

Affect, Verbal Content, and Psychophysiology in the Arguments of Couples With a Violent Husband

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The purpose of this investigation was to study the affect, psychophysiology, and verbal content of arguments in couples with a violent husband. On the basis of self-reports of violent arguments, there were no wife behaviors that successfully suppressed husband violence once it began; moreover, husband violence escalated in response to nonviolent as well as violent wife behaviors, whereas wife violence escalated only in reaction to husband violence or emotional abuse. Only wives were fearful during violent and nonviolent arguments. The observational coding of nonviolent arguments in the laboratory revealed that both battering husbands and their wives (DV) were angrier than their maritally distressed but nonviolent (DNL) counterparts. As predicted, on the more provocative anger codes, only DV men differed from their DNL counterparts. However, DV wives were as verbally aggressive toward their husbands as DV husbands were toward their wives.

As many as one half of all married women in this country may experience at least one episode of violence during the course of their married life (Straus, Gelles, & Steinmetz, 1980). Despite the approximately equal frequencies of husband and wife violent acts, the physical damage done to wives by husbands is far greater than the reverse (Cascardi, Langhinrichsen, & Vivian, 1992). Moreover, it has been proposed that this similarity in the frequency of violent acts masks differences in the function of violence (Avis, 1994; Jacobson, 1994b). Specifically, it has been argued that the function of male violence is to control women, that male "battering" refers to the instrumental use of aggression for the purposes of subjugation, intimidation, or control (e.g., Hamberger, in press). In contrast, female violence is used primarily for self-defense, retaliation, or for ex-

pressive purposes (Hamberger, in press). Moreover, because of both their greater physical strength and power within traditional marriages, some have suggested that men have the unique capacity to use violence as a method of control (Hamberger, in press; Walker, 1984).

One way to study possible functions of violence is to directly examine the marital dynamics and patterns associated with the use of violence. It is unfortunate that there is almost no existing research on the marital dynamics of couples in which there is battering (see work of Margolin and colleagues, e.g., Margolin, John, & Gleberman, 1988, for exceptions). Until the marital interactions of batterers and their partners are better understood, one can only speculate about how violence unfolds in these relationships, the function that violence serves, or the communication patterns associated with violence.

One purpose of our research was to delineate the roles that male batterers and female victims play during violent altercations. On the basis of theories that men use violence to control women, several related hypotheses can be made:

First, if the function of male battering is control, and if that control has been successful, then only the battered wife should experience and express fear during altercations and arguments because it is through fear that violence or the threat of violence becomes a successful method of control. We expected women to exhibit significantly more fear than men during violent arguments and significantly more fear than nonviolent controls during nonviolent arguments.

Second, if male violence is an effective form of control, then it should be relatively unpredictable. To the extent that male battering is unpredictable, women will experience it as uncontrollable. One aspect of uncontrollability is the inability to stop the violence once it starts. Thus, we expected cessation of male violence to be unpredictable, given a variety of wife behaviors; that is, we did not expect wife behaviors to be predictive of decreases in male violence.

Third, if male violence serves a controlling function whereas female violence serves a self-protective function, there should

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be gender differences in which behaviors predict increased likelihood of violence. Women in violent relationships should be violent largely in reaction to male violence. This is what we predicted. We also expected husband violence to increase in likelihood following a variety of nonviolent wife behaviors.

Fourth, although both spouses in a violent relationship might experience more anger than nonviolent couples, the type of anger they experience and express may differ, given the differing effects that violence has on them. Previous studies have shown that battered wives were at least as negative as husbands during some phases of conflict discussions (Margolin et al., 1988). However, there are many levels of anger, some of which include verbal aggression (e.g., belligerence or contempt) and others of which do not (e.g., criticism, disagreement, or defensiveness). To the extent that violent husbands are using violence for control, they would be expected to express anger that includes verbal aggression and provocative, controlling behavior. Although battered women experience heightened anger compared with other married women, they might be disinclined to express it aggressively because to do so may put them at increased risk for violence. Thus, we predicted that relative to nonviolent husbands, violent men would express more verbally aggressive and provocative forms of anger, such as belligerence and contempt, whereas women in violent relationships would be inclined to express anger in less aggressive forms.

Fifth, given our hypotheses regarding group differences between violent and nonviolent couples in the experience of anger and fear, we decided to directly examine psychophysiological measures of autonomic nervous system arousal during the conflict discussions. Self-reports of physiological arousal have suggested that violent husbands experience more arousal than other men (Margolin et al., 1988). However, no published studies have directly examined psychophysiological responses. Although Margolin et al. did not find differences in self-reported physiological arousal between wives in violent and nonviolent relationships, our predictions regarding heightened fear in these women would suggest greater physiological arousal than in their nonviolent counterparts.

Unlike previous research on marital interaction and violence, we studied a clinical population exhibiting severe husband-to-wife violence. Moreover, we matched violent and nonviolent control groups on marital satisfaction so that group differences could be unambiguously attributed to violence per se rather than greater marital dissatisfaction in the violent group. Finally, we minimized overlap between experimental and control groups by restricting nonviolent control couples to those where neither partner reported any incidents of physical aggression by either party throughout their relationship history.

Method

Subjects

We recruited 60 couples experiencing husband-to-wife domestic violence (DV) and 32 couples who were maritally distressed but nonviolent (DNV).¹ All couples were recruited through a combination of public service announcements, media advertising, and random digit telephone dialing. Each was paid \$200 for participating in the study.

The Conflict Tactics Scale (CTS; Straus, 1979) was used to determine whether or not couples experienced husband-to-wife violence. To be

classified as DV, the husband, on the basis of the wife's CTS report had to have: (a) pushed, grabbed, shoved, slapped, hit, or tried to hit his wife six or more times in the past year; (b) kicked, bit, or hit her with a fist at least twice in the past year; or (c) beat her up, threatened her with a knife or gun, or used a knife or gun on her at least once in the past year.² To be classified as DNV, the wives' score on the Marital Adjustment Test (MAT; Locke & Wallace, 1959) had to be 90 or below, and neither partner could have engaged in any violence in their relationship history.³

The vast majority of partners in both groups were in some form of psychotherapy: 78.9% of the DV husbands; 80.4% of the DV wives; 77.1% of the DNV husbands; and 85.7% of the DNV wives.

Table 1 shows that we succeeded in matching DNV couples with DV couples on marital satisfaction. There were no significant differences between husbands or wives on Dyadic Adjustment Scale (DAS; Spanier, 1976) scores. Moreover, the means are very similar in the two groups, for both husbands and wives. According to DV wives, 36% had been beaten up within the past year; 75% had been kicked, bitten, or hit; 21% of the husbands had been arrested on a domestic violence charge; and 80% of the wives had been injured by their husbands' actions, 23% seriously enough to seek medical attention.

To what extent should our sample be thought of as unilateral, that is, only exhibiting husband-to-wife violence, and to what extent was the violence bilateral? According to the wives themselves, almost half (28 out of 57) would have qualified for our DV group if wife violence had been the criterion, and almost all (52 out of 57) admitted to at least low-level violence. Thus, despite selecting for husband-to-wife violence, in the vast majority of DV couples the wife also admitted to engaging in at least some violence herself.

Procedure

Laboratory interview. We developed a structured interview to assess the interactional dynamics of prototypical violent and nonviolent argu-

¹ Although these sample sizes reflect the total number of subjects who participated in the study, some analyses have smaller numbers of subjects because of missing data.

² We used wife reports to classify husbands as violent for the following reasons: (a) We were primarily interested in husband-to-wife violence; (b) we expected many of the husbands to deny that they were violent, given previous findings; (c) we reasoned that if we only chose couples where husbands acknowledged that they were violent, we would end up with a very unrepresentative sample. As it turned out, husband scores on the Conflict Tactics Scale for their own behavior were within the moderate to severe range on domestic violence, and 54 of 57 husbands in the DV condition admitted to at least some violence toward their wives. Moreover, when we divided the DV sample in half and compared husbands in the upper 50% of self-endorsement for violence with those in the lower 50%, the groups were virtually identical in their relationship to criterion variables.

³ We also used wives to classify couples as maritally distressed. This was largely a matter of expediency because wives were interviewed to determine whether the DV classification was warranted. It was relatively easy to classify them in terms of marital distress in the same interview. However, if husbands reported any violence between either of them once they were interviewed, couples were disqualified from the DNV condition. Moreover, we set the cutoff for marital distress low enough (90 or less) on the Marital Adjustment Test to ensure that most husbands would score in the distressed range. As it turned out, although the husband Dyadic Adjustment Scale (DAS) means were somewhat higher than their wives, they still fell well within the distressed range. Thus, even though we relied on the wives for classification purposes, we ended up with a valid sample of maritally distressed but nonviolent subjects. This is not surprising, given the high correlations between husband and wife DAS scores typically reported in the marital literature.

Table 1
Scale Scores and Demographics for Domestic Violence (DV) and Distressed but Nonviolent (DNV) Couples

Scale and spouse tested	DV couples		DNV couples		<i>F</i> (1, 80)
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	
Dyadic Adjustment Scale					
Wife	84.54	21.12	86.18	18.76	0.14
Husband	92.28	17.19	94.88	13.74	0.57
Conflict Tactics Scale (self)					
Wife	13.58	17.48	0.03	0.17	19.72**
Husband	11.04	19.99	0.15	0.51	9.74*
Conflict Tactics Scale (partner)					
Wife	21.46	25.78	0.03	0.18	22.68**
Husband	11.71	14.66	0.36	0.19	19.61**
Education ^a					
Wife	14.04	2.36	14.92	2.29	1.06
Husband	14.09	2.51	14.65	1.84	1.26
Income ^b					
Wife	902.17	778.42	1,136.00	802.52	1.06
Husband	1,700.83	969.586	2,508.93	2,055.84	4.50**
Age					
Wife	35.06	10.02	39.42	9.82	1.04
Husband	35.62	8.99	41.42	9.98	1.23
Years married	6.82	6.78	12.21	12.21	3.24**
No. of children	1.96	1.79	1.75	1.35	1.76

^a Total number of years completed. ^b Gross dollars per month earned by each individual.
 * $p < .01$. ** $p < .001$.

ments. Subjects were asked to describe, in the following order, the most recent nonviolent incident, their worst nonviolent incident, and then, for couples in the DV condition, their most recent, worst, and very first violent incidents. For each argument, subjects were allowed to describe the events with as little intervention by the interviewer as possible. A structured probe was used to generate act-by-act descriptions of the arguments.

Transcripts were made of their descriptions, which were later coded for content and for affect. The coding unit was the act. For example, if the husband withdrew, the wife asked him to stop, and the husband then swore at her, there would be three acts to code and each would receive an affect code and a content code.

Coding of argument descriptions. There were three affect codes: *positive/neutral*, *aggressive*, and *distress* (fear or sadness). Coders were blind to the experimental condition of the subjects while coding the nonviolent argument descriptions and to which incidents were being checked for reliability. Interrater reliabilities on the affect codes based on Cronbach's alpha ranged from .93 to .99.

In addition to the affect codes, there were nine content codes: *withdraw*, *criticize*, *defend*, *demand*, *emotional abuse*, *physical aggression*, *positive/neutral*, *distress*, and *self-defense*. Reliability for content codes averaged .88, with a range of .77–.99.

Coding of observational data. Couples talked for 15 min in the laboratory about two problem areas of continuing disagreement. The problems were chosen from a structured interview based on partners' reports of current relationship problems. The interactions were videotaped, and psychophysiological measures were taken.

Specific Affect Coding System (SPAFF). The SPAFF was used to code the affect in the laboratory interactions (Gottman & Krokoff, 1989). Coders classified the behaviors of speaker and listener as affectively *neutral*, as one of four positive affects (*affection*, *humor*, *interest/curiosity*, or *joy/enthusiasm*), or as some form of negative affect that fell

into one of three axes: (a) an *anger* axis (anger, domineering, belligerence, contempt, or disgust); (b) a *sadness* axis (sadness or whining); or (c) a *fear* axis (tension, worry, defensiveness, or fear). Within the anger axis, the specific codes differed not only in intensity but also in how provocative they were. Belligerence and contempt can be considered the most provocative codes. A belligerent act deliberately challenges and provokes (e.g., "What are you gonna do about my drinking, huh? Go on, I dare you to do something about it"), whereas a contemptuous act is insulting or demeaning.

Nonstudent, staff observers were trained to criteria. (There is a manual, training, and test tapes available for the SPAFF.) The mean Cronbach's alpha reliabilities for the SPAFF were .62 for wives and .58 for husbands. For those codes discussed in the Results section, reliabilities ranged from .47 to .86.

Psychophysiological data. Three physiological measures of cardiovascular arousal were obtained during laboratory interactions by using a system consisting of a Coulbourn eight-channel polygraph and a DEC LSI 11/23 microcomputer. The data were averaged by the microcomputer over 1-s intervals. We assessed the following physiological variables from both husband and wife: (a) *cardiac interbeat interval* (IBI). This measure was determined by measuring the time interval between successive spikes (R-waves) of the electrocardiogram (EKG). Beckman miniature electrodes with Redux paste were placed in a bipolar configuration on opposite sides of the subject's chest; (b) *pulse transmission time to the finger* (PTT-F): A UFI photoplethysmograph was attached to the second finger of the nondominant hand. The time interval was measured between the R-wave of the EKG and the upstroke of the peripheral pulse at the finger; and (c) *finger pulse amplitude* (FPA). This was an estimate of the relative volume of blood reaching the finger on each heart beat, detected by using a finger photoplethysmograph on the second finger of the nondominant hand. The trough-to-peak amplitude

of the finger pulse was measured, thus providing an index of the amount of blood in the periphery.

Results

Table 1 shows the means and standard deviations for husbands and wives in DV and DNV groups on demographic variables, marital satisfaction (measured by the DAS; Spanier, 1976), and severity of domestic violence (measured by the CTS). Although DV husbands and wives were younger than their DNV counterparts and had been married for a shorter duration, neither age nor duration of marriage correlated significantly with the dependent variables of primary interest. The same was true of husbands' income: Although higher among DNV husbands, this variable was not significantly correlated with our criterion variables.

Roles That DV Husbands and Wives Play in Violent Arguments

In the following series of analyses, we looked for consistency in what DV husbands and wives reported doing during violent arguments and whether there were patterns that differentiated them from their nonviolent arguments.

Behaviors predictive of violence. Using lag one sequential analyses, we examined whether or not any wife behaviors were predictive of husband violence. Specifically, we compared the unconditional probability of husband violence with the conditional probabilities of husband violence given specific wife behaviors, using the binomial formula (Allison & Liker, 1982). This formula produces *Z* scores for each couple. To combine *z* scores to arrive at a description of the entire group, we used Rosenthal's (1991) method. When this aggregate group score exceeds 1.96, one can infer that we have improved, to a statistically significant degree, our ability to predict husband violence.

According to wives, husbands were inclined to continue their level of violence when wives were violent themselves ($z = 3.08$), when they verbally defended themselves ($z = 3.71$), and even when they withdrew ($z = 3.56$). In contrast, neither husbands nor wives reported any behavior that predicted suppression of husband violence (no *z* scores < -1.96). Husbands reported the antecedents of violence continuation somewhat differently than wives did: According to them, their violence continued only when the wife was violent ($z = 7.23$) or when she was emotionally abusive ($z = 2.24$).

According to wives, the only husband behavior that led to continuance of wife violence was husband violence ($z = 3.47$). Husbands agreed that wife violence continued following husband violence ($z = 2.57$) but also reported that wives continued their violence in response to husbands' emotional abuse ($z = 2.47$).

Husbands and wives both reported that there were three likely wife responses to husband violence: violence ($z = 3.47$ for wife reports, and 2.57 for husband reports); self-defense ($z = 8.12$ for wife report, and 4.14 for husband report); and psychological distress ($z = 4.33$ for wife reports, and 2.48 for husband reports).

Sequential patterns during violent arguments. Table 2 depicts reported affect sequences during violent and nonviolent

Table 2
Z Scores of Affect Sequences Among Domestic Violence Couples During Violent and Nonviolent Arguments at Home

Sequence	Violent argument		Nonviolent argument	
	Wife report	Husband report	Husband report	Wife report
Negative reciprocity				
Wife	11.21	7.70	7.71	8.08
Husband	13.02	10.02	7.73	7.62
Start-up				
Wife	2.88	2.03	3.20	2.37
Husband	2.04	1.76	1.13	2.54
Positive reciprocity				
Wife	5.91	3.86	8.65	7.69
Husband	4.01	2.46	9.53	7.26

Note. Negative reciprocity = probability of aggression following aggression. Start-up = probability of aggression following positive or neutral behavior. Positive reciprocity = probability of positive or neutral behavior following positive or neutral behavior of the spouse.

arguments, based on the structured laboratory interview. We examined the following lag-one sequences: *positive reciprocity* (the probability of one partner being positive, given that the other has just behaved positively); *negative reciprocity* (the probability of one partner behaving aggressively, given that the other has just behaved aggressively); and *start-up* (the probability of one partner responding to the other's positive behavior with aggression).

When comparing these sequences in violent and nonviolent arguments within the violent group, husbands were more inclined toward positive reciprocity in nonviolent arguments ($z = 3.20$ for husband reports, and $z = 3.43$ for wife reports). The same was true for wives ($z = 2.56$ for husband reports, and $z = 3.45$ for wife reports).

To examine base-rate differences between violent and nonviolent arguments, affect and content codes were entered into three-way analyses of variance (ANOVAs) with actor, reporter, and type of argument (nonviolent vs. violent) serving as within-subject variables. There was a significant interaction between actor and type of argument, $F(1, 45) = 20.30, p < .001$. Husbands exhibited a higher proportion of aggressive affect in violent than in nonviolent arguments, $F(1, 45) = 53.44, p < .001$, whereas wives' aggressive affect was constant across the two types of arguments. In both types of arguments, men were more emotionally abusive than women, $F(1, 45) = 7.76, p < .01$. However, there were no differences in emotional abuse between violent and nonviolent arguments, $F(1, 45) < 1, ns$.

Affect and Verbal Content During Nonviolent Arguments in the Laboratory

Table 3 shows the means and standard deviations for both groups on SPAFF. Both DV wives and husbands displayed more anger, $F(1, 92) = 5.44, p < .03$, than did DNV partners. Across both groups, men were more inclined than women to be domi-

neering, $F(1, 92) = 6.40, p < .02$, and defensive, $F(1, 92) = 14.90, p < .001$. In contrast, women regardless of group were more likely to be angry, $F(1, 92) = 6.54, p < .02$, and sad, $F(1, 92) = 13.56, p < .0001$, than were men. There were no significant Group \times Partner interactions for any of these codes (all $F_s < 1$).

When we looked at the provocative anger codes, only DV husbands were clearly differentiated from their nonviolent counterparts. Only DV husbands exceeded their DNV counterparts in contempt, $F(1, 93) = 4.57, p < .04$; there were no significant differences between DV and DNV wives, $F(1, 93) = 1.85, ns$. In addition, where only DV husbands showed more belligerence relative to their DNV counterparts while speaking, $F(1, 93) = 5.94, p < .02$, and while listening, $F(1, 93) = 5.43, p < .03$, there were no significant differences between DV and DNV wives. In contrast, only DV wives, not husbands, showed greater tension and fear than their DNV counterparts, $F(1, 93) = 4.37, p < .04$.

However, despite confirmation of our hypotheses, the pattern of results was not as we expected for the belligerence and contempt codes. Our expectation was that DV men would be higher on these two codes than all other groups, including their own DV wives. However, as the means in Table 3 show, it is the DNV men who are the outliers. Their rates of belligerence, $2.43 < ts(92) < 3.55, .001 \leq ps \leq .02$, and contempt, $1.62 \leq ts(92) \leq 2.44, ps \geq .02 \leq .12$, are lower than those in the other three gender-group combinations. In fact, there were similar rates of belligerence, $t(60) = 1.46, ns$, and contempt, $t(60) = .89, ns$, in DV husbands and wives.

Table 3
SPAFF Means and Standard Deviations for Domestic Violence (DV) and Distressed but Nonviolent (DNV) Couples During the Laboratory Interaction

SPAFF code	DV		DNV	
	Husbands	Wives	Husbands	Wives
Anger				
<i>M</i>	4.66	8.31	2.36	4.21
<i>SD</i>	6.53	11.01	4.84	6.58
Domineering				
<i>M</i>	6.39	2.46	3.46	1.76
<i>SD</i>	9.81	4.63	6.36	3.58
Belligerence				
<i>M</i>	10.75	13.12	5.55	12.21
<i>SD</i>	11.20	11.06	6.78	11.33
Contempt				
<i>M</i>	4.02	5.18	1.61	3.03
<i>SD</i>	6.19	8.40	2.55	4.63
Sadness				
<i>M</i>	2.80	7.34	3.00	6.09
<i>SD</i>	4.35	8.01	4.85	10.50
Tension or fear				
<i>M</i>	6.74	8.66	5.46	5.88
<i>SD</i>	8.60	6.97	5.47	4.20
Defensiveness				
<i>M</i>	26.25	19.84	24.85	15.15
<i>SD</i>	20.17	14.56	15.85	10.55

Note. The values represent mean frequency counts across the interaction. $n = 61$ for DV couples; $n = 33$ for DNV couples. SPAFF = Specific Affect Coding System.

Table 4
Physiological Means and Standard Deviations for Domestic Violence (DV) and Distressed but Nonviolent (DNV) Couples During the Laboratory Interaction

Physiological measure	DV		DNV	
	Husbands	Wives	Husbands	Wives
Interbeat interval (ms)				
<i>M</i>	769.53	722.05	774.66	735.63
<i>SD</i>	124.93	112.04	128.46	97.29
Finger pulse transit time (ms)				
<i>M</i>	200.41	195.17	197.95	206.01
<i>SD</i>	24.15	20.83	27.58	21.64
Finger pulse amplitude				
<i>M</i>	.015	.017	.015	.012
<i>SD</i>	.007	.009	.011	.009

Note. The values represent the mean across the interaction. $n = 60$ for DV couples; $n = 32$ for DNV couples.

Physiological Findings

The summary means and standard deviations for the physiological data are presented in Table 4. We found that differences in cardiovascular arousal held primarily in discriminating wives (but not husbands) in violent marriages from other wives. Specifically, DV wives, compared with DNV wives, showed larger finger pulse amplitude ($t = -2.56, p < .01$) and faster finger pulse transit time ($t = 2.31, p < .01$) across all three 5-min segments.

Discussion

What have we learned in this study about the roles of batterers and victims in violent altercations? Only the DV wives were fearful during violent arguments; the husbands acknowledged their wives' fear. Although husbands might deny responsibility for the violence, they do not claim to be afraid of their wives. This gender difference underscores one of the major differences between husband and wife violence: Only husband violence produces fear in the partner. It is largely this difference that accounts for the unique ability of husbands to use violence as a means of psychological and social control.

Furthermore, wives' descriptions indicate that they are violent only in reaction to husband violence, whereas husbands are violent in response to a variety of nonviolent wife behaviors. Although husbands were not in complete accord with this account, even they acknowledged that wife violence is largely reactive to either physical or emotional abuse on their part. Moreover, husbands admitted to their own violence continuing in response to at least some nonviolent wife behaviors. Finally, husbands admitted that once the violence begins, there is nothing that the wife can do to stop it. Even strategies such as wife withdrawal produce continuation of violence rather than suppression. Thus, in a very real sense, women seem to have little recourse when it comes to stopping the fight once it starts. The arguments at home seem to confirm clinical descriptions that,

even when violence is bilateral, the husbands are the perpetrators.

One of our primary interests was to study anger and aggression in a more differentiated manner than had been done in past studies. "Anger" is far too general a construct to be of much use in understanding the interaction of DV couples. When the less provocative manifestations of anger are examined, DV women were as easily discriminated from their nonviolent counterparts as were DV men: Both wives and husbands in violent marriages showed more aggression at home and looked angrier in the laboratory than did nonviolent couples.

In our DV sample, men differentiated themselves from other men by their preponderant use of the most provocative anger codes, especially belligerence and contempt. However, in our sample, it was not just the DV men who were belligerent and contemptuous during the laboratory interactions. Wives showed more anger than their husbands did and were at least as belligerent and contemptuous. We thought that DV women might be too frightened and sad to take their husbands on during verbal arguments and would be guarded in their affective responses due to their history of physical abuse. Although DV women did exhibit more fear and sadness than did their husbands, they also showed more cardiovascular arousal during the interaction and at least as much anger and verbal aggression.

What emerges is a profile of two partners in DV marriages who are angry, belligerent, and contemptuous. However, there were some gender differences in affect during the argument. Men were more domineering and more defensive, whereas women showed more tension, fear, and sadness. Thus, the men were more controlling and less likely to acknowledge that there is anything wrong with them. Both of these seem to be characteristics of men in general when discussing conflict; however, the consequences may be more severe in relationships with a history of violence. It can be said that DV women are providing a more complicated and even contradictory affective response. Their simultaneous heightened expressions of anger, fear, and sadness during the interaction may all be accounting for their increased cardiovascular arousal. Apparently, at least some DV women respond with strong competing affects during arguments with their husbands. Their intense anger, combined with fear and sadness, may be part of the experience of helplessness reported by battered women (Walker, 1984). They are intensely angry and hostile toward their husbands because of the physical abuse, yet they are also frightened of them. The ambivalence associated with these competing affective responses may be an important component of the experience of being in an abusive relationship.

These findings must also be considered in light of the gender differences found in nonviolent couples. We found that the outlier group—gender combination were the nonviolent husbands, who were less belligerent, contemptuous, and angry than their wives and both groups of partners in the DV group. It is by now a common finding in the marital interaction literature that wives in distressed marriages exhibit higher rates of negative affect than do husbands. These differences have been interpreted in light of the tendency for women to be less satisfied with their marriages than their husbands and to be seeking more change (Jacobson, 1989). However, when distressed relationships include husband-to-wife violence, this gender difference

disappears. To the extent that negative affect can be viewed as an expression of marital dissatisfaction, DV husbands are not getting what they want. In this sense, they are more like their wives and the women in distressed but nonviolent relationships than they are like other men. Just as wives may be the messengers of marital distress, husbands may be the messengers of violence. When husbands show the same level of verbal aggression as their wives during verbal arguments, wife battering is likely to be present in the relationship.

As a final commentary on the absence of gender differences among DV couples in rates of verbal aggression, these findings should not be construed as supporting the notion that battered women cause or are in some way provoking violence through their verbal aggression. These results simply illustrate that the battered women in our sample, despite their history of being beaten, had not been beaten into submission (cf. Cordova, Jacobson, Gottman, Rushe, & Cox, 1993). The verbal aggression occurred during nonviolent arguments, and there is no evidence that these behaviors on the part of wives were correlated in any way with husband violence. Moreover, even if a correlation were found between wife verbal aggression and husband violence, it would not absolve battering husbands of responsibility for their violence (Jacobson, 1994a). Indeed, everything we found in our analyses of violent arguments is consistent with the notion that it is the men who are driving the system.

However, considerable work remains to be done in this area. In this study, we focused on couples selected for severe husband-to-wife violence. Even though in most of the DV couples violence was bilateral, this sample did not include couples selected for wife-to-husband violence or for bilateral violence. It is possible that we would have found different types of gender differences in the function of violence had we selected for such couples.

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Call for Nominations

The Publications and Communications Board has opened nominations for the editorships of the *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, the *Journal of Educational Psychology*, the Interpersonal Relations and Group Processes section of the *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *Neuropsychology*, and *Psychological Bulletin* for the years 1997-2002. Larry E. Beutler, PhD; Joel R. Levin, PhD; Norman Miller, PhD; Nelson Butters, PhD; and Robert J. Sternberg, PhD, respectively, are the incumbent editors. Candidates must be members of APA and should be available to start receiving manuscripts in early 1996 to prepare for issues published in 1997. Please note that the P&C Board encourages participation by members of underrepresented groups in the publication process and would particularly welcome such nominees. To nominate candidates, prepare a statement of one page or less in support of each candidate.

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