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Power and Violence: The Relation Between Communication Patterns, Power Discrepancies, and Domestic Violence

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This study hypothesized that power discrepancies in the marital relationship, where the husband is subordinate, serve as risk factors for husband-to-wife violence. The construct of marital power was assessed from 3 power domains operationalized by discrepancies in economic status, decision-making power, communication patterns, and communication skill. Three groups of married couples ($N = 95$) were compared: domestically violent (DV), maritally distressed/nonviolent (DNV), and maritally happy/nonviolent (HNV). DV couples were more likely than the 2 nonviolent groups to engage in husband demand/wife withdraw interactions. Within the DV group, husbands who had less power were more physically abusive toward their wives. Thus, violence may be compensatory behavior to make up for husbands' lack of power in other arenas of marriage. Difficulties in assessing marital power and future direction for the study of power and violence are discussed.

Domestic violence has recently become a topic of national concern and an important social problem affecting every stratum of American society. Although societal patriarchy may be the bedrock of husband-to-wife aggression (Dobash & Dobash, 1979), it remains unclear why some men use violence against their wives and other men brought up amid the same societal pressures do not. Aggression may be initiated by men who feel that they should command dyadic power and feel frustrated by their inability to command such power (Dutton, 1988). In power-discrepant relationships, in which the man is subordinate to his wife in some respects, the man may regain some power through the use of physical dominance.

Research on power relations within the family has proliferated in the past several decades (Turk & Bell, 1972), but it has not clearly informed social scientists as to how marital power relates to domestic violence. Marital power has proven to be an extraordinarily difficult construct for social scientists to measure (Scanzoni, 1979). This problem of measurement arises because power is not unidimensional (Heer, 1963). Moreover, the literature suggests that there are almost as many definitions of power in intimate relationships as there are people who have studied it (Murphy & Meyer, 1991). In addition, although many variables may be theoretically related to marital power, it is unclear if there exists an empirically cohesive construct of marital power. In this article, we present a brief discussion of marital power; however, we make no attempt to examine this construct exhaustively. For an in-depth discussion of marital power, see reviews by Scanzoni (1979), Cromwell and Olson (1975), McDonald (1980), and Gray-Little and Burks (1983).

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Literature Review

Marital Power

Research on marital power has been impeded by methodological problems and lack of standard conceptual definitions of power. Many studies of marital power have focused exclusively on the power outcome domain (Cromwell & Olson, 1975), commonly assessed by self-report of who makes major decisions, such as which car to buy or how to spend time with friends. A few studies have assessed through direct observation behavioral indicants of dyadic power (Gray-Little & Burks, 1983). Studies comparing self-reports of decision-making power with direct observation of behavior have shown little correspondence (Corrales, 1975; Gray-Little, 1982). Even studies comparing power measures of the same method (e.g., two questionnaire measures) have failed to correlate significantly (Cromwell & Olson, 1975; Gray-Little & Burks, 1983).

The failure of multitrait–multimethod analyses (Campbell & Fiske, 1959) points to the conclusion that marital power is not a unitary construct. This adds to the conceptual controversy about what marital power really is. A major issue is whether to view power as a potential, for example, by the amount of resources available for distribution or exchange, or as the actual control exercised over outcomes. Alternatively, power can be defined as the capacity to produce intended effects (Gray-Little & Burks, 1983). Although theories about power structure may not become more sophisticated and valid until the methodology of power structure improves considerably (Safilios-Rothschild, 1970), the methodology of power may not be improved without the application of a consistent, broad, conceptual framework.

Cromwell and Olson (1975) divide power into three domains: power bases, power processes, and power outcomes. *Power bases* are the personal assets, such as knowledge, skill, or re-

wards, that form the basis of one partner's control over another (Gray-Little & Burks, 1983). Power bases are synonymous with resources, as discussed by Blood and Wolfe (1960), but are not solely economic: Power bases can be any personal resource that someone brings into a relationship. Also included in this category is the cultural definition of who has the authority. *Power processes* are the interactional techniques such as assertiveness, persuasion, problem-solving, or demandingness that individuals use in their attempts to gain control. Finally, *power outcomes* are related to who makes the final decision, or "who wins" (Cromwell & Olson, 1975; McDonald, 1980).

Even within these specific power domains there seems to be a lack of coherence among the disparate variables at both the empirical and the conceptual levels. For example, the subconstruct of power bases may include economic resources, cultural definitions, affective resources (e.g., level of involvement or dependence), personal resources (e.g., physical appearance), and cognitive resources (e.g., the perception of power; Cromwell & Olson, 1975). However, perceived power and asymmetric control over a particular resource may be quite different entities. In addition, differences in the mode of measurement (observation vs. self-report) and response domain (overt behavior vs. perception) add to the empirical disunity.

Although one may question the empirical evidence for the construct of power, there is no doubt that marital power is a phenomenon of interest. Bertrand Russell observed that "the fundamental concept in social science is Power, in the same sense in which Energy is the fundamental concept in Physics. Like Energy, Power has many forms" (1938, as cited in Murphy & Meyer, 1991, p. 12). Perhaps the usefulness of the fundamental concept of power lies not in its empirical coherence but in the predictive utility of its many forms.

Power Bases and Domestic Violence

It is important to consider the wider sociohistorical context in examining power bases and domestic violence. Historically, it was considered a necessary aspect of a husband's marital obligation to control and chastise his wife through the use of physical force (Dobash & Dobash, 1977). Sociologists indicate that the sexist power hierarchy between men and women is the major contributor to violence against women. However, not every man, even within a patriarchal culture, beats his partner. Real or perceived challenges to the man's possession, authority, or control most often result in the use of violence (Dobash & Dobash, 1977).

The effect of economic power bases on domestic violence has been examined. In a random survey of 1,553 Kentucky women, Hornung, McCullough, and Sugimoto (1981), found that women with jobs that were higher in status than their husbands' jobs were much more likely to experience life-threatening violence than were wives who were occupationally similar to their husbands. However, when the man's job is high in status relative to his partner's occupation, there is a significant reduction in the risk of life-threatening violence. In a review of similar studies, Hotalling and Sugarman (1986) concluded that if the wife has more education or higher income than the husband, the likelihood of husband-to-wife violence increases.

Power Outcomes and Marital Violence

Decision-making power is associated with marital satisfaction, but its relation to domestic violence may not be a simple one. In a large, nationally representative sample, marital power was assessed by asking "who has the final say" in making decisions (Straus, Gelles, & Steinmetz, 1980). Wife abuse was nearly three times more likely when the husband dominated decision making than when the wife dominated and roughly eight times more likely than in egalitarian marriages (Murphy & Meyer, 1991; Straus, et al., 1980). In contrast, Coleman and Straus (1986) reported that when marital disagreement is low, female-dominant, male-dominant, and egalitarian power arrangements show about the same rates of husband-to-wife violence. When the stress of high marital disagreement is added, female-dominant relationships evidence the highest rates of husband-to-wife violence. In addition, female-dominant relationships are likely to be the least maritally satisfying (Blood & Wolfe, 1960; Corrales, 1975). Thus, marital satisfaction may moderate the impact of decision-making power on violence.

Foci of the Current Study

First, although there is some evidence that socioeconomic and decision-making power are associated with marital violence, discrepancies in occupational status and decision-making may be moderated by processes or other bases of dyadic power. Men who are unable to effect their intentions through negotiation and who find that nonphysical coercion may be insufficient in their attempts to achieve their own intentions may resort to pushing, slapping, beating, and so forth (Scanzoni, 1979). Communication deficits could be considered a personal power base (e.g., a trait of communication skill) or a power process (e.g., a dysfunctional marital pattern). A power base variable involving the ability to achieve nonphysical coercion and successful negotiation may be a resource that a skilled communicator has over a less skilled one. Communication skill deficits might threaten the "patriarchal social order" (Dobash & Dobash, 1977, p. 434) and limit the man's repertoire of conflict resolution skills. If the wife is more verbally competent than her husband, his only effective expressive retort may be physical aggression.

Although communication problems have been noted in clinical samples of batterers (Ganley & Harris, 1978), a systematic examination of discrepancies in general communication skill has not yet been applied to domestically violent samples. However, Bograd (1988) reported that one of the most common justifications the husband gave for his violence was that he had no other way to handle the conflict. Moreover, Holtzworth-Munroe and Anglin (1990) found that male batterers were significantly poorer at generating competent responses to problematic social situations than maritally distressed/nonviolent and nondistressed/nonviolent men. It is possible that batterers' lack of competence in response to problematic marital situations is a product of deficits in general communication skill.

Second, there may be interaction patterns indicative of power processes in marriage. A common interactional pattern in couples seeking therapy is the demand/withdraw pattern (Jacobson, 1989). In these interactions, the demander, usually the woman, pressures the partner through emotional requests,

criticism, and complaints, and the withdrawer, usually the man, retreats through defensiveness, passive inaction, or "stonewalling" (Christensen & Heavey, 1990; Gottman & Krokoff, 1989). The roles of the demander and the withdrawer within this interaction pattern may also illuminate the balance of power within the relationship. Given the principle of least interest (Waller & Hill, 1951), those who want less have more to say; that is, those who demand change, intimacy, or engagement are in a less powerful position than those who want to maintain the status quo (Christensen & Heavey, 1990; Jacobson, 1989). The stereotyped sex-difference in the demand/withdraw interaction pattern (Christensen & Heavey, 1990) may be attributable to men's greater control over the allocation of rewards (Kelly, 1979); women, as a low-power group, may use psychological pressure to influence male partners' behavior (Raush, Barry, Hertel, & Swain, 1974). Moreover, by withholding resources that women want (i.e., involvement, closeness, or new behaviors), men maintain power over women. Therefore, we believe that being in the demanding role means being "one down," whereas being in the withdrawing role is one manifestation of power. To date, no research has examined the occurrence of the demand/withdraw interaction pattern within a domestically violent sample.

Although the various theories of marital power are complex and multifaceted, empirical studies generally examine one variable at a time, within one power domain. Marital power has most commonly been operationalized as relative status, earning power, or decision-making power. In the present study, we assess marital power with variables from each of the three domains delineated by Cromwell and Olson (1975). Figure 1 is a theoretical diagram of the power variables as they relate to power bases, power processes, and power outcomes and to a general construct of marital power. In addition to the interest in discrepancies between husband and wife in communication skill, we chose to examine general communication skill for methodological reasons. We thought that this broad, personal power base might correlate with other marital power bases, such as economic resources, as well as to power process and power outcome variables. That is, communication skill may be the glue that binds disparate variables of marital power together empirically.

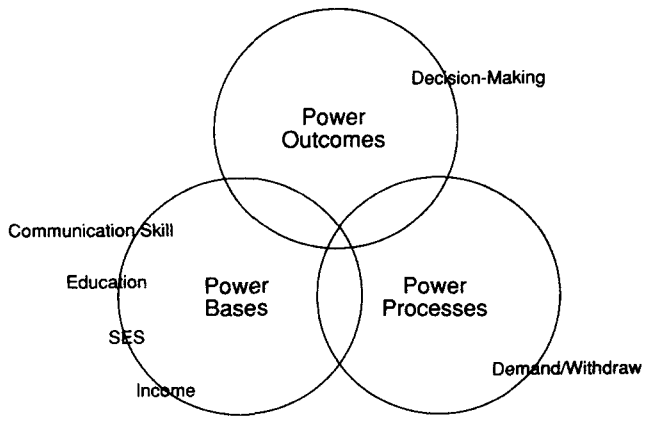

Figure 1. The construct of marital power: A multivariate approach. (SES = socioeconomic status.)

This study examines the relation between marital power and domestic violence and predicts that a husband's lack of power relative to his wife's will be related to increased violence. Because female-dominant relationships may be at greatest risk for marital violence (Coleman & Straus, 1986; Hornung et al., 1981), we hypothesized that marriages in which the husband is subordinate in marital power would be at greatest risk for violence. Two general hypotheses were made. First, a between-groups hypothesis predicted that the maritally violent couples would evidence greater discrepancies than the distressed/nonviolent couples, favoring the wife in communication skill, income, socioeconomic status (SES), education, and decision-making power. Planned comparisons compare (a) the domestically violent (DV) couples with the maritally distressed/nonviolent (DNV) couples to test the effect due to violence and (b) the DV and DNV couples versus the HNV couples to test the effect due to marital distress. Second, a within-group hypothesis predicted that within the DV population, husbands with lower marital power will exhibit more extreme violence toward their wives. That is, given a violent population, those relationships in which the husband is lower in power than his wife are hypothesized to be significantly more violent than those in which the husband is in a more powerful position.

Method

Subjects

Three groups of married couples ($N = 95$) were recruited through the media, by a combination of public service announcements and advertisements. The ads generally requested married couples interested in participating in a research study or (because the general ad attracted a preponderance of happy couples) married couples who are unhappy or experiencing conflict in their relationships. Couples were paid $200 for participating in the study. Criteria for group assignment were based on the Conflict Tactics Scale (CTS; Straus, 1979) and the Short Marital Adjustment Test (SMAT; Locke & Wallace, 1959), which were administered to the wives over the phone. Wives' reports were used because we assumed that husbands might underreport their own violence. We assumed, however, that marital satisfaction would be highly correlated between husband and wife. To be included in the DV group ($n = 49$), the husbands had to have engaged in a minimum of six or more minor violent acts (i.e., pushing or hitting with something), two or more moderately violent acts (i.e., slapping), or at least one life-threatening violent act (i.e., beating up or threatening with a knife or gun) in the past year. Nonviolent couples were categorized by wives' and husbands' reports of no physical aggression in the past 5 years and no moderate or life-threatening violent acts ever. Nonviolent couples who scored 115 or more (one standard deviation above the mean) on the SMAT were classified as happy/nonviolent (HNV; $n = 16$); those whose wives scored 90 or below were classified as DNV ($n = 30$). We chose the criterion of 90 rather than the customary mean split at 100 to ensure a moderately to severely distressed sample of couples that we hoped would match the marital satisfaction levels of the DV group. Matching these groups on marital satisfaction is important because differences between these two groups could be attributed to violence rather than to degree of marital distress.

Measures

Marital Power Bases

Communication skill. Communication skill was coded with the Behavioral Observation of Communication Skill (BOCS) coding system

(see Appendix), a 19-item, Likert-type coding measure adapted from other communication skill coding instruments (Backlund, 1978; Rubin, 1982; Spitzberg & Hurt, 1987). It is a global measure akin to general verbal ability. Other measures assess verbal ability nonverbally with standardized tests (e.g., the Scholastic Aptitude Test–Verbal) or on the basis of self-report of competence (Rubin, 1985). The BOCS assesses actual communication performance during a systematic interview. Husbands and wives were rated during separate 4-hr semistructured clinical interviews. Husbands and wives were interviewed about marital arguments separately and rated independently. All subjects were presented with the same verbal stimuli in the same setting to reduce the variance that is problematic in coding naturalistic conversation. Moreover, the separate interview format was chosen rather than a conversation between the partners in an attempt to (a) hold constant factors such as the topic of the discussion, (b) rule out artifacts such as domination of talk-time by one spouse, (c) code general communicative ability rather than spouse-specific communication, and (d) eliminate factors such as spousal intimidation and fear. Fear and intimidation were expected to be greatest among the DV group and might spuriously affect the battered wives' communication skill ratings. Subjects were asked to describe in detail two past (nonviolent) arguments with their spouse. Coders unaware of experimental hypotheses and group assignment rated subject's delivery, organization, content, English skills, listening skills, and overall communication effectiveness.

Each tape was rated by at least two trained coders. Reliability of the BOCS was assessed by means of intraclass correlations based on total BOCS score. These correlations averaged .74 and ranged from .67 to .77 (Babcock, Jacobson, & Gottman, 1991). A factor analysis was performed on the 19 items, and three factors of communication skill emerged: (a) Communication Clarity, (b) Communication Quantity, and (c) Social Comfort (Babcock et al., 1991). Only the total BOCS score was used in the present study. Although husband–wife discrepancy in communication skill was the power variable of interest, subtracting the husband's score from the wife's score is questionable because the BOCS is on an ordinal, not interval, scale. Therefore, the basis for group comparison was a 3×2 analysis of variance (ANOVA) with sex of spouse as the within-subject variable, groups as the between-subject variable, and communication skill scores as the dependent variable.

Economic resources. Socioeconomic status was based on occupation title, using Stevens and Cho's (1985) revision of Duncan's (1961) SES measure. This index is based on the 1980 U.S. Census Bureau's listing of occupational title. SES scores from a regression equation based on occupational prestige, education, and income were generally associated with the job title. Highest level of education attained and monthly income were directly solicited and also entered into analyses. Husbands' and wives' education, SES, and income were entered separately as within-case variables in the repeated measures, between-groups analyses. Relative economic and education power was also assessed by difference scores (wife − husband) on SES and on self-reported monthly salary and years of formal education.

Marital Power Processes

The demand–withdraw communication pattern was measured with the Communication Patterns Questionnaire (CPQ, Christensen & Sullaway, 1984). This questionnaire was designed to assess spouse perceptions of dyadic communication about relationship problems (Christensen & Heavey, 1990). The CPQ items were scored into two subscales that indicate the likelihood of (a) husband demand/wife withdraw interaction and (b) wife demand/husband withdraw interaction. Husband demand/wife withdraw communication consists of three items that assess asymmetrical behaviors in which the husband presses the wife to discuss a problem and then criticizes, nags, and makes demands on her, and the wife tries to avoid discussion of the problem and defends herself, withdraws, becomes silent, or refuses to discuss the matter further. Wife demand/husband withdraw communication consists of three items identical to the subscale above except the husband and wife are in opposite roles (Christensen & Shenk, 1991). Reliability and validity data of these subscales, using Cronbach's alpha, have been reported to range from .62 to .86 ($M = .71$; Christensen & Shenk, 1991). Husband demand/wife withdraw was based on the husband's report and wife demand/husband withdraw was based on the wife's report of likelihood of these communication patterns. Perception of demand/withdraw roles (i.e., who is demanding and who is withdrawing) was considered the within-case variable in the analyses. Using the data from the present study, husbands' and wives' reports correlated significantly for husband demand/wife withdraw ($r = .39$, $p < .001$) and for wife demand/husband withdraw ($r = .54$, $p < .001$).

Marital Power Outcomes

Decision-making power was assessed with the Who Does What (WDW) questionnaire (Cowan, Cowan, Coie, & Coie, 1978). The WDW is an instrument designed to assess husbands' and wives' perceptions of their relative responsibility for household tasks, family decision making, and the caring for children. For the current study, we analyzed only the decision-making scale. Decision-making power was found by averaging the 12 decision-making items related to who makes decisions in particular areas of the relationship. For example, items are rated (range, 1–9), with 1 indicating *she does it all* and 9 indicating *he does it all* (Whisman & Jacobson, 1989). For the between-groups analyses, husbands' reports and wives' reports were entered separately, with sex of report serving as a within-subject variable. However, in the within-group regression analyses where a choice had to be made as to whose report should be entered, decision-making power was based on husbands' report, because we were particularly interested in their perception of powerlessness. Husbands' and wives' reports of decision making were significantly correlated in the present study ($r = .35$, $p < .001$).

Marital Violence

The Conflicts Tactics Scale—Form N (CTS; Straus, 1979) is the most widely used measure of marital violence. It assesses self- and partner-aggression during the past year. Significant interpartner agreement on reports of physical aggression have been demonstrated using this scale (Jouriles & O'Leary, 1985). The CTS was administered to both husbands and wives. Violence and Psychological Abuse subscales were composed from the CTS. The Violence subscale was Items K through R, which ranged from "threw something at the other one" to "used knife or gun" (Hornung, et al., 1981). The psychological Abuse subscale was derived from Items D (insulted or swore at the other one) through J (threw, smashed, hit, or kicked something). Analyses focused on husband-to-wife abuse and were based on wives' report of husbands' behavior on the CTS.

Marital Satisfaction

Two measures of marital satisfaction were administered. As previously mentioned, the SMAT (Locke & Wallace, 1959) was administered to wives over the phone in order to classify couples as distressed or happy. The SMAT is a brief, 17-item self-report measure that assesses global relationship satisfaction. The Dyadic Adjustment Scale (DAS; Spanier, 1976) was administered to husbands and wives separately on their initial visit to the laboratory. The DAS is a 32-item

Table 1
Demographics

	Couple						
	DV (n = 49)		DNV (n = 30)		HNV (n = 16)		
Variable	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*F*(2, 93)
Years married	6.2	5.3	16.0	18.4	6.4	7.5	7.63**
DAS							
Husbands	94.0	16.3	95.1	16.5	124.6	9.6	31.3***
Wives	85.9	18.1	82.7	18.5	121.9	8.2	39.8***
Age							
Husbands	35.0	8.2	43.2	9.9	35.3	10.1	8.1**
Wives	34.5	9.7	39.9	9.4	33.5	9.9	3.7*
Education							
Husbands	13.8	2.3	14.3	2.5	15.9	2.5	4.8*
Wives	13.8	2.3	14.4	2.3	16.0	1.8	6.2**
SES							
Husbands	31.5	20.8	37.2	26.1	38.0	24.9	0.8
Wives	25.5	21.9	30.4	21.9	30.2	23.5	1.5
Monthly income ($)							
Husbands	1,468	1,084	2,476	2,084	1,756	867	4.6*
Wives	858	752	936	709	1,365	1,720	1.7

Note. DV = domestically violent; DNV = distressed/nonviolent; HNV = happy/nonviolent; DAS = Dyadic Adjustment Scale; SES = socioeconomic status.
* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

questionnaire that assesses dyadic satisfaction, consensus, cohesion, and affectional expression and has been shown to have high reliability (Cronbach's $\alpha = .96$; Spanier, 1976). Both of these scales have excellent psychometric properties (Jacobson & Margolin, 1979).

Results

The demographics of the three groups are reported in Table 1. There were significant group differences on most of the demographic variables. DNV couples were older, $t(94) = -2.63$, $p < .05$, married longer, $t(94) = -3.12$, $p < .01$, and had greater husband income, $t(94) = -2.68$, $p < .01$, than the other two groups. Differences on DAS scores between the DV and DNV groups were not significant, based on either husbands', $t(94) = -.33$, *ns*, or wives', $t(94) = .87$, *ns*, reports. As predicted, husbands' and wives' DAS scores of marital satisfaction were highly correlated ($r = .67$, $p < .001$). In the DNV group, in which all wives were in the maritally distressed range, 41% of the husbands also met the criteria for marital distress (90 or below), and 59% scored below the mean of 100 on the DAS. In the HNV group, in which all wives were in the happily married range, 85% of the husband met the criteria for marital happiness (115 or above), and 100% scored above 100 on the DAS. Interspousal agreement about husbands' violence on the CTS was significantly greater than chance ($r = .42$, $p < .01$).

Table 2 shows the correlations between the power variables and the abuse variables. Note that the power variables are not significantly intercorrelated, except for SES discrepancies with the other two discrepancy variables. Also, husbands' reports of decision making was correlated negatively with discrepancies in education. That is, greater discrepancies in education favoring the wife were related to the husband's lower perception of his own decision-making power.

Between-Groups Analyses

Power Bases

The socioeconomic-based discrepancy variables (differences in education, income, and SES) failed to correlate significantly with either husbands' violence or psychological abuse. Husbands' BOCS score correlated negatively with their psychological ($r = -.21$, $p < .05$) and physical ($r = -.26$, $p < .01$) abuse, as measured by the CTS. That is, the less communicative husbands were more physically and psychologically abusive toward their wives. Wives' BOCS correlated significantly negatively only with husbands' psychological abuse on the CTS ($r = -.25$, $p < .01$). That is, wives' lower communication skill was related to husbands' greater psychological abuse but not greater husbands' violence (see Table 2).

Where discrepancy in power bases between husband and wife was the measure of interest, the Group × Sex interaction tested the significance of the discrepancy. Separate 3 × 2 ANOVAs were calculated with sex of spouse as the within-couple variable and group as the between-subjects variable. Communication skill, education, income, and SES were the dependent variables. There were no significant Group × Sex interactions on any of these variables: communication skill, $F(2, 84) = .34$, *ns*; education, $F(2, 91) = 0.06$, *ns*; income, $F(2, 92) = 2.39$, *ns*; or SES, $F(2, 84) = 0.40$, *ns*. One-way ANOVAs were also run, using difference scores (wife − husband) on the interval variables of income, education, and SES. These data are presented in Table 3. There were no differences between the three groups of couples in education or SES discrepancies. However, there was a significant between-groups difference in income discrepancy score. As can be seen in Tables 1 and 3, DNV couples had the greatest discrepancies in income favoring the husbands. Although it was predicted that DV couples would have a positive

Table 2
Intercorrelations Among Power Variables and Correlations Between Power and Violence

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	CTS scales: Physical violence	CTS scales: Psychological abuse
1. Wives' BOCS	—	.05	−.08	−.11	−.09	.04	.02	−.08	−.25**
2. Husbands' BOCS		—	−.11	−.14	−.14	−.07	−.02	−.21*	−.26**
3. Husband demand/ wife withdraw			—	−.08	.07	.14	.17	.40***	.35***
4. Decision making				—	−.25*	.02	−.10	−.21*	−.15
5. Education discrepancy					—	.11	.27**	.12	.04
6. Income discrepancy						—	.37**	.10	−.09
7. SES discrepancy							—	.16	.07

Note. BOCS = Behavioral Observation of Communication Skill; SES = socioeconomic status; CTS = Conflict Tactics Scale.
* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

discrepancy score, only HNV couples had income discrepancies that favored the wives.

The first planned comparison between the DV and DNV groups, testing for the effect of communication skill due to violence, was not significant for wives' BOCS scores, $t(87) = -.67$, *ns*.[1] There was a trend in which DNV husbands were higher on the BOCS score of communication skill than were DV husbands, $t(85) = -1.84$, $p < .07$. The second planned comparison, comparing the DV and DNV couples with the HNV couples to test the effect due to marital distress, was not significant for either husbands', $t(85) = -1.49$, *ns*, or for wives', $t(87) = -1.23$, *ns*, BOCS scores. The significant main effect due to group was carried by differences between DV and HNV husbands on communication skill, $t(32) = -5.54$, $p < .05$. There was also a main effect due to sex of spouse, with wives across all groups scoring consistently higher on the BOCS than their husbands, $F(2, 84) = 20.55$, $p < .001$.[2]

Power Processes

The husband demand/wife withdraw interaction pattern correlated significantly with increased psychological ($r = .35$, $p < .001$) and physical ($r = .40$, $p < .001$) abuse.[3] The roles within the demand/withdraw interaction pattern were examined by means of a repeated measures, within-case ANOVA, with roles (husband demand/wife withdraw and wife demand/husband withdraw) as the within-couple variables. This ANOVA revealed a highly significant main effect due to role, $F(1, 86) = 17.07$, $p < .001$. The Group × Role interaction was also significant, $F(2, 86) = 3.06$, $p < .01$. Figure 2 displays the main effects and interaction on the demand/withdraw pattern.

In the first planned comparison between DV and DNV couples, there was a significant differences in husband demand/wife withdraw pattern, $t(89) = 4.71$, $p < .001$. However, there were no differences between DV and DNV groups in the likelihood of wife demand/husband withdraw, $t(88) = .42$, *ns*. In the second planned comparisons between the two distressed groups and the nondistressed group, wife demand/husband withdraw was significantly higher in the DV and DNV couples in comparison with HNV couples, $t(88) = 6.55$, $p < .001$. There were also significant differences when comparing the DV and DNV couples with the HNV couples in husband demand/wife withdraw, $t(89) = 3.23$, $p < .01$.[4]

Power Outcomes

Decision-making power correlated negatively with husbands' violence ($r = -.21$, $p < .05$).[5] As predicted, husbands' lower decision-making power is related to greater violence. A within-case, repeated measures ANOVA was run with husbands' and wives' reports of decision making entered as the within-couple variable. There were no significant differences on decision-making sex of respondent, $F(1, 64) = 3.17$, $p < .09$, and no Group × Sex of Respondent interaction, $F(2, 64) = 0.84$, *ns*. The first planned comparison, comparing DV and DNV husbands'

[1] We chose to report both overall *F* statistics and planned comparisons, because we were interested in the overall interaction term to test husband/wife discrepancies and specific between-groups differences to examine the effects due to violence and those due to marital distress.

[2] Although there were many group differences on demographic variables, only education correlated significantly with communication skill ($r = .21$, $p < .05$). Analyses were rerun controlling for education. The results of communication skill did not change significantly: For husbands there remained significant between-groups differences when controlling for differences in education, $F(2, 84) = 3.05$, $p < .05$, attributable to the difference between DV and HNV husbands.

[3] Demand/withdraw was reanalyzed with a composite score of husbands' and wives' reports, which did not significantly alter the results.

[4] Again, because there were several between-groups differences on demographic variables, the between-groups differences on demand/withdraw could be attributable to demographic differences rather than to violence. Husbands' income correlated negatively with husband demand/wife withdraw ($r = -.21$, $p < .05$), and wives' education correlated significantly negatively with wife demand/husband withdraw ($r = -.19$, $p < .05$). Separate analyses of covariance were run, covarying out husbands' income and wives' education. Partialing out these demographic differences did not significantly alter the results. The main effects due to group, demand/withdraw role, and the Group × Role interaction all remained highly significant ($ps < .001$).

[5] Decision-making power was reanalyzed with a composite report. This composite score failed to correlate significantly with the CTS violence scale ($r = -.02$).

Table 3
Mean Power Variables

Variable	Couple: DV (n = 49) *M*	DV *SD*	DNV (n = 30) *M*	DNV *SD*	HNV (n = 16) *M*	HNV *SD*	F^a	*df*s
Power bases								
BOCS								
Husbands	56.73	9.1	60.65	8.0	62.45	6.1	31.5*	2, 87
Wives	64.71	9.3	66.35	8.5	68.55	8.5	1.07	2, 87
Discrepancies								
Education	0.32	2.5	−0.29	2.3	0.31	2.7	.53	2, 94
SES	−7.09	26.2	−1.92	26.1	−9.07	33.0	.39	2, 84
Income	−684	1,177	−1,857	2,155	114	2,105	6.80**	2, 93
Power processes								
Demand/withdraw								
Husbands	15.23	5.3	9.43	5.3	7.83	4.3	18.24***	2, 85
Wives	18.52	5.5	17.97	6.3	8.06	4.5	21.99***	2, 82
Power outcomes								
Decision making								
Husbands' reports	4.66	0.90	4.61	0.66	5.04	0.55	0.44	2, 73
Wives' reports	5.18	0.99	4.93	0.96	5.05	0.51	0.37	2, 65

Note. DV = domestically violent; DNV = distressed/nonviolent; HNV = happy/nonviolent. BOCS = Behavioral Observation of Communication Skill; SES = socioeconomic status.
[a] *F*s are from separate one-way analyses of variance by group in conjunction with planned comparisons.
* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

perception of decision-making power was not significant, $t(73) = -.124$, *ns*. The second planned comparison between the two distressed groups and the HNV husbands was also nonsignificant, $t(73) = -1.27$, *ns*.

Within-Group Analyses

To test the hypothesis that men within the DV group who have less power across the three power domains are more violent, we performed hierarchical multiple regression with the power variables serving as the predictors and CTS husband-to-wife violence scores serving as the criterion variables. Because the DV sample was selected for high rates of violence, violence scores were skewed toward relatively extreme violence. To increase the range of scores, normalize the distribution of violence scores, and increase the power of the analysis, subjects who reported some violence in the past year but not enough to meet criteria for the DV group were added in these within-group analyses. Couples who had at least one husband-to-wife minor, but not life-threatening, act of violence in the past year (n = 18 couples) were included in these analyses. Only the power variables with significant zero-order correlations with the CTS scales were entered into this multiple regression equation; these were communication skill, decision making, and demand/withdraw. Husbands' and wives' communication scores were entered at Step 1; husbands' decision-making power and the husband demand/wife withdraw interaction pattern were entered at Step 2. The order of entry of the power base, process, and outcome variables was arbitrary; the analysis was later rerun, reversing the order of the steps. Using a $p < .01$ criterion of Mahalanobis distance, we identified no multivariate outliers among the cases. Table 4 displays the semipartial correlations, standardized regression coefficients (β), and multiple correlation statistics for the equation at both steps. Within the DV group, husbands' and wives' communication skill scores significantly predicted husband-to-wife violence (R = .44, $p < .01$), with communication skill scores accounting for 16% of the variance in violence scores. At Step 2, husbands' decision-making

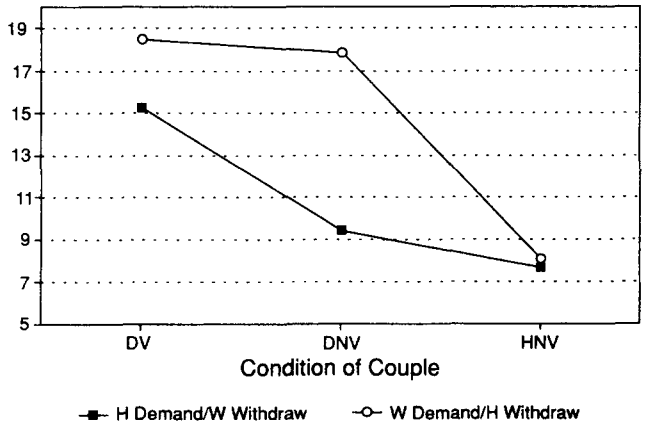

Figure 2. Mean likelihood of demand/withdraw interaction pattern as a function of group and role. (DV = domestically violent; DNV = distressed/nonviolent; HNV = happy/nonviolent; H = husband; and W = wife.)

Table 4
Multiple Regression, Using Power to Predict Violence Within the Supplemented Violent Sample

Variable	Semipartial *r*	*β*	*R*	R^2	Adj. R^2	ΔR^2	*F*	*df*s
			Analysis 1					
Step 1			.44	.20	.16	.20**	5.48**	2, 45
Wives' BOCS	−.46	−.42	—	—	—	—	—	
Husbands' BOCS	−.12	−.13	—	—	—	—	—	
Step 2			.56	.31	.25	.12*	4.92**	4, 43
Decision-making power	−.33	−.33	—	—	—	—	—	
Husband demand/ wife withdraw	.07	.11	—	—	—	—	—	
			Analysis 2					
Step 1			.42	.18	.13	.18*	3.99*	2, 43
Decision-making power	−.42	−.42	—	—	—	—	—	
Husband demand/ wife withdraw	.06	.04	—	—	—	—	—	
Step 2			.59	.35	.27	.17*	4.62**	4, 43
Wives' BOCS	−.39	−.39	—	—	—	—	—	
Husbands' BOCS	−.12	−.11	—	—	—	—	—	

Note. BOCS = Behavioral Observation of Communication Skill; Adj. = adjusted.
* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

power and husband demand/wife withdraw increased the amount of variance accounted for to 25% ($R = .56$, $p < .01$). That is, husbands' and wives' poor communication skill, husbands' low decision-making power, and increased husband demand/wife withdraw patterns were all associated with husbands' greater violence toward wives. These four variables together accounted for 25% of the variance in husband-to-wife physical aggression. Reversing the order of entry, the equation remained significant at both steps, and the variance accounted for increased to 27%. Examining the beta weights, it appears that wives' BOCS score and decision-making power accounted for the most variability in violence.

Discussion

Husbands who battered their wives were more likely to report the husband demand/wife withdraw interaction pattern than were other men. This is the reverse of the sex-stereotyped pattern during arguments (Jacobson, 1989). When couples present for marital therapy, wives, but not husbands, are usually depicted as being in the demanding role. The withdrawing role is believed to be associated with power because those who demand something are in a less powerful position than those who want to maintain status quo. Thus, these data provide some evidence that DV men compensate for their lack of marital power with physical aggression. Wives in the DV group were just as likely to report engaging in wife demand/husband withdraw interactions as the wives in DNV marriages. Both DV and DNV wives engaged in this pattern more than HNV wives, suggesting that wife demand/husband withdraw may have more to do with marital distress than with domestic violence. Thus, consistent with much of the literature on violent relationships, it is the husbands' rather than the wives' behavior that differentiates DV from DNV marriages.

DV couples are characterized by both husband demand/wife withdraw and wife demand/husband withdraw patterns. Nonviolent couples do not describe themselves this way; normally, there is either one spouse in each role or the pattern does not exist in any form. The reports of DV couples suggest that both spouses play the demanding role and that both respond to the other's demands by withdrawing. In short, it is not a simple matter of the husbands as opposed to the wives taking on the demanding role. Rather, both play the role at different times. This could provide the seeds for a great deal of conflict and suggests the potential for numerous power struggles. This conflict over demand/withdraw deserves further exploration as possibly one of the basic interactional dynamics in DV couples.

Although the husband demand/wife withdraw pattern was the only one that discriminated the DV from the DNV couple groups, the more sensitive correlational analyses showed that poor husband communication, as well as discrepancies in education and decision-making power favoring the wife, were also associated with husband-to-wife aggression. Furthermore, within the DV group, couples in which both spouses (especially the wife) have few communication resources and in which there was a discrepancy in power process and outcomes favoring the wife were likely to exhibit more severe husband-to-wife violence. Specifically, when a man has demonstrated a propensity toward domestic violence and both he and his wife have poor communication skill, violence is likely to increase as the husband's decision-making power decreases and husband demand/wife withdraw interactions increase. However, global communication deficits and discrepancies in SES or decision-making power cannot account for the differences between violent and nonviolent relationships. Therefore, some aspects of

power may contribute to the frequency of violence once it occurs but are not likely to explain its occurrence per se.

The clinical portrait of the battering relationship is one in which both partners are poor communicators and husbands perceive themselves as lacking power. We can be more confident about some of these findings than we can of others. Because there were discrepancies between the findings based on ANOVAS and those based on correlational analyses, results should be interpreted with caution pending replication.

Although clinicians have painted a portrait of the wife-beater as being verbally deficient relative to his wife, batterers do not appear to be any more deficient than do other distressed husbands. Those who made these clinical observations were, in effect, interpreting a main effect for gender as an interaction between gender and existence of violence. What clinicians have anecdotally observed as a disparity between husbands and wives in violent relationships may be a product of the main effect of gender on communication skill: that wives in general are more communicative than their husbands. At any rate, these results point to the importance of having an appropriate control group when examining the correlates and causes of domestic violence.

However, it is still possible that deficits in husband communication skill are particularly acute in the relationships of batterers. Perhaps these deficits are greatest when conflict issues are being discussed with the partner. If the wives of batterers are more adept at verbal arguments and the husbands are desperate to win those arguments, they may choose physical violence as their alternative. We can test such a hypothesis only by comparing couples' communication and arguing skills while they are engaged in direct interaction with one another. We plan to examine such interactions in future studies. Before the hypothesis regarding discrepancies in communication skill can be definitively confirmed or disconfirmed, these differences need to be examined across a variety of situations.

Within the DV sample, when both husband and wife were low on communication skill there was an increased risk of husband-to-wife violence. This may be because both husband and wife lack the skills to resolve conflict and to verbally diffuse the argument. When both husband and wife lack communication ability and when the husband is in a less powerful position relative to his wife, the incidence of violence is likely to increase even further. When power or status discrepancies exist in a marriage and when the husband has a history of being violent, physical aggression may be the only effective mode of stopping an argument or asserting a dominant position when both he and his wife lack verbal skill.

Although global communication deficits may not account for differences between violent and nonviolent marriages, there may be specific areas of communication that do contribute to marital violence. Demand/withdraw interaction constitutes one example. It is unclear how therapists could effectively change global communication skill; yet therapists know quite a bit about how to change specific communication skills and patterns (Jacobson & Margolin, 1979). Future research will examine specific communication styles associated with domestic violence and determine whether the husband demand/wife withdraw interaction pattern is a prominent theme in arguments that become violent.

Given the past failure of multitrait–multimethod analyses to yield a cohesive power construct (Cromwell & Olson, 1975), it is not surprising that our multivariate power measures failed to produce an empirically consolidated construct. Our attempt at sampling power from each of the three domains, using different methods (observation and self-report) and different modes (perception of decision-making power and demand/withdraw behavior), only increased the divergence in the variables. For the most part, correlations between the different power variables assessed were nonsignificant. Communication skill did not correlate with, or add coherence to, the disparate measures of power as we had hoped. Although we did not solve the construct validity problem of marital power, some of the variables examined did demonstrate predictive utility.

The study of power bases based on economic discrepancies is potentially confounded with demographic differences. In our study, if discrepancy scores between husband and wife in income had correlated with violence it would have been unclear if this correlation was due to group differences in husbands' income in general or to discrepancies in income. For example, if all wives had identical incomes and husbands' incomes varied substantially, then the difference score would carry no information other than that contained in the husbands' score. Because the discrepancy score did not have predictive utility, this was not an issue in the data presented. Moreover, there are difficulties in using income and education as both a dependent variable and a covariate. Are demographic differences between DV and DNV couples of empirical interest or just noise? We could have matched groups demographically if SES differences were considered confounds. However, then we may have obscured the discrepancies in economic resources between husband and wife. In addition, if we matched our sample on all demographic variables, it is likely that we would have selected a very nonrepresentative sample.

Finally, the construct of marital power can only be as good as the variables used to measure it. Traditional measures of decision-making and economic resources have limited ability to capture the aspects of marital power that affect marital violence. In this study, the process variable, which we call the demand/withdraw interaction pattern, was the best discriminator between violent and nonviolent relationships. The development of observational measures to assess power processes during in vivo arguments or interaction tasks (e.g., Straus & Tallman, 1971) may be even more meaningful and useful. Perhaps new coding systems will have to be developed to capture the power processes that are of specific concern to marital researchers in the area of violence. At the very least, the elusive construct of power requires multilevel analysis. Individual traits or behavioral dispositions, perception, interaction styles, and social norms are all likely to be associated with power in marriages.

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(*Appendix follows on next page*)

Appendix

Behavioral Observation of Communication Skill Coding System

The observations are based on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (*inadequate*) to 3 (*adequate*) to 5 (excellent).

I. Delivery

1. Shows vocal variety and appropriate affectual tone of voice (note if *monotone* or *overly dramatic*)
2. Articulates clearly (no speech impediment, mumble, or slur)
3. Speaks at a good rate (note if *too slow* or *too fast*)

II. Organization

4. Expresses ideas clearly and in orderly manner
5. Gives clear description of incidents

III. Content

6. Answers appropriately and informatively to questions
7. Maintains topic (not tangential)

IV. Speaking Skills

8. Responds quickly to questions asked
9. Speaks fluently (uses few speech pauses)
10. Makes appropriate choice of words

V. Listening Skills

11. Appears to be listening to interviewer (eye contact, etc.)
12. Understands questions asked (answer fit question)

VI. Overall Communication Skill

13.	Unskillful				Skillful
	1	2	3	4	5
14.	Inexpressive				Expressive
	1	2	3	4	5
15.	Inattentive and unresponsive				Attentive and responsive
	1	2	3	4	5
16.	Anxious and nervous				Relaxed and confident
	1	2	3	4	5
17.	Not talkative				Talkative
	1	2	3	4	5
18.	Inappropriate				Appropriate
	1	2	3	4	5
19.	Ineffective				Effective
	1	2	3	4	5

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