CAMBRIDGE

Cambridge University Press & Assessment
978-1-108-98680-9 — Entrapment, Escape, and Elevation from Relationship Violence
Wind Goodfriend , Pamela Lassiter Simcock
Excerpt
More Information

1 Introduction

Two of the central foci of social psychology are perceptions of the self and of interpersonal relationships. Perhaps there is no greater crucible for one's self-concept and self-esteem than experiencing intimate partner violence (IPV). What happens to the self when the person who is supposed to love and support you the most is the one who harms you?

The World Health Organization defines IPV as "behavior within an intimate relationship that causes physical, sexual, or psychological harm, including acts of physical aggression, sexual coercion, psychological abuse, and controlling behaviors" (2010, p. 11). The frequency of IPV can be surprising and somewhat staggering. Recent statistics estimate that 47 percent of men and women in the United States experience psychological or physical abuse from a partner at least once in their lifetime (National Center for Victims of Crime, 2018). Estimates in other countries vary, but the scope of the issue is difficult to measure due to public stigma aimed toward survivors and, therefore, lack of reporting of IPV to any kind of authority (see Arnocky & Vaillancourt, 2014; Littleton, 2010; Murray et al., 2018). In the worst-case scenario, intimate partners account for about 45 percent of homicides of women in the United States and 5 percent of homicides of men (Cooper & Smith, 2011).

The self-concept is generally defined as the summary of who we are, including our personality, positive and negative traits, experiences, goals, individual and group-based social roles, and more (Bem, 1967; Higgins, 1987; Rivenburgh, 2000; Tajfel, 1981). In contrast, self-esteem is our subjective evaluation of our self-concept; it is our judgment of whether and the degree to which we like who we are (Baumeister et al., 1996; Crocker & Major, 1989; Greenwald et al., 2002). Several scholars in social psychology offer theories regarding how the self-concept and self-esteem are affected by one's intimate relationships. For example, self-expansion theory (Aron & Aron, 1986) notes that people's self-concept often includes their romantic partner, such that our individual talents and experiences can grow when our partner fosters them. Interdependence theory (Kelley & Thibaut, 1978) suggests that decision-making changes once we are in a committed relationship, with selfish motives transforming into a desire to maintain long-term satisfaction for both partners. Cognitive interdependence theory (Agnew et al., 1998) points out that once a solid relationship has formed, individual partners shift from thinking of the self as "me" and "my" to "we" and "our." Work from both behavioral confirmation theory (Darley & Fazio, 1980; Merton, 1948) and the "Michelangelo phenomenon" (Drigotas et al., 1999)

© in this web service Cambridge University Press & Assessment www.cambridge.org

CAMBRIDGE
Cambridge University Press & Assessment
978-1-108-98680-9 — Entrapment, Escape, and Elevation from Relationship Violence
Wind Goodfriend , Pamela Lassiter Simcock
Excerpt
More Information

note that our partner's expectations of us can slowly affect our self-concept, changing our worldviews and goals for the future.

Given these theoretical foundations, it seems clear that relationship partners have a significant influence on each other's self-concept and self-esteem. Ideally, partners support and encourage each other, leading both to feel the benefits of being together. But the presence of aggression, violence, and psychological, sexual, and/or emotional manipulation in a relationship can change this experience to one of disappointment and degradation. These negative effects may be exacerbated in individuals who also suffer from systemic disadvantages and discrimination because of – for example – status based on their ethnicity (Jaffray, 2021; Rizkalla et al., 2020), being undocumented or a refugee (Njie-Carr et al., 2020), disability (Brownridge et al., 2020; Savage, 2021; Stern et al., 2020), transgender or sexual minority identity (Peitzmeier et al., 2020; Pittman et al., 2020; Scheer et al., 2020), or socioeconomic status (Cunradi et al., 2002; Hammett et al., 2020; Stalans & Ritchie, 2008).

Social psychological theories offer insight into how one's self is transformed through the experience of IPV. Pragmatically, attention to victims and survivors is needed to ameliorate this pervasive societal problem. Academically, more understanding is needed to advance theory and scholarship on the psychological mechanisms involved in IPV relationship dynamics. There is already a well-known model called I^3 (Finkel, 2008, 2014; Finkel & Hall, 2018; Finkel et al., 2012). This model is useful for predicting when interpersonal violence is most likely to occur, including within romantic couples. Instigation (the first "I") refers to immediate aspects of a couple conflict that typically make violence more likely (e.g., jealousy). Impellance is the couple members' personalities that might affect IPV behaviors (e.g., narcissism). Finally, inhibition includes factors that might decrease violence (e.g., self-discipline). While promising in its own right, the I^3 Model does not focus specifically on IPV survivors' psychological experiences and does not offer implications for change in given individuals over time.

We propose the E3 Model to specifically capture the psychological viewpoints and longitudinal experiences of survivors of IPV in terms of their evolving identity, self-concept, and self-esteem. We suggest a novel way to organize relevant research with a three-phase framework: Entrapment, Escape, and Elevation. Each phase highlights how a survivor moves through IPV from start to finish and the possible accompanying changes to one's sense of self. (Note that while Finkel's I^3 Model is typically pronounced "I cubed," we suggest pronouncing our model "E three.")

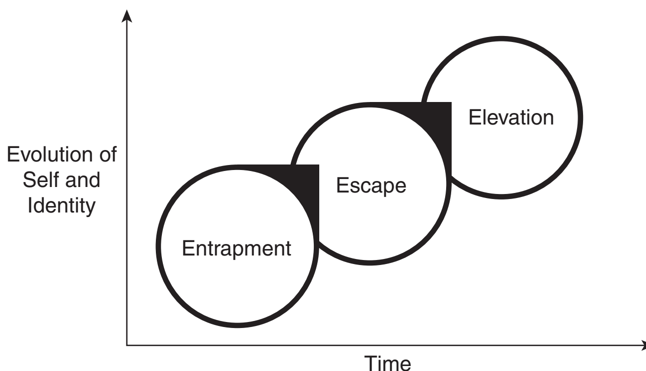
© in this web service Cambridge University Press & Assessment www.cambridge.org

CAMBRIDGE

Cambridge University Press & Assessment
978-1-108-98680-9 — Entrapment, Escape, and Elevation from Relationship Violence
Wind Goodfriend , Pamela Lassiter Simcock
Excerpt
More Information

The E3 Model posits three phases for two reasons. First, it parallels the I^3 model reviewed here. But, much more importantly, many IPV researchers and scholars discuss the experience of survivors in phases but without consistency in formalizing and naming them. One example comes from Rosen (1996; Rosen & Stith, 1997), who interviewed survivors and outlined movement through a seduction period, then "entrapment", then "escape". Heywood et al. (2019) focus on the aftermath of IPV by interviewing women as they shifted from "victim" to "survivor" to "thriver," a model more directly parallel to our own. Others focus exclusively on cross-sectional moments in a relationship (e.g., attraction, escape), many of which are described later, but without emphasis on longitudinal change. We believe the three phases of the E3 Model are intuitive and reflect much of the current work on IPV. In layperson's terms, the phases might be discussed as "getting in, getting out, and healing." That said, we acknowledge that more than three phases might feel right to some survivors, while others might relate to possible subphases and so on. We recognize that each person's experience is individual and valid for them; the E3 Model is intended to suggest what may be common trends for many people – not necessarily all.

The model is shown in Figure 1. It is important to note that the E3 Model proposes that the three phases may not be distinct from each other. Individuals targeted by relationship violence might move up and down along the *y*-axis, shifting temporarily from one phase to the next. Phases



Note: As time progresses (x-axis), ideally the IPV target's evolution of self-concept, self-esteem, and identity will also progress (y-axis). The three phases are depicted as overlapping to emphasize that movement up and down along the y-axis is possible, although the overall trajectories are forward-moving for people who eventually reach Elevation.

Figure 1 The E3 Model of experiencing IPV

© in this web service Cambridge University Press & Assessment www.cambridge.org

CAMBRIDGE
Cambridge University Press & Assessment
978-1-108-98680-9 — Entrapment, Escape, and Elevation from Relationship Violence
Wind Goodfriend , Pamela Lassiter Simcock
Excerpt
More Information

may also have significant overlap with each other. For example, targets of IPV will leave and return to an abuser an average of seven times before leaving permanently (NDVH, 2021), moving back and forth from the Entrapment and Escape phases. Someone might be psychologically ready to Escape, but pragmatic concerns keep them in Entrapment (for the time being). The psychological scaffolding needed to Escape might be built while someone is still in the relationship. In other words, the E3 Model is not a strict stage model; progressive growth over time might be delayed or convoluted by temporary backward motion. We use the word "phase" instead of "stage" to emphasize this point. The model is applicable to people who do eventually move through to the end, which is not the case for people who stay in their relationship or are killed by their abuser. We hope the model can offer help and optimism to those in need of it.

Phase 1, Entrapment, focuses on how people first enter into and become committed to a relationship that later becomes violent, and how experiencing IPV affects the self. Phase 2, Escape, explores how victims grow into survivors as they slowly build the resources needed to leave safely, including bolstering self-esteem. Finally, Phase 3, Elevation, centers on how survivors psychologically grow from their experience and become stronger, happier selves.

Note that terminology regarding people experiencing IPV can be controversial. Some scholars and activists believe that the word "victim" should never be used for those who are abused by their partners because it connotes "helplessness and pity" (Helloflo.com, 2021; see also Kirkwood, 1993; Romero-Sánchez et al., 2020). Many suggest that "survivor" is better because it connotes someone who has the strength to endure hardship and become empowered afterward. Throughout this Element, we approach the terminology from a scientific perspective in which "victim" will refer to someone who is still being abused, and "survivor" will refer to someone who has successfully escaped this violence. It is also important to note that the E3 Model is particularly relevant to forms of IPV in which one partner abuses the other – what social psychologists call intimate partner terrorism – as opposed to mutual or situational forms of IPV (Johnson, 1995, 2007).

2 Entrapment

The first phase of the E3 Model is *Entrapment*, the initial attraction to and formation of a relationship with a partner who will become abusive. Rosen (1996) first suggested the word "entrapment" when describing her own qualitative research with young women who were still in or had recently left abusive relationships. Her work sought how to best understand and empower them.

© in this web service Cambridge University Press & Assessment www.cambridge.org

CAMBRIDGE
Cambridge University Press & Assessment
978-1-108-98680-9 — Entrapment, Escape, and Elevation from Relationship Violence
Wind Goodfriend , Pamela Lassiter Simcock
Excerpt
More Information

Rosen interviewed twenty-two women and identified several themes regarding how people still in violent relationships psychologically responded to IPV in ways that kept them committed despite the violence. Themes included (for example) "romantic fusion," in which the relationship becomes one's all-encompassing identity and passion, and "illusions of control," the unrealistic belief that things might change for the better if only the victim herself could find the key to changing the perpetrator's behavior. A third theme was "romantic fantasies," described in more detail in the Section 2.1.

In addition to Rosen's (1996) pioneering work, several other scholars have contributed theory and research regarding how experiencing relationship violence affects one's sense of self and perception of the relationship. Many studies provide evidence of the link between IPV and lowered self-esteem, as well as several other negative well-being outcomes (e.g., Choi, 2020; Pereira et al., 2020; Sáez et al., 2021). We highlight some of these important contributions to understanding the Entrapment phase later in the Element, focusing on work tied to perceptions of the self. Again, we exclude research on mutual forms of IPV and focus instead on work regarding intimate partner terrorism (Johnson, 1995, 2007).

2.1 Romantic Myths and Fantasies: Prescriptive Cultural Norms

One influence on the self-concept is culture. Culture can shape social norms, expectations of gender performance, goals, values, and so on. Cultural values are passed from one generation to the next through social agents such as parents, peers, and the media (Bandura, 1986). The stories children hear and see can change their expectations regarding roles within relationships and what is (or is not) appropriate behavior. In this way, women may be groomed by a culture preparing them to become Entrapped in future IPV before they even meet their partners – and men may be taught unhealthy gender roles and expectations from a toxic patriarchal perspective.

For example, male characters in children's picture books are significantly more likely to be portrayed outdoors and/or in paid professions, while girls and women are portrayed indoors and in nurturing roles such as caring for others (Hamilton et al., 2006). The subtle messages in such stories could imply that boys and men are active problem-solvers while girls and women should be more passive and subservient to others – prescriptive norms that affect heterosexual relationships (Prentice & Carranza, 2002). For example, when people endorse traditional gendered prescriptive norms, "women may act nurturant and warm on dates and men may act dominant and chivalrous" (Eagly et al., 2004, p. 275). These norms are taught via cultural messages and give permission for men to

© in this web service Cambridge University Press & Assessment www.cambridge.org

CAMBRIDGE
Cambridge University Press & Assessment
978-1-108-98680-9 — Entrapment, Escape, and Elevation from Relationship Violence
Wind Goodfriend , Pamela Lassiter Simcock
Excerpt
More Information

have traits such as aggression and dominance, which can take negative forms when used to control their partners.

Media aimed at children and adolescents may contribute to Entrapment into IPV relationships through what social psychologists label "romantic myths" (e.g., Cava et al., 2020; Masanet et al., 2018; Sánchez-Hernández et al., 2020). Romantic myths are unrealistic expectations perpetuated through cultural messages such as that love can overcome all difficulties, belief in love at first sight, or that love is associated with jealousy and possessiveness (Cava et al., 2020). Romantic myths may therefore emphasize prescriptive norms of male dominance by couching these expectations as "romantic." Men and women might internalize these norms as part of their identity. Self-discrepancy theory (Higgins, 1987) proposes that we all have three identities: our actual self (current self-concept), our ideal self (who we hope to become), and our ought self (the person we believe others want us to be). The ought self is affected by our understanding of prescriptive norms and cultural expectations of how we "should" act – and we are taught these lessons very early (Levinson & Rodebaugh, 2013).

As noted previously, Rosen (1996) identified examples of these cultural influences on relationships in her interviews with victims and survivors of IPV. Two specific romantic fantasies emerged that she linked to culture-based fairy tales taught to young children. The first is what she called the Cinderella fantasy (p. 159): "the illusion that a man can transform a woman's life, erase her insecurities, protect her from her fears, or save her from her problems." A key to the Cinderella fantasy is that young women are taught that a heterosexual male relationship partner is the path toward a better future, an idea especially appealing for women who struggle from low socioeconomic status or abusive families of origin, just like the original heroine of the story. Rosen notes that this fantasy is unrealistic and promotes dependency on a partner instead of empowering women to create their own happy endings. The same fantasy and negative gender-based outcomes have been called the "glass slipper effect" by other scholars (Rudman & Heppen, 2003).

Rosen's interviews also led to what she called the Beauty and the Beast fantasy (1996). Here, the fairy tale promotes the fantasy that women should be attracted to aggressive or troubled men who – with enough love and sacrifice from their partners – can be transformed into loving princes. This fantasy excuses "beastly" behavior as not the perpetrator's fault and instead can put the blame on the victim or survivor herself through the implication that she has simply not been patient or accommodating enough.

© in this web service Cambridge University Press & Assessment www.cambridge.org

CAMBRIDGE
Cambridge University Press & Assessment
978-1-108-98680-9 — Entrapment, Escape, and Elevation from Relationship Violence
Wind Goodfriend , Pamela Lassiter Simcock
Excerpt
More Information

The notion of romantic fantasies or myths underlying unhealthy and/or abusive relationships has been supported by others. Jackson (2001) suggested that cultural romantic narratives (like fairy tales) teach that violent behavior from male partners is an expression of their love and that women should endure these challenges until their love magically transforms their partners. Another recent study found that romantic myths such as the beliefs that love is suffering, jealousy is a sign of love, and one must have a romantic partner to be happy are tied to accepting abusive behaviors, partially by not recognizing them as atypical or coercive (Cava et al., 2020). These myths are shown to affect both men and women in terms of their decreased likelihood of labeling problematic behaviors as abusive (Sánchez-Hernández et al., 2020). In sum, one way that identity and self-concept are affected by culture is by the messages young people are taught about what to expect from romantic relationships – and sometimes these myths and fantasies unknowingly promote unrealistic and unhealthy expectations and perceptions.

The E3 Model applies to all genders who are targets of IPV. Endorsement of myths about sexual aggression is significantly associated with victimization within relationships for men and women in heterosexual relationships, especially in cultures that value traditional gender norms (Fernández-Fuertes et al., 2020). This victimization disrupts self-determination and personal identity development (Parra-Barrera et al., 2021). Prescriptive norms about male dominance may also contribute to the minimization of men's experience when they are the targets of IPV; they are sometimes not taken as seriously as women who report the same events (Arnocky & Vaillancourt, 2014; Machado et al., 2017). Much more research is needed regarding men and nonbinary people who are victims.

2.2 Invisible Impacts on the Self: Sexual and Emotional Violence

Once people have formed adult intimate relationships, different forms of IPV may affect the self in different ways. One of the most traumatic forms of IPV may be sexual violence, which is estimated to occur in about 10 percent of intimate relationships (McLindon et al., 2018). Sexual violence can disrupt one's sense of self and lead to psychological scars, including lowered self-esteem and other negative mental health outcomes (Roth & Lebowitz, 1988). It is tied to Entrapment because sexual behaviors can lead one to feel more emotionally invested in a partner and therefore less likely to leave despite low satisfaction overall (Rusbult & Martz, 1995).

One study that focused on sexual violations within intimate relationships summarized the experience of these invisible impacts as "being attacked from

© in this web service Cambridge University Press & Assessment www.cambridge.org

CAMBRIDGE
Cambridge University Press & Assessment
978-1-108-98680-9 — Entrapment, Escape, and Elevation from Relationship Violence
Wind Goodfriend , Pamela Lassiter Simcock
Excerpt
More Information

the inside out" (Tarzia, 2021a). In-depth interviews with women in Australia revealed four themes in terms of how IPV (specifically sexual IPV in this study) can affect one's sense of self. "Shaken foundations" is a feeling of personal confusion and betrayal regarding perceptions of one's place in the relationship. "A different kind of damage" is feelings of shame, guilt, and self-blame that many victims experienced, as well as an overarching sense of lost control over one's life. "Lingering scar tissue" refers to a shaken self-concept, including a pervasive sense of vulnerability to others, doubting one's personal social judgments, and loss of interest in sexual behaviors. The final theme identified in this research was called "it kills something inside you." This theme centered around a dazed self-concept and self-esteem. Victims of sexual IPV describe struggling with body image, confidence, and self-esteem in response to dehumanizing behavior from their partners. These negative effects can be aggravated when one's culture endorses the idea that sex is a "woman's duty" in heterosexual relationships, another example of prescriptive norms (Tarzia, 2021b).

In addition to physical and sexual abuse, emotional and/or psychological abuse can be particularly damaging to one's self-concept and self-esteem. Perpetrators of IPV purposely use power and control tactics to keep their victims subdued; these tactics include shifting the blame to the victim, minimizing the perceived effects of emotional aggression, economic control, isolating the victim, threats, and more (Pence & Paymar, 1993; Ubillos-Landa et al., 2020). Over time, being subjected to these tactics undermines and erodes victims' self-esteem.

Research from Kirkwood (1993) concentrates on how emotional IPV affects identity. Using unstructured interviews with women who eventually left their abusers, she identifies six ways in which victims respond to emotional abuse in terms of psychological perceptions and the self. First is degradation, when victims perceive they are less valued and socially acceptable than most other people. This devaluing of the self can result from a perpetrator's repeated criticism and insults. The second response is fear; victims perceive that the world is unpredictable, which causes anxiety and a pervasive sense of danger. Victims' locus of control moves from internal (the belief they determine their own fate) to external (the belief that their future is in the hands of another; Rotter, 1966, 1975). Third, victims of emotional IPV perceive that their bodies are viewed as sexual objects to be used by their abuser or by others in general. This objectification is tied to victims losing a healthy self-concept that includes "inner energy, resources, needs, [and] desires" (Kirkwood, 1993, pp. 50–51). Other research supports the idea that when victims of IPV feel sexually objectified, they are more likely to silence their needs and feel a lost sense of self (Sáez et al., 2020).

© in this web service Cambridge University Press & Assessment www.cambridge.org

CAMBRIDGE

Cambridge University Press & Assessment
978-1-108-98680-9 — Entrapment, Escape, and Elevation from Relationship Violence
Wind Goodfriend , Pamela Lassiter Simcock
Excerpt
More Information

The fourth result of emotional IPV, according to Kirkwood (1993), is deprivation. Victims perceive an almost constant lack of their needs being met, such as economic, safety, and social needs. This deprivation is associated with a self-concept in which one accepts (at least, temporarily) intense isolation and gives up relationships with friends, family, or community social roles. Fifth, Kirkwood notes that victims' self-concept will change to include an overburden of responsibility. This is experienced as an overwhelming sense of exhaustion and sacrifice needed to maintain the relationship and household. One's identity now incorporates the roles of family manager, housekeeper, and (at least in some relationships) assistant or servant to the perpetrator.

Finally, Kirkwood's (1993) research suggests that emotional IPV is tied to a distortion of subjective reality in the victims' perceptions. A component of this sixth result may be a ubiquitous sense of terror and doubt. This fear may be the result of what some researchers call gaslighting when a perpetrator acts in ways designed to make their victim feel "crazy" or doubt their memories and perceptions (Knapp, 2019; Sweet, 2019). It may also include extremely low self-esteem and potentially a lack of any stable self-concept at all – what Kirkwood described as a "sickening caricature of what [the victims] once believed" about themselves and their world (1993, p. 57).

2.3 Cognitive Reframing and Dissonance

Other research from social psychology has explored how experiencing IPV can lead to a cognitive reframing of the self-concept (e.g., Arriaga, 2002; Goodfriend & Arriaga, 2018). Being victimized, manipulated, or abused by one's partner goes against culturally expected schemas of relationships. In addition, most people do not want to think of themselves as "victims" or as someone who would "put up with" this kind of abuse from a partner. So, when IPV occurs, one possible outcome is for the victim to reframe either the situation or their sense of self to resolve this sense of dissonance (Festinger & Carlsmith, 1959).

Victims of IPV may cognitively reframe the abusive behaviors by minimizing their severity or by interpreting them as not counting as abuse or violence. A notable example is a quantitative study with a community sample of middle-aged women that found victims of severe behaviors (such as being kicked or burned by their partners) sometimes interpreted these actions as "just joking around" or teasing that had accidentally gone too far (Arriaga, 2002). This interpretation was more likely in victims who were highly committed to staying with their partners. Another study using interviews of women in a shelter found that victims who were not able to leave their relationship coped with the

© in this web service Cambridge University Press & Assessment www.cambridge.org

CAMBRIDGE

Cambridge University Press & Assessment
978-1-108-98680-9 — Entrapment, Escape, and Elevation from Relationship Violence
Wind Goodfriend , Pamela Lassiter Simcock
Excerpt
More Information

dissonance of staying with an abuser by redefining the definition of "abuse" (Goodfriend & Arriaga, 2018). Here, some victims explained that their partners were not abusers because, although he used physical, sexual, or emotional aggression, it was not "abuse" as it did not cause lasting physical injury or was not done with a closed fist.

Similar coping strategies may, unfortunately, lead victims to blame themselves instead of their partners (Campbell et al., 2009). Here, the victim's self-concept and self-esteem have been manipulated by the partner until they internalize shame and guilt for the IPV. Interviews revealed self-blame as a pervasive effect of IPV in one study when women were asked to describe a particularly violent incident in their relationship and what caused it to occur (Goodfriend & Arriaga, 2018). Participants responded with statements such as "I am partly to blame for all this," "Maybe I pushed his buttons," and "There must be something that I'm doing wrong if he's hitting me or beating me up" (p. 5). Changing one's self-concept to include blame for being victimized – and the lowered self-esteem that accompanies that change – is a heartbreaking aspect of IPV.

Cognitive dissonance theory (Festinger & Carlsmith, 1959) asserts that when people have incompatible thoughts and/or behaviors (e.g., I believe relationship abuse is unacceptable; I am being abused by my partner), one solution is to change one of the thoughts or behaviors to avoid the anxiety produced. People might reframe the behaviors so they no longer count as violent or they might justify staying by switching the blame from the perpetrator to the self. While cognitive dissonance may explain reframing and self-blame, there are other valid theoretical explanations for these phenomena.

A possible alternative to cognitive dissonance is learned helplessness (Maier & Seligman, 1976; Seligman, 1972). This theory suggests that when people are exposed to prolonged negative events outside of their control, their motivation, emotions, and sense of self are compromised. This includes a shift in their locus of control from internal to external, resulting in feelings of helplessness that can generalize to their overall sense of self, not just specifically relevant to the causal situation or relationship. Effects on victims of violence can be "emotional numbness," "maladaptive passivity," and lowered general self-esteem (Peterson & Seligman, 1983). Learned helplessness may be one explanation for why survivors of one abusive relationship enter others; they perceive a loss of ability to change their situation, their partners, or the culture that produces such behaviors (Follingstad et al., 1988).

All theoretical explanations converge on the replicated finding that being victimized by IPV is associated with a vulnerable self-concept, decreased self-esteem, and fractured overall identity. This state is likely one reason why many victims find it so difficult to leave their partners, moving from the phase of

© in this web service Cambridge University Press & Assessment www.cambridge.org