

Chapter 2

Dominance and Control

It is widely accepted among feminist and family violence scholars that motivation for dominance and control is a major factor in understanding partner violence and that both are linked and mutually enhancing. This, however, is as far as mutual agreement goes. For feminist scholars, scrutinizing dominance and control is a natural means for cracking the gender component in partner violence. They do not consider motivation to be an individual characteristic but rather as derived from social structure. Motivation for dominance and control is awarded through complex social processes to men more than to women, and it may also manifest itself in intimate relationships through violence. The work of Hamburger and Guse (2002) is an example of this perspective. They examined dozens of articles to determine that men, unlike women, use violence to obtain dominance and control. Family violence scholars acknowledge the significance of this motivation and its association with violence but reject the suggestion that the phenomenon has a solid gender basis. The work of Straus (2008) is an example of this perspective; he criticizes the arguments brought by Hamburger and Guse and maintains that none of the articles that they quote provide solid empirical support for these arguments. Straus cites other articles showing that dominance and control correlate with violence for both genders (Kim & Clifton, 2003; Medeiros & Straus, 2006b; So-Kum Tang, 1999; Stets & Pirog-Good, 1990; Straus, Gelles, & Steinmetz, 2006; Sugihara & Warner, 2002).

This chapter addresses motivation and control in partner violence for five major reasons: (1) it is a natural follow-up to the discussion on gender significance in partner violence in the previous chapter; (2) it helps to clarify the nature of partner violence; (3) in many theories, it is a key factor in the frequency and severity of partner violence; (4) it broadens the scope of reference to partner violence from overt (behavior) to covert (motivation) aspects, and (5) it may serve as a stepping stone toward more complex theoretical approaches to partner violence.

Motivation for dominance and control is a combination of three concepts. Motivation represents a need or desire, causing one to act for its achievement or realization. This concept is used to explain why one would do something. The other two concepts are interrelated. When one member of the couple, man or woman,

takes or accepts control over the other partner, he/she becomes the dominant partner. Control is the execution of this power. When the concepts are combined, a new meaning is produced that has greater effect than the sum of their independent effects. This complex combination represents one partner's need or desire to force his/her will on the other partner and to dictate to him/her what to think and/or feel and/or how to behave. Many would suggest that coercion is an integral component of dominance and control and that it is necessarily belligerent. Many would also agree that violence is a specific form or case of belligerence. Hence, it is inevitable to state that motivation for dominance and control is motivation for violence, and that violence is a coercion of will. Addressing partner violence, in these terms, disregards many other possibilities, in which violence is used not to force one's will but, for example as a form of dysfunctional communication, an expression of frustration, or in self-defense. Describing violence as the result of motivation for dominance and control is not sufficiently exhaustive of the variety of situations in which the problem of partner violence is evident.

Motivation for Dominance and Control, and Physical Violence

Johnson (2006), who was mentioned in the first chapter, was not the first to address motivation for dominance and control and violent behavior, but he pushed the field forward by developing and presenting a typology based on these aspects. Johnson's work put an end to the simplistic approach that "violence is violence," by showing that this is a multidimensional and complex phenomenon in partner relationships. He distinguished between types of couples based on two characteristics: motivation for control and physical violence. He presented the concept "motivation for control" as follows:

"The types of domestic violence (situational couple violence, intimate terrorism, violent resistance, and mutual violent control) are defined conceptually in terms of the control motives of the violent member(s) of the couple, motives that are identified operationally by patterns of controlling behavior that indicate an attempt to exercise general control over one's partner."

In this quotation, Johnson does not clarify the concept but only explains how it can be identified. Somewhere else, he writes:

"I hypothesized that there were two qualitatively different forms and/or patterns of intimate partner violence—one that was part of a general strategy of power and control (intimate terrorism), the other involving violence that was not part of a general pattern of control, probably a product of the escalation of couple conflict into violence (situational couple violence)."

This quotation brings Johnson's hypothesis about the existence of two partner violence patterns. One was part of a general strategy of power and control (which he called "intimate terrorism") and another was violence that was not part of a general strategy (which he called "situational couple violence"). He argued that the second pattern was most likely a result of partner conflicts that escalated to violence. Despite

Table 2.1 Possible combinations of control motivation and violent behavior

Partner 1	Partner 2			
	(1) Not controlling and not violent			
	(1) Not controlling and not violent	(2) Controlling and not violent		
	(2) Controlling and not violent	Irrelevant for lack of violence	(3) Not controlling and violent	
	(3) Not controlling and violent	Situational violence	Situational violence	(4) Controlling and violent
	(4) Controlling and violent	Intimate terrorism	Violent resistance	Mutual violent control

these clarifications, “motivation for control,” according to Johnson, remains a vague concept. The measurement that Johnson used to represent the concept may clarify his meaning. He used, among others, measurements developed by Pence and Paymar (1993), which included threats, emotional abuse, financial control, sexual control, isolation, deprivation of privileges, and use of children as a means of control.

Johnson’s writings indicate that he differentiated between two violent etiologies: violence among those with motivation for general control, which is inherent in, stems from and serves the motivation, and violence among those who lack motivation for general control, who use it to settle specific confrontations. This distinction is not completely clear and apparently indicates that violence is more ingrained in the former than in the latter. Johnson presented four types of men or women based on their general control pattern and their physical violence: not controlling and not violent, controlling but not violent, not controlling but violent, and controlling and violent. Based on these types, Johnson identified and profiled four types of violent intimate relationships: “intimate terrorism”—when one partner is violent and controlling, and the other is not; “violent resistance”—when one partner is violent but not controlling, and the other is both violent and controlling; “situational violence”—when one partner is violent but not controlling, and the other is neither violent nor controlling; and “mutual violent control”—when both partners are violent and controlling.

A simple calculation reveals that Johnson addressed only four out of ten possible combinations. Table 2.1 presents the ten possibilities. Evidently, three of the combinations have no physical violence, so it is possible that Johnson deliberately ignored them as irrelevant for his typology. Two other combinations do include violence and can be relevant, but for some reason, were not addressed in Johnson’s work: one combination is when a controlling nonviolent person has a noncontrolling yet violent partner, and the other is when a nonviolent controlling person has a controlling

and violent partner. It is possible that Johnson considered these combinations as rare or nonexistent. For a full understanding of Johnson's suggestions, they warrant exploration in real-life examples and implementation.

The Case of Alon and Noya

I met Alon and Noya while participating in a study on partner violence. Over a period of 2 years, I met with and interviewed the couple several times. These interviews were an opportunity for me to study one of the more common patterns in partner violence (Johnson, 2006).

Alon was in his 40s and this was his second marriage. He had a 4-year-old from his previous marriage to Shiri and 1-year-old twins from his marriage to Noya. Alon told me that he was born premature. He was small and sickly and his mother was afraid to pick him up:

"She was afraid I would break. Hard to believe, huh? Today, 40 years later, I could break anything... if I wanted to."

Alon was the eldest son. His father was a real-estate agent and his mother worked as a dental assistant and a clerk for many years. His younger siblings were Boaz and Maya. He told me:

"I was the eldest, and I set the rules, not only at home, but also in the neighborhood and at school. Everybody did as I said; they looked up to me."

At 13, right after his Bar-Mitzvah, his parents enrolled him in a military boarding school.

"It wasn't that great and after one year, I quit. Too much pressure, they keep telling you what to do, how and when to do it; it wasn't for me. I am nobody's fool. And there were no girls there. What sort of a thing is that? Growing up with no girls is like... I don't know... It wasn't right for me. In the neighborhood, nobody dared to defy me and all the girls... seriously, **all the girls** wanted me. I remember my first time with a chick... I don't really remember the rest of them."

He met his first wife after he was released from military service. Her father was an engineer and her mother an educational consultant.

"She was OK, at first, at least, but she was suffocating me. 'Where have you been? What did you do?' I got rid of her. Who needs it? I think, in the end, she had someone and she thought that she would be better off with a divorce. She would be able to manipulate me, on the one hand, because she has my kid, and she could manipulate that nobody who fell in love with her, on the other."

One year after his divorce, Alon remarried, and with the help of his parents, became a partner in the garage where he had worked since finishing the army.

"Money is not very good, but one can get by. Shiri [his ex-wife] thinks I am making millions at the garage... you'd think. But I am content, I have no-one breathing down my neck, I can do as I please."

He met his second wife, Noya, when she came to the garage.

"As soon as I laid eyes on her, I knew she was going to be my next thing. She played hard to get... virginal... But I know she was hot for me from the first moment..."

They met that same week and started dating.

"I needed a clerk and Noya had the qualifications, but I thought that bringing her in to the business could mean real trouble... she would have had total control over me... now that we've been living together for several years, I can tell you that Noya is the kind of woman that needs a lot of taking care of, and it is not so simple."

Noya came to Alon's garage on one of the worst days of her life. Yair, her boyfriend of the past 6 months, had left her the previous morning, just a week before her 29th birthday. She believed that Yair was The One, but somehow, things had gone wrong. There was a fight, and he picked up his stuff, told her it was over and left the house. She did not respond, played it cool. This was not the first time it had happened. On previous occasions, he had come back after a few hours. This time, he did not. In the evening, she started calling friends to try to find out where he was and what was going on but to no avail. Yair disappeared. The next day, following a night of waiting by the phone, Noya decided that she was going to his parents' in Haifa. But the car would not start, which was how she ended up in Alon's garage:

"When I saw Alon for the first time, I felt... How can I describe it? He had the look of a lost little boy... and it felt good to be single. Very quickly, we became a couple and we had a great time. We had trouble with his wife and Yair also showed up one day, but that is history."

Noya was the third out of four daughters. Her father had a fabric shop. Her mother divided her time between the home and the family business. When Noya was 3 years old, her father left her mother for 2 years.

"It was a rough time. Mom was depressed, because we had nothing. He simply broke off any contact. But then he came back and it all changed. Suddenly, we had plenty of money. Mom got pregnant and my little sister was born."

Noya met her first boyfriend at 13. He was 4 years older.

"He was a man and I was a girl. It was almost illegal. When my parents found out, they freaked. So it was over. Since then, I had six or seven relationships. Each was truly significant. When I love someone, it's very strong. I give of myself completely."

Noya's parents accepted Alon with mixed feelings. On the one hand, he appeared to be a good and diligent man, who would take care of Noya. On the other hand, they were disturbed by his obligations and the child from a previous marriage.

"When I brought Alon home for the first time, there was some tension in the air. But finally, Dad accepted him. He said: 'Look, I have four daughters; the first two are married and gave me three granddaughters. From you, I expect a grandson. If you bring me a grandson...' The funny thing is that eventually, we had twin girls. The wedding was a huge affair. Six hundred people showed up... Our parents took care of everything."

The twins were born 18 months after the wedding.

"The pregnancy was hard. Especially as Alon wasn't there to help. He would come back home very late... demand food, demand sex and go to sleep. What's that supposed to be? Am I carrying my own private babies? If I asked him where he'd been, he'd get angry. If I didn't ask, he'd also get angry. After the girls were born, it was never quite the same..."

When I met with Alon and Noya, they had been married for two and a half years. Their relationship typically consisted of daily friction that often escalated to yelling, insults, and violent threats from both. Noya told me that the lowest point in their relationship was when they went to a wedding of friends in an orchard near the small town of Binyamina in Israel.

“We left home quite late because the babysitter didn’t get there on time, which Alon considered to be my fault. You see, from his point of view, everything to do with the girls is my domain. So if the sitter is late, I’m to blame. He didn’t say it, but I could tell that this was what he was thinking. I saw it in his eyes and heard it in his breathing. It bugged me that we were finally going out alone without the girls, and we could have had so much fun, but he chose to be miserable. The problem is that when he is miserable, everybody else has to be miserable, too. I decided that I was going to have fun. When we set off, I wanted some air, so I opened my window. I knew that he wouldn’t like it, and he didn’t say a word, but closed the window immediately. So I lit a cigarette and he had no choice but to open the window, because he hates the smell of cigarettes. But he opened the window all the way down, so that my hair would be a mess. I kept quiet and continued smoking. When he saw that I wasn’t putting out my cigarette, he took out a heavy metal CD and cranked up the volume. The singer sounded as if he was having his tooth pulled out without an anesthetic. I said nothing, but put out the cigarette and closed the window, and he turned off the CD. We kept going, without saying anything. When we came closer to Binyamina, Alon broke the silence. He asked me: ‘Say, where exactly is the wedding?’ I said I didn’t know. So he said: ‘Take out the invitation. It must have the details on it.’ I told him that I hadn’t brought it with me. He stopped the car at the side of the road, stepped out, came to my side of the car, opened the door, grabbed me by the hair and pulled me out screaming: ‘What do you want from me?’ Then he let go of me and I fell down. I looked up and said quietly, ‘I want you out of my life. I don’t want you anymore... you are a poor and miserable person.’ He gave me a funny look, turned around and started walking away on foot. I stayed there on the ground next to the car. You know what I did first? I looked inside the car to see if the keys were in the ignition. I stood up, walked around the car, and sat in the driver’s seat. The lights were on and I could see him moving forward at the side of the road. The anger and tension I felt inside died down. I thought, ‘How awful, why are we doing this to each other? What is our problem?’ I started the car and began moving slowly toward him. When I came closer, he looked back, saw me and started running. I accelerated and suddenly, he disappeared. He must have thought that I was trying to run him over. He jumped to the side of the road and fell into a ditch. Eventually, we ended up at the hospital in Hadera where they put a cast on his leg.”

From the interviews with Alon and Noya, I learned that both were motivated to control each other, and both resisted each other’s attempts at control. Their “window battle” indicates this clearly. On the overt level, Alon and Noya were competing over who would make the decisions, whether Noya would decide that the window should be open, or whether Alon would decide that it should be closed. They both based their actions on their knowledge of what would “set off” and manipulate the other. When Noya opened the window, she knew that Alon would not like it, that the cigarette smoke would bother him and would force him to open

the window. Alon did not want the window open, but neither did he want Noya to be smoking in the car, so he created a problem for Noya, by playing loud music to annoy her. In return for her closing the window and putting out the cigarette, he was willing to turn off the music. Interestingly enough, this whole control struggle took place without a word being uttered. This indicates how well the partners knew each other, that they were completely unwilling to communicate, and were impatient with each other. This could also indicate desperation and hopelessness. On the covert level, this occurrence could stem from something much deeper in their relationship. When Noya opened the window, she was signaling to Alon that he was suffocating her. This message became clearer when Noya was on the ground near the car. She told Alon: "I want you out of my life." The event can be scrutinized further, but it is used here to test Johnson's ideas.

Had Johnson regarded Alon as controlling and violent and Noya as controlling and nonviolent, he would have found it difficult to identify their pattern as a couple as there is no such type identified in his work. Had he regarded Noya as noncontrolling but as responding to Alon's violence and control, he would have identified the pattern as Intimate Terrorism. Another way for Johnson to address the couple's pattern could be to identify both Alon and Noya as violent and controlling (as Noya deliberately opened a window and lit a cigarette), in which case, the pattern would be Mutual Violence and Control. Less likely, yet still possible, is the option of Situational Violence. The problem in defining the pattern arises from the question of what is control/dominance, and to a lesser extent, what is violence. Clearly, Alon behaved violently but was Noya being violent in forcing an open window and cigarette smoke on Alon?

The Case of Pnina and Moshe

Pnina told me that when she married Moshe, she had no illusions that he was the man of her dreams. He was not particularly handsome or smart, but he was the only one ever to propose and could take her away from her parents' place and the neighborhood where she had been living for 20 years. He could offer her a new life. When he proposed, he promised to make her happy, and she believed him and accepted immediately. Twelve years had passed and he was still promising to make her happy and she still believed that he would. Pnina's parents immigrated to Israel after the establishment of the State and settled in a small southern town. Her father worked at a food factory and her mother stayed at home. Pnina was the second of five children. Pnina told me in an interview:

"The strongest memory I have of my parents' home is the tense silence. Dad would come home from work, always nervous, and Mom would run around him as if trying to calm him down, and would signal to us that we need to keep silent. When Dad would go to the synagogue for the evening prayers, we could start talking again, but quietly. Mom used to say: 'We can't upset your father; he has enough of it as it is.' Besides the nervous silence, I remember the boredom; nothing ever happened. We were not allowed to go outside. We would sit and wait. I don't know

what for. When Dad left, we'd wait for him to come back, and when he came back, we'd wait for him to leave. That is how we passed the time."

Pnina's parents did not think school or a social life was important, and she had no friends. Her mother said: "Girls should have a good husband. Anything else is nonsense." One day, her father came home with Moshe. Two months later, they were married. Moshe was 5 years older than Pnina. He lived in a nearby neighborhood in the house that had belonged to his parents when they were still alive. He had no profession. All that her father told her after Moshe's first visit to their home was that he was a good man and could be trusted. After that night, it all happened very fast: a few phone calls, dates at the café, the restaurant, and the movies. It was a wonderful time. For the first time in her life, Pnina felt that she meant something to someone and that she had something to look forward to. The feeling of dejection faded away. Even her father smiled at her sometimes. Pnina told me:

"Many people came to the wedding. I didn't know most of them. Everybody was smiling, nicely dressed. There was plenty of food and music. It was like a dream. I often find myself daydreaming about my wedding. Each time it looks a bit different, depending on my mood. After the wedding ceremony, Dad came up to me and said: 'Now you're a married woman, don't bring shame on me.' That night, when we came to Moshe's house, my heart was pounding. My dad's words kept ringing in my head. 'Don't bring shame on me... Don't bring shame on me...' Twelve years have gone by. Am I very happy? I can't say that I am, but I'm not so unhappy, either."

Moshe was an only child. His father worked at the local council and his mother at the regional school. His parents wanted him to be a doctor, but all he ever wanted to be was a football player. Moshe told me:

"When I was playing football, I felt that this was my destiny, that no-one could stop me. I was the best player in the neighborhood. Everybody said: 'He will be a star when he grows up.' But all the big plans were ruined when I broke my leg. Then and there, my life ended."

When Moshe was released from the army, he started working at the council as a driver, but after his father died, he quit the job. He spent days on end sitting in coffee shops with his friends. Moshe's mother died 2 years later. When I interviewed him, he said:

"I met Pnina's father at the synagogue during the worst time of my life. I felt all alone in the world. I had friends, I would go out, meeting girls here and there, but it wasn't quite what I really wanted. I felt that I had to do something meaningful with myself. That's when I met Pnina's father. He got me the job at the factory, and took me in to his home. Gave me his daughter; what more could I ask for? Pnina is the best thing that ever happened to me. I know that sometimes I mess it up, but all in all, I am happy."

Pretty soon, Moshe decided that Pnina would be "the mother of his children:"

"She was simply but nicely dressed. She didn't look at me and I tried not to make her nervous. Pnina is not the kind of girl you find in the street. I saw right away that she was made of the right stuff."

The day after Moshe and Pnina first met, he told her father that he wanted to date her and that he had serious intentions. All that Moshe could remember from that

conversation was that Pnina's father was serious, did not say much, and just said: "Don't bring shame on her." Moshe did not want Pnina's father to pay for the wedding. He took the money that his parents had saved, loaned some more money, and arranged the whole wedding on his own:

"No-one will ever forget this wedding... the food, the music... the best that you can get."

Moshe had a little too much to drink and by the end of the evening, he could barely stand on his feet. His friends took him and his wife home:

"When we came home, I was totally wasted. On the one hand, I wanted to be a man, on the other, I wanted to know how much money we got from the wedding and if it would cover the loans. But what actually happened was that I was dead beat. Pnina is a good wife. And I think I am the best thing that happened to her. I know we have our ups and downs, but who doesn't?"

Pnina was interviewed following a stay at a shelter for battered women. She ended up there after several cases in which Moshe hurt her using severe physical violence. In one instance, he caused a cut above her eye that required stitches. On another occasion, he punctured her eardrum. She told me in the interview:

"People think that women run away from their husbands only in extreme cases. It's possible, but I didn't run away. I heard about the shelter and decided to take a time out. In the days before I came to the shelter, he hadn't been beating me up. I just got tired of it all. Moshe is a very difficult person. When he doesn't like something, he talks with his hands. He is always sure that he is right and he has to have the final say in everything. My parents always took his side. After Moshe hurt my eyebrow, my mom said to me: 'You're the one bringing trouble upon yourself. Start behaving like a wife and you will have a good life. You know your father never raised his hand at me. You know why? Because he had no reason to. You give Moshe all the reasons in the world to beat you... Why do you do that?' Moshe bit me that time because I was talking to the greengrocer. He said I behaved promiscuously and it brought shame on all the family. These words were really painful... My husband thinks I'm promiscuous."

Unlike the case of Alon and Noya, Pnina and Moshe's relationship is easy to profile using Johnson's typology. Moshe is controlling and violent, whereas Pnina is neither. Much like her mother, Pnina is completely submissive to her husband's authority. It may be assumed that Johnson would have defined this case as Intimate Terrorism. If Pnina would ever rebel against Moshe's violence and domination, it would be worth considering redefining their case as Violent Resistance.

Johnson's Theoretical Framework, Its Contribution and Limitations

Johnson's work (Johnson, 2006) marks a shift in approach to partner violence. First, as mentioned, it presents a complex, multidimensional perspective on partner violence. In addition, it supports a change of focus from the individual's behavior

in society to the behavior of both partners, enhancing recognition of the importance of the relationship context for understanding the problem. In view of the significance of Johnson's work, it should be criticized and used as a vantage point toward a more progressive approach.

Johnson's idea of control refers to one's general motivation to manipulate one's partner's behaviors in accordance with one's needs, desires and goals. At first, this seems to be an acceptable approach, but a deeper examination reveals its vagueness. It is unclear which factors affect it or are affected by it, what its boundaries and content are, and whether and how it is distinct from other (nongeneral) control motivations. The measurements employed to represent the general control pattern indicate that Johnson regarded nonphysical violence, such as threats, as an indication of the existence of a general control pattern. On the other hand, physical violence was not described in Johnson's writings as an unequivocal indication of such a pattern. Simply put, Johnson did not consider threats to be violence but rather a general control pattern, and he does not regard battering to indicate a general control pattern but violence. Those who consider threats to be a form of violence would consider the general control pattern and the physical violence to be overlapping, rather than separate concepts, at least to some extent. This approach is not characteristic only of Johnson (see also Alexander, 1993; Marshall, 1996; Pence & Paymar, 1993).

Straus and Gozjolko (2009) suggest that the literature on the etiology of partner violence often assumes that psychological aggression is a fundamental component of control. This is a questionable approach because it relies on measuring one thing (psychological aggression) to identify and address another (control). Even worse, this could mean measuring one thing while presenting it as another altogether. As for Johnson, threats indicate a general control pattern, which means that this pattern and nonphysical violence are one and the same. The association between threats and battering among intimate partners has been extensively documented (Winstok & Eisikovits, 2008). It is not an association between control and violence, but rather an association between different forms of violence (Winstok & Perkis, 2009).

Another limitation of Johnson's classifications has to do with their determinism. How many times, and for what length of time, must a partner exhibit violent behavior to be classified as violent? Can this classification be changed following a period of refraining from violence and if so, how long should this period be? Similar questions can be asked also regarding general control patterns. This limitation, in addition to those previously mentioned, indicates that Johnson's arguments are insufficiently developed. It is possible that he did not set out to present a theoretical framework for the study of partner violence in the first place but rather to establish his suggestions regarding the ongoing controversy on gender symmetry. It is also possible that Johnson wished to fine-tune the sensitivity to the various contexts in which violence can be found and to mediate between the two sides of the controversy over gender symmetry. Yet, most refer to his work as an integrative approach or theory rather than an illustration of recommended principles for the study of partner violence.

Final Comments

The term “motivation for dominance and control” often raises negative connotations and rejection. Why is this motivation condemnable? Is it because of its perceived gender basis among feminist scholars, who assume that men rather than women possess this tendency? Would it still be perceived as a negative motivation had it been only a women’s tendency, or if it had been distributed equally between the genders? One should not rule out that motivation for dominance and control is an objectionable notion because it is believed to include a coercive aspect, necessarily perceived as illegitimate. This may or may not be the case, but it is more important to ask whether any form of forcefulness is wrong. Relationships in which one partner has a tendency for dominance and control, but does not force his/her will using illegitimate forceful means, and the other partner accepts (even if unwillingly) and acquiesces to this dominance, are not uncommon. It is less common to find relationships in which none of the partners are dominant or controlling. It seems that if expressions of dominance and control were perceived as having no gender basis, not necessarily forceful and if so, using legitimate force, they would draw little attention in partner violence research.

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