that women's victimization will have a direct, negative impact on outcomes. Childhood trauma is portrayed as negatively affecting outcomes directly and indirectly through its impact on women's violence and victimization.

Sociocultural Context of Women's Violence

This section of the article examines women's violence within the context of the intersectionality of race, ethnicity, and culture. These contextual factors "color the meaning and nature of DV, how it is experienced by self and responded to by others, how personal and social consequences are represented, and how and whether escape and safety can be obtained" (Bograd, 1999, p. 276). A focus on intersectionality in research on IPV enhances understanding of the phenomenon and increases the external validity of the study findings to different ethnic and cultural groups (Sokoloff & Dupont, 2005; Sue, 1999).

Fortunately, there is a small but growing literature on the relationship between culture and family violence. However, only a few articles present empirical data, and very few studies focus on women's violence. In the sections that follow, the literature on African American and Latina cultures and family violence, and how it may relate to women's violence, is discussed. The role of class and socioeconomic status is also reviewed and discussed.

African American Culture and Women's Violence With Intimate Partners

Brother/I don't want to hear/about how my real enemy/is the system.
i'm no genius, /but i do know/that system/you hit me with
/is called /a fist.

Pat Parker (as quoted in White, 1985, p. 25)

The literature on family violence within the African American culture reveals several protective and risk factors that may affect women's use of violence. One area that is relatively unique to African American culture, as compared to other American ethnic groups, is the expectation that African American women are "strong" and invulnerable (Miller, 2001). Donovan and Williams (2002) defined the strong Black woman as self-sufficient, independent, and able to survive difficulties without assistance. The strong Black woman takes care of not only her own problems but also those of her family and community. However, without a balance between self-care and care for others, vulnerability to physical and mental health problems can result.

In the context of DV, a consequence of the "strong woman" expectation is that African American women may be expected to hold the family together and protect their men from the hostile mainstream culture, regardless of the cost to themselves (Bell & Mattis, 2000; Richie, 1996; West & Rose, 2000; White, 1985). A woman striving to be strong and independent may be reluctant to ask for outside help (Few & Bell-Scott, 2002) and may be accused of disloyalty to the Black community if she "airs dirty laundry to White folks" by reporting the violence (Hampton, Oliver, & Magarian, 2003). Battered African American women may also be faced with the dilemma that if they report abuse, they are reinforcing negative stereotypes that intimate relationships between Black men and women are inherently dysfunctional (Few & Bell-Scott, 2002), and that Black men are naturally violent (Donovan & Williams, 2002).

As the "strong woman" construction of African American femininity implies, gender roles in African American culture differ from other ethnic groups. Some literature suggests that African American couples may be more egalitarian in some respects (e.g., acceptance of women's employment, more equitable distribution of child care; Campbell & Gary, 1998; Hampton et al., 2003). These egalitarian gender roles may in some cases reduce the risk of violence (Bell & Mattis, 2000). On the other hand, when there is violence in the relationship, some African American women may hit back because their relationships are more egalitarian; that is, if the couple believes that the woman has the same rights as her male partner, then if he hits her, she has the same right to hit him (Miller, 2001; Oliver, 2000; West, 1998; West & Rose, 2000). In one qualitative study, African Americans were more likely than White participants to hit back. One African American participant who did not fight back "believed she had not lived up to her birthright. . . . 'My image of African American women was that they stood up for themselves'" (Moss, Pitula, Campbell, & Halstead, 1997, p. 448).

In addition, African American women may be reluctant to use legal interventions because of the history of mistreatment of African Americans by the criminal justice system (Campbell & Gary, 1998; Moss et al., 1997; Richie, 1996; Wright, 2000). African American women who fight back may end up getting arrested themselves (Miller, 2001; Wright, 2000). Even if African American women have not fought back, they may still be

perceived as "inauthentic victims" (Bell & Mattis, 2000). The "strong woman" social-ization includes hiding one's vulnerability, especially in the presence of Whites. A qual-itative study by Moss et al. (1997) found that African American battered women were more likely to be loud and angry, rather than docile and weeping. Some empirical data support these contentions. In one study of 465 DV incident reports, abusers of African American female victims were less likely to be arrested than abusers of White or male victims (Robinson & Chandek, 2000). In another study, African American and Hispanic women who called the police regarding DV reported more negative interactions than White women (Ptacek, 1999).

Other social services may also be less than helpful for African American women involved in violent relationships (Donnelly, Cook, Van Ausdale, & Foley, 2005). One common problem is that service providers may not understand or be sensitive to the experiences of Black women (Bell & Mattis, 2000; Few & Bell-Scott, 2002). Thus, Black women may be less likely to use these services or, if they do, may not find them to be helpful. One study found that compared to White women, African American women discussed more negative experiences with social services, such as shelters (Short et al., 2000). Another found that White battered women were 4 times as likely to use a shelter as African American women, and White women were twice as likely to request a restraining order (Joseph, 1997). However, culturally appropriate social services (such as DV support groups), particularly those run by and for African American women, have been found to be very helpful (Taylor, 2000).

Another problem African American women in abusive relationships may face is the lack of possibilities of alternative relationships. Many Black women, particularly mid-dle-class women, have noted a shortage in eligible African American men of their sta-tus. Some women may remain in an abusive relationship because they do not believe they will be able to find another partner (Bell & Mattis, 2000). Another risk factor may be the financial burdens faced by many African American women. Although poverty exists in all ethnic groups, it is disproportionately high among African Americans. Women with very limited finances, particularly those with children, may remain in abusive relationships for economic reasons (Bell & Mattis, 2000).

A potential resilience factor for African American women is a positive racial identity. Racial socialization is the "responsibility of raising physically and emo-tionally healthy children who are Black in a society in which being Black has neg-ative connotations" (Peters, 1985, p. 161). Stevenson (1994) suggested that racial socialization to take pride in Black heritage and culture, use spirituality and reli-gion as coping mechanisms, draw on extended family for social support, and be aware of and cope with racism will all serve as protective factors for African Americans. This protection may extend to a decreased likelihood of involvement in DV as well.

A buffer against violence among some African American families may be a greater involvement with extended kin and community. In Short et al.'s (2000) qualitative

study, African American battered women were much more likely than White battered women to discuss drawing support from family and friends to end their abusive relationships. The extended family network may also exert social pressure to curb a male partner's violence against a woman (Moss et al., 1997). On the other hand, some African American women with strong family support may forgo that support because they want to protect their families from the risks of getting involved (Retzlaff, 1999). Other buffers that may be particularly important in African American culture include religious supports (Bell & Mattis, 2000; Short et al., 2000; West, 2002), spirituality (Few & Bell-Scott, 2002), and a strong sense of being embedded in one's community and neighborhood (Campbell & Gary, 1998; Cazenave & Straus, 1979).

In sum, African American women may be trapped in violent relationships for a variety of reasons, including the "strong woman's" responsibility to keep the family together, lack of access to and help from legal or social services, and economic needs. From the perspective of women's violence, then, we propose that the more a woman is trapped as a result of these various factors in a violent relationship, the more likely she will be to use violence to protect herself. This may hold especially true for African American women because of cultural expectations regarding the strength of Black women and relatively egalitarian gender roles. Potential buffers include positive racial socialization and involvement with extended family and religious communities.

Latino Culture and Women's Violence With Intimate Partners

> I learned that a roof, a plate of beans . . . school for my children does not mean that I have to tolerate . . . all that he did to us. (Latina focus group participant, Perilla, Gonzalez, & Alvarez, 2003)

In an examination of family violence in Latino culture, it is important to consider not only the minority status of Latinos in the United States but also immigration, country of origin, and acculturation. According to the 2000 U.S. Census, 40% of Latinos living in the United States were born in other countries (U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of Census, 2005). Studies have found substantial differences in the prevalence of family violence based on country of origin (Aldarondo, Kantor, & Jasinski, 2002; Torres et al., 2000). One large-scale survey (Kantor, Jasinski, & Aldarondo, 1994) found the highest rates of male-to-female violence in Puerto Rican families (20.4%), followed by Mexican Americans (14.2%), Anglos (9.9%), and Cubans (2.5%). These differences in prevalence are probably confounded in part by the socioeconomic status of people emigrating from those countries.

The role of acculturation in family violence appears to be critical for many Latinos who have immigrated to the United States. *Acculturation* has been defined as the process

by which an immigrant's attitudes and behaviors change toward those of the predominant cultural group as a result of exposure to the new culture (Rogler, Malgady, Costantino, & Blumenthal, 1987). Recent studies indicate that couples who are in the midst of undergoing the acculturation process—who are in between the gender roles of the country of origin and those of the mainstream United States—may be at the highest risk of partner violence. A well-designed longitudinal study with a national probability sample that included 387 Latino couples living in the United States examined participants at low, medium, and high levels of acculturation (Caetano, Ramisetty-Mikler, & McGrath, 2004). Rates of physical IPV were compared using the CTS. Couples with the highest rates of IPV were those in which at least one member of the couple was in the medium-acculturation group. This effect was especially pronounced for female-to-male violence: When both partners were in the medium-acculturation group, the prevalence of female-to-male violence was almost twice that of high-acculturated couples, and more than 3 times that of low-acculturated couples. The medium-acculturation group may be in the process of struggling with the most gender role conflict. Couples in the low- and high-acculturation groups may experience less violence because they are settled into the gender roles of one of the cultures and, therefore, experience less gender role conflict.

Why does acculturation appear to affect women's aggression toward partners more than men's behavior? Migration may change the rules of behavior more for women than for men (Mattson & Rodriguez, 1999). Aggression is much less acceptable for women in Latin America than in the United States. Some studies have explored the gender role conflict that can occur when Latino couples sort out the new roles they are exposed to through acculturation. Morash, Bui, and Santiago (2000) found that Mexican American women who were born in the United States, had higher levels of education, and worked outside the home experienced more violence than women who were born in Mexico, had less education, and did not work. In addition, the more acculturated, educated, working women had different expectations about their role in the family than did their husbands, leading to conflict about men's and women's roles and abuse by their husbands. In contrast, when the women and their husbands agreed on gender roles, whether egalitarian or traditional, the incidence of violence was lower (Morash et al., 2000).

Traditional gender roles affect Latinas' perceptions of what constitutes abuse and how to respond to it. In one study, although Latina, African American, and Anglo women living in shelters reported similar severity of abuse, Latinas reported the longest duration of abuse and the fewest attempts to seek help (Gondolf, Fisher, & McFerron, 1988). Another study found no differences in the severity and frequency of abuse among Hispanic and Anglo women; however, compared to Anglo women, Latinas did not label the behavior as *abuse* until it occurred more frequently (Torres, 1991).

Barriers to seeking outside help may also increase Latina women's risk of abuse. Immigration status frequently prevents women from reporting DV to authorities (Acevedo, 2000; Aldarondo et al., 2002). For example, Detroit police reported a large

volume of calls from Latina women who had been victims of violence; however, many women did not want to prosecute the abusers because of fear of deportation (Maciak, Guzman, Santiago, Villalobos, & Israel, 1999). Language barriers also prevent many Latinas from seeking or receiving help (Torres, 1998). Among battered Mexican, Mexican American, and Puerto Rican women, Latinas who sought help had greater proficiency in English (West, Kantor, & Jasinski, 1998). Finally, the barriers to getting out of abusive relationships created by poverty cannot be overestimated. The issues related to poverty are manifold: unemployment, lack of affordable housing, inability to afford child care, lack of transportation—all of which can trap a woman in a violent relationship (Acevedo, 2000).

Protective factors for Latinas include strong family supports. Latinas will often seek help and advice from their families first before seeking help from outsiders. Latinas are more likely to live in larger households with extended family, and to marry and start families earlier than other ethnic groups (Torres, 1998). The family, then, provides a strong base of support; family members watch out for one another (Perilla, Bakeman, & Norris, 1994). In the case of battering, however, if the family is not able or willing to help the woman, she may be very reluctant to "betray" the family by going outside of it for help. In some cases, the extended family may contribute to the woman's oppression (Acevedo, 2000; Morash et al., 2000). For recent immigrants who left their extended families in their home countries, family supports may be absent. In one study, Mexican women were less likely than Mexican American, Puerto Rican, and Anglo women to seek help from friends and family, probably because of greater isolation because of their recent immigration status (West et al., 1998).

Spirituality can also be an important source of support for Latina women in DV situations (Acevedo, 2000). In the study of battered Latina women in Detroit, of those who sought help, one third did so from a clergy member (Maciak et al., 1999). However, the church can be nonsupportive of battered women as well, advising them to endure the abuse (Torres, 1998). Finally, as is the case for African Americans, positive ethnic identity has been proposed as an important protective factor for the well-being of Latinas (Mattson & Rodriguez, 1999).

Class and Socioeconomic Issues

Virtually every study of DV that examines socioeconomic status (SES) finds that poverty is consistently and robustly related to higher prevalence rates of IPV (Browne & Bassuk, 1997; Hotaling & Sugarman, 1990; Holtzworth-Munroe, Smutzler, & Bates, 1997). In fact, in most studies that control for the effects of SES, differences in the prevalence rates of IPV between racial and/or ethnic groups disappear (Aldarondo et al., 2002; Bograd, 1999; Vogel & Marshall, 2001; West, 1998). However, very few studies have explored what it is about poverty that elevates the risk of IPV.

Benson, Fox, DeMaris, and Van Wyk's (2003) study of the impact of race, SES, and neighborhood on the prevalence of DV systematically examines the relationship between social class indicators and IPV. Using interview and survey data with 5,031 couples who participated in the National Survey of Families and Households (Sweet, Bumpass, & Call, 1988), the study examined a number of objective indicators of social class, including neighborhood disadvantage (e.g., number of people below the poverty line, number of unemployed people), employment instability of the male partner, insufficiency of income to meet basic needs, and a subjective measure of financial strain. They found that the relationship between male-to-female partner violence and SES was not linear; rather, those women living in the bottom 25% of the most disadvantaged neighborhoods experienced twice the prevalence of partner violence compared to those in the upper 75%. They also conducted a longitudinal analysis of predictors of male-to-female partner violence 6 years later. After entering economic distress indicators into the model, the impact of race on rates of DV disappeared. They posited that severe economic disadvantage in a neighborhood fosters anonymity and reduced social controls on IPV—neighbors are not looking out for one another, leaving DV unchecked (Benson et al., 2003). These neighborhood economic factors were found to increase the likelihood of women's and men's use of violence with their intimate partners (Benson, Fox, DeMaris, & Van Wyk, 2000).

Discussion

This article develops a theoretical framework for furthering our understanding of the phenomenon of women's violence. Particular emphasis is placed on the need to study women's violence within social, historical, and cultural contexts. The model proposes a number of risk and protective factors that appear to be related to women's use of violence with male partners, including the male partners' violence against women, experiences of childhood trauma, women's strategies for coping with problems in their relationships, women's motivations for using violence, and the outcomes of depression, anxiety, substance abuse, and PTSD. We argue for the importance of sociocultural contexts in developing theory regarding women's use of violence with intimate partners. Although only two ethnic groups were examined in detail in this article, future research should examine the effects of culture on women's violence with other ethnic groups (Das Dasgupta, 2002).

Models of IPV, such as that proposed here, should also be examined longitudinally. Interrelationships among variables in the model are clearly dynamic; variables that are shown as mediators or outcomes in the various models may also operate as antecedents. For example, one possible alternative model is as follows: Women who have experienced childhood trauma are at risk of developing PTSD. PTSD increases the likelihood of developing maladaptive coping strategies, such as avoidance

coping and poor problem solving, thereby increasing the likelihood that women with PTSD will get involved in, and remain in, violent relationships.

The model proposed here includes a number of critical dimensions that are relevant to women's violence; however, there are certainly other important factors that should be examined in future research. For example, the model does not include age, which has consistently been found to be related to DV, with younger individuals more likely to use violence against partners (West, 1998). It also does not focus on Axis II disorders, such as borderline personality disorder, and the extent to which such disorders may be involved in women's violence. The model only examines outcomes for women, not for their male partners or their children, and is presented in the context of heterosexual relationships. The relationships among variables proposed here may or may not apply to lesbians. The model proposed in this article, although serving as a framework for advancing a theory of women's violence, needs to be tested and refined. Through this process, the field will advance in developing a more comprehensive understanding of women's violence.

Note

1. Swan and Snow (2003) erroneously reported that 52% of the women in this study experienced sexual abuse.

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