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Women’s Motives for Violent and Nonviolent Behaviors in Conflicts

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Drawing from past research on women’s motives for intimate partner violence (IPV) perpetration, correlates of women’s perpetration, and correlates of non-violent conflict, we created a scale containing 125 possible motives, representing 14 broad domains (e.g., self-defense, retaliation). Participants were an ethnically diverse sample of women who had perpetrated no physical IPV against their current partner (*n* = 243), threats but not physical IPV (*n* = 70), nonsevere physical IPV (*n* = 193), and at least one act of severe (e.g., choke) physical IPV (*n* = 93). An exploratory factor analysis yielded a seven-factor solution, representing Partners’ Negative Behaviors, Increase Intimacy, Personal Problems, Retaliation, Childhood Experiences, Situation/Mood, and Partners’ Personal Problems. Differences by women’s IPV perpetration and race and/or ethnicity were tested with means representing these seven factors and a computed variable representing self-defense. Although motives differed by perpetration type, main effects for Partners’ Negative Behavior, Personal Problems, Retaliation, and Childhood Experiences were modified by interactions, suggesting ethnicity should be considered when developing interventions.

**Keywords:** female perpetration; low-income; partner violence; race/ethnicity; scale development

Recent studies have focused on women’s use of intimate partner violence (IPV), addressing issues such as whether women are as likely as men to be perpetrators, whether women’s IPV is as severe as men’s, and whether the consequences (e.g., injury) are similar. Although men’s violence is generally more severe (Rennison, 2002), a sizable proportion of women have been
shown to perpetrate severe IPV (e.g., beat up, use a weapon; Babcock, Miller, & Siard, 2003; Henning & Feder, 2004). However, these findings do not imply that all women are likely to perpetrate IPV. Other responses include withdrawing (e.g., leave the room), avoidance (e.g., refuse to discuss the issue), verbal aggression (e.g., name calling), and compromise (Lloyd, 1990). One way to increase understanding of why women use violence, including severe violence, is to determine how perpetrators of threats, nonsevere, and severe physical IPV differ from nonperpetrators in perceptions of what motivates their behaviors during conflicts. Understanding how motives differ by women’s conflict behaviors will provide needed information to those designing interventions for eliminating women’s use of violence.

Several studies have focused specifically on reasons women give for their IPV perpetration (e.g., Babcock et al., 2003; Follingstad, Wright, Lloyd, & Sebastian, 1991; Hamberger, 1997; Olson & Lloyd, 2005). Others have increased knowledge by addressing the issue less directly. For example, much of the emerging literature has examined the context and situations that prompt women’s violence (e.g., Babcock, Costa, Green, & Eckhardt, 2004). Earlier research on risk factors for women and men’s IPV is also informative, with results suggesting factors such as experiences in childhood are important in understanding women’s perpetration (Marshall & Rose, 1990). A third body of research has examined conflict more generally, determining that factors such as partners’ withdrawal in response to women’s demands are associated with relational conflict (Christensen & Heavey, 1990).

At least two limitations exist in previous research on women’s motives for IPV. First, some studies that explicitly examined women’s perceptions included only women in violent relationships (e.g., Browne, 1987; Hamberger, Lohr, Bonge, & Tolin, 1996). Although this advances understanding of violent relationships, it does not address the larger issue of

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why some women perpetrate IPV in conflicts but others do not. Second, when samples have included women in violent and nonviolent relationships (e.g., Follingstad et al., 1991), comparisons have been made only between men and women, but not between perpetrators and nonperpetrators. Gender comparisons show only how partners differ or are similar. By comparing the motives of women who express varying degrees of physical IPV to those who perpetrate threats of IPV or who are not violent during “serious fights” with their partner, the current study will enhance understanding of what prompts women’s violence. Knowledge of women’s motives for perpetration, especially when women are the primary perpetrators, is important for development of interventions to prevent or decrease women’s IPV.

**Women’s Motives for Violence**

A consistent theme across a wide range of samples is women’s use of violence in self-defense (Babcock et al., 2003; Barnett, Lee, & Thelen, 1997; Browne, 1987; Dasgupta, 1999; Foshee, 1996; Swan & Snow, 2003). Motives reported by women arrested for IPV include retaliating for male partners’ physical violence or psychological abuse, to express feelings or relieve tension, to get their partners’ attention, and to gain power (Dasgupta, 1999; Hamberger, 1997; Hamberger, Lohr, & Bonge, 1994; Saunders, 1986). Dasgupta (1999) also identified a motive of showing strength or being “tough.” In addition, in their comparison of two types of violent women based on Holtzworth-Munroe and Stuart’s (1994) typology, Babcock et al. (2003) found differences between types for initiating IPV, suggesting that women who use severe violence may also be initiators. Although these motives have been endorsed by women who perpetrate IPV, it is possible that nonperpetrators have similar motivations for their behaviors during conflicts with their partners.

We also considered research on risk factors associated with women’s perpetration. Studies suggest that potential correlates include childhood victimization (Kaura & Allen, 2004; Magdol, Moffitt, Caspi, & Silva, 1998), dissatisfaction with power in the relationship (Kaura & Allen, 2004), impulsivity (Schafer, Caetano, & Cunradi, 2004), victimization in past relationships (although this variable was nonsignificant when witnessing interparental violence, it was also included as a predictor of women’s perpetration, Hendy et al., 2003), and substance use (Field & Caetano, 2003).
Study Purpose

The primary goal of the current study was to examine the factor structure and psychometric properties of a scale of motives for behaviors in relational conflicts. We expected to find evidence for at least seven factors, as suggested by previous literature. These factors were (a) retaliation for partners’ behavior, (b) to express feelings, (c) to get partners’ attention, (d) to show strength, (e) to gain power, (f) substance use, and (g) past victimization. Because research has not indicated whether these factors are also perceived as motives for conflict behaviors among nonviolent women or those who use only threats, we were reluctant to hypothesize that each of these factors would exist. Therefore, Research Question 1 asked whether there would be evidence to support the existence of only these seven factors or whether more or fewer factors would be present. For example, we were specifically interested in whether a factor representing women’s initiation of conflict behaviors would be present.

After identifying factors in the motives scale, the second goal was to test for differences by type of women’s IPV perpetration (none, threats only, nonsevere physical IPV, severe physical IPV) in women’s perceptions of their motives for conflict behaviors. Because motives were derived from the violence literature and have been shown to be associated with women’s IPV perpetration, we expected that the groups would differ. Hypothesis 1 stated that women perpetrating severe physical IPV would be most likely to perceive listed motives as important for their conflict behaviors and women not perpetrating any IPV would be least likely to perceive motives as important. It should be noted that women’s IPV was not considered in the context of their partners’ IPV. Because our focus was on women’s perceptions of their motives, it was necessary to consider women’s thoughts about their perpetration (or lack thereof) irrespective of their own victimization.

With perpetrators and nonperpetrators included in the factor analysis, we were not certain there would be a self-defense factor. Thus, we considered the possibility that women who did not perpetrate any IPV would be unlikely to endorse self-defensive behaviors as a motive for conflict behaviors. In the event such a factor did not emerge, we decided to include Research Question 2, which asked whether group differences existed in women’s endorsement of self-defense as a motive. Finally, with limited research suggesting predictors of women’s violence differ by ethnicity (e.g., Field & Caetano, 2003; Schaefer et al., 2004), Research Question 3 asked whether the impact of IPV perpetration on women’s motives would interact with women’s race and/or ethnicity.
Method

Participants

Data were from Wave 6 of Project HOW: Health Outcomes of Women, a study of low-income community women in the Dallas, Texas, metroplex. The goal of the larger study was to examine factors that affect women’s physical and mental health in a sample of ethnically diverse women. Although IPV was of specific interest, women were not recruited based on violence in their relationships. The current study is limited to Wave 6 data because earlier waves focused on women’s perceptions of their partners’ violence and included few questions to assess women’s motives for their own perpetration.

When the larger study began in 1995, women met three requirements: (a) age 20 to 49 years, (b) in a heterosexual relationship for at least 1 year, and (c) income less than twice the poverty threshold (i.e., 200% of poverty) or receive public aid. In 1995, 200% of poverty was equivalent to an annual income of US$30,300 for a family of four, which allowed women to receive some types of aid. Similar numbers of African American, White, and Mexican American women were recruited to allow for within- and between-group comparisons. The only requirement for participation in Waves 2 through 6 was Wave 1 participation. Thus, all 835 women who began the study were eligible for participation in later waves, regardless of poverty status and current relationship. Most participants completed the sixth interview (73.7%). Of women completing Wave 6, the majority (79.0%) had completed all previous waves.

Wave 6 participants were African American (39.5%), White (29.9%), and Mexican American (30.6%). On average, women were age 40.3 years and living at an average of 193.4% of the poverty threshold, within the originally required 200% of poverty. Most women were in a relationship with a man (73.9%), some indicated they were in relationships with two or more men (4.4%), and many women were not in a relationship at Wave 6 (21.4%). Two participants (0.3%) who were in relationships with women were not included because questions were specific to behaviors with male partners. Women’s relationships had lasted an average of 10.92 years. Participants who were not in a relationship had ended their most recent relationship 2.48 years earlier.

Honeycutt, Marshall, and Weston (2001) found the full sample was generally representative of low-income women of the same race and/or ethnicity in the southwest area of the Dallas–Fort Worth metroplex. They compared the Project HOW sample to the 1990 5% Public Use Microdata Sample (PUMS) and the 1994 American Housing Survey (AHS) from the census bureau and found three differences. First, African Americans and Mexican Americans in
the AHS sample were more likely to be married than Project HOW participants. Second, African American and White women in the AHS and PUMS samples were less likely to have graduated high school or attended college than the Project HOW sample. Third, participants were more likely to be receiving public aid at Wave 1, probably because receipt of aid was a proxy for poverty status during screening.

**Procedures**

Participants were recruited for Wave 1 with flyers at health clinics, laundromats, libraries, and businesses. Undergraduates also recruited at shopping centers, flea markets, and employment and health fairs. Family and friends who were participants referred women to the study, while others responded to a mass mailing. Office workers screened women for participation (age, poverty status, relationship) and ensured Mexican Americans had been educated in the United States to minimize acculturation and language problems before scheduling women for interviews.

Although women’s responses were protected with a Privacy Certificate, strict procedures existed for confidentiality at all waves. Office workers administered informed consent and intake forms. They then introduced participants to interviewers using only first names or nicknames women had provided. Undergraduate and graduate female students conducted all interviews. Interviewers completed extensive training and were closely monitored by graduate research assistants. Office workers, with knowledge of identifying information, did not know the content of the interview. The sixth interview was designed to take 4 hr for which women received $75 (incentives increased by approximately $15 at each wave), a gift bag, and a keychain with the Project HOW logo.

In some cases (3.9%), telephone interviews were conducted with women who had moved out of the area. These abbreviated interviews were designed to take 2½ hr. Because not all of the measures included in the current study were asked in the phone interview the sample in the current study was restricted to the 591 women who completed the interview in person.

Interviewers read questions aloud and recorded participants’ responses verbatim. They referred participants to numbers in a notebook containing response scales or other information for answering questions. Additional information on the sample and interviewing procedures is readily available (Honeycutt et al., 2001; Kallstrom-Fuqua, Weston, & Marshall, 2004; Marshall, 1999).
Measures

Marshall’s Severity of Violence Against Men Scale (SVAMS; 1992b) was used to measure women’s threats and acts of physical violence against their partners. The 131 women not currently in a relationship responded to the scale thinking of their most recent relationship. Women indicated whether they had ever perpetrated any of 20 threats of violence (e.g., destroyed something belonging to partner, threw an object at partner), and 20 acts of physical violence (e.g., pushed or shoved, scratched), including 9 acts of severe violence (e.g., punched, choked, used a weapon), in their relationship. The dichotomous responses were summed for each of the three subscales and used to categorize women by type of perpetration.

Although the goal of the study was to examine women’s perceptions of their motives regardless of reported victimization, we also assessed partners’ physical violence perpetration to determine whether women were sole perpetrators. The physical violence subscale of Marshall’s Severity of Violence Against Women Scale (SVAWS; 1992a) assessed women’s physical victimization. Responses were summed and then dichotomized to represent no/any victimization.

All women indicated the importance of 125 possible motives for their behaviors in conflicts with their partners on a 7-point scale ranging from 1 (not at all) to 7 (extremely). Women who reported perpetrating threats or physical violence responded to items thinking about times when they had been threatening or physical with their partners. Women who did not report IPV perpetration in their current (most recent) relationship reported motives for their behaviors in serious fights with their partners. Items included on the scale represented 14 broad domains: retaliation (e.g., to get back at him, revenge, getting even), substance use by women and partners (e.g., drinking, use of nonprescription drugs), self-defense (e.g., protect yourself, self-defense), to express feelings (e.g., he makes you angry, relieve tension), to get attention and/or gain control (e.g., to get his attention, to control him, to be closer to him, get him to do what you want), to show strength (e.g., to get respect, proving your worth by being tough and assertive, look out for your own rights), situation (e.g., stress, frustration, you’re in a bad mood), childhood experiences (e.g., your bad childhood, your parents did it to you, your parents did it to each other), past relationships (e.g., other men did it to you, other women did it to him), partners’ and women’s personal problems (e.g., low self-esteem, emotional or mental problems, immature), impulsivity (e.g., can’t control yourself), and initiation (e.g., to provoke him, to do it first).
Results

Attrition

We conducted t tests with Wave 1 data to compare women with complete Wave 6 data (69.3%) to those without complete data (30.7%). There were differences on age, $t(833) = -2.48, p < .02$; years in the area, $t(833) = -4.77, p < .001$; education, $t(727) = -2.21, p < .04$; and relationship length, $t(832) = -3.14, p < .01$. Women with complete data were older ($M = 33.76$ years), had lived in the area longer ($M = 24.72$ years), had more education ($M = 11.86$ years), and had longer relationships ($M = 8.27$ years) than women with incomplete data ($Ms = 32.32, 20.41, 11.48, and 6.72$, respectively). In addition, an ethnic difference occurred, $\chi^2(2, N = 835) = 8.34, p < .03$. A significantly greater proportion of African American women had complete data (74.8%) than Mexican Americans (69.2%) or Whites (63.7%). Women did not differ on initial poverty status, $t(815) = .06, ns$.

Factor Analysis

Before conducting the exploratory factor analysis (EFA), data were checked for missingness and nonnormality. Of the sample of 591 women, complete data were available from 580 women. We examined distributions for each of the 125 items and dropped 32 because of excessive kurtosis and skewness (i.e., values $> 10$). Representative items dropped include women’s drinking, use of prescribed medicine, afraid he’ll leave, thinking it is fun, to provoke him, and thinking he likes it. In each case, the vast majority of women indicated these were not motives for their behaviors.

An EFA of the 93 remaining items using maximum likelihood extraction and orthogonal rotation was conducted with the sample of 580 women. Although 16 factors were suggested using eigenvalues greater than 1.0 as the criterion, the scree plot suggested six to nine factors actually existed in the data. We removed items that either did not load greater than .400 on any factor (19 items) or that had similar loadings (i.e., cross-loaded) on multiple factors (7 items). Subsequent analyses indicated the best solution for the remaining 67 items was seven factors. This was based on the low proportion (4%) of residual correlations over .05 found for the seven-factor solution compared to the six-factor solution (7% of residual correlations greater than .05). When solutions contained more than seven factors, the additional factors did not contain loadings greater than .400, suggesting that only seven factors were present. The final step reduced the number of items in two factors. On the largest factor (20 items), the 9 items loading greater than .600 were
retained. The 16 loadings for the second largest factor ranged from .520 to .860, with a gap from .620 to .690. Therefore, the 8 items loading higher than .620 were retained.

Loadings for each of the 48 items that were retained are in Table 1, listed in order of variance explained, with reliability information for each factor. After rotation, the seven-factor solution explained 59.85% of the variance, with the largest accounting for 12.40% of variance and the smallest accounting for 4.54%. Moderate correlations between mean subscale scores are also shown in Table 1. The factors were labeled **Partners’ Negative Behaviors, Increase Intimacy, Personal Problems, Retaliation, Childhood Experiences, Situation/Mood, and Partners’ Personal Problems**.

As Table 1 shows, most items loaded on only one factor. Of the 48 items, only four had loadings greater than .400 on two factors, suggesting cross-loading. Two items with primary loadings on Partners’ Personal Problems (his low self-esteem, he needs help) had secondary factor loadings on Partners’ Negative Behaviors. Two items had loadings on Personal Problems in addition to Childhood Experiences (your bad childhood) and Situation/Mood (your emotional or mental problems). When items cross-loaded, secondary loadings were at least .080 lower than primary loadings, which was deemed sufficiently large to retain the items.

There was no support for the self-defense factor, likely because only two items directly related to self-defense (i.e., self-defense, protect yourself). Other items that could be perceived as related to self-defense (e.g., to make him stop being physical) loaded on the Partners’ Negative Behaviors factor. Because a goal of the current study was to determine whether perpetrators and nonperpetrators differed in their endorsement of self-defense as a motive for conflict behaviors, a created variable was the mean of the two self-defense items, which had a correlation of $r = .71$, $p < .001$.

**Differences in Motives by Women’s IPV Perpetration**

**Type of perpetration.** We created four groups representing type of women’s perpetration using summed scores for the SVAMS threat, physical violence, and severe physical violence subscales. Table 2 shows almost one half of the women had not perpetrated any type of violence in their current or most recent relationship (i.e., sums for all subscales were zero). A smaller proportion of women had perpetrated at least one threat of violence but had not perpetrated physical violence. Of the 263 women perpetrating any physical violence, most had not used severe violence. Means for frequency of IPV perpetration by group are included in Table 2. No significant difference occurred in perpetration type by ethnicity, $\chi^2(6, N = 580) = 3.38$, ns.
### Table 1

**Factor Composition, Loadings, and Correlations Across Subscales (N = 580)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Loading on Factor</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>1. Partners’ negative behaviors</strong> (α = .93)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>He gets mean</td>
<td>.755 .010 .119 .281 .107 .099 .080</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>He gets angry</td>
<td>.741 .156 .164 .225 .121 .195 .094</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>His hateful or hostile personality</td>
<td>.718 .094 .158 .132 .074 .095 .332</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>His bad mood</td>
<td>.703 .114 .134 .179 .090 .217 .292</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>He takes something out on you</td>
<td>.677 .111 .236 .252 -.013 .110 .062</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>He can’t control himself</td>
<td>.664 .139 .208 .192 .095 .001 .141</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>He scares you</td>
<td>.604 .059 .252 .250 .096 .039 .103</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>He retaliates or gets even with you</td>
<td>.590 .197 .193 .230 .133 .017 .125</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To make him stop being physical</td>
<td>.550 .123 .183 .313 .149 .013 .113</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>2. Increase intimacy</strong> (α = .94)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Get his support</td>
<td>.037 .865 .203 .088 .053 .057 .034</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To be closer to him</td>
<td>.031 .852 .190 .068 .091 .005 .028</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Get his help</td>
<td>.074 .841 .227 .095 .082 .024 .050</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Get him to listen to your point of view</td>
<td>.103 .751 .098 .161 .087 .227 .160</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Give him advice</td>
<td>.142 .699 .078 .109 .110 .097 .172</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Make him keep a promise to you</td>
<td>.167 .697 .125 .162 .013 .112 .030</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Get his attention</td>
<td>.139 .681 .143 .248 .072 .122 -.009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Look out for your own rights</td>
<td>.242 .647 .092 .163 .144 .136 .042</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>3. Personal problems</strong> (α = .92)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You have low self-esteem</td>
<td>.294 .162 .700 .140 .093 .058 .083</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Insecure about yourself</td>
<td>.159 .125 .693 .276 .120 .102 .135</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dislike yourself</td>
<td>.242 .119 .682 .163 .168 .044 .033</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You’re depressed</td>
<td>.163 .199 .669 .112 .128 .297 .127</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You need help</td>
<td>.125 .136 .598 .229 .213 .153 .220</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Insecure about your relationship</td>
<td>.183 .207 .594 .286 .283 .080 .138</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You have a serious personal problem</td>
<td>.168 .151 .583 .187 .194 .178 .159</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You’re weak</td>
<td>.182 .190 .573 .229 .110 .291 .021</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Upset with yourself</td>
<td>.181 .185 .520 .238 .232 .239 .074</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical illness</td>
<td>.167 .156 .507 .041 .142 .128 .040</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>4. Retaliation</strong> (α = .90)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Get back at him, as a payback</td>
<td>.194 .163 .118 .714 .075 .082 .124</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Revenge</td>
<td>.215 .174 .254 .690 .066 .121 .084</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To hurt him worse than he</td>
<td>.193 .136 .165 .672 .124 .144 .144</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(continued)
Table 2 also shows women’s reports of physical victimization. In general, physical IPV appeared to be mutual, with few women the sole perpetrators, especially when their perpetration was severe. Women who reported perpetrating threats only tended to be less likely to report physical IPV, and few nonviolent women had experienced physical IPV.

Testing for differences in motives. Means for conflict motives were computed using items from each of the seven factors. These means and the self-defense variable were included as dependent variables in a 4 (IPV type) x 3 (race/ethnicity) MANOVA. Multivariate main effects for IPV type, Wilks’s Lambda $F(24, 1625) = 9.56$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .11$, and race/ethnicity, Wilks’s
Lambda $F(16, 1120) = 4.09, p < .001, \eta^2 = .06$, were modified by a multivariate interaction between IPV type and race/ethnicity, Wilks’s Lambda $F(48, 2759) = 1.78, p < .01, \eta^2 = .03$. Univariate interactions between IPV type and race/ethnicity occurred for Partners’ Negative Behaviors, $F(6, 578) = 3.69, p < .01, \eta^2 = .04$; Personal Problems, $F(6, 578) = 2.58, p < .05, \eta^2 = .03$; Retaliation, $F(6, 578) = 4.81, p < .02, \eta^2 = .04$; and Childhood Experiences, $F(6, 578) = 2.66, p < .03, \eta^2 = .03$.

Figures 1 through 4 show the interactions. In general, nonperpetrators across ethnic groups indicated each of the four motives was relatively unimportant for explaining their behavior in conflicts. With the exception of Childhood Experiences, the highest means were found for severe IPV perpetrators across ethnicity. Figure 4 shows White women in the threats only group perceived Childhood Experiences as more important than perpetrators of nonsevere and severe IPV of the same ethnicity. African American and Mexican American women who had perpetrated severe IPV

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Table 2
Women’s Type of Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) Perpetration and Victimization Within Ethnicity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Women’s Perpetration</th>
<th>Different Behaviors Perpetrated by Women</th>
<th>Women Reporting Physical Victimization</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total Threats</td>
<td>Physical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>244</td>
<td>42.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African American</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>39.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>31.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mexican American</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>28.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Threats only</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>12.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African American</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>31.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>31.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mexican American</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>37.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nonsevere physical</td>
<td>189</td>
<td>32.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African American</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>40.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>27.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mexican American</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>31.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Severe physical</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>12.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African American</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>35.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>29.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mexican American</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>35.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

a. Includes severe physical violence perpetration.
indicated Childhood Experiences were significantly more important than did Whites in the same group.

The pattern of results was similar for Partners’ Negative Behaviors and Personal Problems, shown in Figures 1 and 2, respectively. Specifically, Mexican American women in the nonsevere physical IPV group were much more likely than African American and White women to endorse these motives. However, in the severe physical IPV group, White women were most likely to endorse partners’ behaviors and their own problems as motives.

Figures 3 and 4 show that, in the threats group, African American women were more likely than Whites and Mexican Americans, respectively, to endorse Retaliation and Childhood Experiences. In the nonsevere physical IPV group, Mexican Americans were more likely to report Childhood Experiences as motives than were the other groups. Mexican Americans were similar to African Americans in both physical IPV groups for Retaliation as a motive. Finally, White women in the severe physical IPV group were least likely to perceive Childhood Experiences as a motive. Overall, there was no clear pattern suggesting any two ethnic groups were similar.

Figure 1
Means for Partners’ Negative Behaviors by Race/Ethnicity and Perpetration Type

Means for partners’ negative behaviors by race/ethnicity and perpetration type. 

- **African American**
- **White**
- **Mexican American**

a. Multivariate interaction was significant, $F(6, 578) = 3.69, p < .01, \eta^2 = .04$. 

[Graph showing the means for partners’ negative behaviors by race/ethnicity and perpetration type]
Type of IPV perpetration. Univariate main effects occurred for each of the eight dependent variables. Means and $F$ statistics are reported in Table 3, with main effects that were modified by univariate interactions noted. Results generally supported Hypothesis 1, showing the highest means for women perpetrating severe physical IPV and lowest for nonperpetrators. This pattern held for Partners’ Negative Behaviors, Personal Problems, Retaliation, Situation/Mood, Partners’ Personal Problems, and self-defense. On Increase Intimacy, the means for the severe and nonsevere physical IPV groups were similar. For Childhood Experiences, severely violent women were not different from the two other perpetrator groups. Nonperpetrators generally had the lowest means, but not significantly lower for Personal Problems or Childhood Experiences. Also, the mean for Increase Intimacy was slightly higher for nonperpetrators than for perpetrators of threats. Women who perpetrated threats did not differ from those perpetrating nonsevere physical IPV on any motive.

Figure 2
Means for Personal Problems by Race/Ethnicity and Perpetration Type$^a$

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Perpetration Type</th>
<th>None</th>
<th>Threats</th>
<th>Nonsevere Physical</th>
<th>Severe Physical</th>
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<tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mexican American</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

$^a$ Multivariate interaction was significant, $F(6, 578) = 2.58, p < .05, \eta^2 = .03.$

Type of IPV perpetration. Univariate main effects occurred for each of the eight dependent variables. Means and $F$ statistics are reported in Table 3, with main effects that were modified by univariate interactions noted. Results generally supported Hypothesis 1, showing the highest means for women perpetrating severe physical IPV and lowest for nonperpetrators. This pattern held for Partners’ Negative Behaviors, Personal Problems, Retaliation, Situation/Mood, Partners’ Personal Problems, and self-defense. On Increase Intimacy, the means for the severe and nonsevere physical IPV groups were similar. For Childhood Experiences, severely violent women were not different from the two other perpetrator groups. Nonperpetrators generally had the lowest means, but not significantly lower for Personal Problems or Childhood Experiences. Also, the mean for Increase Intimacy was slightly higher for nonperpetrators than for perpetrators of threats. Women who perpetrated threats did not differ from those perpetrating nonsevere physical IPV on any motive.
Figure 3
Means for Retaliation by Race/Ethnicity and Perpetration Type.\textsuperscript{a}

Perpetration Type

\begin{tabular}{l}
\textbf{None} & \textbf{Threats} & \textbf{Nonsevere Physical} & \textbf{Severe Physical} \\
\end{tabular}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Perpetration Type</th>
<th>African American</th>
<th>White</th>
<th>Mexican American</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Threats</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nonsevere Physical</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Severe Physical</td>
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<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\textsuperscript{a} Multivariate interaction was significant, $F(6, 578) = 4.81, p < .02, \eta^2 = .04$

Figure 4
Means for Childhood Experiences by Race/Ethnicity and Perpetration Type\textsuperscript{a}

Perpetration Type

\begin{tabular}{l}
\textbf{None} & \textbf{Threats} & \textbf{Nonsevere Physical} & \textbf{Severe Physical} \\
\end{tabular}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Perpetration Type</th>
<th>African American</th>
<th>White</th>
<th>Mexican American</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
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<tr>
<td>Threats</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nonsevere Physical</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Severe Physical</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\textsuperscript{a} Multivariate interaction was significant, $F(6, 578) = 2.66, p < .03, \eta^2 = .03$. 

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Race/ethnicity. Univariate main effects for ethnicity occurred for Increase Intimacy, $F(2, 578) = 8.43, p < .001, \eta^2 = .03,$ and Retaliation, $F(2, 578) = 6.68, p < .01, \eta^2 = .02.$ Mexican American and African American women were similar on Increase Intimacy ($Ms = 3.08$ and $2.85,$ respectively), but significantly higher than Whites ($M = 2.27$). This pattern of results was similar for Retaliation, with means for White women generally lower than those for African American or Mexican American women, although the main effect was modified by an interaction.

**Discussion**

Research Question 1 asked whether results would support the existence of seven types of motives (retaliation for partners’ behavior, to express feelings, to get partners’ attention, to show strength, to gain power, substance use, and past victimization). In addition, we included items to assess self-defense, temporary mood/situation, intrapersonal problems, impulsivity, and women’s initiation. Although we found seven factors, only three of these were as expected, and there was no evidence for a separate self-defense factor.
Of the three expected factors, Retaliation was the clearest, with all nine items representing aspects of retaliation for partners’ behavior. Only one item, “to control him,” was not expected for this factor. This item had the lowest loading but no cross-loadings. Considering the item in the context of other items suggests women’s behaviors in conflicts may be to prevent their partners from engaging in certain behaviors. The presence of Retaliation and the absence of a separate self-defense factor provide some support for Saunders’ (1986) suggestion that the two domains are indistinguishable.

Although we considered victimization by past partners as a motive for women’s conflict behaviors, the only past victimization relevant in these data were childhood experiences. In addition, items did not necessarily imply that women witnessed or experienced violence, only that parents had engaged in behaviors similar to those women perpetrated in conflicts. For example, women who had not used threats or physical IPV in their current relationship indicated the extent to which their nonviolent behaviors were motivated because “your parents did (the behavior) to you.” Although endorsement by perpetrators implies women had been victimized or witnessed interparental violence, it was not possible to explicitly determine whether this was the case. If so, finding that experiences in childhood are motives for conflict behaviors would extend past research showing an association between perpetration and family-of-origin violence (e.g., Magdol et al., 1998; Marshall & Rose, 1990).

The second factor, Increase Intimacy, represented a combination of getting partners’ attention and gaining power. Items such as “to get his support” and “to be closer to him” support previous research indicating women’s motives for violence include getting their partners’ attention (Dasgupta, 1999). In addition, the aspect of gaining power previously shown to be important (Hamberger, 1997) is represented with items such as “make him keep a promise to you,” “give him advice,” and “get him to listen to your point of view.” The combination of items on this factor suggests that women’s motives can represent attempts at coercive control, similar to those reported by female perpetrators in Babcock et al.’s (2003) study. What is not clear from these data is whether women’s motives tend to vary by mutuality of violence. For example, this factor may be more representative of coercive control for sole or primary perpetrators than for nonviolent women or women in symmetrical, mutually violent relationships. Potential differences in the factor structure by mutuality of IPV should be considered.

Three additional factors represented domains that were assessed but not specified in Research Question 1 because of limited data from previous research. First, we found evidence for a factor representing situational effects such as frustration and negative affect. The existence of this factor corresponds with previous research on women’s motives for IPV (Babcock et al., 2003).
One item, “your emotional or mental problems,” also had a moderate loading on women’s personal problems, which includes items that are potentially more stable than other items included in Situation/Mood.

The factor representing Personal Problems is in line with research on personality characteristics associated with men’s IPV perpetration. Specifically, insecure attachment to partner has been shown to be an important predictor of men’s perpetration (e.g., Babcock, Jacobson, Gottman, & Yerinton, 2000; Dutton, Saunders, Starzomski, & Bartholomew, 1994; Holtzworth-Munroe, Stuart, & Hutchinson, 1997). Finding evidence for a factor representing women’s perceptions of their own intrapersonal characteristics as a motive for conflict behaviors extends past research to women.

Partners’ Personal Problems is much more limited in scope than the corresponding factor for women because of the omission of many parallel items for men. Of the three items in women’s Personal Problems that were also asked for men, only perceived weakness did not load on Partners’ Personal Problems. The symmetry of the two factors for other items suggests that parallel items for men and women should be included in the future.

With the highest loadings found for items such as “he gets mean,” “he gets angry,” and “his hateful or hostile personality,” Partners’ Negative Behaviors may be somewhat representative of women’s perceptions of partners’ psychologically abusive behaviors. This factor was the most important in terms of explained variance. Considering the importance of this factor in conjunction with the absence of one representing women’s initiation suggests that women’s behaviors during conflicts, whether violent or not, may be in reaction to their partners’ behaviors, particularly psychological abuse. Although previous research has considered women’s violence in the context of their partners’ physical IPV (e.g., Barnett et al., 1997; Browne, 1987; Saunders, 1986), few have also considered partners’ psychological abuse (e.g., Hamberger, 1997). Future research should explicitly address the role of psychological abuse as a motive for women’s violence.

Overall, the seven factors found here supported and extended previous research on women’s motives for their behaviors during conflicts with their partners. Results indicated that reasons for low-income women’s behaviors during relational conflicts ranged from distal (e.g., Childhood Experiences) to quite proximal (e.g., Situation/Mood). Acceptable reliability for each of the seven subscales suggests they are internally consistent. In addition, the pattern of correlations between factors provides preliminary support for scale validity. The highest correlations were Partners’ Negative Behaviors with Partners’ Personal Problems and Retaliation. Personal Problems correlated highly with Retaliation, Childhood Experiences, and Situation/Mood.
Research Question 3 asked whether the association between perpetration type and women’s motives would interact with women’s race/ethnicity. Interactions between IPV type and women’s race/ethnicity suggest ethnicity may have a moderating effect on women’s motives for perpetration, implying ethnicity may be important for intervention. Similarities were apparent in Mexican American and White women’s endorsement of their partners’ behaviors and of their own problems. Mexican American perpetrators of physical IPV and severely violent White women perceived both as important motives for their behaviors. Interventions addressing women’s reactions to (or perceptions of) partners’ behaviors and perceptions of their own problems may reduce perpetration for White and Mexican American women but may not be relevant for African American women.

Results for Retaliation were particularly interesting, as African American women perpetrating threats were much more likely than African American women perpetrating nonsevere physical IPV to indicate their behaviors were retaliatory. The meaning and implications for this are not immediately clear. It may be that when African American women become physical, they no longer perceive that retaliation or “getting even” is important. Also, White women perpetrating any type of IPV were less likely than African American or Mexican American perpetrators to perceive their behavior as retaliatory. As programs to prevent or decrease IPV would differ dependent on whether the violence is motivated by a desire to retaliate, it is important to determine whether results differed for Whites because our measure for Whites was lacking, or due to more complex factors.

The pattern for Childhood Experiences was also interesting. Women’s experiences as a motive was less important for African American and White women perpetrating nonsevere physical IPV, but more important for African American and Mexican American women perpetrating severe physical IPV. Perhaps prevention programs should address parental behavior in conflicts to decrease IPV that results from social learning.

Overall, Hypothesis 1 was largely supported. Women perpetrating severe physical IPV were generally most likely to perceive the motives as important for their conflict behaviors. In contrast, women not perpetrating any IPV were least likely to perceive motives as important. Women perpetrating threats or nonsevere physical IPV were between the two groups and not significantly different from each other. The primary exceptions were the lack of difference on Increase Intimacy and Childhood Experiences. For these two factors, nonperpetrators were not different from those perpetrating violence and violent women were not different from severely violent women.
Means for all motives were generally low, suggesting that other motives are likely more salient to women. The highest means were found for Situation/Mood and the self-defense variable. To better understand how perpetrators differ from nonperpetrators, future research should determine whether the structure of the motives scale varies by perpetrator type. For example, items for Retaliation may be stronger indicators for severe IPV perpetrators than for nonsevere perpetrators.

Limitations

Clearly, not considering women’s violence in the context of their partners’ IPV is a limitation of the current study. At least two factors found here (Partners’ Negative Behaviors and Retaliation) imply that women’s behaviors may be in response to their partners’ violence and/or psychological abuse. However, controlling for partners’ behaviors would have effectively resulted in the inclusion of this variable as a motive for women’s behaviors. Because our goal was to determine women’s perceptions of their motives, we included motives related to partners’ behaviors, which may be strongly related to their IPV perpetration. This possibility should be considered in future research.

Additional limitations are related to selection bias and interview length. First, women in the current study had volunteered for at least two waves of a study conducted over 7 years. Demographic differences in age and relationship length were found between women with complete data for the study and those who were dropped for incomplete data. However, both groups were equivalent on education (fewer than 12 years) and the initial sample and those included in the current study had similar ethnic distributions suggesting that results from this analysis are generalizable to other low-income, urban women. Second, the interviews were long, which, from a psychometric perspective, can introduce problems such as response bias and fatigue. To reduce the impact of these biases, women took breaks as often as they wished and were given snacks and drinks during the interviews. Moreover, when scheduling the interview, women were told the likely length so they could be prepared.

Implications and Directions for Future Research

As others (Babcock et al., 2003; Henning & Feder, 2004; Swan & Snow, 2003) have found, there was evidence for women’s perpetration of IPV, including severe IPV. The lack of evidence in this sample for a factor representing initiation as a motive extends research by Hamberger and Guse (2002) and Saunders (1986) by showing violent and nonviolent women are
unlikely to initiate conflicts. The most relevant items for women’s initiation (e.g., to provoke him) were not included in the factor analysis because of extremely low means indicating most women did not perceive these as motives. Although it may be argued that women were responding in a socially desirable manner, other similarly worded items that were retained (e.g., to do it first) did not form a separate factor.

One implication of the lack of a self-defense factor, coupled with the presence of Retaliation, is that women perceive self-protective actions as more retaliatory than self-defensive. In their qualitative study of female perpetrators, Olson and Lloyd (2005) found that few women indicated their perpetration was in self-defense; however, many indicated their violence was in some way retaliation for their partners’ behavior. Although retaliation would suggest women are initiators, it may be that women’s behaviors in conflicts are preemptive or in response to partners’ nonphysical abuse. Women’s perpetration in this context would not be considered legal self-defense. However, a better understanding of retaliation as a motive would be important for ethnically specific prevention and intervention efforts, as research has shown women’s physical retaliation is associated with their victimization (e.g., Dasgupta, 1999).

Results across ethnicity indicated women’s physical IPV, when not in self-defense, was most likely due to situational factors or to increase closeness to partners. This suggests interventions may be targeted toward decreasing violent responses to stressful situations and finding alternate methods for relational communication. However, there were few results to inform understanding of what motivates nonviolent women’s behaviors during conflicts. Given that the majority of women in the current study perpetrated at least threats, perhaps future research should focus on why some women are not violent, rather than why many are violent.

References


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