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Aspects of Intimate Terrorism: A Test of Johnson’s Typology in a Dutch Online Panel

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ABSTRACT
In this study, aspects of intimate terrorism (IT) were examined in a subsample (n = 320) derived from a nationwide study on domestic violence in the Netherlands in 2008. The sample consisted of 60% women and 40% men. Three groups were distinguished: no IT, low IT, and tendency to IT. In the tendency to IT group, more men than women were found, which is in line with several studies. The use of controlling behaviors can be attributed more to men than to women. Violent behaviors (to mock/humiliate the partner, to destroy objects of the partner, and pushing and grabbing the partner) were significantly more present in the tendency to IT group than in the no IT group. These three violent behaviors contributed (10%) independently to the prediction of the dependent variable (aspects of IT). Even though our sample was not representative and the six control tactics were not selected in a self-selected Web survey sample, we tentatively conclude that indications of IT can be detected by the use of online panels and not only by registered and clinical data as stated by Johnson.

From an epidemiological perspective, intimate partner violence (IPV) can be defined as an act carried out with the (perceived) intention of physically hurting another person through verbal aggression, physical aggression, and/or sexual coercion and stalking perpetrated by a current or former spouse, cohabiting partner, boyfriend or girlfriend, or date in their lifetime (Straus, 1979; Straus & Gelles, 1990). For many decades, there has been vigorous debate between family violence and feminist investigators, however, both research approaches investigate different types of IPV using different populations and research designs (Johnson, 2001). Family violence researchers often use representative community-based samples and find women to be equally likely, or even more likely than men to perpetrate at least one act of physical aggression against a partner (Ansara & Hindin, 2010; Archer, 2000). Feminist perspective researchers predominately use qualitative data in agency samples, such as shelters, hospital emergency rooms, and police and court information (Próspero, 2008).
Severe forms of IPV with serious consequences and controlling behavior of the aggressor are rarely found in nationwide representative nationwide samples consisting of married, cohabiting or dating couples (Johnson, 1995). These extremely violent men are only found in prisons, judicial facilities, or treatment programs, whereas seriously injured and traumatized victims are found exclusively in shelters or in treatment programs (Johnson, 1995).

Johnson (2005) proposes an end to this debate by stating that the opposing research approaches examine different types of IPV coming from distinct samples. Both approaches seem to be incomparable and based on completely different individuals and relational dynamics. In Johnson’s control-based typology of IPV, the three major types of IPV (intimate terrorism, situational couple violence, and violent resistance) are distinguished by the control context within which they are embedded. The control context is conceptualized at the level of the relationship rather than the immediate situation and is based on non-situation-specific, dyadic information about the controlling and violent behaviors of both partners in the relationship. Johnson (2005, 2006) has developed a typology of IPV and distinguishes four groups, namely, (a) situational couple violence (SCV), (b) violent resistance (VR), (c) intimate terrorism (IT), and (d) mutual violent control (MVC; Table 1).

SCV is described as a type of interaction in which a person is violent, but not controlling and a partner who is violent or nonviolent and not controlling. The male-female ratio in SCV is relatively symmetric and perpetrators comprise approximately 55% men and 45% women. In this classification, controlling is not the motivation behind the SCV. In addition, the conflicted-couple interaction can escalate in stressful situations from both females and males (Anderson, 2009; Brush, 2009; Próspero, 2008). VR is defined as the interaction of a violent couple in which one partner is violent but not controlling and the other partner is violent and controlling. Little is known about the male-female ratio in the VR category. VR can also be perceived as a form of self-defense. The third categorization, IT, is defined as an interaction in which one person is violent and controlling and a partner who can be violent or nonviolent and not controlling. Graham-Kevan and Archer (2003) found that in an IT interaction, 87% of IT was male-perpetrated. More recently, and contrary to earlier results, Graham-Kevan and Archer (2009), in a study of a relatively large sample of 399 males and 951 females, were unable to confirm that more men than women use overall control tactics. They interpreted this finding as due to control being exerted by both sexes. Finally, MVC is that rare interaction of a violent couple with a violent and controlling individual and a violent and controlling partner (Johnson, 2005). In sum, the categories VR, IT, and MVC are based on a dyadic control typology and use two factors: the violent tendency of an individual and the partner, and the motivation of the individual and the partner to control their partner.

Most studies conducted previously relate to the difference between SCV and IT. The key difference is that IT is characterized by the efforts of one partner, typically the man, to systematically control the other partner, typically the woman. In contrast, SCV involves unilateral or bilateral violence evolving as an escalation of conflicts into violence in the absence of control tactics (Krantz & Nguyen, 2009). Both authors suggest overlap between the dual taxonomy and hypothesize that continuous escalation of violence over time may evolve from SCV into IT (Krantz & Nguyen, 2009).

**Intimate partner violence and injuries**

SCV is associated with less severe injuries while different forms of violence, especially physical violence, are more frequent and injurious in IT (Krantz & Nguyen, 2009). Data from the National Violence Against Women Survey show the two most common forms of domestic violence, namely SCV and IT, have different effects. Victims of IT are attacked more frequently and are more likely to be psychologically and physically injured. They suffer

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**Table 1**

*Johnson’s Violent Control Topology of Intimate IPV*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Individual</th>
<th>Partner</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Violent</td>
<td>Control</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Situational couple violence (SCV)</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Violent resistance (VR)</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intimate terrorism (IT)</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mutual violent control (MVC)</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. IPV = intimate partner violence. Adapted from Johnson (1999, 2001).*
more than other victims of IPV from post-traumatic stress disorder. Also, they use more medication (e.g., painkillers and, perhaps, tranquilizers) and tend to be absent from work more than other victims of IPV (Johnson & Leone, 2005). Próspero (2008) compared SCV and MVC couples. Results revealed that MVC reported significantly higher levels of violent perpetration and worse physical and mental health than SCV. Graham-Kevan and Archer (2009) in contrast found that both women’s and men’s use of controlling behavior were positively related with the use of physical aggression. These results are inconsistent with Johnson’s (2005) view that controlling behavior is only linked to men’s physical aggression based on arguments performed by the authors themselves. First, the Conflict Tactics Scale (CTS) (Straus, 1979) was used and perpetrator’s reports are likely to involve more underrepresentation than victim reports (Archer, 1999; Graham-Kevan & Archer, 2009). Second, some researchers argue that the CTS is still unreliable, inaccurate, and a misleading tool. However, several studies have shown an acceptable factorial structure and reliability of the Contact Tactics Scale (Revised). Research using different populations (e.g., incarcerated women, primary care settings) support the five underlying subscales (Lucente, Fals-Stewart, Richards, & Goscha, 2001; Peralta & Fleming, 2003; Straus, 1979).

An overview of research on symmetry and asymmetry in IPV has continued to yield mixed results. We are more doubtful than Straus (2006), who states that considering the evidence from about 200 studies showing gender symmetry in perpetration of partner assault, research can now focus on why gender symmetry is predominant. Currently in The Netherlands empirical studies are lacking to confirm the findings of Straus. This study is the first in and attempts to detect aspects of IT through online panel data.

We investigate the possibility of finding aspects of Intimate Terrorism (IT) in a sample of IPV offenders interviewed via an online panel. The first objective is to determine if aspects of IT can be found in an online sample and if there are differences between men and women. This is not in accordance with Johnson (2005), who believes that severe forms of IPV with serious consequences and controlling behavior of the aggressor can rarely be found in representative samples. Moreover, data in the present study are collected through an online panel that may cause criticism. The second objective is to study whether six various forms of violence (see Table 2) differentiate between the three offender groups (viz., no IPV, very little IPV, and tendency to IPV).

Method

Procedure

The present study on aspects of Intimate Terrorism is part of a Dutch nationwide study on domestic violence among Dutch men and women held in 2008 and commissioned by the Dutch Ministry of Justice, the Ministry of Health, and the Ministry of Social Affairs (Van Dijk, van Veen, & Cox, 2010). Data were collected using a representative online panel, as is commonly done in research in the medical sciences and epidemiology. However, within the social sciences, online panels are less commonly used because many social scientists believe that online panels are not representative and are unsuitable for examining different forms of Intimate Partner Violence, especially Intimate Terrorism. Certain groups (e.g., elderly, youngsters, and ethnic minorities) have limited access to the Internet, but this argument has little relevance in the contemporary Netherlands. In 2007, more than 50% of the (non-Western) ethnic minority and more than 70% of the Antillean and Surinamese residents have an Internet connection (Van Ingen, de Haan, & Duimel, 2007). Ever-expanding Internet access among the Dutch population is predominantly due to the greater Internet access of non-Western immigrants. In this group, Internet access increased by 13% from 2006 to 2008 (IVO, 2008).

The rise of mobile telephony and new privacy regulations are two developments detrimental to traditional data collection methods. In the Netherlands, the “Do not call me register,” and the MOA (Market Research Association) survey filter make it more difficult to select a random sample (MOA, 2009). Currently, more than 900,000 Dutch individuals do not want to be invited for research representing a significant erosion of representativeness that can be achieved with a traditional interview survey using a random probability sample. A comparative study of telephone data collection with online data collection about the quality of healthcare in the United States shows that telephone research leads to underfunding for young adults and individuals with a low education and a cover of mainly highly skilled (Bethell, Fiorillo, Lansky, Hendryx, & Knickman, 2004). We believe that online panels are suitable for research on domestic violence because it has been demonstrated that sensitive issues such as abuse, violence, and incurable diseases can be examined through online panels (e.g., Farrell & Petersen, 2010; Rankin et al., 2008; Reynolds & Repetti, 2010).
Participants

Between February and November 2008, 9,508 individuals were selected online to complete a questionnaire about domestic violence and IPV. Within the response group (68%), only respondents who reported offender behavior against an ex-partner were relevant to the sub-study. Six hundred seventy respondents identified themselves as perpetrators of domestic violence during the five years preceding the survey. This group received a second questionnaire concerning perpetrator characteristics. Of 670 questionnaires, 391 were returned and, of this number, 320 respondents reported IPV (or ex-partner violence). The remaining 71 respondents had committed violence toward someone other than partners and were excluded from the sample.

In the previous five years, most perpetrators committed one to four violent acts (i.e., physical, psychological, and sexual aggression) against an ex-partner. Nearly 40% of the respondents (n = 119) were male and more than 60% were female (n = 201), and while more females than males reported IPV in the current study this does not mean that more women than men committed IPV. Therefore, it is important to emphasize that our research sample is not representative of the Dutch population. Selection and response effects undoubtedly play a role in the imbalance in the responses of males and females. The age of the participants ranged from 18 to 77 years (SD = 12.52). Ages of the partners were unknown. A majority (89%) of respondents lived together with the partner at the time of the IPV. Of these individuals, 48% were married, 37% were unmarried but cohabiting, and 11% were unmarried and not living together (4% were unknown). High school graduation was the median education level. Nearly 60% of respondents were Dutch, and slightly more than 40% were of immigrant origin (e.g., Turkish, Surinamese, and Moroccan).

Measurement

The Dutch IVAWS

IPV was assessed with the Dutch translation of the International Violence Against Women Survey (IVAWS). The IVAWS is an international, comparative survey specifically designed (a) to target men’s violence against women, especially domestic violence and sexual assault (HEUNI, 2002), (b) to assess women’s victimization in a number of countries worldwide, on a repeatable basis, and (c) to provide novel inputs for the development of specific criminal justice approaches. The IVAWS project relies on the network, infrastructure and methodology of the International Crime Victim Survey (ICVS), which has been implemented in more than 70 countries. The questionnaire can be divided into three parts: (a) experienced violence, (b) consequences of violence, and (c) background information (Nevala, 2005).

Because the IVAWS is primarily designed to measure domestic violence among females, the questions in the IVAWS were formulated as neutral because both female and male victimization were examined. Following translation the questions were reviewed by scientists and policy makers and further questions regarding psychological violence were added because the IVAWS only investigates physical and sexual violence.

Statistical analysis

First, the dependent variable, “Aspects of IT,” was constructed based on the occurrence of six control tactics. Factor analysis (i.e., principle axis factoring [PAF]) was used to investigate the variability of the six observed control tactics. Three groups were classified: (a) no IT = individual scores of 0 to 6 control tactics, (b) very little IT = individual scores of 1 to 6 control tactics, and (c) tendency to IT = individual scores of 2, 3, 5, or 6 to 6 control tactics). Using bivariate analysis, we investigated if the three IT groups differentiate between men and women. Second, a correlation matrix was performed.
Table 3

**Correlation Matrix of Different Types of Violence Against the Partner (Independent Variables)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mocking/humiliating partner</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>.24**</td>
<td>.22**</td>
<td>.13</td>
<td>.09</td>
<td>.17**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Destroying objects of partner</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>.28**</td>
<td>.16**</td>
<td>.17**</td>
<td>.24**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Throwing object at partner</td>
<td></td>
<td>—</td>
<td>.43**</td>
<td>.22**</td>
<td>.36**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hitting partner with object</td>
<td></td>
<td>—</td>
<td>.28**</td>
<td>.30**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pushing/grabbing partner</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>—</td>
<td>.26**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hitting, kicking, biting, or punching partner</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>—</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**p < .01, 2-tailed.**

Table 4

**Offenders (3 groups) by Sex**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Severity of Intimate Terrorism</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No IT</td>
<td>Very little IT</td>
<td>Tendency to IT</td>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Men</td>
<td>47 (35%)</td>
<td>18 (42%)</td>
<td>18 (49%)</td>
<td>83 (39%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women</td>
<td>87 (65%)</td>
<td>25 (58%)</td>
<td>19 (51%)</td>
<td>131 (61%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>134 (100%)</td>
<td>43 (100%)</td>
<td>37 (100%)</td>
<td>214 (100%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4. To prohibit partner from speaking to someone else.
5. Other forms of psychological violence.
6. Threatening a partner with physical violence.

According to Johnson (2006, 2008), these variables are typical of individuals who control their ex-partners. Factor analysis (viz., PAF) analyzed variability among the six observed variables and if the observed variables mainly reflected variations in a reduced number of latent variables. Only one emerging factor had Eigen values greater than the 1.00 criterion and a one-factor solution explained 30.16% of total variability. Factor loadings ranged from 0.39 to 0.68, and Cronbach’s alpha was 0.69 (see Table 2 for the bivariate relationships among dependent variables).

In addition, respondents were classified into three groups based on severity of controlling behavior. Dichotomous variables were calculated (viz., 0 = absent, 1 = present): (a) the no IT group (n = 134), the largest group, achieved a score of 0 on the six control tactics, (b) the very little IT group (n = 43) achieved a score of 1, and (c) the tendency to Intimate Terrorism group (n = 37), the smallest group, achieved a score of 2 to 6 on the six control tactics. Of 320 cases, 160 were missing.

**Independent Variables**

Six independent variables were selected based on the type of violence toward the partner, namely: (a) mocking and humiliating the partner, (b) destroying objects of the partner, (c) throwing an object at the partner, (d) hitting the partner with an object, (e) pushing or grabbing the partner, and (f) hitting, kicking, biting, or punching the partner.
Consistent with O’Brien (2007), the analysis controlled for multicollinearity (Table 3). As the independent variables are not mutually highly correlated, this means that the six independent variables can be seen as individual predictors to predict the outcome variable (i.e., no IT, very little IT, and tendency to IT).

### Results

Sex differences in IT classification based on the number of control tactics were analyzed first. We highlight that the sample is not representative: The male-to-female ratio is disproportionately distributed and the selected respondents were not derived from police, victim, or clinical data, but from a national survey. There is a decrease in the number of women in the group “tendency to IT and IT” and an increase in the proportion of men in both groups (Table 4).

It is out of the question to speak of an asymmetry ratio between men and women consistent with Graham-Kevan and Archer (2003a, 2003b), who found that 87% of IT was male perpetrated. This can partly be explained by the disproportionate male/female distribution in the sample. We see in our results a trend that more men than women occur in the very little and tendency to IT groups.

One-way ANOVA was used to examine whether there were significant differences between the means of the three unrelated group offenders of IPV (viz., no IT, very little IT, and tendency to IT; Table 5). Gabriel’s post hoc test was used because the sample sizes were unequal. The group averages were relatively low on a scale from 0 to 2. For the six forms of violence, the lowest averages are found in the no IT group and the highest in the tendency to IT; Table 5).

Significant differences between the three groups were found on the following independent variables, in particular between the two groups “no IT,” and “tendency to IT”: (a) mocking/humiliating the partner ($p < .01$), (b) destroying objects of the partner ($p < .1$), and (c) pushing and grabbing the partner ($p < .05$). A linear regression was used to predict the values of the independent variables in the dependent variable Aspects of IT. Only the independent variables (i.e., mocking/humiliating the partner, destroying objects of the partner, and pushing and grabbing the partner) that differed on a bivariate level were entered into the regression model. The independent variables mocking/humiliating the partner (stand. $\beta = 0.193$, $t = 2.63$, $p = .009$) and pushing and grabbing the partner (stand. $\beta = 0.166$, $t = 2.204$, $p = .029$) contributed independently to the prediction of Aspects of IT. These variables explained 10% of the variability in the independent variable, Aspects of IT. Due to the asymmetric male-to-female ratio, no adjustment was made for sex.
Conclusions

Our research sample was a subgroup drawn from a nationwide study on domestic violence. The male-to-female ratio among the 320 respondents who had committed IPV was disproportionate. More than 60% were female and less than 40% male. In the group, “no IT with no indications of control tactics toward the partner,” the proportion of females continues to rise to 65% and the proportion of males decreases to 35%. In the group with two to six control tactics (tendency to IT), the disproportionality between males and females disappeared (49% and 51%, respectively). We tentatively conclude that the use of controlling behavior can be attributed more to men than to women, but are unable to confirm the findings of Graham-Kevan and Archer (2003a, 2003b) who found a strong overrepresentation of controlling behaviors among men concerning IPV. This may be because we used a subsample from an online survey, whereas other investigations of IT have been primarily conducted using data derived from interviews with perpetrators and victims.

We also found differences between the no IT and tendency to IT groups. Three forms of violence (viz., mocking/humiliating the partner, destroying objects of the partner, and pushing and grabbing the partner) were significantly more present in the tendency to IT group than in the no IT group. These three forms of violence also contributed independently to the prediction of the dependent variable (Aspects of IT). The three variables explained 10% of the variability in the independent variable. This is low and means that approximately 90% of the variability is explained by other factors not included in the linear regression model.

Examining IPV as a unitary and clear phenomenon is problematic, and the difficulties are exacerbated by the fact that regardless of the studied group, sampling designs are heavily biased. Agency samples gathered from police and victim records, court records, emergency hospitals, and shelters are biased in favor of intimate terrorism. Victims and perpetrators of IT are mainly found in these databases because IT often leads to serious injuries. Nationwide samples, and the sample used in the present study, are biased in the direction of situational couple violence rendering it more difficult to detect serious IT, but not necessarily impossible.

Our research has shown that it is possible to detect Aspects of IT in an online panel. We did not find the same results as Johnson (2005, 2006) and others (e.g., Graham-Kevan & Archer, 2003a, 2003b) among clinical and recorded data (e.g., police, hospitals, and shelters), mainly, as mentioned earlier, due to selection effects. Studies among clinical and registered groups generate selection bias, but this does not apply to this investigation because the group of offenders was drawn from a nationwide sample.

Consistent with the findings of other studies, we demonstrated that IPV is a complex phenomenon that is difficult to investigate. Confining the problem to only the research design (general or clinical and recorded data) is superficial because this study has demonstrated that “aspects of IT” can be found in an online panel. Conversely, we assume it might be more difficult to find forms of situational couple violence in a clinical and registered group.

Tentatively, we support the argument of Dobash and Dobash (1979) that most IT is male-perpetrated and, perhaps, is related to traditional family structures and specific gender attitudes. As such, it is important to make a distinction between types of intimate partner violence. Furthermore, our findings demonstrate that Intimate Terrorism is related more to the concept of malehood than it is to womanhood, not only because of the insights needed to develop reliable and valid risk measurement and optimize treatment methods for victims and for perpetrators, but also for children who have no voice in this debate and who suffer in different ways from violence that occurs between the parents.

Good research requires not only a good research design but also a solid theoretical basis. The limitation of the present study is the non-situation-specific conceptualization of the control tactics. The control context is conceptualized at the level of the relationship rather than the immediate situation, and is based on non-situation-specific, dyadic information about the controlling and violent behaviors of both partners in the relationship. Our respondents were given six controlling behaviors to choose from that applied to them. Undoubtedly, there are many control tactics in a relationship about which we have not asked. Further detailed qualitative research is required to understand the role of control tactics in the interaction between the contesting parties. A further limitation of this study is the use of self-report questionnaires. Self-report questionnaires are sensitive to socially desirable and undesirable responses and thereby create their own social reality. This, however, affects the internal consistency and the external validation of the results. Consequently, it is possible that there was a high dropout rate among more serious offenders, but there is no information from the non-response group to support this.
References


