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Cessation of Family Violence: Deterrence and Dissuasion

ABSTRACT

Family violence research has only recently begun to investigate desistance. Recent developments in the study of behaviors other than family violence, such as the use of addictive substances, suggest that common processes can be identified in the cessation of disparate behaviors involving diverse populations and occurring in different settings. Desistance is the outcome of processes that begin with aversive experiences leading to a decision to stop. Desistance apparently follows legal sanctions in nearly three spouse abuse cases in four, but the duration of cessation is unknown beyond short study periods. Batterers with shorter, less severe histories have a higher probability of desisting than batterers with longer, more severe histories. Victim-initiated strategies, including social and legal sanctions plus actions to create aversive experiences from abuse (e.g., divorce and loss of children) and social disclosure, also lead to desistance. Batterers are more resistant to change when they participate in social networks that support and reinforce violence to maintain family dominance. Desistance may also actually be displacement, where a violent spouse locates a new victim.

Desistance is one of the most persistent—but least analyzed—findings in the criminological literature. Among both juvenile and adult offenders, the duration and frequency of criminal activities vary extensively (Wolfgang, Figlio, and Sellin 1972; Hamparian et al. 1978; Petersilia,

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Greenwood, and Lavin 1978; Petersilia 1980; Blumstein, Farrington, and Moitra 1985). Most criminal careers are very short, consisting of only one or two police contacts or criminal events, while others have protracted careers including both petty and serious crimes. Blumstein, Farrington, and Moitra (1985) suggest a model of offender heterogeneity in which "innocents" stop after one or two criminal events, "desisters" have relatively low probabilities of lengthy criminal careers, and "persisters" have high probabilities of lengthy careers with frequent criminal activity. Among the persisters, the probabilities of desistance are lowest for offenders whose careers begin during adolescence and who remain active at thirty years of age.

Blumstein and Cohen (1982) characterize lengthy careers in terms of three phases: an initiation or "break-in" period, a "stable" period where crime rates remain near their peak annual levels, and a "wear-out" period where the career begins to decline rapidly at around forty years of age. Irwin (1970), Petersilia, Greenwood, and Lavin (1978), and West (1982), among others, have found similar patterns. Even the most persistent and lengthy criminal careers have a natural course, tapering off and eventually ceasing as offenders age, possibly "burn out" physically, and ease out of "the life."

The process of desistance may also take different forms. Some shift from "street crime" to a more occupational type of crime (Clarke and Cornish 1985) or into brief lapses followed by sporadic episodes occurring at unpredictable intervals (Petersilia 1980). However, Blumstein and Cohen (1982) found that for violent offenses, including homicide, rape, and aggravated assaults, career lengths are longer, and those involved in violence are less likely to desist in the early years of their careers than are property offenders.

The criminal careers literature also demonstrates that desistance from crime can occur "spontaneously," or in the absence of any external intervention, and also as the result of a legal or social sanction (Clarke and Cornish 1985). Evidence of spontaneous desistance is offered by Sutherland (1937) in *The Professional Thief*, Irwin (1970) in *The Felon*, and Shover (1985) in *Aging Criminals*. In these studies, ex-offenders reflected on the cognitive processes that influenced their decision to abandon their criminal careers. Cusson and Pinsonneault (1986) interviewed seventeen men who had committed several armed robberies and whose decision to give up crime was "voluntary and autonomous" (p. 78). But scant attention to desistance *as a process* leaves many unanswered questions on the social and psychological processes of stop-

ping criminal behavior, the circumstances in which either "spontaneous" cessation occurs or sanctions are effective, and the behavioral antecedents of such processes.

Relatively little is known about desistance from involvement in "stranger" crimes, and even less is known about the "natural" course of crimes in the home. Few studies have examined patterns or careers of family violence to determine when, whether, or under what conditions desistance or cessation occurs. It is uncertain whether desistance occurs in response to societal (or external) interventions, internal strategies, or actions taken by family members, or if "spontaneous" cessation of family violence occurs. How these events vary by family and offender types is unknown. And little is known about the human processes that underlie cessations.

Family violence research has rightly been concerned with understanding the factors that explain initial involvement, patterns of victimization within families, and strategies to protect victims. The methodological difficulties of research on sensitive family topics (Gelles 1978) pose formidable barriers to integrating our general understanding of desistance with the study of "natural" careers of crimes in the home. Accordingly, the process by which criminal behaviors toward family members end remains a neglected topic for both family violence research and criminology.

There is increasing evidence that desistance also occurs in a variety of other antisocial and destructive behaviors, including both criminal and noncriminal acts. These include opiate addiction, eating disorders, tobacco use, and alcoholism (Stall and Biernacki 1986). This literature shows remarkably consistent results, despite wide variation in research strategies. Together with empirical evidence on desistance from stranger crime, this research provides a basis for developing a framework for studying desistance from spouse and child abuse.

The study of desistance has obvious theoretical and practical importance for family violence research. First, the effectiveness of interventions can be weighed by the rates of cessation. Second, understanding the processes that move individuals to desist from family violence may also shed light on the causes or initiation of such acts. Third, whether individuals comply with recent societal "mandates" to end violence in the home through its criminalization can inform future efforts at understanding general deterrence. Finally, understanding desistance can inform or improve treatment intervention by revealing processes that lead to the end of violence. If the treatment of spouse or child abusers

appears to be complex or unpromising, an alternative is to focus on promoting or accelerating the processes of desistance. Intervention programs for men who batter¹ focus either on undoing the complex and often intractable causal processes of family violence or on learning new repertoires of behavior.

This essay examines the empirical evidence on the cessation of violence in the home and analyzes its relevance to the literature on desistance from other behaviors. The review is selective in that it focuses on violence against wives, an area where there are extensive data and theory development. Section I examines the limited evidence of desistance in family violence—whether resulting from the effects of interventions or from “spontaneous” recovery. Section II provides an overview of the literature on desistance from other problem behaviors and suggests ways that it is germane to criminology in general and to understanding of family violence in particular. Section III assesses the promise and limitations of a desistance model for theory and policy. Section IV discusses policy implications and areas for further study.

I. Desistance from Family Violence

Unlike several other types of crime, there have been few studies of desistance from family violence.² There are no studies that document “natural” or spontaneous desistance without intervention by the victim or as a result of some form of sanction or treatment. The few studies that analyze desistance typically have discussed it as one of three patterns: reductions in violence, or cessation, resulting from interventions, shifts in the victimization patterns of abusers, or cessation resulting from strategies employed by the victim to end the abuse. These three varieties may be called “deterrence,” “displacement,” and “dissuasion.”

¹ Spouse abuse is more common among men, particularly when the relative harm or injury of family violence is considered. Though violence by women toward men and children is common, as well as violence by children toward adults, the more severe and harmful behaviors occur when men batter wives and children (Straus 1978).

² The terms “desistance,” “cessation,” and “remission” are used in this essay to describe patterns of stopping family violence. Desistance refers to a process of reduction in the frequency and severity of family violence, leading to its eventual end when “true desistance” or “quitting” occurs. Perhaps more important, desistance implies a conscious behavioral intent to reduce the incidence of violence. In contrast, “cessation” refers to abstention from family violence, either permanent or temporary, often because of legal or other interventions external to the individual. “Remission” is a natural process. It describes a temporary state where there is an episodic lull in violent behavior. Though the lull may become permanent, remission implies that the likelihood of backsliding and recidivism equals that of quitting.

Yet to be studied is “true desistance,” or “quitting,” which occurs seemingly in the absence of other than internal sociopsychological processes of the violent individual.

A. Cessation by Deterrence

In the 1970s, pandemic violence in American families was disclosed (Straus, Gelles, and Steinmetz 1980). Criminal remedies have been a cornerstone of the societal response. Early research on criminal justice interventions primarily assessed police responses to family violence. Some critics cited weak police responses as tacit societal approval for family violence (Morash 1986). More recently, efforts to halt family violence, particularly violence toward women, have focused on specific deterrence through sanction and punishment. Despite many efforts to improve and strengthen criminal justice interventions, few studies offer conclusive evidence of the deterrent effects of police interventions aimed at family violence. In at least one instance, use of temporary restraining orders seemed to aggravate the situation because of weak enforcement (Grau, Fagan, and Wexler 1984). Until recently, there was little evidence that deterrent approaches could lead to a cessation of family violence.

This changed when Sherman and Berk (1984*a*, 1984*b*) reported the results of a controlled experiment to reduce family violence through the deterrent effects of arrest. They found that apparent cessation of spousal violence was greater when Minneapolis police officers arrested offenders, compared to the effect on violence of counseling or separating the parties. Basing their study on official police records for 314 cases over a six-month follow-up period, Sherman and Berk (1984*a*) found that only 13 percent of those arrested committed a repeat violent act, in contrast to 26 percent of the men in the separated couples. When victim reports were used as the outcome measure, arrest still was the most effective intervention, with a 19 percent failure rate, compared with 37 percent for counseling (mediation).

Looked at another way, nearly 72 percent of assailants, and 87 percent of the arrestees, avoided police contact for family violence for a six-month period. According to victims, desistance was slightly less widespread among arrestees at 81 percent, and 71 percent overall. When a failure-rate analysis was used to determine whether new incidents were delayed, the results again showed that desistance was greater for the arrest group than for those separated or counseled. These promising results were widely embraced, leading to a spate of legislation to man-

date arrest in domestic violence cases.³ These results were then replicated by Berk and Newton (1985) using a nonexperimental sample of domestic disturbance calls to police ($N = 285$) and measures based on official records. The National Institute of Justice is sponsoring six replications of the Sherman and Berk study (see Elliott, in this volume).

The promising findings must be tempered by several factors. First, the follow-up period was relatively short (six months), given the episodic and cyclical patterns of family violence observed by Walker (1979, 1984) and Frieze et al. (1980). Second, self-reports from batterers were not obtained, leaving out the possibility of a "hidden" violence period toward strangers, the original victim, or other victims in the home. Third, distinctions in the level and nature of violence were not made, leaving open questions of the relative harm (e.g., injury, intimidation) that may have accrued from battering incidents. Fourth, the interview process may have depressed recidivism rates. Awareness by offenders of victim interviews may have deterred or simply postponed recidivism during the study period. Fifth, the arrest may have prompted the offender to leave the household and, sooner or later, enter into another relationship where battering may occur. Finally, other forms of abuse, such as persistent denigration or economic reprisal, were not investigated. These forms of abuse, noted in several studies on wife battery (e.g., Walker 1979, 1984; Frieze et al. 1980; Russell 1982), are emotionally harmful, if not threatening to physical safety. Moreover, these forms of abuse may lead to the deprivation of the victim's rights under the law. Noncriminal forms of abuse include psychological abuse (e.g., humiliation), punitive economic deprivation, coerced social isolation, and threatened homicide.

Perhaps the most significant omission from the Sherman and Berk (1984a) study occurred because, for ethical reasons, "Cases of life-threatening or severe injury, usually labelled as a felony . . . were excluded from the design" (p. 263). Any theoretical formulation of cessation via deterrence must take into account the offenders' violence histories. Career criminal studies tell us consistently that persistent offenders differ from the "innocents" or desisters. Fagan, Stewart, and Hansen (1983) report that spouses with histories of severe violence at home are more often violent toward strangers, have more often been arrested for violent offenses, and more often injure both domestic and

³ Washington, Ohio, New Jersey, and Connecticut are among the states enacting such statutes.

stranger victims. Sanctions (including arrests with uncertain outcomes) may affect these persistent offenders far less than they do first- or one-time offenders or men who are violent only within the home.

In another study of the deterrent effects of criminal sanctions, Fagan et al. (1984) evaluated federally supported demonstration programs in six communities testing criminal justice interventions in family violence. The cross-sectional study included more serious cases of violence among the 270 self-selected program clients and analyzed both legal and social interventions such as shelter and counseling. Victim reports for a six-month follow-up period provided data on subsequent abuse and violence.⁴ Several measures of subsequent abuse were used to compensate for the limitations of individual measures. The Conflicts Tactics Scale (CTS; see Straus [1978]) was used to measure violence, based on victim reports. The scales were modified to include sexual assault. Also, items measuring verbal threats and harassment were included to provide measures of abuse as well as physical violence. Other measures included injuries before and after the program intervention and subsequent calls to police by the victim due to reoccurrence of abuse or violence, as well as victim and offender background characteristics, especially childhood experiences with violence and violence toward other family members and strangers.

As expected, criminal justice interventions resulted in less frequent and severe violence for the less severe cases—those with little prior history of violence or prior injuries (Fagan et al. 1984).⁵ Overall, 72 percent reported no subsequent violence, and 94 percent reported no injuries during the follow-up period. When an arrest occurred, 83 percent reported no subsequent violence, compared with 80 percent of those receiving victim assistance (legal information and referral to advocates) but only 55 percent for “informal” police responses (mediation, separation).

However, the reincidence of abuse was nearly twice that of violence, and criminal justice interventions were more effective in reducing its reincidence only for cases with low prior injury. Overall, over half (56 percent) of the former clients reported reincidence of verbal threats and harassment, compared to 28 percent for violence. Yet abuse in the

⁴ Abuse was defined as verbal harassment, degradation, threats, and other nonphysical assaults. Violence included only physical assaults.

⁵ “Low” prior injury was defined as no injury worse than bruises, while “high” injuries included bleeding, broken bones, lacerations, unconsciousness, or miscarriages due to abuse.

follow-up period was reported by about 15 percent of clients with low prior injury histories, compared to 33 percent of those with more serious prior injury histories. The recurrence of threats or harassment was greater for nonlegal interventions.

After we controlled for the severity of violence, the rates of apparent cessation differed from the Minneapolis study's findings. Table 1 shows that cessation rates varied by the severity of prior injury. For low prior injury, cessation rates were over 90 percent for both victim assistance and arrest but significantly lower (67 percent) for informal police response. Interventions other than police response actually resulted in higher cessation rates than informal police responses. For more severe cases (higher prior injury), the same differentials prevailed, but at a consistently lower cessation rate. The severity of recidivist behaviors was measured with two scales based on a modification of the Conflict Tactics Scales (Straus 1978). An "abuse" scale added verbal abuse (threats, insults, harassment) and sexual assault to the CTS violence items. A violence scale was constructed that added only sexual assault to the CTS violence items and excluded verbal abuse.⁶

The severity of subsequent aggression was lowest following arrest and highest following victim assistance. There were no differences when "abuse" or "violence" served as measures of recidivism. Differences correlated with the severity of prior injury were found only for nonlegal interventions. By comparison, the Minneapolis results also suggested that prior violence at home predicts subsequent violence, regardless of the type of police action (Berk 1986).

In cases where prosecution was attempted, and also where convictions were obtained and offenders sentenced, table 1 again shows that cessation rates were higher for less severe cases.⁷ But for assailants with more severe histories of violence, the imposition of more serious sanctions was associated with increased incidence of violence. The results

⁶ For the abuse scale, Guttman scaling procedures resulted in a continuous variable. The coefficient of scalability was 0.59, and the coefficient of reproducibility was 0.90. Similar procedures for the violence scale also resulted in a continuous variable. The coefficient of reproducibility was 0.89, and the coefficient of scalability was 0.64, both well within the conventional thresholds for acceptance of scale properties (Edwards 1957). Interestingly, both Guttman procedures placed sexual assault atop the hierarchy of abuse and violence items. Browne (1987) found that sexual assault was one factor that discriminated marital violence cases that resulted in homicide from others. The omission of sexual assault items from the CTS scales suggests a serious flaw in the conceptualization of marital violence in earlier works.

⁷ Sentencing categories were collapsed due to their rare occurrence. The sentences included probation, fines or restitution, and jail.

TABLE 1
Prevalence of Subsequent Aggression and Mean Aggression Score
by Legal Sanction and Severity of Violence

Legal Sanction and Incidence of Prior Injury	Sample	% Desisting	Mean Aggression Score of Recidivists
Police response:			
None:			
Low	65	79	3.79
High	79	76	3.23
Informal:			
Low	18	67	3.17
High	33	49	3.18
Victim assistance:			
Low	19	90	4.00
High	32	75	4.00
Arrest:			
Low	12	92	2.00
High	12	75	2.00
		$\chi^2 = 36.1$	$F = 2.76$
		$p = .02$	$p = .05$
Prosecution attempted:			
No:			
Low	88	77	3.50
High	108	65	3.37
Yes:			
Low	26	88	4.00
High	48	67	3.38
		$\chi^2 = 17.4$	$F = 0.08$
		$p = .04$	$p = \text{ns}$
Convicted and sentenced:			
No:			
Low	17	82	4.00
High	39	64	3.50
Yes:			
Low	9	100	0
High	9	78	2.50
		$\chi^2 = 0.2$	$F = 2.95$
		$p = \text{ns}$	$p = .03$

SOURCE.—Fagan et al. (1984).

NOTE.—ns = not significant.

suggest that more serious sanctions may aggravate spousal violence, especially for more serious cases. Cases unsuccessfully prosecuted afford little protection for victims from reprisals by assailants. For cases successfully prosecuted, the apparent increase in abuse and violence may reflect the substantive punishment following conviction for family

violence. If the punishments imposed are relatively weak, such as probation supervision on large caseloads with minimal contact, there are also few protections for victims. There may also be counterdeterrent effects that signal the limits on the courts' willingness to impose strong punishment. Assaultants in more serious cases usually have extensive prior court involvement for stranger violence as well as having prior family violence arrests (Fagan, Stewart, and Hansen 1983). A weak sentence may actually neutralize the deterrent effects of legal sanctions for spousal violence, particularly for offenders with lengthy criminal histories.

These findings again suggest that sanctions are likelier to deter wife beaters with less severe histories than those with more severe histories.⁸ But these less violent offenders tend to be individuals who have little experience with the criminal justice system. They are unlikely candidates for arrest and may be concerned about how employers or neighbors will respond to disclosure of their behaviors. Conversely, the more violent assaultants are likelier to be arrested and on average have more often been arrested previously for a violent act. For this group, cessation is less likely, regardless of whether legal sanction or some other societal intervention is attempted (Fagan et al. 1984). Little is known about the outcomes of the previous arrests—whether punishment was imposed, for example. Failure of sanctions in earlier arrests may teach an unfortunate lesson to violent spouses about societal support for wife beating. The often-arrested assaultant may already have learned that he has little to fear from the law.

The addition of more serious cases and multiple, continuous measures of violence in the Fagan et al. (1984) study challenges the interpretation from the Minneapolis study of how legal sanctions affect family violence. However, these findings should also be viewed cautiously. As in the Minneapolis study, the follow-up period was limited to six months, and victim reports were the sole data source. Also, the cross-sectional study compared victims who selectively had sought legal or social interventions in several locales, where the context and substance of the interventions varied.

Few studies report the marginal effects of criminal justice responses after arrest on recidivism of wife battery. Dutton (1987) examined data

⁸ Conclusions about desistance from a six-month follow-up period should be made with caution. Analyses controlling for intact relationships contrasted with separations showed no differences in desistance probabilities. However, this does not rule out the possibility that the violence simply was in remission and might reappear later.

sets from the United States and Canada to construct conditional probabilities for detection, arrest, conviction, and sanction (punishment) of wife battery cases. He identified a "winnowing" process that results in significant case attrition from detection of wife assault through conviction. He concluded that, given the occurrence of wife assault, the arrest probability is 21.2 percent (compared to a 20 percent rate for a composite of other crimes), and the assailant has a punishment probability of 0.38 percent. The analysis illustrated the difficulty of establishing conditions under which general deterrence may occur. The low likelihood of detection and punishment of wife assault makes suspect the attribution of specific deterrent effects to arrests for wife assault.

In sum, we frequently observe apparent cessation from family violence in less serious cases where legal sanctions are imposed, but for serious cases, the rates are no greater than when nonlegal interventions are applied. Because of the short follow-up periods characterizing the major research, we do not know whether cessation is temporary or lasting. Also, the effects of legal sanctions may vary with the severity of prior violence. In the three studies cited here, there are no reported acts of violence in 70 percent or more of cases for the six-month follow-up period. About three in four offenders overall, and nine in ten with less severe prior violence histories, commit no reported acts of family violence. But these rates decline markedly for those with more severe violence histories. Possibly the more serious cases are simply the less serious cases at a later stage in the natural course of battering relations. More serious offenders may follow different causal paths than do less severe or frequent offenders. Accordingly, we may expect that the processes that lead to more sustained, injurious violence may neutralize the processes leading to desistance.

The consistent finding that spousal violence is often repeated and escalates in severity bears on the limits of desistance. Several writers have suggested that the severity of family violence is related to assailant background characteristics, especially to childhood exposure to violence (Walker 1979; Pagelow 1984; Fagan and Wexler 1987). If so, it is not likely that one arrest or a stint on probation will initiate processes of "unlearning" to desist from a pattern of battering. But for those whose socialization is less strongly linked to normative violence, the processes of cessation or desistance may well begin with use of a cultural or legal sanction. For others, more complex processes must precede desistance. These latter strategies are not necessarily stronger medicine but rely on different models of behavioral change.

B. Cessation by Dissuasion: Victim-initiated Strategies

Table 1 suggests that some offenders cease battering even when legal sanctions are not invoked. In fact, until recently, calling the police was an ineffective, if not unavailable, option for battered women. The large volume of these cases, plus the low priority police historically gave them, made it difficult for battered women to obtain help or protection for other than the most violent incidents. In those conditions, victims sought other solutions. However, these victim-initiated strategies long remained unstudied, despite the rapid increase in family violence research in the past decade. The study of cessation without *formal* intervention holds important clues not only to policy on how best to counsel and advise victims but also for understanding the contexts, motivation, and processes of cessation by assailants.

Bowker's (1983) study of victim-initiated strategies was the first research that looked specifically at cessation from family violence. The research focused on victims who had remained in their own homes and minimized abuse by use of social networks, self-help strategies, and available help sources. A self-selected sample of 146 women was recruited from the Milwaukee area to describe and typify the strategies used by former victims to promote the cessation of family violence. Respondents were recruited through social agencies, religious and cultural groups, and media advertisements in the greater Milwaukee area.

Three types of sources were used by victims to promote cessation: personal strategies, formal help sources (legal and social agencies), and informal help sources (social networks). Bowker asked the women to indicate which were most helpful and which were least helpful in ending the abuse. Also, the assailants' self-initiated help strategies were assessed. The questions were posed in such a way as to uncover the factors that enabled women to demand an end to the battering and to reveal the factors that enabled assailants to end the violence. The latter findings may contribute to identifying the sociopsychological processes by means of which batterers ceased their violence.

The preliminary analyses showed that no single tactic was consistently effective or ineffective. Table 2 presents these results in collapsed categories from the original report. Comparing what worked "best" and "least," the patterns reveal three effective types of strategies. The first, social disclosure, "worked best" in 30 percent of the cases. This included disclosure of the violence to neighbors, relatives, friends, and others. Resort to these informal resources helped the violence emerge from the private family realm to social knowledge, and the social sanctions attached to wife beating were invoked. The second

TABLE 2
Victim Reports of Strategies That Worked Best and Least
to Stop Violence

	Worked Best		Worked Least	
	N	Percent	N	Percent
Social disclosure	45	30	14	10
Self-defense	33	23	12	8
Escape or hiding	15	11	3	2
Social or legal intervention	44	30	39	28
Talking	5	4	10	7
Promises from batterer to stop	0	...	21	14
Other	2	1.3	0	...
Nothing	1	.7	46	31
Total	145	100	145	100

SOURCE.—Bowker (1983).

strategy included sociolegal interventions and worked “best” in 30 percent of the cases. This included contacting a social agency or a criminal justice agency. These resources threaten a formal sanction, as opposed to simply a social sanction. Also, contacting the clergy or women’s groups often initiated formal help and carried with it the threat of social stigmatization. The third strategy was a group of self-defense efforts, including hiding, taking shelter, and physical self-defense. This was the most effective approach in 23 percent of the cases.

What worked “least” was doing “nothing” (31 percent). Sociolegal interventions (described by 30 percent as working “best”) worked “least” for 28 percent! The possibly counterproductive effects of help seeking have been widely documented (Morash 1986) and may underlie these contradictory findings. If legal sanctions promote cessation only for those with less severe histories, these results may reflect the group with more severe histories. The results suggest that external “authorities” and social sources of support are particularly important in promoting the processes of cessation, but not for all victims.

Table 3, also from Bowker’s (1983) data, further shows the importance of external authorities. Bowker asked the female respondents to report on their perception of what worked “best” and “least” in helping the batterers to desist. Over half (51 percent) of the males apparently responded to fear of divorce or legal sanction. About one in four also

TABLE 3
Enabling Factors for Batterers to Cease

	N	Percent
Fear of divorce	27	30
Fear of legal sanction	19	21
Want to reestablish relationship*	23	25
Accepted changes in partner	9	10
Other	13	14
Total	91	100

SOURCE.—Bowker (1983).

* Also, fear of loss of partner.

feared loss of their partner and “wanted to reestablish the relationship.” Finally, only half of the assailants made any attempt to end the violence. Those who sought help turned mostly to friends and did so when the victims also initiated social or legal sanctions.

Bowker’s results once again show the importance of sanctions in initiating cessation. Cessation seemed to occur in response to actions primarily designed to raise the cost of battering to the husband. Bowker’s results show that many women victimized by spousal violence raised the stakes in trying to stop it by threatening legal, social, or personal sanctions.

Bowker’s findings also suggest that use of sanctions was effective primarily in relations where the history of violence was less severe and power imbalances between partners were minimal (1983, p. 128). For example, the strongest correlates between the relationship history and cessation of violence were duration of violence (Pearson $r = -.31$) and abuse during pregnancy (Pearson $r = -.15$). Again, it appears that more severe and protracted violence may be much more difficult to stop despite formal external interventions, legal or otherwise.

The results of this study stop short of identifying specific processes of cessation or desistance but offer important findings on conditions or antecedents within the relationship. First, a restoration of the balance of marital power is evident in the strategies used by the women studied by Bowker. This notion fits well with other studies (e.g., Frieze 1979; Walker 1979; Pagelow 1984) that correlate marital violence to imbalances in marital power such as in decision making or control of social networks. Second, raising the costs of battering implicitly suggests a social learning approach in which the “costs” of maintaining marital

power through force are no longer worthwhile. The actions by victims may represent the introduction of negative reinforcement or aversive social consequences for battering. The removal of the gratifying rewards of battering may also result from these strategies, again opening ways to initiate the processes of desistance.

Third, by establishing social networks with norms and values supportive of marital equality, those norms that reinforce battering behaviors may be effectively neutralized. Such messages to batterers were not consistently communicated, however, in Bowker's Milwaukee study. Informal police responses often deemphasized the illegal status of battering. In contrast, women's shelters effectively communicated societal rejection of battering; shelters create alternatives for women to remaining in violent homes and may neutralize male dominance and control that typifies violence toward wives (Loseke and Cahill 1984; Bowker and Maurer 1985).

Consistent with this is the importance of establishing a "folklore of quitting" for both male batterers and victims. For batterers, a positive social status may be attached to cessation, again neutralizing those values that promote violence. For women, it conveys the availability of paths and "technologies" for ending violence in the home. Part of the process of changing social norms that support battering is the dissemination of these stories of success through broad cultural outlets.

Finally, both Bowker's Milwaukee study and his larger national sample suggest that, for most batterers, "natural" or spontaneous desistance may be a misnomer. Bowker (1984, 1986*b*) augmented the Milwaukee sample with a similarly recruited sample nationwide for a total sample of 1,000 women. While some batterers may spontaneously desist after one or two incidents, desistance for chronic batterers is often a lengthy process, frequently preceded by specific actions by victims. The incidence of unprovoked "conversions" is extremely rare in theoretical (i.e., purposive) samples of battered women (Walker 1979, 1984; Bowker 1983, 1986*a*) or probability samples of women (Frieze et al. 1980; Russell 1982). Frieze (1986) found only one case of "spontaneous" desistance in her sample, which included both battered women and matched controls, by a batterer whose childhood background was atypically void of childhood violence experiences. Accordingly, while the decision to stop battering may be "spontaneous," these studies from several locales, involving both clinical and random samples, suggest that desistance is a process that involves a reduction in the frequency and severity of violence, perhaps interrupted by increasingly rare violent episodes.

The roles of various events should be acknowledged and integrated into both victims' and assailants' strategies to end violence. It appears that desistance often begins with provocation from an external source, often a victim-initiated event, usually involving the threat of legal or social sanctions that raise the cost of battering. Only then do the socio-psychological processes of desistance begin for the batterer.

C. Desistance by Displacement: Taking It Elsewhere

Few studies have examined the course of battering careers in terms of changes in victimization patterns within and outside of the family or even compared assailants' violence toward strangers, intimates, or both. Anecdotal data from victims and shelter workers suggest that violent spouses often seek out other victims if cut off from a battering relationship. They move on to other relationships and resume violence, albeit with another victim. Desistance for one victim may be initiation for another. This process may be termed *displacement*, where the violence simply moves (with the assailant) to another relationship.

Only one study has specifically examined displacement, or shifts in victimization patterns, by violent spouses over time. Shields and Hanneke (1981) reported on the intersection of family and stranger violence and also on shifts over time in victim relations. The design compared violent spouses (or partners) with a comparison group of men not known to be violent at home. The study is noteworthy for its direct contact with men, a rare occurrence in research on marital violence (Morash 1986). They recruited subjects from social agencies, newspaper advertisements, and chain referral ("snowball") techniques in metropolitan St. Louis. Respondents were classified as (1) domestic violence only, (2) stranger violence only, or violent only toward persons outside the family, and (3) general violence toward persons in both categories. Data were collected in lengthy interviews that included retrospective accounts of violence histories, childhood socialization patterns, and a variety of personality traits and behaviors.

The findings suggest that victimization patterns of domestic assailants are far from static: nearly 45 percent of the "generally" violent men began their adult violence careers victimizing only strangers. In other words, their circle of victims widened over time to include family members. Yet the researchers rarely found men whose victim circles widened outward *from* the family—few "domestic violence only" men became violent over time toward strangers as well. There were no indications that generally violent men narrowed their circle of victims

over time to include one group or the other, an important finding on desistance. For this sample, desistance did not occur, and the number of victims grew over time. However, it was uncertain whether the rate of violent incidents toward the spouse remained constant or whether some violent incidents were displaced from one group of victims to the other. What did *not* occur was displacement of violence within the home to stranger victims.

Comparing the characteristics of men who commit “general violence” and men who commit “stranger violence” only, Shields and Hanneke (1981) found that they were virtually indistinguishable in terms of background characteristics such as age or duration of the relation. The “domestic violence only” men differed from the others in several ways. They were from higher social status groups and had higher educational attainment, though this may well be a sampling artifact.⁹ They more often had drug and alcohol problems, they more often had extramarital affairs, and they more often had been exposed to violence as children. They less often exhibited evidence of psychopathology, but they manifested other personality traits often associated with battering: jealousy, low self-esteem, and depression. Naturally, they also had had fewer contacts with the law and were less embedded in violent subcultures.

The lessons for desistance in these findings involve not only the mutability of violence careers over time but also the important fact that “domestic-violence-only” men tend to remain within that pattern. One limitation of this study is its retrospective design—a longitudinal study might reveal shifts in violence patterns or recurring movements between groups that this study could not identify. Desistance is not necessarily permanent and may be “remission”—either a lull in offending or a more casual drifting in and out of a behavior pattern (West 1963). We simply do not know whether violent spouses follow similar career trends.

The differences between groups, and the fact that “domestic-violence-only” men tend to remain in that pattern, suggest plausible hypotheses about desistance prospects and strategies for the different types of offenders. For “domestic-violence-only” men, their violence is instrumen-

⁹ Higher social status and educational attainment may well affect arrest probabilities, particularly at the ecological or neighborhood level. Smith (1986) illustrated the effects of neighborhood context on police arrest decisions, suggesting that arrest probabilities are higher in lower social class areas for otherwise comparable situations. Accordingly, assignment to a “generally” violent category may be more likely for those subject to higher arrest probabilities.

tal in motivation. Legal and social sanctions will be more meaningful to this (usually) higher social status individual who has much to lose from social disclosure or punishment. Also, psychotherapeutic approaches may be more appropriate for the personality traits associated with that group.

For the “generally” violent men, who had longer histories of violence and arrest, desistance would need to occur through changes in cultural patterns as well as by raising the costs of their well-established behavioral patterns. For them, violence may be expressive and less amenable to external control. It is uncertain whether desistance from family violence would accompany withdrawal from all acts of violence or whether it would mean only desistance from hurting intimate victims. Finally, for all three groups, it is possible that “specialization” follows displacement—that is, ceasing attacks on one group of victims may redirect violence to others. For these answers, a prospective study is necessary.

The Shields and Hannecke research failed to uncover “spontaneous” desistance. In fact, they found quite the opposite—expansion of victim circles for the “stranger only” group and no evidence that victimization patterns contracted in scope. However, sample characteristics may limit the evidence on desistance, whether spontaneous or gradual. Though desistance was far removed from the focus of their research, they did not find assailants within any group who halted their violence. Again, it appears that desistance without a catalyst for change is an extremely rare occurrence. This fact alone bears on our understanding of “recovery” models of cessation.

In sum, the evidence on desistance from family violence suggests several processes leading to its cessation. Recent evidence from studies of legal and social sanctions for spouse abuse suggests that desistance in less chronic or serious (i.e., injurious) cases may occur in response to legal sanctions. However, legal sanctions for more serious cases were less effective and possibly led to escalations in violence. Evidence from theoretical samples of former victims who had ended spouse abuse in their relationships suggests that both legal and social sanctions were important factors in ending violence. Strategies varied, depending on the relationship history and on the assailants’ backgrounds. Once again, desistance in severe cases with more injurious and protracted violence was more difficult, regardless of the nature or strength of the sanction. This suggests that habitual or systemic violence may be more amenable to different desistance strategies than less serious cases. Other research

suggests that violence in the home may subside or end by displacement to victims outside the home. Actions by victims that deter violence by raising the personal or social costs, together with efforts to redefine the social status of battering, seem to be promising strategies. Questions remain on the processes of desistance—how the decision is made to stop and how the process of stopping occurs. In the next section, evidence from studies of desistance from other patterned behaviors is examined for its possible contributions to understanding the processes that may end family violence.

II. Spontaneous Cessation from Other Problem Behaviors

In a recent review of research on decision making by criminal offenders, Clarke and Cornish (1985) cite a variety of factors that influence burglars to desist from persistent careers. An accumulation of aversive experiences, changes in personal circumstances (what Irwin [1970] has termed “aging out”), and contingencies in the neighborhood or targets may lead to the decision to abandon criminal activity or to displace it elsewhere. Greenberg (1977) and Trasler (1979) both concluded that “occupational” criminality may be incompatible with family demands or with holding down a steady job. Each of these may be viewed as predictable life events that are correlated with age and with the increasingly difficult task of maintaining a deviant life-style. Unfortunately, we know little more about the processes that initiate criminals’ decisions to quit and that aid them in carrying out the decision. Among violent offenders, there is reason to believe that desistance may run a different course, reflective of the differences in motivation and method that separate them from chronic property offenders.

Most criminal “careers” end at a young age (Farrington 1986), and there is a general decline in arrest rates with age (Blumstein et al. 1986). Those offenders who continue criminal activity at later ages tend to slow their rate of offending, and the number of crime types tends to decrease (Petersilia 1980). Whether desistance from persistent criminal behavior reflects an age-related phenomenon (Hirschi and Gottfredson 1983) or the influence of social or legal factors associated with desistance (Blumstein, Farrington, and Moitra 1985), there is a strong age-skewed distribution to criminal activity. The decline in offending may reflect developmental changes (e.g., maturation effects traditionally observed in studies of juvenile offenders) or the conscious decisions of offenders to quit crime.

The epidemiology of wife beating is also age skewed, both in frequency and severity (Shulman 1979; Straus, Gelles, and Steinmetz 1980; Fagan, Stewart, and Hansen 1983). Chronic and injurious violence occurs more often among younger males. These age-correlated drop-offs in spousal assault during early adulthood may similarly reflect decisions or processes among assailants to stop the violence. If the criminal career paradigm applies to family violence, there may be correlates of desistance that apply to the majority of violent males and other correlates that describe persistent assailants.¹⁰ The decisions to quit crime, observed in several studies of desistance from stranger crime (Irwin 1970; Shover 1983; Cusson and Pinsonneault 1986), may also occur among family violence offenders.

For family violence, we know little about how often such decisions occur or the circumstances in which they are made. But the studies cited in the previous section identify external events that may lead to internal decisions to desist from wife abuse. To understand how such decisions are made, we must turn to other research disciplines where the social and psychological processes of desistance have garnered greater attention.

"Spontaneous remission," "natural recovery," and similar terms have been used in the literature on substance abuse and addictions to describe what criminologists now call "desistance." For criminologists, desistance implies the decision to cease behavior, whether or not intervention has occurred. Researchers in the addictions distinguish "treated" and "untreated" cessation and usually apply a criterion of one year of continuous cessation for designating the problem behavior to have ceased. For purposes of this discussion, the "treatment" distinction remains important in understanding the enabling factors leading to cessation.¹¹

A. Desistance from Opiate Addiction

Charles Winick (1962, 1964) noted that each year the names of identified addicts disappeared from FBI registers. In general, disap-

¹⁰ This raises the likelihood that different intervention strategies will be appropriate for chronic or infrequent assailants.

¹¹ This by no means constitutes acceptance of a medical or disease model of family violence. It refers only to the distinction between those whose desistance occurs absent formal or lay intervention and those who desist pursuant to some form of "treatment" or social control. Desistance may mean an active decision to stop a behavior or a process leading to behavioral change. It does not suggest that the "causes" of family violence have been addressed or that a pathology has been reversed.

pearance occurred as the addict reached 35–40 years of age. Winick's "maturing out" theory proposed that addiction was a self-limiting process that was abandoned when its purposes were served. Putting aside important but unanswered questions about *how* and *why* the process occurred, there was little doubt that untreated desistance from opiate addiction occurred.

The findings were replicated often in the next decades, in a variety of social surveys, program evaluations, and longitudinal surveys (Waldorf and Biernacki 1979). In general, these studies relied on "alternative survey" populations or theoretical sampling approaches. That is, they oversampled from "high risk" populations in order to increase the prevalence of cases with the behavior of interest. Robins (1973) studied young men who had a unique exposure to drugs while serving as enlisted men in Vietnam in 1970–71, sampling from those who had been detected as drug positive at the time of departure from the war zone. Robins and Murphy (1967) focused on inner-city black males in a study of a general population of urban men. O'Donnell et al. (1976) surveyed a national sample of young men of "high-risk" ages (18–30). Burt Associates (1977) and Macro Systems, Inc. (1975) conducted three-year follow-up studies of treatment populations. While the study designs varied considerably, from survey (polling) methods, to open-ended interviews with recruited samples of current or former addicts, to longitudinal studies of treatment populations, they consistently found occurrences of periods of desistance of varying length. The studies differed, too, in their definitions of addiction and thresholds for determining either remission or desistance.

The process of desistance from opiate addiction was explicated in detail by Waldorf (1983) and Biernacki (1986). They studied the social-psychological dynamics of recovery from opiate addiction through interviews with untreated ex-addicts ($N = 100$) and with treated cases ($N = 100$) from drug treatment programs. Respondents were recruited through chain referral sampling procedures. Addiction was defined as at least one year of daily opiate use and the experience of at least five of ten physiological withdrawal symptoms. Verification was made through short interviews with third parties. Recovery was defined by the length of abstinence—at least two years prior to the interview. Treatment programs included residential and outpatient models, as well as drug-free and methadone maintenance models.

Biernacki (1986) suggested that natural recovery was contingent on reversing the addict's immersion in the subcultures and social worlds of

addiction and, conversely, isolation from more conventional roles and norms. Reestablishing ties with legitimate activities and social networks was less difficult for those who had not drifted very far. Once contact with the nonaddict cultures was initiated, successfully recovered addicts relied heavily on appropriate social relations for support and maintenance of their new roles. It was important that these new worlds provided ways for addicts to reinterpret drug use and, in particular, the craving for drugs. The new social roles provided opportunities to substitute legitimate activities—physical exercise or prayer, for example.

Waldorf (1983) noted that, for some addicts, emotional states such as despair preceded the decision to cease opiate use. However, other patterns were noted as well—"drift," rational choice, or "conversion." Conversion was in some cases a religious transformation and immersion in that belief system. In other cases, the ideology of the drug treatment program became a religious attachment. The latter was observed primarily in therapeutic communities that followed the Synanon model. Drift was similar to the patterns cited by Matza (1964) but also involved physical movement away from the old scene.¹² In the instances of rational choice, addicts reported simply tiring of the tenuous life of "spoon calls," crime, and the burden of unmet family and social responsibilities. Whether this was a maturation process, as Winick first called it, or simply an age-correlated phenomenon, remains unsettled. Waldorf (1983), citing recent life-cycle research, terms these evolutions simply "developmental changes."

Still other addicts displace their opiate consumption with alcohol, other substances, or, in rare instances, mental illness. But these were rarely observed. More common was an initiation process in which

¹² Synanon was the forerunner of therapeutic communities. Founded in the 1950s, Synanon was a "therapeutic community" that offered a new social world to alcoholics and opiate addicts who had failed in residential drug or alcohol treatment. The principles included abstinence, acknowledgment by residents of the dominance of alcoholic (or addict) personality traits, expunction of those traits through (often harsh) group therapy processes, and immersion in the social and economic activities of the community. In effect, the Synanon world was substituted for the former world that supported addiction or drinking. While not a formally stated theory, the concept of drift (Matza 1964) has been used convincingly to describe delinquent behavior as well as untreated desistance from opiate use (Waldorf 1983). In short, persons give up deviant behaviors because they have only limited commitments to the behavior and any social norms that support it. The behavioral change occurs not because of an emotional experience, an abrupt change in perception or belief, or psychological growth (e.g., maturation). Rather, it simply reflects a drift toward conventional behaviors. Such a drift can occur when individuals move to new social statuses, take up new activities or responsibilities, or enter new social roles (e.g., marriage, becoming a parent, meaningful employment).

addicts decided to stop using drugs when the conditions of maintaining their behaviors became untenable. In these cases, the availability of social worlds and sustaining relations supported the processes of behavioral change. Biernacki (1986) calls this an identity transformation, with attendant changes in self-definition and social roles and vocabularies.

Many of the corollary studies (summarized by Stall and Biernacki 1986) cited similar reasons for quitting drug use: aversive experiences with peers and family members, social stigmatization, geographic changes, and profound personal discoveries. In each instance, the change process involved new social worlds and identities, reinforcing social networks and new (negative) functional values for addictive behaviors, and the development of coping strategies to maintain their abstinence.

B. "Spontaneous Remission" from Alcoholism

Researchers on alcoholism and alcohol treatment use the term "spontaneous remission" to describe the process of untreated recovery from chronic alcohol use. The research on cessation from alcohol abuse is more extensive than that on opiate addiction, and theory development is more advanced. Estimates of spontaneous remission range from a low of 4 percent of "problem alcohol drinkers" to a high of 59 percent, depending on how remission or recovery is defined (Stall and Biernacki 1986). Methodological and measurement strategies account for much of the variability, but differences certainly exist among populations (Roizen, Cahalan, and Shanks 1978). There have been relatively few studies of the processes of spontaneous (untreated) recovery from alcoholism. Such attempts have concentrated on the motivations to stop drinking, rather than on the processes and problems of actual extrication from daily use. A general population survey of adults in Scotland found that new marriage, a change in jobs, problems with health, and short drinking histories were associated with spontaneous recovery (Saunders and Kershaw 1979). Stall's (1983) ethnographic study of Kentucky adults found that untreated ex-alcoholics often were motivated to give up alcohol when they experienced some significant event (e.g., life-threatening accidents, a sudden change in life circumstances such as a job opportunity) that they interpreted as critical to their ability to end problem drinking.

Tuchfeld (1981) studied a small group of former problem drinkers who stopped drinking without the aid of treatment. He found that untreated recovery occurred when problem drinkers identified their

role models as negative influences, underwent humiliating experiences, suffered serious health problems, suddenly reorganized their previously intense beliefs concerning alcohol use toward other belief systems (e.g., religious conversion), but who also had had prior success with self-control. Both Tuchfeld (1981) and Stall (1983) noted that recovery proceeded in phases, though they differed in the number and nature of the phases.¹³

Factors often associated with the initiation of spontaneous remission include health problems and social pressures (probably indicating negative social sanctions from problem drinking). Once the decision is made to stop drinking, factors associated with "family life" (especially marital relations) are seen as supports for cessation (Stall 1983). Other factors supporting the process of quitting include increased religiosity, high intensity of beliefs about the negative aspects of alcohol, and positive social reinforcement from more stable social and economic conditions after remission. Stall also described a process of reorganization of beliefs about alcohol as a path to quitting and reliance on these beliefs to sustain the individual's decision in the face of cravings for alcohol. Displacement also occurs in this framework, especially for treated quitters who rely on physical outlets (e.g., running) to manage alcohol cravings, Alcoholics Anonymous models for the sustaining of beliefs and social supports, and other forms of substitution (e.g., excessive work and proselytizing).

The conventional picture of problem alcohol (or opiate) use as a relatively immutable problem may require rethinking (Roizen, Cahalan, and Shanks 1978). As with other problem behaviors, there appears to be a natural process of desistance for some people or lulls in and out of the most severe episodes for others. The biochemical, or even pathological, aspects of problem substance use may be only correlates or contributing factors, not independent causes of addiction. A critical discovery of cessation research is the contribution of social circumstances to sustaining the behavior patterns, initiating the decision to

¹³ For example, alcohol researchers strongly disagree on the definition and use of abstinence as a criterion for desistance in studies of "problem drinking." Definitions vary primarily in the length of time of remission, ranging from one to several years before the behavior is regarded as abstinent. Obviously, a lengthy criterion time provides a hedge against false positives among an "abstinent" group, avoiding false "desistance" by those whose behavior may be only a temporary "remission." Whether abstinence is an appropriate measure of change in drinking behavior depends on the social definition of alcohol abuse. Some studies use statistically significant reductions in consumption as measures of decreased alcohol abuse or problem drinking, while other studies regard any use of alcohol as evidence of continued problem use.

break them and reinforcing that decision through developmental changes.

C. Other Addictive Behaviors

Studies of cessation from other addictive behaviors also inform our understanding of desistance by citing factors common across several populations. In particular, the limited research on untreated desistance from smoking illustrates the processes involved in such habituated behaviors. Perri, Richards, and Shulthers (1977) interviewed college students who had quit smoking ($N = 24$) and an equal (but unmatched) sample of those who had failed in their efforts. The successful quitters rated themselves as more motivated and committed to personal change, persisted with a broader repertoire of coping techniques for longer periods of time, and more often used self-reinforcement and problem-solving tactics to evade cravings. Hecht's (1978) small sample of self-quitters ($N = 27$) were mostly males who were well educated, older, and formerly heavy smokers. Among the eight basic reasons for quitting smoking were general and specific health concerns, pressure from significant others, redefinitions of smoking (as a filthy habit) and smokers (a negative self-perception). Most used some substitute to quit, such as food, exercise, or chewing gum to manage cravings for nicotine.

Other studies found similar results. DiClemente and Prochaska (1979) compared treated ($N = 29$) and untreated ($N = 34$) former smokers. Both groups had about the same remission rates after five months: about 60 percent. Those who succeeded in quitting reported processes similar to those shown in other studies (e.g., substitutions to manage cravings, and self-reinforcement). They managed cravings by avoiding situations and settings where they had previously smoked (e.g., bars, and gatherings where there also was heavy drinking). Pederson and Lefcoe (1976) also examined how small samples of self-quitters ($N = 48$), compared with treated quitters ($N = 46$), maintained their decision to stop smoking. Again, processes of substitution were critical in avoiding recidivism, as were acute health concerns. They also found that successful quitters more often lived with nonsmokers.

Stall and Biernacki (1986) reviewed the empirical literature on smoking cessation and eating disorders, especially overeating. Again, as in opiate and alcohol cessation, negative social sanctions or aversive experiences influenced the decision to stop. Among smokers, accidental fires or health problems often preceded the decision to stop. And substitutes such as chewing gum also played an important role. Reorientation of

social circumstances to avoid smoking situations helped sustain the decision to stop. The support of friends and intimates, as well as constant reinforcement of the negative consequences of smoking, also sustained the decision to quit smoking.

To study desistance from eating disorders, Stall and Biernacki turned to the popular literature and lay publications. In general, Stall and Biernacki found that the professional literature often overlooked the factors that resulted in weight loss without treatment. While they found ample evidence that people do gain control over their eating problems without formal treatment, they turned to the lay literature to identify the processes of weight loss.

For example, Jeffrey et al. (1984) conducted two obesity prevalence surveys over a decade apart among suburban populations, comparing results in order to separate lasting from episodic weight loss. About half (54.8 percent) of the males and nearly four-fifths (79.8 percent) of the females reported significant weight loss through low-calorie regimens and simple dieting. Schacter (1982) compared an academic department with the working population of a resort town, and found that about two in three had successfully lost significant weight without formal treatment. Only Rosenthal, Allen, and Winter (1980) identified social-psychological processes that contributed to weight loss among obese people, citing differences in weight loss among women in a clinical sample. Those women who more often enjoyed the involvement of husbands had significantly greater weight loss than those without spousal support, a factor that they termed a "nontreatment" variable.

To understand nontreatment factors important to successful weight loss, they reviewed popular magazines such as *Slimming and Nutrition* and *A Silhouette Slimmer*. They found factors contributing to weight loss to be similar to those that supported desistance from smoking, problem drinking, and opiate addiction, albeit in different terminology. "Significant (health) accidents" to increase motivation, social shame and tantalizing new self-images, instigation from family and relatives, redefinition of the social meaning and context of eating, and social reinforcement of cessation decisions were cited as components of desistance from obesity.

D. Common Factors in Cessation: Making and Sustaining the Decision to Quit

The common themes in the literature on "spontaneous remission," "natural recovery," or "quitting" other problem behaviors offer useful

perspectives for thinking about desistance from family violence. These lessons derive from diverse behaviors—opiate use, eating disorders, alcoholism, and smoking—that have distinctive social meanings in our cultural landscape. Accordingly, their commonalities may offer the beginning of a theory of cessation.

The decision to stop appears to be preceded by a variety of factors, most of which are negative social sanctions or consequences. Health problems, difficulties with the law or with maintaining a current life-style, threats of other social sanctions from family or close relations, and a general rejection of the social world in which the behaviors thrive are often antecedents of the decision to quit. For some, religious conversions or immersion into cultural settings with powerful norms (e.g., treatment ideology) provide paths for cessation. Several commonalities appear when these characteristics are compared with the desistance characteristics of the property offenders in Clarke and Cornish (1985), the decisions to quit by the seventeen robbers discussed by Cusson and Pinsonneault (1986), and the experiences of the violent spouses in tables 2 and 3. Notable similarities are the threat of social disclosure (a form of sanction) or sociolegal sanction. For violent men, the threat of loss (of the relationship, in particular) appears to influence a decision to quit.

The literatures on addictions and habituated behaviors also describe processes that sustain and reinforce the changed behaviors on the part of those who have decided to quit. Among these are changes in physical location and social networks, transformations of identity and forming ties to conventional life-styles, changes in the functional definitions of the problem behavior, drift from the preceding social world to new social relations and contingencies that reinforce the decision, displacement of the old behavior with new forms of behavior or expression (from religion, to physical outlets, to strong belief systems), and, occasionally, misuse of substances or substitution of other problem behaviors. The latter, however, were rarely found in the addictions literature.

III. Toward a Model of Desistance from Family Violence

One need not subscribe to theories of addiction to apply these lessons to spousal violence. There is a basic difference between explaining the *causes* of crime and the *occurrence* of crimes (Clarke and Cornish 1985). The explanatory theories that address initial involvement in a crime may address neither continuance of crime nor desistance. Farrington

(1979) has suggested that the different stages of a criminal career may require different explanations. Theories of desistance may span several behaviors which, at the same time, require quite different causal explanations. There are parallels in desistance from systemic violence toward spouses, problem substance use, and other patterned behaviors. This is not to equate the behaviors but, instead, to suggest that we may understand and model cessation of behaviors whose occurrence results from similar processes, despite radically different origins.

Drawing on the literature discussed in the previous sections, this section proposes a tentative model for understanding desistance from family violence. Three stages characterize the cessation process: building resolve or discovering motivation to stop, making and publicly disclosing the decision to stop, and maintenance of the new behaviors and integration into new social networks (Stall and Biernacki 1986). The disclosure period is particularly difficult, for the old behaviors have been disavowed, but new ones have not yet been developed or internalized. In the third stage, a variety of processes are needed to strengthen the decision, including social sources of identity and definition, social reinforcement of beliefs, and, most important, the immersion into a social world where the old behaviors are conspicuously disapproved while new ones are made available and are approved. Reinforcement may take the form of improved health, social, emotional, or economic conditions, or the substitution of strong belief systems to provide external controls on behavior. These ingredients of a modified social and personal identity, reinforced and supported along the way, provide paths to ending problem behaviors.

A. Catalysts for Change: The Beginning of the End

When external conditions change and reduce the “rewards of violence,” motivation may build to end the violence. That process, and the resulting decision, seem to be related to one of two conditions: a series of negative, aversive, unpleasant experiences from family violence, or corollary situations in which the positive rewards, status, or gratification from wife beating are removed. The desistance research discussed earlier shows the potential role of legal or social sanctions in initiating a process of cessation. In the Bowker study (1983), fear of sanction or loss enabled a large percentage of the batterers to stop. From the victims’ perspectives, public disclosure (leading to social censure as well as to official scrutiny by social control agents) and sociolegal sanctions contributed most often to desistance. Both the victim and societal re-

sponses may combine to bring about these changes in the objective conditions that sustain battering.

The converse of increasing the negative consequence to perpetrators of violence against family members is decreasing the positive consequences of violence. Gratification from family violence may come from achieving or maintaining dominance in a relationship, from the expressive release of anger and aggression, from the attainment of positive social status that domination affords, or even from the "hearts and flowers" aftermath of many battering incidents (see Walker 1979 for examples).¹⁴ Bowker argues that gratification is realized by many men from maintaining, by violence, traditional stereotypes of male dominance: the cultural transmission of values that demand male domination and the reinforcement of those values through socialization as children in male-dominated families and later social embedment in violence-supporting social relations.

The importance of reinforcing societal values, modeled in early childhood and refined in adult years, suggests that both environmental or normative supports for domination of women as a group and situational interactions at a social or subcultural level contribute to male violence toward women. Bowker's (1986*a* or 1986*b*) analysis of his study of batterers' battered women ($N = 1,000$) shows the relation between social embedment in male subculture and the severity of husbands' violence toward wives. Figure 1, derived from victim reports, suggests that more frequent contacts with exclusive male subcultures are associated with more severe forms of wife assault. Both trends in figure 1 are significant ($p \leq .001$).

Bowker suggests that "the myriad peer-relationships that support the patriarchal dominance of the family and the use of violence to enforce it may constitute a subculture of violence. The more fully a husband is immersed in this subculture, the more likely he is to batter his wife" (1983, p. 135). Less clear, though, are the processes that translate such ecological effects into specific socialization processes that contribute to, or attenuate, a propensity to violence.

¹⁴ Walker (1979, 1984) describes the cyclical nature of violence toward wives. There are discrete phases, beginning with the buildup of tension, an explosion of violence, a period of remorse (by the batterer) and contrition, followed again by a buildup of tension. Walker reported that during the remorse stage, many batterers gave the victims flowers, candies, and sometimes elaborate gifts to demonstrate their contrition as well as their love. The batterers tended to be extremely attentive and caring during these periods. This phase is characterized further by the batterer's apparent dependency on the victim, fearing her departure or the loss of her love and craving her nurturing and caretaking.

FIG. 1.—Social embedment in male subculture and severity of wife assault. Source: Bowker (1986).

When gratification is neutralized, or when it is overwhelmed by negative experiences, motivation or “resolve” builds to stop. Gelles (1983) calls this “raising the costs of family violence.” Batterers will decide to stop when the consequences of violence raise problems that cannot be ignored or have psychic or emotional costs. These include problems with the law or with family members or social sanctions that may in turn lead to economic problems or even punishment. In early years of a battering “career,” these problems may not pose difficulties. But in later years, when personal circumstances change, they can become unmanageable, and their “costs” unacceptable.

For the batterer with a lengthy criminal record or for one who knows firsthand that legal sanctions are often weak, legal measures short of incapacitation may be ineffective (Dutton 1987). The career criminal literature shows that sanctions have uncertain effects on criminality. Blumstein et al. (1986) show the difficulty in attributing desistance to arrest and highlight the problem of false desistance in explaining career termination. Further research with batterers may tell us whether weak police interventions (i.e., those with no arrest) reinforce violence by not firmly penalizing it. Other ineffective encounters with the law teach a similar lesson for crimes at home. If this is true, then the costs of an arrest to the offender may not appear to be very high. This would explain the greater frequency of calls to police by victims of batterers with more severe battering histories *and* with arrest records for stranger

violence. Other costs or sanctions may be necessary to catalyze these men to change.

It is likely that the forces contributing to a decision to desist will build over time, rather than occur in response to a single event. Unlike substance abuse models, conversion or significant accidents are less likely to occur in the case of batterers. Instead, repeated separations, police calls, or involvement of other help sources are more likely to be necessary. Accordingly, the change in the offender's "cost-benefit analysis" of battering must occur from a series of interventions—from the victim, from a social or legal sanction, or from both. When a victim calls for help or declares limits, how others respond is crucial. Repeated interventions may be needed to build the motivation to stop and change the calculus of violence. The victim-initiated strategies described by Bowker and the *early* responses of police and social networks to a violent family are significant in bringing about conditions leading to desistance. If these succeed in creating a change in the balance of power in the relationship, the batterer may either decide to stop or to move on to another relationship. Whether the battering resumes elsewhere may depend on similar contingencies.

B. Discontinuance

Interviews with victims have shown that violence and injury are frequent, and sometimes daily, occurrences (Walker 1979; Frieze et al. 1980; Russell 1982). Just as the decision to stop violence may take time to build, so, too, may violence take time to discontinue. It is unlikely that the batterer will consider alternatives each time he wants to lash out. Maintaining the resolve to stop will require significant supports for both batterer and victim.

For victims, the resolve to show the batterer, even at personal cost, that battering will have negative consequences is critical to desistance. Economics and emotional ties are often cited as reasons why victims do not abandon violent relationships (Loseke and Cahill 1984). Sidel (1986) provides stark data from interviews with 100 women whose marriages ended precipitately to validate fears of economic loss or loneliness. This study included women with violent episodes in their marriages. The threat of economic and psychological hardship may deter some women from ending a violent marriage (Walker 1984). Browne (1987) reported that threats of harm to children and threats of economic and physical reprisal were tactics commonly used by batterers to deter women from ending the marriage.

For the batterer, the decision to abandon violence may mean loss of social support from peers and uncertainty about how to cope with conflict and anger. Bowker (1983; 1984) interpreted the strong social embedment of the violent husbands as evidence of immersion in a subculture supporting or approving male violence toward family members. Social interactions with only male friends, time spent (without wives) in bars, and participation in male-oriented recreational organizations had the strongest correlations with several dimensions of marital violence, including frequency, duration, and severity of marital violence, and violence toward children. Bowker concluded that the better integrated the battering husband was in male subcultures, the more severe was his violence in the home. Bowker (1984) hypothesizes that violent male subcultures are a major factor in the maintenance and support of marital violence for many men. Dobash and Dobash (1979) describe patriarchal influence as normative, while Straus (1976) describes the marriage license as a "hitting license." The Bowker studies suggest a socialization process that translates normative ecological influences into social processes that operate at the situational and individual levels. While there is no national lobby that supports wife beating, there probably are myriad independent social networks that tacitly condone violence or at least fail to sanction it negatively. Embedment in these cultures poses a high risk of severe violence in the home.

Leaving the subculture is not unlike leaving the world of the addict or the alcoholic. Biernacki (1986) noted the exclusiveness of the social involvements maintained by former addicts during the initial stages of abstinence. With social embedment comes the gratification of social acceptance and social identity. The decision to end a behavior that is socially determined and supported implies withdrawal of the social gratification it brings. For batterers, it also threatens the loss of the gratification from domination in the home. Alternatively, even if the social support for battering is tacit or implied, abandoning violence risks the loss of acceptance in the social environment. The more deeply embedded in that social context, the more dependent the batterer is on that social world for his primary sources of approval and social definition. Similar problems were experienced by the former addicts in Biernacki's study, who reported uncertainty and anxiety that nonaddicts in new daily contacts would not accept them socially.

Addicts develop a number of ruses to deal with withdrawal (Waldorf 1983), while problem drinkers develop similar ruses to manage the urge to drink (Stall 1983). For example, some addicts substituted strenuous

athletic activities. Others joined political or religious groups, and still others simply spent all their time at work. Biernacki (1986) reports that one ex-addict moved from southern California to a rural farming area, substituting rigorous farm hours for the relative idleness of urban life. One became a marathon runner, while another organized a union of inmates in state prisons, and a third is now a drug researcher.

It is likely that batterers face similar confusion, but there are few data to describe how they cope with it. Intervention programs for men who batter concentrate on anger management and development of new, nonviolent skills for dealing with situations that in the past led to violent episodes (Gondolf 1985*a*, 1985*b*). Such programs also provide new social worlds in which former batterers can immerse themselves. What is clear is the need for alternatives and substitutes for the now disavowed behavior, but they may be ineffective if not accompanied by revised definitions of marital power and standards of gratification for dominance in the family. (See Saunders and Azar, in this volume, for a review of the effectiveness of treatment programs for batterers.)

Depending on whether such skills are acquired, and also on the responses of victims when discontinuance begins, one of three outcomes of the decision to stop will occur: a return to violence or displacement elsewhere after a short respite, intermittent episodes or a gradual decrease in the frequency and severity of violence, or a complete and abrupt halt.

The processes that *initiate* the decision to stop may not suffice for discontinuance. The decision to abandon violence, and the events preceding the decision, mark the beginning of involvement of both batterer and victim in new social networks and possibly the departure from old ones. This, too, may shift the balance of power in the relationship, creating an immediate change in the calculus of battering. As in other problem behaviors that are not hidden, social relationships (with other family members, peers, and neighbors) especially are contingent on acceptance of the behavior or at least complicity in ignoring it.

But the implications of desistance are clear—social supports for battering, or at least tolerant attitudes toward spouse abuse, may no longer be available. The responses by social control agents, family members, and peer supporters to further episodes of violence are critical in shaping the outcome of discontinuance. New social and emotional worlds to replace the old ones may strengthen the decision to stop. With discontinuance comes the difficult work of identity transformations (Biernacki 1986) and establishing new social definitions of behavior and relation-

ships to reinforce them. Whether desistance can be maintained *without* exchanging social networks and identities remains a question for new research to improve our understanding of these outcomes and the situational factors (especially victim responses) that influence them.

Finally, discontinuance may contradict the cultural norms that contributed to the violence over a lifetime of socialization (Dobash and Dobash 1979). The subcultures and social worlds that reinforce values supportive of violence to women will remain intact, despite the batterer's decision to stop. Yet these values influence some, but not all, men to use violence in families. How men reject those values is an important part of the discontinuance process that is worthy of study. One step involves developing new social definitions of family equalities and new behaviors (e.g., family decision making) that reflect more egalitarian family processes.

If violence is supported through peer cultures to express these broad cultural values, then the development of "immunities" to those influences is critical to discontinuance. Development of new social peers is critical to support a new social identity. And the continued high social and personal costs of violence must be maintained to rationalize the decision to stop.

C. Maintenance

Following the initial stages of discontinuance, strategies to avoid a return to violence build on the strategies to break from a lengthy pattern of violence: further integration into a nonviolent identity and social world, maintaining the costs of battering, acceptance and institutionalization of changes in the balance of power in the relationship, and refinement of the batterer's skills to manage anger and conflict. But immersion into a supposedly nonviolent world does not remove the formerly violent spouse from cultural norms that are ambiguous with respect to wife battery.¹⁵ Men who batter and men who do not batter

¹⁵ In analyzing the contributions of patriarchy to family violence, researchers such as Dobash and Dobash (1979), Pagelow (1984), and Browne (1987) specifically focus on economic inequalities and cultural portrayals as manifestations of male orientation and hegemony. The changing role of women in American society and new legislation criminalizing family violence suggest changes in normative values condemning battering. Yet other cultural and economic markers continue to express patriarchal values: the disparity in economic status of women as a group, and the role and portrayal of women in popular culture. Economic inequalities place a lesser value on women's labor and social contributions and reinforce the dominant role played by men in the labor market. Women earn less, and there are fewer women in senior management positions in business or government. There also are fewer women in elective office. Popular culture offers fewer por-

both live out cultural values that are conflicting but nonetheless popular in our culture (Dobash and Dobash 1981). The management of this duality appears to be part of the skill of maintenance.

Two types of strategies appear necessary to maintain nonviolence: substitution and stabilization. Substitution involves the replacement of peer supports and those elements of the social organization of family life that support battering. Stabilization is the process of building social and psychological buttresses to maintain a life free of violence against wives.

1. *Substitution.* Social supports for battering are the cultural conditions and peer interactions that either afford social status to the assailant or fail to condemn violence toward wives. Empirical studies suggest that social embedment is associated with severe wife battery. Bowker (1984) found strong correlations for 1,000 men between severe wife assault and three measures of social embedment in male culture: exclusive contacts with male friends, time spent in bars without wife, and reading pornography.

Maintenance depends in part on replacing these networks of peers and associates with supports that both disapprove of battering and approve of new nonviolent beliefs and behaviors. This may not be an easy task for those men who are strongly embedded in social worlds at work or in the community. Men's support groups are important sources of alternative social supports to maintain a nonviolent style. In other words, maintenance may depend on immersion into a social world in which wife beating meets immediately with strong formal and informal sanctions.

Bowker (1983) suggests the importance of peer support groups modeled after Alcoholics Anonymous to sustain behavioral and attitudinal changes. But this may not apply to the many batterers who are not embedded in male peer subcultures of violence. For these men, social control is a major restraint on violence, but redefined marital relations can also be such a restraint. Social institutions provide both control and cultural norms of behavior that restrain violence, just as weak societal responses facilitate violence. Their responses convey the supports of or prohibitions against violence.

trayals of women than of men in egalitarian social positions or family roles in cinema, television, or print media. These cultural and economic indicators suggest that women occupy a lower status, which in turn reinforces both male attitudes of superiority and the legitimacy of domination.

A more difficult but equally important substitution is the balancing of power. Continued use of informal and formal help sources by the woman maintains high costs for battering as well as social restraints against it. The availability of help sources narrows the inequalities that place women at an economic and social disadvantage. Help sources offer social networks to support decisions to disallow violence and maintain access to legal help and social sanctions. Most important, external resources maintain the victim's option to leave, which is only possible when material and social supports are available to the woman. The high number of separations that preceded desistance in the nationwide study of 1,000 women who overcame battering (Bowker 1986*b*) supports Walker's (1979) contention that the victim's willingness to leave is the first step to ending the violence.

Other possible causes of battering should also be addressed. For example, problematic alcohol use often is associated with marital violence. Disinhibition theories offer an explanatory bridge to relate substances and behavior. If alcohol is a correlate of abuse, then alcohol treatment should be part of a maintenance strategy.¹⁶

2. *Stabilization.* Despite these efforts to maintain nonviolence, desistance is likely to be episodic, with occasional bouts interspersed with lengthening of lulls. The linkages of victims with societal supports and responses will determine whether the episodes are part of a declining pattern or the beginning of a resurgence. Age is a critical variable in desistance research, regardless of whether it is associated with maturation or similar developmental concepts. Desistance is part of a social psychological transformation for both victim and batterer. A strategy to stabilize the transition to nonviolence requires the active use of supports by both men and women to maintain the norms that have been substituted for the forces that supported violence in the past.

Careful research is needed to describe and analyze that process. Further empirical data are needed to understand fully what happens to those who discontinue and succeed and those who discontinue and fail. The natural course of family violence remains unknown beyond anecdotal evidence. Cross-sectional data with cohorts of older subjects may develop adequate models for testing in prospective studies with younger subjects.

¹⁶ Alcohol is a correlate of family violence, but its relation to battering varies extensively by study design and samples. Its weaknesses as an explanation of battering lie in two observations: not all the men who drink excessively are wife batterers, and alcohol use by men does not explain why some women are abused and others are not.

IV. Conclusions

Desistance from stranger crime has been well documented by criminologists, as has spontaneous remission from substance abuse. The family violence literature was silent until recently on desistance, but recent evidence suggests that desistance does indeed occur in a variety of circumstances. The evidence on desistance has been generally descriptive and lacks theoretical grounding. The shared characteristics of desistance in three literatures suggest that a preliminary model of desistance may be constructed and put to systematic inquiry.

The evidence on desistance suggests important similarities between family violence and other behaviors whose origins may be quite different. Changes occurred when the pleasurable, gratifying aspects of the old behavior were no longer there. Aversive experiences play an important role in forming the resolve to desist, as does the decline of gratification associated with it. Extraction from the social systems that support and validate wife battery, the substitution of new social networks for batterers with different normative values, balancing marital power (through help sources for victims), and identity transformations that embed batterers within new networks are critical elements of desistance. The maintenance of external restraints, both by significant relationships and others, reinforces the new behavioral norms and restrains the old ones. Also, it seems that desistance is a reciprocal or recursive process, in which the initial effects of aversive experiences initiate a gradual process of decline in the incidence and severity of violence.

Both social and legal sanctions contribute to desistance, though their effects appear to be greater for those with less severe histories of violence. Stronger legal sanctions are required for more severe batterers. Batterers with shorter, less severe histories have a higher probability of desisting than those who are further along in a violence career. In other words, most early desisters stop with little external intervention. But other types of sanctions are effective as well, including victim-initiated strategies and sanctions imposed within the relationship—specifically, the resolve to leave and inflict loss and shame on the batterer. But the situational conditions that make this possible are the help sources that empower women and the access to legal sanctions to maintain restraints. These contextual influences should be integrated into a theory of desistance.

Some aspects of desistance from nonviolent crime and other behaviors are unknown with respect to family violence. “Maturing out” has

been cited in several studies of career criminals and addicts, but little is known about age-related desistance from family violence. Also, there is no evidence that the dramatic personality changes or new beliefs ("conversions") that occur for addicts also occur for batterers. But so little research on batterers has been done that this, too, remains an unanswered question.

Is a special theory needed for desistance from family violence? For decades, explanations of crime and violence have differed on whether they are unitary or isomorphic phenomena. Among family violence researchers, similar debates have not yet resolved whether family violence is a special case of violence (Gelles and Straus 1979). One reason has been the concern with understanding the origins of crime (Clarke and Cornish 1985) and predicting its occurrence (Blumstein, Farrington, and Moitra 1985). The policy contributions of these concerns are evident and have led to efforts to prevent or control crimes of social importance. Another reason has been the continuing segregation of family violence from both criminology and violence research. Family violence continues to be viewed as an idiosyncratic crime, much like white-collar crime, and remains outside the mainstream of criminological theory and research (Fagan and Wexler 1987). The result is a focus on unique causes of and solutions to specific crime types, overlooking the common origins of different behaviors and neglecting the importance of situational influences on crime events and later stages of careers.

Whether desistance from family violence parallels desistance from other behaviors may not speak to its origins. But it may yield important clues about the stages of family violence, and the possible convergence of deviant behaviors despite uncommon origins. In other words, the utility of a desistance model may not depend on whether batterers are generalists at violence or specialists within the home. By examining desistance, we force ourselves to rethink the relations among etiological variables—what is important to initiation of violence may be irrelevant to its cessation.

A. Policy and Applications

Many of the contributions of feminists to theory, policy, and practice are evident in cessation processes. Shelters are important in balancing the power of victims with batterers and allowing victims to establish internal sanctions absent fears of physical reprisal. Other help sources help victims avoid economic reprisals and provide social supports for

demanding an end to violence. They directly allow victims to raise the personal "costs" of continuing violence. Criminal sanctions also restrain battering by raising its social costs. Massive public education can erode the cultural supports for violence by bringing to public debate the consequences of traditional sex roles. In other words, policy must attend to the postcessation environment to provide *cultural* supports for the changing status of women.

How can policy apply knowledge of desistance to decrease battering? Intervention policies can aim to promote desistance processes. Specific policies may be salient for the distinct offender types. Research on batterers suggests the existence of several categories, which in turn supports efforts to taxonomize not only batterers but also policy responses. First, the criminal careers analogy suggests that there is a continuum of battering "types" from a small percentage of chronics, through a middle group whose careers vary in intensity and length, to many who batter only once or twice and never more. Studies of the effects of criminal sanctions imply that early legal intervention in a battering "career" may yield better prospects for desistance than entering later into more serious and protracted battering careers.

Second, Shields and Hanneke (1981) identified distinct violence patterns with both "generally" violent men (who victimize both spouses and strangers) and "domestic-violence-only" men who are violent only toward spouses. Third, Fagan, Stewart, and Hansen (1983) found that the most severe (i.e., injurious) forms of violence occurred most often among the chronic batterers, whose victimization patterns also more often fit the profile of "generally" violent men described by Shields and Hannecke. Fourth, the Bowker studies (1983, 1984) also identify different tactics that battered women used to deal with violence, differential responses used by battered women to deal with violence, and differential responses by batterers to various reactive strategies by women.

Sensible policy-making would recognize the varieties of batterers and develop a range of sanctions and interventions. Sanctions appear to be effective in promoting desistance, particularly for less serious cases or early cases, together with other aversive experiences for batterers. For generally violent men, focusing on stranger crimes may run the risk of displacing stranger violence exclusively into the home. But focusing on family violence may remove the cultural supports for violence by promoting changes in general peer networks supportive of it. Substitution of social supports can maintain the rewards of nonviolence. Treatment interventions may focus on accelerating the processes of desistance by

encouraging changes in social networks while teaching new ways to respond to conflict and anger.

Criminal justice policies should promote consistency in establishing the aversive consequences of family violence (protecting victims while sanctioning offenders, for example), but should also take care not to make empty threats through weak sanctions. Monolithic policies, such as presumptive arrest in all cases, may assume that family violence is a homogeneous phenomenon. The variety of patterns of violence suggests a range of policies with diverse approaches to sanctioning assailants and protecting victims. The widespread public promotion of these policies will also signal the new "costs" of violence.

The evidence on victim-initiated strategies suggests that policy should balance sanctions for assailants with supports for victims. Neither is sufficient alone to promote the conditions leading to desistance. Since cultural and situational factors influence each situation, policies should address both areas—for example, presumptive arrest policies still require implementation and coordination in the courts and prosecutors' offices to be effective. Similarly, expanded help sources should be supported by policies that enable victims to avoid the economic hardships of separation.

This economic reality points to the need to coordinate policies that may logically span social arenas. Many communities have formed coordinating bodies for family violence. Recognizing that economic hardship is often a barrier to victim participation in the court process, policies should be coordinated to ease the threat to victims' (and their children's) well-being and should be strategically focused on the weaker areas in the community's response system. This effort, if well publicized, will also add to efforts to reverse cultural supports for battering.

The lessons of desistance also point toward foci for prevention. Beyond policy developments, earlier intervention is needed to sanction the antecedents of marital violence. Recent evidence on "date rape" suggests that aggression toward women is indeed a part of male socialization and is manifested early.¹⁷ Social development curricula in

¹⁷ Studies of general adult female populations (Russell 1984), male adolescents (Ageton 1983), and female college students (Malamuth 1981) consistently show that rape or forced intercourse occurs on dates. Ageton's study of a nationwide sample of adolescent males estimated that 5 to 16 percent of the sample reported committing a "sexual assault," and that most are "spontaneous events which occur in the context of a date." In Malamuth's 1977 survey of female college students, over half the women reported that they experienced "offensive male sexual aggression" in the past year. Over half (56

schools should emphasize peer norms that devalue aggression toward intimates and condemn violence in all its sociocultural forms. Peer interventions at that early stage may influence both individual and subcultural processes. Increasing the social status of women will avoid the power differentials that both license violence (Straus 1978) and discourage victims' help seeking (Gelles 1983). These may include such policies as mandatory maternity leave and child care supports to encourage women to remain in the workplace.

B. Research

A desistance approach suggests several complementary directions for research: career studies with cohorts of older respondents to gain longer study periods, replication of deterrence research with more serious (felony) abusers, and desistance studies on other forms of intrafamily violence. As new empirical evidence develops, triangulation of knowledge from separate endeavors will build to refine theory and models.

The examples of desistance research cited above illustrate the methodological dilemmas of family violence research. Retrospective studies and the preponderance of victim reports as data sources highlight limitations on theory and research in the field of offender behavior. Victims may be unaware of displaced aggression on new victims when the assailant leaves home. New efforts are needed to focus on assailants as research subjects, both to validate previous research and to answer new questions on styles of violence. Also, research on men will elucidate the influences, perceptions, and decision processes of offenders in the intervals surrounding battering incidents.

Questions of central importance to desistance research should focus on the role and perception of sanctions, compared with personal circumstances and with the way that formal and informal sanctions are interpreted. Clarke and Cornish (1985) call for research on the heuristic processes that offenders use to assess costs and benefits of crime commission. Similar research should be conducted on violence in the home, examining techniques or processes of neutralization that offset loving, moral, or legal restraints and exploring how situational factors (e.g., drinking and economic stress) affect assailants' actions. These models may also determine how assailants select victims (or joint victimization patterns) within or outside the home.

percent) in Russell's 1982 interviews with 930 women in the San Francisco Bay area reported that forced intercourse had been obtained by threat, rather than rape. Of these, 82 percent involved nonstrangers.

The important role of peer supports for maintaining desistance suggests research to describe how norms supportive of violence are communicated and reinforced. Yet it is still unclear how these norms are translated in situational contexts to legitimate the use of violence to maintain dominance in the family. Recent evidence on adolescent aggression toward women suggests that these beliefs develop well before adulthood and marriage. These beliefs express cultural norms and values that reflect a hierarchical, patriarchal social organization. Such norms have been associated with wife assault in empirical studies in the United Kingdom (Dobash and Dobash 1979) and the United States (Bowker 1984; Yllo and Straus 1984). Straus (1976) identified nine specific manifestations of a male-dominant structure that support wife assault.¹⁸

For questions of this type, ethnographic research in natural settings may be especially valuable for understanding how peer norms are communicated and enforced and how they influence the development of violence careers. Research on the ability of many men to avoid the predictable consequences of patriarchal influences will point out the social, legal, and moral restraints that help them avoid violence in marriage (Morash 1986).

The important deterrence experiments of this decade should be broadened to include other types of family violence and more serious crimes than the misdemeanors in issue in the Minneapolis study. Longer follow-up and more sensitive measures will provide more information on the effects of sanctions and on the deceleration of violence. Experiments on more serious sanctions for felony cases can also further elucidate the relation between sanctions, violence, and individual characteristics. Shorter study periods make certain theoretical assumptions—that desistance is a unitary event, that its effects are not susceptible to erosion, and that offenders are unaware of the surveillant effects of ongoing research. Measurement and design choices often produce artifactual results—the use of dichotomous recidivism variables or emphasis on behavior to the exclusion of consequences,¹⁹ for example—

¹⁸ For example, use of force as defense of male authority, normative attitudes supporting violence toward wives, compulsive masculinity, economic constraints and discrimination, burdens of child care (and failure to provide relief to these burdens), a myth of the intrinsic weakness of the single-parent household, preeminence of the caretaker/wife role for women, women's negative self-image, and male orientation of the justice system.

¹⁹ The debate on husband battering illustrates the ensuing problems that result from overreliance on measures of behavior. Though Steinmetz (1977) found a comparable incidence of violence among women and men, other analysts (e.g., Straus 1978) pointed out the differences in injury from husband-wife violence.

which may mask both good and bad results. Strategies accompanying formal sanctions such as shelter and social disclosure also should be included in desistance research. Designs comparing legal sanctions alone, or combined with social sanctions, can help plan strategies for intervention.

Desistance research requires representative samples of known and self-identified offenders. Research on cessation from substance abuse often has relied on ethnographic samples recruited from populations generally not found through official sources, whose behaviors otherwise remain hidden. Bowker (1983, 1984) and Shields and Hanneke (1981) also relied on recruited samples. The latter study, especially, was noteworthy for its use of violent men as subjects. Each study in turn sheds new light on desistance; these strategies should be part of a coordinated research effort. Clinical studies of violent men from treatment or incarcerated populations are well complemented by research on recruited samples.

Strategies developed by Frieze et al. (1980) for comparison samples can further strengthen these designs. Frieze sampled from the same residential blocks to identify matched cases for comparison with battered women. The natural controls for social structural variables provided a parsimonious alternative to other matching techniques. The results, too, were controversial: over 37 percent of the "controls" also reported wife assaults in the past year.

Desistance research on sexual and physical child abuse has been limited largely to studies of families in treatment or under court sanctions.²⁰ For all types of violent families, these strategies are powerful tools for sampling from universes of unknown dimensions.

Retrospective study is a basic limitation of such career studies. But recent developments, again primarily in research on narcotics and crime (Speckart and Anglin 1986), offer techniques to minimize recall problems. Using key life events to establish temporal anchors, Anglin has traced the addiction careers of treated and untreated heroin users in

²⁰ Literature reviewed for this essay revealed very few studies of desistance from other forms of family violence. These were primarily treatment evaluations. Anecdotal information from clinical studies suggests that cessation of child abuse, both physical and sexual, occurs when the child reaches an age where she or he is no longer a salient target. What happens then is unclear. Incest research hints at displacement to grandchildren in some cases, or to other children nearby, where the offender gains access to the child through a trusting role (Finkelhor et al. 1986). For physical child abuse, or abuse where both mother and child are victims, the removal of the child may displace the aggression onto the mother. Most research to date either is epidemiological or clinical, with few efforts to trace the course of abuse in a family.

California. Many of Anglin's subjects were over fifty years of age and were recalling with accuracy events over thirty years old. These methods can be translated to the study of intrafamily violence to construct violence histories that have evolved both over many years and through a variety of influences. Victimization patterns and displacement, other shifts in the frequency or severity of violence (lulls, episodes, relapses after lengthy desistance periods), and contributing situational factors (e.g., peer group roles, legal or social sanctions, and life events such as the birth of a child) can be temporally anchored over a multidecade period to establish "natural" violence careers and the factors that affect their course.

Desistance research is an important part of the study of criminal careers but a neglected one in the literature on violence and aggression in families. Research on desistance from other forms of family violence, particularly incest and child abuse, may also tell us about the relations among them. Desistance research with assailants in both domestic-only and general violence can reveal shifts in victimization patterns and in the factors that influence the choice of victims. The simple integration of questions on violence in and out of the home will add to the explanatory power of theory developed from separate study. The concept of a family violence career, and studies of desistance as well as of displacement within that career, promise to strengthen our understanding of violence. How these patterns vary by social area and the social status of offenders are other important questions.

The systematic study of family violence is a relatively new field. Desistance research should be an important part of it. We must be careful to ask the right questions, not simply whether violence stops within a limited period or in response to a particular policy. Desistance may be a process as complex and lengthy as the processes of initial involvement. Developing empirical knowledge of desistance may require new research strategies that combine both deterministic and voluntary perspectives (Clarke and Cornish 1985). So long as the dimensions of the universe of those violent in families remain unknown, a variety of sampling strategies and research designs will make useful contributions to theory and knowledge. Knowledge of how violence stops does more than lead to new thinking on the prevention of family violence and its control. By framing questions within this perspective, we can begin to understand such important issues as the relations among types of family violence and the bearing of contemporary theories of violence on the special case of the family.

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