11 Violence Against Women

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Explain what is meant by the gendered nature of violent crime
2. Indicate the percentage of U.S. women who have experienced a rape or attempted rape
3. Summarize the relationship between social class and intimate-partner violence
4. Summarize the evidence pointing to gender inequality as a factor underlying violence against women
5. Describe any two rape myths
6. Describe any two myths regarding domestic violence
7. Discuss the concept of learned helplessness
8. Discuss the debate over whether men experience domestic violence as often as women do

CHAPTER OUTLINE

Overview: The Gendered Nature of Violent Crime
An International Problem
Defining Rape/Sexual Assault and Domestic Violence
   International Focus: Rape in the Nordic Nations
Extent of Rape/Sexual Assault and Domestic Violence
   Rape and Sexual Assault
   Intimate Rape and Sexual Assault
   Domestic Violence
   Crime and Controversy: “All I See Is Blood”: Rape and Battering in the Military
Social Pattern of Rape/Sexual Assault and Domestic Violence
   Age
   Social Class
   Race and Ethnicity
Crime in the News

In April 2013, the University of Arizona held a march and rally as part of the campus's annual "Take Back the Night" to protest rape and sexual assault and to support survivors of sexual violence. Several people at the rally told of their own experiences of being sexually assaulted. After hearing their stories, one student commented, "I've never been to Take Back the Night, I wasn't really sure what to expect. Once people started talking about their own experiences I got really emotional. Some of the people that spoke, I really care about, and I didn't think I would start crying but I started crying. I almost didn't come, but I'm glad I did because it was a great experience."

Source: Burgoyne 2013.

Before the 1970s, sexual assault and domestic violence were hardly ever discussed inside or outside the college classroom, even though they had been occurring for centuries. Then these crimes began to capture the attention of the modern women's movement, which was still in its early stages. Because of the feminist movement, there are now countless numbers of scholarly studies and popular accounts of sexual assault and domestic violence. Many college courses now consider these crimes, and many campuses, as the Crime in the News story illustrates, have Take Back the Night marches and rallies, Rape Awareness Weeks, and other events. This chapter discusses the major findings from the burgeoning research on violence against women and continues the book's emphasis on the sociological roots of criminal behavior.

▶ Overview: The Gendered Nature of Violent Crime

Women, like men, are victims of the major violent crimes examined in Chapter 10: homicide, aggravated assault, and robbery. For all these crimes, their rates of victimization are much lower than men's rates. However, there are two types of violent crime for which women's rates of victimization are much higher than men's rates: (1) rape and sexual assault and (2) domestic violence, or violence committed by intimates (current or former spouses and partners). In NCVS data, women were the victims in 86 percent of all rape and sexual assaults in 2011, in 79 percent of all nonlethal violence (aggravated and simple assault, robbery, rape and sexual assault) committed by intimates, and in 92 percent of all serious nonlethal violence (aggravated assault, robbery, rape and sexual assault) committed by intimates (Bureau of Justice Statistics 2013). In line with intimate violence figures, women were also the victims in 79 percent of all homicides committed by an intimate in 2011 (Federal Bureau of Investigation 2012). All these numbers yield a central conclusion: Women are the primary targets in rape and sexual assault and domestic violence precisely because they are women.

Sociologically, this is not surprising. Socially, economically, and physically, women have less power than men. As Chapter 10's discussion of hate crime against people of color and other subordinate groups illustrated, powerless groups are often the victims of violence by those with power. Sexual assault and domestic violence are no different. We cannot understand violence against women unless we recognize men's social, economic, political, and physical dominance and women's lack of such dominance. It is no accident that men are almost always the ones who commit
rape and sexual assault and domestic violence or that women are their targets. Given this context, rape and sexual assault and domestic violence may even be regarded as the equivalent of hate crimes against women.

▶ An International Problem

As we look around the globe, violence against women is a worldwide phenomenon of "epidemic proportions," according to international organizations (Cheng 2013). These organizations estimate that almost one-third of women worldwide have been physically and/or sexually assaulted by a former or current spouse or partner and that 7 percent of women worldwide have also been sexually assaulted by a nonintimate. In addition to these forms of violence, female genital mutilation, a routine practice in many countries, affects an estimated 140 girls and women worldwide (World Health Organization 2013).

In Pakistan, women in police custody are often sexually and physically abused. In Kuwait, male employers routinely rape their foreign maids. About half of married men in Northern India say they have physically or sexually abused their wives (Martin et al. 1999). In Uganda, more than half of women have been victims of physical and/or sexual violence, while the government does little to prevent it or to punish the men who commit it. One young woman recalled her beatings after she got married: "At first all he did was beat me, and then he began to have sex with me by force as well. When I told him to wear a condom because I suspected he had been sleeping with other women, he would beat me some more. . . . I know that even if I go to the Local Council, they won’t do anything; the same thing happens to my friends and nothing is done when they report it" (Amnesty International 2010b:12).

In India and Pakistan, dowry deaths claim the lives of thousands of women annually (Thekkekara 2012). Brides in those two nations are supposed to pay the groom money or goods. If they do not, the groom often beats his wife, or he and his relatives murder her. To hide their crime, they often burn the woman with kerosene and claim she caught fire accidentally in the kitchen. Police then accept bribes from the husband and/or his relatives to pretend the murder was an accident. A Pakistani human rights attorney once noted, "These cases are some of the most horrifying and gruesome human rights abuses in the world." Although they are common in Pakistan, she said they reflect a more general international problem: "It is really, at bottom, simply about violence and cruelty to women. That is not a story unique to Pakistan" (Sennott 1995:1).

The nations mentioned in these examples are neither wealthy nor industrialized, but international human rights groups emphasize that violence against women is very common in the industrialized world as well, as this chapter will illustrate for the United States. Amnesty International reports that emergency service agencies in the United Kingdom receive one phone call each minute about domestic violence. A woman there explained why she finally called the police after being beaten by her partner for eight years:

I really don’t know what it was that evening that made the chance to decide to call the police, but I always say it was the sight of cleaning up my own blood. People have asked me why I didn’t just leave, but my partner made lots of threats to me which he always carried out. I was very, very frightened of him. So you get to the point where you live with it, it becomes a normal pattern of life, you adapt, you cope, you live it. (Amnesty International 2004b:1)

Some of the worst abuses of women occur in wartime. In one of the first books on rape, Susan Brownmiller (1975) wrote that wartime rape has been occurring for centuries. In nations that are dissimilar geographically and culturally, such as Mexico and Bosnia, women have been routinely raped and genitally mutilated over the past two decades during ethnic and political conflicts. After a war began in eastern Congo in 1998 between rebels and government forces, the latter routinely used rape as a weapon to quell the rebellion. It is estimated that over the next five years, soldiers raped almost one-third of eastern Congolese women, leaving thousands of them with vaginal
fistula (a medical term for an abnormal duct or passage resulting from an injury or disease) and unable to work or to have sex or children (Wax 2003). Another epidemic of wartime rape occurred in Sudan during bloody ethnic conflict that racked the Darfur region of that Northern African nation in 2003 and 2004. A government-sponsored militia known as the Janjaweed (translated as “armed men on horses”) attacked village after village and routinely raped the women they found there, often in front of their husbands and other villagers (Amnesty International 2004a).

Rape and battering in the United States are thus part of a larger, international pattern of violence against women that also includes murder, torture, sexual slavery, incest, genital mutilation, and involuntary sterilization. Jane Caputi and Diana E. H. Russell (1992:15) termed these acts sexist terrorism. They are directed against women because they are women and the acts are motivated by “hatred, contempt, pleasure, or a sense of ownership of women.” In its most severe form, such violence involves what Caputi and Russell called femicide, or the murder of women. They likened femicide and other antiwomen violence to the lynchings of African-Americans that were designed to reinforce white dominance over African-Americans. In a similar fashion, they wrote, men’s violence against women helps maintain their dominance over them. Femicide goes back at least to the witch hunting in medieval Europe that killed some 300,000 people, most of them poor women (Demos 2009). The gendered nature of these witch killings led one scholar to call them “part of the ongoing attempt by men . . . to ensure the continuance of male supremacy” (Hester 1992:36). In the modern era, women in the United States and elsewhere are murdered by men who have been battering them. In other countries they are also killed during ethnic and political conflicts or because they violate rigid cultural codes of sexuality. Whatever the reason and the context, women are murdered or assaulted because they are women. Men are not killed or assaulted for the same reasons.

► Defining Rape/Sexual Assault and Domestic Violence

Put most simply, rape may be defined as sexual intercourse (vaginal, anal, or oral penetration) without the consent of the victim, while sexual assault may be defined as sexual contact without the consent of the victim that does not include intercourse. Force or the threat of force is often involved in rape and sexual assault; however, sexual contact of someone who is under the influence of alcohol or other drugs or otherwise unable to give consent is also considered rape when penetration occurs or sexual assault when it does not occur.

Domestic violence, or battering, may be defined as physical and sexual attacks committed by intimates: spouses or ex-spouses, boyfriends or girlfriends, and ex-boyfriends or ex-girlfriends.

This form of violence is also called intimate-partner violence (IPV) or more simply, intimate violence. IPV includes aggravated assaults, in which a weapon is used or a serious injury occurs; simple assaults, in which no weapon is used and only a minor injury occurs; and rape and sexual assault; and robbery; some discussions of IPV limit themselves to just aggravated and simple assaults. Although the definition of domestic violence allows for men to be battered, most domestic violence, and almost all serious domestic violence is committed against women, as we have already seen. One problem with defining domestic violence as physical and sexual attacks is that doing so excludes psychological abuse, which is often as harmful or even more harmful than physical abuse. Because there is much more research on physical abuse than on psychological abuse by intimates, most of our discussion addresses the physical dimension.
The Nordic nations of Denmark, Finland, Norway, and Sweden are widely regarded as among the wealthiest and most progressive in the world, with a strong record of gender equality throughout their societies. Despite this reputation, rape remains a serious problem in these nations that is compounded by the failure of their governments to take it seriously. A recent Amnesty International report declared that “rape and other forms of sexual violence remain an alarming reality that affects the lives of many thousands of girls and women every year in all Nordic countries.” The report went on to discuss many ways in which the Nordic governments compound the problem.

For example, Denmark’s rape laws fall short of international human rights standards in at least two respects. First, they provide lower penalties for men who have sex with women who are in a helpless state, for example, because of mental illness or drug use, because physical force was not used or threatened; if a husband rapes his wife who is in a helpless state, there are no penalties. According to the Danish Minister of Justice, “It is not natural to call it a ‘rape’, if the perpetrator has not used physical coercion or has not threatened the victim or placed that victim in a state where that person is unable to resist.” Second, the laws allow for reduced penalties if a rape is committed by a husband against a wife even when she is not in a helpless state. The government was reconsidering this latter problem at the time of this writing.

Finland’s rape laws take into account the seriousness of the violence used against a woman and include a category called “coercion into sexual intercourse.” The average prison term for this type of rape is only seven months, even though the “coercion” often involves very serious violence. Two examples illustrate this problem. In one case, a man raped a woman in a restaurant bathroom after banging her head against the wall, twisting her arm behind her, and covering her mouth with his hand to prevent her from screaming. He was convicted of coercion into sexual intercourse and received a seven-month sentence that was suspended. In a second case, a case “where a woman was held captive for several days, raped repeatedly and denied her medication,” according to Amnesty International, also resulted in a conviction and then had been convicted only for coercion into sexual intercourse.

In these and other ways, the Nordic nations fail to protect women who are raped or otherwise sexually abused. The Amnesty International report called on their governments to take several measures to help their women, including: (1) adopting legal definitions of rape that conform to international human rights standards, (2) undertaking education and other preventive efforts to reduce rape, and (3) improving the quality of the investigation and judicial handling of rape cases.

Source: Amnesty International 2010a.

► Extent of Rape/Sexual Assault and Domestic Violence

Rape and Sexual Assault

When the U.S. women's movement turned its attention to rape in the early 1970s, it documented the role that rape played in women's daily lives. Thus Susan Griffin (1971:26) began her classic essay, “Rape: The All-American Crime,” by saying, “I have never been free of the fear of rape. From a very early age I, like most women, have thought of rape as a part of my natural environment—something to be feared and prayed against like fire or lightning. I never asked why men raped; I simply thought it one of the many mysteries of human nature.”

Research since the early 1970s confirms the magnitude of the rape problem. The NCVS estimates that almost 244,000 rapes and sexual assaults occurred in 2011 against people age 12 or older. Of this number, about 86 percent were committed against females for a rate of 1.6 per 1,000 women; 68 percent of these were committed by someone the woman knew and only 28 percent by a stranger (see Table 11-1).

While the NCVS focuses on crimes in the past year, other U.S. national and local surveys estimate how many women have been raped at some point in their lifetime (prevalence rates). The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) conducted such a survey in 2010 (Black et al. 2011). Almost one-fifth (18.3 percent) of the women in the survey, equal to some 22 million women nationwide, reported that they had been raped in their lifetime; more than one-fourth (27.2 percent) reported having been sexually assaulted. Another survey, the National Violence against Women Survey (NVAW), similarly found that 18 percent of women had been raped at least once in their lifetime (Tjaden and Thoennes 2000). These sets of findings indicate
TABLE 11-1 Victim-Offender Relationship for Rape and Sexual Assault (percentage of all offenses committed against women). NCVS, 2011

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>OFFENDER</th>
<th>PERCENTAGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nonstranger</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intimate</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friend or acquaintance</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stranger</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Bureau of Justice Statistics 2013.

that almost one-fifth of U.S. women have been raped and that more than one-fourth have been sexually assaulted. Both national surveys also found that nonstrangers committed more than 80 percent of the rapes reported by respondents.

A study of a random sample of 420 women in Toronto found an even higher rape prevalence rate. Melanie Randall and Lori Haskell (1995) supervised face-to-face interviews with the subjects that lasted about two hours each. Of the 420 women, 56 percent reported at least one experience of forced or attempted forced sexual intercourse, with 83 percent of these rapes committed by someone they knew. When Randall and Haskell included other forms of sexual assault, including unwanted sexual touching of the breasts or genitals, two-thirds of the subjects reported at least one completed or attempted sexual assault, including rape. The researchers concluded that “it is more common than not for a woman to have an experience of sexual assault during her lifetime” (p. 22).

Review and Discuss

How common are rape and sexual assault? How might the way the answer to this question is determined affect the estimates that are found?

Intimate Rape and Sexual Assault

Table 11-1 shows from NCVS figures that intimates accounted for 19 percent of all rapes and sexual assaults in 2011. The CDC survey just mentioned found that intimates had committed about half of the rapes and one-fourth of the sexual assaults committed against women. The NVAW survey also mentioned found that intimates, including dates, committed 62 percent of the rapes its respondents reported. The Toronto study found that intimates committed 30 percent of all sexual assaults occurring after a woman reached the age of 16.

Taking all these studies together, a fair estimate is that intimates commit at least one-fifth and perhaps more than half of the rapes and sexual assaults of women. Such rapes are especially likely to occur in marriages or relationships that also include battering: In the Toronto study, half of the women reporting a physical assault by an intimate had also been sexually assaulted by the same man. Intimate rapes, whether or not they occur without other physical violence, are often more traumatic for women than stranger rapes for at least two reasons. First, they cause a woman to feel betrayed and to question whether she can trust any man. Second, women raped by husbands or boyfriends they live with often have to continue living with them (Bergen 2006).

Review and Discuss

How does an understanding of the victim-offender relationship help us understand why rapes occur?

Domestic Violence

What about domestic violence? The best evidence indicates that domestic violence is even more common than rape. According to the NCVS, about 121,000 aggravated assaults and 391,000 simple assaults were committed by intimates against women in 2011, or about 512,000
Women who serve our country in the military often find that the greatest threat to their safety comes from the men with whom they serve. As the title of a news report put it, "they fear ambush, snipers—and an enemy within." From 2002 to 2006, more than 500 military women in Afghanistan or Iraq reported being raped or sexually assaulted by U.S. military personnel; the actual number was probably much greater than this, since many women keep quiet about being attacked because they fear retaliation and because they do not think the military will take any action.

Members of the military reported 3,374 sexual assaults to authorities in 2012. However, anonymous surveys of military personnel indicated that 26,000 such assaults occurred that same year, with most of the assault victims not reporting them.

A decade ago, the Denver Post conducted one of the first investigative reports of sexual assault and domestic violence in the military. This report, published in November 2003, documented thousands of rapes and acts of battering of women at military bases in the United States and elsewhere. The Post began its investigation after dozens of women cadets in the U.S. Air Force Academy came forward in February 2003 with reports that they had been raped or sexually assaulted by other cadets. The Academy, they said, did little or nothing to their offenders, while they, the victims, were intimidated and even punished for reporting the crimes. The Post's investigation found that sexual assault and battering were rampant throughout the armed forces.

According to the Post report and more recent investigations, many military women keep quiet about their victimization, but when they do report it, military officials usually treat the offenders with kid gloves, if they investigate the cases at all. As the Post observed, "The obstacles to pursuing justice are wrenching. Many (victims) fear retaliation, damage to their careers and being portrayed as disloyal. And those who do report are often punished, intimidated, ostracized or told they are crazy by their superiors."

Many women told the Post that the crimes committed against them and the callous responses of military officials amounted to a betrayal of trust. One woman, who was raped on a South Korea base by an army sergeant, said, "These people were supposed to be my family. All through basic training, that's what you're taught. Now I know that's not true."

Women veterans testify to the emotional trauma caused by their rape and battering. One woman, Rebekah, who was assaulted by her captain in Iraq, recalled, "The first two days after the incident, I just kept throwing up. After two days with the medics, I came back to the unit. But after that happened, I was so paranoid. It screwed me up for a while." Another woman, Sharon, was a combat medic during Operation Desert Storm in 1991 when she was gang-raped by fellow soldiers after being drugged. Although her rapists threatened to kill her if she reported what happened, she did so anyway, only to hear the military police officer respond, "What did you expect, being a female in Saudi Arabia?" In 1999 she suffered an emotional breakdown and was diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder.

A third woman, Marian, was 18 and just out of basic training when she was gang-raped by her drill sergeant and four other soldiers. In addition to the repeated rapes, they fractured several bones including her spine, urinated on her, and burned her with cigarettes. Her assailants were never brought to justice. Years later, she was continuing to have many serious health problems arising from her gang rape and beating when she was diagnosed with cervical cancer and given just a few years to live. Her will specifies that if her daughters join the military, they will not inherit any of her money. She will also not display the American flag: "When I looked at the American flag, I used to see red, white, and blue. Now, all I see is blood."

Congressional hearings in Spring 2013 focused new attention on sexual assault in the military. Although Pentagon officials promised increased efforts to reduce sexual assaults and to prosecute those accused of committing them, these promises were undercut by revelations that two military officers responsible for addressing sexual assaults had themselves been accused of sexually assaulting women.

Source: Cassata and Baldor 2013; Harris 2007; Schmitt 2004; Vanden Brook and Zoriah 2013.

overall for a rate of about 3.9 assaults per 1,000 women. The CDC survey found that one-third of U.S. women, or about 39 million women overall, have been physically assaulted by an intimate partner, and that 4 percent, or 4.7 million women, are assaulted annually by their partners. The NVAW survey concluded that 22 percent of women are assaulted in their lifetime by a partner, including 1.3 percent in the past year (Tjaden and Thoennes 2000).

This body of evidence suggests that one-fifth and one-third of U.S. and Canadian women have been assaulted by a husband or other male intimate. This evidence leads domestic violence
scholar Angela Browne to conclude that women “are more likely to be attacked and injured by a male partner than any other category of person. They are also more likely to be killed by a male partner than any other category of person” (Reynolds 1987:A18).

► Social Patterning of Rape/Sexual Assault and Domestic Violence

Age

The NCVS has reported detailed sociodemographic patterns for a combined measure of intimate-partner violence (IPV) that includes rape and sexual assault, aggravated and simple assault, and robbery (Catalano 2012a). Because robberies comprise only 12 percent or less of the total measure, the patterns revealed by NCVS IPV data safely apply to rape/sexual assault and domestic violence. With this in mind, rape/sexual assault and battering are, like many other crimes, more common among some demographic subgroups than others. One of the biggest risk factors is age: Young women are much more likely than older women to experience IPV (see Figure 11–1).

Social Class

Many discussions emphasize that rape/sexual assault and battering transcend social class boundaries. Although this is true, the NCVS does find that the poorest women have rates of IPV six times higher than those for women in the highest income bracket (see Figure 11–2). This social class difference underscores an important consequence of economic inequality in society.

That said, it remains true that rape/sexual assault and battering also occur among the middle and upper classes. As the notorious case of O. J. Simpson illustrates, men in all walks of life commit these crimes. In 1989 police responding to a “domestic dispute”

![The National Crime Victimization Survey estimates that male intimates commit tens of thousands of assaults against women every year.](image)

**FIGURE 11–1 Age and Intimate-Partner Violence Committed Against Women, 2010.**

Source: Catalano 2012.
saw his wife, Nicole Brown Simpson, "her lip bloodied, face swollen and eye blackened," running across the lawn and collapsing. At that point she screamed, "He's going to kill me, he's going to kill me!" When the police asked her who, she said, "O. J." (McGrory 1994:12).

Studies of college students reinforce this point: 5 percent of women college students nationwide report being raped during the past year, and experts estimate that at least one-fifth of college women are raped or sexually assaulted during their years in college (Paul et al. 2013). In various studies, between 8 percent and 14 percent of male college students report committing a rape, and between 25 percent and 60 percent report committing a sexual assault (Mouliso and Calhoun 2013). These men include campus leaders, athletes, and fraternity members (Schwartz et al. 2001). The college student evidence led Diana Scully (1995:2007) to conclude that "sexual aggression is commonplace in college dating relationships."

Race and Ethnicity

Racial differences in IPV against women also appear to exist. In 2010, rates of IPV victimization were higher for African-American women (7.8 victimizations per 1,000 women) than for white women (6.2) or Latina women (4.1) (Catalano 2012a). Although these differences are fairly small, Native American women have an especially high rate of IPV. A 2007 report by Amnesty International estimated that one-third of Native American women will be raped at least once in their lifetime, compared to only half that for non-Native American women (Amnesty International 2007). The higher rates for African-Americans and Native Americans probably stem from several factors, including (1) these groups' greater poverty, (2) their greater likelihood of living in high-crime areas, and (3) a lack of adequate legal help and social service provision for IPV survivors (Benson et al. 2004; Stark 2004).

Many women of color face particular problems in seeking help from rape crisis centers, battered women's shelters, social service agencies, the police, and other sources (Huisman 1996; Potter 2006). A major problem is that the antirape and battered women's movements were begun by white feminists and over the years have included few women of color. As a result, rape crisis centers and battered women's shelters continue to be relatively absent in inner cities and other areas, such as Native American reservations, where women of color live. For women in the United States who do not speak English, another problem is the language barrier (Klevens et al. 2007). Even when rape
crisis centers and battered women’s shelters do exist, they do not always have interpreters to whom these women can talk. The same problem applies when a non-English-speaking woman calls the police for help. Many times her husband or partner may speak English better than she and thus be able to convince the police there is no real problem. Sometimes the husband or partner even has to translate the woman’s words to the police; as you might expect, they cannot be trusted to tell the police what the woman is saying. For immigrant women and undocumented workers, the problem is even worse. In addition to the language barrier, these women also face possible legal problems, including deportation or arrest, should they seek help from the police or social service agencies.

Certain racial or ethnic groups also have cultural traditions that make battered or raped women especially reluctant to seek help (Huisman 1996; Klevens et al. 2007; Rasche 1988). For example, a strong norm on Native American reservations is that one does not seek help outside one’s own community. In addition to this obstacle, reservations are usually in isolated rural areas, and a woman may not be able to get off the reservation even if she wants to get help. If she decides to seek help on the reservation, it is likely that law enforcement officers and social service agency workers know her and/or her abuser. In Asian-American communities, hostility toward the larger, white society may inhibit women from reporting their victimization. The particularly high respect in Asian-American families for men leads to the same inhibition.

Another problem affecting many women of color is fear of and hostility toward the police. A good deal of evidence suggests that people of color of either sex are more likely than whites to distrust the police (see Chapter 2). This feeling may lead women of color to be less likely than white women to call the police in cases of battering or rape. One additional problem facing battered African-American women is that the police may have more trouble noticing bruises on their bodies than they would on white women’s bodies (Rasche 1988).

Review and Discuss
What special problems do women of color face in regard to intimate violence?

Explaining Rape/Sexual Assault and Battering

A basic issue in explaining rape/sexual assault and battering is whether the crimes are more psychological or sociological in origin. A psychological perspective assumes that many and even most rapists and batters have psychological problems that predispose them to commit their crimes. A noted proponent of this view is A. Nicholas Groth (1979:5), who wrote, “Rape is always a symptom of some psychological dysfunction, either temporary and transient or chronic and repetitive.” Although more than three decades have passed since Groth wrote this, this view remains popular within the field of psychology (Corvo and Johnson 2013; Young et al. 2012). In contrast, a sociological approach emphasizes the structural and cultural roots of rape/sexual assault and battering. Adopting this view, Diana Scully (1995:199) said it is wrong to assume that “individual psychopathology is the predisposing factor that best explains the majority of sexual violence against women.” This assumption, she said, overlooks the social sources of this violence and implies that it is “unusual or strange” (p. 204), rather than a common phenomenon of everyday life.

In evaluating this debate, recall from Chapter 6 that psychologically normal people are very capable of committing antisocial and even violent behavior. Although it might be difficult to understand how psychologically normal men could rape and batter, there is ample evidence that such men commonly commit these crimes. Although no one will deny that some rapists, batters,
and other criminals have mental disorders, these individuals comprise only a small proportion of all criminals. The remainder are as psychologically normal as you or people you know.

Support for this view comes from the evidence on the prevalence of rape and battering. If these crimes are so common, it becomes very difficult to argue that they stem from psychological abnormality, unless we want to assume that 20 to 30 percent or more of all men are psychologically abnormal. That, of course, would be silly. Instead, these figures indicate that structural and cultural forces must be at work.

**Gender and Economic Inequality**

A key force here is gender inequality. Feminist scholars see rape and battering as inevitable consequences of *patriarchy*, or *male dominance*. These crimes reflect women's social and economic inequality and allow men to exert and maintain their power over women (Valenti 2013a). This does not mean that all men rape or batter women, but that a gender-based analysis of violence against women is necessary.

Anthropological evidence supports this view. Peggy Reeves Sanday (1981) studied 95 tribal societies on which a wide variety of information had been gathered. In forty-seven of these societies, rape was unknown or rare, and in eighteen, rape was common. She then compared the two types of societies and found that women in the rape-prone tribes had less decision-making and other power than did women in the rape-absent tribes. A similar study by Rae Lesser Blumberg (1979) focused on women's economic power in sixty-one preindustrial societies. Beatings of women by male partners were more common in societies in which women had less economic power.

Some U.S. evidence complements this anthropological evidence, but the evidence is complex overall (Vieraitis et al. 2007). Studies using city and state data usually find that rape rates are higher where women have lower levels of income and education, but some also find that rape rates are higher where women have higher levels of employment and occupational prestige. Complicating matters further, studies often also find that rape rates are higher where women have greater equality relative to men (e.g., when relative measures, such as women's income divided by men's income, are used). This latter evidence is interpreted as supporting a *backlash hypothesis* that violence against women is higher when men feel threatened by women's growing equality compared to what men already have. The U.S. ecological evidence, then, does suggest that gender inequality matters for rape rates, but also that it matters in a complex manner that future research will have to clarify.

If gender inequality might contribute to rape, so does economic inequality. In her classic essay, Susan Griffin (1971) observed that women become convenient scapegoats for the anger some men feel over their low socioeconomic status: "For every man there is always someone lower on the social scale on whom he can take out his aggressions. And that is any woman alive." In this regard, recall the discussion in Chapter 10 of masculinity and violence. We saw that men with low socioeconomic status use violent, "opposition" masculine behavior against each other to gain the respect their low status deprives them of. A similar argument holds for their interaction with women; rape/sexual assault and battering allow them to take out on women their frustration over their economic inequality and to prove their masculinity (Petrik et al. 1994).

Supporting this view, several studies find higher rape rates in areas with greater rates of economic deprivation (Martin et al. 2006). In a study of the fifty states, Larry Baron and Murray A. Straus (1987) found that states with higher economic inequality had higher rape rates. The authors concluded that "rape may be a way for some men to assert their masculinity in the absence of viable avenues of economic success" (p. 843).
Cultural Myths Supporting Rape and Battering

If economic and gender inequality make rape and battering inevitable, so do cultural beliefs that either minimize the harm these crimes cause or somehow blame women for their victimization (Valenti 2013b). Because these beliefs distort reality, they are often called cultural myths. The myths about the two crimes are similar in many ways, but for clarity's sake receive separate discussions here.

Rape Myths

Two of the most common rape myths are that women like to be raped and “ask” to be raped by their dress, behavior, or both (Deming et al. 2013). Regarding the first myth, one of the most famous scenes in U.S. cinema occurs in Gone with the Wind, when Rhett Butler carries a struggling, resisting Scarlett O'Hara upstairs to have sex with her—in short, to rape her. The next scene we see takes place the following morning, when Scarlett awakens with a satisfied, loving smile on her face.

Unfortunately, traditional psychoanalytic views of women support the idea that they want to be raped. Psychoanalyst Karen Horney (1973:24) once wrote, “The specific satisfactions sought and found in female sex life and motherhood are of a masochistic nature. . . . What the woman secretly desires in intercourse is rape and violence, or in the mental sphere, humiliation.” Another psychoanalyst, Ner Littner (1973), distinguished between “professional victims” of rape and “true victims.” The former unconsciously want to be raped and thus act unknowingly in a way that invites rape, whereas the former do not unconsciously want to be raped. Although psychoanalysts have begun to abandon such notions, they remain common in both psychoanalytic and popular circles (Melton 2010).

Decades after Gone with the Wind, attitudes have changed, but many men still believe that women enjoy being forced to have sex and thus do not take her no for an answer. Despite the anti-rape movement’s dictum that “no means no,” this cultural myth is still very much with us. The traditional dating ritual demanding that men “make the first move” feeds into this myth. So does the traditional component of masculinity that says men are more masculine, or “stud,” if they have a lot of sex. As we saw from the studies of approval by male college students for hypothetical rapes, many men, even those who do not rape, find the idea of forcing a woman to submit to them to be sexually stimulating. This notion combines with the cultural myth that women enjoy being forced to have sex to produce tragic consequences for women and their loved ones.

The other myth is that women “ask” or “deserve” to be raped by the way they dress and/or behave and thus precipitate their own victimization. In this view, if a woman dresses attractively, drinks, walks into a bar by herself, or hitchhikes, she wants to have sex. If a rape then occurs in these circumstances, it is thought that she really wanted it to happen anyway or at least was asking for it to happen. Either way, she bears some blame for the rape. As writer Tim Beneke (2013:566) puts it, “A woman who assumes freedoms normally restricted to a man (like going out alone at night) and is raped is doing the same thing as a woman who goes out in the rain without an umbrella and catches a cold. Both are considered responsible for what happens to them.” In turn, the man who rapes her is held only partly responsible, or perhaps not even responsible at all.

This reaction is especially common if the woman has been sexually active in the past. Unless a woman in any of these circumstances suffers physical injuries in addition to the rape, it is often assumed that she consented to have sex and thus was not raped. Many people believe a “real rape” has not occurred unless all the following are true: (1) An injury or other evidence indicates forced intercourse, (2) the woman has not been sexually active, and (3) the woman did not dress or act
in any way that might suggest she wanted to have sex (Deming et al. 2013). This way of thinking ignores the fact that women are often raped without visible injuries. Often they do not physically resist the rape out of fear of even worse consequences or out of paralysis induced by the sheer terror of the situation.

These rape myths start early in life. A study of Rhode Island students in sixth through ninth grades found more than half saying it is okay for a man to force a woman to have sex if they have been dating at least six months. About a fifth said it is acceptable for him to force her to have sex if he has spent money on her on a date. About half said a woman who dresses “seductively” and walks alone at night is asking to be raped. More than 80 percent said rape is okay when a couple is married, and almost a third said it “would not be wrong” for a man to rape a sexually active woman (Hood 1995; White and Humphrey 1995).

As this evidence suggests, rape myths are part of the larger culture and, as such, are learned from this culture. During 2012 and 2013, several gang rapes by teenage boys occurred in the United States and Canada, perhaps most notoriously in Steubenville, Ohio, where the victim was unconscious. After these rapes, the alleged offenders proudly shared photos of what they had done. Commenting on their actions, Jessica Valenti (2013c), a feminist critic of rape, observed, “Boys across North America didn’t get the idea to rape and humiliate their female peers out of thin air; they learned it. Yes, rape is illegal; in theory, we take it seriously. But in reality, rape jokes are still considered funny, women are told that what they wear has some bearing on whether or not they’ll be attacked, and the definition of rape is still not widely understood.” She added, “That’s why whenever we blame a woman for being attacked—when we speculate what she was wearing, suggest she shouldn’t have been drinking or that she stayed out too late—we’re making the world safer for rapists.”

**Domestic Violence Myths**

Myths about battering also abound (Policastro and Payne 2013). One myth blames battered women for being hit and says that they must have done something to anger their male partners. This myth is akin to the victim-preparation myth that women ask to be raped. Feeding into this myth, a batterer often says he hit his wife or partner only because she did something to provoke him.

Another myth is that, because many women do not leave their batterers or call the police, the battering cannot be that bad. If it were bad, the reasoning goes, then they would leave or call for help. This myth distorts reality in at least two ways. First, most battered women do try to leave their batterers or at least call the police. Second, when women do not leave, they typically have many practical reasons for being hesitant to leave or to otherwise seek help. Perhaps, you even know a woman who has been beaten but who has not tried to end the relationship or call the police. Did you ever wonder why she did not take either action? Let’s examine her possible reasons (Kim and Gray 2008).

First, there is often nowhere to go, especially if a woman has children. Battered women’s shelters are only a short-term solution and are often filled to capacity. Relatives or friends may be able to house a battered woman and her children for a while. However, this again is only a short-term solution, and many women cannot find a relative or friend to stay with. Second, the question of money applies particularly to wives and other women living with their batterers: Because many battered women have no income independent of their husband’s or partner’s, economically they simply cannot afford to leave.

Next, women may fear that if they do try to leave their batterer, he will track them down and hurt them even worse than before. They may fear the same consequence if they call the police. Unfortunately, this fear is often warranted (DeKeseredy and Schwartz 2009; Ornstein and Rickne 2013). Studies indicate that at least 50 percent of women who do try to leave their batterers are harassed or further assaulted and that more battered women are killed while trying to leave their abusers.
than at any other time (Browne 2004). As family violence researcher Angela Browne observed, "If a woman attempts to end or ends the relationship, there's often an escalation in violence just at that point because the man believes he's losing the woman" (Elias 1994:10). Echoing these views, one batterer said about beating his wife, "Every time, Karen would have ugly bruises on her face and neck. She would cry and beg me for a divorce, and I would tell her, 'If I can't have you for my wife, you will die. No one else will have you if you ever try to leave me'" (Browne 1995:232). In this context, the O. J. Simpson case again serves as a reminder. As sociologist Saundra Gardner (1994:A9) wrote at the time, "Nicole Simpson left. Not only did she leave, she took legal action and divorced her husband. And, she is dead."

Another reason battered women stay is that many continue to love their batterers. Most relationships begin in love, and battered women often continue to love their batterers and to hope things will improve. Feeding this hope, many batterers are very apologetic after hitting their wives or girlfriends and say it won't happen again. It is also true that women often blame themselves for being battered, just as rape survivors often blame themselves for being raped, feeling they should not have "dressed that way," led the guy on, and so forth. In short, battered women often accept the myth that the battering is their fault. Helping this to happen, a man might tell a woman he's battering her for any number of reasons: The kids are noisy, the dinner was cold, she allegedly looked at another man. He thus tries to get her to think it was her fault she had to be hit, and she often believes him. If she does blame herself for being battered, she is less apt to try to leave or call the police.

Finally, experts on women's violence talk about a sense of learned helplessness that some women develop from repeated battering (Walker 1984). This self-defense mechanism helps a battered woman cope by giving up any hope of improvement and by becoming passive.

With all these reasons in mind, the surprising thing might be that so many battered women do try to leave or call the police. Certainly, if a woman takes neither action, it should not be assumed that the battering "can't be that bad."

Review and Discuss
What are any three cultural myths that help explain the amount of rape and battering in the United States today?

Other Factors and Perspectives
Gender and economic inequality and cultural myths help explain why rape and battering occur, but other factors also matter. Specific factors highlighted by researchers include the overuse of alcohol, unemployment and other stressful life events, and male peer support (Armstrong et al. 2006; DeKeseredy et al. 2006; Fisher et al. 2010). Thus, rape and battering stem not only from the inequality and myths stressed in a feminist perspective on violence against women but also from other sources.

Disputing a feminist perspective, Richard B. Felson (2006; Felson and Lane 2010) contends that violence against women is not qualitatively different from violence against men. By this he means that the same factors that explain violence against men also explain violence against women, and that patriarchy, misogyny, and other concepts basic to a feminist perspective play no role in violence against women. As an analogy, he says that although the Nazis killed millions of women, it would be a mistake to say they did so out of sexism because they also killed millions of men. Thus Felson (2006:21) asks, "Perhaps this same kind of selective focus affects our understanding of violence against women today. Are the offenders sexist or just violent men? Are women victimized because of their gender, or because they make up half the population?" His answer is that "sexism plays at most a trivial role in rape and in physical assault on wives. Typically, men who commit these crimes commit other crimes as well, and their backgrounds and attitudes toward women are similar to those of other criminals." In this violence perspective, then, violence against women is no different from violence against men in its origins and dynamics, and the feminist perspective has no basis.

Feminist scholars dispute Felson's violence perspective (Brush et al. 2007). Among other objections, they say it ignores the gendered nature of violence against women, including the fact that so much of it is committed by male intimates, and the roots of violence against women in
male dominance. Although Felson's argument has forced feminist scholars to sharpen their own arguments, it seems beyond question, as this chapter observed at the outset, that women are raped and battered precisely because they are women and that violence against women is in many ways qualitatively different from violence against men. The issue of battered men, to which we now turn, again reflects the tension between the violence and feminist perspectives on the violence women experience.

Battered Men: Fact or Fiction?

The violence perspective also assumes that men are assaulted by their wives and girlfriends as often as women are assaulted by their husbands and boyfriends. If this is true, there is nothing special about the battering of women because both sexes commit violence against the other sex, and women victims should not be singled out for extra attention. This in turn implies that the physical harm men do to women is less reprehensible because women inflict the same kind of harm on men. As you might expect, this issue is the source of a heated debate among criminologists and other observers.

Murray A. Straus (1993; 2006), a noted family violence researcher, says that the prevalence of violence by wives against husbands (and, by extension, female intimate partners against other men) is at least as great as that by husbands against wives. About 12 percent of each sex commits at least one act of violence (contained in a Conflict Tactics Scales [CTS] list ranging from slapping to using a knife or gun) against a spouse in a given year. Studies using the CTS to examine dating relationships also report such gender equivalence in battering (Marshall and Rose 1990).

In his early work, Straus argued that this gender similarity obscures important differences that make domestic violence a far more serious problem for women (Straus 1980). One difference is that a woman's violence is usually in self-defense or the result of being battered, whereas a man's violence is meant simply to injure and dominate his wife or partner. Another difference is that women tend to commit more minor acts of violence (e.g., slapping or pushing), whereas men tend to commit more serious acts (e.g., beating or using a weapon). Men are also much more likely to repeat their violence. In another difference, even when women and men both slap or punch, the man's greater strength allows him to inflict a far more severe injury. A final difference is that male batters tend to be especially likely to hit a pregnant partner.

In his later work, Straus abandoned this argument. Instead, he concluded that women often initiate violence against their husbands and are not acting in self-defense or in response to a history of battering, and he has called for more research on this topic (Straus 2006). The title of one of his articles called their violence a "major social problem" (Straus 1993). This assertion of gender symmetry in intimate-partner violence, as it is often called, has received considerable attention in the popular media and has often been cited as evidence that the attention given to the battering of women is at least partly misdirected because it ignores the battering of men (Kay 2013).

Critics sharply criticize the gender symmetry claim as yet another myth that obscures the true nature of IPV (DeKeseredy 2006; Johnson 2006). Ironically, the reasons for their criticism echo those that Straus noted in his early work, that is, most women's "violence" against men is best considered self-defense or the result of repeated battering and men injure women far more than women injure men (Allen et al. 2009). Among other things, critics also say that CTS measures ignore the context of violence and do not include rapes and other acts that men inflict. Another problem is that some CTS measures are overly broad. For example, one measure is "bit, kicked, or hit with fist." A woman who bites gets the same score as a man who uses his fist (Dobash et al. 1992).

Perhaps, the most important evidence against the gender symmetry claim comes from victimization surveys such as the NCVS, which, contrary to CTS studies, finds that about 80–85 percent of all intimate violence is committed against women (Catalano 2012a; Lauritsen and Heimer 2008). Drawing on such evidence, reviews conclude that evidence overall fails to support the gender symmetry claim (Kimmel 2002; Saunders 2002).

Michael P. Johnson (2006) says the different findings about gender symmetry in IPV stem from different sampling strategies and different measurement of IPV. He adds that different types of IPV exist, including intimate terrorism, in which one individual (almost always a man) is extremely violent and controlling, and situational couple violence, in which both partners commit
relatively minor and limited violence and neither partner is controlling. The studies that find gender symmetry, he says, typically rely on representative surveys of the population, but these surveys have high refusal rates (many people refuse to answer the questions), and the people who refuse are likely those who are either committing or experiencing the most serious IPV. For this reason, these surveys underestimate the serious, one-sided violence men commit and overestimate gender symmetry. Johnson urges future research on the issue to explicitly recognize that IPV is not a “unitary phenomenon” (p. 1015).

Scholars and other observers will no doubt continue to debate the belief that the battering of men is as bad as the battering of women. For now, it seems fair to say that male battering is certainly not fiction, but that it is also not the huge problem that some observers assert. Claims of gender symmetry in IPV are not justified and do an injustice to the tens of thousands of women each year who fear for their lives from men they once loved and from men they sometimes continue to love despite the violence they experience.

### Stalking

In 2009, Erin Andrews, a sideline reporter for ESPN, was stalked by a man who spied on her in hotel rooms. He filmed her through peepholes he made and posted videos of her unclothed body on the Internet. He was later arrested and sentenced to thirty months in prison (Dillon 2010).

Although rape, sexual assault, and battering are the most serious forms of violence that target women because of their gender, stalking, or the persistent following, observing, and/or harassment of an individual, “has come to be seen as a new and increasingly prevalent form of criminal behavior” (Mullen and Pathé 2002:275). Although this behavior has undoubtedly existed for many years, only since the early 1990s have the public and media come to recognize it as a serious problem and criminal laws have been passed against it. Although celebrities of either sex can be stalked by persons of either sex, stalking has become generally seen as a violent crime that a man does against a woman. A common goal is to intimidate the woman into staying in a romantic relationship (Fleming et al. 2012).

How common is stalking against women? Perhaps the best evidence comes from the NCVS, in which respondents were asked in 2006 whether they had experienced any of the following behaviors at least twice:

- Unwanted phone calls
- Unwanted letters or emails
- Following or spying on the victim
- Appearing at places without a legitimate reason
- Waiting at places for the victim
- Leaving unwanted presents
- Spreading rumors about the victim, including on the Internet

If a respondent reported experiencing any one of these behaviors at least twice and also reported being afraid as a result, the NCVS reasoned the person had been stalked. Based on this measure, the NCVS concluded that 1.5 percent of Americans 18 or older, amounting to 3.3 million people, had been stalked in the prior year (Catalano 2012b). This overall figure masked a gender difference: 2.2 percent of women reported being stalked, compared to only 0.8 percent of men. Translating these percentages into actual numbers, women comprised about 75 percent of all the stalking victims, and men only 25 percent.

The national CDC survey discussed earlier also measured stalking with items similar to those used by the NCVS. The CDC survey found that about 16 percent of American women and 5 percent of men had been stalked in their lifetimes (Black et al. 2011). These figures translated
to about 19 million women and almost 6 million men. A similar gender difference was found in stalking in just the past year: 4.3 percent of women compared to 1.3 percent of men.

Combining all these figures, it seems safe to say that women are about three times as likely as men to be stalked. If so, stalking is yet another crime that is gendered to women’s distinct disadvantage.

Stalking is also fairly common in college and university settings. A national survey of 4,500 college women found that slightly more than 13 percent of these students, who were surveyed during the spring semester, reported being stalked at least once since the beginning of the academic year about seven months earlier (Fisher et al. 2002). Four of every five stalking victims knew their offender, but they reported less than one-fifth of their stalking incidents to campus security or local police.

Another study of college students focused just on cyberstalking, a specific form of stalking involving electronic devices and/or the use of social media and other aspects of the Internet. The authors studied the prevalence of cyberstalking among a random sample of 974 students at a large Midwestern university (Reyns et al. 2012). Almost 41 percent of the students reported having ever been cyberstalked. Here again a gender difference emerged: 46 percent of female students had been cyberstalked, compared to 32 percent of male students. Another, though slight, gender difference existed in cyberstalking offending: 7 percent of male students admitted they had cyberstalked someone, compared to 4 percent of female students. The authors called for replications of their study at other colleges and universities to determine the amount of cyberstalking at campuses in general.

Whatever form it takes, stalking can last for many months and may produce anxiety, sleeplessness, and psychological trauma (Ornstein and Rickne 2013). Besides the fear they often feel, victims also perceive that they have little or no control over what happens and that the criminal justice system offers little help. An important question about stalking is how often it actually results in a physical attack on the victim. Although more research is needed, it is estimated that 30 to 40 percent of stalking victims are eventually attacked, with this risk being the highest for stalking by an intimate or ex-intimate (Mullen and Pathé 2002). In 15 percent of all stalking incidents reported in the national college women survey, the offender threatened the victim, attempted to harm her, or actually harmed her (Fisher et al. 2002).

▶ Reducing Violence Against Women

Along with crime rates generally, IPV against women has decreased dramatically since the early 1990s. The IPV rate for women was 16.1 per 1,000 in 1995 but only about one-third of that, 5.9, in 2010 (Catalano 2012a). Experts attribute this decline to greater awareness of such violence, to improved services for battered and raped women, and to improved policing, despite the problems that still exist in these areas. Although the decline in IPV is welcome, several policies and measures would help reduce it even further.

If violence against women is a consequence of gender inequality, to reduce it we must first reduce male dominance. As Melanie Randall and Lori Haskell (1995:27) put it, “Understanding the causes and context of sexual [and physical] violence in women’s lives, and examining how and why it continues to happen on a massive scale, means calling into question the organization of sexual inequality in our society.” Similarly, if economic inequality precipitates violence against women, then efforts to reduce poverty should also reduce violence against women. Reducing male dominance and economic inequality are, of course, easier said than done. But unless these underlying causes are addressed, rape and battering will surely continue.

A related solution focuses on the nature of masculinity. As Chapter 10 stressed, the violent nature of masculinity underlies much violent crime. If men in the United States and elsewhere learn to be violent, it is no surprise that they commit violence against women as well as against men. To reduce violence against women, we must begin to change the way we raise our boys.

In another area, one of the major accomplishments of the women’s movement has been the establishment of rape crisis centers and battered women’s shelters. These have been an invaluable aid to women who have been raped and/or battered. There is a need for even more crisis centers and shelters in urban and rural areas alike. To this end, more money should be spent to expand the network of existing rape crisis centers and battered women’s shelters.
One final possible solution to violence against women lies in the criminal justice system. Compared to forty years ago, police, prosecutors, and judges are more likely to view rape/sexual assault and domestic violence as real crimes, not just as private matters in which the woman is to blame. That said, many of these legal professionals still subscribe to the myths discussed earlier (Alderden and Ullman 2012). Efforts to educate criminal justice officials on the true nature of intimate violence continue to be needed, as are efforts involving collaboration between criminal justice officials and community groups (Visher et al. 2008).

Other problems include the fact that women who are raped and battered often face a difficult time if they choose to bring charges. If they testify on the witness stand, defense attorneys often question their character and try to vigorously suggest that they share the blame for their victimization. More women might bring charges if this line of questioning were limited or prohibited.

Recognizing this, just about all states now have rape-shield laws that restrict the use of a woman’s sexual history in rape cases. However, the degree of this restriction varies from state to state. Some states prohibit any such evidence unless it concerns a prior sexual relationship between the defendant and his accuser, whereas other states allow this evidence if the judge decides it is relevant. Many states allow evidence of a woman’s sexual history if it might show that sexual activity with a third person accounted for any semen that was found. All states permit evidence of a sexual history with the defendant.

Arresting Batterers: Deterrence or Escalation?

Does arresting domestic violence offenders make it more or less likely that they will batter again? The answer to this question is important for both theoretical and practical reasons. Theoretically, it addresses the more general issue of the degree to which arrest, prosecution, and punishment deter criminal behavior. Practically, it holds important implications for how we can best protect battered women. If arresting batterers does indeed help keep them from battering again, as deterrence theory would predict, then batterers should be routinely arrested. However, if arrest increases the chances for future battering, as labeling theory might predict, then arresting batterers may put battered women even more at risk. What does the research say?

In a widely cited investigation of this issue in Minneapolis in the early 1980s, the government sponsored a study in which police randomly did one of the following when called to the scene of a battering: (1) arrested the batterer, (2) separated him from his wife or partner for 8 hours, or (3) advised the batterer as the officer saw fit, but did not arrest or separate him. Researchers then compared the battering recidivism (repeat offending) rate in the three groups. They found that arrest produced the lowest recidivism rate in the six months after the police were called (Sherman and Berk 1984). The finding that arrest worked prompted many jurisdictions across the country to begin arresting battering suspects routinely, even when their victims did not want an arrest to occur (Sherman and Cohn 1989).

However, the Minneapolis experiment suffered from methodological problems that cast doubt on its conclusions (Sherman 1992). For example, its measurement of recidivism neglected the seriousness of repeat offending in terms of injury and hospitalization. In another problem, it examined recidivism only for the six-month follow-up period. It is possible that arrest may reduce recidivism during this period, but increase it beyond this period. Further, because Minneapolis differs from other cities in its racial composition and other factors, its results were not necessarily generalizable to other locations.

These concerns led the government to sponsor several replication experiments in other cities: Charlotte, North Carolina, Colorado Springs, Colorado, Miami, Milwaukee, and Omaha, Nebraska (Sherman 1992). In two of the cities, arrest generally reduced future battering, but in the other three cities, arrest often increased battering after first decreasing it. The effects of arrest depended to a large extent on certain offender characteristics. In three of the cities, arrest reduced recidivism by employed offenders, but increased it by unemployed offenders. In one city, arrest increased recidivism by unmarried offenders, but did not increase it among married offenders.

Lawrence W. Sherman (1992), the primary architect of the Minneapolis study, noted that the equivocal results of the replication studies leave police and other officials with some major policy dilemmas. Because arrest apparently increases battering in some cities but reduces it in others, we cannot tell whether a city will experience an increase or a decrease. As Sherman observed, “Cities that do not adopt an arrest policy may pass up an opportunity to help the victims of domestic
violence. But cities that do adopt arrest policies—or have them imposed by state law—may catalyze more domestic violence than would otherwise occur” (p. 19).

Further, because arrest may increase battering by unemployed men but reduce it among employed men, mandatory arrest policies may protect women whose husbands or partners work, but harm those whose husbands or partners do not work. As Sherman noted, “Even in cities where arrest reduces domestic violence overall, as an unintended side effect it may increase violence against the poorest victims” (p. 19). Another dilemma arises from the finding in some cities that arrest reduces battering in the short term, but increases it in the long term. With such evidence in mind, it becomes difficult to know whether arrest would do more harm than good.

Mandatory arrest policies raise other issues as well (Chesney-Lind 2002; Humphries 2002). First, because these policies increase the number of arrests for domestic violence, they can be very costly in terms of prosecutorial and court resources. This effect can undermine the intent of mandatory arrest. For example, after domestic violence prosecutions increased in Milwaukee during the mid-1990s, such cases took much longer to process and convictions for domestic violence decreased, as did victims’ satisfaction with the handling and outcome of their cases. The researchers who uncovered these unintended effects concluded, “Good intentions do not always result in good public policy. Arresting more batterers does not necessarily result in more prosecutions” (Davis et al. 2003:280).

Second, mandatory arrest policies lead to more women being arrested for domestic violence even though their violence is much less serious than men’s violence. Women’s arrests may trigger child-custody actions and other difficulties. Third, mandatory arrest, as we have seen, may put some women in more danger. Fourth, mandatory arrest deprives victims of any role in the decision to arrest even though they may have good reasons for not desiring an arrest: It might put them more at risk for future battering, for example, or affect their family’s financial stability. For his part, Sherman (1992) concluded from all the evidence that mandatory arrest laws should be repealed where they now exist, especially in locations with high unemployment rates.

Kathleen J. Ferraro (1995) believes that arrest helps define battering as a real crime, but she also fears that police will enforce mandatory arrest policies more against poor people and people of color than against wealthy whites. Although arrest may be needed, she said, to help women in great danger, battering and other violence against women will be reduced only to the extent that the patriarchy underlying these crimes is also reduced. The criminal justice system may deal with individual batterers, but more will take their place as long as patriarchy continues to exist.

A recent study analyzed the arrest issue with NCVS data. It found that arrest did not reduce repeated domestic violence, but it also found that victims’ reporting of domestic violence to the police did reduce repeated violence. The researchers concluded that “the best policies for deterrence will be those that encourage victims and third parties to report violence by intimate partners to the police” (Felson et al. 2005:563). As should be clear, the appropriate legal handling of batterers will remain an important issue for some time to come.

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Review and Discuss
Do you think men who abuse their female partners should always be arrested? Why or why not?

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Conclusions

This chapter continued the Chapter 10 emphases on the huge amount of violence by nonstrangers, on the inequality lying at the heart of much of this violence, and on the psychological normality of the offenders who commit violence. As long as the structural and cultural forces responsible for violence, including violence against women, continue to exist, the crimes resulting from them will continue as well.

Violence against women is an international problem that manifests itself in the United States through rape, battering, and other behaviors. Although it is true that most men do not rape and batter, it is also true that rape and battering are two of the most dire consequences of patriarchy and gender inequality. It might not be too much of an exaggeration to say that men who do rape and batter are fulfilling, in an extreme and terrible way, certain notions of masculinity. We certainly must hold individual men responsible for their violence against women, but at the same
time we must also seek to reduce gender inequality and change the norms of masculinity if we want to reduce this violence. Because women have much more to fear from men they know than from men who are strangers, it is not enough to focus on making the streets safer for women. The problem goes far beyond popular conceptions of strangers lurking in alleyways.

It is time now to leave interpersonal violence to turn to property crime. We will return to the issue of violence in later chapters on white-collar crime, where we discuss corporate violence, and on political crime, where we examine political violence. These chapters will show that violence takes many forms and is even more common than this and the previous chapter indicated.

**Summary**

1. Violence against women is an international problem in poor and wealthy nations alike. Human rights organizations estimate that one-third of women worldwide have been sexually or physically abused. Other forms of violence against women include murder, torture, genital mutilation, and involuntary sterilization.

2. Rape and battering are two common crimes within the United States. Various studies estimate that 20 to 30 percent of U.S. women will be raped or sexually assaulted at least once in their lifetime and that the same proportion of women will be physically assaulted by a husband or intimate partner.

3. Rape and battering seem more common among people who are young adults and who are poor or near-poor. The evidence on racial or ethnic differences in rape and battering is inconsistent, but substantial differences do not seem to exist. If they do exist, they are likely due to the greater poverty and other criminogenic circumstances in which people of color are more likely than non-Latino whites to live.

4. A sociological understanding of rape and battering emphasizes gender and economic inequality. Cultural myths also matter and include such ideas as a woman "asking" to be raped or a woman not leaving her batterer because his behavior is not that bad.

5. One of the most heated controversies in the study of domestic violence is the issue of battered males. The best evidence indicates that women are far more likely than men to be battered.

6. A study in the early 1980s in Minneapolis suggested that the mandatory arrest of batterers would reduce battering. Replications of this study suggested that the issue is much more complex, and it is not clear whether mandatory arrest overall helps battered women to be safer or less safe.

**Key Terms**

- battering 222
- cultural myths 230
- domestic violence 222
- dowry deaths 221
- female 222
- genital mutilation 221
- male dominance 229
- patriarchy 229
- rape 222
- sexual assault 222
- stalking 234

**What Would You Do?**

1. Your friend Susan went to a movie with a guy she had met in one of her classes. Afterward they went out to get a bite to eat and then he took her back to her dorm room. She invited him in and they began to kiss, when suddenly he forced himself on her, threatened her with bodily harm if she screamed, and raped her. Paralyzed with fear, she kept quiet and did not fight back. The next morning she tells you what happened. She wonders what she might have done to provoke him, and she also fears that no one will believe her story. What do you advise her to do or not to do? Why?

2. Suppose one of your neighbors, a good friend, confesses that her husband recently hit her because she was late putting dinner on the table. She says this was "only the second time" that he had hit her and urges you not to say or do anything about it. Although you want to respect your friend's wishes, you also worry about her safety. What do you do?