Adaptive and Maladaptive Personality Traits as Predictors of Violent and Nonviolent Offending Behavior in Men and Women

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The aim of this study was to assess both violent and nonviolent offending behavior in a single, mixed-sex population. The rationale for this is that the two types of offending are usually researched separately, despite evidence that they overlap. A comprehensive measure of general violence, intimate partner violence (IPV), and nonviolent offending behavior was administered to 116 men and 181 women, together with measures of personality and personality disorder (PD) traits, to investigate whether predictors of violent and nonviolent offending were similar or different for men and women. Men were found to perpetrate higher levels of general violence and nonviolent offenses than women, but women perpetrated significantly more IPV than men. Cluster B PD traits predicted all three offense types for women and also men’s general violence and nonviolent offending. Women’s general violence and men’s non-violence also had one unique risk factor each, low agreeableness, and low conscientiousness, respectively. The main difference was for IPV, where men’s IPV was predicted by cluster A PD traits, indicating that men’s and women’s risk factors for IPV may be different, although their risk factors for the other offense types were fairly consistent. Aggr. Behav. 35:1–10, 2010.

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INTRODUCTION

Offending Behavior by Men and Women

Offending and antisocial behavior are traditionally deemed to be male-dominated acts, and this is true for both self-reports, informant reports, and officially-recorded statistics [Moffitt et al., 2001; Steffensmeier and Allan, 1996]. Research has shown that, outside the home, men are more violent than women, at every age [Archer, 2004, 2009; Moffitt et al., 2001]. From this sex difference, it has been inferred that women are different from men in their capacity and motivation for violence. However, an area of research which conflicts with this pattern of men being more violent than women is partner violence. Studies using unselected samples, such as student or community samples, have found that women can be as physically aggressive as men, if not more so, within intimate relationships [Archer, 2000, 2002, 2006; Graham-Kevan and Archer, 2003]. This is true of “minor” violence (e.g. pushing, slapping, hitting) as well as more “severe” types of violence [Ehrensaft et al., 2004; Lussier et al., 2009; Straus, 2008]. Similar conclusions can be drawn from the figures of two British Crime Surveys, which show equal proportions of men and women being assaulted by a partner in the last year [Coleman et al., 2007; Mirrlees-Black et al., 1998].

The view that partner violence involves mutual combat is associated with family conflict researchers [e.g. Straus and Gelles, 1988]. The conflicting viewpoint, associated with feminist and evolutionary researchers [e.g. Dobash et al., 1992; Dobash and Dobash, 2004], is that the majority of partner violence involves men as the aggressors and women as their victims. The feminist theory also posits that women’s partner violence is defensive, whereas men’s partner violence is coercive and is a consequence of...
patriarchy. Paralleling this is the evolutionary view that male violence is the consequence of mate-guarding arising from paternity uncertainty [e.g. Wilson and Daly, 1992, 1996]. However, some research suggests that women’s IPV is not solely motivated by self-defense [Gray and Forshee, 1997; Straus and Gelles, 1988; Stets and Straus, 1990] as women can be violent toward nonviolent partners [Morse, 1995; Simmons et al., 2005; Straus and Ramirez, 2007], and the risk factors for intimate partner violence (IPV) are present 3 years before dating [Moffitt et al., 2001]. Therefore, self-defense cannot reliably account for women’s perpetration of IPV. If men and women differ in their use of general violence and antisocial behavior, but are similar in their use of IPV, the risk factors for these two types of behavior need to be investigated separately, for men and women.

Few studies have assessed general violence, IPV, and nonviolent offending behavior in men and women at the same time. These three areas are usually researched separately, although there is research to suggest that the offenses may partially overlap [Farrington et al., 2006; Gottfredson and Hirschi, 2007; Moffitt et al., 2000; Straus and Ramirez, 2004], providing a rationale for assessing them all in one population. When the three crime types have been assessed in the same population, different measures, with different response formats, have been used to assess each one. Some authors [e.g. Straus and Ramirez, 2004] have commented that the one limitation of their research is the brevity of the measure of general violence and nonviolent offending. To overcome this limitation, this research used a measure which assesses all three offense types, has equal questions for partner and general violence, and uses the same response format throughout.

Earlier research has typically not separated involvement in general violence and nonviolent offending, combining them into one category. Moffitt et al. [2000] included general violence with nonviolent offenses as “general crime,” and compared this with IPV, finding that general crime was predicted by low self-control but that IPV was not. They did not assess whether general violence and nonviolent crimes were distinct. This study extends this research by analyzing the three offenses as three separate domains, although with the limitation that this study involved a relatively small student sample, whereas that of Moffitt et al. was a large representative longitudinal study.

**Personality and Offending Behavior**

There has been a lot of research interest in the relationship between personality and offending behavior. Psychoticism, extraversion, and neuroticism have been found to be predictors of self-reported nonviolent offending [Eysenck, 1996; Walker and Gudjonsson, 2006]. Similarly, Heaven [1996] found that conscientiousness correlated negatively with self-reported offending in men and women, and that agreeableness correlated negatively with self-reported offending in men. Personality traits have also been correlated with aggression. Low agreeableness and conscientiousness and high neuroticism were found to be associated with physical aggression in men and women [Caprara et al., 1996; Gleason et al., 2004; Sharpe and Desai, 2001; Tremblay and Ewart, 2005]. Heaven [1996] found that low agreeableness was correlated with partner violence for men and women, but neuroticism only related to partner violence perpetration for women. Similarly, Sommer et al. [1992] found that women with higher scores on the psychoticism and neuroticism scales were most at risk for partner violence perpetration. This research suggests that men and women who offend (whether violently or not) have lower adaptive personality traits.

Personality disorders (PDs) have also been associated with offending behavior. However, most studies focus on borderline and antisocial PDs, so that empirical data on the remaining eight PDs is sparse [Emmelkamp and Kamphuis, 2007]. Cluster B PDs consist of antisocial, borderline, histrionic, and narcissistic, which together are known as the “dramatic” disorders, and have been associated with perpetration of crime and violence. Antisocial PD is characterized by a lack of regard for others, aggressiveness, and impulsivity, and a lack of remorse for actions. Patients with antisocial PD may also get pleasure from the suffering they inflict on others [Emmelkamp and Kamphuis, 2007]. Antisocial PD has been associated with nonviolent offending, as well as violent behavior in and out of the home, for men and women [Barros and Serafim, 2008; Emmelkamp and Kamphuis, 2007; Holtzwirth-Munroe et al., 2000]. Borderline PD is characterized by general instability across many areas of life, including relationships, as well as unpredictable mood swings from extreme anger to despondency. Borderline PD has been associated with partner violence perpetration, and also with violence out of the home, in both men and women [Emmelkamp and Kamphuis, 2007; Henning et al., 2003; Holtzworth-Munroe and Stuart, 1994]. Narcissistic PD has also been associated with violence within and outside relationships. The initial idea for the link between narcissism and aggression came from Baumeister et al. [1996], who established that physical aggression was the result of a combination of threatened egotism.
and favorable self-appraisals. Similarly, Lawrence [2006] has found that an unstable self-concept combined with high narcissism is linked with aggression. Narcissists may react with aggression if they feel humiliated, socially rejected, or if their self-esteem is challenged, and they report low levels of empathy for their victims [Emmelkamp and Kamphuis, 2007; Henning et al., 2003].

Cluster C PDs consist of avoidant, dependent, and obsessive–compulsive, which together are known as the “anxious” disorders, and have been associated with perpetration of violence [Emmelkamp and Kamphuis, 2007] and IPV in men [Dutton, 2002; Dutton and Kerry, 1999; Munroe and Stuart, 1994] and women [Henning et al., 2003]. However, Ehrensaft et al. [2006] found that cluster C PDs were protective in relation to IPV perpetration in men and women.

Cluster A PDs consists of paranoid, schizoid, and schizotypal, which together are known as the “odd” disorders. Cluster A PDs (i.e. schizoid) have been associated with violent and criminal behavior in the borderline subtype of men [Holtzworth-Munroe et al., 2000], and have been associated with men’s and women’s IPV [Ehrensaft et al., 2006]. Therefore, research findings suggest that many perpetrators of violence, in and out of the home, and perpetrators of nonviolent offending behavior will show evidence of PDs.

There seems to be no studies investigating both adaptive and maladaptive personality in violent and nonviolent offending behavior, so this study addresses this gap. It is important to investigate adaptive as well as maladaptive personality, so as to avoid labeling people with a “deviant personality” and to assess how adaptive traits may also be involved. Focusing only on the maladaptive part of personality is a very narrow approach and can lead to overpathologizing of offenders. Therefore, considering personality on a dimension of adaptive and maladaptive traits is a more rounded approach and also considers protective factors.

The purpose of this study was twofold: first, to investigate sex differences in offending behavior; and second, to investigate predictors of violent and nonviolent offending separately for men and women, to assess whether there were offense-specific and sex-specific risk factors.

METHOD

Participants

Participants were a convenience sample recruited on a British university campus. There were 297 participants, 116 (39.1%) men and 181 (60.9%) women. Ages ranged from 18 to 49 with a mean of 23.83 years (men: 23.08; women: 24.31). The response rate was 71.6%. Of the 358 returned questionnaires, 61 were removed either owing to missing data, respondents not having had a partner in the past 12 months, or respondents not being in a heterosexual relationship; therefore, 297 were retained for analysis. Individuals in homosexual relationships were not included in this study, because the number of responses was very low.

Measures and Procedure

The following questionnaire was distributed to university students on campus, along with return envelopes. Participants were recruited from open-access computer rooms, the university library, and from large lectures. Participants were from a variety of courses, including Psychology. Students did not receive course credit or compensation for taking part in the research. Participants were told that the data would be anonymous and that they could withdraw anytime before handing in the questionnaire, but once they had returned it, this would not be possible. Participants were told about the purpose of the research on the front cover sheet of the questionnaire and were given the opportunity to ask any questions in the debriefing following the completion of the questionnaire.

Violent and Nonviolent Offending Behavior Scale (Thornton et al., unpublished manuscript)

The scale developed measured IPV perpetration (20 items) and victimization (20 items), general violence perpetration (20 items), and perpetration of nonviolent offenses (30 items). All items were pulled from already existing measures and were adapted for use in this study, so that all items had the same scoring procedure. Participants were asked to self-report the extent to which they had been violent toward their partners and others, and engaged in nonviolent offenses in the past 12 months. Participants were also asked to self-report their own IPV victimization in the past 12 months. This time period is commonly used in both studies of IPV [e.g. Straus, 1979; Straus et al., 1996] and in general aggression research [e.g. Richardson and Green, 1999, 2003]. Items were answered on a 7-point scale of 0 (Never happened) to 6 (Happened more than 25 times). Straus et al. [1996] recommend recoding the responses to weigh the data by creating midpoints for each of the items as follows: 4 (3–5 times), 8 (6–10 times), 15 (11–20 times), and 25 (more than
RESULTS

Before analysis, the data was screened for accuracy, missing data, outliers and, normality [Tabachnick and Fidell, 2007]. Outliers were reduced, so that extreme scores were one more than the next most extreme score. There were no multivariate outliers. Once outliers had been adjusted, there were no violations of normality. A P value of .05 was deemed not to be stringent enough, as it may result in type I errors; therefore, a level of .01 was used throughout.

Frequency scores were calculated for each offense category, separately for men and women. The means and standard deviations for the number of offenses, along with F and d values for the sex differences, are shown in Table I. A series of one-way between subjects analyses of covariance were used to test for sex differences for each offense category, controlling for the effect of age. Research has shown that violence [e.g. Archer, 2004] and offending [Gottfredson and Hirschi, 2007] decreases with age. Comparing younger men with older women may increase the sex difference; therefore, it was necessary to adjust for age. After adjusting for age, it was found that men were more violent outside relationships than women and men perpetrated significantly more nonviolent offenses than women. Women reported perpetrating significantly more IPV than men. All these results were a medium-sized effect, according to Cohen’s [1988] criteria (Table I).

Correlational Analyses

Table II shows the Pearson correlations between individual difference variables and each offense category, separately for men and women. There are similarities and differences between the correlations for men and women. General violence was significantly related to IPV perpetration and non-violent offending in both men and women, demonstrating that general violence overlaps to some degree with perpetration of other offenses. However, IPV was only significantly related to nonviolent

<p>| TABLE I. Means and Standard Deviations for Number of Offenses Within Each Category, for Men and Women (N = 116 Men, 181 Women), and F and d Values for Sex Differences Controlling for Age |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Offense category</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>F (df)</th>
<th>d^a,b</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>General violence</td>
<td>7.74</td>
<td>9.87</td>
<td>4.33</td>
<td>5.81</td>
<td>12.21 (1, 294)*</td>
<td>0.44 (0.41)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IPV perpetration</td>
<td>0.91</td>
<td>1.53</td>
<td>2.91</td>
<td>4.11</td>
<td>27.39 (1, 294)**</td>
<td>−0.59 (−0.62)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IPV victimization</td>
<td>2.37</td>
<td>3.52</td>
<td>1.54</td>
<td>2.56</td>
<td>5.31 (1, 294)</td>
<td>0.28 (0.27)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nonviolent offending</td>
<td>10.05</td>
<td>11.12</td>
<td>6.13</td>
<td>7.31</td>
<td>12.20 (1, 295)*</td>
<td>0.43 (0.41)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

^aMinus sign signifies higher values for women than men. ^b/d values in brackets are computed from the F value when controlling for age. The d values not in brackets were calculated from the means and standard deviations. *Significant at P < .01, **significant at P < .001.
offending in women, suggesting less overlap in this case for men (although the correlation was in the same direction for men). Age was significantly related to general violence, but not IPV or nonviolent offending, for both men and women, showing that both sexes are less generally violent with age. Cluster A PD traits (paranoid, schizoid, schizotypal) were significantly correlated with IPV and nonviolent offending in men. Cluster B PD traits (histrionic, antisocial, narcissistic, borderline) were related to all three offense types in both men and women. Cluster C PD traits (compulsive, avoidant) were not significantly related to any of the offense types in either sex. Of the “Big Five” traits, men’s nonviolent offending was linked negatively with conscientiousness and with neuroticism, whereas women’s IPV was linked negatively with neuroticism and their general violence was linked negatively with agreeableness. These findings indicate sex differences in the associations between offense types and personality variables.

Multiple Regression Analysis

Six hierarchical multiple regressions were conducted, to assess the predictors of general violence, IPV, and nonviolent offending, separately for men and women. Hierarchical regression was used so that age could be controlled in step 1, because research has shown that offending behavior decreases with age and there were consistent negative correlations in this study (Table II); step 2 added the other six predictor variables, three of the “big five” personality traits (agreeableness, conscientiousness, neuroticism) and the three PD trait clusters (A, B, and C). Table III displays the standardized regression coefficients (β), R² for step 1, and R² change for step 2.

General Violence for Men

Hierarchical regression showed that age explained a significant proportion of variance in general violence for men in step 1. In step 2, age and cluster B PD traits significantly explained a further 17.4% of the variance. The increase in explained variance contributed by the final model was significant (F(7, 106) = 3.73, P < .01). Age was negatively associated with general violence, suggesting that men get less violent as they get older. Cluster B PD traits were positively associated with violence, so that men scoring higher on these traits are more likely to be physically aggressive toward other people. Overall, the model accounts for 29.6% of the variability (24.2% adjusted) in general violence for men and the overall regression model was significant (F(8, 106) = 5.56, P < .001).
### TABLE III. Summary of Hierarchical Regression Analyses Displaying the Standardized Regression Coefficients ($\beta$) for Personality Traits and Personality Disorder Traits, as Predictors of (1) General Violence, (2) IPV, and (3) NonViolent Offending, for Men ($N = 116$) and Women ($N = 181$)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>General violence Men</th>
<th>General violence Women</th>
<th>IPV Men</th>
<th>IPV Women</th>
<th>Nonviolent offending Men</th>
<th>Nonviolent offending Women</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Step 1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>-.35**</td>
<td>-.32**</td>
<td>-.10</td>
<td>-.16</td>
<td>-.19</td>
<td>-.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step 2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>-.28*</td>
<td>-.25*</td>
<td>-.09</td>
<td>-.10</td>
<td>-.03</td>
<td>-.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cluster A</td>
<td>.16</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>.49**</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>.17</td>
<td>.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cluster B</td>
<td>.35*</td>
<td>.24*</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td>.29*</td>
<td>.47**</td>
<td>.40**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cluster C</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td>-.10</td>
<td>-.23</td>
<td>-.0</td>
<td>-.23</td>
<td>-.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agreeableness</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>-.22*</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>-.08</td>
<td>-.07</td>
<td>-.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conscientiousness</td>
<td>-.03</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>.16</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>-.23*</td>
<td>.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neuroticism</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>-.04</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>-.12</td>
<td>-.10</td>
<td>-.06</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

$R^2 = .12$ for step 1; $\Delta R^2 = .17$ for step 2 ($P < .01$). General violence men, $R^2 = .10$ for step 1; $\Delta R^2 = .10$ for step 2 ($P < .005$). General violence women, $R^2 = .01$ for step 1; $\Delta R^2 = .26$ for step 2 ($P < .001$). IPV men, $R^2 = .03$ for step 1; $\Delta R^2 = .11$ for step 2 ($P < .01$). IPV women, $R^2 = .04$ for step 1; $\Delta R^2 = .37$ for step 2 ($P < .001$). Nonviolent men, $R^2 = .03$ for step 1; $\Delta R^2 = .15$ for step 2 ($P < .001$). Nonviolent women.

*Multiple regressions were also conducted using the yes/no variety scoring method (as advocated by Moffitt et al., 2000); however, the overall results remain unchanged. The same variables predicted the criterion variables.

* $P < .01$; ** $P < .001$.

#### General Violence for Women

For women, a significant proportion of the variance in general violence was again explained by age in step 1. In step 2, age, cluster B PD traits, and agreeableness significantly explained a further 10.2% of the variance. The increase in explained variance contributed by the final model was significant ($F(7, 168) = 3.08$, $P < .01$). The negative association with age indicates that women's general violence decrease as they get older. Agreeableness was also negatively associated with general violence, and there was a positive association for cluster B PD traits (as there was for men). Overall, the model accounts for 20.5% of the variability (16.7% adjusted) in general violence for women and the overall regression model was significant ($F(8, 168) = 5.42$, $P < .001$).

#### IPV Women

Age did not explain a significant proportion of the variance in IPV for women in step 1. In step 2, cluster B PD traits significantly explained 11.2% of the variance. The increase in explained variance contributed by cluster B PD traits was significant ($F(7, 168) = 3.12$, $P < .01$). The positive association between these two variables indicates that the higher women score on cluster B PD traits the more likely they are to be physically aggressive toward their partner. The overall model accounts for 13.7% of the variability (9.6% adjusted) in IPV for women and the overall regression model was significant ($F(8, 168) = 3.34$, $P < .005$).

#### Nonviolent Offending for Men

Age did not explain a significant proportion of the variance in nonviolent offending for men in step 1. In step 2, cluster B PD traits and conscientiousness significantly explained 36.8% of the variance. The increase in explained variance contributed by these variables was significant ($F(7, 106) = 9.35$, $P < .001$). The positive sign for cluster B PD traits indicates that men scoring higher on these traits are more likely to perpetrate nonviolent offenses. The negative association for conscientiousness indicates that men scoring higher on this trait are less likely to perpetrate nonviolent offenses. The overall model accounts for 40.4% of the variability (35.9% adjusted) in nonviolent offending for men and the
overall regression model was significant \((F(8, 106) = 8.99, P < .001)\).

Nonviolent Offending for Women

Age did not explain a significant proportion of the variance in nonviolent offending for women in step 1. In step 2, cluster B PD traits significantly explained 14.6% of the variance. The increase in explained variance contributed by cluster B PD traits was significant \((F(7, 169) = 4.25, P < .001)\). The positive association indicates that women scoring higher on cluster B PD traits are more likely to perpetrate nonviolent offenses. The overall model accounted for 17.2% of the variability (13.3% adjusted) in nonviolent offending for women and the overall regression model was significant \((F(8, 169) = 4.39, P < .001)\).

Conclusions from Multiple Regression Analyses

Multiple regressions show similarities and differences in the predictors of men’s and women’s offending. For general violence, men’s and women’s offending share two predictors: a negative association with age and a positive association with cluster B PD traits. However, women’s general violence was also predicted by lower agreeableness and men’s was not. The predictors of IPV perpetration were different for men and women. Men’s perpetration of IPV was predicted by cluster A PD traits, whereas women’s perpetration of IPV was predicted by cluster B PD traits, but to a lesser extent. Both men’s and women’s nonviolent offending was predicted by higher cluster B PD traits. However, men’s nonviolent offending was also predicted by lower conscientiousness and women’s was not. Overall, these results suggest that although men’s and women’s offense perpetration shares similar risk factors, there are also risk and protective factors that are more relevant to one sex than the other.

DISCUSSION

In this study, self-reported offending was measured in men and women, together with personality variables. The aim was to investigate sex differences in offending and whether individual differences could predict offending separately for men and women. The results not only revealed some consistent predictors of violent and nonviolent offending, but also revealed some unique risk and protective factors. In many ways, these findings support earlier research that has investigated one or two of the variables investigated in this study (offending behavior, personality traits, and PD traits), but not all have earlier been investigated together in the same sample.

When controlling for age, it was found that men perpetrated significantly more violence out of the home than women. This was an expected finding, as earlier research in this area shows that men are usually more aggressive than women outside intimate relationships [Archer, 2004, 2009; Moffitt et al., 2001]. The results also revealed that women perpetrated more physical aggression toward their intimate partners than men did. This sex difference in the perpetration of partner violence supports earlier research findings which indicates that, within intimate relationships, women can be as physically aggressive as men, or slightly more so [Archer, 2000, 2006; Mirrlees-Black et al., 1998; Moffitt et al., 2001]. This finding is influenced by culture and occurs more in developed Western nations, such as the United Kingdom, United States, and Canada, where gender equality and individualism are both high [Archer, 2006, 2009]. However, reporting issues may have influenced the finding that women are more physically aggressive in relationships than men. Research has shown that both men and women underreport their perpetration of IPV, but this bias is more pronounced for men [Archer, 1999], leading to sex differences being slightly more in the female direction for perpetrators’ reports than for victims’ reports [Archer, 2000]. This reporting bias may have affected the current results for perpetration if men disclosed less of their IPV perpetration than women did. This seems likely, in view of the absence of a significant sex difference in IPV victimization, although this was slightly higher in men than women. This result supports British Crime Survey data which found that equal numbers of men and women reported being victims of IPV in the last year [Coleman et al., 2007; Mirrlees-Black et al., 1998]. These results support the view that there is similarity in the acts of physical aggression perpetrated by men and women in unselected samples [Archer, 2000, 2002; Felson, 2002; Straus and Ramirez, 2007]. The correlations between IPV perpetration and victimization were large and significant for men and women in the sample, which also supports the argument of mutual combat within relationships [e.g. Cascardi et al., 1992; Straus and Ramirez, 2007].

We found that men perpetrated more nonviolent offenses than women, which supports earlier research findings, such as that of Moffitt et al. [2001]...
and Steffensmeier and Allan [1996], who report that men are generally more antisocial than women. Women's involvement in nonviolent offenses is consistent with the forensic literature, which suggests that they generally perpetrate offenses where there is a low risk of physical harm [Campbell, 1999, 2002].

Current findings show moderate-to-high correlations between the three offense categories for men and women, which suggests that perpetration of one type of offense is associated with perpetration of other types of offense. However, we did find that IPV and nonviolent offending were unrelated for men, which suggests less overlap of offending behavior in men than in women. Our results support and extend to those of Farrington [2006] and Gottfredson and Hirschi [2007], who found that offenders commit a wide variety of criminal acts. They also support the findings of Moffitt et al. [2000] that many partner violence perpetrators are also violent toward others. This was indicated by the moderate correlations between perpetration of general violence and IPV for men and women. However, similar to Moffitt et al. [2000], this study shows that although there are moderate relationships between the three offense types between sexes, there are also some differences in predictors between offense types and between men and women. This suggests that the three offense types may have both shared unique risk and protective factors in terms of their associations with personality variables.

There were some shared predictors for general violence in men and women. Age and cluster B PD traits were significant predictors of general violence for both sexes, but agreeableness was a protective factor for women's general violence. The first association supports the well-known finding that offending behavior in general [Gottfredson and Hirschi, 2007; Quetelet, 1833–1984] and violence in particular [e.g., Archer, 2004; Courtwright, 1996; Daly and Wilson, 1990, 2001; Eisner, 2003] decrease with age. Cluster B PDs, such as borderline and antisocial PDs, have been associated with men's general violence in the batterer typology of Holtzworth-Munroe and Stuart [1994], but there is little earlier research on women's general violence and maladaptive PD traits. The correlational results showed that men's and women's general violence was related to cluster B PD traits, but the relationship was stronger for men. Earlier research has shown that agreeableness is a protective factor with aggression in both sexes [Gleason et al., 2004; Sharpe and Desai, 2001], but in this study this association was only found for women. These results suggest that men and women have some common risk factors for general violent offending, but that agreeableness may protect women.

Predictors for IPV were different for men and women. Men's IPV was predicted by higher cluster A PD traits, whereas women's IPV was predicted by higher cluster B PD traits. Both cluster A and B PD traits correlated significantly with IPV for men, but the relationship was stronger for cluster A and only cluster B was a significant correlate of IPV in women. Cluster A PDs are the least researched cluster [Emmelkamp and Kamphuis, 2007], and have not typically been linked with offending behavior, so this is a novel finding from this study. However, one cluster A PD (schizoid) has been associated with violent and criminal behavior in the borderline subtype of IPV men [Holtzworth-Munroe et al., 2000]. Individuals with cluster A PDs have also been found to score higher on neuroticism and lower on agreeableness [Emmelkamp and Kamphuis, 2007], results that correspond with earlier links found between aggression and these two “Big Five” factors [Gleason et al., 2004; Sharpe and Desai, 2001]. This could account for the link between IPV and cluster A PD traits in this sample of men. Cluster A PD is the cluster that is closest to mental illness. It is possible that men need to be more disordered than women before they perpetrate IPV, owing to the inhibiting factor of negative social attitudes toward perpetrators of IPV, especially male perpetrators [Harris and Cook, 1994; Simon et al., 2001; Taylor and Sorenson, 2005]. In this sample, both men's and women's IPV correlated with borderline PD traits, which has earlier been linked to men's [Dutton, 2002; Holtzworth-Munroe and Stuart, 1994] and women's [Spidell et al., 2004] perpetration of partner violence. However, cluster B PD traits only emerged as a significant predictor of IPV for women in this study. Our findings suggest that although men and women perpetrators of IPV show similar correlations with personality and PD traits, the predictors vary overall, indicating that there are likely to be risk factors for IPV that are unique for each sex.

Cluster B PD traits were also a significant predictor of nonviolent offending in both sexes, but conscientiousness was a protective factor for men's (but not women's) nonviolent offending. Earlier research has found an association of antisocial PD and nonviolent offending behavior [Barros and Serafim, 2008; Emmelkamp and Kamphuis, 2007], so that the present findings are consistent with these results. Earlier research has also found low conscientiousness to be associated
with nonviolent offending [Heaven, 1996], which supports the present findings for men but not for women. Again, there are not only similarities in men’s and women’s risk factors for offending behavior, but there is also a protective factor, conscientiousness, which is specific to one sex.

To conclude, this study found that adaptive personality traits were not consistent predictors of offending in men and women: men’s nonviolent offending was inversely related to conscientiousness and women’s general violence was inversely related to agreeableness. Maladaptive traits were related to all three offense types. Cluster B PD traits were a consistent predictor of offending behavior in women and predicted involvement in general violence, IPV, and nonviolent offending. These traits were not as consistent a predictor for men, predicting only general violence and nonviolent offending. Men’s IPV was instead predicted by cluster A PD traits, so that predictors of men’s and women’s IPV perpetration differed. This supports the view that there may be different risk factors involved in men’s and women’s partner violence perpetration. Overall, the results suggest that offending behavior is related to similar intra-personal factors for men and women, with the exception of IPV. In order to advance research in this area, other variables need to be investigated to determine whether predictors consistently vary between the offense types and sexes, or if there are further shared risk factors.

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REFERENCES


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