

Of comparable significance to the unfolding of the intimacy process is the partner's response. Supportive responses encourage the growth of intimacy, whereas disinterested or critical responses are likely to inhibit its development. Partner responses provide signals (again involving both verbal and nonverbal content) that the self-discloser uses to infer whether the partner has understood the personal meaning of whatever was communicated, whether the partner values and appreciates the self-discloser, and whether the partner can be trusted to be caring. Of course, in the real-time ebb and flow of conversation, these exchanges are rapid, spontaneous, and complex, suggesting that there is considerable subjectivity in how self-disclosures and responses are interpreted. A large body of research has established that both the objective properties of these behaviors and the individual's idiosyncratic interpretations of the behaviors are influential.

Another important consideration is that the intimacy process is both recursive and reciprocal. That is, as each partner comes to trust the other's response to his or her self-revelations, each becomes increasingly willing to disclose personal thoughts and feelings to the partner. Typically, disclosers and responders swap roles back and forth, often repeatedly in the same conversation. An individual's experience as responder usually affects his or her subsequent willingness to be open with his or her own thoughts and feelings; similarly, each partner's perception of the other's responsiveness is likely to affect his or her own willingness to be responsive in turn to the partner. These principles illustrate the fundamentally interactive and interdependent nature of intimacy.

### Individual Differences and Intimacy

Ever since Erik Erikson, one of the most influential psychoanalytic psychologists of the 20th century, described the successful attainment of a primary intimate relationship as the fundamental life task of early adulthood, researchers have been interested in identifying factors that predispose some people to achieve higher levels of intimacy in their close relationships and others lower levels. This research demonstrates that many factors contribute to an individual's preferences and capabilities with regard to intimacy.

No other variable has been studied as extensively as has a person's biological sex. A general conclusion from these many studies is that women's social lives tend to exhibit higher levels of intimacy than men's do, and that this difference is greater in same-sex

friendships than in other types of relationships (e.g., heterosexual romantic relationships, marriages). Although some researchers see this difference as mainly being the result of biological differences between men and women, evidence for this position is sparse and in fact contradicted by certain studies: For example, studies showing that same-sex friendships in non-Western cultures tend to find small, if any, sex differences in intimacy. The best supported conclusion appears to be the developmental one: that in Western culture, men learn to be more reluctant about the vulnerabilities inherent in intimate interaction.

Another important avenue for research has viewed intimacy as a motive, emphasizing determinants from personality (including both genetically determined and learned qualities) and from past experiences in close relationships. For example, self-esteem, openness, comfort with closeness, empathic concern for others, trust, extraversion, parental warmth, and prior intimacy tend to be associated with higher levels of intimacy and intimacy motivation, whereas social anxiety, fears about exploitation, vulnerability, dependence, social avoidance, conflict and distance with parents, and prior dysfunctional relationships tend to be associated with lower levels of intimacy and intimacy motivation. Regardless of differences in motivation, intimacy is known to be an essential component of social life and, more broadly, human experience.

*Harry T. Reis*

*See also* Close Relationships; Emotion; Nonverbal Cues and Communication; Self-Disclosure; Social Anxiety

### Further Readings

- Prager, K. (1995). *The psychology of intimacy*. New York: Guilford Press.
- Reis, H. T., & Patrick, B. C. (1996). Attachment and intimacy: Component processes. In A. Kruglanski & E. T. Higgins (Eds.), *Social psychology: Handbook of basic principles* (pp. 523–563). New York: Guilford Press.

---

## INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE

---

### Definition

Intimate partner violence refers to the intentional use of aggressive behaviors that are enacted with the immediate goal of causing physical pain to an intimate partner.

If the pain is caused accidentally (e.g., by inadvertently shutting a door on the partner's fingers), it does not qualify as intimate partner violence. This entry focuses specifically on physical violence in romantic relationships; it does not address psychological aggression.

Virtually all intimate partner violence is instrumental, in that the partner's pain is a means to an end rather than an end in itself. Regardless of whether violence is motivated by the desire to control the partner's behavior in the argument at hand, to gain justice or retribution, or to defend one's self-image, it typically is not random or sadistic. As such, intimate partner violence is best conceptualized as a (conscious or nonconscious) goal-directed social influence tactic, albeit an extreme one with deeply disturbing consequences for victims.

### Frequency

Physical violence is perpetrated against romantic partners with alarming frequency. According to a nationally representative survey conducted in 1985, for example, 16.1% of married couples in the United States experienced an incident of violence during the previous year. When the definition of violence is limited to include only *severe* violence perpetration (e.g., kicking, beating up, using a knife or gun), incidence remains high at 6.3%. Moreover, intimate partner violence is not limited to married couples; evidence suggests that perpetration rates might be even higher among unmarried dating couples.

### Two Types of Intimate Partner Violence

Until the mid-1990s, researchers investigating intimate partner violence in heterosexual romantic relationships found themselves embroiled in a heated controversy over whether such behavior is best characterized as (a) a phenomenon in which men batter women in the interest of exerting control or dominance or (b) a gender-neutral phenomenon in which men or women sometimes become aggressive toward their partner during heated conflict. Although this controversy is far from resolved, researchers have recently brought some coherence to the literature by developing typologies to distinguish between qualitatively distinct categories of intimate partner violence.

One prominent typology suggests that there are two types of intimate partner violence in Western countries: intimate terrorism and situational couple violence. Intimate terrorism (or patriarchal terrorism)

is argued to be a product of cultural traditions that bequeath to men the right to control "their" women, with violence serving to exert and maintain control. In couples characterized by intimate terrorism, violence tends to (a) be perpetrated predominantly by men, (b) occur chronically, (c) increase in severity over time, and (d) be unidirectional (i.e., the victim typically does not fight back). In contrast, situational couple violence (or common couple violence) is a nonescalating and frequently bidirectional form of physical violence that arises occasionally when conflictual situations get out of hand. Unlike intimate terrorism, there do not appear to be substantial gender differences in the likelihood of perpetrating situational couple violence. Nonetheless, female victims are more likely to be injured or killed, in part because of males' greater physical strength.

The causal mechanisms underlying intimate terrorism relate to psychopathology and patriarchal socialization practices, topics that have been systematically studied in disciplines (e.g., clinical psychology, sociology) other than social psychology. After all, social psychologists typically investigate social dynamics in normal (nondeviant) populations. The causal mechanisms underlying situational couple violence, in contrast, relate to interpersonal conflict, impulsiveness, and behavioral restraint, topics that fall squarely in the domain of social psychology. The remainder of this entry focuses on social psychological research relevant to understanding the perpetration of situational couple violence.

### Conceptual Analysis of Situational Couple Violence

Researchers must ask three general questions regarding a given interaction between romantic partners to determine whether situational couple violence is likely to transpire. First, are the partners experiencing conflict with one another? Second, does either partner experience impulses toward intimate partner violence as a result of this conflict? And third, does that person exhibit weak behavioral restraint?

Many scholars have concluded that conflict is inevitable in romantic relationships. Jacob may speak disrespectfully toward Monica when he is trying to quit smoking, or Monica might become jealous when Jacob goes out for dinner with his ex-girlfriend, interrogating him aggressively upon his return. Each of these behaviors may cause the partner to become irritated and may ultimately ignite relationship conflict.

Although experiencing relationship conflict may be inevitable in romantic relationships, intimate partner violence as a tactic for dealing with this conflict is not.

Relationship conflict typically does not cause partners to experience violent impulses. Such impulses, however, are not unheard of, and certain risk factors render them more likely. Factors that increase the likelihood that the experience of conflict leads a given partner to experience violent impulses include features of the immediate situation (e.g., experiencing anger or humiliation), the relationship (e.g., relationship commitment, power/control dynamics), the potential perpetrator's personality (e.g., dispositional hostility or narcissism), and the potential perpetrator's background characteristics (e.g., exposure to parental violence).

Even if partners experience violent impulses in response to relationship conflict, they will only act on these impulses if they exhibit weak behavioral restraint (or if they believe that intimate partner violence is acceptable, which is relatively rare in situational couple violence). Factors that increase the likelihood that experiencing violent impulses will lead to violent behavior include features of the immediate situation (e.g., impulsiveness, alcohol consumption, experiencing life stressors) and of the potential perpetrator's personality (e.g., low self-control, belief that violence is acceptable).

*Eli J. Finkel*

**See also** Aggression; Anger; Close Relationships; Frustration–Aggression Hypothesis

### Further Readings

- Archer, J. (2000). Sex differences in aggression between heterosexual partners: A meta-analytic review. *Psychological Bulletin*, *126*, 651–680.
- Felson, R. B. (2002). *Violence and gender reexamined*. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.
- Johnson, M. P. (1995). Patriarchal terrorism and common couple violence: Two forms of violence against women. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, *57*, 283–294.
- Straus, M. A., & Gelles, R. J. (1986). Societal change and change in family violence from 1975 to 1985 as revealed by two national surveys. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, *48*, 465–479.

---

## INTIMIDATION

---

**See** SELF-PRESENTATION

---

## INTRINSIC MOTIVATION

---

### Definition

Intrinsic motivation is the desire to do something “just to be doing it.” That is, the experience of the behavior is reward enough, independent of any separable consequences that may follow. Intrinsic motivation often leads to or promotes flow, in which individuals become completely absorbed in some challenging activity, such as rock climbing or piano playing. Intrinsic motivation is typically contrasted with extrinsic motivation, in which behavior has no intrinsic appeal and occurs only because of the rewards and reinforcements it brings.

### Background and History

It took a long time for the concept of intrinsic motivation to be accepted in psychology. This is because the concept does not fit well with the behaviorist and drive-theory models of human nature that dominated in the early to mid-20th century. Behaviorist theories say that behavior occurs because it has been rewarded in the past, that is, because it has been positively reinforced by rewards or consequences administered after the behavior is over. Drive theories say that all behavior is ultimately motivated by the necessity of dealing with biological demands and needs, such as hunger, thirst, and pain avoidance. Neither model can explain spontaneous, playful, and exploratory behavior that is unrelated to external rewards or to biological drives. Such spontaneous behavior was observed many times in the early part of the century, even in lower animals. For example, rats will incur pain, and hungry monkeys will pass up food, to get the opportunity to explore a new area of their enclosure. Mechanistically oriented psychologists at the time tried to reduce such behavior to biological drives or external conditioning, but their explanations were unpersuasive. It was not until the cognitive revolution of the 1960s that an appropriate paradigm emerged for viewing intrinsic motivation. From a cognitive perspective, intrinsic motivation expresses the desire to stimulate, exercise, and develop the central nervous system. Given that complex online information processing is central to human adaptation, it makes sense that humans would have evolved an inherent motivation to seek out challenges, develop interests, and consolidate their knowledge of the world. This assumption is also central to contemporary cognitive-developmental theory, according to which